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François Laroque

DUKE SENIOR. Now, my co-mates and brothers in
exile,
Hath not *old custom* made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? [...]
Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
(*As You Like It*, 2.1.1-3, 12-14, ¹ italics mine)

- 1 The phrase "Old custom" which sounds as a sort of general pronouncement on a simple, traditional way of life, is certainly congruent with the rather vague denomination of Duke Senior (as opposed to Lodge's Gerismond in *Rosalind*), who plays the part of some sort of pastoral lord of misrule in the forest of Arden. In the popular imagination, this stoic praise of rusticity was far from incompatible with festivity and with all sort of ancient rites like the wearing of the deer's skin. In this paper, I will argue that, if many of Shakespeare's plays may be read from an anthropological point of view, of cultural anthropology that is. Indeed, they provide many examples of, or allusions to, "old custom[s]", i.e. to the festive games and traditions of good old 'Merry England' – especially when Charles the Wrestler's explains that "[t]hey say he is already in the Forest of Arden and a many merry men with him, and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England" (1.1.109-11). But the playwright's attitude towards and use of such phenomena remains deeply ambivalent all along his career.
- 2 To the horror of Voltaire, who definitely saw the "toad" rather than the "jewel" in these popular remnants, "Les Gilles et les Pierrot de la foire de Saint-Germain, il y a cinquante ans, étaient des Cinna et des Polyeucte en comparaison des personnages de cet ivrogne de Shakespeare que M. Le Tourneur appelle le Dieu du theatre" ("The Giles and clowns of the St Germain funfair, fifty years ago, were Cinnas and Polyeuctes when compared to the characters of that drunkard Shakespeare, whom M. Le Tourneur calls

the god of the theatre”),² Shakespeare indeed often tapped the oral or popular culture of his day and mixed high and low, so that his plays are marked by an indulgence in the grotesque and the hybrid. To Voltaire, it is clear that this custom would have been “more honoured in the breach / Than i'th'observance” (*Hamlet*, 1.4.18), But what has long been responsible for his being misunderstood and misrepresented in France is precisely what has aroused a fresh interest as well as new paths of research over the past thirty years in the fields of orality and festivity in general.

I. Magic and magical thinking in Shakespeare

- 3 The English Reformation clipped the official calendar of most of its saints' days while later refusing to adopt Pope Gregory XIII's substitution of a new calendar to the old Julian one, thus leading England and most Protestant countries in Europe to lag some ten days behind countries like France, Spain and Italy. This only contributed to widen the gap between England and the Continent a little further. If the Puritan zealots launched repeated assaults against the medieval, ritualistic, vision of religion, and against all aspects of festivity from maypoles to misrule, their strictures were mainly targeted against at the London playhouses. For them, the adjectives “popish” and “pagan” were synonymous, and like Stephen Gosson, a former actor, John Rainolds, Philip Stubbes or William Prynne later, they saw the “very pompes of the divell”³ in hobby horses, morris dancing, church ales or bear-baiting.
- 4 Now, Shakespeare certainly had a good personal knowledge of the complexities of the old calendar, which he used for the computation of time in his plays, with an undeniable nostalgia for the old days and old ways, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, when the Nurse keeps referring to Lammastide instead of July 31st or St Peter-in-the-Chains. The playwright appropriated the old system because of its multiple internal as well as external correspondences and echoes and for its rich storehouse of images, names, proverbs and puns. The Nurse's allusion to Lammastide, one of the four Celtic festivals of the year, indeed contains an oblique reference to Hallowe'en, which serves to link Juliet's birthday with October 31st, the possible date of her conception during the night when ghosts and the spirits of the dead were believed to be roaming among the living. Juliet, who “[...] hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear” (1.5.41-43) is indeed Jule or July (“Jule” “Ay”, as the Nurse says in a punning echo of the month of her birth; 1.3.45-46, 49-50, 59).⁴ This uncanny association, which was part of the popular as well as the judicial “art of memory” known as “reckoning backward” (“supputation retrograde”),⁵ came from the habit of reckoning nine months back in time in order to ascertain the probable date of conception of the child in order to assess how legitimate it was.
- 5 Such computation also touched on the more learned art of casting horoscopes and nativities which is mocked by Edmund in *King Lear*, when he alludes to his being the fruit of the adultery of his father, the duke of Gloucester, in a sarcastic sneer:

My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. Fut! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. (1.2.116-21)

Edmund, a skeptic and a libertine,⁶ is an adept of the “goddess” Nature, and he logically refuses to indulge in any sort of magical thinking of the type illustrated by his father or by the credulous, superstitious Nurse. He rails against “the plague of custom” (1.2.3), while the Nurse seems entirely determined by custom, by calendar traditions and random family memories.

