# Table of Contents

Summary ..............................................................................................................................................................1

Act and Scene Summaries ..................................................................................................................................5

Themes ...............................................................................................................................................................28

Characters .........................................................................................................................................................31

Analysis ..............................................................................................................................................................38

Critical Essays ...................................................................................................................................................43

Teaching Guide .............................................................................................................................................1068

Quotes .............................................................................................................................................................1076

Short-Answer Quizzes ..................................................................................................................................1092
Summary

Twelfth Night is a story of love and confused identity. At the beginning of the play, after having survived a shipwreck, Viola (the play's protagonist) finds herself stranded in Illyria. She disguises herself as Cesario, a young man, and enters into the service of Duke Orsino.

Orsino is in love with the countess Olivia, but she does not return his affections. In order to woo Olivia, Orsino sends Cesario (who is actually Viola) to serve as his representative, but Olivia falls in love with Cesario instead. Meanwhile, Viola, in her service to Orsino, is drawn into close friendship with him and finds herself falling in love. Thus, the story of Twelfth Night revolves around this love triangle fueled by mistaken identities, by which Viola is in love with Orsino, who is in love with Olivia, who is in love with Cesario (who is actually Viola).

Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, is also traveling to Illyria with his friend Antonio. When they reach their destination, they separate. There is an additional subplot within Olivia's own household involving her uncle, Sir Toby Belch; her servant, Maria; her steward, Malvolio; and another would-be suitor to Olivia, Andrew Aguecheek. Entertaining themselves at the steward's expense, Maria leaves letters forged in Olivia's handwriting that lead Malvolio to assume that Olivia is in fact in love with him. Maria also advises him to present himself in such a manner that Olivia would find offensive. Malvolio finds these letters and falls for the deception.

Meanwhile, Olivia continues to be in love with Cesario, and Andrew notices her favor for Orsino's servant. Toby tries to push Andrew into fighting Cesario as a way to win Olivia's affections. However, Antonio stumbles upon the scene. Mistaking Viola for her twin brother, he comes to her defense, only to be arrested. Antonio looks toward the man he believes to be Sebastian for support—only to find, of course, that he does not know Antonio or anything about him. Antonio curses his friend as a betrayer as he is dragged away. Finally, the real Sebastian stumbles upon Olivia, who marries him, mistaking him for Cesario.

As the play comes to a close, this comedy of mistaken identities is resolved, with the full truth brought to light. Brother and sister are reunited, Viola reveals her true identity, and Orsino proposes marriage to Viola.

Summary: Introduction

Twelfth Night; or What You Will was composed by William Shakespeare in either 1600 or 1601 as the last of his three "mature comedies" (the other two being Much Ado About Nothing and As You Like It). Like his early comedies, The Comedy of Errors or The Taming of the Shrew for instance, Twelfth Night is essentially a celebration of romantic love and can be viewed as a traditional romantic comedy. The play has many of the elements common to Elizabethan romantic comedy, including the devices of mistaken identity, separated twins, and gender-crossing disguise, and its plot revolves around overcoming obstacles to "true" love. And, like other representatives of the genre, Twelfth Night also features a subplot in which a self-inflated "sour" or "blocking" character, the steward Malvolio, is brought to his knees through a trick orchestrated by a ribald if also self-inflated character in the person of Sir Toby Belch.

But unlike his early comedies, Shakespeare also strikes some discordant notes in Twelfth Night, including a conception of love and other themes that are not part of the conventional romantic comedy formula. Thus, for example, the subject of insanity surfaces as a salient theme and as a force within the plot. Indeed, while Twelfth Night concludes with tandem weddings, Shakespeare also speaks about the madness of love.
Synopsis of the Play

This is a play about love, placed in a festive atmosphere in which three couples are brought together happily. It opens with Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, expressing his deep love for the Countess Olivia. Meanwhile, the shipwrecked Viola disguises herself as a man and endeavors to enter the Duke’s service. Although she has rejected his suit, the Duke then employs Viola, who takes the name of Cesario, to woo Olivia for him. Ironically, Cesario falls in love with the Duke, and Olivia falls in love with Cesario, who is really Viola disguised.

In the midst of this love triangle are the servants of Olivia’s house and her Uncle Toby. The clown provides entertainment for the characters in both houses and speaks irreverently to them. He is the jester of the play. Maria, Olivia’s woman, desires to seek revenge on Malvolio, Olivia’s steward. To the delight of Sir Toby, Olivia’s uncle, and his friend Sir Andrew, Maria comes up with a plot to drop love letters supposedly written by Olivia in Malvolio’s path. When she does, they observe him, along with Fabian, another servant, as Malvolio falls for the bait. Believing that Olivia loves him, he makes a fool of himself.

The love plot moves along as Cesario goes to woo Olivia for the Duke. The second time that Cesario appears at Olivia’s home Olivia openly declares her love for Cesario. All along, Sir Andrew has been nursing a hope to win Olivia’s love. When he plans to give up on her, Sir Toby suggests that Sir Andrew fight with Cesario to impress Olivia. Cesario, however, refuses to fight.

In the meantime, Viola’s brother, who is also shipwrecked, makes his way to safe lodging in Illyria with Antonio the sea captain. After the fight between Cesario and Sir Andrew begins, Antonio intervenes to save Cesario, whom he takes for Sebastian. But the Duke’s officers promptly arrest Antonio for a past offense. Olivia later comes upon Sir Andrew and Sebastian wrangling at her house. Olivia, thinking Sebastian is Cesario, leads Sebastian to marriage in a nearby chapel.

The complications of identity are unraveled in the fifth act. Cesario finally reveals that he is Viola. Sebastian recognizes her as his sister. The Duke takes Viola up on her love offerings and proposes to her. Olivia assures Malvolio that she did not write the letter that so disturbed him. Sir Toby marries Maria in appreciation for her humiliating scheme.

Estimated Reading Time

You can read through Twelfth Night in about three and a half hours. But, when reading Shakespeare, you should plan to re-read at least one more time. When you read more carefully, paying attention to difficult words and Shakespeare’s exquisite use of language, your reading time will necessarily increase. Your more careful reading may take about six hours.

Summary

Viola and Sebastian, brother and sister twins who closely resemble each other, are separated when the ship on which they are passengers is wrecked during a great storm at sea. Each thinks that the other is dead and sets out alone with no hope of being reunited.

The lovely and charming Viola is cast upon the shores of Illyria, where she is befriended by a kind sea captain. They decide to dress Viola in men’s clothing and have her take service as a page in the household of young Duke Orsino. Dressed in man’s garb, Viola calls herself Cesario and becomes the duke’s personal attendant. Impressed by the youth’s good looks and pert but courtly speech, Orsino sends “him” as his envoy of love to woo the Countess Olivia, who is mourning the death of her young brother.
The wealthy Olivia lives in a splendid palace with her maid, Maria; her drunken old uncle, Sir Toby Belch; and her steward, Malvolio. Maria and Sir Toby are a happy-go-lucky pair who drink and carouse with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, an ancient nobleman who is much enamored of Olivia. In return for grog supplied by Sir Andrew, Sir Toby is supposed to press Sir Andrew’s suit with Olivia. Actually, however, Sir Toby never stays sober long enough to keep his part of the bargain. All these affairs are observed disapprovingly by Malvolio, Olivia’s ambitious, narrow-minded steward, who cannot tolerate jollity in those about him.

When Cesario arrives at the palace, Olivia is instantly attracted to the page—thinking her a man. She pays close attention to Orsino’s message, but it is not love for Orsino that causes her to listen so carefully. When Cesario leaves, she sends Malvolio after her with a ring. It is a shock for Viola, who hitherto enjoys playing the part of Cesario, to realize that Olivia fell in love with her in her male clothes.

Meanwhile, Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew decide to stop Malvolio’s constant prying into their affairs and devise a scheme whereby Malvolio will find a note, supposedly written by Olivia, in which she confesses her secret love for him and asks him to wear garish yellow stockings tied with cross garters and to smile continually in her presence. Overjoyed to receive this note, Malvolio soon appears in his strange dress, capering and bowing before the startled countess. Olivia decides that Malvolio lost his wits; to the amusement of the three conspirators, she has him confined to a dark room.

As the days pass, Viola falls in love with the duke, but the latter has eyes only for Olivia, with whom he presses his page to renew his suit. When Cesario delivers another message from Orsino to Olivia, the countess openly declares her love for the young page. Cesario insists, however, that his heart can never belong to any woman. So obvious are Olivia’s feelings for Cesario that Sir Andrew becomes jealous. Sir Toby and Maria insist that Sir Andrew’s only course is to fight a duel with the page. Sir Toby delivers Sir Andrew’s blustering challenge, which Cesario reluctantly accepts.

While these events unfold, Viola’s twin brother, Sebastian, is being rescued by another sea captain, named Antonio, and the two become close friends. When Sebastian decides to visit the court of Duke Orsino at Illyria, Antonio decides to accompany him, even though he fears that he might be arrested there because he once dueled with the duke. Upon arriving in Illyria, Antonio gives Sebastian his purse for safekeeping, and the two men separate for several hours.

While wandering about the city, Antonio chances upon the duel between Cesario and Sir Andrew. Mistaking the disguised page for her brother, Antonio immediately goes to the rescue of his supposed friend. When officers arrive on the scene, one of them recognizes Antonio and arrests him in the name of the duke. Thinking that Viola is Sebastian, Antonio asks her to return his purse and is surprised and hurt when she disclaims all knowledge of the captain’s money. As Antonio is dragged away, he shouts invectives at “Sebastian” for not returning his purse, thereby alerting Viola to the fact that her brother is still alive.

Meanwhile, the real Sebastian is being followed by Sir Andrew, who never dreamed that this young man is not the same Cesario with whom he just dueled. Prodded by Sir Toby and Maria, Sir Andrew engages Sebastian in a new duel and is promptly wounded, along with Sir Toby. Olivia then interferes and has Sebastian taken to her home, thinking that he is Cesario. After sending for a priest, she marries the surprised—but not unwilling—Sebastian.

As the officers escort Antonio past Olivia’s house, Orsino—accompanied by Cesario—appears at her gates. Orsino recognizes Antonio instantly and demands to know why the sailor returned to Illyria—a city filled with his enemies. Antonio explains that he rescued and befriended the duke’s present companion, Sebastian, and because of his deep friendship for the lad accompanied him to Illyria despite the danger his visit involves. Pointing to Cesario, he sorrowfully accuses the person he supposes to be Sebastian of violating their friendship by not returning his purse.
The duke is protesting against Antonio’s accusation when Olivia appears and salutes Cesario as her husband. Now the duke also begins to think his page ungrateful, especially since he told Cesario to press his own suit with Olivia. Just then Sir Andrew and Sir Toby arrive, looking for a doctor because Sebastian wounded them. Seeing Cesario, Sir Andrew begins to rail at him for his violence until Olivia dismisses the two old men. The real Sebastian then appears and apologizes for having wounded the old men.

Spying Antonio, Sebastian joyfully greets his friend. Antonio and the rest of the amazed group, unable to believe what they see, stare from Cesario to Sebastian. After Viola reveals her true identity and explains how she and her brother became separated, she and Sebastian greet each other warmly. Seeing that the page of whom he grew so fond is a woman, Duke Orsino declares that he will marry her.

After Malvolio is summoned, the plot against him is revealed. As he storms off, vowing revenge, the others begin celebrating the impending marriages of Viola and Orsino and of Sir Toby and Maria. Only Malvolio, unhappy in the happiness of others, remains peevish and disgruntled.
Act and Scene Summaries

Act and Scene Summaries: Act I, Scene 1 Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Orsino: the Duke of Illyria, who is madly in love with Olivia
Curio: one of the Duke’s attendants
Valentine: another gentleman attending the Duke

Summary
The play opens at the Duke’s palace in Illyria. The Duke is lovesick, and so the first 15 lines express his powerful love for the Countess Olivia. He pours forth sweet words of passion for his love object.

He desires to have music feed his appetite for love. He feels at first that he can’t get enough of the energizing “food of love,” but abruptly urges the musicians to stop playing: “Enough, no more!”

Then, addressing the “spirit of love,” he characterizes it as so broad a force that nothing can outdo or overcome it. Love is very, very powerful.

After this outpouring, one of the Duke’s attendants, Curio, asks him if he plans to go hunting. But Orsino is in no mood for recreation; he is deeply in love. So his response is more than a mere “no.” He says that his desire for Olivia has stronger control over him than anything else.

Valentine, another attendant, enters with words that the Duke does want to listen to because they concern Olivia. Valentine informs the Duke of Olivia’s mourning. She is grieving the loss of her dead brother and plans to stay in mourning for a long time. So, for her, love is out!

This news frustrates the Duke. He realizes that he will not achieve the object of his desire—at least, not yet. He recognizes that Olivia is full of love, but is channeling it in another direction, away from him. Still, his lover’s hope does not lessen as long as he feels that love will awaken in Olivia.

Analysis
The first scene leads us instantly into the major theme of the play—love. Shakespeare, the skillful dramatist, wastes no time in developing it. In so doing, he uses poetic devices such as metaphor, simile, puns, and synesthesia to reveal the extraordinary nature of true love.

The poetry of the Duke’s opening speech clearly conveys the power of his love for Olivia:

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.

The Duke uses a physical metaphor of eating food to show how strong his experience of love is. He commands the musicians to overwhelm him with music, so that his lingering appetite for Olivia will die. He is totally wrapped up in his love for her.
Further on in the Duke’s opening speech, he directly addresses the “spirit of love,” using a falconry metaphor to indicate the depth of true love. One doesn’t have to be a hunter to appreciate the thought he tries to convey. Consider that the sky is such a broad and spacious area and that falcons can reach great heights while flying. The power of the poetry here rests in comparing the experience of love with the falcon reaching its highest point in flight. It’s a dizzying image. The bird reaches its highest point and then must come down to lower heights. Just as the falcon cannot outdistance the sky, so “nought” can overdo or overwhelm the power of love. All other forces and influences will “fall into abatement” if they try to overwhelm love.

The Duke has ample time to walk around his palace being in love, doing nothing else. This sense of stasis suggests that the Duke is illustrating true love in its intensity as it lasts. He is engaged in the process of loving; he has not entered into a relationship with Olivia or any other woman as yet.

Accordingly, it might be said that the Duke is “in love with love.” But his speeches in Scene i; while exalting the business of love, also demonstrate that he knows his love object to be Olivia, a real, breathing person, and he makes an effort to win her.

The title of the play, *Twelfth Night*, orients the reader toward another element in the play, namely, that of the playful and festive atmosphere of the action. The *Twelfth Night* of Christmas was an occasion for merriment when a “Lord of Misrule” was appointed to direct the festivities. It is interesting that Shakespeare associated this particular holiday with the theme of love. In the festival running through the play, love plays an important part as the characters meet and pair off. Plots and affairs of love are entertaining to be involved in. The meaning of the subtitle, “What You Will,” is not so apparent to the reader. It is spoken by Olivia at the end of Act I to Malvolio when she instructs him to get rid of Cesario, who’s come to woo her for the Duke. The casualness of the phrase reflects her loose attitude toward the Duke’s love. It points up the contrast between her feelings and those of the Duke. Feste, the Clown, will later emphasize this mundane level of love. It may also suggest a satire on the foibles of man.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act I, Scene 2 Summary and Analysis**

**New Characters:**
Viola: the female of a twin brother–sister pair, who enters Illyria disguised as Cesario and finds love

A Sea Captain: a friend to Viola who comes ashore with her

**Summary**
The setting of this scene is appropriately away from the majestic atmosphere of the Duke’s palace. We meet Viola and a captain on a seacoast. Viola’s practical nature serves to complement the Duke’s romantic character.

Shipwrecked, Viola asks the Captain and sailors where she is. The Captain tells her that they are in a region called “Illyria.” Her brother, who had also been on the ship with her, is separated from them, which causes Viola to wonder if he has drowned. The Captain suggests that he may still be alive because he last saw him struggling to stay afloat.

The Captain was born and raised in Illyria, and he knows about the Duke’s courtship with Olivia. The Captain relates Olivia’s disinclination to accept Orsino’s pledge, as he has heard from gossip.

Upon hearing this, Viola is moved to serve Olivia. But the Captain tells her that that is impossible. Olivia has closed herself off to any new relationships while she deeply mourns the loss of her brother.
Viola quickly gets another idea. She decides to serve the Duke instead, as his eunuch. Since she is a woman, that plan will require a disguise: “Conceal me what I am.” This plan is very practical, for it utilizes a disguise. Viola claims to have a purpose in assuming a disguise, but, at this point, it is not clear exactly what she wants to achieve. She even says, “What else may hap, to time I will commit.”

**Analysis**

This scene shifts the thematic emphasis to a practical, commonsense aspect of love. In so doing, Shakespeare is implying that there’s more to love than mere poetry. It’s all right to put one’s loved one up on a pedestal, but it also becomes necessary to find a way to get her down and together with the wooer. Valentine, the Duke’s servant, had only gone to Olivia to report the Duke’s love for her and obtain a favorable reply. Viola represents a viable plan of action to bring the two together in love. Her offerings of money to the Captain, for example, symbolize this practical side to her character. Money is a tool and a means to an end. Viola is well aware that money represents a way to get people to do what she wants.

The disguise plan has been used a lot in Shakespeare’s plays. Here, as in *Measure for Measure* and *As You Like It*, a noble character puts on a mask in order to influence the behavior of other characters. Since Viola desires to serve the Duke, her goal may be to help make the love match a reality for him.

Relevant to her noble motivation is Viola’s stating of a significant Shakespearean theme, that is, appearances versus the reality underlying them. Shakespeare knew all too well that appearances can be deceiving. People seem other than what they are in order to deceive or hurt other people. Viola comments perceptively on the Captain’s true character. He is authentic and can be trusted. Her valuing of an authentic character implies that her own motivation is for the Duke’s benefit.

Viola repeats the music image of the first scene. True to her character as we’ve seen it thus far, she has in mind a specific practical use for music. She plans to “speak to him in many sorts of music.” Clearly, Viola wants to get on the Duke’s good side and help him. So, she will use music to do so. Notice the active/passive contrast of each character’s use of music. Whereas the Duke passively requests that his musicians play music so it will fill him to overflow, Viola contemplates the active use of music to get into the good graces of the Duke.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act I, Scene 3 Summary and Analysis**

**New Characters:**
Sir Toby Belch: Olivia’s uncle, who drinks a lot

Maria: Olivia’s lady-in-waiting

Sir Andrew Aguecheek: Sir Toby’s friend, who thinks he is a potential suitor for Olivia

**Summary**

This scene is set in Olivia’s house, but we do not as yet meet Olivia. She is in extended mourning. Sir Toby, her uncle, opens with a question about Olivia. He is talking to Maria, Olivia’s lady-in-waiting, who responds with a complaint about Toby’s late carousing.

Maria refers to Sir Toby’s friend, Sir Andrew, as a fool. She heard that Sir Toby had brought him to the house to woo Olivia. Sir Toby, on the other hand, praises the many virtues his friend possesses. He is handsome, has a good income, and speaks several languages. Furthermore, they are drinking buddies.
When Sir Andrew enters, Sir Toby immediately urges him on Maria, “board her, woo her, assail her,” though Sir Andrew misunderstands him at first. As Sir Toby’s meaning dawns on him, he asserts that he wouldn’t do such a thing in Olivia’s house.

Before departing, Maria invites Sir Andrew for a drink. Sir Toby realizes that her invitation was made in a joking manner, and he engages Sir Andrew in a playful conversation. Sir Andrew talks of leaving, having lost hope of winning Olivia’s love. He believes the Count Orsino has a much better chance for her than he does. Nonetheless, Sir Toby reassures him that his chances are still good because Orsino is not the kind of man Olivia is looking for. This reassurance encourages Sir Andrew to stay a month longer.

So, continuing their conversation together, Sir Toby questions his friend’s dancing ability. Sir Andrew says that he’s quite a capable dancer. They then plan to go partying together.

Analysis
The characters of Maria and Sir Toby put us in touch with a lower class of people in Illyria; that is, they do not belong to the aristocracy as do Orsino and Olivia. This is a play for all kinds of people; love is for everyone. The disguise trick suggests this notion. It doesn’t matter what your financial or social status is in love because true love does not play favorites. That is why Sir Andrew and Malvolio can entertain hopes of winning Olivia’s love. Love is an experience that occurs between two human beings. A disguise can prove this statement because if you can conceal who or what you truly are, then it follows that it doesn’t matter what your real identity is. Love can blossom. All is fair in love.

A note of competition enters the play in this scene. Sir Toby believes Sir Andrew to be a proper suitor for his niece. Despite his praise, however, the scene leaves us with the impression that Sir Andrew may not be so appropriate. Maria, for one, knocks him. By suggesting Sir Andrew for Olivia—in the light of his iffy status—Shakespeare asserts the universality of his love theme.

Beyond that, these characters illustrate the party-and-fun atmosphere, as implied in the title’s holiday. They drink, dance, and flirt with the ladies, everything one would expect at a wild, exciting festival. There’s a lighthearted playfulness all through the play; Sir Toby and Andrew seem to keep the celebration going. Their roles may be to suggest that liveliness and fun should surround the process of falling in love.

Notice how Shakespeare uses the language to reveal Sir Toby’s free spirit. He parodies Maria’s use of the word “exception.” His repetition of the word “confine” with a new meaning is an instance of the figurative device called “ploce.” Maria uses it in the sense of “keep,” while Sir Toby switches to the sense of “dress.” There’s a sly defiance in this switch of senses that reflects his high-spirited nature. This example of “ploce” and others in this scene lend a sharp emphasis to the dialogue.

The scene ends with Sir Toby introducing a succession of “dance” images. This imagery both characterizes Sir Toby as the representative of partying that he is, and it strengthens the overall presence of a festival in Illyria.

Act and Scene Summaries: Act I, Scene 4 Summary and Analysis

Summary
We find Viola (now named “Cesario”) on her fourth day in the Duke’s palace, her disguise having gained her the access she wished. Valentine is amazed, in fact, at how much favor she has already gained with the Duke.
The Duke assigns Cesario the task of pursuing Olivia for him. He urges him to be aggressive: “Be clamorous and leap all civil bounds.” The Duke is confident that Cesario can effectively persuade Olivia to respond to his true passion. Cesario is doubtful.

Part of the Duke’s confidence owes to his intuition of Cesario’s real feminine qualities. He implies, in other words, that she can play the womanly matchmaker role well. He promises him a reward if he is successful in his undertaking.

Viola’s last lines allude to another plot strand in the play, her love for the Duke, which she cannot reveal because of her disguise.

Analysis
It is appropriate to consider a definition of the type of play (or “genre”) that Twelfth Night is. Twelfth Night belongs to a species of drama known as “comedy.” We expect the course of action in a comedy to be different from that in a tragedy. As M.H. Abrams puts it in A Glossary of Literary Terms:

> Romantic comedy, as developed by Shakespeare and some of his Elizabethan contemporaries, is concerned with a love affair that involves a beautiful and idealized heroine (sometimes disguised as a man); the course of this love does not run smooth, but overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy union.

Twelfth Night contains both of these elements and a lot more. The definition enlightens us about the ending; it will be a happy one. In comedy, love conquers all. Northrop Frye makes it clear that comedy is “community-oriented, its vision has a social significance. This vision calls for the establishing of society as we would like it.” (Frye, 286)

Recall, therefore, that up until the fourth scene, the Duke’s love is virtually the “talk of the town.” Not only does the Duke brim with lyrical expression of his love, but the other characters are also aware of his infatuation. This tight interweaving of the Orsino courtship strand develops the love theme quite nicely.

This scene offers an inkling as to a slight alteration in the Duke’s impassioned stance toward Olivia. Cesario’s brief stay has exerted a subtle influence on him. Orsino closes the scene with a display of common sense that moves him momentarily away from the love-filled garden he’s been in. He judges Cesario’s ability to perform the errand and offers him wealth if he succeeds.

Act and Scene Summaries: Act I, Scene 5 Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Olivia: the countess with whom Orsino is in love and who rejects him
Clown: servant to Olivia who sings and provides entertainment
Malvolio: steward to Olivia

Summary
This scene opens with Maria and the Clown engaged in conversation. Maria, wondering where the Clown has been, tells him that he’ll be punished for his absence unless he has good reason for it. This threat fails to scare the Clown, as he shows in his offhand replies.
The Clown is equally offhand with Olivia when she enters. He responds to her with insult, ironically calling her a “fool.” Although she tries to get rid of him, the Clown prevails on her to prove that she is the fool. To that end, he questions her about her mourning her brother’s death.

Unoffended, Olivia turns to her steward Malvolio for his opinion of the Clown. An exchange of insults follows her question. The Clown puts down Malvolio and Malvolio puts down the Clown. Malvolio considers the Clown a stupid, useless character. Olivia sides with the Clown, even calling Malvolio an “egotist,” because the Clown is only playing his role as “fool” properly.

Maria announces Cesario’s arrival. Olivia is not in the mood to listen to a suit from the Duke. Malvolio returns to Olivia to tell her that Cesario stubbornly refuses to leave until Olivia will speak with him. Olivia wonders what kind of man he is. She allows him to enter and puts on a veil.

Cesario begins by showering lover’s compliments on Olivia. Cesario makes a point of the fact that her suit is memorized. Everything he will say has been rehearsed beforehand.

Shortly after starting his speech of love, Cesario requests to see Olivia’s face. Olivia complies and is met with praise for her “beauty truly blent.” Cesario further affirms the Duke’s passion for Olivia, expressing a hope that Olivia will reciprocate the Duke’s love.

Unfortunately for the Duke, Olivia has no desire to love him. Cesario does not quite believe her rejection of Orsino. He can do little more than express a hope that Olivia will return the Duke’s love, before he exits.

Olivia then reveals that she has been taken with the youth. His charms have worked their subtle ways on Olivia’s eyes. So, she sends Malvolio after him with a token of her newfound affection, a ring. Her final words intimate some confusion about what is happening to her.

**Analysis**

The original love connection of the Duke admiring Olivia has gone awry by the end of this scene. We witness two twists: Viola states her attraction to Orsino, and Olivia reveals a liking for Cesario. These two twists suggest that, for Shakespeare, love is truly a subjective experience. When a person sees a potential sweetheart and falls in love, he or she feels it in his or her own heart and mind. One cannot be forced to love another by the sheer strength of the other’s attraction, as the Duke’s suit might imply.

Another way that Shakespeare emphasizes the subjective nature of love is through the Clown’s speech. The Clown stands in counterpoint to the Duke in respect to his attitude toward Olivia. The smitten Duke utters his passionate feeling for Olivia, but the Clown’s insults are couched in a jarringly logical manner. The former exalts Olivia; the latter belittles her. The Clown insists on proving Olivia a “fool.” This slighting of Olivia reveals her to be a real person rather than the idealized goddess that the Duke opens the play with.

Shakespeare’s plays have fools and clowns in them, whose speech very often has relevance to the action. The most famous example is Lear’s fool, who utters profound commentary on Lear’s plight. The Clown’s role in *Twelfth Night* is a bit more subtle. As noted, the Clown’s self-conscious reference to words and logic provide an indirect commentary on the Duke’s love.

In an obvious way, the Clown is the clown of the party in the play. His wordplay and attitude toward Olivia demonstrate that he’s enjoying the amusement that is found in a festive atmosphere. In keeping with the fun-filled atmosphere, Sir Toby makes a drunken entrance to comment briefly on Cesario’s arrival.

Cesario’s prepared speech for Olivia, on Orsino’s behalf, contains an extended theological metaphor, which Olivia picks up on and carries forward. Cesario contends that he has a sacred message for Olivia. The loftiness
of the theological metaphor reflects the great value placed on Orsino’s suit. His love is sacred; Olivia is his
goddess. A special bond is thus formed between Cesario and Olivia in view of the way Olivia responds to the
theological language of his speech. Perhaps she is valuing the speaker more than the speech.

Cesario finishes his effort to persuade Olivia with speech that has not been studied. He includes hyperbole to
emphasize the Duke’s passion. (I. 256) Cesario earnestly believes that Olivia should return the Duke’s offer
of love. He regards her closed-mindedness as cruel.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act II, Scene 1 Summary and Analysis**

**New Characters:**
Antonio: a sea captain, friend to Sebastian, who wishes to serve him

Sebastian: Viola’s twin brother, who survives the shipwreck and initially believes Viola has drowned

**Summary**
This short scene serves the purpose of letting us know that Sebastian, Viola’s twin brother, has reached the
shores of Illyria. We need this information to prepare our understanding of later scenes.

Sebastian tells us a little about himself, thus informing us that he has a twin sister. He thinks that she drowned
while he managed to gain safety.

He wishes to separate from Antonio and wander about the area. But shortly afterward, he contradicts himself
in this intention by stating that he, specifically, wants to go to “the Count Orsino’s court.” Although Antonio
offers to serve Sebastian, he cannot go immediately with him to Orsino’s court because he has “many
enemies” there. Yet, we will learn that Antonio’s affection for Sebastian is strong enough to prompt him to
follow after him eventually.

**Analysis**
Notice the very straightforward and formal manner in which these men talk to one another. Since this scene
serves an informative purpose, the formal dialogue is most appropriate. There is very little poetry in this
scene. They are not expressing their love for a woman as Orsino was doing in the first scene. The dialogue
serves up numerous indications that its purpose here is just to inform. Antonio starts the dialogue with a
straightforward yes-or-no question: “Will you stay no longer?” Sebastian gives his answer. Then Antonio
makes a request whose very words explicitly suggest that this scene is providing the audience with
information: “Let me know of you whither you are bound.” Finally, Sebastian states background information
in his next speech.

The contrast between the formal prose of this scene and the poetry of the love speeches should teach us about
Shakespeare’s use of language. Poetry expresses feeling, often strong feeling, so using it to reveal the depth of
one’s love is a fine touch. Prose aims to inform and enlighten us about a particular subject or issue, and it is
often, though not always, free of the embellishments and imagination of poetry.

The use of shipwrecked twins in a romantic plot, such as in *Twelfth Night*, is not an idea original to
Shakespeare. As with most of his plays, he used source materials to inspire him with characters and plots.
L.G. Salingar enlightens us as to the way in which Shakespeare manipulated his sources:

> There are four essential characters to *Gi’Ingannati* [a Sienese comedy], Bandello [story],
Riche [story], and Shakespeare; namely, a lover, a heroine in his service disguised as a page,
her twin brother (who at first has disappeared), and a second heroine. The basic elements common to all four plots are: the heroine’s secret love for her master; her employment as go-between, leading to the complication of a cross-wooing; and a final solution by means of the unforeseen arrival of the missing twin.

Even Shakespeare’s mastery required original source materials on which to work.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act II, Scene 2 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
Malvolio catches up with Cesario to give him the ring from Olivia. Naturally, he is surprised inasmuch as he knows he did not leave a ring. Malvolio also repeats Olivia’s desire not to have any further dealings with Orsino. Before leaving, Malvolio puts the ring on the ground.

Left alone on stage, Cesario utters a soliloquy in which he expresses his confusion over the ring. He now realizes that Olivia has fallen in love with him. “She loves me sure,” he asserts. He acknowledges that the disguise must be responsible for stirring up her love. He finishes up the soliloquy wondering how this mistaken love on his part and frustrated love on his master’s part will be resolved. As matters currently stand, there is a mess for all the lovers involved. Time will bring in the solutions.

**Analysis**
It is useful to understand the function of a soliloquy in drama. Sometimes a playwright cannot include important information about character or plot in the dialogue, so a soliloquy may become necessary.

Soliloquy is the act of talking to oneself, silently or aloud. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character, alone on the stage, utters his thoughts aloud; the playwright uses this device as a convenient way to convey directly to the audience information about a character’s motives, intentions, and state of mind, as well as for purposes of general exposition. (Abrams, 180)

In this scene, Cesario certainly makes an important commentary about the love situation while alone on stage. A soliloquy like the one he utters is true to the character of Cesario we’ve seen so far.

His words continue to reflect his role as representative of the practical, commonsense aspect of love in this play. He very logically takes account of Olivia and Orsino’s feelings. True, he may be capable of such intense feelings for another person, but he realizes that people have to get along in the real world each day, too. This play gives us the feeling that the depiction of love would somehow be incomplete if it emphasized just the romance and passion of Orsino and Olivia’s feelings. Love can still see the beloved as an ordinary human being.

Critics have argued over how to interpret Malvolio. The issue relates to Malvolio’s character and the significance of the comic plot centered on him. Consider how dutiful and nonchalant he appears in this scene. He brings the ring, delivers Olivia’s message, and takes off. We can start to form our opinion of his character.

In his soliloquy, Cesario repeats the motif of “appearances versus reality.” Every instance of a motif should enhance our understanding of the playwright’s views on that particular subject.

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!

These lines express his concern that appearances are deceiving. In this context, Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario’s outer masculinity, which causes him to realize that a mask can lead someone into love, regardless of the true character of the person beneath it. It is not Cesario’s intention, however, to seduce Olivia.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act II, Scene 3 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
In case we’d forgotten about the merriment of the play, this scene puts us back in Olivia’s house and opens with the leader of the party, Sir Toby. If we follow the love plot of the previous scene, we are then led astray by what these two men say. They begin by talking about going to bed early. Sir Toby says that going to bed after midnight is equal to going to bed early. Toby calls for some wine to have with their food.

When Feste the Clown enters, Andrew compliments his singing voice and his skill displayed in entertainment the previous night: “Why, this is best fooling, when all is done.” Then, continuing in this vein, Sir Toby calls for another frequently used element in Shakespeare’s plays—a song. Feste suggests either a love song or a song with a moral. Naturally, a love song is apropos. The Clown sings a song that recalls the Duke’s elevated emotion of the first scene; he also defines “love.” Very pleased with the Clown’s song, they engage him in some more singing.

Nevertheless, Maria enters and chides them for their nonsense. Sir Toby banters with her, as is appropriate to his role as “lord of misrule,” (to use the holiday expression). Malvolio’s questions refer to their purpose as the merrymakers in the play. His question, “Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house?”, best points up the intersection of the holiday atmosphere and the love theme, which constitutes the play’s peculiar blend. Malvolio seriously restates his lady’s displeasure with Sir Toby’s revels. What follows, to Malvolio’s chagrin, is more singing and wine-drinking. Malvolio departs with an insult from Maria.

It is at this point that the comic plot is hatched. Maria reveals that she wants revenge on Malvolio, and Sir Toby and Andrew go right along with her scheme. Maria believes that she is wreaking revenge on Malvolio’s Puritan character. Maria explains the plot: it involves dropping letters in Malvolio’s way, supposedly written by Olivia (in her own hand), which will lead him to believe that Olivia is professing her love to him. They are to delight in the spectacle.

