

Subversion And Containment In A Midsummer Night's Dream And Twelfth Night

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's comedies possess a timeless universality. These plays, which brings tensions between love, identity, and order to the stage, reveal the unchanging nature of human relationships while also showing how social norms are reestablished. In this article, I aim to examine William Shakespeare's comedies *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* within the framework of Stephen Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment. In both plays, normative structures concerning gender roles, class hierarchy, and desire are temporarily subverted within the play's realm; however, these subversions ultimately result in the reestablishment of the existing ideological order. The identity confusion that begins with Viola's disguise as a man, Olivia's unconscious love for someone of the same sex, and Malvolio's ridicule are moments in *Twelfth Night* when "subversive" elements become visible. Similarly, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania's love for a figure from the lower class, the power struggle in the fairy world, and the festival atmosphere presented in the play offer a collective hallucinatory environment, allowing for a temporary relaxation of social norms. Yet, in both plays, the final scenes end with the restoration of order through "restorative" heteronormative marriages, social exclusion, and the regaining of power by authority figures. This study argues that, as Greenblatt suggests, theatre is not only a structure that reinforces the ideological order, but also one that reproduces this order by making its limits visible.

Keywords: *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Subversion and Containment, New Historicism, carnivalesque*

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William Shakespeare'in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ve *Twelfth Night* Komedyelerinde Yıkıcılık ve Sınırlandırma

ÖZ

Shakespeare'in komedileri, çağlar ötesine ulaşan bir evrensellik taşır. Aşk, kimlik ve düzen arasındaki gerilimleri sahneye taşıyan bu oyunlar, insan ilişkilerinin değişmeyen doğasını gözler önüne sererken, toplumsal normların nasıl yeniden kurulduğunu da gösterir. Bu makalede, William Shakespeare'in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ve *Twelfth Night* adlı (Bir Yaz Gecesi Rüyası ve On İkinci Gece) komedyelerinin Stephen Greenblatt'ın yıkıcılık ve sınırlandırma kuramı çerçevesinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktayım. Her iki oyunda da toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, sınıf hiyerarşisi ve arzuya dair normatif yapılar, oyun evreni içinde geçici olarak altüst edilir; ancak bu altüst oluşlar, nihayetinde mevcut ideolojik düzenin yeniden tesis edilmesiyle sonuçlanır. Viola'nın erkek kılığına bürünmesiyle başlayan kimlik karmaşası, Olivia'nın aynı cinsiyetten birine duyduğu farkında olmadan gelişen aşk ve Malvolio'nun alaya alınması, *Twelfth Night* oyununda "düzen karşıtı" unsurların görünür kılındığı anlar olarak öne çıkar. Benzer biçimde, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* oyununda da Titania'nın alt sınıftan bir figüre duyduğu aşk ve periler dünyasındaki güç savaşları ve oyunda yer verilen festival ortamı kolektif bir halüsinasyon ortamı sunar ve bu da toplumsal normların geçici olarak esnetilmesine olanak tanır. Ancak her iki oyunda final sahnelerinde düzeni "onarıcı" heteronormatif evlilikler, sosyal dışlamalar ve otorite figürlerinin yeniden güç kazanmasıyla son bulur. Bu çalışma, Greenblatt'ın öne sürdüğü gibi, tiyatronun yalnızca ideolojik düzeni pekiştiren değil, aynı zamanda bu düzenin sınırlarını görünür kılarak onu yeniden üreten bir yapı olduğunu savunur.

Anahtar kelimeler: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, Yıkıcılık ve Sınırlandırma, Yeni Tarihselcilik, karnavalesk

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's comedies can be read not only as romantic intrigues or misunderstandings, but also as scenes in which social order, gender roles, and class hierarchies are temporarily questioned. These temporary upheavals mostly take shape in a festive or carnivalesque atmosphere; roles are reverse, social boundaries blur, and authority figures are mocked. However, most of these plays end with a return to "normality" after the chaotic liberation. It is precisely this tension—the conflict between the spirit of festivity and the reestablishment of the patriarchal/ideological order—that elevates Shakespeare's comedies from mere entertainment to politically readable texts. In this context, the plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* deserve a comparative analysis in terms of Shakespeare's treatment of the festival theme and the ideological function of it. The aim of this study is to examine the two plays in line with the theoretical approach of Greenblatt's subversion and containment, and to discuss the function of the temporary chaos brought to the stage in Shakespeare's comedies in the face of dominant ideological structures. Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment argues that authority does not merely suppresses opposition but also produces and absorbs it within its own boundaries. Greenblatt argues that authority in Renaissance England was not only a repressive force but rather produced potential threats from within itself in a controlled manner and then suppressed them to consolidate its power. Therefore, as stated by Greenblatt this "subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers it ends" (Greenblatt, 1988, p. 30). As seen to be in this argument, the things that appear to be harmful to social order, such as atheism or scenes in theatre that oppose order, are actually under the control of the system. These acts of rebellion offer the audience a space for "resistance": but in the end, the system has already anticipated this resistance and set its limits.