- 6 The magical thinking behind the superstitious characters after all sounds no less legitimate than scepticism or libertine sensualism, since it belongs to the world view of a given play and is further justified or comforted by the related systems of imagery that are an important dimension of the overall make-up of a play. Shakespeare, as usual, lets his audience or readers decide for themselves without prescribing or prohibiting any sort of interpretation. As Gloucester retorts to Edgar’s “Ripeness is all” at the end of *King Lear*: “[...] that’s true too...” (5.2.11). In other words, Shakespeare seems happy to combine a series of relative points of view that interact or contradict one another without trying to establish or restore any single, simple, overarching perspective that would attempt to unify such an addition of fragmented visions. This suggests that his playtexts provide us with the tools to put ourselves at a distance from those archaic, medievalizing, views.
- 7 In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas defines magic as a mentality or as a mode of sensibility, rather than as a particular body of doctrines, “a ritual method of living, not a set of dogmas”.⁷ In his chapter on “The impact of the Reformation”, he defines it as a Catholic rather than as a Protestant turn of mind:

Protestantism [...] presented itself as a deliberate attempt to take the magical elements out of religion, to eliminate the idea that the rituals of the Church had about them a mechanical efficacy, and to abandon the effort to endow physical objects with supernatural qualities by special formulae of consecration and exorcism[...]. To Catholics the Church was also important as a limitless source of supernatural aid, applicable to most of the problems likely to arise in daily life. It offered blessings to accompany important secular activities, and exorcisms and protective rituals to secure them from molestation by evil spirits or adverse forces of nature.⁸

- 8 In his re-creation of a magical universe, Shakespeare does provide us with “blessings to accompany important secular activities” like Oberon’s blessing of the “couples three” and of “the owner of [this palace]” at the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (5.1.392-413); with the ‘mock-exorcisms’ of Dr Pinch in *The Comedy of Errors*, in Feste’s baiting of Malvolio under the guise of Dr Parson in *Twelfth Night* as well as in Edgar’s wild ravings when he masquerades as Poor Tom in *King Lear* when he echoes Samuel Harsnett’s *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), a book in which the devils are said to dance the “Morrice” in the body of Sara, one of the girls diagnosed as possessed.⁹
- 9 In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the happy ending of the comedy rehearses the protective rituals meant to secure the couples from molestation by evil spirits or the adverse forces of nature:

And the blots of nature’s hand
Shall not in their issue stand.
Never mole, harelip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious such as are

Despisèd in nativity
Shall upon their children be [...] (5.2.39-44)

- 10 But in the case of maleficent magic generally associated with witchcraft, cursing used language as a way of bringing about evil on the head of the offender or of the person one wanted to be revenged against. Margaret, in *Richard III*, and Lear, in *King Lear*, give us a number of strong and forcible examples of this type of magical thinking, where words are supposedly endowed with the power to harm:

No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils.
Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog,
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
The slave of Nature and the son of hell;
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb,
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins,
Thou rag of honour, thou detested— (1.3.222-30)

In a similar way, the infuriated king Lear curses his daughter Goneril for asking him “a little to disquantity [his] train” (1.4.210):

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.
Into her womb convey sterility,
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
(*King Lear*, 1.4.237-45)

- 11 In these examples linked to the particular fears attached to childbearing and childbirth in early modern England, one notes the symmetry of the blessing/cursing paradigm where things are poles apart, as in the rites of misrule that turned the ordinary world upside down. Famous examples for this are the witches' equivocation “Fair is foul and foul is fair” at the beginning of *Macbeth* (1.1.10), or Lear's “change places? and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?” (*King Lear*, 4.5.144-45) according to the perceptive insights of mad Lear who sees the world more clearly and accurately in madness than in reason. Take also Falstaff who refers to his companions as “Diana's foresters” in 1 *Henry IV*,¹⁰ thus placing himself, like Robin Hood,¹¹ under the tutelage of the green world and of popular justice, but who in fact appears as no more of a robber than King Henry who stole the crown of his cousin Richard.
- 12 Shakespeare's magic is generally of classical inspiration¹² as in *King Lear*, *Macbeth* or *The Tempest*. Of course, there is the case of Joan of Arc, whom Talbot calls a “railing Hecate” in 1 *Henry VI* (3.5.24), and of Duchess Eleanore's raising of spirits and dabbling in the occult in the second part of the same history play:

BOLINGBROKE. Patience, good lady; wizards know their times.—
Deep night, dark night, the silent of the night,
The time of night when Troy was set on fire,
The time when screech-owls cry, and bandogs howl,
And spirits walk, and ghosts break up their graves [...]

Here [they] do the ceremonies belonging and make the circle; Bolingbroke or Southwell reads, 'Coniuro te', etc. It thunders and lightens terribly; then the SPIRIT riseth.