**Analysis**
This scene is a good illustration of what L.G. Salingar (quoting Enid Welsford) characterizes as Shakepeare’s transmuting “into poetry the quintessence of the Saturnalia.” There is plenty of wine and singing running through a scene that also gives us the springboard for Malvolio’s pending humiliation. To clarify this important element of the play, Salingar further adds, “The sub-plot shows a prolonged season of misrule, or ‘uncivil rule,’ in Olivia’s household, with Sir Toby turning night into day; there are drinking, dancing, and singing,…and the gulling of an unpopular member of the household.” So, by this point, the significance of the title should be quite clear.

It is noteworthy how appropriate the song from Feste the Clown is, for it defines love. This is a play that illustrates the theme of love, showing a particular vision of the love experience. The song is divided into two halves: the first half resembles the outpourings that we’ve already read from the Duke. It expresses praise and longing for the love object. The second half embodies the theme, “What is love?” The definition emphasizes the intensity of feeling such as the Duke has shown. Thus it has little relevance to Cesario’s role in the play.
There is a double-faceted nature to love. (Some may even see or feel more facets.) Willard Gaylin puts it this way in his *Rediscovering Love*:

> Obviously loving and being loved can and should coexist in one relationship—there is no real conflict between the two. One may so dominate the psychological needs of an individual as to exclude the other [as we clearly see with Orsino], but they have a natural compatibility.

(Gaylin, 108)

In the opening scene, the Duke has no relationship with Olivia as he utters his love. Cesario enters his service to engender a loving relationship for him.

As for the controversy surrounding Malvolio, there is no reason to expect that he take part in the revelling. So, Maria’s criticism of his being too straitlaced doesn’t hold a lot of water. He performs his service earnestly and dutifully for his lady. We ought to ponder whether revenge is a fitting motive for the deception to follow. Some readers might conclude that Maria and Sir Toby resent Malvolio because he appears moralistic and judgmental.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act II, Scene 4 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**

In this scene, we are back at the Duke’s palace. Once again, the Duke wants to hear some music, the food for his love. He calls for the Clown, who happens not to be there at the moment. While waiting for the Clown to be located, he speaks with Cesario.

The Duke affirms his true love. He continues to be the passionate lover who yearns for his beloved. His emotions, as a lover, are topsy-turvy.

The Duke surmises that Cesario had once also been in love, as he currently is. He answers “yes” that she was of the same age and temperament as the Duke. He responds with his belief that the woman should be the younger of the pair, so as to ensure that the love remain robust.

The Clown returns and Orsino is eager for a love song, a song that deals with the innocence of love, such as he is experiencing. The emphasis in the Clown’s song is prophetic. It focuses on the Duke’s frustration with and failure to obtain Olivia, his heart’s desire. The lover in the song is “slain by a fair cruel maid.” In short, it’s a song of unrequited love.

Interestingly, in spite of the Duke’s praise for this song, the Clown insults Orsino in a manner similar to the way he insulted Olivia in Act I. The Clown suggests that he lacks consistency and direction, though the logical form of his expression is not so apparent as in his insult to Olivia.

The Duke sends Cesario to Olivia to woo her for him. Cesario warns him that Olivia is not open to romance with him. Cesario asks the Duke if he would love a woman just because she had an intense attraction to him. The Duke does not think that that is a valid comparison, suggesting that a man’s love is more powerful. Cesario disagrees with the Duke’s proposition. Women are capable of very strong love attachments. Cesario, in fact, refers to his father’s daughter as an example.

**Analysis**

The Duke wants to hear some music. This is the same request he makes at the start of Act I. This suggests that his love is still strong. The frustration has failed to extinguish the fire in his heart. Again, he is in the passive
role of wanting the music to work on his feelings. His request for Feste to sing again should also remind us of the festive spirit.

As the Duke speaks to Cesario, we find him in the same infatuated frame of mind as in previous scenes. Shakespeare thus illustrates the love theme. The Duke is in the state of “loving” (in Gaylin’s terms). He is not yet in the condition that Cesario perhaps represents.

Cesario presents more evidence that he is in touch with the reality of the situation. After the Duke requests that he go to Olivia to sue, Cesario counters with an eye-opening question: “But if she cannot love you, sir?” Not only does the Duke’s answer suggest that his love continues intense, but it also demonstrates that love has a will of its own that may run at variance with reality. “No” is not a viable answer for him. In this way, Cesario is trying to reason with Orsino. Just because he is in love with Olivia, it doesn’t follow that Olivia will fall in love with him.

The song Feste sings is prophetic, so it relates to the theme in a forward-looking manner. It expresses the death of love, which, in view of the Duke’s confidence, may astonish the reader. The Duke feels that Olivia should reciprocate his love. But there’s a song that tells of a “fair, cruel maid,” who is obviously Olivia, who has killed her wooer. Cesario has already referred to Olivia as “fair cruelty.” Olivia never accepts the love of Orsino. To the passionate lover, such rejection is tantamount to murder. So intense are the rejected lover’s feelings that he desires to be buried in a grave. This intensity is fitting for Orsino, who has already expressed such passionate feelings for his beloved.

Act and Scene Summaries: Act II, Scene 5 Summary and Analysis

New Character:
Fabian: the servant to Olivia who is the third spectator to Malvolio’s humiliation

Summary
This scene is devoted exclusively to the devious comic plot. Sir Toby gathers Fabian, another servant, and Andrew to enjoy the exercise in shame that Maria is about to execute. Fabian seems to have a bone to pick with him, so he is interested in what will happen to Malvolio.

Maria has the whole trick worked out. They will hide in a box tree and observe as Malvolio picks up the falsified letter to read it. Olivia is on Malvolio’s mind when he enters. Sir Toby and Fabian believe that Malvolio’s arrogance makes him suitable game for the trap that’s been set. Malvolio fancies himself a suitor to Olivia.

Speaking aloud, Malvolio continues to let his imagination run wild over the prospect of loving Olivia and the accompanying self-aggrandizement. While doing so, Sir Toby, Fabian, and Andrew devilishly comment on his behavior. That they are sadistic in intention is evident in such remarks as “Pistol him, pistol him” and “O for a stonebow, to hit him in the eye.”

Eventually Malvolio sees the letter, which appears to him to be in Olivia’s handwriting. Though it is a love letter, it doesn’t completely mention Malvolio by name. Malvolio takes the declaration of love to be addressed to him because it identifies the beloved as “M,O,A,I,” four letters that can be found in Malvolio’s name. Furthermore, the phrase “I may command where I adore” leads him to believe that he is the man because he is her servant.
The letter goes on to suggest that fortune is now smiling on Malvolio. The letter also induces him to adopt peculiar behaviors. He is to be hostile with a kinsman, smile in Olivia’s presence, study political treatises for advice, and wear yellow stockings and cross-garters. Malvolio, convinced of the letter’s authenticity, resolves to follow all of its suggestions.

Sir Toby foreshadows his subsequent marriage to Maria in this scene. He is so intrigued by her skill in the trap that he cannot help feeling love for her: “I could marry this wench for this device.”

As yet, Malvolio has not humiliated himself before Olivia. The scheme will come to fruition when Malvolio confronts Olivia with smiles and yellow stockings, cross-gartered. So, for this devilish group, the best is yet to come.

Analysis

“Whether Malvolio has been most notoriously abused, or whether he is the well-deserving victim of a practical joke that explodes his vanity, social-climbing, and pretentiousness is the point at issue,” says Maurice Charney. Until the device of Maria’s letter, the play does not firmly emphasize Malvolio’s vanity and social-climbing. As has been shown, he properly carries out his duty for Olivia. Only through what other characters say of him may we feel justified in labeling him an “overweening rogue,” as Sir Toby does. His behavior, though, is quite proper.

What we should come to terms with is the relationship of this comic plot to the other plot. What it has in common, of course, is the theme of love. Malvolio is duped into believing that Olivia loves him, and he falls in love. This “symbolist drama,” as Ralph Berry terms it, becomes a perversion of Orsino’s love for Olivia. Malvolio may be likened to the Duke in the way that the letter ignites his passion for her. The letter, as a practical means of expression, reminds us of Cesario’s position in the total rendering of the love theme. But, since the letter is a trick, Malvolio’s love is a parody of the feelings and behavior of the Duke and Cesario. Olivia does not, nor will she, love Malvolio.

Perhaps the most glaring instance of perverseness is in the endings of the plots. Comedy prescribes a happy ending for the lovers in the romantic plot. Maria’s contrived plot only issues forth a cruel outcome for Malvolio. The letter contains no truth. Malvolio will go mad.

This scheme is too cruel to be characterized as a bit of sport in keeping with the festive atmosphere. The desire for revenge that Sir Toby and Maria reveal undermines the acceptability of such as “jest,” as Sir Toby euphemistically calls it. Malvolio is alienated from the rest of the household, and the way in which its members so handily trap him, “the woodcock near the gin,” emphasizes his alienation. From the moment Malvolio enters, he is unaware of the others in the box tree. His lines are interspersed with the reactions of the spectators, with neither side being able to hear the other. This gives us a physical representation of the psychological phenomenon of “alienation.” The spectators enjoy the device on Malvolio at the expense of his pride and feelings.

It is evident why this plot element in the play has been puzzling to critics.

The spectators to the trick associate animal imagery with Malvolio throughout this scene. This imagery lays emphasis on both his alienation from them as human beings and their view of him as an egotistical fool. Sir Toby’s first question to Fabian refers to Malvolio as a “sheep-biter,” that is, sneaky dog. To Maria, he is the “trout that must be caught with tickling.” For Fabian, he is alternately a “rare turkey cock” and a “woodcock near the gin.” Sir Toby also uses a bird image after Malvolio has begun reading the letter. As these characters delight in the cruel scheme, they feel that they have Malvolio right where they want him. Reducing Malvolio in their eyes to animal status sharply conveys that feeling. Animals lack reason, so they are wrapped up in their own little worlds to the extent that they operate by instincts. Sir Toby, Fabian, Andrew, and Maria are
presumably drawing a parallel between the animals’ instinctual selfishness and Malvolio’s egoism.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act III, Scene 1 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
Cesario and Feste the Clown are conversing in Olivia’s garden. Cesario, of course, has arrived with the purpose of courting Olivia. Cesario begins by asking the Clown if he earns a living with his tabor. In addition to engaging Cesario in wordplay, the Clown comments on the arbitrariness of words. People can do whatever they like with them regardless of good or bad intentions. Cesario briefly turns the conversation to identifying the fool. Feste, as usual, cannot give her a straight answer. He answers ironically that Olivia has no fool until she marries the man who will accept the role. In a short span, the Clown mentions a beard for Cesario, coins earning interest, and the love story of *Troilus and Cressida*. The Clown then goes to fetch Olivia. While awaiting Olivia, Cesario praises Feste’s skillfulness at being a fool.

Sir Toby and Andrew arrive before Olivia. Sir Toby informs Cesario that Olivia is eager to see him. Paradoxically, Cesario asserts that he is Olivia’s servant as well as Orsino’s because the Duke has put himself at Olivia’s service. His servant therefore is also hers. Olivia insists that she does not want to hear anymore wooing. Orsino is out.

Olivia, recalling the ring, broaches the subject of love toward Cesario. Cesario, rather than accept her love, says that he feels pity for Olivia. Cesario faithfully suggests the Duke’s love again only to hear Olivia pour out her feelings of love for him: “I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,/Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.” Cesario does not wish to form a relationship with Olivia or any woman.

**Analysis**
We are meant to note a kind of kinship between Feste and Cesario. Shakespeare establishes this kinship by means of the ploce in the opening dialogue. For example, when Cesario says that those who manipulate words can make them “wanton,” meaning equivocal, Feste picks up on another sense of “wanton,” that is, unchaste, in his response. They have used the same word but in different senses. To play on someone else’s words shows an interconnection between the two characters’ ways of thinking. Cesario appreciates the Clown and even pays him for acting his role as fool.

The Clown of this play is a wordsmith and logician, in addition to being a good singer of the thematic songs. It behooves us to question the Clown’s self-conscious commentary about words and their logic. He even refers to himself as not the fool, but rather Olivia’s “corrupter of words.” In essence, the Clown indicates his understanding of the arbitrariness of words: “Words are grown so false I am loath to/prove reason with them.” There is no necessary and sufficient relationship between words and the reality to which they refer. Therefore, people can so manipulate words to do and say what they want, whether or not the words are true to the reality of the situation. Keeping in mind Cesario’s connection with the motif of “appearances versus reality,” his appreciation for the Clown’s sensitivity to that issue is readily understandable. This scene sketches the Clown/fool’s role in the play. For the characters in the play, this role of fool has entertainment value, and for the readers, his words have relevance to the play’s interpretation.

In his short soliloquy following the Clown’s departure, Cesario reveals his appreciation for the skill Feste exercises: “And to do that well craves a kind of wit.” If Cesario can appreciate this skill, he is certainly capable of exercising it himself. The Clown is attuned to the mood and quality of people with whom he practices his fooling. Although we can assert that the Clown is very talented in his use of words, the truth value of what he says about others is not so clear.
Cesario, who represents practical common sense for the lovers, is everywhere a most admirable character. He makes a diligent effort to woo on Orsino’s behalf. Another way that Shakespeare demonstrates his good communication skills is in the way he uses the same metaphors as other characters. When Sir Toby uses a trade metaphor, “trade be to,” to characterize Cesario’s presence in the garden, Cesario responds with another expression drawn from the language of trade, “I am bound to your niece.” Cesario understands and can get along with all the characters in the play.

Olivia discloses her love for Cesario in this scene. The fundamental irony is that Cesario is there on the Duke’s behalf, but Olivia expresses love for Cesario. This creates a complication in the original plot. Not only has Olivia not reciprocated her love to Orsino, but she’s also bestowed it on Cesario. At this point, although we should expect a happy resolution to this entanglement, the issue of who-joins-who is not clear in this scene. Olivia, in declaring her love, is in the state of “loving”: Cesario does not accept her offer.

The one clue we have that Cesario cannot wind up with Olivia is the knowledge of his true gender. Cesario is really a woman, so he must be paired with a male. At this point, we can surmise that Cesario will form a relationship with Orsino, the man for whom his female self has already expressed an attraction. Herschel Baker argues that the delay in the happy ending derives from the characters’ inability to know the truth about themselves. This brings in the issue of “self-knowledge.” Not everyone knows who they are, what they believe, or what they really want out of life. Thus, Cesario’s disguise represents any such intellectual and emotional confusion of the other characters in concrete terms. It is only when he unmaskes at the end and the misconception is cleared up that they can feel a sense of liberation from their illusions. Self-knowledge is attained, according to this view. This view changes Cesario’s place in the love theme.

Taking the plunge into the experience of love, as Orsino and Olivia amply demonstrate, appears easy enough. The important related step of cementing a bond between the two persons is not so easy. Understanding this truism makes Cesario an appealing and curious character in the play.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act III, Scene 2 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
Sir Andrew is disappointed that Olivia has not shown an interest in him. He has seen her giving more attention to Cesario than to him. Fabian claims that Olivia was deliberately trying to exasperate Andrew so as to spur him to more aggressive action. Andrew should have seized the moment to prove his masculinity: “You should have banged the youth into dumbness.” Having failed to act has put Andrew way out of Olivia’s thoughts, unless he can act quickly to arouse her admiration with his valor. Andrew agrees.

Sir Toby’s idea for Andrew to achieve Olivia’s love is to challenge Cesario to a fight. A fight will kindle her admiration. Sir Toby tells Andrew to write out a provocative challenge—“Let there be gall enough in thy ink”—to Cesario. Despite this incitement, Sir Toby says he will not actually deliver the letter to the youth.

Sir Toby espies Maria with a term of affection. Maria informs them how hilarious Malvolio’s deception has turned out. He has obeyed every point of the letter. She manifests her sadistic pleasure in the way he is so taken over by the letter.

**Analysis**
Sir Toby plays his role as “lord of misrule” in this scene as well as in others. No sooner has Sir Andrew conveyed his frustration at winning Olivia’s hand than does Toby devise a hostile plan to get her attention. It might be more proper to designate someone to court Olivia, as Cesario has done for Orsino, but, he instead tells Sir Andrew to write an inflammatory letter to Cesario, a letter Sir Toby does not intend to pass on. Sir
Toby keeps the action lively, stirring up a fracas that has love as its dubious impetus.

Sir Toby’s plan reveals, moreover, underlying masculine values. First of all, he proposes a fight, which is often considered a manly activity. Secondly, he and Fabian place a great value on “valor” as a stimulus to love. This statement of belief in valor as a “lovebroker” for Sir Andrew is more evidence of the breadth of the love theme. Love is very subjective. People may love another for varied reasons and in varying intensities. In Sir Toby’s masculine world, the reputation of valor may lead a woman into love.

Maria comes in to report that her scheme is reaching its high point. She deems it odd that Malvolio has so naively accepted the contents of the letter to the point of following every item. She mentions the confrontation with Olivia that is about to take place. However perverse it may be, Malvolio’s embarrassing descent into love is also indicative of the subjective nature of the experience of love. It’s puzzling, however, why Malvolio was so ripe to fall for his lady—unless the reader accepts the argument that Malvolio is egotistical and arrogant.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act III, Scene 3 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
This short scene lets us know that Sebastian and Antonio are making their way into the action; they have not been left out. Antonio explains to a grateful Sebastian that both love and concern for his safety urged him to catch up to the youth. Antonio knows the area; Sebastian does not.

Sebastian desires to do some sightseeing in town, to see the “memorials and the things of fame,” but Antonio has to back out. Antonio is wanted by Orsino’s court for his part in a previous incident at sea. Sebastian reckons that perhaps he has murdered. Not so; Antonio says he is only guilty of piracy.

Antonio gives his money to Sebastian in case he wishes to purchase something, while Antonio lays low. He also recommends an inn where they can meet (the Elephant). They agree to find each other there.

**Analysis**
This scene does advance the plot even though there is no mention of either character’s being in love. Sebastian is Viola’s twin brother. As far as the love theme is concerned, we can predict—since a theme should be coherently worked out—that just as Viola has a place in the love plot, so too will Sebastian. He is a missing link. Olivia, Orsino, and Cesario expressing love make an uneven number. One more is needed to make two couples. These two couples, as they will eventually turn out to be, constitute two of the three love knots that are realized by the end of the play. Malvolio’s love comes to naught, however, and Sir Andrew never gets Olivia.

We have had plenty of exposure to Olivia, Orsino, and Cesario’s brand of loving and being loved in the play. So, Shakespeare need not belabor the role that Cesario has represented as the practical, commonsense-oriented person in the relationship. It’s the Cesarios that keep the relationship going from day to day. The family tie that exists between Viola and Sebastian also implies a thematic parallel between the two characters. Shakespeare’s economy had no need to dramatize Sebastian’s practicality.

Antonio is familiar with the Duke and his Illyria. He, unfortunately, has had a run-in with the Duke’s men in the past, so he feels it necessary to hide his presence. Shakespeare keeps him involved in the plot in such a way that will call attention to the illusion created by Viola’s disguise. Later on, Antonio will take Cesario for Sebastian.
Act and Scene Summaries: Act III, Scene 4 Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Servant: the one who informs Olivia of Cesario’s return
First Officer: one of the Duke’s officials who comes to arrest Antonio
Second Officer: accompanies the First Officer to carry out the arrest

Summary
Olivia, longing for Cesario and out of sorts, wonders where Malvolio is. Here, she commends his nature as agreeable to her. Maria alerts her to his agitated state: “He is sure possessed.” In accordance with the letter, Malvolio is smiling about the place. Nonetheless, Olivia wants to see him because she feels as disturbed as he.

Malvolio speaks to Olivia as though she knew about the letter. His smiling doesn’t fit the mood Olivia is in. After Malvolio refers to his cross-gartering, Olivia asks if there is something wrong. Malvolio only mentions the commands of the letter to explain his behavior. For the rest of the dialogue between them, Malvolio quotes directly from Maria’s letter, while Olivia intersperses her bewildered replies. Having been subjected to this unaccountable behavior, Olivia considers Malvolio to be mad: “Why, this is very midsummer madness.” At this point, a servant enters with news that Cesario has come.

In his soliloquy, Malvolio sounds convinced that Olivia is following the letter. So, her bewilderment was lost on him as he raved on. He thanks Jove for the divine assistance he’s been given.

Sir Toby, along with Fabian and Maria, comes to investigate Malvolio’s behavior. Malvolio assumes the hostility toward him that the letter commands, not listening to the mock sympathy Sir Toby demonstrates. Fabian and Maria’s similarly mock sympathy must be false because they know he’s still under the influence of the letter. When Malvolio leaves, the culprits reflect on Malvolio’s absorption by the letter. Sir Toby foreshadows at Malvolio’s madness and ordeal in the dark room.

Sir Andrew enters with his letter of challenge. Fabian compliments the phrasing of the letter, containing a challenge to a fight, as Sir Toby reads it aloud. Sir Andrew is then egged on to draw on Cesario in the orchard. Claiming that Sir Andrew’s letter will not ring true for Cesario, Sir Toby chooses to convey the challenge by word of mouth in order to “drive the gentleman…into a most hideous opinion of his rage, skill, fury, and impetuosity.”

Following this, there is a brief interlude involving Olivia and Cesario. Olivia complains that her protestations of love are falling on deaf ears. Part of her thinks that it is blameworthy to be so bold, but another part of her holds that love gives her the freedom to speak her love. Cesario likens Olivia’s passion to Orsino’s. Giving Cesario a jewel, Olivia asks him to return tomorrow. Olivia, conscious of her honor, wonders what it will inspire her to give Cesario. Cesario wants nothing but her return of love to the Duke. That is not possible for Olivia because she’s given her love to Cesario. Olivia repeats her request for Cesario to come tomorrow.

When Olivia departs, Sir Toby alarmed Cesario with the news that Sir Andrew is preparing to attack him. He urges Cesario to prepare to defend himself. Innocently Cesario cannot believe that he’s done offense to anyone. Sir Toby counters that he has given cause for a fight. Sir Toby further tries to frighten Cesario with Sir Andrew’s strength and prowess. Sir Toby conjures an image of Sir Andrew as a valiant and well-connected knight who has three deaths in dueling to his credit. Cesario refuses to fight, it’s not his way. So he seeks an escort from Lady Olivia.
Cesario surmises that Sir Andrew is only trying to test his valor. But Sir Toby explains that he has just cause. Cesario therefore must face the challenge. At Cesario’s request, Sir Toby leaves to get Sir Andrew so he can tell him what offense Cesario has done. Fabian only admits to knowing that Sir Andrew is incensed against him. Fabian echoes Sir Toby’s spurious praise of Sir Andrew’s skill and power.

When Sir Toby finds Andrew, he scares him with an equally spurious account of Cesario’s skill at fencing. Likewise, Andrew decides to avoid the duel, even offering his horse as a peace offering. Sir Toby supposedly rides off to make the proposal to Cesario. Cesario and Andrew are holding images of each other’s hostility.

As these two men finally come together, Sir Toby alters the situation by claiming the cause not to be as grave as it was first thought to be. But, as a formality, they should have a duel. Sir Toby assures both of them that harm will not come of it.

After they draw, Antonio makes a timely entrance into the garden. His first impulse is to protect Cesario, who he believes is Sebastian. As soon as Sir Toby draws on Antonio, the Duke’s officers enter. They recognize Antonio and arrest him. Antonio asks Cesario for some of the money he gave Sebastian. Cesario, though confused at this request (not being Sebastian), offers Antonio some of his own money. Antonio takes that as a denial and warns him that he will become angry at his ingratitude. Cesario affirms that Antonio is a stranger to him; Antonio cannot possibly hold a claim on him. Antonio recounts how he rescued Sebastian from drowning and showed him brotherly love. Antonio, feeling betrayed, leaves with the officers.

Cesario gathers that Antonio was referring to his brother, Sebastian. Realizing that he closely resembles his brother, Cesario fervently hopes that Antonio meant Sebastian.

Sir Toby judges Cesario a coward. This stirs up Sir Andrew’s ire to fight, which is met with Sir Toby’s command to give him a good thwacking.

Analysis
This is a lengthy scene in which Shakespeare draws together some of the loose ends of the love plot. Considering that Sebastian’s presence is now signaled, this scene becomes the climax of the rising action. This revelation constitutes the major surprise, for the rest of the scene forms a logical continuation of plots that have been in motion since Act I. “This scene as a whole,” according to L.G. Salingar, “with its rapid changes of mood and action, from Olivia to the sub-plot and back towards Sebastian, braces together the whole comic design.”

In order for Malvolio’s humiliation to be complete, he has to face Olivia under the influence of the letter. Olivia, at the start of the scene, has her mind on Cesario. She wants to see him and considers how she can best allure him. She speaks solemnly of Malvolio, “he is sad and civil,” with whom she desires some fellowship. Maria alerts her to his mental agitation.

Malvolio’s dialogue with Olivia is at once comic and per-verse. We must laugh at the way he has been so duped by the other characters, as well as the way he carries the illusion until he is undeceived. The perversion of the love experience stands out promi-nently. Malvolio has the commands of the letter on his mind as he speaks to Olivia. Such love has no genuine source, as Orsino and Olivia’s does. Malvolio elaborates on a love that Olivia has no idea of, nor has she any intention of falling in love with her servant. The only genuine element in this whole perverse matter is Malvolio’s temporary infatuation. Shakespeare heightens the cruelty of the trick by having Maria play dumb and Olivia bespeak concern for his state of mind. Charles T. Prouty sums it up this way: “Thus the subplot may be seen as representing the obverse, the other side of the coin. In the main plot the characters move in the world of an established convention while in the other the characters are alien, if not antithetical, to the convention.”
Sir Andrew returns to show Sir Toby the letter he has written. Sir Andrew has obviously taken a liking to
Olivia; we have just not heard him utter his passion. Sir Toby’s commonsense plan to interest Olivia in his
friend partakes too much of the playful spirit of the play to qualify as reasonable interceding. Nonetheless, Sir
Toby as the “lord of misrule” brings together these two major aspects of the play, love and foolery. Those two
aspects intersect in the duel scene.

The interlude between Cesario and Olivia keeps their two distinct roles in the play sharply focused. The
dialogue does not surprise us, so we can take pleasure in Cesario’s consistency as representative of a practical
quality. Olivia says that she has poured out her heart to a heart of stone. Cesario asserts his master’s love, thus
finely playing his role of intermediary.

In addition to blending the play’s two key elements, the arranged fight between Cesario and Sir Andrew
prepares the way for Antonio’s timely rescue. Antonio comes upon the duel and believes he is saving his
friend Sebastian. Regardless of whether the officers had come for him or not, it is evident that he would have
made Sebastian’s existence known. Upon his arrest, Antonio asks of Cesario the money he had given to
Sebastian. The interchange that ensues finally brings out the name “Sebastian.” Cesario’s hope for her brother
is revived.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act IV, Scene 1 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**
The Clown and Sebastian are talking in front of Olivia’s house. Sebastian, unlike his sister, has not taken so
well to Feste. They seem at odds with each other. Sebastian dismisses the Clown, maintaining that he has no
business with him. The Clown, characteristically clever, responds by denying the reality of everything:
“Nothing that is so is so.” Indeed, Sebastian is not Cesario. Sebastian orders Feste to take his folly elsewhere.
The Clown, clever though he be, is not omniscient, so he thinks that Sebastian is just pretending ignorance.
He requests a message for Olivia. Sebastian dismisses him with an insult, but not without giving him a tip.
The Clown is thankful.

Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Fabian enter. Sir Andrew immediately strikes Sebastian, mistaking him for
Cesario. Though puzzled, Sebastian strikes multiple blows in return. Sir Toby joins the fray to help Sir
Andrew by seizing Sebastian. After witnessing the fray, the Clown goes off to inform Olivia.

They continue the fight, with Sir Andrew threatening legal action and Sebastian ordering them to let go.
Sebastian forcefully disentangles himself from their holds and warns them that on further provocation, he’ll
draw his sword. Apparently, Sir Toby cannot resist; he draws on Sebastian.

Olivia enters and surveys the scene to her distaste. The fracas is yet another instance of Sir Toby’s uncivilized
tastes. She orders them to stop and get out. That her beloved (or the one she thinks is Cesario) is involved in
the fight adds to her sense of offense. Olivia hopes that Sebastian will look rationally on the incident. She
invites him to her house so she can tell him about Sir Toby’s other “fruitless pranks.”

Olivia’s invitation baffles Sebastian. He wishes for further oblivion to add to the confusion he is experiencing.
Yet, when Olivia repeats her invitation, he accepts.

**Analysis**
Critics disagree on how to interpret Feste’s role. Despite Sebastian’s attitude to Feste, the Clown and his role
retain their dignity within the play. If anything, Sebastian depreciates the value of the Clown’s content, that is,
what it is he talks about. Cesario’s praise for his wit, however, is well-taken. And his wit is clever in this
scene. Although the Clown’s songs have relevance to the theme and plot, the relevance of his dialogue is less clear. He is good with words and logic, and his displays of skill have proven quite entertaining, but whether he penetrates character and motive remains debatable. After all, in reality, Sebastian is not dissembling. Feste does not know he’s with Sebastian instead of Cesario. L.G. Salingar puts it this way, “Feste is not the ringleader in Twelfth Night, nor is he exactly the play’s philosopher.” Similarly, Maurice Charney, in his chapter on Twelfth Night, discusses only Feste’s agile mind at wordplay.

This is the scene in which Sebastian and Olivia are brought together, the foursome of the love plot is hence complete. Rightly so, the confusion seems all on Sebastian’s part.

What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
Or I am mad, or else this is a dream.
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep! (4.1.60–3)

This confusion arises out of the familiar way in which Olivia addresses Sebastian, whom she thinks is Cesario. Olivia has had dealings with Cesario already and expressed her love for him. In this scene, since they are twins, she thinks it is he. Sebastian does not fall in love with Olivia; rather, he puzzles over her familiarity. What does she mean, he wonders. The whole situation seems so unreal that he thinks he may have lost his senses. Yet he goes along with Olivia, perhaps taking pleasure in the illusion. He asks for oblivion so he can prolong the dream that Olivia is sustaining. To the extent that Sebastian’s analogous role (to his sister’s) is a necessary component to the love theme, his acquiescence in Olivia’s dream is very likely. One of the complications of the plot is about to be cleared up, and the genre’s happy ending is happily in the offing.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act IV, Scene 2 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**

Maria gives the Clown a gown and beard, apparently wishing to prolong the sham with Malvolio. Feste readily accepts the offer to play Chaucer’s Sir Topas. He has a stereotyped notion of a curate and a student, which he doesn’t fit, though he does account himself an honest man and a good citizen. Sir Toby enters, greeting him as a parson, and pushes him on to Malvolio.

The Clown, dressed as Sir Topas, visits Malvolio in a very dark room. Malvolio immediately orders Sir Topas to go to Olivia without specifying the contents of his message. Malvolio perceives himself as a wronged man. He says that to Sir Topas and, in the same breath, he asserts his sanity. Sir Topas responds with assurance of his own mildness. Malvolio insists that the house is dark and that his abusers have laid him in the darkness. Sir Topas points out that there are sources of light coming into the room. Malvolio suggests that it’s perhaps a figurative darkness surrounding him as well as maintaining his sanity once again. Sir Topas does not admit to any darkness, insinuating instead that Malvolio is full of perplexity.

Malvolio asks for a test of his sanity, to which Sir Topas responds with a question about Pythagoras’ doctrine. Malvolio answers aptly, but Sir Topas does not admit his sanity.

According to Maria, Malvolio is so blinded he cannot even see the Clown’s disguise. The Clown goes once more, at Sir Toby’s prompting, to talk with Malvolio. Sir Toby shows that his sadism in the matter has not subsided. The reason he must stop the trick is Olivia’s disapproval of his antics.

The second conversation between Malvolio and Sir Topas follows in the same vein as the previous one. This time, Malvolio requests a pen, ink, and paper with which he can write to Olivia. The Clown (as Sir Topas)
persists in the contention that Malvolio is mad, which Malvolio vigorously rejects. Moreover, Malvolio’s counterclaim of abuse in this scene provides compelling evidence of the validity of his perceptions. He has indeed been played with.

During this conversation, the Clown speaks to Malvolio as both the Clown and Sir Topas. When Malvolio realizes this, he asks the Clown to get him some paper and light. He wants to send a message to Olivia. The Clown, though agreeing to help, still cannot resist implying that Malvolio is mad.

The Clown ends this scene with a song, whose significance is a bit obscure but does bear relevance to Malvolio’s present predicament.

**Analysis**

The Clown puts on an act in this scene. He goes to Malvolio’s room disguised as a Chaucerian curate, Sir Topas. This performance is commendable to the extent that the Clown is fulfilling his role as jester. It is truly his role to entertain the others. The talent the Clown exhibits is also impressive. It is not easy to do all that he does in this play.

Maria shows that she wants to antagonize Malvolio and continue the cruel deception. The Clown operates more out of the requirements of his role than a desire to further vex Malvolio. What he says to Malvolio helps to illuminate Malvolio’s character and the effect of the trick on him. Malvolio is certain that he has been wronged. The confidence with which he asserts the abuse builds our sympathy for him. He appears the undeserving victim of a cruel hoax. A man who can perceive the wickedness of abuse would probably not be the kind to foist abuse on others. His perception therefore is valid.

The Clown insinuates that he is mad. Malvolio maintains his sanity. His perception of his sanity is reinforced by his desire to communicate with Olivia. He knows he has humiliated himself before her, and the reasonable thing to do is to make amends. The impulse to communicate is a sound one. Presumably he wants to apologize and to show her that he is in possession of his faculties.

The darkness surrounding Malvolio symbolizes his alienation from the other members of the household, which has reached a grotesque level. The darkness also suggests more. It may symbolize the cruelty and lack of understanding of the other characters. They are the ones who have abused him as he eloquently maintains. The Clown points out that there are sources of light in the room. They just aren’t illuminating a man who has been swooped down on by malicious associates. The darkness may symbolize the closedmindedness of the Puritans. His incarceration may be the “lack of freedom” of the Puritanical philosophy.

The image of darkness coupled with allusions to the Devil offer compelling evidence of bad intentions on the other characters’ parts and Malvolio’s sound character. Sir Topas’ second speech to Malvolio reflects this: “Out hyperbolical fiend! How vexest thou this/Man!” Sir Topas states explicitly that the forces impinging on Malvolio are malicious.