However, studies that specifically compare these two comedies-- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*--within the scope of Stephen Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment are quite limited. This study aims to fill this gap and reveal how the carnivalesque atmosphere of freedom in both plays simultaneously transforms into a space for ideological reproduction. In the existing literature, most studies on Shakespeare's comedies have generally approached these texts within different theoretical frameworks. For example, C.L. Barber (1959) relates the festive and temporarily liberated atmosphere in the plays to the suspension of social norms, while Michel Bakhtin (1984) similarly draws attention to the ideological function of a temporary upheaval through the concept of the "carnavalesque." On the other hand Carol Neely (1985) and Jonathan Dollimore (1984) examines Shakespeare's comedies in terms of gender roles and power relations.

A Midsummer Night's Dream centres on young lovers rebelling against patriarchal laws, the carnivalesque chaos of the fairy world in the forest, and ultimately the restoration of order through weddings. *Twelfth Night* presents a festive pattern where gender roles are blurred, lower-class characters take centre stage,

and moral guardians are mocked. In both plays, the lower classes, women, or gender expressions experience a temporary liberation, but this space of freedom is mostly limited by the patriarchal and class-based order, reestablished at the end of the play. The fundamental questions here is: Do Shakespeare's festival-specific subversions truly hold transformative potential, or do they merely make the boundaries visible?

This article intends to find out these questions. The festive scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* in the context of gender and class relations, discussing the characters' temporary freedom on stage, in the end, reproducing the existing order. In doing so, the ideological mechanisms underlying the joyful atmosphere presented on the surface of Shakespeare's comedies will be revealed, and the political limits of the festive aesthetic will be questioned.

By approaching both plays comparatively through Greenblatt's framework, this article contributes to the discussion on how Shakespeare's comedies negotiate power and ideology, rather than only reflect social order.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stephen Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment argues that early modern texts represent oppositional or subversive ideas but also present them in a way that is safely "contained" by the authority. Although most of Shakespeare's plays appear to question power, gender roles, or class hierarchy, this problematization usually results in the restoration of order at the end of the texts. This structural feature is directly related to the position of theatre at that time. Elizabethan theatre, despite appealing to a broad audience, operated under the direct control of monarchical authority. Even if the theatre was open to the public, it was not entirely permitted for potentially subversive ideas to circulate, and any statement that could threaten the authority of the monarchy and the state was removed from the play. At that point in time, the theatre had become a growing industry. As Wells (2006) states people went to the theatre for many reasons. Some went for entertainment, while others went to learn about English and Roman history. Some went to the theatre to be encouraged to think about the social and political issues of the time; however, due to legal restrictions, these topics often had to be addressed indirectly (p.9).

In this case, Shakespeare's life experiences can also be interpreted within this theoretical framework. In particular, the theatre company he joined in 1594, *Lord Chamberlain's Men*, operated directly under the patronage of the royal court. First under the patronage of Elizabeth I, then James I, the company took the name "The King's Men" and performed regularly at court. The royal support for Shakespeare's plays made it difficult for his works to be fully oppositional, but it allowed him to bring the contradictions of power to the stage in different ways.

Greenblatt (1988) argues "Shakespeare's drama, written for the theatre subject to state censorship, can be so relentlessly subversive: the form itself, as a primary

expression of Renaissance power, helps to contain the radical doubts it continually provokes” (p. 65). From this perspective, Shakespeare can be considered as a figure who is in harmony with the dominant culture of the period, but at the same time navigates the boundaries of that culture. To illustrate, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ends with a wedding, giving the impression that order was restored; however, the scenes set in the forest, Titania's love for Bottom under the influence of the love juice and her explicit expression of her desires for him reveal female desire and the imagination of the lower classes. These temporary situations unveil both the festive spirit and the limits of power of the authority.