(2 Henry VI, 1.4.14-18)

- 13 More than real magic, all this sounds like the atmosphere of magic which renders the *frisson* of the occult and of the forbidden without going into the details of the incantations and the paraphernalia of the black arts, contrary to what happens in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* for example, when the Wittenberg scholar conjures up Mephistopheles within a circle where "Jehovah's name/[is] Forward and backward anagrammatised" (1.3.8-9).¹³ In a play like *Othello*, Iago is a sceptic, like Edmund, and he makes it clear when he declares to Roderigo, that "we work by wit and not by witchcraft" (2.3.345). His "medicine" (4.1.42) which makes Othello fall into a trance and an "epilepsy" (l. 47), is nothing but a technique of mental manipulation placing his victim in a state of frenzy, or possession, so that he finally regresses to the supposed barbarity of the African savage. Magic thus expresses credulousness, a rather pathetic resorting to amulets, talismans and fetishes like Desdemona's handkerchief:

That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
She was a charmer and could almost read
The thoughts of people [...]
There's magic in the web of it:
A sybil, that had numbered two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful
Conserved of maidens' hearts...

One finds here echoes of Leo Africanus's description of the "vices [...] the Africans are subject unto", and of his insistence on their credulousness.¹⁴ Interestingly, the combination of magic, folklore and Galenic medicine (the reference to Hippocratic *pneuma*, or air and breath, as well as to "clyster-pipes", 2.1.175-76) is reminiscent of contemporary carnival practices,¹⁵ probably through the influence of Rabelais who praised festive and sexual energies and mocked medical incompetence and charlatanism.¹⁶

- 14 The Moor indeed seems to live in a world of fable and narrative, a narrative that, as Greenblatt puts it, "is forever constituting itself out of the materials of the present instant, a narrative in which the storyteller is constantly swallowed up by the story".¹⁷ So, as he his "pilgrimage dilate[s]", telling of "the cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi" (1.3.152, 143-44), Othello explains that he did not win Desdemona "by spells and medecines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.61), and that the only witchcraft he used was "the story of his life". Simultaneously, when he refers to Desdemona's "greedy ear" that "devour[ed]" his "discourse" (ll.148-49), he unwittingly describes the rapacious female organ that allegedly made woman some sort of sexual cannibal. One sees here how orality, folklore, and sexuality blend in the text and how the narrative becomes simultaneously self-consuming and self-destructive.
- 15 Lear, who swears by "the mysteries of Hecate and the night", and transmogrifies himself into a dragon, the emblem of wrath, evokes "the barbarous Scythian, / Or he that makes his generation messes / To gorge his appetite" (1.1.108, 114-16), to terrify his disobedient or, as he thinks, unloving daughter, because she dared answer him with

the word “nothing” (1.1.78). Contrary to Desdemona’s silent rapture at hearing the story of Othello’s life, Cordelia’s charade is misread by her father as an index of coldness. But in both cases, speech, or what is left of it (one word in the case of Cordelia) is self-cancelling as it leads to misprision and to wrong-headed interpretations. At the end of *Othello*, the “base Indian” or “Judean” (5.2.356), to whom Othello compares himself, has become the equivalent of Lear’s “barbarous Scythian” which suggests the random sacrifice of the innocent.

- 16 Linda Woodbridge argues that magical thinking and its correlative scapegoating phenomena and fertility rituals, turn sacrifice into an agent of renewal and that, contrary to comedy where Shakespeare is said to handle the green world “with indifference to magical meanings”,¹⁸ a tragedy like *Titus Andronicus* “seems to use human sacrifice and seasonal and sexual symbolism in a ritual pattern of renewal”.¹⁹ To her, even rape “as a violent act of sexuality, combines the world of sacrifice with that of fertility”, and she suggests that “the Renaissance saw dismemberment as potentially regenerative”, only to conclude that “tragedy seems hostile to magical thinking”.²⁰ What matters in fact are the language and the image patterns that use such fertility myths and expressions of magical thinking for the purpose of performance and dramatic effect:

Shakespearean tragedy pretends to no ritual efficacy; it repeatedly challenges the possibility of human control over events. But its language situates it within a discourse of fertility, casting what is desirable as organic, green, even explicitly rural. Such mental sets were bound to cause strain in an urbanizing culture.²¹

- 17 In a play like *Julius Caesar*, situated in a pagan world where the fertility myths must have been regarded as meaningful and efficient, especially with early allusions to the Lupercalia meant to exorcize Calphurnia’s barrenness (1.2), or with Decius’ interpretation of her dream of the “fountain with an hundred spouts / Run[ning] pure blood” (2.277-78) as a promise of plenty, we are now confronted with what looks like a form of bloody sacrifice meant to ensure fertility for Rome as a whole through the death of the potential tyrant:

This dream is all amiss interpreted.
It was a vision, fair and fortunate.
Your statue spouting blood in many pipes
In which so many smiling Romans bathed
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance. (2.2.83-89)

After reading these lines in terms of Shrove Tuesday butchery, Richard Wilson sees in them an allusion to Catholic martyrs.²² One might also interpret them as some sort of pagan mass or eucharist, with the extra possible confusion or superimposition of Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ, since their names have the same ‘J. C.’ initials and they are similarly associated with calendrical landmarks.²³ But these lines are just Decius’ interpretation and, like the Lupercalia, which Caesar uses as a political test on the Roman plebs in his desire to be proclaimed king, it serves to re-assure Caesar that he should go to the Capitol anyway, so that his assassination may take place as planned by Brutus and Cassius.