**Act and Scene Summaries: Act IV, Scene 3 Summary and Analysis**

**Summary**

This scene is set in the garden, a fitting locale for the culmination of a love match. Sebastian tries to come to terms with his good luck in his opening soliloquy. This love match is so quick that we have no inkling as to Sebastian’s feelings about love as an experience and as they relate to Olivia.
He tells us that she gave him a pearl. He marvels at his new-found sweetheart and discounts that he is mad. He wishes for Antonio, who he couldn’t locate at the Elephant, and for his esteemed advice. The improbability of his good fortune leads him to doubt the reality of what has happened. Unlike Cesario, however, he doesn’t reject Olivia’s gift of love. When the thought crosses his mind that Olivia may be mad, he dispels it immediately with the knowledge that Olivia is such a competent and fit manager of the affairs of her household. His good instincts conclude that there’s some kind of deception attaching to Olivia’s love.

Olivia wastes no time in proposing marriage. She has brought a priest to Sebastian to marry them. She invites Sebastian to the nearby chapel to participate in the ceremony. She promises him confidentiality until such time as he becomes ready to divulge the news of their wedlock. Sebastian accepts, pledging his everlasting faithfulness.

Analysis
In this scene, one of the love matches is fully realized. Olivia and Sebastian marry. This is a hasty move for Sebastian, who accepts, but not for Olivia. She has been in love with his twin (Cesario) throughout the play. So, she feels a sense of triumph in gaining her beloved. Sebastian, on the other hand, should express the surprise and wonder that he does. The play hitherto has given us little knowledge of his thoughts and feelings. Sebastian’s significance resides in his symbolic function as Viola’s thematic twin.

Sebastian and Olivia serve to illustrate the love theme quite well. Olivia has expressed her love; Sebastian takes his place as the practical, common sense complement to the loving aspect. His soliloquy reflects his appreciation for the role of reason and prudent management in life. He praises Olivia for the latter.

Act and Scene Summaries: Act V, Scene 1 Summary and Analysis

Summary
This scene forms a conglomeration of previous elements in the play. We are before Olivia’s house when it opens with Fabian and the Clown. Fabian is asking Feste to show him Malvolio’s letter to Olivia, which he doesn’t want to show him.

After this brief exchange, the Duke, Cesario, Curio, and other lords are on the scene. After inquiring of Feste and Fabian if they are connected to Olivia, the Duke recognizes one of them as the Clown. Upon being asked how he is, the Clown starts in with his wordplay. He answers ironically that, as far as his foes are concerned, he is better, and as far as his friends are concerned, he is worse. That makes no sense to the Duke, so he requests an explanation. The Clown’s explanation holds that friends deceive, while enemies tell the cold truth. Once explained, the Duke likes the idea and tips him. The Clown wants more and gets another coin from the Duke. Before leaving to summon Olivia, the Clown requests yet another coin from the Duke.

Antonio and the officers then enter. Cesario recognizes Antonio as the man who stepped in on his fight with Sir Andrew. The Duke also recognizes Antonio from the time when he did courageous battle with one of his ships. An officer relates that he arrested Antonio while fighting in the street. Cesario hastens to his defense mentioning his help, though his speech quite perplexed him.

Antonio recounts how he saved Sebastian, inadvertently referring to Cesario, and offered his love and service to him. He exposed himself to danger for Sebastian’s sake. Yet, Sebastian denied him when he intervened in the fight. Sebastian held back his purse, too.

Cesario wonders how that could be possible. He has been under the Duke’s service since arriving in Illyria.
In walks Olivia asking the Duke how she can be of service to him. She takes Cesario for Sebastian. Olivia’s speech thus baffles Cesario. Olivia repeats her rejection of the Duke. The Duke expresses his disappointment and adds a fierce note for emphasis. He retaliates by spiriting Cesario away, out of Olivia’s sight. Cesario, supportive of the Duke, reveals his love for him.

Olivia calls for the priest to remind Cesario that they are married. She thinks that Cesario is afraid to admit the truth. The priest comes to substantiate the marital bond that exists between them (her and Sebastian). This proof convinces the Duke, who becomes angry with Cesario.

Sir Andrew, entering injured, calls for a doctor to attend him and Sir Toby. Sir Andrew lays the blame for this violence on Cesario. Cesario, of course, denies the charge. Sir Andrew was set on him by Sir Toby. Sir Toby enters limping and requests a doctor. Olivia orders him to bed.

Sebastian enters with an apology for the injuries he has produced. He was justified inasmuch as he acted in self-defense. The Duke notices the resemblance between him and Cesario, considering it an optical illusion. Sebastian is glad to see Antonio.

For the first time in the play, Sebastian speaks to Cesario. Cesario offers clear proof that he and Sebastian are related. The time is not right for Cesario to unmask, but he promises to bring Sebastian to where his woman’s clothes are hidden.

Sebastian characterizes Olivia’s mistake as natural since she was attracted to Cesario’s masculine exterior.

Seeing a chance for his own happiness, the Duke shows interest in Cesario. Cesario accepts because she did, in fact, fall in love with him. The Duke wishes to see the Viola beneath the Cesario.

Olivia then requests to see Malvolio, at which point the Clown enters with his letter. Feste continues to ascribe madness to Malvolio. Irked by his unusual manner of reading the letter, Olivia asks Fabian to read it. The letter blames Olivia for the cruel joke that’s been played on him. Though her love letter led him astray, he still kept his wits about him. He intends to broadcast the wrong she’s done him. Olivia requests to see him.

The Duke proposes to Viola.

Malvolio enters chastising Olivia. She need only read her letter for the proof. Malvolio asked what possessed her to stoop to such a wicked scheme. Olivia recognizes the handwriting as Maria’s and assures Malvolio that he will get justice. Fabian confesses his and the others’ wrongdoing. He attributes their actions to “some stubborn and uncourteous parts,” character flaws in them. Now that the trick has been exposed, Malvolio vows revenge on all those involved. Olivia acknowledges the abuse he’s suffered at her servants’ hands.

The Duke desires that a solemn combination be made of their hearts at a propitious hour. The third couple to join the other two is Maria and Sir Toby. Sir Toby proposed to Maria as a reward for her cleverness.

Analysis
This is the last scene of the play, so Shakespeare must provide a sense of closure. The way the action wraps up determines the overall meaning of the play. The genre of comedy has already provided us with some sense of the play’s message. The dizzying sequence of interludes mirrors the festive form of the previous acts and gives the impression of a large holiday gathering. This scene is a fitting conglomeration of the play’s elements—all the more satisfying because it resolves previous misunderstandings and complications. It ends in a happy “combination” of three couples. Even Malvolio is presented with some consolation from Olivia.
The Clown’s irreverence toward the Duke is entirely in character. He is a wit to the very end. The Duke, pleased with his foolery, tips him twice before he goes off to get Olivia.

Antonio is necessary as a catalyst to the recognition scene. Having already raised hope of Sebastian’s existence for Cesario, in this scene, Antonio dramatizes the duality of character. He speaks to Cesario as though he were Sebastian, which astonishes Cesario. The twins look alike, but they are not the same person. Antonio’s previous dealings have been with Sebastian.

When Olivia enters, the Duke speaks the last words of love to her that he will ever speak. She has remained steadfast in her rejection. He acknowledges how futile his passion has been.

The confusion over mistaken identities continues a bit longer as Cesario prepares to leave with Orsino. Olivia speaks to Cesario as though he were her husband. This causes more astonishment for the Duke and Cesario—clarification has not yet come. The priest adds to the confusion by confirming the marriage ceremony between Sebastian and Olivia.

Happily the moment of recognition and resolution comes when Sebastian himself enters hard on the heels of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. The twins, now together for the first time in the play, face each other and make their relationship clear. They are brother and sister. This clarification paves the way for the pairing of Viola and the Duke: “You shall from this time be/Your master’s mistress.” Critics offer numerous opinions on this ending. Alexander Leggat affirms that the play embodies the theme of love: “The ending takes little account of the reasons for particular attachments; it is, on the contrary, a generalized image of love.” The pairings make up a formal design, which, in turn, illustrates the theme.

The cruel scheme against Malvolio is also laid bare in this scene. Fabian reads Malvolio’s letter in which he accuses Olivia of abuse. Knowing herself innocent, Olivia requests to see Malvolio. When Malvolio comes, Olivia has a chance to vindicate herself and assign the blame to Maria where it belongs, for she composed the letter. Once again, this resolution, which may perhaps be cathartic for Malvolio, becomes a perverse reflection of the resolution of the love plot. Olivia tries to console him with the prospect of justice being served, while Malvolio, more harshly, thirsts for revenge.

Feste ends the play with a song, which unlike previous examples, has a looser connection to the action. The fact that the rain comes down every day has a bearing on their lives and activities. By referring to life’s stages and natural imagery, he places the action in a larger, more ambiguous context. The song tells us how we are to take all the confusion and how we are to react to it. We shouldn’t take troubles too seriously; life works itself out. The song is nonetheless open to interpretation. One critic has said of it that it is just “whistling in the dark.”
Themes

The essential spirit of *Twelfth Night* is captured in its title. It refers to the "Twelfth Night" of Christmas, the Feast of the Epiphany celebrating the gift of the Magi to the infant Jesus. Believed by the Elizabethans to also be the day of Jesus' baptism, the *Twelfth Night* was an even more important holiday in Shakespeare's time than Christmas itself. In (partial) contrast to our own domesticated Christmas, this was not only a festive season for the Elizabethans but a time when excess and license were expected to run rampant. It was a time of merry-making, of hard drinking, and of romantic (or lusty) pursuits. The play is unique among Shakespeare's works in having a second or subtitle, "What You Will." This second part to the play's title is an open-ended invitation by Shakespeare to his audiences. They can choose to enjoy the play as a simple, romantic comedy with a happy ending, but they are also free to take note of certain negative or problematic aspects woven into the general revelry by the mature Bard.

The world of *Twelfth Night* is one of comedy and comic excess; and among all of the characters in the play, it is the drunken, misbehaving and prankish Sir Toby Belch who epitomizes its humorous nature. The plot against Malvolio is, to an extent, a jocular undoing of a negative character, an authority figure without power intent upon silencing Sir Toby. The humor here is amplified by the degree to which Malvolio comes to see himself as Olivia's equal. Thus, in the phony letter he receives, Malvolio emphasizes the words, "Some are (born) great, some (achieve) greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em" (II.v.144-145). No matter how he slices it, Malvolio comes to the opinion that he, a mere steward, is somehow great or deserves to become great by virtue of his pomposity. The audience is in on the joke from the start, so that Malvolio's reading of the letter is entertaining in itself and magnifies the humor of his ultimate demise when Olivia's behavior makes it plain that Malvolio is not great, but deluded.

In addition to the comic moments of mistaken identity that arise in the course of *Twelfth Night*, there are many funny bits in the play that stand on their own. In the first scene of Act III, the clown Feste is asked by Cesario if he is a musician who "lives by" playing the tabor. He replies that he "lives by the church." When the disguised Viola then asks "Art thou a churchman?" Feste answers: "No such matter, sir: I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by a church" (III.i.1-5). Along with Sir Toby, Andrew, and Maria, Feste is one of several characters in *Twelfth Night* who engages in comic wordplay, some of it on purpose and some of it unwittingly. After learning of Olivia's love for Cesario, the disguised Viola says to the countess at the end of Act III, scene ii:

I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
And that no woman has; nor never none
Shall mistress be of it, save I alone.
And so adieu, good madam; never more
Will I my master's tears to you deplore.
(III.i.158-162)

This speech is, of course, ironic, since the speaker is, in fact, a woman. But above this, Viola's response to Olivia's overture highlights the primary subject of the play: romantic love. In her coupling of "one heart, one bosom, and one truth," Viola gives expression to an idealized conception of "true" love as being an all-consuming passion for a single "authentic" lover that will overcome any and all obstacles.

*Twelfth Night* validates this idea of love, but with some disconcerting qualifications. Love is true in *Twelfth Night*, but it is also irrational, excessive and fickle; it wanes over time, as does its chief cause, physical beauty.
Duke Orsino opens the play with the lines: If music be the food of love, play on, / Give me excess of it; that surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die (I.i.1-4).

But after hearing strands of the same tune being played in the background, Orsino commands "Enough; no more; / 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before" (I.i.10-11). In *Twelfth Night*, Orsino is irrational in his pursuit of the lovely Olivia, but he cedes her readily to Sebastian and then falls instantly in love with "Cesario" when he reveals himself to be Viola. Love is powerful, but its constancy is certainly in question. In Act II, scene iv, the Duke says to Cesario that "For women are as roses, whose fair flower, / Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour" (II.38-39). Love at first sight is rampant in Shakespeare's Illyria, but he will not vouchsafe its permanence.

Worse, in *Twelfth Night*, love is consistently associated with madness. After seeing Cesario for the first time, the love struck Olivia says at the end of Act I, "Mine eye [is] too great a flatterer for my mind" (I.v.309). Love is a form of insanity, in which one's senses deceive and overcome one's reason. In Act IV, scene iii, Sebastian waxes about his instantaneous love for Olivia:

This is the air, that is the glorious sun;  
This pearl she gave to me, I do feel't and see't;  
And though 'tis wonder that enraps me thus,  
Yet 'tis not madness. …  
(IV.iii.1-4).

Sebastian's denial that his love for Olivia is madness only underscores the connection between unbounded passion and an unbalanced mind. Shortly thereafter, Sebastian says that because of his love for Olivia, he is willing to "distrust mine eyes" and "wrangle with my reason" (IV.iii.13-14). In a play in which many references are made to being possessed by the devil and being victimized by witchcraft, love is of necessity equated with being mad.

There is one character in *Twelfth Night* for whom love (co-mingled with self-infatuation) is madness—the steward Malvolio, whose professions of love to Olivia lead to his being restrained as a lunatic. Over the centuries, Shakespearean critics have discussed the so-called "Malvolio problem." On the one hand, Malvolio is basically a stock comic figure who deserves the comeuppance that he receives. But on the other, his imprisonment is excessive, and he excludes himself from the closing marriage ceremony with good cause. Indeed, when he speaks finally of exacting revenge in Act V, Malvolio evokes a certain sympathetic understanding. Malvolio has been abused as the target of a trick perpetrated by the parasitical, self-serving Uncle Toby. For his part, Uncle Toby, Malvolio's chief tormentor, is a merry soul, but he is also a rogue who is scheming to marry his fair niece to the absurdly non-heroic, non-romantic figure of Sir Andrew. If we view the play as a standard romantic comedy, Malvolio warrants the comedown that he undergoes; but as a matter of justice, Malvolio has done very little to earn a humiliating payback.

**Themes: Advanced Themes**

**Celebration and Festivity**  
*Twelfth Night*’s light-hearted gaiety is fitting for a play named for the Epiphany, the last night in the twelve days of Christmas. While the Christian tradition celebrated January 6 as the Feast of the Magi, the celebrations of the Renaissance era were a time for plays, banquets, and disguises, when cultural roles were reversed and normal customs playfully subverted. The historical precedent to this celebration is the Roman Saturnalia, which took place during the winter solstice and included the practices of gift-giving and showing mock hostility to those authority figures normally associated with dampening celebration. While the action of *Twelfth Night* occurs in the spring, and no mention of Epiphany is made, the joyful spirit of the play reflects
the Saturnalian release and carnival pursuits generally associated with the holiday. The youthful lovers engage in courtship rituals, and the one figure who rebukes festivity, Malvolio, is mocked for his commitment to order. The Saturnalian tradition of disguise is also a major theme in *Twelfth Night*, with Viola donning the uniform of a pageboy, Olivia hiding behind a veil of mourning, Malvolio appearing in cross-gartered yellow stockings, and the wisest of all characters, Feste, in the costume of a clown. However, some critics argue that, as Feste reminds the audience, that nothing is as it seems, underneath the festival atmosphere of Illyria lies a darker side, which is revealed in brief episodes such as the gulling of Malvolio. While the merrymakers contribute to the high comedy of the play through their practical joke, its conception lies in their desire for revenge.

**Role Playing and Problems of Identity**

Nearly every character in *Twelfth Night* adopts a role or otherwise disguises his or her identity. Viola disguises herself as a man upon her arrival in Illyria, setting the plot in motion. Feste disguises himself as a priest and visits the imprisoned Malvolio. The deliberate deception of these consciously adopted disguises provides a contrast to the subtle self-deception practiced by Olivia and Orsino: when the play opens Olivia is clinging to the role of grieving sister long after the time for such behavior has passed, while Orsino stubbornly hangs on to the role of persistent suitor despite Olivia's lack of interest in him. Yet another example of role playing can be seen in the duping of Malvolio, which involves outlining a role for him to play before Olivia—that of a secretly loved servant.

Critics have attempted to show how these disguises and adopted roles relate to the various themes of the play. Their overall effect is to make Illyria a place where appearances cannot be trusted, and the discrepancy between appearances and reality is a central issue in *Twelfth Night*. The appearance of a woman as a man, a fool as a priest, and a servant as the suitor of a noblewoman evoke the festivities and revelry of the Christmas holidays when the everyday social order of the period was temporarily abandoned. On a deeper level, the roles and disguises influence the major characters' ability to find love and happiness.

**Language and Communication**

Wordplay is one of the most notable features of *Twelfth Night*. Feste's wittiness is an obvious example: words that seem to mean one thing are twisted around to mean another. He states that words cannot be trusted, that they are "grown so false I am loath to prove reason with;" yet he skillfully uses words for his own purposes. Viola, too, demonstrates a talent for wordplay in her conversations with Orsino, when she hints at her feelings for him, and with Olivia, when she makes veiled references to her disguise. In these instances, the listener must look beneath the surface meaning of the words being used to discover their true import. Thus, language contributes to the contrast of illusion and reality in the play.

Commentators have also examined how the written messages in *Twelfth Night* also contribute to the theme of language and communication. When the play begins, Orsino and Olivia are engaged in a continuing exchange of messages that state and restate their stubbornly held positions which lack any real emotion to back them up. Another formal message, in the form of a letter, dupes Malvolio into believing that Olivia loves him. In these instances, formal messages convey no truth, but serve only to perpetuate the fantasies of the characters in the play. Malvolio's message to Olivia is an exception: while he is imprisoned, Malvolio pleads his case passionately to her in a letter. This instance of true communication provides a contrast to the self-indulgent fantasizing of Olivia and Orsino.
Characters

Characters: List of Characters

Viola (Cesario)

Viola is the protagonist of Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*. She is an aristocrat who disguises herself as a young man named Cesario after being shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria. Viola is witty, resourceful, and charismatic. She shows self-control and dignity in contrast to the bombastic, overly sentimental performances of Orsino and Lady Olivia. (Read extended character analysis of Viola.)

Duke Orsino

Duke Orsino is the duke of Illyria. He is mercurial and passionate, and he is more in love with the idea of being in love than he is with any person. He passionately pursues Lady Olivia for the majority of the play while simultaneously revealing his personal thoughts and emotions to Cesario. (Read extended character analysis of Duke Orsino.)

Sebastian

Sebastian is Viola’s twin brother, who becomes lost in the shipwreck. Sebastian is pragmatic and kind. He is not as passionate as other characters in *Twelfth Night* and appears to be fairly calm in relation to the wildly loving characters surrounding him, such as Lady Olivia and Antonio. (Read extended character analysis of Sebastian.)

Lady Olivia

Lady Olivia is an upper-class, wealthy, and beautiful countess in Illyria. Olivia is judgemental and overindulgent. Much like Duke Orsino, Olivia is also quick to fall in love and makes rash decisions. She also claims to be in a seven-year, loveless period of mourning for her recently deceased brother. However, Lady Olivia’s mourning period appears to exist as an excuse to refuse Orsino’s advances. (Read extended character analysis of Lady Olivia.)

Minor Characters

Antonio

Antonio is a sea captain and a friend of Sebastian’s. He is generous, kind, and loyal to a fault. His selfless nature leads him into trouble, as does his intense love for Sebastian. Antonio’s love for Sebastian is one of the only examples in the play of a love based on intimate knowledge of another person. Antonio spends three months taking care of Sebastian and getting to know him. As such, his love for Sebastian is based on a solid foundation of knowledge and friendship.

Antonio’s love for Sebastian leads him to follow Sebastian when he leaves for Illyria, despite the region being a dangerous place for Antonio. Antonio has “many enemies in Orsino’s court” due to his piracy against Orsino’s ships. When Antonio and Sebastian arrive in Illyria, Antonio is generous and gives Sebastian his coin purse to allow Sebastian to buy things for himself. Despite his lower social standing, Antonio gives money to Sebastian as if he were his benefactor.
Antonio, like other characters in the play, accidentally falls prey to Viola’s duplicitous disguise. When Antonio sees Viola in disguise as Cesario, he mistakes her for Sebastian and goes so far as to protect her from a duel with Sir Andrew. Viola, of course, does not know who Antonio is, and lets him be arrested by Orsino’s men. Antonio, still thinking that Viola, disguised as Cesario, is Sebastian, believes that Sebastian has betrayed him, despite his generosity and love. At the end of the play, Antonio is reunited with Sebastian, who rapturously greets Antonio with love: “how the hours have rack’d and tortur’d me / since I lost thee!” Despite their reunion, Antonio only appears confused and distrustful of the similarity between Viola and Sebastian. He is unsure if Sebastian is truly himself or someone else.

Sir Toby Belch

Sir Toby Belch is Lady Olivia’s uncle. He is one of the more comedic characters in Twelfth Night, engaging in tricks, jokes, and hijinks. Sir Toby is also a drunkard—which explains his surname—who is nearly always drinking with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the silly and vain knight who wants to woo Lady Olivia. Sir Toby enjoys being entertained and will trick others for his own amusement. He is similar to Maria, Lady Olivia’s lady-in-waiting, who also looks for entertainment through tricks. Sir Toby and Maria engage in playful banter throughout Twelfth Night, and together they offer the audience playful respite.

Sir Toby’s playfulness—and arguably his duplicity—can be seen when he convinces Sir Andrew to duel Cesario for Olivia’s affection. Sir Toby knows that Sir Andrew will never gain Olivia’s affection, but he keeps him around for entertainment and as a friend to drink with. He believes that the duel will allow Sir Andrew to stay around longer. At the very least, it will entertain him. Sir Toby works with Fabian, Olivia’s servant, to purposely confuse and scare Sir Andrew and Cesario before the duel, adding further hilarity for those observing. Sir Toby also engages in romance, but in a much calmer and quieter way: Near the end of Twelfth Night, Sir Toby proposes to Maria, Olivia’s lady-in-waiting, as a reward for her wit.

Maria

Maria is Lady Olivia’s lady-in-waiting. She is witty, intelligent, and fast-paced. Maria is also the love interest of Sir Toby and banters with him throughout the play. She is another of the comedic and lighthearted characters, and she plays the role of a trickster in some respects. While she mostly engages in humorous conversations with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste, the jester, Maria is also responsible for tricking Lady Olivia’s steward, Malvolio. She, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew trick Malvolio with a letter Maria wrote: the letter appears to be from Olivia, and it declares Olivia’s love for Malvolio. The group watches as Malvolio reads the letter and pompously believes he could marry the countess Olivia, who is very high above his social standing. The letter also includes directions for Malvolio that result in humor and bad consequences for him.

Near the end of the play, Sir Toby proposes to Maria, quietly and in the background. She and Sir Toby act as minor characters in this way, with a love story that contains little confusion or drama.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek

Sir Andrew Aguecheek—the word “ague” means shivering—is a foolish and cowardly knight. Although supposedly of a high social status, Sir Andrew lacks knowledge and often misspeaks throughout Twelfth Night. He is a source of ridicule and entertainment for Sir Toby, who keeps him around to drink with. Sir Toby even convinces Sir Andrew to duel Cesario (Viola in disguise) when Lady Olivia expresses affection for Cesario. When Sir Andrew tries to duel Cesario, he is blocked from doing so by Antonio, who is promptly arrested by Orsino’s men.

Malvolio
Malvolio is Lady Olivia’s dry and puritanical steward. He lacks humor and good nature. In fact, his name means “ill will.” Malvolio is a subject of ridicule in *Twelfth Night* and is representative of the madness that love can bring.

He is tricked by Maria into thinking that Lady Olivia is in love with him after he finds a love letter seemingly written by her. The letter claims that Lady Olivia loves him but wishes him to smile more, act proud, and wear cross-gartered yellow stockings. For Malvolio’s social position, acting proudly would be insulting to Olivia. Furthermore, cross-garters and the color yellow are Olivia’s least favorite things. Malvolio’s utter belief in the letter’s authenticity points to his vanity and lack of knowledge of Olivia. Furthermore, Malvolio’s following through with the letter’s stipulations illustrates his irrational behavior. Despite his lower status, he is willing to act pompous and proud because the letter asked him to do so. He is also willing to wear horrendous and low-status clothing. Blinded by love, Malvolio cannot see the ridiculousness of the requests in the letter.

When Malvolio approaches Olivia, wearing the yellow cross-gartered stockings, smiling, and acting pompously, Lady Olivia believes him to be insane. Maria had previously warned Olivia that Malvolio seemed “out of his wits.” Thus, Lady Olivia leaves it to Maria to look after Malvolio, who urges Sir Toby and Fabian to lock him in a dark room. This act only stokes madness in Malvolio, who is tricked and mocked more while locked away. Feste, who disguises himself as a curate named Sir Topas, visits Malvolio and confuses him further. Malvolio is abused throughout the play in this way, and at the end of *Twelfth Night*, he swears revenge on all the characters.

**Feste**

Feste is Lady Olivia’s fool, or court jester. Feste is the only character who is willing and able to express the truth about others—a role exclusively available to fools. He creates humor and ridicule through his observations, often pointing out the hypocritical nature of those around him. Feste is also the most witty and intelligent of the characters. It is shown that for Feste to be a successful fool, he must be intelligent enough to read another person’s character and faults and to create a successful joke out of it. As said by Viola: “this fellow’s wise enough to play the fool.”

Feste interacts with multiple characters in *Twelfth Night*. He also uses more than one persona and dresses up as Sir Topas the curate when playing more tricks on Malvolio, who has been locked away. Feste does several performances in *Twelfth Night* as well, and although he is Lady Olivia’s fool, he flits between Orsino’s and Olivia’s houses. Feste acts as a sort of background narrator, tying together all of the characters’ experiences through humor, truth, and song.

**Sea Captain**

The Sea Captain rescues Viola after the shipwreck. He is the only character to know of Viola’s true identity after she disguises herself as Cesario.

**Curio**

Curio is one of the servants of Duke Orsino.

**Valentine**

Valentine is one of the servants of Duke Orsino.

**Fabian**
Fabian is a servant of Lady Olivia.

**Characters: Viola**

**Extended Character Analysis**

Viola is the protagonist of Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*. She is an aristocrat who disguises herself as a young man named Cesario after being shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria. Viola is witty, resourceful, and charismatic. She shows self-control and dignity in contrast to the bombastic, overly sentimental performances of Orsino and Lady Olivia.

In the aftermath of the shipwreck, Viola has lost her twin brother, Sebastian. Viola decides to disguise herself as a man in order to survive in a male-dominated world. Her disguise acts as a protection. Without her brother, Viola is alone and unable to make a living. Disguised as Cesario, she is able to find a job under Orsino, the Duke of Illyria.

**Viola as Cesario**

Viola’s disguise brings confusion and duplicity into other characters’ lives as well as her own. As Cesario, Viola also provides insight into characters such as Lady Olivia and Duke Orsino. Although Viola is well-meaning, she realizes that her disguise leads to ill consequences. For example, Orsino, who is infatuated with Lady Olivia, orders Cesario to go and woo Lady Olivia for him. Viola, who is rational and logical, at first avers that Olivia wouldn’t let her in. However, Viola must do Orsino’s bidding, and in an aside Viola claims, “Whoe’er I woo, myself would be his wife.” This shows that Viola has already decided to love and marry Orsino, despite her disguise and situation. Unfortunately, when Cesario arrives at Lady Olivia’s home to deliver Orsino’s message, Olivia falls in love with Cesario instead. Viola’s disguise highlights Lady Olivia’s true desires. Olivia does not love Orsino, and she is hypocritical in how she throws out her proclaimed mourning period to court Cesario. Viola sees the fallacy and misfortune in Olivia’s love for Cesario, saying “Poor lady, she were better love a dream.”

Viola also finds herself the subject of dislike and trickery while disguised. Sir Toby, for example, tricks Sir Andrew into challenging Cesario to a duel in order to gain Olivia’s affection. Sir Andrew’s duel with Cesario for Olivia is a ridiculous act, and Viola tries to decline. When she fails to avoid the duel, she is tricked further by Sir Toby and Feste, who work to convince both Viola and Sir Andrew of the other’s prowess in dueling, when in reality both Viola and Sir Andrew are inept duelers. Viola and Sir Andrew reluctantly show up to the duel, both feeling an irrational fear of each other’s skills due to Sir Toby’s and Feste’s trickery.

Viola’s disguise also inadvertently causes Antonio, a sea captain, to be arrested. Antonio, who is the savior and friend of Sebastian, sees Viola in disguise and believes she is Sebastian. He sees that Viola is about to duel Sir Andrew and tries to protect her from the duel. Antonio is then arrested by Orsino’s men, and he asks Viola for money, thinking that she is Sebastian. However, Viola does not know Antonio, and her refusal and claim of not recognizing him makes Antonio believe he has been betrayed by Sebastian.

**Viola and the Irrationality of Love**

The revelry of love is a primary theme in *Twelfth Night*. Viola is in the midst of much amorous wildness, with Duke Orsino’s excessive pining and Lady Olivia’s quick infatuation with Cesario. Even Viola finds that she is falling in love with Duke Orsino, despite her precarious situation.
Lady Olivia’s declaration of love for Cesario shows love’s irrationality, especially given her quick turn-around from grieving to infatuation. When Lady Olivia meets Cesario, she drops all pretenses of mourning and tries to court Cesario. Viola highlights Olivia’s rashness in a soliloquy, claiming that women are susceptible to falling in love with deceitful men: “How easy it is for the proper false / In women’s waxen hearts to set their form!” For the audience, Lady Olivia’s irrational love for Cesario is an example of dramatic irony. The audience knows that Cesario is Viola, a woman in disguise, while Olivia is blissfully unaware and infatuated with a person who, in a sense, doesn’t exist. With Lady Olivia’s advances, Viola finds herself unwillingly placed in an insensible love triangle. While reflecting on her powerlessness in love and relationships, Viola claims, “O Time, thou must untangle this, not I.”

Viola as Viola

At the end of play, Viola is reunited with Sebastian. After making sure he is truly her twin, she then reveals that she is a young woman in disguise. Viola then expresses her love to Duke Orsino, who agrees to marry her, despite having been supposedly in love with Olivia for the majority of the play. The lovesick characters are all married, putting an end to the romantic and duplicitous madness of Twelfth Night.

Characters: Orsino

Extended Character Analysis

Duke Orsino is the duke of Illyria. He is mercurial and passionate, and he is more in love with the idea of being in love than he is with any person. He passionately pursues Lady Olivia for the majority of the play while simultaneously revealing his personal thoughts and emotions to Cesario.

Orsino and Surfeiting Love

Duke Orsino is so in love with Lady Olivia—or at least he believes he is—that he wishes to be drowned in Olivia’s love. The idea of satiety, or of being surfeited in love, is something that Orsino longs for throughout the play. He only wishes for his love-sickness to end, claiming, “If music be the food of love, play on!”

Orsino exemplifies love’s irrationality in his decisions and his tendency to leap into romance. His affection for Olivia has little foundation. Orsino appears to enjoy pining for Olivia more so than he actually loves and wants to be with Olivia. Olivia’s consistent refusal allows him to continue to be in the throes of unrequited love as opposed to actually being with Olivia.

Orsino’s Friendship with Cesario

In Twelfth Night, Orsino is unaware that Cesario, his recently hired servant, is Viola in disguise. However, he does feel a certain attraction towards Cesario because of Cesario’s “shrill” voice and feminine looks. Orsino allows Cesario into his confidence within three days, which is a short period in which to begin to trust a stranger. Furthermore, Orsino claims that he has opened his soul to Cesario like a book and has allowed Cesario to see his deeper emotions and thoughts: “I have unclasped / to thee the book even of my secret soul.” In doing so, Orsino forms a close relationship with Cesario, inspiring Viola’s eventual love for Orsino.

Unfortunately for Viola, Orsino trusts Cesario enough to send her to woo Lady Olivia for him. Cesario’s existence is also a tool for Orsino; as a Duke, he is likely unable to act out, so he instead asks Cesario to go to Olivia and “be clamorous and leap all civil bounds.” Whereas Orsino cannot do this, Cesario can. Furthermore, Orsino believes that Cesario’s admirable feminine features will help. He claims that Lady Olivia will be more inclined to return Orsino’s favor after hearing it from a younger and sweeter-looking man like
Cesario. Ironically, Orsino’s idea ruins any chance of gaining Olivia’s love—being unwilling or unable to go and woo her himself, he inadvertently causes Olivia to fall for Cesario.

Orsino’s quick friendship with Cesario and his unrequited love for Lady Olivia highlight his irrational nature when it comes to love and relationships. This reflects Twelfth Night’s underlying theme of the revelry and madness of love.

Orsino and Viola

Orsino continues pursuing his unrequited love for Olivia until Viola casts off her disguise and reveals that she is truly a young woman. Orsino then happily agrees to marry Viola, despite claiming to have been in love with Lady Olivia for almost the entire play. He sees that he can still gain something from the situation by marrying Viola, stating, “I shall have share in this happy wrack.”

In Twelfth Night, Orsino shows the madness that love can bring through his pining for Olivia. However, when there is no longer a problem of identity, his decisions in love become more logical, as everything has returned to its “proper” place.

Characters: Sebastian

Extended Character Analysis

Sebastian is Viola’s twin brother, who becomes lost in the shipwreck. Sebastian is pragmatic and kind. He is not as passionate as other characters in Twelfth Night and appears to be fairly calm in relation to the wildly loving characters surrounding him, such as Lady Olivia and Antonio.

Sebastian and Antonio’s Relationship

Antonio is Sebastian’s friend and rescuer. He shows an arguably dangerous amount of love and loyalty toward Sebastian. Antonio claims to love Sebastian deeply after having saved him and nursed him back to health. When Sebastian travels to Illyria, Antonio follows, despite being wanted by Orsino and his men.

After arriving in Illyria, Sebastian is shown further kindness by Antonio, who offers him his money. Sebastian accepts it, despite his higher social class. This shows Sebastian’s dependence on Antonio, who has become a sort of nurturer and caretaker for him. Without Antonio, Sebastian would not have arrived in Illyria or survived the shipwreck.

Sebastian and Lady Olivia

Sebastian becomes distracted once in Illyria. After parting with Antonio and promising to reunite with him later, he wanders off and meets Lady Olivia. Upon meeting Olivia, he finds himself in wondrous circumstances: The wealthy and beautiful Lady Olivia is in love with him and wants to marry him, believing that he is Cesario.