Twelfth Night, on the other hand is particularly remarkable in terms of Greenblatt's theoretical concept. The cross-dressing and gender confusion at the heart of the play create an upheaval in which traditional social roles are suspended. Viola's ability to move freely as a man, Olivia's love for her, and Orsino's emotional attachment to her point to a dramatic structure that questions the heteronormative order. However, at the end of the play, Viola returns to her female identity and marries Orsino, which signifies the containment of gender ambiguity within the play.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM—FESTIVAL, GENDER AND OBEDIENCE

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play that “dream about watching a play about dreams” (Greenblatt, 2015, p. 809). The fact that the play takes place in a dreamlike setting shows the audience that the characters in the play are experiencing a collective hallucination. Moreover, the play can be read that centre on festival aesthetics and temporarily suspends the structural codes of Elizabethan society, such as gender, class, and authority. The temporary upheavals in Shakespeare's comedies also align with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the “carnavalesque.” For Bakhtin (1984), the carnivalesque offers a space of freedom where social hierarchies are temporarily reversed and norms are suspended. As Lachmann (1989) puts it “In the ‘carnavalesque’ game of inverting official values he sees the anticipation of another, utopian world in which anti-hierarchy, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted” (p.118). When read alongside Greenblatt's model, Bakhtin's perspective reveals how order is both questioned and reestablished in Shakespeare's plays.

In this play, the forest scenes provide a suitable example for understanding the thoughts of Stephen Greenblatt. It can be argued that “social boundaries and laws dissolve in the dreamscape of the play” (Walters, 2016, p. 125). For Greenblatt, literary texts do not explicitly suppress elements that question the power of theatre; instead, they temporarily render these elements visible, making them functional, and ultimately bring them under control in a safe manner. In this context, Shakespeare is “rather than leaving his audience with a heightened understanding of complex political problems, or in a state of uncertainty, or divided among

themselves, Shakespeare uses play and illusion to lead them though subversive thoughts to positive acceptance of the dominant order” (McAlindon, 1995, p. 412). Therefore, it is argued that the subversion makes visible in Shakespeare’s plays undoubtedly returns to its former order at the end of both plays.

From the second act onwards, the scene shifts from Athens to the fairy forest, and this transition also signals a carnivalesque environment where social norms are sort of unbound. For instance, Hermia and Lysander’s escape to the forest in defiance of patriarchal laws, Helena’s obsessive pursuit, and Titania’s enchantment of a lower-class man (Bottom) in the fairy world demonstrate Shakespeare’s purposeful subversion of social and class boundaries. Moreover, Titania’s love for Bottom, who is from the lower class and does not look like the “others,” suspends both gender norms and social hierarchy. Here, this situation can be considered what Greenblatt calls “subversion”: the female character becomes the subject of desire and comes close to break the patriarchal order by feeling sexual attraction toward a man who is socially “below” her.

However, this subversion does not last long. As Titania is “freed” from the effects of love juice, Oberon reminds her of what happened, and she says: “My Oberon! what visions have I seen! Methought I was enamoured of an ass” (Shakespeare, 2015, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 4.1.75–76) As can be seen, Titania remembers finding herself in love with Bottom and recoils in disgust, signifying a return to boundaries that were thought to have been crossed.

Similarly, the complicating love changes experienced by young lovers in the forest also give the impression that order has been suspended. For instance, the effect of the love juice, which causes Demetrius to suddenly fall in love with Helena, reveals the unsteady and changeable nature of love. Yet, these love relationships are also brought into order through weddings at the end of the play. In the forest, all the characters experience a sort of a freedom, but at the end of the play, it can be observed that they return to the patriarchal order through marriage.

In the final scenes of the play, after all the chaotic events in the fairy world, the characters return to Athens. With Theseus’s approval, three separate weddings take place at the same time: Hermia- Lysander, Helena-Demetrius, and Theseus-Hippolyta. At first, these scenes convey a sense of reconciliation and celebration; however, an ideological reading reveals another aspect of this arrangement. Even though Theseus appears to reject Egeus’s authority over his daughter Hermia, ultimately Hermia’s right to marry is determined by the male authority figure (Theseus). Therefore, the decision regarding the woman’s fate remains under the control of a male figure. This argument echoes Greenblatt’s way of thinking. Although authority appears to be almost broken, another power apparatus comes into play to maintain the dominant order.