- 18 In her book on *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, Naomi Liebler establishes a parallel between the Lupercalia and native English rituals:

Although significant attention has been given to the Roman Saturnalia as analogous to [...] seasonal folk practices in England, the equally close relation of the Lupercalia has not been recognized. [...] Besides the mildly violent boundary running [in the beating of the bounds during the Rogations], there is for instance the whipping of the spectators by the Fool during the Morris dance, which inverts the Saturnalian scapegoat sacrifice and more closely resembles the flagellation of the Lupercal race. [...] The Lupercalian elements in *Julius Caesar* not only authenticate the representation of historical and political Rome but also resonate with the semblance of native English rites.²⁴

- 19 This type of parallel or analogy between ancient Roman rites and surviving pagan customs in the popular festivities of Elizabethan England sounds a little too abrupt, even though such correspondences may have been present in the minds of some of the spectators of *Julius Caesar*. Indeed, the smearing or blackening of faces is not necessarily a symbolic blood-bath, as in *Coriolanus*, for instance, where the warrior's blood mask or 'mantle' becomes an awesome initiation rite in the grim carnival of war ("From face to foot / He was a thing of blood", 2.2.104-105) but it also suggests a form of new birth. Morris dancers indeed sometimes blackened their faces as a reference to the possible Moorish origins of the dance,²⁵ which is alternately interpreted as diabolical by Puritan polemicists like Philip Stubbes or as the badge of popular revolt.²⁶ Incidentally, this may also be read as a current form of stage practice referring to the actor's face being covered with soot for the part of the Moor of Venice (as in Laurence Olivier's famous performance). So, ultimately, what is described here as ritual may simply be common theatrical practice. Now the question is how ritual and ritualistic the theatrical performance exactly was, as Luc Bondy pointed out in his conversation with Georges Lavaudant on the opening day of Shakespeare 450 at the Odéon theatre. Indeed, it generally took place on certain festival days at court²⁷ and in liminal spaces outside the City's jurisdiction in the public and popular playhouses. This indirectly poses the question of the monarch's politics of mirth and of the inclusion of a measure of misrule meant to tolerate a degree of license, irreverence and lawlessness, the better to control it in the end.

II. Shakespeare's uses of Misrule

- 20 In an early article, I argued that Renaissance misrule, with its Lords and Abbeyes, was not just the contrary of rule but that it was in fact the "rule of 'mis[s]'".²⁸ So, instead of a simple reversal which turned things topsy-turvy or inside out, it was to be read as a subversion of traditional patriarchy in which women had the upper hand or, in the words of Natalie Davis, when they were "women on top".
- 21 As Dekker and Middleton put it in *The Honest Whore Part One*, this corresponds to the Saturnalian principle, i.e. to the inversion of ordinary status and of gender roles, according to the Roman festival of the Saturnalia, also known as *libertas decembris*, which was meant to re-instate for a few days the reign of Saturn, when everything went backwards and when men and women, masters and servants, switched both roles and clothes: "Monarchs turn to beggars; beggars creep into the nests of princes, masters serve their prentices: ladies their servingmen, men turn to women."²⁹ One may

remember here an echo of Nerissa's bawdy reply to Portia's suggestion that they should wear such a habit that their husbands will "think [they] are accomplished / With what [they] lack": "Why, shall we turn to men?" (3.4.61-2, 79). In *Twelfth Night*, Feste suggests that purses, persons, gloves and names may be "turned outward" and thus be made "quickly [...] wanton (3.1.12, 14). Besides the possible allusion to Shakespeare's family trade, the glove image also currently referred to the early modern representation of the male and female sexual organs, the latter being nothing but penis and scrotum turned inward.³⁰ So, the turning outward could be an allusion to the boy actor playing the role of the woman but also to current beliefs about androgyny and sexual transformation, as in the Marie Germain episode narrated by Montaigne in his *Essays* (after the girl jumped over a brook, the exertion suddenly caused the appearance of a penis in her, so that she was turned into a boy).³¹ Finally, the expression also foreshadows the turning outward of Malvolio when he comes out of the closet and masquerades as a "turkey-cock" (2.5.26) in his cross-gartered yellow stockings, which Olivia interprets in festive terms as a sign of "midsummer madness" (3.4.52).

- 22 In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff is the victim of the merry wives' tricks as he is forced to disguise himself as the old witch of Brainford, only to be carried in a buck-basket full of foul linen before he is ducked into the Thames. This is the theatrical equivalent of a charivari or skimmington ride then commonly used in English country life and villages for the punishment of sexual offenders. At the end, when Falstaff is disguised as Herne the Hunter and waits for both women near the big oak in Windsor forest, the ithyphallic horn of plenty evoked by the name of the local giant is turned into the emblem of cuckoldry and, as Falstaff gets pinched and burnt by the schoolboys disguised as fairies, he is once more humiliated and punished for his lechery and parasitic plans.
- 23 In an article about the play, Leah Marcus examines what she calls "local customs" and "local texts" to analyse Shakespeare's textual strategies and his politics of misrule and festivity:

The Folio version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a comedy of small town and rural life [...] but also imbued with 'high' presence of the royal court; the Quarto version is 'lower', more urban, closer to the pattern of city or 'citizen' comedy.