In an act of nonchalance and perhaps madness, he wonders at Olivia’s seemingly unfounded love and contemplates marriage. Sebastian even believes that he is mad, or “else this is a dream… If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!” His wish to continue his “dream” shows his oddly ideal situation, as well as his satisfaction with it. He is unsure of what to say to Olivia, and he wishes for Antonio’s presence, saying “His counsel might do me golden service.” This comment shows that he trusts Antonio and wants his advice.
However, in a logical yet hasty decision, Sebastian decides to marry Olivia, seeing that marrying her will bring him wealth and social stature. Sebastian’s role in the play allows Lady Olivia to have a heterosexual marriage with someone who appears to be her beloved Cesario. With Sebastian’s arrival, the comedy begins to fall into place. Soon, the main characters are paired happily with their loves.

At the end of the play, Sebastian is reunited with Antonio and greets him with affection. Sebastian is also reunited with Viola, and the confusion over identity is solved, ending all duplicity.

**Characters: Olivia**

**Extended Character Analysis**

Lady Olivia is an upper-class, wealthy, and beautiful countess in Illyria. Olivia is judgemental and overindulgent. Much like Duke Orsino, Olivia is also quick to fall in love and makes rash decisions. She also claims to be in a seven-year, loveless period of mourning for her recently deceased brother. However, Lady Olivia’s mourning period appears to exist as an excuse to refuse Orsino’s advances.

**Olivia's Hypocrisy**

Lady Olivia claims at the beginning of *Twelfth Night* to be mourning her brother’s death. She says she will mourn for seven years and will refuse to fall in love during that time. Lady Olivia shows that she is hypocritical in that she uses her brother’s mourning period to avoid Orsino’s romantic advances but ignores her promise to mourn once she falls in love with Cesario. When she meets Cesario—Viola in disguise—she throws her vow away and sends a ring after Cesario to secretly show her affections. Lady Olivia realizes the irrationality of her love for Cesario but finds that she cannot help it. In following with the theme of revelry in love, Olivia chooses to pine after Cesario despite her original intentions.

**Olivia's Love**

Olivia’s abrupt change of heart and mind shows a distinct lack of rationality. She tries to woo Cesario, but is unsuccessful given that Cesario is Viola in disguise. Olivia claims that she cannot love Orsino, despite his wealth, stature, and genuine personality. Olivia’s love for Cesario highlights the illogical side of love. Orsino is the more logical, sensible decision, but Olivia immediately feels love for a new young man whom she does not know.

Olivia goes so far in her love-induced blindness as to marry Sebastian, Viola’s twin brother. Olivia believes that Sebastian is Cesario, and is pleasantly surprised when she notices his interest in her. Beforehand, Cesario (Viola) had always politely rejected her advances. Olivia is so excited to be able to marry Cesario that she plans the ceremony and completes the marriage with Sebastian in a single day. However, having married Sebastian instead of Cesario, Olivia soon finds herself in the center of duplicity and chaos over love and mis-attributed identity.

When Olivia meets Viola, who is still disguised as Cesario, she calls Cesario “husband.” This results in confusion and arguing until Sebastian arrives and clears the confusion. Olivia’s willingness to marry Sebastian (whom she believed was Cesario) with such speed shows that her love was shallow and passionate instead of steady and thoughtfully considered. Once Olivia learns that Sebastian isn’t Cesario, however, she is surprised but not entirely disappointed. Like Orsino, Olivia’s love for Cesario was more motivated by the journey of finding love as opposed to an actual grounded affection for Cesario’s personality.
Analysis

Analysis: Historical Background

Although fifteenth-century England had been a time of grave civil unrest and violence, by the time Shakespeare achieved prominence during Elizabeth and James’ reigns it was enjoying a period of socio-political security and respect for the arts. Queen Elizabeth’s reign extended from 1558 until 1603, when she was succeeded by the Scottish King James. Shakespeare received the patronage of both monarchs during his career as a playwright.

Elizabeth’s reign was not without its tensions. There was an intense religious climate in which the Queen had to act decisively. The religious tensions that existed during Elizabeth’s reign continued during James’ reign, when he was pitted against the Puritans. England had gone to war with Spain. In other foreign affairs, the Queen was moderate, practicing a prudent diplomatic neutrality. There were, however, several plots on her life.

There was also evidence of progress. The nation experienced a commercial revolution. Elizabeth’s government instituted two important social measures: “the Statute of Artificers” and the “Poor Laws,” both of which were aimed at helping the people displaced and hurt by changing conditions. Laws were passed to regulate the economy. Explorers started to venture into the unknown for riches and land. The machinery of government was transformed. The administrative style of government replaced the household form of leadership.

The Elizabethan Age was an age that made a great writer like Shakespeare and his contemporaries possible. It produced excellent drama; Marlowe’s Tamburlaine and Jonson’s Every Man in His Humour are two examples. Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser produced masterpieces during Elizabeth’s reign. Shakespeare was in good company.

Shakespeare was well suited to the English Renaissance, with its new-found faith in the dignity and worth of the individual. Shakespeare profoundly understood human nature and provided us with some of the most imaginative character studies in drama. Shakespeare wrote for his company of players, known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. He achieved considerable prosperity as a playwright. In addition to his artistic brilliance, Shakespeare wrote under the influence of the philosophy and effervescent spirit of the Elizabethan Age. Notably, we find the presence of the “Great Chain of Being,” a view of life that started with Plato and Aristotle, in some of his plays. Furthermore, other ideas and social structures established in the Middle Ages still held sway during the early seventeenth century.

Shakespeare could display his universality and penetration in the public theater for his audience. His work, largely free of didactic and political motives, proved very entertaining.

The date of the composition of Twelfth Night is fixed around 1600. In using his creative powers on original sources, such as the Plautine Gl’Ingannati and Barnabe Rich’s “Of Apolonius and Silla,” Shakespeare was following a Renaissance tradition of working creatively with original situations. Shakespeare thus enjoyed artistic freedom and encouragement to produce a play like Twelfth Night for his audience, knowing that it would entertain viewers of all ages and status.
Analysis: Places Discussed

*Ilyria

*Ilyria. Region on the east shore of the Adriatic Sea, between Italy and Greece. Its history is marked by waves of conquering invaders, from early Slavs to Ottoman Turks. In William Shakespeare’s time, Illyria—still part of the Ottoman Empire—was a group of city-states controlled by Venice. In the play, Illyria is distinctly Italianate, making for an atmosphere that is congenial to romance, with the seacoast providing an apt setting for plot conveniences of shipwreck, separated twins (Viola and Sebastian), and exotic adventures. At Illyria, fantasies and dreams are realized, and lessons are learned. There Viola is transformed from a woman to a man to “Orsino’s mistress,” and there she is finally able to live in an earthly Elysium.

Duke’s palace

Duke’s palace. Site of romantic sentimentality. The duke revels in wordplay and music, which feed his passion. The palace is also a site of ambiguous sexual identity, as shown by Viola’s disguise as Cesario.

House of Olivia

House of Olivia. House modeled on the English system of servants and retainers with prescribed duties. On one hand, there is the mourning figure of Olivia, and the humorless, austere, proud figure of her steward, Malvolio, the epitome of all puritans. On the other, there are Fabian and Maria, Olivia’s servants, and the faithful old retainer, Feste—a well-educated clown. Olivia attempts to live a cloistered life, but Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the two rowdy rioters, are unaffected by Olivia’s sadness over her dead brother.

In a room within this house, Malvolio is confined indarkness and cruelly mocked and tormented by a disguised Feste, at the instigation of Sir Toby and Maria.

Olivia’s orchard

Olivia’s orchard. Scene of Malvolio’s gulling by Maria’s faked letter. One of the comic highlights of the play comes from Malvolio’s strange cross-gartering and absurd posturings as Olivia’s would-be lover. However, the real point of the comedy is character revelation.

Analysis: Modern Connections

Twelfth Night is a holiday that occurs on January 6, which is the festival of Epiphany and the last day of the twelve days of Christmas. During Shakespeare's time, Twelfth Night marked the end of a period of seasonal festivities when dances, parties, and banquets were held and plays were performed, and the traditional social order was temporarily overturned—ideally to allow any tensions that had built up over the year to be safely released. A king or lord of misrule was crowned, and traditional social roles (master/servant, bishop/choirboy, king/fool) were reversed. Today, Halloween, New Year's Eve, and Mardi Gras perform a similar function: on these holidays, many people eat and drink whatever they want, go to parties until early in the morning, and temporarily lose their cares and sometimes their inhibitions by wearing costumes or masks, pretending for a short time to be someone else.

Although Shakespeare never makes it clear whether or not the play's action occurs during the Christmas season, Twelfth Night has been described as carnivalesque in plot and tone, and indeed, Sir Toby Belch, for example, seems to be perpetually drinking and partying until late at night with his friend Sir Andrew
Aguecheek. There are also plenty of role reversals in the play, including a fool speaking words of wisdom (Feste), a humorless steward made to look like a fool (Malvolio), and a woman (Viola) pretending to be a man.

Women were not employed in acting troupes during Shakespeare's time, so female roles—such as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet or Ophelia in Hamlet—had to be performed by boys whose voices had not yet deepened. This fact added an extra bit of humor to the action in Twelfth Night: Renaissance audiences knew that the part of Viola was played by a boy, and would find it amusing when Viola disguised herself as Cesario, thereby in reality becoming a boy playing a woman playing a young man.

Today, the part of Viola is customarily performed by a woman, which allows modern audiences to focus more on her heart-to-heart discussions with Duke Orsino regarding the differences between the sexes—an issue that continues to interest us today. In II.iv.29-41, for example, Orsino supports his remark that women should marry men who are older than themselves by arguing that men's "fancies are more giddy and unfirm, / More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, / Than women's are." Today, those who say that men behave badly, or that they are just like little boys, are voicing arguments similar to the duke's. Orsino then asserts that men need to marry younger women because female beauty does not last very long: "women," he declares, "are as roses, whose fair flow'r / Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour." This sounds very much like the still current attitude of some people that men grow distinguished but women grow old.

Viola, however, strongly disagrees with Orsino's claim in II.iv.93-103 that women cannot love as passionately and profoundly as men can. Still disguised as the male page Cesario, Viola asserts that men are all talk and no commitment when it comes to love: "We men may say more, swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows, but little in our love" (Il.iv.116-18). The debate over the intensity of a man's love versus a woman's persists today, and men are often stereotyped as being afraid of commitment.

Finally, Twelfth Night focuses not only on the roles of the sexes, but on those of the different social classes as well. As a countess, Olivia is a member of the nobility; on the other hand, her steward, Malvolio, is a commoner and is expected to recognize and remain in his place as Olivia's inferior. All the same, Malvolio has hopes. Just before he falls victim to Sir Toby and Maria's practical joke, the steward is heard fantasizing about marrying the countess, telling himself that weddings between commoners and the nobility have happened before. "There is example for't," he says, "the Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe" (II.v.39-40). In the United States, there isn't a formal class system like the one that plagues Malvolio, but there are divisions between the rich, the middle class, and the poor. There are no rules which prevent marriages between members of different financial classes; nevertheless someone who is poor or middle class usually cannot afford to travel in the same circles as someone who is fabulously wealthy. Like Malvolio, some Americans may dream about marrying someone rich and famous, but that doesn't mean it is likely to happen.

Bibliography

Berry, Ralph. Shakespeare’s Comedies: Explorations in Form. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972. A discussion of Shakespeare’s comedies in which each chapter is devoted to a specific play. In the chapter “The Messages of Twelfth Night,” Barry discusses the deceits and illusions in the play and concludes that it calls the very nature of reality into question.

and the Antiromantic *Twelfth Night* focuses on the discordant elements of the play.


**Bibliography: Bibliography and Further Reading**

*If available, books are linked to Amazon.com*


Encyclopedias:


Quotations of Twelfth Night are taken from the following edition:
Critical Essays

Critical Essays: Critical Overview and Evaluation

William Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* apparently to be performed on the twelfth feast day, the joyous climax of the Renaissance Christmas season; however, the feast day itself otherwise has nothing to do with the substance of the play. The play’s subtitle suggests that it is a festive bagatelle to be lightly, but artfully, tossed off. Indeed, Shakespeare may have written the play earlier and revised it for the Christmas festival, for it contains many signs of revision.

The tone of *Twelfth Night* is consistently appropriate to high merriment. With nine comedies behind him when he wrote it, Shakespeare was at the height of his comic powers and in an exalted mood to which he never returned. Chronologically, the play immediately precedes Shakespeare’s great tragedies and problem plays. *Twelfth Night* recombines many elements and devices from earlier plays—particularly *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1594-1595) and *The Comedy of Errors* (pr. c. 1592-1594, pb. 1623)—into a new triumph, unsurpassed in its deft execution.

It is a brilliant irony that Shakespeare’s most joyous play should be compounded out of the sadnesses of its principal characters. However, the sadnesses are, for the most part, those mannered sadnesses that the Elizabethans savored. Orsino, for example, particularly revels in a sweet melancholy reminiscent of that which afflicts Antonio at the beginning of *The Merchant of Venice* (pr. c. 1596-1597, pb. 1600). Orsino’s opening speech—which has often been taken overly seriously—is not a grief-stricken condemnation of love but rather owes much more to the Italian poet Petrarch. Orsino revels in the longings of love and in the bittersweet satiety of his romantic self-indulgence. He is in love with love.

On the other side of the city is the household of Olivia, which balances Orsino and his establishment. Although Olivia’s sadness at her brother’s death initially seems more substantial than Orsino’s airy romantic fantasies, she, too, is a Renaissance melancholic who is wringing the last ounce of enjoyment out of her grief. Her plan to isolate herself for seven years of mourning is an excess but one that provides an excellent counterbalance to Orsino’s fancy; it also sets the plot in motion, since Orsino’s love-longing is frustrated by Olivia’s decision to be a recluse.

The point of contact between Orsino and Olivia—ferrying back and forth between the two—is Viola. As Cesario, she also is sad, but her sadness, like the rest of her behavior, is more direct and human. The sweet beauty that shines through her male disguise is elevated beyond a vulgar joke by Olivia’s immediate, though circumstantially ridiculous, response to her human appeal. Viola’s grief is not stylized and her love is for human beings rather than for abstractions. She seems destined to unite the two melancholy dreamers, but what the play instead accomplishes is that Viola, in her own person and in that of her alter ego, her brother, becomes part of both households. The ultimate outcome is a glorious resolution. It is, of course, immaterial to the dreamy Orsino that he gets Viola instead of Olivia—the romantic emotion is more important to him than is the specific person. Olivia, already drawn out of her seclusion by the disguised Viola, gets what is even better for her, Sebastian.

The glittering plot is reinforced by some of Shakespeare’s best and most delicate dramatic poetry. Moreover, the drama is suffused with bittersweet music, and the idyllic setting in Illyria blends with language and imagery to create a most delightful atmosphere wholly appropriate to the celebration of love and to the enjoyment of this world.

The one notable briar in the story’s rose garden is Malvolio; however, he is easily the play’s most interesting
character. He is called a Puritan, but although he is not a type, he does betray the characteristics then associated with that austere Anglican sect. He is a self-important, serious-minded person with high ideals who cannot bear the thought of others being happy. As Sir Toby puts it to him, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" Malvolio suffers within a joyous world; it is against his will that he becomes part of the fun when he is duped and made to appear ridiculous. As a character, he represents a historical group, then growing in power, whose earnestness threatens to take the joy out of life (and, incidentally, to close England’s theaters). Yet, Shakespeare does not indulge in a satire on Puritanism. He uses the critical powers of comedy in indirect ways.

Malvolio is ridiculous, but so are the cavaliers who surround him. The absurd Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the usually drunken Sir Toby Belch are the representatives, on the political level, of the old order that Malvolio’s counterparts in the real world are soon to topple. While these characters are flawed, they are certainly more engaging than the inflated Malvolio. Shakespeare does not set up the contrast as a political allegory, with right on one side and wrong on the other. Nevertheless, Malvolio is an intrusion into the otherwise idyllic world of the play. He cannot love; his desire for the hand of Olivia is grounded in an earnest will to get ahead. He cannot celebrate; he is too pious and self-involved. Nothing is left for him but to be the butt of a joke—his role in the celebration. Some critics have suggested that Malvolio is treated too harshly, but a Renaissance audience would have understood how ludicrous and indecorous it was for a man of his class to think, even for a moment, of courting Countess Olivia. His pompous and blustery language is the key to how alien he is to this festive context. When he does his bit, Olivia casually mentions that perhaps he is put upon, but this is the only sympathetic gesture he deserves. He is the force that threatens to destroy the celebration of all that is good and refined and joyful in Elizabethan society.

Twelfth Night develops its theme on two levels. The main plot, written mostly in blank verse, shows the nobility in pursuit of love. The subplot features lower characters, who speak in prose and pursue drunkenness and mischief.

In the main plot, the twins Viola and Sebastian are shipwrecked on the Illyrian coast and separated; each presumes the other dead. Disguised as a young man, Viola joins the court of Duke Orsino, falls in love with him, and becomes his favorite. Orsino loves the lady Olivia, who refuses his attentions because she still mourns her dead brother. When Orsino sends Viola to woo Olivia for him, Olivia falls in love with Viola.

In the subplot, Sir Toby Belch, Olivia’s uncle, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a ridiculous suitor to Olivia, fall out with Malvolio, Olivia’s puritanical steward, who condemns their revels. With the help of Maria and Fabian, Olivia’s servants, they trick the self-serving Malvolio into thinking Olivia loves him, then they confine him for insanity. Sir Toby also persuades Sir Andrew to challenge Viola to a duel.

These plots untangle when Sebastian appears, marries Olivia, and whips Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. Viola throws off her disguise and accepts Orsino’s proposal of marriage. Freed, Malvolio stomps out vowing revenge on them all.

Symbolically opposed to Malvolio is Feste, the wise clown. He fools Olivia out of her mourning and Orsino out of his lovesickness—both self-indulgent, sterile behaviors, like Malvolio’s self-love. Shakespeare implies that people should open themselves to celebration and love, even if it makes them appear foolish, since it is truly foolish to deny these life forces.

Bibliography:

that it calls the very nature of reality into question.


**Critical Essays: The Image and Metaphor of "Drowning" in *Twelfth Night***

William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will* is a comedy rich in poetry and puns, a masque concerning masks, a romance with none of the required elements missing. Beyond this, it is a play about drowning: in love, in sorrow, in appetite. It is an intriguing statement about people who are so immersed in excesses of various sorts that they cannot see beyond their own immediate desires in order to act to obtain what they claim to want. The play is a bridge between the comedies that Shakespeare wrote previously and the tragedies to come; as such it has elements of both and is an echo and a prophecy.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the image and metaphor of "drowning" in this play as it relates to the central themes, and to examine some of the ways in which this image takes the play out of the realm of pure fun and farce into Shakespeare's usual realm of profound human truths.

Drowning in *Twelfth Night* is nearly always a metaphor for loss, usually a loss of perspective through submersion in excess. The theme is seen in the first speech of the play, as Orsino asks to be drowned in the music that feeds his melancholy love. Act I is primarily concerned with exposing the ways in which the central characters are caught up, as Orsino is, in the final stages of emotion. Scene ii gives us the first of the two literal scenes of drowning, which turn out to be counterfeit in two senses: Sebastian is not really drowned as Viola believes; and Viola does not drown, but comes out of the sea to Illyria and is thus the person who rescues the inhabitants of that land from inundation.

Sir Toby Belch's particular sea is that of drink; in Act I we find that he is "drunk nightly" in, as he puts it, "drinking healths to my niece." Feste is the first to seize upon this metaphor when speaking of Sir Toby, whom he likens to a "drowned man, a fool, a madman - in the third degree of drink - he's drowned." The image is picked up by others, including Viola, who speaks to Olivia of Orsino's love as being with "adorations, with fertile tears," here linking Orsino's tears to Olivia's, called by Valentine, "eye offending brine."
Act II moves back to the sea, where Sebastian becomes the second person to be saved from the deep; again the image of tears is linked to drowning, this time by Sebastian, speaking of his sister: "She is drowned already sir, with salt water, though I seem to drown her remembrance again with more." Two very different images associated with the sea occur later in the act in a dialogue between Feste and Orsino. Feste suggests to Orsino that men like him, with such changeable minds, should be "put to sea that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing." Orsino answers with his own view: his love is "all as hungry as the sea and can digest as much."

In terms of the play's major theme, Antonio's sea imagery in Act V is the most important; the lines might have better been spoken by Viola:

That most ingratitude boy there by your side  
From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth  
Did I redeem. A wrack past hope he was.  
His life I gave him, and did thereto add  
My love without retention or restraint,  
All his in dedication.

Later in the act it is Viola who is again, though mistakenly, linked to drowning and the sea. Sebastian speaks: "I had a sister, / Whom the blind waves and surges have devoured," and were she alive, "I should my tears let fall upon your cheek and say, 'Thrice welcome, drowned Viola!'".

Other characters are drowning in things other than tears or drink. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is absorbed in eating, Maria in troublemaking, Malvolio in his own self-importance. The one thing that the characters all have in common is boredom as the reason for their individual monomanias. What kind of place is this Illyria, which allows its inhabitants the freedom to indulge in such nonsensical excesses? Joseph H. Summers has noted that in this world,

the responsible older generation has been abolished, and there are no parents at all... in which young ladies, fatherless and motherless, embark on disguised actions, or rule, after a fashion, their own household, and in which the only individuals possible over thirty are drunkards, jokesters, and gulls, totally without authority. ¹

If irresponsibility can reign supreme in this land at any time, imagine the scene on Twelfth Night, when the spirit of revelry is in complete control, and drunkenness and practical joking at their height. It would seem that, of all the characters, only Feste and Viola are interested in disturbing the revelry and games so that the real business of living can begin.

Viola is responsible for saving those similar spirits, Orsino and Olivia from their sea of tears; both are startled out of their sense of propriety by falling in love with her as Cesario. Olivia is distraught because she has fallen for a servant, Orsino because he is attracted to a boy. Viola manages the situation purely through verbal skill and a charming double-edged wit. We can see in Viola the one person who keeps her head above water for the length of the play; she is the only one with any strong inclination toward self-preservation. She is a realist in the company of complete sentimentalists, and with Feste, finds something to love in these weak Illyrians, and so saves them.

Feste, the sharpest wit of all Shakespearian clowns, attempts through mockery to pull the other characters out of their absurd moods; he sees the essential sanity in his cynicism, as opposed to the madness of the rest of the Illyrians: "I wear not motley in my brain." No one escapes Feste's cutting wit; there is no one whom he cannot outsmart or out talk, and yet he is also the only person to treat Malvolio humanely, with actions and not just words. Viola is the only one to see Feste's real accomplishments: "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
And to do that well craves a kind of wit. This is a practice as full of labor as a wise man's art." Feste's art is best put to use in his scene with Malvolio, in which he impersonates Sir Topas. Malvolio's prison is a sea of sorts, in which he is drowning in confusion and terror. Although Feste has been sent in to mock Malvolio, he perhaps sees the comic truth in Malvolio's assertion that he is "as well in my wits as any man in Illyria," and he promises to help him. The song with which Feste ends the play also serves to tie together some of the tear and drowning imagery, whether it be with a sexual pun, as Leslie Hotson has suggested, or through the references to drowning in the rain.

Shakespeare's most serious commentary on the evils of excess is contained in the subplot concerning the gulling of Malvolio. This is a perfect example of a joke that has gone too far and of the imposition of the neurotic compulsion towards "fun," that comes from boredom and drink, on another person. Malvolio's humiliation comes close to marring the comic spirit of the play and yet, the incident is a necessary one in terms of portraying the limits of human cruelty. Malvolio alone remains untouched by Viola's saving goodness; the most serious note in the play is sounded by Feste when he explains the situation and concludes: "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges."

It is interesting to ask to what extent the excesses of the beginning of the play have given way to moderation at the conclusion. Olivia seems not to have changed much; the hasty marriage and then the easy acceptance of Sebastian hint that she is still more in love with the idea of love than with her husband. Orsino easily accepts Cesario-Viola as his bride, in place of Olivia, but any hope we have for the success of this match rests on Viola's talent for love. Maria and Sir Toby get what they deserve: each other, and they will probably cause more mischief as a team then they ever did alone. Malvolio does not seem to have learned very much, and swears to be "revenged on the whole pack of you!" Feste, of course, remains alone to comment on the coming follies of the Illyrians. All in all, however, no one has really been lost. There is no more cause for tears in Illyria, and this in itself is a salvation from drowning. Twelfth Night is the most festive of Shakespeare's plays, and yet much of the humor and singing is ironic, with the mockery turned towards both characters and audience. One may, of course, choose to ignore the undercurrents and concentrate solely upon the fun. The poles of the play are quite clearly drawn in Orsino's first speech: one may be drowning in sentimentality and enjoy it; and yet there comes the time when one realizes that, "'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."

Shakespeare gives us his play with a choice of perspectives: the festival of Twelfth Night or, what you will.

FOOTNOTES

1. Summers, p. 25.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Critical Essays: Worm i'the bud: The Games of Love in Twelfth Night

According to Patrick Swinden in his book, An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies, a comedy does not demand "the degree of concentration and belief" required by tragedy. As a result, an audience of a play "is amusedly aware that it's all a play, a game that they are sharing with the actors". 1 In Twelfth Night, it is the characters, almost without exception, who, in varying degrees, are involved in deception. Swinden says,
"Whether we look in the plot that Shakespeare took (indirectly) from the Italian, or the plot he made up to put beside it, we shall discover deceit piled on deceit."  

Cesario/Viola deceives Olivia, Orsino, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby, while Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste deceive Malvolio.

In an intricate pattern of "concealment" and "revealment" the play spins dizzily toward its happy resolution with all the deceptions that had, and had been, concealed revealed. Is the end of the play really a happy ending? What dynamic in the process of deception could cause Sir Andrew to disappear or force Malvolio to declare, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (V.i.380)? Are the characters bettered or changed by their experiences when they arrive at the end of Act V than when they started at the beginning of Act I? Whether it be a practical joke or a clever disguise, the games being played in Illyria simultaneously result from and protect each character's deception not only of others but also, more importantly of themselves. The clearest examples are Duke Orsino and Olivia.

The games begin with Orsino's opening lines to the play:

> If music be the food of love, play on;  
> Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,  
> The appetite may sicken and die (I.i.1-4).

As Orsino continues to wax rhetorical and hysterical about being in love, it rapidly becomes apparent that he is playing a game with himself, which he will continue throughout the play. He is not in love, but in love with love. Olivia is unattainable and she has told him so repeatedly. Yet Orsino persists in making himself suffer, listening to sad love songs, writing to her, staying awake at night and crying into his pillow because he believes that this is the way someone in love acts. We almost want to shout at him "Get over it. Move on." It is part of the game that while it may appear that Orsino is rhapsodizing about Olivia, he is actually concentrating on himself. The words "I," "me," and "mine" occur ten times in the opening passage, culminating with:

> How will she love...  
> ... when live, brain, and heart,  
> Those sovereign thrones, are all supplied and filled  
> Her sweet perfections with one selfsame king! (35-39).

Shakespeare's use of "selfsame" intensifies not only Orsino's description of Olivia, but also his focus on himself. Throughout these lines there is a sense that Orsino's sexual identity, encased in a male body, has not yet been clearly defined, hence his necessity for adopting what he thinks are the affectations of a successful lover.

Orsino begins Act II, scene iv in the same way he begins Act I: "Give me some music" (II.iv.1). Here, however, Orsino requests a specific song, one overheard just the night before, as Feste, Olivia's fool, sang it. How Orsino managed to overhear Feste's performance is one of the mysteries of the play, but its effect on Orsino is unquestionable "it did relieve my passion much" (II.iv.4). The song's lyrics are most depressing:

> Come away, come away, Death,  
> And in sad cypress let me be laid.  
> Fie away, fie away, breath,  
> I am slain by a fair cruel maid;  
> My shroud of white, all stuck with yew,  
> O prepare it.  
> My part of death no one so true  
> Did share it.
Not a flower, not a flower sweet
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
A thousand thousand sighs to save
Lay me, O where
Sad lover never find my grave
To weep there (II.iv.49-64).

Although Orsino says that he heard only a "piece of song" (II.iv.2), he also notes that it is an "old and antique song" (II.iv.3), indicating that he knows it in its entirety. Its tune and sentiment are so powerful that it remains with him the next morning. It is possible that the song reminds Orsino that he is no longer young enough to pursue an amorous campaign, and that there will be neither lover nor child to mourn him as Olivia mourns her brother. In modern pop-psychology terminology, Orsino appears to be having a mid-life crisis.

Orsino's game reaches a breaking point when Cesario interrupts his rhetoric with, "Ay, but I know" (II.iv.99). Orsino is shocked that this young man may have love experiences to which he has not been privy. He questions what Cesario knows about love and women and is eager to hear the boy's "blank" (II.iv.106) story. Yet, Orsino remains oblivious to Cesario's confession: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, And all the brothers, too" (II.iv.116-117). Orsino seems to be uncomfortable with this very personal, very intense revelation from another man since his "Ay, that's the theme" (II.iv.119) appears to restore his concentration to the safety and comfort of the pursuit of Olivia.

Orsino decides to discard his affectations and goes to speak directly with Olivia. Whatever has transpired between him and Cesario in their "three months" (V.i.88) silence of Acts III and IV has given him the strength to declare that he "will be so much a sinner to be a double-dealer" (V.i.27).

Many productions have offered Orsino actually falling in love with Cesario, such as the 1994 Royal Shakespeare Company version which had the events of Act II scene iv take place in Orsino's bed. Orsino and Cesario share a passionate kiss that surprises them both, but the kiss also seems to flow from the action and its location. Trevor Nunn's 1996 film moves the moment of passion to the scene during which Feste sings a love madrigal in a stable. Feste who coughs at the critical moment of their lips almost touching breaks the momentum. The interpretation is a valid one based on Orsino's customarily rhetorical proclamations of love for Cesario:

Why should I not ... Kill what I love. (V.i.106, 108)
...This your minion ... whom, by heaven I swear I tender dearly (V.i.114-115)
... the lamb that I do love (V.i.119).

Has Orsino fallen out of love with love and in love with Cesario? His proclamations arise from his anger at Olivia's very public rejection of them as "fat and fulsome to mine ear / As howling music" (V.i.98-99), the same music that he has found so soothing. This anger is not generated by some newfound awareness. Swinden comments: "He is talking about Cesario, not Olivia... The presence on stage of both partners during the tirade brings out very delicately the ambiguity of Orsino's shift in feeling. He fails to distinguish the object of his anger from the object of his love." 3

Even when Cesario is revealed to be Viola, his acceptance of a "share in this most happy wrack" (V.i.250) seems to be dependent on his seeing her in "woman's weeds" (V.i.257). Yet it is to Viola still dressed as Cesario to whom Orsino offers his hand, not once but twice. That Orsino will not accept Viola unless she looks like a proper woman and yet offers his hand to the male vision suggests that Orsino has not surrendered completely his comfortable sexual cocoon into which he has only admitted Cesario and then only with
restraint. This reticence is confirmed at the play's end when Orsino admits:

... Cesario come -
For so you shall be while you are a man,
But when in other habits you are seen
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen (V.i.362-365).

In his essay, "The two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in Twelfth Night and The Merchant of Venice," Joseph Pequigney explains that, "[Orsino's] attraction to Olivia, where he is heterosexually straight, like the other would-be wooers Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio, is a disaster. The love Cesario could not have changed instantaneously with the revelation of his femaleness; if it is erotic, then it would have been erotic before; what does change is that marriage suddenly becomes possible, hence the immediate proposal." This proposal is followed by a mournful song from Feste on the stages of a love life, which brings the play back to the beginning. Clearly, Orsino has not changed from the man he was: he will still have his "fancy." He is as he was at the beginning of the play: he cannot totally abandon his own sexual game. In all likelihood, Viola will now become an Olivia substitute, "his fancy's queen."

As Orsino hides behind the game of love, Olivia hides behind the game of grief cut off from love, adopting an Orsino version of mourning behaviour. Her entire household is in mourning and she daily goes to her brother's grave. As long as she grieves for her dead bother, her sexual desires can be put on hold. Grieving gives her the perfect excuse for rejecting Orsino's suit and relieves her of making a sexual investment in any man until she chooses "the sight / And company of men" (I.ii.40-41). Unlike Orsino, Olivia has put a seven-year limit on her mourning for her father and brother of which "twelvemonth" has already elapsed when Viola lands in Illyria.

In addition, Olivia differs from Orsino significantly since she can:

sway her house, command her followers,
Take and give back affairs and them dispatch
With such a smooth, discreet and stable bearing (IV.iii.17-19).

She is generous and tolerant, boarding Sir Toby and his guest, Sir Andrew, and positive in her view of the repressed Malvolio. With Feste's logical and systematic stripping away of her facade, with Olivia's consent, Olivia is free in a way that eludes Orsino. She demonstrates keen judgment about the affectations of love: "'Tis not that time of the moon with me to make one in so skipping a dialogue" (I.v.164-165). She has an agile mind and is able to counter Cesario's metaphors as quickly as he issues them. She is inquisitive and only asks Cesario the necessary questions. She seems to be a realist, offering "divers schedules of my beauty" (I.v.200-201) in response to Cesario's lyricism. These qualities refuse to be submerged even as she finds herself falling in love with Cesario:

... Not too fast! Soft, soft!
... Even so quickly may one catch the plague.
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be. (I.v.248, 250-253)

Olivia thus chooses to abandon the safety of her game and pursue Cesario with complete abandon and confidence in her womanhood. In her pursuit, free from her facade, Olivia is naively honest with herself and Cesario. She confesses in Act III scene i that she sent "a ring in chase of" him (III.i.98). She asks him honestly, "I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me" (III.i.123). Cesario attempts to repay this honesty, "That you do think you are not what you are" (III.i.124). Because of her naïveté, Olivia takes the phrase literally and assures Cesario that she is not mad. However, the line also points out that Olivia, the noblewoman, has fallen
in love with a manservant, though a "gentleman," and that that gentleman is actually a gentlewoman. Even so, Olivia is rational enough to realise that, "wit nor reason can my passion hide" (III.i.137). Unlike Orsino, Olivia embraces the opportunity for sexual fulfilment with such enthusiasm that she will attempt to overcome every obstacle with actions, not moaning and words. She is quite lucid on love, "Love sought is good, but giv'n unsought is better" (III.i.141). In this sense, she is the sexual positive to Orsino's negative.