When the magic of the fairy world comes to an end, Titania and Oberon make peace and reunite. However, this peace is not a victory for Titania’s free will; it

is the result of Oberon's manipulation, which was planned from the beginning. According to Montrose's (1983) analysis, the play stages a "a fantasy of male dependency upon woman is expressed and contained within a fantasy of male control over woman" (p. 65). Thus, the temporary chaos in the fairy world is suppressed through marriage, submission, and patriarchal approval, stereotypical symbols of patriarchal system.

To conclude, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though it appears initially to be a fairy tale about freedom, love, and transformation, reveals a sophisticated structure that shows how the dominant order allows temporary chaos to occur and reestablish itself. The forest is not a space of liberation but an ideological place. The play offers characters the right to dream, but draws the boundaries of those dreams, keeping them within the limits of the legitimate order. Thus, Greenblatt's subversion and containment model is highly effective in explaining how this structure operates: Shakespeare offers the audience the illusion of stepping outside the order, but in the end, he reestablishes his illusion within the aesthetic framework of the order itself.

Therefore, the festival in the play is not transformative but regulatory. Although it temporarily makes differences and deviations visible, it ultimately reinforces patriarchal system and class norms. Shakespeare does not merely tell a story here but reproduces the power relations of Elizabethan England. In this context, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not merely a romantic comedy, but also an ideological arena of negotiation.

THE MASK OF GENDER: SUBVERSION AND IDEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN *TWELFTH NIGHT*

In Elizabethan England, theatre was not only a means of entertainment, but also a powerful public space that reflected, transformed, and sometimes reproduced the ideological and social codes of the period. Theatres operating under the state supervision found opportunities to discuss issues related to the lower classes, women's religious differences, and social unrest within the limits approved by the government. At that time, subversion of gender on stage was technically commonplace, especially due to male actors playing female roles in that era. However, this theatrical norm was creatively employed by Shakespeare to produce plays that challenged the audience's perceptions of gender roles. *Twelfth Night* is perhaps one of the most sophisticated examples of this type of play: it contains many subversive elements such as cross-dressing, blurring of sexual orientations, mockery of class differences, and the temporary subversion of social order.

Nevertheless, this "subversion" ultimately concludes in a notable reconstruction of the heteronormative and class-based order. In *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt (1988) mainly argues that Renaissance theatre does not merely glorify the existing order; it also brings to the stage alternative ideas that stretch the boundaries of that order, even questioning it. However, these subversive elements

are controlled, framed, and ultimately reinterpreted in favour of the existing order within the structure of the play. Like the theoretical framework mentioned in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* follows a similar structure: throughout the play, gender roles become ambiguous, identities become mixed, and desires change direction; however, in the end, each character returns to their socially accepted roles and order is restored. In this way, theatre becomes both a liberating realm of imagination and a disciplinary mechanism reinforcing ideological norms in Elizabethan England.

The main subject of *Twelfth Night* is Viola, who survives a shipwreck and, after losing her brother Sebastian, disguises herself as a man named Cesario, and enters the service of Orsino. Viola's transformation into a man directly challenges the gender norms of the time. For instance, Viola, despite being a woman, behaves like a man, entering public spaces and freely communicating with male characters. The emotional closeness she develops with Orsino and Olivia's love for her creates a theatrical universe where desires and gender identities become blurred and normative structures are disrupted. As Veenstra (1995) states that this disruption of gender roles serves a dialectical opposition that strengthens the structure of a totalizing society. This gender ambiguity, described as "defining, off-centerweight," is clearly seen in the "scandalous shadow story" that runs throughout Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night* (p.189).

Viola's line describing her situation is also quite meaningful: "Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much" (Shakespeare, 2015, *Twelfth Night*, 2.3.26–27). These lines demonstrate both an individual identity crisis and how easily gender can be reversed in theatre. Viola, despite being a woman, behaves like a man; Olivia is attracted to her masculinity, while Orsino is emotionally drawn to her. Thus, the play blurs the direction of heterosexual desire.

On the other hand, Olivia's love for Cesario (i.e., Viola) also blurs the "traditional" gender norms. Olivia explicitly declares her love for Cesario, saying:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honor, truth, and everything,
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor? wit nor reason can my passion hide. (Shakespeare, 2015, *Twelfth Night*, 3.2 .140-144)

This kind of female desire is a gesture that challenges the patriarchal order. Yet, this subversive potential is brought under control at the end of the play when it is revealed that Olivia is in love with Sebastian.