Both versions are teeming with folk rituals [...] in keeping with ancient seasonal ritual.³²

This reveals a double strategy insofar as it points to a distinction between a version written for the court and one written for the Globe, and to a use of festival and of misrule as a means of accommodating both an early spring (Shrovetide customs) and a late summer reading (Hallowe'en) of festive traditions in the comedy.

- 24 So, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, another play without sources, Shakespeare uses contemporary folklore and misrule traditions in highly ambivalent ways with one text meant to court the nostalgia for the waning green world of Merry England and another for those in the audience who were more interested in the satirical spirit of city comedy. Such strategy sounds like a shrewd commercial exploitation of an ambiguity that allowed the playwright to use different texts for different audiences.
- 25 What Leah Marcus calls "levelling" is part of what misrule and the experience of misrule are about. It is certainly connected with images of the world upside down as in the Fool's bitter and biting jests in *King Lear*:

LEAR. When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?
 FOOL. I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches,
 [Sings] Then they for sudden joy did weep
 And I for sorrow sung,
 That such a king should play bo-peep,
 And go the fools among. (1.4.137-44)

"Old fools are babes again" as Goneril had said to Oswald (1.3.19) and the pathetic illustration provided by the Fool follows the satirical tradition of the popular iconography of the world upside down as in the image of "the cart draw[ing] the horse" (1.4.189).

- 26 This "carnival of time"—a form of anachronism or temporal misrule that inverted the normal eating and sleeping habits (a disruption which is a sign of the king's derangement in *King Lear*)—also corresponds to the lawlessness of Falstaff's Eastcheap tavern:

FALSTAFF. Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?
 PRINCE. Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous as to demand the time of day [...]
 (1 *Henry IV*, 1.2.1-10)

- 27 Falstaff lives a life beyond all measure characterized by all sorts of excess and abuses. He turns night into day and day into night. The Boar's Head, the emblem of his over-eating is also the "Whore's Bed", the place where Mrs Quickly and Doll Tearsheet take care of him. The girth of his waist, with his oversized belly, is in itself an emblem of carnival misrule:

HAL. Here comes lean Jack, here comes bare-bone. How now, my sweet creature of bombast, how long is't ago, Jack, since thou sawest thine own knee?
 FALSTAFF. My own knee? When I was about thy years, Hal, I was not an eagle's talon in the waist, I could have crept into an alderman's thumb-ring: a plague of sighing and grief, it blows a man like a bladder.
 (1 *Henry IV*, 2.5.299-305)

- 28 But the most wonderful moment of misrule in the history play is found in the scene in which Falstaff plays the king to Hal playing his own role until the two switch parts. Here Falstaff becomes a mock-king using ordinary objects to represent the symbols of majesty: "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown" (2.5.344-45). When Hal suggests they switch their parts, Falstaff exclaims "Depose me?" (l.396), an ironical backward glance at Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard II. Falstaff is then turned into a scapegoat with such carnivalesque images as the "roasted Mannintree ox with the pudding in his belly" (2.5.412-13), and assimilated to Morality figures like "that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father

Ruffian, that Vanity in years [...] that villainous abominable misleader of youth [...] that old white-bearded Satan (2.5.413-22).

- 29 The feminine counterpart of Falstaff, as an emblem or embodiment of misrule, is no other than Cleopatra, she whose "infinite variety" (2.2.241) and playfulness allow her to turn the muscular, pleasure-loving Mark Antony into her own plaything, using him for her pleasure and happily reversing gender roles as Omphale did with Hercules:

CHARMIAN. 'Twas merry when
You wagered on your angling, when your diver
Did hang a salt fish on his hook, which he
With fervency drew up.
CLEOPATRA. That time? – O times!—
I laughed him out of patience; and that night
I laughed him into patience, and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantle on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan. (2.5.15-23)

- 30 Later on, Antony calls her "the armourer of [his] heart" (4.4.8), turning the queen of Egypt into another "fair warrior" or Amazonian figure whom he seems to regard as his equal and as endowed with manly qualities and is publicly reproached for lacking them in her company:

CAESAR. From Alexandria
This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel: is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he [...] (1.4.3-7)

- 31 This Oriental confusion between the sexes amounts to making life in Alexandria a permanent carnival, which the "boy Caesar" (3.13.16) strongly disapproves of according to the Roman, patriarchal, ascetic vision of things. So, the world of misrule is identified with oriental rule where East and West are put back to back:

If in the Europe of rule we find adults, the ruling class, males, humans, and intellectuality, in the Orient of misrule we find children, the lower classes, females, animals, and the lower bodily stratum. The Europe of rule speaks latin, writes epics, and polishes its blank verse; the Orient of misrule speaks the vernacular, writes pastorals, poses riddles and utters curses.³³

- 32 Besides their drinking capacities, their night revelling and permanent confusion of rule and misrule, another feature common to Falstaff and Cleopatra is the fact that they both reverse the age categories, thus promoting an age-saturnalia where the old take the place of the young. Falstaff, the "latter spring", the "All-hallowen summer (1 *Henry IV*, 1.2.140-41) according to Hal, regards himself as much younger than the Lord Chief Justice and definitely embodies rebellious youth opposing "gravity", authority and the rod of the law:

CHIEF JUSTICE. There is not a white hair on your face but should have his effect of gravity.
FALSTAFF. His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy [...] You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young; you do measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls. And we that are in the vaward of our youth

[...] are wags too.

JUSTICE. Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not [...] a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity? And will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

FALSTAFF. My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white beard and something of a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with halloing and singing of anthems. (2 *Henry IV*, 1.2.147-73)

Falstaff's claim to permanent youth reverses the normal order of time as in the mythical time of Saturn when one was born old and died young. He is also a colourful parody of the Puritan, disguising his vices under a sanctimonious masque of virtue and piety. But there is something truly magical and funny at the same time in his refusal to accept the ordinary laws of time. Misrule, magic and mirth indeed all wonderfully combine in this extraordinary scene.

- 33 In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the title parts are both rather ageing figures (Antony is in his late fifties and Cleopatra in her late thirties) and yet they are madly in love like the young couples in a comedy, as opposed to the figure of Octavius Caesar who emblemizes the figure of the *puer-senex*, the serious young man who is wise and mature. Physically, Antony has a "grizzled head" (3.13.16), he is an old lion (3.13.94), an "old ruffian" (4.1.4) while Cleopatra is well past her "salad days" (1.5.72), she has a "waned lip" (2.1.21) and is "wrinkled deep in time" (1.5.29). But, as Enobarbus also admits, "Age cannot wither her" (2.2.240). Love works as a rejuvenating force, so that the two lovers are magical old turned young figures. In the words of Linda Woodbrige, "the couple's outrageous sexuality bespeaks youth, as does Cleopatra's irrepressible playfulness".³⁴
- 34 Contrary to Falstaff, who ends up a pathetic victim of Hal's *Realpolitik*, when he is levelled and disclaimed by the madcap prince now crowned king ("I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers", 2 *Henry IV*, 5.5.45) after hearing "the chimes at midnight" (3.2.209) and singing his Shrovetide swansong with Master Silence at the end of 2 *Henry IV* (5.3.32-35, Antony marries in death ("I will be / A bridegroom in my death and run into't / As to a lover's bed", *Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.15.99-101) and is consequently upgraded from one of the "tawny-finned fishes" caught by Cleopatra's "bended hook" (2.5.12) to the wonderful, regal image of the bouncing "dolphin", the king of fishes, in the Queen's final vision of magical, eternal plenty:

For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The elements they lived in. (5.2.85-89)

- 35 If, according to Richard Wilson's idea that "carnival is a rite of exclusion [and] mumming [...] a game of identification with the alien",³⁵ then in the carnival misrule of *Henry IV*, Falstaff is shamed and isolated, thus playing the anthropological function of the scapegoat, while in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Egyptian rites of hospitality turn out to be as generous and excessive as "o'erflowing Nilus", 1.2.43). So, the "holy priests / Bless" Cleopatra "when she is riggish" (2.2.244-45) and Antony's "lascivious wassails"

(1.4.56) are converted into a form of Triumph of Love or victory over time, war and history.