Olivia's views will be challenged, however, when confronted by Sebastian. Since fraternal identical twins are a biological impossibility, it would seem that Olivia would note some difference between Cesario and Sebastian. But in the throes of sacrificing love, she would rather soothe her beloved's ire with tales of "how many fruitless pranks" have been instigated by Sir Toby than launch an investigation into any differences that may exist between the sister and brother.

For his part, Sebastian seems to think that nature caused Olivia's consistency in being sexually attracted to a woman who looks just like him. But like Orsino, Olivia is eager for the sexual experience promised by marriage. Olivia is actually very much steeped in Orsino's "selfsame" deception. She was in love with the image of a man, not a man, admitting she was suffering from "a most extracting frenzy of mine own" (V.i.265). With this admission, Olivia too returns to being as she was at the beginning, involved in a self-deceiving sexual game, as Cesario had lamented: "Poor lady, she were better love a dream" (II.ii.23).

Although Sebastian notes that he sees the reality and thinks it a dream, Olivia's relationship with Sebastian will ostensibly have to be redefined, as will Orsino's with Viola. Pequigney observes:

Like Orsino, Olivia goes through a homoerotic phase that lasts through and beyond betrothal; both have experiences that evince their bisexuality. Nor do they ever pass beyond it, for the sine qua non of their psychological development - his away from fruitless doting on her, hers away from fixation on a dead brother - and it has a crucial, integral, and unerasable part in both their love stories, that of Orsino with Cesario/Viola and that of Olivia with Cesario/Sebastian. 5

Twelfth Night not only asks the comic question, "How does an individual get out of tune with society?" But also the tragic question, "Why does the individual behave this way, and why does society insists upon its standards." 6 This play is unique in that it asks these questions simultaneously, and within the context of the sexual games of the play, the answers can be found in the most basic and defining activity of human kind: sex.

FOOTNOTES


2. Swinden, p. 127.


BIBLIOGRAPHY
Critical Essays: Feste and Fabian: Plots and Complots

Act II, scene v of Twelfth Night opens with Sir Toby's injunction to a character we have never seen before: "Come thy ways, Signor Fabian" (II.v.1). Fabian's reply indicates that he not only knows of the intended "sport," but that he too has a grudge against Malvolio: "You know he brought me out o' favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here" (II.v.6-7). By Maria's entrance, it becomes clear that it is to be Fabian, and not Feste, who is to hide in the box-tree with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in order to observe Malvolio's antics over the letter; indeed that Feste will not appear in the scene at all. The sudden and unexpected appearance of Fabian in the famous "box-tree" scene is one of the intriguing elements of Twelfth Night. His appearance is intriguing because he has apparently replaced Feste in Sir Toby and Maria's plot against Malvolio. Yet in Act II scene iii, where the idea for the letter is conceived, Maria quite clearly suggests, "the fool make a third" (II.iii.167-68). Why does Shakespeare suddenly replace "the fool" with Fabian with no warning? The answer to this question lies in the character of Feste. Examining Fabian's role in the Sir Toby-Maria plot against Malvolio gives us a greater understanding of Feste and his overall function within the play.

I would like to look briefly at who Feste is, before addressing the question of Fabian, in order to establish the social and intellectual differences between the two characters. The list of characters describes Feste as "the clown, [Olivia's] jester" 1, yet throughout the play he is referred to as "the fool." These terms may have been interchangeable but the Oxford English Dictionary defines a clown as "a fool or jester as a stage character, or (in Shakespeare) a retainer of a court or great house" 2 and a fool as "one who professionally counterfeits folly for the entertainment of others." 3 Whilst these definitions are certainly close, it is interesting to note that a "fool" is not necessarily attached to a house or court. We are also told that Feste is "a fool that the lady Olivia's father took much delight in" (II.iv.11-12), but are given the impression that he has been absent from Olivia's house for sometime: "Nay, [either] tell me where thou hast been…. My lady will hang thee for thy absence" (I.v.1-3). Feste appears to be more of a "free spirit" since he doesn't appear to be part of Olivia's permanent household and we are given the impression of a passing itinerant who doesn't entirely belong in Illyria.

Feste is a lone character; a commentator and an analyst who in many respects provides a link between the audience and the action of the play. Trevor Nunn's 1996 film of the play makes all three of these points very strongly. Ben Kingsley's Feste hovers on the fringes of the Edwardian society in which the film is set. He is an itinerant musician, a traveller with license to appear at Olivia's home and Orsino's palace. Trevor Nunn comments:

The image of a traveller… seemed to me to provide what Malvolio would revile, what Sir Toby would relate to, what Olivia would forgive, what Maria would scold, and that by which Viola would feel threatened, Sebastian pestered and Orsino disturbed. 4

The welcome extended to him by Olivia suggests long acquaintance; he has known her since she was a small child and shrewdly reads the truth behind her actions and her moods. Yet despite this intimacy with Olivia, Feste remains an outsider throughout the film. His quiet departure from the scene of midnight revels immediately expunges him from the possibility of becoming part of the gulling of Malvolio (interestingly,
Maria's line, "let the fool make a third" (II.iii.167-68) is cut), and his ability to disturb Orsino, Sebastian and Viola with his penetrating questions and perceptive observations gives him the quality of an "otherworldly" visitor. This impression is given credence by the fact that Feste is the only character that makes direct eye contact with the camera; we later realize that it is his voice that has spoken the "prologue" at the beginning of the film. In effect, the film makes him a storyteller and we watch the story through his eyes.

Turning to Fabian, it is harder to define exactly who he is in the social world of the play. Actors playing Fabian have found him a difficult character to play since he has no stated function in Olivia's household, and is given little opportunity to develop a distinct character in the play. Directors have also found Fabian a problem in terms of introducing him and fitting him into the fabric of the play. Bill Alexander felt that he had partially solved the problem of how to fit Fabian into the play in his 1987 production at Stratford-upon-Avon by making him "a kind of under-steward to Malvolio… it gives him a potential aspiration and a relationship to Malvolio – a reason why he should join in a plot against Malvolio." 5 Describing the effectiveness of this solution, Alexander comments that:

I think it helps… to introduce him [Fabian] silently into the earlier scenes: for instance, when Olivia and Malvolio first appear, he was clearly one down the pecking order from Malvolio – he did what Malvolio told him to physically, and he hung around and was dressed in a way that suggested a sort of second-in-command. 6

Alexander's comment takes us to Fabian's grudge against Malvolio over the "bear-baiting," which seems to me to provide a strong clue about Shakespeare's reasons for replacing Feste with Fabian in the "box-tree" scene. Fabian's comment not only provides us with evidence about his connection with Olivia's household, it clearly, and more importantly, allies Fabian with Sir Toby and identifies him with Sir Toby's world of "cakes and ale." This is a world, which Feste, for reasons we shall examine, is never a complete part of; he lives on the fringe of the Illyrian worlds and effectively becomes a kind of Greek chorus, a link between the audience and the world of the play. Fabian however, is "all-Illyrian" and therefore practically useful to Sir Toby in ways that Feste can never be.

Critics have described Fabian's sudden appearance as both "crude" and "clumsy," arguing that his abrupt introduction "contrasts strikingly with the theatrical expertise of the play so far." 7 Certainly the theatricality of Fabian's first entrance seems somewhat contrived and clumsy as Sir Toby initiates Fabian into the plot and introduces him to the audience. The pace of this very comic and theatrically accomplished scene lags somewhat in its opening moments as we register Fabian's presence and Feste's absence. Warren and Wells note that it is at this point the "difficulties" of the second half of the play begin. The first half of the play has a tight theatrical structure and moves smoothly through the introduction of the major characters and their situations. The second half however, falters slightly around the middle of the play, "especially in the very long 3.4." 8 Warren and Wells attribute this faltering of the dramatic rhythm to Fabian, partly because of his verbosity in this later scene:

Fabian not only plays a major part in spurring Sir Andrew on to challenge Viola, he does so at length and in a very elaborate, even laboured, style, with formally balanced phrases and contrived comparisons… not like the utterance of a dramatic utterance but like a set speech… Shakespeare is cranking the dual plot into action…. 9

The idea that Fabian's appearance occurs as the secondary plot is starting to unfold is also helpful for examining the reasons behind why he replaces Feste. The gulling of Malvolio is the brainchild of Maria and Sir Toby and Feste has had no part in developing it. Looking ahead to the theatricality of the box-tree scene, Sir Toby clearly needs an accomplice to exploit the humour of this scene; Sir Andrew is included by association, but he does not have the wit necessary to carry the comedy; Maria has written the letter and her part is effectively played, so a third character is needed to offset Sir Toby's boisterous humour. When the idea
for the plot is raised in Act II scene iii, Feste is present. Many productions show him leaving soon after
Malvolio's exit because he says nothing further in the scene. However there is no stage direction to imply that
he exits before the others so that Maria's suggestion that "the fool make a third" (II.iii.167-68) is made in his
hearing.

Sir Toby instantly applauds Maria's proposal in a typically boisterous and enthusiastic way. She includes
Feste in the plot at that stage, much in the way that she makes Sir Andrew the implicit "second": he is still
present and he has been part of the midnight high-jinks interrupted by Malvolio. It is not because either of
them are obvious choices; Sir Andrew is a visitor to the house and has no long-standing personal grudge
against Malvolio, and Feste is not the obvious "third" in terms of character or motive. Maria's idea for the
gulling of Malvolio is a prank reminiscent of playground humour, earthily and bawdily comic, but is hardly in
keeping with the analytical and intellectual wit we have seen from Feste. The Elizabethan Fool held a special
position in royal or noble households and was given license to speak his mind without punishment. As Olivia
rather impatiently tells Malvolio, "there's no slander in an allowed fool" (I.v.89-90). It seems unlikely that a
Fool who values and promotes his position as a professional in his trade would achieve any degree of
professional satisfaction from a prank such as this.

If Feste remains onstage as the text indicates, then the problem arises of how to explain his silence after
Maria's suggestion that he become "a third" in the gulling plot. He says nothing and his silence is frequently
taken for complicity. This compounds our surprise (and chagrin) at the appearance of Fabian in Act II scene v
– we are expecting the subtle wit and intellectual humour of the Fool and instead we are given a characterless
nobody. If, however, we consider the staging of the "midnight revels" scene and the theatrical possibilities
inherent in stage silences then plausible alternatives for Feste's silence become evident, in-line with his
character. His silence in this scene gives him the opportunity of physically rather than verbally disassociating
himself with Maria's plan, and indeed this does occur in performance. Warren and Wells observe that:

His [Feste's] silence may make dramatic points. Peter Hall's 1958 production… let Feste
'feign sleep, head on arm, at a table. As the others went out he raised his head and stared
thoughtfully after them…' this Feste was a detached observer. The Feste of Hall's 1991
version made this detachment more specific: after Malvolio's exit, he lay stretched on a seat,
and when Maria said let the fool make a third, he simply waved a dismissive hand; Fabian
was clearly needed to make a third here. 10

A "dismissive" gesture from Feste here makes the point clearly; he is "out," and Sir Toby and Maria will need
to find someone else to fill the place. Therefore a new character is needed and Fabian's later appearance is
explained.

Removing Feste from the gulling of Malvolio returns the focus of the gulling plot to the worlds within the
play. Illyria is almost a parallel universe: Orsino, Olivia, Viola, and Sebastian belong to the world of courtly
and romantic love; Sir Toby to the world of "cakes and ale" and the spirit of Twelfth Night. The gulling of
Malvolio belongs firmly in Sir Toby's world and Sir Toby's accomplices need, by association, also to be part
of that world. Fabian, with his second line referring to the "bear-baiting," establishes himself as an integral
part of the "Sir Toby world" in which gaming, drinking, duelling, and sports such as "bear-baiting" reflect the
world of Elizabethan England. Whilst Feste is able to play the role of Fool with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in
Act II scene iii and join their drunken banter, he remains removed from their world, hence his sudden silence
toward the end of this scene.

Sir Toby's hasty acceptance of Fabian's involvement with the plot against Malvolio at the beginning of Act II
scene v suggests a familiarity between them that does not exist with Feste. Whilst Sir Toby addresses Feste in
familiar terms, Feste always refers to him as "Sir Toby," maintaining a personal distance. Sir Toby refers to
Fabian as "Signor," possibly ironically, but equally possibly suggesting that Fabian has the status of a
gentleman. Fabian himself seems on easy terms with Sir Toby, addressing him familiarly as "man" ("I would exult, man" (II.v.6)) and their collusion in both this scene, and the later duel scene with Sir Andrew and Viola serves to sideline Sir Andrew and instate Fabian as fellow-conspirator in the Sir Toby-Maria jest against Malvolio. Feste however, seems to exist on the fringes of both worlds, able to interact with both, but never becoming a part of them. He moves easily from the gentle catechism of Olivia, to the riotous midnight revels with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria, to the melancholic mood of Orsino's court. In acknowledging this it is therefore impossible to see him playing an active part in the gulling of Malvolio or taking delight in the burlesque duel between Sir Andrew and Viola-Cesario.

Feste does, of course, have his own agenda in relation to Malvolio, and we see his contribution to the downfall of Malvolio in the often-troublesome "dark house" scene in Act IV scene ii. Sir Toby's treatment of Malvolio in confining him in the dark house often seems vindictive and unnecessarily cruel, yet it is Feste who prolongs the scene and taunts Malvolio still further. Sir Toby admits to Feste that it has been a "sport" to humiliate Malvolio in this way; it is at his suggestion that Feste impersonates Sir Topas the curate in order to further "baffle" Malvolio's wits, but he leaves Feste to his own devices and does not stay to witness the "knavery." The scene becomes troublesome when we suspect that Feste goes beyond the role of impartial observer that he has hitherto represented, and becomes actively and primarily involved in the degradation of Malvolio.

Sir Toby's aversion to Malvolio, as we have seen, is because he represents a Puritan threat to the celebration of festivities such as Twelfth Night. Feste's involvement is harder to explain. He has a much more personal axe to grind, and in Act V scene we are given his explanation: "...but do you remember, Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal, an you smile not, he's gagged..." (V.i.370-72), as he reminds Olivia of the moment in Act I scene v, when Malvolio denigrates both Feste and his wit. The line suggests that Feste's professional pride has been abused by Malvolio's comments and that the nonsensical catechism of Malvolio in the "dark house" scene is his way of proving Malvolio to be a fool. His final comment to Olivia seems to suggest that his motives were not sinister, and that he regards the "Sir Topas" episode as a consequence of Malvolio's unpleasantry: "...thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (V.i.373). As John Caird comments,

…what Feste is saying to Malvolio is, 'Do you remember, you who were so pompous... Now look who the joke's on. Thus, the whirligig of time brings in its revenges. I didn't.' Feste doesn't actually do anything. 11

Theatrical interpretations of both this and the "dark house" scene itself vary considerably, with directors portraying Feste at both ends of the revenger-joker spectrum.

In posing the question of the reasons behind Feste's treatment of Malvolio in the "dark house" scene, it is useful to contrast Fabian's function in the play with Feste's function. Fabian, as we have seen, is a useful adjunct to Sir Toby's tremendous energy in the gulling of Malvolio. He is the crucial accomplice in the "box-tree" and the "duel" scene, and he does this successfully because he is an unremarkable character who does nothing to detract the focus from Sir Toby. Feste, on the other hand is a remarkable character, and to expend his energies as Sir Toby's back-up man would detract considerably from his complexity and versatility as a character. Feste describes himself to Viola-Cesario as Olivia's "corrupter of words" (III.i.34-5) and he plays with and distorts language much as the play itself plays with and distorts concepts of gender. Shakespeare uses distortion of gender to reveal truths about the nature of love, and he uses Feste to distort language to reveal psychological truths about the other characters.

In Trevor Nunn's film, Ben Kingsley's Feste highlights the character's function as an analyst: he analyses Olivia's grief, analyses Orsino, analyses Malvolio, even analyses Viola. Rather in the manner of a psychological clairvoyant, he is able to see truths that the other characters cannot see, and through his Fool's "toolbox" of wit and language distortion, he forces the main protagonists to see truths about themselves. He
takes Olivia through a mock catechism to reveal to her the absurdity of her elaborate mourning regime, and proving her a "fool." This routine is repeated in the "dark house" scene with Malvolio in which Feste, as "Sir Topaz" attempts to restore the apparently mad Malvolio to his right mind through a catechism on a series of contemporary Elizabethan religious issues, and in doing so, proves Malvolio to be the real "fool" of the play. For this reason, it seems preferable to accept John Caird's interpretation of Feste's final comment since it becomes the way in which Feste attempts to show Malvolio the truth about himself. Thus, Feste's function as commentator and analyst is fulfilled, and his final song to the audience provides the link between the world of the play and the audience's world in the "wind and rain" of reality.

FOOTNOTES


2. OED, sense 3.

3. OED, sense 2.a.

4. Nunn, intro.

5. Billington, p. 103.

6. Ibid.


8. Ibid. p. 52.

9. Ibid. p. 53.

10. Warren and Wells, p. 130.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Critical Essays: Present Me As An Eunuch: Female Identity in Twelfth Night

Throughout *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare examines patterns of love and courtship through a repositioning of traditional Elizabethan gender roles. The familiar comic formula of identical twins creating confusion is employed with an added twist so that identical twins of opposite gender provide the foundation for the comic confusion. Viola, the protagonist, is stranded on the shores of a foreign land by a shipwreck. She adopts the identity of her brother, Sebastian, so that she can live in safety without a male protector. Shakespeare uses the comedy behind Viola's gender transformation to explore the notion that concepts of romantic love are not always selective by gender. In the course of the play we are presented with a series of same-gender love situations (Olivia for Viola, Orsino for Cesario-Viola, Antonio for Sebastian) that parallel "legitimate" opposite gender love relationships (Orsino for Olivia, Viola for Orsino, Maria for Sir Toby and in some respects Malvolio for Olivia). The result is a unique "comedy of gender" that uses gender and disguise of gender to reveal one of the play's chief messages: "nothing that is so, is so" (IV.i.8).

The "unnatural" love relationships in *Twelfth Night* highlight a major gender issue in Shakespearean drama: the role of boy players. They also bring into account the position of Elizabethan women in society and how that position was undergoing subtle changes during the period. Shakespeare's notion of Elizabethan gender roles, and in particular those of Elizabethan women, was presumably that of the accepted theological doctrine, which taught that Adam was created first, and Eve from his body; she was created specifically to give him comfort, and was to be subordinate to him, to obey him and to accept her lesser status. Thus, to Elizabethans the concept of sexual equality would have been anathema. A dominant woman was unnatural, a symptom of disorder. Shakespeare apparently endorses this belief in his comedies, returning his heroines to the accepted and "safe" role of wife/daughter once the resolution of the play takes place. However the theatre itself is a place of fluidity and artifice where "nothing that is so, is so." I will discuss the ways in which Shakespearean theatrical conventions override Elizabethan notions of the female role and in *Twelfth Night*, establish female characters not as two-dimensional Elizabethan archetypes but as tenacious and distinct characters with a strong sense of identity.

Viola, the chief female protagonist, is by far the strongest character in *Twelfth Night*. After the tragic shipwreck that has separated her from her brother, Viola disguises herself as a man for most of the play not only to protect herself, but also in order to preserve her state of free will. It can be argued that in placing his heroine in this situation, Shakespeare is using Viola as a means for examining female capabilities and instincts. The shipwreck has left her in an unprecedented, indeterminate state: she has no one to connect with at all. Lacking anyone to provide for her, she is forced to take measures to protect herself so that the understood reason for her deception is to insure herself against immediate danger, but also to retain her prospects and status for the kind of future that she would like to have. She is unwilling to accept the female role of complete passivity just as Olivia is unwilling to submit to Orsino’s advances because she enjoys playing her role as “lady of the manor.” Viola enjoys her life and position as a man, and does not reveal who she is until the last scene of the play. Curiously, she also voluntarily accepts the role that society would impose on her again at the close of the play: that of a wife. It is important to note however, that she freely chooses this role and does so out of her own sense of self. For Viola, it is a personal choice based on her desires. She is in love with Orsino and keeping the pretence of her male identity is no longer necessary, as she desires to be his wife.

Shakespeare’s female characters have frequently been criticised as two-dimensional and unrealistic portrayals of subservient women, a notion that clearly overlooks the complex contradictions not to mention the acting challenges inherent in roles such as Portia, Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. The general assertion has often been that the roles of women in his plays were prominent for the time and culture that he lived in. Little conclusive evidence exists concerning the actual involvement of women with the Elizabethan stage. Women were not
permitted to act on the stage, with the occasional exception of women at court taking part in special, private performances for Elizabeth and her guests. By the reign of James I it was not uncommon for the ladies at court, including Queen Anne, to take part in the masques that were a popular form of court entertainment. It does seem however, that the appearance of women on the public stage was not altogether unknown. Coryat's Crudities of 1611, recounting experiences in Venice comments: "I saw women acte, a thing that I never saw before, though I have heard that it hath beene sometimes used in London". It is therefore clear that although they took part in plays on the Continent, particularly in the popular Commedia dell'arte plays, it was not the norm for women to act on the public English stage. Boys or young men whose voices had not yet changed acted the women's parts, and it is this convention of contemporary Shakespearean theatre practices that in many ways contributes to the development of positive and powerful female characters in Shakespearean drama.

Boys acting as women disguised as boys provide the strongest visual symbol of Feste's comment in Twelfth Night that "nothing that is so, is so" (IV.i.8). Several of Shakespeare's comic plays, of which Twelfth Night is just one, capitalize on the effect of boys acting women, who then take on disguise as boys. Sylvia (Two Gentlemen of Verona), Portia, Nerissa and Jessica (The Merchant of Venice), Rosalind (As You Like It), and Imogen (Cymbeline) are other well-known characters. Shakespeare often exploits the extra layer of irony available in this situation by having the character refer to his/her/his male/female attributes. Much of the ironic humour of Viola's situation comes from her own wry acknowledgement of her assumed manhood. In Act II scene ii when Malvolio catches up with her after leaving Olivia's house, she meditates on Olivia's motives in sending the ring to her. She quickly anticipates Olivia's feelings: "Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her" (II.ii.18), but goes on to contemplate the possible complexities of the situation: "How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly, / And I, poor monster, fond as much on him, / And she, mistaken seems to dote on me" (II.ii.33-35). Shakespeare is setting up a double level of humour: the humour inherent in the age-old love triangle, but also the humour of a male actor wooing a boy actor playing a girl, who is wooing a boy actor playing a girl who is posing as a boy, who in turn is a boy actor playing a girl posing as a boy who is in love with the first male actor! The humour thus worked on an entirely different level for Shakespeare's audience than it does for a modern audience.

By placing boy actors in these complex levels of cross-dressing humour, Shakespeare, along with the other dramatists of his time was flouting biblical law and incurring considerable opposition from the Puritan faction. Their argument against the practice was based on the biblical verse Deuteronomy 22.5 in which it is stated:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

The notion of boys playing women clearly went against this law, yet the playhouses continued to uphold the practice, and in some cases they had their supporters. John Case, a defender of the drama on Humanist grounds pointed out: "It is not necessarily indecorum for a man to wear the dress of a harlot on the stage, if his object is to expose the vices of harlotry." The idea that drama could function as a means for moral instruction was not a new one; indeed the Church itself sanctioned drama for that purpose in the medieval period. However Case's cautious endorsement raises another possibility: that women in drama could be presented in an alternative way to the traditional view of women and womankind; that boy players actually legitimize women as strong, thinking individuals.

In order to explore this notion further it is useful to look briefly at the way women were viewed socially and iconographically at this time. The Medieval church in Europe established a view of women that was split between the ideal of the Virgin Mary and her weaker counterpart Eve, or the anti-type to the ideal, the Whore of Babylon. The Elizabethan church continued this tenet, supported by the general distrust of women portrayed in frequently misogynistic Medieval and Renaissance literature. Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part One
depicts the French heroine Joan of Arc as a witch, a devil-woman in league with Hecate and a "foul accursèd minister of hell" (I Henry III, V.vi.93); but Queen Elizabeth ("Gloriana," "the Virgin Queen," "Good Queen Bess") is portrayed variously in literature as a female ideal. It is for this reason that Shakespeare's plays frequently demonstrate that men have difficulty seeing women as something between these two extremes: if they are not perfect they must be whores and/or witches. This goes some way to explaining the abrupt swing between love and hate in such characters as Claudio (Much Ado About Nothing), Othello (Othello), and Leontes (The Winter's Tale). The accepted hierarchy of the sexes was that women were the lesser sex because of their unpredictability.

The female in Elizabethan society was not only subordinate to the male because of her unpredictability but also because of her nature as the "gentler sex." A woman was considered to be fit for homemaking and child-bearing; she was considered to have no interest in, or ability to, understand politics and her virtue was at all times protected, firstly by her father, brother, or guardian and subsequently by her husband. For a woman to show an interest in current affairs, to express opinions or even to write literature other than a personal diary was to exhibit unladylike and indecorous behaviour. The major female figurehead to escape the shackles of contemporary Elizabethan womanhood was Elizabeth I, who became a powerful image of female authority despite her unmarried state and who commanded respect for her hard-headed intellect in all manner of political, religious, social, and artistic affairs. The presence of such a figurehead on the throne of England created an interesting situation for the literary and dramatic worlds in terms of the way they could now portray women in general. For the dramatic world, the move away from allegorical representations of character to more three-dimensional characters also allowed for more diversity in the ways women were portrayed, and the use of boys in the women's roles seems to have been part of this move. It is hard to imagine that a male representation of a woman, particularly given the social and religious history, could be anything other than stereotypical, however, in order to refute this, it is necessary to return to Shakespeare's text.

The inherent humour of boys playing girls is exploited in many ways throughout the play. In Act III, scene i, Olivia displays the confusion created for both characters and audience as she takes on the traditionally male role of wooer in an attempt to win the disguised Viola, whom she knows as Cesario. Viola, too, is in an unusual position, being firstly dressed as a boy and secondly sent to woo Olivia on behalf of Orsino. The sexual ambiguity of both Viola and Olivia in this scene highlights the way in which both women are supposed to be behaving and are not. Neither young woman is displaying behaviour appropriate to females of the era: Viola because she is dressed as a man and not chaperoned, and Olivia through her overt interest in a young "man" with whom she has no acquaintance. Judged by the morals of the time, both women, had they been real people, would be labelled whores. However the play neither passes judgement nor censure on them. Arguably, this is because the "women" that Shakespeare's audience were seeing on the stage were well known to actually be male. If a man plays the part of a woman then the female character and behaviour become hypothetical rather than actual. Through Viola Shakespeare seems to be celebrating the female potential for honour, loyalty and truth as opposed to censuring the behaviour of a whore.

The approbation given to boy actors such as the celebrated Nathan Field, suggests that their portrayals of women were at least realistic enough to be believable in comic situations and to arouse appropriate levels of pity and fear in tragedies. In 1582, Stephen Gosson complained in his Epistle to Sir Francis Walsingham about the practice of boys playing women, and in doing so, highlights an interesting point about the success of the boys in these roles:

The Law of God very straightly forbids men to put on women's garments… In Stage Playes for a boy to put one the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman is by outwarde signes to shew them selues otherwise then they are, and so with in the compasse of a lye…

His comment, designed as it was to challenge the existence of the boy players on a theological level serves to defend them on a dramatic level. Gosson's observations suggest that the boys are not simply putting on the
clothing of a woman they are actually mimicking female gestures and passions; so much so that they are "within the compass of a lie." This type of characterization is a huge development from the two-dimensional figures of the morality plays and early imitative comedy that used classical "stock" characters and plots. The notion that the boys were starting to imitate female voices, movements and habits suggests a much greater attention to the detail of characterization. Therefore, despite the "fact" of the male actor behind the female character, what the audience sees is a "woman" exemplifying behaviour outside of the normal female spectrum without becoming the two-dimensional "virgin Mary" ideal or the "devil-woman." In the case of both Viola and Olivia, Shakespeare can be said to have moved them beyond the extremes of Elizabethan womanhood to a point that is both acceptable and desirable to Elizabethan men; in this case Orsino and Sebastian.

Whilst it is these situations of sexual ambiguity that provide much of the comedy and also much of the lyrical poetry in the play, these two female characters also represent contradictory female role models for Elizabethan women. As already remarked, it can hardly be thought that Viola's situation in Twelfth Night can be considered a typical one for an Elizabethan woman. Her trials and tribulations in Illyria are very much the stuff of fairytale: an accident, separation from her brother, near disaster followed by despair, frustrated love, and finally love triumphant are all part of the romantic comedy formula that was starting to emerge in dramatic literature at the beginning of the seventeenth century. What is of particular note about romantic comedies is the fact that Shakespeare's women start to be portrayed in subtly different ways. Unlike characters such as Kate in The Taming of the Shrew or Adriana in The Comedy of Errors, the heroines of romantic comedy - for example Viola, Rosalind, and Portia - despite acknowledging their state as "helpless" females, prove themselves assertive, capable and intelligent. They are often responsible for creating comic misunderstandings but also challenge the stability of appearances, gender roles, and the "off-limits" territory of same-sex-desire. This also applies to the secondary female characters who start to appear as confidante and support to the heroine (Celia and Nerissa are good examples), or, as in Olivia's case, as a foil or counterbalance to the heroine. Both scenarios allow for enriched comic interaction and female dominated scenes and situations such as the battle of wits between Olivia and Viola.

Viola shares the same characteristics that Shakespeare imparted onto many of his later heroines; characteristics that make them strong, and fiercely individual. Though Elizabethan society demands certain behaviour from women, Viola, through necessity, chooses to undertake a different path to deny that behaviour. In doing so, she promotes self over public image and proves that women can be both individual and intellectual without compromising what Elizabethan men saw as the "ideal" in womanhood. Presenting Viola as "an eunuch" is a way of legitimizing her choice and free will, and at the same time liberating female characters from two-dimensional stereotypes. Twelfth Night stands out particularly well as a play in which Shakespeare, though conforming to contemporary attitudes of women, circumvented them. He did this by utilizing theatrical conventions to his advantage in order to experiment with the creation of resolute female characters with a strong sense of self and an individual identity.

FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid. p. 251.

3. Ibid. p. 217.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The only reference to *Twelfth Night* during Shakespeare’s own lifetime is to a performance on February 2, 1602. A law student named John Manningham wrote in his diary about a feast he attended at the Middle Temple in London where he was a law student and where “we had a play called *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will.*” This was likely to have been an early performance since it is generally agreed that the play was probably written in 1601. In 1954 Sir Leslie Hotson's book, *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, sought to identify the exact date of the first performance of *Twelfth Night*. He used the evidence of old records to suggest that Queen Elizabeth asked for a new play for the last night of the Christmas 1600-01 season, the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6, and that Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* accordingly.

Among other evidence for this conclusion cited by Hotson is the information that during this period Queen Elizabeth was entertaining at court one Don Virginio Orsino, the Duke of Bracciano, who supposedly gave his name to the chief male character in the play. Hotson’s conclusion is that this play was written specifically for this occasion – hence the title. Whether or not this was indeed the case, and the play did in fact gain its primary title from the date of its first performance, has continued to be a source of disagreement for critics, directors, and actors, some of whom, like Samuel Pepys, agree that the play is “not at all related to the name of that day.” The title is therefore not necessarily helpful in ascribing time, or even place to *Twelfth Night*. It has been variously presented onstage at any time of the year from the deepest and bleakest English midwinter to the height of "midsummer madness" on a Greek island. I would like to address two issues: firstly, what kind of relationship the play has with its title, and secondly, where, or rather what, Illyria is.

The festival of Twelfth Night is the Roman Saturnalia, the Feast of Fools. There can be little doubt that the licence that marked this occasion had its origin in very ancient pagan customs. As Christianity spread across Europe, the church subsumed the old pagan festivals and replaced them with celebrations of religious significance. However the old traditions took centuries to die out, and the feast of the Epiphany on January 6 retained a Saturnalian flavour for many centuries. Even superficially, it is quite clear that *Twelfth Night* echoes this religious and cultural "compromise" by highlighting notions of order and chaos: the order of accepted religious and social morals, and the chaos of pagan Saturnalian licence. It is certainly possible from Leslie Hotson’s extensive research that the play was indeed performed on this date, but I suggest that the title has more to do with the atmosphere surrounding the play than the actual date of the original performance. Unlike Samuel Pepys, I cannot contend that the play has nothing to do with the feast – indeed I will argue that the festival of Twelfth Night and the traditions surrounding it are central to both the sustaining mood of the play.
The world of *Twelfth Night* is often seen to be a utopia of "Olde Englande," where the old traditions are given free reign and where that elusive "happy ever after" quality can be achieved. Yet there are disquieting elements in Illyria that in many ways reflect the situation in early seventeenth century England. Despite the exotic and distant sound of its name, Illyria is in fact a peculiarly English setting and the play is sprinkled liberally with references to the social life and customs of Jacobean England: Antonio and Sebastian lodge at the Elephant (probably an inn south of the Thames in London); Fabian is in trouble with Olivia for a "bear-baiting," Sir Andrew is a "great eater of beef" (I.iii.81); Sir Toby talks heartily of beagles, staniels and bumbailies; and we hear variously of spinsters, tinkers, tosspots, peascods, bawcocks and woodcocks. The disquieting element comes with the revelation that despite Sir Toby’s freedom to drink and make merry, despite Malvolio’s strict adherence to puritanical doctrine and despite Orsino’s romantic inclinations not one of them is truly happy; in fact nobody in Illyria is happy. Society cannot function normally because the extremes of social and religious life depicted by Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio cannot co-exist.

The cause of the underlying despondency is the way in which Illyrian society works in reverse to social norms. This reversal is linked closely with the festivities of Twelfth Night. The central idea of Twelfth Night was derived from the old notion behind Saturnalia: a brief social revolution or period of "misrule" in which power, dignity, or impunity is reversed upon those ordinarily in a subordinate position so that masters become servants and servants become masters. A mock figure known as the "Carnival King" or "Boy-Bishop" was elected to head the festivities; a figure echoed in *Twelfth Night* both by Sir Toby Belch, who becomes a kind of "carnival king" upholding the feasting, revelry and license of the festival period, and by Feste who impersonates a clergyman in his attempts to "re-educate" Malvolio into his "right" mind. When challenged about his drinking by Maria; “Ay but you must confine yourself within the limits of order,” Sir Toby retorts, “Confine! I'll confine myself no finer than I am.” In the true style of Saturnalia, Sir Toby overturns all norms. He almost literally turns night into day through his apparently continuous drinking: “Cousin, cousin, how have you come so early by this lethargy” (I.v.102), and is cheerfully unrepentant of his behaviour: “I'll go burn some sack; 'tis too late to go to bed now” (II.iii.159-60). He presides over the mock duel between Viola and Sir Andrew, and he finally rejects the social norms of his class to marry a waiting maid.