Thus, Olivia is married to a "real" man, and the heteronormative order is reestablished. On the other hand, Orsino's affection for Cesario (i.e., Viola) remains ambiguous throughout the play. Orsino begins to perceive Cesario not only as a "messenger" but also as an emotional friend. In his conversations

with Cesario, he praises his face, voice and sensitivity: “Thy small pipe / Is as the maiden’s organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman’s part” (Shakespeare, 2015, *Twelfth Night*, 1.4 .31-33) In these words, Orsino is attracted to Cesario’s feminine qualities; his interest, unaware that Cesario is actually a woman, shows sort of a fictional space of freedom. However, this space is not allowed to persist when Viola is revealed to be a woman; Orsino breathes a sigh of relief and immediately proposes marriage to her, thereby incorporating her into the heterosexual order. Thus, the homoerotic tension is neutralised through containment. At the end of the play, Orsino says: “Give me thy hand / And let me see thee in thy woman’s weeds.” (Shakespeare, 2015, *Twelfth Night*, 5.1 .263-264) This line implies that Orsino justifies his closeness to Cesario solely because Viola is a woman. Greenblatt’s concept of containment is very clear here: the gender ambiguity presented in the play is “resolved” at the end through a change of clothes and marriage.

In addition to this, another important subversive element in the play is what happens to the character Malvolio, Olivia’s servant. He stands as one of the other cheerful characters in the play with his moralistic and serious nature. He is convinced that Olivia is in love with him. This creates a class reversal: a member of the lower class tries to rise socially by believing that he has won the love of his master and, all of a sudden, he becomes obsessed with the idea of becoming “Count Malvolio”. Shakespeare makes visible the lower class’s desire for social advancement. However, this visibility does not pose a threat, because Malvolio is ridiculed, excluded and removed from the play’s universe. From this, it is seen that that Shakespeare’s marginalised characters are elements outside the dominant order and are pushed out at the end of the play, thus restoring the unity of the ideological order. In this case, it is obvious that Malvolio is a tragic figure who reminding us of the limits of the temporary freedom granted to the lower class. To conclude, *Twelfth Night* offers a festive space where social codes such as gender, class, and desire are temporarily subverted. Yet, this space is not permanent. Viola returns to her female identity, Olivia marries a heterosexual partner, Orsino redirects his sexual attraction to the “right” direction, and Malvolio is excluded. Greenblatt’s concept of subversion and containment provides a fundamental key to understanding how this structure works: Shakespeare offers the audience the illusion of stepping outside the order; but this illusion is nothing more than the aesthetic reproduction of the order. Thus, theatre both opens space for ideological deviations and suppresses them.

CONCLUSION

William Shakespeare’s comedies *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Twelfth Night* are notable not only for their staging techniques of the period, but also for their structures that temporarily question social, sexual, and ideological structures. These two plays utilise the carnivalesque freedom offered by Elizabethan theatre as a dramatic tool to temporarily suspend norms. However, this freedom is not absolute. Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of subversion and containment provides an effective theoretical framework for understanding how the anti-establishment

tendencies observed in these plays are produced, circulated, and subsequently neutralised.

For Greenblatt, Renaissance theatre does not merely praise the dominant ideology; rather, it reveals the complexity of power dynamics. Play texts temporarily open space on stage for alternative thoughts and identities. However, as we can understand from Greenblatt's thoughts, this "subversion" is subjected to a process of "containment" by the structural mechanisms of the text, rendering it ideologically harmless. Drawing on Greenblatt's concept, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* are two texts that allow the audience to reflect on fundamental structures such as gender, class, and desire ultimately reestablish these structures.