Conclusion

- 36 Without the work of William Shakespeare, our knowledge of the vestigia of pre-Christian traditions with their semi-magical *bric à brac* would not be what it is. Hamlet's "For O, for O, the hobby horse is forgot" (3.2.122), probably a fragment of a lost ballad, "signals a longing for old days and old ways, a nostalgia that would restore what was lost by the king's murder".³⁶ But Shakespeare was all too aware that the good old days of Merry England were well behind. Indeed, traditional, rural culture with its pagan fertility magic had then lost considerable ground and become almost inaccessible to city-dwellers who were more interested in urban culture and urban problems than in fairies, folklore and wishing wells.
- 37 Shakespeare's green world comedy was to lose its significance and centrality on the public London stages and, in the different quarto and folio versions of his plays (provided these reflected authorial revisions in his manuscripts) as well as in the problem plays (in *Measure for Measure* in particular), he seems to have anticipated the changes in trend and fashion. All the same, his plays allow us to remain in touch with "the world we have lost", to take up Peter Laslett's title,³⁷ and to think of him as a playwright who was personally interested in the old holiday pastimes, in carnival abuses, wassail bowls and morris dances. This was not only because these 'old custom(s)' provided him with a rich store of images borrowed from the real life of country people and old-standing calendar traditions, all of them convertible into stage practices that could transpose customs into costumes. The other reason is his choice of a theatrical strategy geared at multiple audiences with different versions of the same comedy in order to please both popular and courtly audiences. After 1603, Shakespeare certainly read John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*, as the French writer was a collector of curiosities, of Indian artefacts brought from Brazil and the New World, and had a specific philosophical, or rather anthropological interest in the life of other peoples and nations, the cannibals included.
- 38 But, for all his fascination with folklore and popular or exotic cultures, Shakespeare should not be reduced to a simple antiquarian or collector of old ballads. What is particularly noticeable in his use of festivity and misrule is that he hardly ever fully presents a carnival, a banquet, a riot or a Morris dance on stage, with the exception, perhaps, of the Jack Cade rebellion in 2 *Henry VI* and of the sheep-shearing scenes in *The Winter's Tale*. He proceeds obliquely, through allusions, either in his titles or in moments of holiday misrule that are always interrupted for some reason or other, thus never allowing us to get a thorough view of what these may have been like in real life. This is the reason why such technique of condensation and allusion turns the web of festive allusions into some sort of big jigsaw puzzle that then needs to be sorted out by scholars and social historians, so that festive Shakespeare can no longer be understood nowadays through any sort of existing oral tradition or rites of memory. He has become a Shakespeare with many footnotes!
- 39 All the same, Shakespeare may be considered as an anthropologist of sorts fascinated with liminality and the preposterous as well as with the world upside down which he presents now in a comic vein, as in *Measure for Measure*, now in a grotesquely tragic way

as in *King Lear*. His dramatic themes include popular rebellion, primitiveness and war, sexual violence and sacrifice and in these, Shakespeare certainly contributed to document these darker sides of man often accompanied by the performance of ancient rites and customs ("This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (5.1.278-79) while he also insists on their being the obsolescent remnants of a bygone era. In Shakespeare, the festive or rebellious *élan* is almost irresistible as we can see in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, with little space for individual control or retreat away from it, and at the same time his whole work seems to me to be a plea for 'free will' and liberty. Such contradiction or fusion of opposites is often found in his works and it is, in my view, part of a Lévi-Strauss-like form of bricolage where old custom(s) are used or alluded to but also visibly forgotten, when not completely silenced.

- 40 If his anti-Puritanical stance may explain part of this complex attitude, such an important side of this theatrical oeuvre cannot be reduced to a mere political posture in the defence of the interests of the theatre and of the 'entertainment industry'. So, I can only close by saying that Shakespearian anthropology remains as mysterious as it is deeply ambivalent since the playwright keeps us in a double bind, now speaking in favour of the continuation of these customs, now criticizing them as responsible for superstition and alienation.

NOTES

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to The Norton Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt ed., W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1997.
2. Letter to the Comte d'Argental (27 August 1776), Voltaire, *Correspondance*, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Basel, 1789, vol. 68, n° 156, p. 275.
3. This echoes the ritual sentences for baptism, where one swears to renounce the "pomps of the devil" and is one of the Puritans' pet phrases.
4. On this see my "Tradition and Subversion in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Jay L. Halio ed., *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Texts, Contexts, and Interpretation*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, London, Associated University Presses, 1995, p. 26.
5. The expression is used by Rabelais in his *Quart Livre (Fourth Book)*. On this, see my "Tradition and Subversion in *Romeo and Juliet*" p. 24, and my *Shakespeare's Festive World*, Cambridge, CUP, 1991, p. 205.
6. See William R. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1988, p. 125-30.
7. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p. 76.
8. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 75-77.
9. *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, London, 1603, p. 49.
10. "[...] let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon [...]" (1.2.23-6).