However in Shakespeare’s day, the ruling Church of England was not only attempting to retain control over the excesses of festivals such as Twelfth Night, but also endeavbouring to temper a compromise between the rival factions of Rome and Geneva; in other words, to mitigate the abstemiousness of the Puritans. The "Roman" faction favoured observance of the old saints’ days (also called "holy days" or "holidays"), which, as we have seen, retained elements of the old pagan rituals, whilst the Puritans frowned on festivities of all kinds. Sir Toby’s response to Malvolio’s puritanical admonishments in the "midnight revels" scene: “Dost thou think that, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?” (II.iii.114-15), is essentially a rejoinder to the sobriety of the Puritans. If Toby’s drunkenness and unconventional behaviour are purely Saturnalian, Shakespeare also shows the diametrically opposite excesses at Olivia’s house: her mourning for her dead brother verges on self-confinement in a nunnery and her steward’s objections to all merry-making voice the confines of Puritanism.

Both the main plot and the sub-plot of *Twelfth Night* strongly echo the idea of Saturnalian "misrule," as Warren and Wells identify in the Oxford edition of the play:

…in the main plot, the Duke Orsino is educated out of his aberrant state of love-melancholy by his servant, who then becomes her "master’s mistress;" in the sub-plot, Olivia’s steward aspires to become his mistress’s master. 3

Social boundaries are crossed and re-crossed as the characters undergo transformations in class distinctions, appearance and gender. These transgressions of the norm cause varying degrees of chaos that can only be
eventually restored to order through the appearance of both twins onstage together, providing a visual sense of order that resolves the chaos created by their separation. Orsino, Olivia, Sir Toby, Malvolio, and implicitly, Maria’s love interests lead them across the divisions of the social classes defined in the play, just in the way that social codes were reversed during the period of Twelfth Night. The crossing of gender norms and gender boundaries is constantly examined through the actions of the main characters. Viola and Sebastian, fraternal twins, are mistaken for each other because they wear the same clothing. In the true spirit of carnival, the audience becomes complicit in the element of misrule as they suspend their disbelief to "see" these fraternal twins as identical beings. Similarly, we are asked to believe in, and recognize love at first sight. Viola's transvestism is also emblematic of the antic nature of festival. Cross-dressing was a feature of Twelfth Night revels, and gives Viola not only the appearance of a male, but the privileges and power of masculinity. In this way, by reversing her own notions of social and romantic normality, Viola becomes the servant in charge of her master, the woman in charge of a man, and leads Illyrian society towards a normal hierarchy.

At the beginning of the play, Orsino declares his passionate love for Olivia, who is probably his social equal and therefore an appropriate marriage partner, although Sir Toby interestingly tells Sir Andrew that Olivia will “not match above her degree” (I.iii.102-3). His affection for her is soon perceived by the audience as merely self-indulgent and during the course of the play, we are led to assume, becomes focused instead on his page, the disguised Viola. The comic confusion of this situation is given greater effect through the reversal in the master-servant relationship as Viola-Cesario. By the end of the play Orsino accepts as his “fancy's queen” this young woman who only five minutes before functioned as his male page, underscoring the opal-like quality of his affections. Olivia, who has spurned the sight of men rejects the love of her social equal Orsino and instead embraces a complete stranger, the Duke's page, as a worthy partner. It is interesting that in doing so, she also rejects the conventional forms of wooing as she takes the initiative both in appearance and in fact; much as Viola does on Orsino’s behalf. She eventually marries Sebastian whom we gather is not of her class, but his blood is “right noble” (V.i.258), making the marriage socially acceptable. Sir Toby too, rejects social expectation and eventually marries his niece’s waiting-woman, Maria, rather than a woman of his own class. Maria provides an interesting parallel with Malvolio in that she, like Malvolio, seeks a liaison outside her social class. The difference is that unlike Malvolio, she is able to see the necessity of both excess and restraint. She is therefore rewarded for her clever schemes by being allowed to rise through the social hierarchy as she becomes the wife of a knight.

Of all the characters however, it is Malvolio who gains nothing from the play’s resolutions. Malvolio’s very name, Italian for "ill-will" sets him up in opposition to the other characters. His social status is quite clearly defined – he is the steward of Olivia’s household, a figure who, in the Elizabethan period was a highly trained and often well-educated person with responsibility for the running of a large house and estate. Malvolio, however, has developed a greater sense of his own importance. He is, as Maria points out, “a kind of puritan” (II.iii.130), and the humour of the "box-tree" scene and his appearance in yellow stockings “derives from the incongruity between his puritanical rectitude and the context in which he finds himself...”. The Puritan faction was a crucial part of Shakespearean society, providing a threat to both the social and religious traditions of generations. Forty years after Twelfth Night was written, the Civil War saw them running the country; a fact that critics often claim the play very accurately foreshows in Malvolio’s somewhat disconcerting exit line, “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you” (V.i.368). It is certainly tempting to read the play as a call for moderation in the changing society of the early seventeenth century.

Whilst Maria’s description suggests that Malvolio only adopts a puritanical demeanour when it suits him, it does not adequately explain that it is his unbending attitude towards his fellow human beings that means that eventually, he cannot be redeemed from himself. Being the puritan in the general Illyrian atmosphere of license and revelry allows him to create a sense of dignity and authority. What he forgets, and what Sir Toby reminds him of so abruptly in the "midnight revels" scene, that he is, in truth, no more than a steward. Malvolio’s crime, and the one for which he undergoes punishment, not only in the dark house but also by leaving the impending wedding festivities without allowing himself to be reconciled to the other inhabitants,
is that he refuses to acknowledge a balance between the extremes of his existence and that of Sir Toby.

Taking Malvolio and Sir Toby as the opposite ends of the Illyrian spectrum gives us a personified image of the Saturnalian spirits of chaos and order. Sir Toby represents not only the advocate of perpetual festivity, but through it, the chaotic aspects of Illyria. For Illyria, whilst a place of magic and enchantment, is also a place of lurking dangers inspired by carnival revelry and reversals of normal behaviour. There is a wild and uncontrolled element that lurks beneath the apparent festivity and jollity of the surroundings. Illyria is, in the language of the play, a world "gone mad." No-one, not even the sanctimonious Malvolio is exempt from the influences of Illyrian magic and its carnivalesque reversals of normality and acceptability. It is a world pervaded by the non-conformist spirit of carnival that allows aristocrats to fall in love with servants, servants with their masters, and where stewards are able to entertain absurd delusions of grandeur. Disguise, mistaken identity, and gender reversals combine to provide a deliberate and provoking reversal of sixteenth century English social norms. Notions of madness and sanity are frequently invoked to provide a counterpoint to the normality of life outside the play, a fact we are reminded of by Feste, when he sings of the "wind and the rain" in his final song. It is not in fact a "real" place at all. Geographically, Shakespeare used the name for an area on the Adriatic coast, but in terms of the play, it exists only as a hypothetical parallel universe inhabited by drunkards and zealots.

Into this peculiar melting pot of puritan extremism and festive license arrives Viola, a heroine who brings with her the power for a restorative balance to the wild swings of mood, temperament, and behaviour inherent in Illyrian society. If Sir Toby represents the archaic "carnival king," and Malvolio the unbending proponent of puritanical abstinance, then Viola can be seen to approximate the reverse: the voice of reason and renewal. Sir Toby upholds chaos, Malvolio maintains rigid adherence to unrealistic self-denial, and Viola is eventually the mechanism for normality and order. Viola’s arrival suggests an influence from the external world – our world, the world of the audience – where festivity is confined within proper boundaries, and an apposite balance of gravity is achieved: nothing occurs in excess.

What we see therefore is that Twelfth Night refers not to the time of year at which the events in the play take place, nor perhaps even the time at which it was first performed. Twelfth Night is not about the end of the Christmas festivity period when the decorations come down and "normal" life is resumed, it is instead a picture of the chaos and order created by extremism at both ends of the spectrum. By association, the place in which the play is set is not geographically representative of any actual place, but of a hypothetical state in which the norms and order of everyday life are absent, and the chaos of excess runs unchecked. The opposing elements of liberalism and Puritanism espoused by the chief characters of the play, and the way in which the multi-plots of Twelfth Night rely heavily on the elements inherent in the historical festivities of Twelfth Night show that the title has much more to do with the pervading "anything goes" spirit of festival; the "What You Will" of the subtitle.

Footnotes

1. Billington, p. x.
2. Billington, p. xi.
3. Warren and Wells, p. 5.
4. Warren and Wells, p. 43.

Bibliography

Simultaneity and coincidence are the essential features which connect Viola and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*. Twins, after all, are born at the same time and coincide in one womb. Indeed, Sebastian identifies himself as Viola's twin, rather than merely her brother: "He [Sebastian of Messaline] left behind him myself and a sister, both born in an hour: if the heavens had been pleased, would we had so ended!" Though Viola never reveals that her brother is her twin until she is mistaken for him, Sebastian begins his existence in the play as a twin and, just as importantly, as a displaced twin. His lament for lost simultaneity is followed in the next scene by Viola's response to her own emotional quandary: "O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie" (2.2.39-40). For both twins, time is the deciding factor: Sebastian regrets the failure of simultaneity in his experience while Viola commits herself to time, both when she adopts her male disguise and when she discovers the situation which that disguise has provoked. By rescuing Sebastian, Antonio has, from Sebastian's perspective, disrupted the simultaneity of the twins' experience, which arose from their birth at the same time and was reflected in their crucial similarity of feature. What was once a twinned existence in brother and sister becomes a string of coincidences in Illyria. Whereas before they experienced life at the same time (and would have died at the same time), when the play begins their lives are only coincidentally the same. Both are rescued and befriended by a ship's captain; both set down in Illyria; both decide to serve Duke Orsino; and both are caught in the interplay between Olivia's household and the Duke's. The events which occur to them are similar but no longer identical.

In consequence, a minor but fascinating textual problem develops in *Twelfth Night*. As Dennis Huston succinctly puts it, "Sebastian and Viola collide spatially when they are temporally almost three months apart." The doubled time experienced by the twins arises from two unnecessarily specific temporal references, one which precedes the sequence of scenes which causes the problem and one which follows those scenes. Before Viola leaves the Duke to woo Olivia on his behalf, Valentine, noting how fond the Duke has become of his new page, draws her attention to the fact that "he [the Duke] hath known you but three days" (1.4.2-3). In the middle of the conversation between Viola and Olivia which immediately follows, after she parts company with Olivia in act 1, scene 5 and before she receives from Malvolio the ring Olivia has sent after her in act 2, scene 2, Sebastian lands in Illyria with Antonio. His first appearance in act 2, scene 1 would cause no controversy except that in act 5 Antonio insists that Sebastian has just arrived that day and has been with Antonio "for three months before" (5.1.92). During the three days in which Orsino has come to trust Cesario, Sebastian has passed three months with Antonio. Sebastian's lament for lost simultaneity is made literal in the context of the major differences between the twins' experiences: Viola becomes enamored of
Orsino in three days, and Sebastian becomes the beloved of Antonio in three months.

This temporal disjunction provokes interesting responses from both critics and producers of the play. The standard critical explanation is that the incongruity is not noticeable to a spectator watching the action. As John Dover Wilson puts it, "It is only evident to the careful reader, the spectator would notice nothing wrong."4 When *Twelfth Night* becomes a text to be read rather than a performance which has a promptbook, the discrepancy becomes noticeable; the reader facing the text recognizes the references to time. Perhaps because *Twelfth Night* is so thoroughly a text as well as a play by the early 1700s, a number of productions, as presented in both promptbooks and performance editions, appear to resolve the problem anyway. They either omit all or part of Viola's conversation with Valentine in act 1, scene 4 or, more drastically, move the first scene between Sebastian and Antonio so that it does not intrude between Olivia sending the ring and Viola receiving it. Both resolutions of the double date within *Twelfth Night* are quite revealing, but the ease with which Valentine's reference to three days can be dropped shows how arbitrary the reference is from the start.

*Twelfth Night* shows an attention to time which rivals that in *As You Like It*, ranging from the sea captain's assertion that he was "bred and born / Not three hours' travel from this very place" (1.2.22-23) to the priest who has married Olivia and Sebastian "since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave / I have travell'd but two hours" (5.1.160-61). Most often, however, periods of time define the relationships in this play, as if emotional distance or proximity were a temporal consideration. Orsino responds to Olivia's plan to mourn for seven years by imagining how great her love for him will be if she will "pay this debt of love but to a brother" (1.1.34). When Valentine marvels at the threeday bond between Orsino and Cesario, he seems to suggest an instant attraction. Even Malvolio articulates his imagined relationship with Olivia in a specific time frame and plans his life, "Having been three months married to her" (2.5.44). These measures of affection have all the consistency of Cecily and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Earnest* when each stakes her claim as Ernest's fiancée by asserting, respectively, the most recent proposal or the first.5 In the same way, strength of affection in *Twelfth Night* can be measured in one scene by seven year's mourning and in another by three day's acquaintance.

Yet the force of time as a measure of emotional ties most vividly appears in Sebastian's assertions of his feeling for his sister and in Antonio's response to the apparent betrayal of Sebastian. Sebastian's claim of being born within an hour of Viola first introduces simultaneity as a principle of closeness. Their separation in the course of the play, first introduced by Viola and then intensified in Sebastian's claim of twinning, signals a failure of congruent experience. This loss of simultaneity is set against the way relationships in Illyria are figured in terms of varying, and even sometimes contradictory, time frames.

Antonio brings together these two models in response to the twins he perceives as one. He represents "Sebastian's" inexplicable coldness to him by describing how Sebastian "grew a twenty years' removed thing / While one would wink; denied me mine own purse, / Which I had recommended to his use / Not half an hour before" (5.1.87-90). He offers this description in almost the same breath in which he affirms that he and Sebastian have spent the last three months married to her" (2.5.44). These measures of affection have all the consistency of Cecily and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Earnest* when each stakes her claim as Ernest's fiancée by asserting, respectively, the most recent proposal or the first.5 In the same way, strength of affection in *Twelfth Night* can be measured in one scene by seven year's mourning and in another by three day's acquaintance.

When Antonio first invokes the model of simultaneity, his claim is dismissed as lunacy. Even so, Orsino's response to him extends the three days of Valentine's remark to three months: "fellow, thy words are madness. / Three months this youth hath tended upon me" (5.1.96-97). Thus begins the process in the final scene.

66
whereby the coincidences in *Twelfth Night* begin to produce simultaneity. The odd congruence of Orsino's and Antonio's three-month connection with Cesario, the similar claims on her loyalty from Olivia and Orsino, and the identical grievances of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are concurrent demands on Viola which build to the ultimate coincidence: "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons!" (5.1.214). This final coincidence, which cannot be explained away as Antonio's madness or Viola's duplicity, leads the twins to their dance of mutual recognition. They survey what proofs, what coincidences, link them. Each had a father named Sebastian; the father of each had a mole upon his brow. The final and deciding coincidence is, suitably, temporal—both recall the father who "died that day when Viola from her birth / Had number'd thirteen years" (5.1.242-43).

The most unusual aspect of this proof is frequently overshadowed by Sebastian's inexplicable failure to identify himself as Viola's twin: he does not acknowledge that his father also died on his thirteenth birthday but says, "He finished indeed his mortal act / That day that made my sister thirteen years" (5.1.245-46). His answer apparently violates the parallelism of their mutual catechism ("My father had a mole upon his brow." / "And so had mine" [5.1.240-41]), but actually follows Viola's impulse to identify herself. After all, Sebastian has external verification when he recognizes Antonio and Antonio names him; Viola's identity is the issue, as Sebastian's questions indicate: "what kin are you to me? / What countryman? What name? What parentage?" (5.1.228-29). Her self-identification depends on the internal evidence of memory. The proof she offers is remarkable indeed—the date of her thirteenth birthday is the date of her father's death. Olivia reinforces this return to simultaneity and restored relationships when she offers to be Orsino's sister and asserts that "one day shall crown th'alliance on't" (5.1.317); the twins will marry simultaneously, and Orsino and Olivia will become brother and sister in amity at the same time. The "whirligig of time" (5.1.375) may bring its revenges to Malvolio, but "golden time convents" (5.1.381) to sort out most of the other relationships in Illyria—once the twins are restored to the same time.

Similar concerns for simultaneity and identity, time and connection, are the very principles at work in the determinations of two very different dates for the play in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the late 1700s when Edmond Malone first argued that a chronology of Shakespeare's plays would be useful, texts like *Twelfth Night* which appear only in the Folio posed special problems. In the absence of quartos or other early references, scholars relied on internal evidence to ascertain a play's date. Horace Howard Furness points out in the Variorum edition that a scholar named Thomas Tyrwhitt discovered an apparent topical reference to undertakers; as a result, the play was dated at 1614 when there was considerable parliamentary furor about undertaking, "although this date involved the undesirable conclusion that *Twelfth Night* was the last play that Shakespeare had written."6 Published references to the 1614 origin of *Twelfth Night* actually begin with Malone's "An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in Which the Plays Attributed to Shakespeare Were Written," which is included as part of the introductory material in the George Steevens edition of Shakespeare's works in 1778.7 In discussing the chronology he offers, Malone affirms the 1614 date by challenging readers to discover "among the plays produced before 1600, compositions of equal merit with *Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, The Tempest,* and *Twelfth Night* which we have reason to believe were all written in the latter period" (p. 271). For the next fifty years, most experts considered *Twelfth Night* to be one of the later, if not the last, of Shakespeare's works.

References to the 1614 date of *Twelfth Night's* composition occur in a variety of places besides Malone's scholarly essay. Perhaps the most pervasive case is *The Life of WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE: Collected and Arranged from Numerous Rare and Authentic Documents. Containing EVERY FACT OF IMPORTANCE from the Birth of This Eminent Poet to the Close of His Brilliant Career*, written by Joseph Graves in the 1820s. Though Graves acknowledges that all efforts to establish which of Shakespeare's plays was written first have failed, he feels confident enough about some of the sequence to assert that: "we may not hesitate . . . to station 'Pericles, the three parts of Henry VI., Love's Labour lost; The Comedy of Errors; The Taming of the Shrew; King John; and Richard II.;' among his earliest productions, we may with equal confidence, arrange 'Macbeth; Lear; Othello; Twelfth Night; and the Tempest;' with his latest, assigning them to that
season of life, when his mind exulted in the conscious plenitude of power.” The cover of this Life of Shakespeare announces that it is "adapted and printed, for the purpose of binding up with any edition of Shakespeare's Plays." Some editions, particularly Cumberland's British Theatre (1830), did indeed bind up Graves's version of Shakespeare's life with the plays. Moreover, others who were producing biographies of Shakespeare echoed Graves, like Charles Symmons, who in 1837 also assumed that Shakespeare wrote Twelfth Night "when his mind exulted in the conscious plenitude of power."  

Even The Dramatic Souvenir: Being Literary and Graphical Illustrations of SHAKESPEARE and Other Celebrated English Dramatists, published in 1833, devotes fully half of its "literary illustration" of the play to discussing its composition: "Malone considered Twelfth-Night was written at leisure, in 1614, when the author had retired from the Theatre, the very last of his plays, and about three years before his death." These ideas about the date of the play were also accepted by Shakespeare enthusiasts, as John William Cole's intensely annotated edition of Shakespeariana indicates. His copious notes on the available editions and documents associated with Shakespeare testify to his interest in the plays and their author, while he lists in his own hand Twelfth Night's date of composition as 1614.  

However, in 1831 John P. Collier completely revised the date of Twelfth Night's composition by publishing his discovery of John Manningham's 1601-2 diary entry, which alludes explicitly to a production of the comedy: "Feb 2, 1601 [-2] At our feast we had a play called Twelve Night or what you will, much like the comedy of errors, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like & neere to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practise in it to make the steward believe his lady widdowe was in love with him by counterfayting a letter." This reference seems indeed, as Collier says, "a striking, and at the same time a rarely occurring, and convincing proof (p. 327). This determination also completely revises the date promoted by Malone and others.  

This nominally "absolute" determination of the comedy's date dislocates the text; as a result, later editions had to explain the change. Burton's Theatre Edition, published in 1852, quotes the Oxberry introduction but carefully rectifies the date by offering Collier's discovery, evidently common knowledge by that time (p. V). Other editors, like those of Chambers's Household Shakespeare (1840), felt obligated to justify the earlier error: "The dramatic art evinced in Twelfth Night, and its general excellence, led to a belief that it was one of the poet's latest productions" (p. I). Far from rendering the comedy more firmly established, the diary entry actually exposes the ways in which even identical texts can vary because of "extratextual" considerations such as their date of composition.  

The Tyrwhitt Twelfth Night (1614) differs from the post-Manningham Twelfth Night (1602) established by Collier because Tyrwhitt depended on the way the playwright's imagination supposedly transformed and reflected the events of his day within the play. Collier, on the other hand, derived his date for the play from the physical evidence of the play's production. Both versions of Twelfth Night's date depend on the crucial mutuality which the play itself considers—coincidence and simultaneity. For Tyrwhitt, and Malone as well, the mention of undertakers in act 3, scene 4 and the furor over "undertaking" in Parliament in 1614 were too great a coincidence for the reference not to be deliberate: "Mr. Tyrwhitt, with great probability, conjectures, that Twelfth Night was written in 1614: grounding his opinion on an allusion, which it seems to contain, to those parliamentary undertakers, of whom frequent mention is made in the Journals of the House of Commons for that year" (Malone, p. 344). Toby's jesting about undertaking reflected Shakespeare's creative rendering of a topical issue particularly hot in 1614—the two must have occurred simultaneously.  

When Collier discovered the Manningham diary, Toby's comment was revealed as an irrelevant coincidence rather than one which denotes simultaneity. The many features which define the comedy Manningham saw—the title Twelve Night, Or what you will, the plot's similarity to The Comedy of Errors, the trick on a steward involving a letter—coincide in the diary entry dated 1601. Although there is a play by John Marston called What You Will, all the circumstances in Manningham's diary combined constitute an even greater
coincidence than a single reference to undertakers. Thus the occurrence of Manningham writing in his diary and Shakespeare's company producing *Twelfth Night* must be mutually determinant—the date attached to one can also be attached to the other.

Like the twins, two texts of *Twelfth Night*, one dated 1614 and another dated 1601, look the same but participate in different relationships. These doubled texts enact the situation imagined in Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*". The narrator claims that Menard's "work, possibly the most significant of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of the twenty-second chapter."¹⁴ Menard does not copy the novel; he does not produce a contemporary version or a transcription; he does not write it by reenacting Cervantes's life. He takes up a different challenge—to write *Don Quixote* as Pierre Menard. As a result, the narrator tells us, "The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer" (p. 52). In this story, Borges displays the inherent contradiction between, on the one hand, attempting to anchor the text historically in relation to its author and, on the other hand, claiming that a text transcends its time. By insisting that the second *Don Quixote* is "infinitely richer," Borges imagines that the temporal displacement enriches and changes the text, even though the later version is "verbally identical." The second *Twelfth Night*, dated at 1601, may not necessarily be "infinitely richer" but it has certainly occasioned many more readings of the play, including some analyses explicitly based on the 1601 date, like Leslie Hotson's *The First Night of Twelfth Night*.¹⁵

For the readers of the early nineteenth century, *Twelfth Night* is a comedy self-evidently from the close of Shakespeare's career. Yet, for the twentieth-century reader, with the benefit of 150 years of scholarship based on the 1601 date, *Twelfth Night* is obviously a middle comedy with connections to *Hamlet* and to the tragedies. Like the two versions of *Don Quixote* in Borges's story—one from the sixteenth century and one from the twentieth—the Folio text of *Twelfth Night* before 1831 and after are typographically identical, but utterly different.

Although *Twelfth Night* seems one of the least problematic works in the Shakespearean canon because we can now establish its date so confidently, the achievement of that fixed date actually reveals the text's multiplicity rather than its singularity. Moreover, the real purpose of dating *Twelfth Night* or any Shakespearean play is not so much absolute as relational. The shift of *Twelfth Night*'s date not only exposes the doubled nature of that play, but also calls into question the status of *The Tempest*. The speculation on *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's last play (and final statement) originated at the time when *Twelfth Night*'s date shifted. Malone corrected his own chronology in 1821 to give the date as 1607, and, as Gary Taylor notes, Thomas Campbell at around the same time first put forward the attractive theory about *The Tempest*'s valedictory quality.¹⁶

When Malone initially published his attempt to discover the order of Shakespeare's plays, he laid out the potential importance of such knowledge: "While it has been the endeavour of all his editors and commentators, to illustrate his obscurities, and to regulate and correct his text, no attempt has been made to trace the progress and order of his plays. Yet surely it is no incurious speculation, to mark the gradations by which he rose from mediocrity to the summit of excellence; from artless and uninteresting dialogues, to those unparalleled compositions, which have rendered him the delight and wonder of successive ages" (pp. 270-71). Malone implied that the idea of giving a chronology to Shakespeare's works had not occurred to anyone before him, even though Nicholas Rowe indicated his own curiosity concerning the dating of the plays as early as 1709 (Taylor, p. 157). Malone also linked chronology to the evolution of Shakespeare's art. Indeed the readers and critics of Malone's day were interested in his chronology and fashioned their own theories of Shakespeare's development. Joseph Graves gave a typical view: "It is probable that such as were founded on the works of preceding authors, were the first essays of his dramatic talent: and such as were more perfectly his own, and are of the first sparkle of excellence, were among his last" (pp. 9-10). Graves, like Malone and others, carried his point by inviting the reader to compare the earlier works with the superior later ones.
The significance of dates, then, is twofold. The comedy's date of composition determines its connections with the other plays, and those connections anchor the text to the author's evolving psyche. As Margreta de Grazia has argued, Malone's purpose in determining the sequence of plays was little more than a small part of his overarching aim to establish Shakespeare as an individual. She further suggests that this treatment of Shakespeare's artistic development becomes a model for the emerging bourgeois subject.\textsuperscript{17} That model hinged on the idea that his development registered ever-greater perfection.

Comments on \textit{Twelfth Night} found in performance editions before 1831 underscore this notion. George Daniel's 1830 introduction to the play is particularly fulsome: "It is, therefore, not without emotion that we approach this last work of Shakspeare's mighty genius. . . . That Shakspeare parted with the world on terms of friendship, this legacy of his love sufficiently demonstrates; though, in the Epilogue Song (the last lines that he ever wrote,) we think we can discover something that savours of transient bitterness" (Cumberland, p. 5). Daniel even goes so far as to praise John Fawcett's acting of Feste by commenting that "he sang the Epilogue Song with true comic spirit; and with a harmony and feeling as if conscious that the last words of Shakspeare were trembling on his lips" (Cumberland, p. 7). While asserting \textit{Twelfth Night}'s privileged position as the last play, these statements also raise several problems.

Most striking, perhaps, is the reference to the Epilogue Song, which we are asked to take as Shakespeare's last words. After all, Malone himself notes that the song appears "earlier" in Shakespeare's career, in a slightly different form as one of the Fool's songs in \textit{Lear}\textsuperscript{18} If Feste's cryptic song is Shakespeare's final statement, the various attempts to decipher or dismiss the song which begin as early as 1774 with Bell's edition take on new significance: "The epilogue song gives spirit to the conclusion, tho' there is very little meaning in it, except a trifling address to the audience in the last line" (Bell, vol. 5, p. 329).\textsuperscript{19} The song troubled Leigh Hunt as well, who praised Fawcett's presentation of the Clown's role but disliked the song: "Yet we do not like to think that this was the last song which Shakespeare wrote. It has too much of the scorn of the world and all he has seen in it."\textsuperscript{20}

There are also more subtle problems revealed in the assumptions expressed by Daniel. For example, it is now common knowledge (with all the uncertainty the phrase should imply) that Shakespeare left the theatre well before he left the world. Yet placing the date of \textit{Twelfth Night} at 1614 suggests that Shakespeare wrote the play after retiring from London. \textit{Twelfth Night} is thus not only the last of his plays but also a work written after he left the playhouse. Malone goes to some lengths to explore this most unusual aspect of Tyrwhitt's date. He develops an elaborate explanation of why Shakespeare would take up the pen again after he had abandoned the theatre: "When Shakspeare quitted London and his profession, for the tranquillity of a rural retirement, it is improbable that such an excursive genius should have been immediately reconciled to a state of mental inactivity, . . . To the necessity, therefore, of literary amusement to every cultivated mind, or to the dictates of friendship, or to both these incentives, we are perhaps indebted for the comedy of \textit{Twelfth Night}; which bears evident marks of having been composed at leisure, as most of the characters that it contains, are finished to a higher degree of dramatrick perfection, than is discoverable in our author's earlier comick performances" (Malone, p. 344). Malone perceived a greater perfection in Shakespeare's characterization in his "last" comedy, underscoring his notions of Shakespeare's developmental improvement. Daniel concurred and reinforced this sentiment in the opening of his introduction: "We have now come to the last production of the Divine Shakspeare. Having followed his genius through its bright path of glory, we arrive at the point where it sets, with a splendour worthy of its highest meridian" (Cumberland, p. 5).

These comments may seem like little more than amusing, if antiquated, examples of previous misconceptions about Shakespeare, which we can safely ignore. Nevertheless, the readers of Shakespeare in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries knew a different \textit{Twelfth Night} from the 1601 text we read now, whether they subscribed to the bardolatrous view of the comedy which Daniel offers or thought, as the Oxberry edition tells us, that "it is not a little singular that this play should be one of the last of Shakspeare's productions, a play that has all the joyousness and revelry of youth about it" (Oxberry, p. ii).
Even though explanations of Shakespeare's developing art have changed considerably, Malone was more prophetic than he knew. While perhaps no longer a subject as hotly debated as it was when Malone and George Chalmers argued about whether Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* "in 1614 or in 1613" (*Souvenir*, p. v), the dating of his plays still functions as the unacknowledged foundation for many critical arguments. Our readings depend upon the coincidences recorded in Manningham's diary as thoroughly as Malone and Tyrwhitt relied on a coincidental reference to undertakers. However, as the twins' experiences in the play and Malone's error point out, coincidences do not necessarily indicate simultaneity. Current criticism may take a different model of development, but it derives comparably from the interconnections between chronologically linked plays and their presumed reflections of an author's individual evolving psyche.

For example, many psychoanalytic approaches to *Twelfth Night* rely on its position in Shakespeare's development. Leonard Manheim argues that the play is a wish-fulfillment fantasy restoring the playwright's son Hamnet, twin to Judith, who died in 1596. In turn, Thomas MacCary discovers in the plays a model of male sexual development through homoerotic attraction which he sees most fully expressed in the mature comedies like *Twelfth Night*: "The late romances do not share that fervour and obsession so characteristic in the mature comedies like *Twelfth Night*." Joel Fineman, in his argument about the shifting uses of doubling at the crucial shift in Shakespeare's career from comedy to tragedy, implicitly depends on the contemporaneity of the four plays he considers, *As You Like It, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida*, and, of course, *Twelfth Night*. Likewise, C. L. Barber and Richard Wheeler explicitly rely on canon chronology for their study of Shakespeare's psychology, *The Whole Journey*. For these critics, involved in considering Shakespeare's development, the status of *Twelfth Night* as mature comedy is essential and unquestioned.

Even critics less overtly concerned with Shakespeare's overall psychological development also assume the fixed placement of *Twelfth Night* in the canon. Nowhere in his essay about the problem of identity in the play does Dennis Huston specify the play's date as a concern, yet he opens the essay by explicitly linking the comedy to *Hamlet* and brackets the comedy's treatment of sexuality as "an idea that Shakespeare used twice before as a starting point for comedy—in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*—and would use again with more serious overtones in *Measure for Measure*" (p. 283). Matthew Wikander, who juxtaposes psychological and anthropological readings of adolescent experience in *Twelfth Night* with the experiences of the boy-actress in Shakespeare's company, also calls upon *Hamlet* in support of the ambivalence toward the theatre which he reads in the boy-actress facing his uncertain future in the company.

In contrast to the central and sometimes invisible role of the 1601 date in these studies, the 1614 date figures in current criticism only as a curiosity. Both Margreta de Grazia and Gary Taylor mention it in passing, but both are more concerned with the developing uses of Shakespeare as an icon rather than with the development of a particular set of texts. Taylor, for example, dismisses Leigh Hunt's praise of *Twelfth Night* as Shakespeare's last play with the conclusion that, given modern scholarship, Hunt is wrong (p. 157). The 1614 date is simply incorrect and therefore irrelevant. Or is it? After all, Taylor catalogs successive generations of scholars and readers who all discover their own versions of Shakespearean authenticity, and de Grazia explores late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century scholarly recuperations in terms of the emergence of bourgeois subjectivity. Similarly, because revisions of the date relocate and duplicate a text like *Twelfth Night*, the text's relationships to the rest of the canon are more historical constructs than transparent reflections of Shakespeare's development.

The shift in *Twelfth Night*'s date implicitly challenges any absolute assumptions, including our own, about the comedy's position in the Shakespearean canon. The historical contingency of our ideas about Shakespeare's chronology, based on the evidence available now, suggests that the suppositions in our current criticism and the analyses themselves are only provisional. However, the resulting loss of transcendent truth does not negate the value of their readings and assumptions or of ours. Instead the significance of successive understandings of the Shakespearean text derives from their historical specificity, that is, from their placement within a particular cultural situation and historical moment. Consequently, the 1614 date of *Twelfth Night* is more than
a mistake or an oddity; it is one of those historical moments which reveals the multiplicity of Shakespearean plays in general and of \textit{Twelfth Night} in particular. Collier's discovery changed the \textit{Twelfth Night} texts as it changed the comedy's date of composition because the physical texts of the play, which we think of as permanent and limited, always exist only within a multiplicity of contexts, including their several selves.

For some scholars, this multiplicity may seem easily resolved. After all, doesn't the problem disappear if what is "really" changing is the interpretation and not the material text itself? This question raises the implicit issue of the material text and its boundaries. The narrative of \textit{Twelfth Night}'s changing date actually reveals three distinct texts, all of which are (at least potentially) typographically the same. The first is the \textit{Twelfth Night} for which the date of composition is irrelevant and unknowable, mere speculation according to Nicholas Rowe. When Malone introduces the importance of recovering the chronology of Shakespeare's plays, not only does he initiate the creation of the Shakespearean subject, as de Grazia argues, he also creates a second \textit{Twelfth Night}, composed around 1614. With the chronology, what was outside the text and unnoted becomes part of the text and inseparable from its interpretation. As the 1601 date gradually became well known, altering the comedy's position among Shakespeare's plays, the change yielded yet a third \textit{Twelfth Night}. The very typographical sameness of these \textit{Twelfth Night} texts points to the real issue: what is inside and what is outside the text? The uncertainty of the text's limits, which this chapter explores in terms of date, the rest of this book examines in terms of the many physical texts associated with Shakespeare's comedy.