An independent landscape outside the normative order arises in both plays. The forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the imaginary scape of Illyria in *Twelfth Night* seems to be other spaces where social and sexual roles are blurred, desires shift their directions, and identities are blended. These spaces evoke a temporary freedom, an atmosphere where authority is suspended and social roles are inverted. Yet, this inversion is not portrayed as unlimited freedom but as a controlled deviation in Shakespeare's plays.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, characters who fall in love with one another under the spell of magic demonstrate that concept of love is not rational but a manipulative emotion. Titania's love for Bottom, creates an upheaval in terms of class and sexual order. These instantaneous moments occur in the forest outside the realm of order. However, when the spell is broken, Titania interprets this love as a dream and returns to her role as queen. Desire is recognised as a temporary deviation, but ultimately suppressed by marriage and hierarchy, and everything returns to its former order. Likewise, Viola's disguise as a man in *Twelfth Night* directly challenges gender roles. Her appearance on stage as Cesario, under her male identity shows that the heteronormative order is temporarily blurred, both through Olivia's love for her and her emotional closeness to Orsino. However, this confusion is resolved with the arrival of Sebastian: Olivia marries a real man, and Orsino proposes to Cesario as soon as he learns she is now a woman. The reversal of gender creates a space outside the normative order, but this space ultimately vanished.

In both plays, the direction of desire is not fixed. Characters fall in love with different people through conscious or magical means, and their identities become confused. This situation offers an alternative to the naturalised narrative of desire. Titania's interest in an animal, Olivia's love for a woman (without knowing she is a woman), or Orsino's interest in Cesario show that the direction of desire is shaped not by social structures but by the plot on stage. These examples bear traces of the performative nature of gender in Elizabethan theatre. Yet, these deviations are temporary and functional. The two plays introduced alternative forms of gender and desire to the audience; however, they render them ineffective

within the ideological framework precisely through this visibility. Viola's return to her female identity and her marriage to Orsino resolve the sexual ambiguity that persists throughout the play. Titania's recollection of her love for the donkey as an illusion is a similar ideological closure. Shakespeare opens a possibility to reinforce the legitimacy of the order, that is reestablished at the closing of the play.

The roles of lower-class characters form a significant ideological layer in both plays. The artisans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Bottom, Snout, Quince, etc.) enter the realm of the nobility by attempting to perform a play on stage. Yet, their performance is ridiculed by Theseus and Hippolyta. Although the artisans manage to take the stage, the art they present is deemed valueless, thereby revealing the boundaries of class mobility. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio's desire to climb the social hierarchy is directly punished. Malvolio is tricked by Maria and Sir Toby into believing that his mistress is in love with him. He thus becomes obsessed with the idea of becoming "Count Malvolio." This fantasy not only subverts class hierarchies but also contains an erotic reversal. However, by the end of the play, Malvolio is mocked, and leaves the stage in revenge. This conclusion implies that any deviation threatening the class order must be expelled. Malvolio's suppression defines the boundaries of the limited freedom Shakespeare grants the audience.

Although everything seems to have fallen into place at the end of both plays, a completely happy ending cannot be achieved. The melancholic song sung by Feste in *Twelfth Night*— For the rain it raineth every day— contrasts with the play's overall cheerfulness and highlights the exclusion of certain characters and unresolved identity conflicts (Shakespeare, 2015, *Twelfth Night*, 5.1.378). Similarly, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the deviations caused by the magic are interpreted as a dream and thus rendered ineffective. However, this dream continues to imply the existence of an alternative world shown to the audience. In his *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt (1988) mainly points out that the theatre is not merely an ideological apparatus but also a stage that reveals tension yet is compelled to suppress it. Shakespeare's comedies both bring unconventional possibilities to the stage and neutralize them within the dramatic structure, returning them to the old status. In this way, theatre nourishes dreams that lie outside social norms while at the same time preventing them from transgressing boundaries.

To conclude, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* are the two texts that exemplify both the creative and ideological nature of Shakespeare's theatre. These plays offer the audience dramatic experiences with through themes like deviation, reversal gender roles, and the flexibility of desire. Yet, these experiences ultimately end in favour of the established order. Greenblatt's concepts of subversion and containment is illuminating in this regard: Shakespeare temporarily leads to the audience to other possibilities, but this openness ultimately serves to reinforce the normative order. For this reason, Shakespeare's comedies reflect the ideological

nature of Renaissance theatre most powerfully, both through the freedom they portray and the way they frame that freedom.

This study contributes to the existing literature by re-examining Shakespeare's comedies through a contemporary theoretical lens that bridges early modern ideology and modern critical thought. Re-reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night* within the framework of subversion and containment reveals that Shakespeare addressed themes such as gender, class, and desire in an extremely bold manner for his time. The timelessness of these plays lies in their ability to be reinterpreted through modern concepts such as power, identity, and freedom; thus, Shakespeare's imagination continues to evoke thought and inspire in today's world.

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