11. As Linda Woodbridge puts it, "[...] the Robin Hood myth, in its authority-flouting, is essentially saturnalian" (*The Scythe of Saturn. Saturn and Magical Thinking*, Urbana and Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1994, p. 183).
12. See Hecate, Medea, according to what Ovid and Seneca write of their powers.
13. Christopher Marlowe, *Le docteur Faust* (texte bilingue), ed. François Laroque, transl. François Laroque and Jean-Pierre Villquin, Paris, GF Flammarion, 1997.
14. *The First Booke of the Description of Africa*, p. 185, in *The History and Description of Africa, done into English in the year 1600 by John Pory*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1846.
15. Particularly in Iago's "making the beast with two backs" (1.1.116), a quotation translated from *Gargantua*.
16. See also *Shakespeare's Festive World*, p. 300-302.
17. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 238.
18. In *The Scythe of Saturn*, p. 192, she writes that "even in a comedy of forest and field such as *As You Like It*, the magic is starting to bleach out of the landscape. And this kind of comedy soon disappeared". It is true that Shakespeare's "green world comedy" was soon superseded by Jacobean city comedies (Middleton, Jonson, Dekker) that "are not congenial to 'seasonal' readings" (she gives the example of *Measure for Measure*).
19. *The Scythe of Saturn*, p. 184, 172.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 172, 173, 180.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
22. "'Is this a holiday?'. Shakespeare's Roman Carnival" in *Will Power. Essays on Shakespearean Authority*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 45-62; *Secret Shakespeare. Studies in theatre, religion and resistance*, Manchester, Manchester University Press (Chapter entitled "Dyed in mummy"), p. 171.
23. Julius Caesar is the creator of the so called Julian calendar that will remain in use in England until 1752 after Elizabeth had refused to adopt the Gregorian reform, while the name of Jesus Christ abbreviated as J.C. serves as a watershed between ancient (before J.C.) and modern (A.D.) times.
24. *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy. The rituals foundations of genre*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, p. 110-11.
25. This is alluded to in a parodic way in the Schoolmaster's mock etymology in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*:
Look right and straight
Upon this mighty 'Moor' of mickle weight.
'Ice' now comes in, which, being glued together,
Makes 'Morris' and the cause that we came hither. (3.5.119-22)
26. See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in early modern France*, Stanford, 1975 (1965), p. 139: "In Wales [...] the men who conducted the *ceffyl pren*, as the local rough music was called, blackened their faces and wore women's garb."
27. On this see Chris R. Hassel, *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year*, Lincoln, Nebraska, Nebraska University Press, 1979.
28. "La notion de 'Misrule' à l'époque élisabéthaine: La fête comme monde à l'envers et comme contre-temps" ["The idea of Misrule in the Elizabethan age. Festivity as a world upside down and as inverted time sequence"] in Jean Lafond and Augustin Redondo, eds., *L'image du monde renversé et ses représentations littéraires et para-littéraires de la fin du XVI^e siècle au milieu du XVII^e* [The image of the world upside down and its literary and para-literary representations from the end of the Sixteenth and the mid-Seventeenth Century], Paris, Vrin, 1979, p. 161-70.
29. 1 *The Honest Whore*, 4.3.130-35 in Fredson Bowers ed., *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols., 1953-61, vol. 2, Cambridge, CUP, 1955.

30. On this see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex, Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990.
31. *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech, London, Penguin, 2003 [1991], "On the power of the imagination", p. 111: "He said that he had been straining to jump when his male organs suddenly appeared. (The girls there still have a song in which they warn each other not to take great strides lest they become boys, 'like Marie Germain')".
32. Leah Marcus, "Levelling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42/2 (Summer, 1991), p. 175-76.
33. *The Scythe of Saturn*, p. 309.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
35. "Men of Monsters" in *Shakespeare in French Theory*, p. 247.
36. "Hamlet's Hobby Horse" in *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, p. 179.
37. *The World we have lost—further explored*, London, Methuen, 1965.
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ABSTRACTS

In this paper I argue that, up to a certain extent, Shakespeare's dramatic works partake of an anthropological interpretation of society. In *As You Like It* the old rustic way of life is presented by Duke Senior as quite preferable to the artificial pomp of the court, while in *King Lear* Edmund inveighs against "the plague of custom" which prevents him from accomplishing himself and from satisfying his ambition as well as his desires. If, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nurse still refers to the old calendar, Hamlet, as for himself, criticizes the Danish customs and mores that seem to sanctify drunkenness. As to Falstaff, he still embodies the spirit of old, merry England partly ruined by Henry IV's realpolitik. This anthropological interest of the playwright for a world that had partly been lost, but whose vestigia still haunted his imagination, takes on a new significance in the wake of the work of social historians since they are very much interested in the study of magical remains in the exercise of royal power as much as in the rites of carnival, charivari or religious sacrifice.

Cet article entend montrer jusqu'où le théâtre de Shakespeare peut se prévaloir d'un regard anthropologique porté sur la société. La vie ancestrale et rustique est présentée dans *As You Like It* comme bien préférable à la pompe factice de la cour tandis qu'Edmond le Bâtard se plaint, dans *King Lear*, de la peste qu'est à ses yeux la coutume qui l'empêche d'être lui-même et de réaliser son ambition autant que ses désirs. Si, dans *Romeo and Juliet*, la Nourrice continue de se fier à l'ancien calendrier julien, Hamlet, lui, déplore les coutumes et les mœurs danoises qui en viennent à vouer un culte à l'ivrognerie. Quant à Falstaff, il continue d'incarner l'esprit de la Joyeuse Angleterre effectivement mis à mal par la realpolitik des Lancastre. Cet intérêt anthropologique du dramaturge pour un monde en grande partie disparu mais dont les vestiges continuent de le hanter reprend en effet du sens dans le cadre de l'histoire des mentalités qui s'intéresse aux survivances magiques dans l'exercice du pouvoir royal autant qu'aux fonctions du carnaval, du charivari ou du sacrifice.

INDEX

Keywords: As You Like It, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV 1 and 2, custom, festive traditions, Merry England, social historians, carnival, charivari, sacrifice

Mots-clés: As You Like It, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV 1 and 2, coutume, traditions festives, Joyeuse Angleterre, histoire des mentalités, carnaval, charivari, sacrifice

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