Thus double dating offers my first negotiations between "inside" and "outside" the text. When Jacques Derrida argues that the text is "henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself," he suggests that texts endlessly overrun their apparent boundaries. Nonetheless, we assume an inside and an outside to texts like \textit{Twelfth Night}. On the one hand, the shifting grounds of \textit{Twelfth Night}'s date implies that dating is somehow outside the text, changeable, subject to constant revision, victim to chance, coincidence, and time. The double date is an aberration; our current date is correct. On the other hand, the changes that \textit{Twelfth Night} underwent between the early nineteenth century and now, merely because of the dating, suggest that the changeability of \textit{Twelfth Night}'s date is part of the multiple traces which break open the notion of the singular text.

In the shift of dates, the texts of \textit{Twelfth Night} experience a temporal dislocation similar to that the twins experience in Illyria; the 1614 \textit{Twelfth Night} exists in a different time with different connections than the 1601 \textit{Twelfth Night}, even though they both occur in one place—the Folio text. When the coincidences overwhelmingly support the 1602 date, \textit{Twelfth Night} apparently takes on a fixed, determinant date. Comparably, when coincidence supports Sebastian's version of time, identity is restored, as Viola redefines herself in terms of father/author and twin. The mysterious other time which Viola/Cesario occupied during the comedy vanishes, just as the 1614 date of the Tyrwhitt \textit{Twelfth Night} becomes irrelevant and has, in essence, vanished. Perhaps the spectators watching the play, like the critics now discussing the date, would not notice the double time of the twins' experience, yet it is that separation and reunion of the twins in time which underscores the metaphoric force of relative time in many relationships within the play.

As a result, the end of \textit{Twelfth Night} gives a truer picture than the current critical perception of a single \textit{Twelfth Night} fashioned around 1600: Viola and Sebastian are twins, the same in appearance but involved in different relationships. The Tyrwhitt \textit{Twelfth Night}, associated with the late plays and implicated in an early-nineteenth-century theory of Shakespeare's development, and the Manningham \textit{Twelfth Night}, associated with the end of Shakespeare's comic writing and implicated in his psychological development, are the same but different. The existence of the second does not negate or dissolve the experience of the first, any more than the dominance of Sebastian's time and the resulting coincidences negate Viola's earlier experiences in the play. \textit{Twelfth Night} leaves us with both twins, and I argue that this history of double dating leaves us with multiple texts. The odd congruence of the history of \textit{Twelfth Night}'s dating and the stories of the twins within the play is, of course, just coincidence.
For my reading, that coincidence demonstrates that the multiplicity of texts, generated materially through history as Jerome McGann suggests, constantly reworks the boundaries of "the text." The permeable, provisional edges, the Derridean "folds" where suddenly the outside edge touches the inside of the form, open a space which is somehow neither inside nor outside. Reading the "outside" history of Shakespearean texts, as this book does, does not and cannot avoid reading the "inside" of those texts as well. This continuing transgression of the textual edges, which are themselves constantly under construction and erasure, is an essential feature of my critical project. The apparently exterior history of performance editions—considered to be outside proper textual history, irrelevant to reading the play, tangential in critical scholarship—also offers an "interior" history of the comedy: a repetition of loss and return, impossible desire and shifting sexual identity, displacement and continuity, and, inevitably, simultaneity and coincidence.

Notes


2 Olivia's emotional turmoils are also marked by time as a clock inexplicably strikes in the middle of her confession of love for Cesario and she responds, "The clock upbraids me with the waste of time" (3.1.132).


7 Edmond Malone, "An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in Which the Plays Attributed to Shakespeare Were Written," in The Works of William Shakespeare, vol. 1, ed. George Steevens and Samuel Johnson (London: Bathurst, 1778), pp. 269-71. Malone did change his mind and in a later edition gave the date as 1607. I provide the full text of these titles, but regularize the capitalization in both chapters and the bibliography of performance editions.

8 Joseph Graves, The Life of William Shakespeare: Collected and Arranged from Numerous Rare and Authentic Documents. Containing Every Fact of Importance from the Birth of This Eminent Poet to the Close of His Brilliant Career. To Which Are Added His Last Will and Testament (London: Printed and Published by J. Duncombe, n.d.), p. 10.


11 John William Cole's annotated Shakespeariana is part of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Shakespeare Miscellany (verso to page 68).


28 Derrida associates this kind of coincidence with the study of borders in Blanchot's narrative where "the edge of the set [ensemble] is a fold [pli] in the set." The fold he discovers, the invaginated structure he
describes, where the "inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then
opens a pocket," offers the text as Kleinian bottle, where the outside somehow becomes an inside (Derrida,
"Living On," p. 96).

Source: "Double Dating," in The Trick of Singularity: Twelfth Night and the Performance Editions,

**Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night: Introduction**

**Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night**

Casey Charles, *University of Montana*

See also, *Twelfth Night* Criticism and volumes 34 and 85.

The emergence of queer studies in the academy has led to many influential rereadings of Renaissance works,
including those of Shakespeare. While *Twelfth Night* continues to be one of the major textual sites for the
discussion of homoerotic representation in Shakespeare, interpretive conclusions about the effect of same-sex
attraction in this comedy are divided, especially in light of the natural "bias" of the heterosexual marriages in
act 5. The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian has proven the most fertile ground for queer inquiry;
for example, Joseph Pequigney recently has set out, in New-Critical fashion, to prove the "sexual orientation"
of these two characters as unquestionably "homosexual" in a play whose "recurring theme" is "bisexuality." Although Pequigney's observations are refreshing as well as important, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex
Love" unproblematically applies contemporary constructions of sexual identity to an early modern culture in
which the categories of homo- and bisexuality were neither fixed nor associated with identity. In fact, as I will
argue, *Twelfth Night* is centrally concerned with demonstrating the uncategorical temper of sexual attraction.

The other main focus of queer study in this drama continues to be the relationship between the Countess
Olivia and the cross-dressing Viola/Cesario, though critics, tellingly, have discussed the lesbian erotics that
are integral to the first three acts of the play much less often. In her recent *Desire and Anxiety: The
Circulation of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, Valerie Traub has acknowledged the lesbian overtones of
the erotic scenes between Olivia and Viola as part of what she calls the play's "multiple erotic investments";
but her careful and ground-breaking study warns us that Viola's homoerotic investment is not celebrated in the
play and concludes that *Twelfth Night* is less "comfortably" open in its representation of the "fluid circulation"
of desire than *As You Like It.* In my view, the Olivia-Viola affair is more central to *Twelfth Night* than
previously has been acknowledged. This centrality—along with the homoerotics found in relations between
Antonio and Sebastian as well as between Orsino and his page—establish same-sex erotic attraction as a
"major theme" in the play, to use Pequigney's shopworn term. But this theme functions neither as an
uncomplicated promotion of a modern category of sexual orientation nor, from a more traditional perspective,
as an ultimately contained representation of the licensed misrule of saturnalia. The representation of
homoerotic attraction in *Twelfth Night* functions rather as a means of dramatizing the socially constructed
basis of a sexuality that is determined by gender identity.

Judith Butler's critique of the notion that there are fixed identities based on the existence of genital difference
provides a useful model for understanding how *Twelfth Night* uses the vagaries of erotic attraction to disrupt
paradigms of sexuality. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the cultural meanings that attach to a sexed
body—what we call gender—are theoretically applicable to either sex. Initially, Butler questions the idea that
there is an essential, prediscursive subjectivity that attaches to the biology of either male or female, arguing
that the "production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of
cultural constructions designated by *gender.*" In other words, what she calls the law—the cultural, social, and

75
political imperatives of social reality—actually produces and then conceals the "constructedness" that lies behind the notion of an immutable, prediscursive "subject before the law" (2). Her attack on the concept of biological inherence is followed by an equally strong indictment of the "metaphysics of gender substance"—the unproblematic claim that a subject can choose a gendered identity, that the self can "be a woman" or a man (21).

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler's subsequent work, she partially retreats from this position of radical constructivism, returning to the sexed body by shifting the terms of the debate from the "construction" of "gender" through an interpretation of "sex" to an inquiry into the way regulatory norms "materialize" the sexed body, both in the sense of making it relevant and fixing or "consolidating" it. The reiteration of norms simultaneously produces and destabilizes the category of sex, creating "terrains" and "sedimented effects" that influence the way we understand the sexed body. Even as the process of materialization creates boundaries, surfaces, and contours by which sex is established as heterosexually normative, these strategies of materialization simultaneously expose the exclusions and "gaps" that are the constitutive instabilities inherent in these norms. Bodies That Matter seeks to understand how what has been foreclosed or banished from the "proper" domain of "sex"—where that domain is secured through a heterosexualizing imperative—might at once be produced as a troubling return, not only as an *imaginary* contestation that effects a failure in the workings of the inevitable law, but as an enabling disruption, the occasion for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all.

In both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* the primary way that the categories of sex are both established and disrupted is through a process of what Butler calls "performativity," the means by which the norms of sex are naturalized and substantiated simply by their continual pronouncement as foundational and ideal—by the sheer weight of their repetition. Yet because this reiteration necessarily creates erasures that are the very cites of deconstructive possibilities, the interrogation of those exclusions is one strategy by which the symbolic hegemony of sexuality can be challenged. Although performativity is primarily a discursive practice derived from the notion of the performative in rhetoric, Butler acknowledges cross-dressing as a performative practice in which the "sign" of gender is parodically reiterated in a potentially subversive way. The performance of cross-dressing can be disruptive, Butler argues, to the extent it "reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed" (231) or "exposes the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals" (237).

Within the context of early modern theatrical culture, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* functions as a dramatic critique of the ideal norm of imperative heterosexuality in three interrelated ways. First, the effects of Viola's cross-dressing point to the socially constructed nature of gender in Shakespeare's play. Secondly, Shakespeare's drama interrogates the exclusionary nature of the constructed categories of sex and challenges the symbolic hegemony of heterosexual love by producing representations or "citations" of same-sex love between Viola and Olivia as well as Antonio and Sebastian. Lastly, I will argue that the final act, through a series of improbable turns of plot and phrase, exposes the failure of heterosexual "regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals."

**Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night: I. The Renaissance Context: "I, poor monster" (2.2.33)10**

The early modern English theatre, unlike its counterparts in other European countries, maintained the practice of using all-male acting companies to perform the parts of both men and women. Thus, an element of what
Butler calls the "denaturalization" of gender difference is built into the structure of Elizabethan stage convention, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, like many other plays of the period, dramatizes the consequences of this ambiguity by casting its heroine Viola, played by a boy, as a character who cross-dresses as the male page Cesario. In the doubly androgynous role of male actor playing a woman playing a man, Viola/Cesario must literally perform the role of the male; her success before the aristocratic Orsino and Olivia consequently points to the constructedness and performative character of gender itself. In other Renaissance critical venues, the concept of performance in social roles has been discussed convincingly by Stephen Greenblatt as "self-fashioning" and by others in relation to the role of the courtier in Castiglione's famous treatise. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is arguably about the fashioning of gender. This staging of gender imitation by Viola, the performance of her gender performance, uses her disguise and her identity with her brother Sebastian as vehicles to demonstrate that erotic attraction is not an inherently gendered or heterosexual phenomenon. The homoerotic and cross-gendered disruptions that ensue, finally, operate within a world that is properly named Ill-lyria in order to demonstrate how the phenomenon of love itself operates as a mechanism that destabilizes gender binarism and its concomitant hierarchies. Lovers like Olivia, Orsino, Malvolio, and Antonio construct fantasies that turn the objects of their affection into something more than they are, thereby disrupting the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality and classconsciousness through the performance of these imaginary fantasies.

Butler's postmodern promotion of gender trouble and its application to Shakespeare's dramatization of sexual identity finds historical support in Renaissance conceptions of masculinity and femininity that, by most accounts, were much less essentialized than today's fixed categories of woman and man. Arguably more patriarchal, more homophobic, and more misogynist than contemporary western culture, the polarized rhetoric of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe nevertheless masks a decided anxiety about what is feared to be the actual fluidity of gender. Studying the pseudomedical treatises of the period, commentators like Thomas Lacquer have argued convincingly that sixteenth-century anatomists viewed female genitalia as merely an inverted male penis and testicles. Renaissance scientist Johann Weyer, for example, states, "although women are feminine in actuality, I would call them masculine in potentiality," indicating the degree to which women were thought of as merely incomplete males, capable on certain traumatic physical occasions—a particularly tall hurdle or heated liaison—of springing forth a penis. What Weyer refuses to admit, in spite of evidence to the contrary from the physician Ausonius, is that men, given the proper circumstances, could as it were suck in their genitalia and become women. "[N]ature always adds, never subtracts," Weyer insists, "always thrusts forth, never holds back, always moves toward the more worthy, never toward the less" (346). Weyer's phobic response to the possibility of reciprocated interchange between men and women, his resort to ethics to uphold his science, is a telling sign that the barriers between masculine and feminine in Renaissance discourse were considerably more blurred than they are today. Although Greenblatt has argued that this homology between the sexes was almost always presented within the rhetorical context of a patriarchal ideology, the possibility of women becoming men and to a lesser extent men becoming women was a real one for the physiologic consciousness of the Elizabethan, who upon viewing the final scene of *Twelfth Night* saw just how interchangeable sex as well as gender were.

The English Renaissance popularity of both the all-male stage companies and plays about gender switching reflects a social and cultural fascination with the subject who symbolized the bodily cite of this gender ambiguity: the hermaphrodite—strictly speaking, a person who possesses both male and female sexual organs, but more broadly defined as an androgynous subject with both male and female characteristics. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have argued that Renaissance discussions of hermaphroditism reveal that all attempts to fix gender during this period were essentially "prosthetic," that gender in the Renaissance was "a fetish" that played "with its own fetishistic nature" unhampered by the essentializing claims of medicine and biology in the nineteenth century. Their view is usefully contrasted to that of Greenblatt, whose essay on *Twelfth Night* focuses finally on the way the discourse of androgyny is recuperated into a masculine ethos that supports a patriarchal gender hierarchy. The views of these critics are not, however, mutually exclusive; anxiety over the "prosthetic" nature of gender difference could well have produced the exaggerated rhetoric of
misogyny and male superiority common in Renaissance discourse. In a play like Jonson's *Epicoene*, for example, representations of the ambiguity of gender in the silent woman exist in conjunction with the rhetoric of antifeminism in speeches by Truewit and Morose. When Sir Edward Coke, the foremost English jurist of the Renaissance states in his *Commentaries* that "every heir is either a male, or female, or an hermaphrodite, that is both male and female," he is acknowledging the degree to which official discourse sanctioned what Trumbach calls the "third sex." But when the same jurist states that hermaphrodites are required by law to follow either a masculine or female role exclusively, his injunction manifests an official desire to place that third term within a juridical binarism that reduces gender to the binary of sex.

The figure of the hermaphrodite, both on and off the stage, gives Renaissance culture a more ready and accepted focus for the questioning of the ideology of gender, even though the rhetoric of that ideology remains more strident. The Renaissance preoccupation with hermaphrodites in medical discourse accompanies social concerns about transvestites walking the streets of London like Moll Cutpurse or the ingle in Middleton's *Microcynicon," as well as in political concerns about queens who were kings (Elizabeth) and kings who were queens (James I).* At the outset, however, we must be careful about readily ascribing erotic motivation or sociological categories to these transgender experiences. Cross-dressing was and is undertaken by different subjects for different reasons. Woman as diverse as Mary Frith (Moll Cutpurse) and Lady Arabella Stuart passed as males out of economic and social necessity because of the limited public roles for women, while the male ingle in Middleton and the roaring girl walk the streets of London presumably for homoerotic as well as economic reasons. By contrast, an androgynous sixteenth-century portrait of Francois I as Minerva met with approval primarily because the influential philosophy of neoplatonism portrayed the soul as ideally androgynous. Women passed as men and men as women for political and social reasons not necessarily attributable to what we now call homo- or heterosexuality.

Viola's metatheatrical cross-dressing takes place within the transvestite context of the Elizabethan stage convention of all-male repertory companies like the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who were the formal successors to the traveling players that roved the countryside in Tudor England as well as other presumably more rotten states like Denmark. Theatrical transvestism—still extant in Asia—arises out of a configuration of social and economic variables that must be distinguished from nontheatric cross-dressing, though most certainly the restricted freedom of women plays a decided part in both. Scholars have questioned why Elizabethan England and not other European states followed the custom of young male actors playing women's parts. Lisa Jardine has argued that the boy actors, by arousing homoerotic passions for the predominantly male audience in late-sixteenth-century England, presented an unthreatening version of female erotic power. In agreement, Stephen Orgel claims that "homosexuality in this Puritan culture appears to have been less threatening than heterosexuality" because it avoids "a real fear of women's sexuality." These explanations shed less light on the historical development of English stage convention than on the growing controversy over the moral implications of this stage practice in the face of the increased secular and religious power of Puritanism. As early as 1579, Stephen Gosson in the *School of Abuse* accuses the theatre of being "effeminate" and effeminizing. In *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, Dr. John Rainoldes, citing the injunction in Deuteronomy 22.5 against cross-dressing, condemns the wearing of female dress by boy players as "an occasion of wantonness and lust." By 1633, William Prynne's *Histrio mastix* proclaims transvestism to be a wickedness "which my Inke is not black enough to discypher." "Players and Play haunters in their secret conclaves play the Sodomites," he announces. As Barish and others have documented, Malvolio and the Puritans finally were "reveng'd on the whole pack" of actors when the theatres were closed in 1642.

The continued enjoyment of all-male repertory companies as well as the insertion of Puritans and crossdressers into plays by Heywood, Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Ford evidence how the English theatre became both a literal and figurative staging ground for debates over early modern sexuality. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, first staged in 1601, dramatizes this debate by incorporating it into the heart of its plot. Viola, after her initial introduction as a would-be eunuch, describes herself in her soliloquy as a "poor monster," a Renaissance appellation reserved for unnatural prodigies, including hermaphrodites. Sir
Toby will later in jest call her a "firago"—a virago or female warrior (3.4.279). Once Viola realizes the effect of her "disguise" on Olivia, she calls her transvestism "a wickedness, / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much," anticipating Prynne's rhetoric (2.2.26-27). "Could this enemy be Satan?" commentators have conjectured. Instead of blaming herself as the deceiver, Viola displaces the mischief of her disguise on to the device of transvestism itself, which is "pregnant"—ready to hatch—the "wantoness and lust" that serve as the signifiers of same-sex desire in the Renaissance. Viola's surprise and concern over the effect of her deception demonstrates the relational nature of transvestism: it functions as a behavior the motivations for which may wholly differ from the erotic effect it produces on those who confront it.

Viola's androgynous performance as a woman playing a man, like the position of the young men playing women's parts on the Elizabethan stage in general, upsets the restriction of erotic attraction to heterosexual binarism in part because that dualism is collapsed in a single subject. As Viola is a man, her "state is desperate for her master's love," but as Viola is a woman, Olivia's sighs for her must prove "thriftless," under the social condemnation of same-sex love (2.3.35-38). She not only upsets essentialist constructs of gender hierarchy by successfully performing the part of a man as a woman, but in her hermaphroditic capacity as man and woman, I will argue, she also collapses the polarities upon which heterosexuality is based by becoming an object of desire whose ambiguity renders the distinction between homo- and hetero-erotic attraction difficult to decipher. The theatrical convention of crossdressing and the androgyny it comes to symbolize thus challenge the regulatory parameters of erotic attraction through the vehicle of performance, a performance that shows gender to be a part playable by any sex.

Critics have struggled recently to determine the degree to which such theatrical gender trouble affected the social fabric of Renaissance England. Although the plethora of antitheatrical diatribes from 1570 to 1633 would appear to signal a strong reaction among some circles to the influence of the popular theatre, the critical social question has tended to revolve around the circumscribed role of women in the Renaissance in relation to Shakespeare's depiction of strong directorial female characters who cross-dress, such as Portia, Viola, and Rosalind. While Catherine Belsey and Phyliss Rackin argued first that "stage illusion radically subverted the gender division of the Elizabethan world," new historicists like Stephen Greenblatt and Howard have more recently made claims that the Globe operated as a world in itself, a place of stage and licensed misrule, which had less effect on the diminishing power of women in Renaissance England. Even if the popular performance of Shakespeare's comedies did not coincide with social change for women in late-sixteenth-century England, this lack of coincidence does not necessarily warrant a conclusion that the Elizabethan theatre was socially ineffectual. If the relative power of woman was diminished in Renaissance England, the causes of that reduction were as much due to religious and political forces as they were to mechanisms of cultural appropriation.

The larger debate over whether cultural representation has the capacity to subvert and influence social reality or is usually contained by a political matrix that limits its power is not only raging today over questions of pornography and violence on television, but is important for purposes of Gender Trouble and Twelfth Night because both Butler and Shakespeare rely upon performance as a theoretical means of shaking the foundations of the metaphysics of binarism and gender hierarchy. If that performance is contained or circumscribed within the saturnalia or "green world" of comedic convention, its social and political utility is mitigated. Although the effects of literary discourse are rarely as pronounced as the slue of suicides that followed the publication of The Sorrows of Young Werther or the gang fights that took place outside the movie houses after Boulevard Nights, Shakespeare's transvestite comedies are safely counted as part of a discursive explosion concerning questions of gender and sexuality, an explosion that included texts as disparate as Sidney's New Arcadia, James I's Letters, and Marston's satires. In his antitheatrical tract Histrio-mastix, Prynne claims that the popular theatre not only promoted sodomitical practices among the theatregoers, but also encouraged effeminacy and sodomitical practices in the general population as well.
For a stage production in Elizabethan England to occur under the purview of an autocratic and censorious monarchy does not mean that the terms of that play's representation necessarily replicate the terms of that matrix of political power. Ironically, the historicist quest to determine whether Shakespeare's plays or other texts actually produced social trends is finally dependent for its conclusions on an examination of texts themselves—diaries, cases, speeches, satires, and last but not least plays. Monique Wittig theorizes that language is a set of acts repeated over time that produce reality effects that are eventually perceived as "facts." The text and the play Twelfth Night is an act of language both as it was performed in the Globe in 1601 and as it is read by undergraduates preparing to cast or ignore votes on anti-gay rights initiatives. When Shakespeare's play represents gender and sex in a certain way, it is engaging, from the viewpoint of textual materialists like Wittig, in an act of domination and compulsion, a performative that creates a social reality by promoting a certain discursive and perceptual construction of the body. Historicists in search of containment narratives that reinstate a monolithic patriarchy are not only engaging in what Butler calls the determinism behind a universal, hegemonic notion of masculine domination but also forgetting that Shakespeare's play is part of a contemporary canon of literature that the academy is requiring students to read and take seriously—nothing being more serious than Shakespeare's sexual comedies. Which is not to say that women in Renaissance England—or now for that matter—were free of social, political, and religious oppression; yet to extrapolate from this historical trend that Shakespeare's play was and is largely ineffectual or recuperated or contained by larger social and political forces is, I think, an argument that both overlooks the implications of our own inescapable historicity as contemporary readers and fails to consider fully the ways in which textual power operates through complicated, contradictory methods.

Shakespeare's comedies are sometimes read teleologically for reasons that are as ideological as they are aesthetic. Whether under the rubric of a renewal of normality or of patriarchal containment, the categorical heterosexuality that act 5 hastily produces as the solution to the erotic problems explored in the bulk of the play has become the definitive statement of Twelfth Night's perspective, while the possibility of interpreting the conclusion as an ironic retraction in keeping with the medieval tradition remains less appealing to the modern reader. When C. L. Barber suggests that Shakespeare's festive comedies use the sexual and social upheaval of conventional saturnalia in order to renew the meaning of normal sexual relations, he may be overlooking the possibility that Shakespeare's play is as much about the unconventional treatment of erotic attraction in the development of the drama as it is about the conventional romance ending in marriage, as much about Viola fending off Olivia's unknowingly lesbian protestations as about Orsino's decision to marry his page once she retrieves her female habit from the sea captain in the last act.

Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night: II. "I am the man" (2.2.24)

If part of the problem with the recent criticism of Twelfth Night comes from a proclivity on the part of some to reduce the concerns of gender studies to the us-against-them binarism of traditional feminism, Shakespeare's play arguably introduces patterns of homo-erotic representation in order to disrupt that binarism and to show how gender identities that uphold such duality are staged, performed, and "playable" by either sex. Viola/Cesario is the primary performer: she is that strange androgynous "monster," that eunuch/castrato/page or "script" who, through her gender ambiguity, retunes the music of love that has fallen out of key under the belated courtly scripts that the Count and Countess banally reenact in Illyria. Like the drag queen Butler discusses in Gender Trouble, Viola/Cesario demonstrates a parodic awareness of the three contingent dimensions of her corporeality: her anatomical sex as a boy actor, her gender identity in the drama as a woman washed ashore, and her gender performance as the page Cesario in the employ of the sexist Orsino.

Cesario points to himself as actor or performer in the metadramatic comments he makes in his first encounter with Olivia in act 1, scene 5. Having reluctantly been asked to woo the countess on behalf of the man she loves, Cesario initially feels conflicted about delivering the "speech" he has "penned" and "conned" (1.5.174-75). When Olivia asks where he has come from, Cesario replies, "I can say little more than I have
studied, and that question's out of my part" (1.5.179-80). When he admits to Olivia that he is not what he plays, the metaphor of theatricality in this scene continues in even greater earnest. Cesario is alluding, in his staginess, to more than the fact that he is a she in this drama; he is reminding us, when he tells us that he took "great pains" to study his "poetical" "commission," that he is an actor playing a part, a boy actor playing the part of a woman playing a part of a man (1.5.190, 195-96). Given the common Elizabethan bawdy pun on the word "parts" as sexual genitalia, this confluence of meaning between the theatrical and the sexual has particular significance for Twelfth Night's staging of the performative homology between the two. When Olivia presses Cesario to divulge his identity ("What are you?" [1.5.215]), he cryptically tells her that what he is and what he would be are "as secret as maiden-head," pointing primarily to his gender identity as Viola in the drama but also alluding to the male virginity that Sebastian will admit to in the final act when he tells Olivia she will marry a man and a maid (1.5.218-19). The boy actor's and Cesario's maidenhood is also Viola's maidenhood; the part he plays depends on the hiding of the nature of his private part(s).

Even though Cesario goes out of his text in 1.5 when he lifts the veil of his rival Olivia with jealous interest and commends her unparalleled beauty, his growing interest in Olivia reminds us that Viola is now adlibbing as Cesario and that this impromptu performance, which points to her servant's role as disguise, is in many ways more endearing than the stiff delivery of an identity-bound young man. In fact, improvisation allows Cesario/Viola to enact her third role as agent of her master: the boy actor playing a woman playing a male page who is asked to act out the passion of his master. "If I did love you in my master's flame" (1.5.268), Cesario proclaims, as he warms up to his poetic performance, he would

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!"

[1.5.273-77]

In this performative address, in which the poet speaks the loyal canton s/he has written, Viola/Cesario is the antithesis of Patience on a monument. In Viola's role as a self-conscious male mediator between man and woman, s/he becomes a better—a more eloquent, persuasive—man than the man s/he represents. In fact, Cesario plays his part so well that Olivia immediately catches the plague of lovesickness, a sickness which, from the point of view of gendered identity in the play, casts her as an unwitting lesbian. The upshot of this self-reflexive gender confusion is a layered combination of ironic plays on performance that self-consciously point to boy actor/Viola/Cesario/Orsino's agent's uncanny ability to be what he does, to adopt his identity through imitation, through an art that not only outdoes nature, but shows nature herself to be art. The "babbling gossip" of the natural element air in its reverberate identity as Echo will take on the poetic artifice of the singing poet, crying out, "Olivia." Echo is a fitting mythological analogue for the imitative Viola/Cesario, whose performative roles as actor and agent make her a master of reverberation.

When Olivia falls in love with the page we know to be a woman, she realizes that the imaginary fantasy of love has taught her that "ourselves we do not owe [own]" (5.1.314-15), that the self is not an entity within the control of an ego-identity. The unorthodoxy of a countess's infatuation with a servant is enough to prove to Olivia that she has, as a result of her passion, fallen into "abatement and low price," but the dramatic nexus between social degradation and homoerotic attraction—not without its historical analogues—is an even more troubling development. Alan Bray and others have identified the relationship of servant/master as one of the social arenas in which homoerotic interaction commonly took place.37 Admittedly, Cesario/Viola is not Olivia's servant, but Cesario's ostensible estate is well below that of the Countess, and she takes liberties, such
as the gift of her ring, which would not be expected to occur between social equals. Although until recently most scholarship in Renaissance homoerotics has dealt almost exclusively with male-male relationships, there is no reason to believe that lesbian practices were not equally as common within the protected hierarchal environment of the domestic house-hold. In fact, erotic practices between women may have been less threatening and more overlooked within domestic spheres. Not only was sex between women not explicitly prohibited under the 1533 sodomy statute enacted by Henry VIII (in force until 1967), but women were also confined within the household to a much greater degree than men. Condemned by St. Paul in Romans 1:26 and Aquinas in his *Summa*, lesbian sexual practice continued to be an egregious offence outside of England, as Greenblatt has demonstrated in his discussion of the hanging in France of Marie le Marcis for falsely impersonating a man and marrying a woman. Yet even on the Continent, where women were condemned for homosexual practice until before the French Revolution, records of premodern persecutions remain scarce.

The relative dearth of lesbian prosecutions in early modern Europe is indicative of a history even more hidden than that of male homosexuality. The combination of a crime too nefarious to name and a set of perpetrators officially silenced and obedient within a predominantly patriarchal culture has made lesbian history a “blank,” a closet within a closet, that scholars are only now beginning to attempt to reconstruct. Cultural representation of relations between women have recently garnered some attention. The Fioirdispina-Bradamante episode in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* and Philoclea’s love of the apparently Amazon Zelmane in the *New Arcadia* are well-known examples from the romance tradition, while Donne’s “*Sappho to Philes*” and Katherine Philip’s Restoration love poetry are English verses that must be counted as part of this presumably lost tradition.

Jorge de Montemayor’s *La Diana*, a sixteenth-century Spanish romance translated into English by Bartholomew Yong in 1598, is an important analogue to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, which contains more than one episode of same-sex love between women cast under the narrative rubric of transvestite performance. In Book Two of *La Diana* Felismena disguises herself as the page Valerio when her beloved Don Felis is sent to the Portuguese court by his father. After enlisting in the service of her unwitting Don Felis, Valerio/Felismena adopts the same role as Viola/Cesario, wooing another woman on behalf of the man she loves and causing that woman, Celia, to fall in love with her instead. In this more tragic rendering of the Italian stage comedy *Gl’Inganni* (1562), Montemayor, unlike Shakespeare, decides not to create a Sebastian-like clone to meet the romance convention of reconciliation. Instead Celia—the Olivia counterpart—dies heartbroken when she learns that the male page with whom she has fallen in love has a stronger affection for his male master than herself. The performance of gender in the story of Felismena leads finally to a suicide that presumably arises out of an assumption by Celia of a male homoerotic relationship that undermines her own unwitting lesbian love for Felismena. *La Diana*, by some accounts the most fashionable Spanish book in England at the close of the sixteenth century, establishes a prose precedent for the representation of erotic relations between women through the mechanism of transvestite performance.

In a theatrical forum more public and regulated than the spheres of private circulation and limited publication of early domestic fiction and poetry, Shakespeare’s representation of same-sex attraction between women must even more cautiously use indirection to find direction out. In her discussion of the homoerotics of Shakespearean comedy, Valerie Traub has argued that the limitation of the consequences of theatrical crossdressing to the evocation of male homoeroticism ignores the ambiguities that transvestism creates and reinstates the restriction of gender binarism into the discussion of homoerotics. Women were in attendance at the Globe, and there is no reason to ignore female homoerotics as part of the disruptions that cross-dressing explores. The gender ambiguity of Viola/Cesario in fact sets the stage for the representation of a plethora of desires: homoerotic attraction between Orsino and Cesario, heterosexual attraction between Orsino and Viola, and lesbian attraction between Viola and Olivia. The last relationship is in many ways the most compelling and time-consuming in the play. Ostensibly, the passion that Olivia finds herself unable “to hide” by means of “wit or reason” is directed at a young man, but dramatic irony tells us that her hidden passion is for a maid (3.1.153-54). When, after their first encounter, Olivia sends Cesario her symbolic ring for him to slip his
finger into, Cesario/Viola, in her famous soliloquy, suddenly realizes, "I am the man: if it be so, as 'tis, / Poor lady, she were better love a dream" (2.2.24-25). Viola is acknowledging that her performance as a man has out-manned every other suitor of Olivia in Illyria, but she also realizes that this performance has led to a homoerotic attraction more socially and legally untenable than an illusory dream. Olivia is not entirely to blame for this sudden attraction, as Traub has pointed out. Viola/Cesario, whose original inclination was to stay with the Countess, has gone out of her text in their first meeting, taking the liberty of lifting Olivia's veil, and playing the part of her wooer with more fervency than expected. "But if you were the devil," Cesario exclaims upon seeing her face, "you are fair" (1.5.255).

In her soliloquy that follows their first meeting, Viola/Cesario unquestionably blames the wickedness of her disguise and the frail nature of women for this instigation of bi-gendered passion, but this retreat into essentialism is undermined by Viola's unnatural status as boy actor, female character, and male page, which demonstrates that although frailty may be the name of woman, the name of woman is applicable to both sexes in this play:

My master loves her dearly
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:
What will become of this? As I am a man,
My state is desperate for my master's love,
As I am a woman (now alas the day!)
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?

[2.2.32-39]

Viola/Cesario is the poor hermaphroditical monster or, in another context, the master/mistress who has stirred the homoerotic passion of Olivia by incorporating the polarities of sexual and gender difference into the unity of her maddening disguise, thereby representing gender tropes in a manner that de-forms, de-naturalizes, and de-constructs their oppositional status. The dear fondness and doting, moreover, is not altogether gender specific; it occurs among all three in this love triangle. When Viola attempts to articulate the "knot" of her predicament, she finds that her gendered figures of speech are subject to ironies that unsettle the heterosexual bent of her identity as the lover of Orsino. Editors insist that "desperate" in this context means "hopeless," but when Cesario tells us that as a man he is desperate for his master's love, the male homoerotic irony of such a statement again problematizes her desire to be sincere in her heterosexual identity. As a woman, she laments, even pities, the profitless sighs that Olivia must undergo both in her mistaken doting on a page and in her capacity as a woman in love with another woman in a world where such behavior was literally unheard of.

Despite Cesario's protestations, Olivia continues her amorous assault until the end of the play, unwilling to take no for an answer. In act 3, the haughty Olivia is willing to ask Cesario what he thinks of her:

Viola: That you do think you are not what you are.
Olivia: If I think so, I think the same of you.
Viola: Then think you right; I am not what I am.
Olivia: I would you were as I would have you be.
Viola: Would it be better, madam, than I am?
I wish it might, for now I am your fool.

[3.1.141-45]

In dramatic context, Viola is attempting to fend off Olivia by telling her that she is not really in love as she thinks she is because Cesario is not in fact a man; however, in textual isolation this witty repartee functions as a profound if unsystematic critique of gender identity as a boundary to licit love. Viola assumes that Olivia's
love would vanish if she knew Cesario's true sex, but the persistent Countess reminds the heroic androgynene that s/he too thinks s/he is someone s/he is not, thinks s/he is not in love with Olivia when in fact the pity s/he shows her is a form of love. When Cesario almost steps out of his part and admits with Iago-esque frankness that he is not what he is, the text again shifts into its self-reflexive gear, reminding both audience and reader that subjectivity is constructed by epistemology; it does not exist in some pre-Cartesian substance that instantly assigns a bedrock of transcendent traits to either female or male. Mistaking Sebastian for Viola, Feste will later remind the audience of the fiction of gender identity: "Nothing that is so, is so," he surmises, as he looks at Viola's identical male twin (4.1.8-9). His sly critique of what Butler calls the "metaphysics of gender substance" continues in his role as Sir Topas, the Pythagorean curate, in act 4. "That that is, is," the learned cross-dressing Sir Topas proclaims, "I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson" (4.1.14-15). Feste's mock tautology points to the performative nature of what we assume to be ontological essence. This jester turned sermonizer is who he is because he plays who he is; in the same way Viola can be the male Cesario by transvestite performance.

Similarly, who Viola/Cesario is or is not, as a subject, is as much a figure of Olivia's and Viola's imaginations as it is a stable, gendered identity, the revelation of which will undo some mistaken affection (4.2.15-16). The dialogue that Olivia and Cesario have in act 3 not only dramatizes the instability of the subject as a determinate entity that exists outside of social interaction but also shows how the performative self is further complicated by the fictions or fantasies played out in the imaginary mental constructions of those in love. When Olivia tells Cesario that she wishes he were the reciprocating lover she would like him to be, she is divulging the way in which lovers, by reason of their imaginary dreams, act as agents in the disruption of normative identity politics. Put simply, the lover, like Olivia, turns the object of her love into something more than he or she is. Olivia's amorous thinking reshapes this male servant into the gentleman of her dreams, while in fact that gentleman is a woman—a Viola whose anagrammatic name shapes the reverberate echoes that feed the Countess's narcissism. Cesario recognizes that Olivia's amorous strategy is turning him or her into a fool, that her narcissistic aggressivity is the consequence of an emotion that both disrupts determined notions of subjectivity while simultaneously transferring its own ideal notions of self on to the object of love.

Yet surely, critics have argued, the identity and gender trouble produced by Viola's disguise is largely undermined by her ultimately heterosexual aim; after all, the object of her desire is Orsino. Butler herself warns that heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through the denaturalization of cross-dressing, when those denaturalizing parodies work to "reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question." Unlike Moll Cutpurse or even Portia, Viola, Jean Howard argues, does not use her disguise to gain power, but only to secure her position as a dutiful wife. She neveractually challenges patriarchy. By privileging intentionality over action or what Butler calls performance, these important objections to my line of argument assume that the subversive effects of Viola's disguise are vitiated by the sexual orientation of the character Viola, while it is my position that the language of the play questions the metaphysics of orientation and intentionality, replacing them with a concept of performativity.

Even if Viola does not actively challenge patriarchy in her erotic goal, she nevertheless questions its validity in her disguised wooing of her master in act 2, scene 4. In discussing earlier scenes, both Bruce Smith and Pequigney have commented upon the homoerotic overtones of Orsino's sudden infatuation with his new domestic servant, to whom he "unclaps .. the book even of [his] secret soul," delighting in Cesario's "smooth and rubious" lips and "shril and sound" voice, which he calls a "small pipe" comparable to a "maiden's organ" (1.4.31-33). This ambiguous affection for his male servant sets the stage for their discussion of the differing capacities of male and female amorous longing in act 2. When asked by Orsino, Viola/Cesario admits that she is in love with a "w oman," but one close to the Count in "years" and "complexion" (2.4.26-28). When Orsino complains that no woman's heart is capacious enough to hold the passion that a man feels, Viola/Cesario challenges him by passionately telling her own story in the third person: "My father had a daughter lov'd a man / As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your lordship" (2.4.107-9). The ironies of gender that inform the performative layers of this scene render Orsino's sexist construction of love highly suspect. As
a servant, Cesario boldly challenges his master's complacent speculation even as Viola is reiterating the strength of her own passion under the risk of revealing her disguise. But this scene critiques Orsino's assumptions not merely by contrasting traditional female patience to male boasting; both those positions are thrown into question by the posture of Viola's performativity—by the very fact that she is commanding the discursive space of this scene. Her impersonation of herself in her autobiographical history, her objectification of herself as quiet, allegorical Patience on a monument is a verbal tour de force ironically iterated by a woman. Viola reveals her concealment, impatiently describes her patience and thereby points to the constructedness of both Orsino's and her own depictions of gender paradigms. Meanwhile, as the boy Cesario tells the story of his sister who is himself, Orsino continues to fall in love with his/her "masterly" speech (2.4.22). This scene thus challenges patriarchy not by reidealizing the heterosexual norms of passion-vowing males and patiently passive females, but by calling those constructions into question through portraying the cross-dressing female as a figure who deconstructs the categories of gender by ironically reiterating them in a context that depicts their reversal.

Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night: III. "I do adore thee so, / That danger shall seem sport" (2.1.46)

In counterpoint to the ironies and ambiguities that closet the lesbian subtext in the main courtship of Twelfth Night, the representation of male homoeroticism in this comedy is by contrast glaring and ultimately inexplicable. Metaphors of adoration, devotion, and passionate oblation saturate the heated but highly stylized rhetorical interactions between Sebastian, the twin brother of Viola, and Antonio, the erstwhile pirate, who redeems Sebastian "[f]rom the rude sea's enrag'd and foamy mouth" and gives his life back to him, adding thereto his "love, without retention or restraint / All his in dedication" (5.1.76-80). Neither the Ciceronian tradition of male friendship nor attention to the intensity of homosocial male bonding in the Renaissance can explain away Antonio's melancholia. He is prepared, we learn, to spend three months with his foundling after rescuing him, prepared to risk his life to follow Sebastian to Illyria (where he is wanted on criminal charges) prepared to give this young man his purse, and prepared finally to intercede on his behalf in the midst of a duel: "I do adore thee so," Antonio states, "That danger shall seem sport, and I will go" (2.1.46-47; emphasis mine). Like Olivia, Antonio has "exposed himself pure for love"—an exposure doubly dangerous because its gendered object represents an unmentionable anathema to the religious and judicial laws that officially condemned such homoerotic behavior. To put this notable pirate's passion in perspective, we need turn no further than the pages of Billy Budd to find a trace of the sodomitical practices that traditionally have been ascribed to men at sea. In the seventeenth century, according to B. R. Burg, English sea rovers and buccaneers were renowned for their sodomitical behavior. Antonio may be a part of this historical tradition, while at the same time he may be another one of Shakespeare's male characters—Horatio, Enobarbus, Patroclus, Antonio in The Merchant of Venice, to name a few—who are devoted to other males.

Antonio disrupts normative constructions of gender by enacting his homoerotic passion in a character that is the most traditionally "masculine" in the play. He is aggressive, bold, eloquent, faithful, uncompromising—traits which are ironically alignable with his counter-part Olivia and also ironically employed in the service of a homoerotic rather than heterosexual compulsion. Some critics recently have argued that male homoerotics were not associated with effeminacy until later in the seventeenth century, Antonio's machismo being a case in point. Whatever the validity of this point of social history, Antonio exists as a direct foil to the hopelessly sycophantic but presumably heterosexual courtier, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Although Antonio's histrionic intensity is tempered by little or none of the gender irony ascribable to Viola, the play's dramatic representation of him as one of the most heroic and intense characters in the drama points to an alternative domain of cultural intelligibility in which the significations of heterosexual masculinity are repeated within a context that directly subverts the rigid codes of heterosexual practice.

85
The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian even subverts some of the accepted parameters of homoerotic practice in the Renaissance. Although Pequigney calls it "the classic relationship, wherein the mature lover serves as guide and mentor to the young beloved," this facile reading overlooks a number of factors that make this homoerotic relation strangely unclassic, tellingly noncategorical. Alan Bray has tried recently to delineate the difference between the often-similar rhetoric of male friendship and sodomy in the English Renaissance. He concludes that the passionate discourse of male friendship did not imply sexual practices as long as the interlocutors were both assumed to be gentlemen, their relationship personal not mercenary, and their interaction not disruptive of the social order. Despite Orsino's epithets "notable pirate" and "salt-water thief" (5.1.66), Antonio denies his piracy, bears himself as a gentleman consistently, and is known for his fame, honor, and kindness. Antonio's loaning of his purse to Sebastian is an act of generosity, not payment. Although the sea-captain is presumably of lower social standing than Sebastian, the play does not provide sufficient evidence that their interaction is unnatural or disruptive of the social order. Antonio's homoerotic attraction contains few of the social clues of the sodomite that Bray outlines. What is unusual in this relationship is that Antonio, although of lower social status than Sebastian, is the more powerful and principled figure, a circumstance that places their connection outside the scope of the usual master/servant, teacher/student matrices that social historians indicate as potentially homoerotic. Similarly, though critics assume Antonio to be older and more experienced than Sebastian because of his sea-battle experience, the play does not make the age difference between the two so discernible that this relationship falls squarely within the man/boy paradigm often associated with homoeroticism in this period. Nor, finally, can this couple be subsumed under accepted categories of gender binarism. Although Antonio's more intense ardor and Sebastian's possibly homoerotic name might lead to assumptions about their masculinity and femininity, both are proven swordsmen; and, ironically, the resistant Sebastian is the character who readily adopts a heterosexual role when he accepts Olivia's marital offer. Even in its depiction of same-sex love, Twelfth Night departs from patterns that would subsume homoeroticism under entrenched gender stereotypes. The dramatization of the marginal erotic relationship of Antonio and Sebastian carefully avoids a rendition that reinstates the excluded outside of homoeroticism as a simplified reflection of heterosexual roles within a same-sex context.

Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night: IV. "Thou hast put him in such a dream, that when the image of it leaves him he must run mad" (2.5.193-94)

Like Olivia's love for Cesario/Viola, Antonio's love for Sebastian partakes in a psychological enactment of fantasy that functions as an inward performance of gender trouble. Mistaking Viola for her twin brother in act 3, "even in a minute" Antonio has his faith undermined by the confused Cesario (3.4.370-72), who is unable to return Antonio's purse because he does not have it. In his crestfallen state, Antonio announces that he has done "devotion" to Sebastian's "image" with a "sanctity of love," but that this "god" has proved a "vile idol" unworthy of Sebastian's handsome features (3.4.374-75). Antonio's passionate disenchantment—reminiscent of Othello's—is based on a mistaken interpretation of objective reality, and like the amorous image-making that preceded it, his recasting of Sebastian into the image of a deceiving "devil" partakes of the same process of transference that marked his process of falling in love. He turns his lover into something more than he is through a mentality that seeks finally the attention of the idol that he has created, fashioned, and enacted in the realm of his imaginary fantasy. Although his bitterness is played out within the comedic context of his mistaking a "girl" for his "boy," his virulent disappointment stands in marked contrast to his unexplained silence in the play's final act, when his beloved Sebastian has cavalierly married and when, from a contemporary point of view, Antonio would seem to have more reason to protest. Silence is often the most telling form of disappointment.
Antonio and Olivia's transformation of their lovers into something more than they are is indicative of a larger pattern in *Twelfth Night* that employs the process of love as an agency in the disruption of gender binarism and social hierarchy. The internalized fantasy of the lover—whereby an Orsino turns Olivia into a Petrarchan goddess or a Malvolio turns her into a Duchess of Malfi—lays the foundation for the legitimization of a social and gender upheaval under the rubric of what Antonio calls the "witch-craft" of love (5.1.74). Orsino sets the stage for this disruption in his opening words:

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there
Of what validity and pitch so'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy,
That it alone is high fantastical.

[1.1.9-15]

At once capacious and enveloping, love is at the same time ephemeral and destined to disappointment, primarily because of its dependence on an internal fantasy for its sustenance. In Shakespeare's usage, "fancy" connotes both the operation of "love" and "fantasy" or imagination. The quick and giddy shapes that the lover's imagination generates and transfers on to the object of affection render that object vulnerable to the "abatement and low price" that the realities of compulsory heterosexuality and diverging desire reaffirm in the proverbial fifth act of Shakespeare's comedies. Yet the capacity to create and "perform" those "shapes"—the ability of Olivia to turn Cesario into the perfect lover, of Antonio to idolize Sebastian—remain the fragile but crucial catalysts for the promotion of gender trouble.

Few who read this final scene, upon which much criticism depends, are not troubled by the solutions to the erotic problems that the plot has engendered. For Traub, *Twelfth Night's* conclusion seems "only ambivalently invested in the 'natural' heterosexuality it imposes," while Pequigney challenges the accepted interpretation that Sebastian has rejected his male lover because he has taken a wife. Olivia's ready acceptance of her beloved's twin as her husband and Orsino's equally mercurial capitulation to his male page who awaits her change of attire add to the delightful but troubling improbability. These unlikelihoods, whether explained as dramatic plot convention or a return to normalcy, expose "the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals."

*Twelfth Night* attempts to resolve this trouble by playing on the concept of identity in so far as it means *sameness* as opposed to *individuality*. If the major portion of Shakespeare's plot employs the tropes of performance to show how gender is a melodramatic act rather than an inherent trait of the individuated ego, the ending of the play reaffirms this conclusion by producing a male that is, for all intents and purposes, the same or identical to a female. Viola/Cesario is not only a female successfully playing a male, but her success is confirmed by her fungibility with her twin brother. The reunion of Viola with Sebastian comes after he opportunely is betrothed to an Olivia who mistakes him for Cesario. Seeing Cesario and Sebastian on stage together for the first time, Orsino exclaims "one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons! A natural perspective that is, and is not!" (5.1.214-15). The identity of this twin brother and sister does more than provide a convenient Terencian plot device to untie the erotic knot that the play has created up to this point; this sameness also points to the way in which the essentialism of a "natural perspective" is not always divided into gendered binarism. Nature herself has produced an unnatural perspective that reveals the constructedness of essentialist notions of gender by depicting the collapse of difference. Echoing Troilus's famous speech during his eavesdropping of a Cressida that is and is not, Orsino sees a nature that is capable of copying itself exactly in spite of the natural sex difference between brother and sister that we expect. In the identity of Sebastian and Viola, the play's denouement stages a critique of binarism, a parodic subversion of the
dichotomies between female and male, homo- and heterosexual. The result of the appearance of these identical twins in the final act is a decided disruption of the stability of sexual and gender difference and the sense of individuated identity it fosters. Sebastian tells Olivia that even though she would have been contracted to the maid Viola if he had not fortuitously appeared, she is now "betroth'd both to a maid and a man" (5.1.261). He is not only assuring her that he is himself a virgin, but he is also making wanton with the meaning of the word "maid" as a young woman. Sebastian is a character whose similar appearance to his sister gives him a decided resemblance to a maid, but whose identity with Cesario allows him to play the part of a man. Even in this concluding marriage scene, therefore, the play's language produces destabilizing configurations of gender.

The prosthetic nature of gender's supposed inherency is dramatized even further by the role that costume plays in this concluding scene. Once Cesario discloses herself as Sebastian's twin sister, Orsino decides he wants a share in the "happy wrack" of this collapse of gender identity by capitalizing on Cesario's previously proclaimed love for a woman like him; but he continues to address her as "boy" and "Cesario":

For so you shall be while you are a man;  
But when in other habits you are seen,  
Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen.

[5.1.385-87]

Like Clerimont in Jonson's Epicoene, who uses his "ingle" at home when his mistress is unattainable, Orsino settles for a marriage with his male page. For Orsino, Viola can only establish her true identity by recovering her maiden's weeds from the captain she left in act 1, who now for some reason is under arrest at the behest of Malvolio. Consistent with the import of Renaissance sumptuary laws that regulated dress among classes as well as sexes—laws championed by Malvolian moralists like Gosson and Stubbes—Orsino's final statement indicates, albeit playfully, that Viola will be a man until she adopts the "habit" of female attire, until her appearance conforms to the mundane trappings that are the foundations of gender identity. Her gender is dependent upon a factor as easily changeable as her weeds are pret-a-porter. Ironically, that attire is still unrecovered at the close of this final scene, as Orsino walks off stage with his Cesario.

While the wonderful discoveries of act 5 make for a tidy if contrived romance ending, below the surface of these marriage knots, with their diluted flavor of androgyne, lies an entanglement that transcends the freedom these characters may gain from a mild subversion of normative gender relations. What is particularly troubling about the ending of Twelfth Night—and particularly important from a perspective beyond the necessary upheaval of entrenched gender politics—are the ways in which gender performance in this play, although successful in questioning identity, does not necessarily give these characters what they want. The dismantling of the automatic collapse of sex and gender in this play, even when successful, does not bring the subject to a new metaphysical substance, to a new place of performative stability. Although Viola achieves her goal of marrying Orsino, the man she is betrothed to has, minutes before, agreed to sacrifice her for the love of Olivia. Arguably Sebastian is satisfied with his surprise catch of the Countess, but his reaction to the appearance of his friend Antonio on the scene gives the audience pause: "Antonio! O my dear Antonio, / How have the hours rack'd and tortur'd me / Since I have lost thee!" (5.1.216-18). How can Olivia have satisfied her desire by mistakenly marrying the enchanting Cesario's seeming copy, a stranger as passionately attached to a pirate as herself? The homoerotic element of the play, while troubling and disruptive in its dramatic development, may not have the power in this final scene to overcome fully the symbolic dictates of compulsory heterosexuality, at least from a perspective of formal kinship relations. Yet even if homoeroticism triumphed in Twelfth Night and Viola walked off stage arm-in-arm with Olivia and Sebastian with Antonio, the problems of the irrationality of desire and the instability of identity would not vanish. Desire is not erased by the successful disruption of gender boundaries; it continues to haunt the subject despite the performance of the most fantastic of love's imaginings. Yet the interminable nature of desire and the fantasies of love that are
desire's dialectical counterpart serve as important catalysts for the subversion and displacement "of those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power" through strategies of gender trouble.  

Notes


5 Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 130, 141.


9 See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 12.


11 In *Gender in Play* (221-23), Shapiro lists eighty-one English dramas during a period from 1570 to 1642 that portray heroines in male disguise.

13 My argument here and elsewhere is indebted to Catherine Belsey's discussion of the play's questioning of conventional models of gendered interaction in "Disrupting Sexual Difference," 16-17.


17 Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," 78.

18 Jones and Stallybrass, "Fetishizing Gender," 105-6.

19 Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," 92-93.


21 In her speech to the troops at Tilbury, Elizabeth states, "I have the body but of a weak and frail woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king" (The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume One, 6th ed. [New York: Norton, 1993], 999). James's romantic letters to his favorites Somerset and Villers are evidence of his homoerotic tendencies; see his *Letters of King James VI and I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). In this regard, note the Renaissance popularity of the story of Edward II and his fateful attachment to Gaveston in works such as Marlowe's *Edward II* and Michael Drayton's *Piers Gaveston* (1593).


30 For another dramatization of the controversy over theatrical cross-dressing, see the puppet show in the final act of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*.


36 Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 245.


41 For an even more developed lesbian subplot in *La Diana* than the analogue to *Twelfth Night*, see the story of Selvagia and Ismenia in Book One (Jorge de Monte-mayor, *A Critical Edition of Yong's Translation of George of Montemayor's Diana and Gil Polo's Enamoured Diana*, ed. Judith M. Kennedy [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968]).


43 Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 121.

44 Shapiro, *Gender in Play*, 151-54.
Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 130.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), Jacques Lacan remarks that narcissistic gratification is love's primary motivation. Comparing the processes of analysis to the interaction of lovers, he concludes that the lover turns the beloved into a *subject supposed to know*, someone who can answer all his questions about what he wants (267). This transference is actually undertaken by the lover as a strategy of narcissism, in which the beloved, flattered by the lover, eventually recognizes and pays attention to the beloved (253). This imaginary and narcissistic fantasy called love necessarily seeks to close off the unconscious and the lack that is desire. The motto of the lover in approaching the beloved is always "in you more than you," a phrase that summarizes this process of imaginary overestimation for purposes of avoiding desire (263).


"Despite her masculine attire and the confusion it causes in Illyria, Viola's is a properly feminine subjectivity; and this fact countervails the threat posed by her clothes and removes any possibility that she might permanently aspire to masculine privilege and prerogatives" (Howard, "Crossdressing," 432). For Howard the truly transgressive female in the play is Olivia, but she is "punished, comically but unmistakably" by her love for Viola/Cesario (432). But what characters do not fall into "abatement and low price" because of their erotic attraction in this play? Howard's reading of *Twelfth Night* usefully illustrates one way in which the concerns of feminism can collide with the aims of gender studies, in so far as the latter attacks power through parodic deconstruction of its categories while the former seeks to work within those categories of power by searching for women who gain masculine "privilege."


Pequigney, "The Two Antonios," 204.


Admittedly, one of the historian's main points is that these clues were growing more and more ambiguous at the end of the sixteenth century.


See Saslow, "Homosexuality," 94.

The "homoeroticization" of St. Sebastian is evident in Renaissance art and carried forward in Derek Jarman's recent film. See, for example, Antonio and Piero de Poliamolo, *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (1496?), National Gallery, London.

Butler, Bodies, 237.


Although Greenblatt ("Fiction and Friction") argues that the sameness is a maleness since both characters are dressed as men at the end of the play, Viola's central performance throughout the play has already shown that clothes do not necessarily make the man, that masculinity is a role played most successfully by a woman.


Butler, Gender Trouble, 34.


Critical Essays: Malvolio and the Eunuchs: Texts and Revels in Twelfth Night

John Astington, University of Toronto

… a good practise in it to make the steward beleue his Lady widdowe was in Loue w\textsuperscript{th} him by counterfayting a lett\textsuperscript{f}

John Manningham

He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

1 Corinthians, 7, 32-3

Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

1 Timothy, 5, 5-6

Fashionably enough, the central farcical scene of Twelfth Night concerns an act of reading. What Malvolio reads and how he reads it have significant connections both with other events in the play, and with the wider world of seventeenth-century English society. The letter he finds invites him to join the festive rituals of love—to disguise himself, to smile, and to become a wooer, on the expectation of ending the revelling with epithalamium and marriage. This model for human conduct—the argument of romantic comedy—is in fact endorsed by a secondary text hidden within the first, as we shall see. But Malvolio, reading the words eagerly in the light of his predisposition, sees no subtleties, let alone the gaping trap. The festival in which he has already begun to take part is not the affirmative and sustaining one he imagines, but a punitive, defaming, mocking ritual aimed at him, his pride, pretensions, and authority. His reading—or misreading—marks his entry to a festive world, and festivals, like texts, are ambiguous. Particularly his treatment at the hands of the
plotters forms a suggestive inverse ritual to set against those patterns which are traced by the energies of misplaced and baffled erotic desire, eventually untangled and fulfilled.

In the last scene of the play Feste finally delivers Malvolio's letter, excusing himself with the observation that 'madman's epistles are no gospels'. One could say that Malvolio's mistake has been to fall into the trap of taking a mad epistle for gospel, but here Olivia is not to be diverted by Feste's attempt to superimpose a theatrical style on plain sense: Orsino's recognition that 'This savours not much of distraction' echoes her own. Earlier in the play, Toby has pre-empted another plain reader, Viola, by rewriting Sir Andrew's challenge and by avoiding committing it to paper: 'this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will breed no terror in the youth. He will find it comes from a clodpoll'. In the course of the play we have, then, two epistles which are gospels, in so far as their sense, or lack of it, is revealed in their style, and one which is dressed as a dish of poison, devilish and heretical.

Malvolio, if he is indeed a 'kind of puritan', should have had some experience in the interpretation of difficult or ambiguous writings, but he capitulates so absolutely to the apparent sense of a text that even Maria is amazed at his extreme folly: 'Yon gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado, for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness.' Something has been wrong, clearly, with Malvolio's Puritan discipline, if he can fall so easily for 'some obscure epistles of love', taking the shadow for the substance in such an unguarded manner. In doing so, of course, he is unconsciously aping his betters, and it is the deluded Olivia who is readiest to understand and forgive him, pointedly comparing his case with hers twice in the play. Not that she is aware of her own delusion, however. She confidently assumes she is an accomplished reader of texts, and of bodies as texts, when she dismisses the first chapter of Orsino's heart, which Viola proposes as her gospel: 'O, I have read it. It is heresy.'

The revenge of foolery and holiday on Malvolio is motivated by his repressive and humourless sense of order, and by his self-conceit, but the terms of his humiliation are very deliberately chosen: not only is he made to transgress class barriers, but he is translated into a lover, about which role there is something deeply and fundamentally inappropriate. Malvolio's initial rule over the celibate, mourning household of Olivia is sterile and deathly. Sad and civil, he is customarily dressed in suits of solemn black, and he marks himself all too clearly as an enemy to the life of comic energy: his first line in the play invokes the pangs of death. Olivia's own brooding on death, however affected it may be, aligns her sympathetically with Malvolio's gloomy order: the entirely imaginary affection that Maria invents has at least a germ of plausibility about it. But Malvolio is valued by Olivia as a servant precisely because he appears to be passionless, 'Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow', a defender not only of wit, manners, and honesty, but of honesty in its sexual sense, a symbolic guardian at Olivia's gates. As a classically constructed blocking character, Malvolio inamorato is punished by the passion he apparently denies.

By the beginning of the box-tree scene, the treasons have already been planted in his mind, which is running on marriage: 'Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state— ... Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown, having come from a day-bed where I have left Olivia sleeping.' Dreams of power and luxury, therefore, accompany the relatively sober, yet preposterous 'married to her'; indeed the fantasy of high social rank runs slightly ahead of dreams of sexual indulgence. Married in his mind, he encounters the fateful epistle, the very letters of which drip with concupiscence. The style of the text he reads is a clever mixture of obliquity and directness, fustian riddles, grandiloquence, and minor rhetorical flourishes with a rather dated air. The prose begins with a clear warning—'If this fall into thy hand, revolve'—and immediately passes to an apparently clear statement—'In my stars I am above thee'—followed by a fugal development on the theme of greatness, which Malvolio is naturally disposed to hear with pleasure. Within the famous tripartite clause, thrice repeated in the course of the play, there lurks, perhaps, another warning for the truly virtuous. That is to say that the construction of this part of the epistle is remarkably close to gospel. In the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St Matthew, Christ has been drawn by the Pharisees into
a discussion of divorce and marriage. The complexities of morality and law lead the disciples to think that perhaps 'it is not good to marry'. In the King James Bible, Christ replies as follows:

- But hee said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying saue they to whom it is given.
- For there are some Eunuches, which were so borne from their mothers wombe: and there are some Eunuches, which were made Eunuches of men: and there be Eunuches, which haue made themselues Eunuches for the kingdome of heauens sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receiue it.

Christ's words, he twice warns, are not to be understood by everyone, and the terms of his analogy are in many respects puzzling, but the evident centre of his meaning is that true greatness is not of this world, and that sexuality may be a bar to finding it. If Maria has intended this gospel text to serve as an allusive reflection beneath the surface of her epistle, the sense of the phrases begins to shimmer with opposites and distinctions: physical loss and spiritual gain, greatness and littleness (deficiency), fertility and sterility.

Malvolio has been offered an oblique warning about the futility of his marriage, if not a veiled insult, but fails to catch either. He would not, however, have known the gospel in the Authorized Version, and any kind of Puritan would have been most likely to be familiar with the Geneva Bible. The 1560 text translates the crucial verse in Matthew in a slightly different way:

For there are some chaste, which were so borne of (their) mothers bellie: and there be some chaste, which be made chaste by men: and there be some chaste, which haue made them selues chaste for the kingdome of heauen.

The effect of 'chaste' is a good deal blander, and implies choice rather than compulsion or accident, although the second clause becomes puzzling in this respect. But the marginal glosses, a chief feature of the Calvinist bibles, leave the reader in no doubt over the sense in the first instance: 'the worde signifieth (gelded) and they were so made because they shuld, kepe the chambers of noble women: for they were iudged chaste.' Malvolio, keeper of the chamber to Olivia, certainly wishes to be judged chaste, but is far from deeming himself unable to marry, from recognizing his own incapacity. The gloss on those that make themselves chaste, or who achieve chasteness, might we say, explains the phrase as a positive effect of grace, and of an effort of free will rather than negative self-abnegation or mutilation: Christ's phrase refers to those 'Which haue the gift of c tin ce, & vse it to serue God with more free libertie.' And perhaps because the connection between chastity and godliness has an unfortunately Papist slant, the final sentence of the verse, Christ's second caveat, receives the following gloss: 'This gift is not commune for all men, but is verie rare, and giv to fewe: therefore men may not rashly absteine from marriage.' The Puritan reading of the text, finally, is to endorse the argument of comedy. This is made particularly clear in Calvin's own commentary on these verses. Speaking of the disciples' uncertainty, he writes, perhaps rather surprisingly:

But why do they not think on their side how hard was the bondage of their wives? Simply because they are thinking only of themselves and their own convenience and are not motivated by the mind of the flesh that they forget others and want only themselves to be considered. Their ungodly ingratitude betrays itself that they reject this wonderful gift of God out of fear of one inconvenience or out of boredom. According to them it would be better to flee marriage altogether than to tie oneself to a perpetual bond of fellowship. But if God instituted marriage for the common welfare of the human race, it is not to be rejected because it carries with it some things which are less agreeable.

The world must be peopled, and the will of God followed. Malvolio may therefore have some sense of the buried text, but without necessarily reading it as being directed against marriage; God, or 'Jove', as he may
have more innocuously become by the time of the Folio text, seems to be overseeing the whole affair, including the interpretative spirit with which the sense of the words is received. Malvolio's reading of the letter, which he imagines to be free of 'imagination', could therefore be said to be a parody of the tendency of Puritan interpretation to read ambiguous texts in the direction of a theological programme, or to invoke the will of God to endorse personal predilections.

Godliness may render a man unfit for marriage, but the Geneva glosses also warn that 'Some by nature are vnable to marië, and some by arte'; 'The worde Eunuche is a generali word, and hath diuers kinds under it, as gelded men and bursten men.' By extension, one might say that the metaphoric application of physiological circumstances, Christ's starting point, hath divers kinds under it. Malvolio's spiritual sterility renders him unfit for comic marriage, whatever his physical potency may be. More importantly to the rituals of comedy, the gulling which is initiated in the box-tree scene is an extended episode of humiliation. Induced to declare himself no eunuch by nature, Malvolio then puts himself at risk of being made one by art. His self-exposure, capture, imprisonment, and binding—the entire course of his 'bafflement'—is not only the well-recognized expulsion of repressive order from festival and holiday, but an act of sexual degradation—a displaced gelding, through which Malvolio is emasculated by the laughter of the sexually united pairs:

Maria writ
The letter, at Sir Toby's great importance,
In recompense whereof he hath married her.
(Twelfth Night, 5.1.359-61)

Yet however absurd the holy duty of marriage may seem in Malvolio's case—and it is not so much that the world has no need of more Malvolios as that he is contemplating marriage with the wrong person and for entirely the wrong reasons—it is extremely important to the play as a whole. 'If anyone imagines', says Calvin, 'that it is to his advantage to be without a wife and so without further consideration decides to be celibate, he is very much in error. For God, who declared that it was good that the woman should be the help meet for the man, will exact punishment for contempt of his ordinance. Men arrogate too much to themselves when they try to exempt themselves from their heavenly calling.' The solemnity of God's punishment may be out of place in a comedy, as may the name of God itself, but the sense of 'heavenly calling' in sexual union is precisely in key with the magical happiness towards which the romantic comedies move. Resistance against this movement, or surprised acquiescence in it, is generally expressed with reference to purely natural or pagan forces, as when Viola speaks to Olivia about her beauty.

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.
(1.5.230-2)

Or when, at the end of the same scene, Olivia gives in to something beyond her own power to resist:

Fate, show thy force. Our selves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be; and be this so.
(1.5.300-1)

It is Olivia who most resists her obligation to marry by taking on a vow to what she imagines are higher things. Her withdrawal from the world is cast in the language of religious observance.

… like a cloistress she will veilèd walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine—
But the form of the observance, as Feste points out, is really without a religious object, an empty fetish like that of abjuring the sight and company of men, 'as if celibacy contained some meritorious service—just as the Papists imagine it is an angelic state. But all Christ intended', Calvin says of making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake, 'was that the unmarried should set the aim before them of being more ready for the exercises of religion if they are freed from all cares. It is foolish to imagine that celibacy is a virtue, for this is no more pleasing to God in itself than fasting is, nor does it deserve to be reckoned among the duties required of us.' The 'divinity' the disguised Viola brings to Olivia shows her the vanity of withdrawing from the world. False and true divinity continue to pursue each other, with ironic effect, throughout the play. Immediately following the scene in which a false priest catechizes the desperate Malvolio, Olivia marries the dream she has loved since the fifth scene of Act 1.

If you mean well
Now go with me, and with this holy man,
Into the chantry by. There before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace.

(4.3.22-8)

The wonderful gift of God is celebrated in a religious ceremony which the seemingly arbitrary forces of nature, imagination, and sheer chance have helped bring about. The 'peace' Olivia looks forward to is precisely what has eluded Malvolio at the end of the play—but his symbolic and structural roles are very different from hers.

Viola's loss of a brother does not lead her to a cloistered withdrawal from the world, but she does pursue concealment, and specifically proposes a disguise which will remove her from the responsibilities of sexuality: 'Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.' She makes herself a eunuch not for the kingdom of heaven's sake but to gain some advantage over the forces of time and occasion, both of which eventually give her the peace they give Olivia. The exotic nature of Viola's proposed role, however, is unlikely to render her unobtrusive: in a Christian climate the eunuch was both freakish and foreign, specifically Turkish, as the Captain recognizes in his acknowledgment of Viola's request. Eunuchs might be fascinating in themselves as human types, but certainly by virtue of being involved in the mythologized fantasy world of Turkish sexuality. No more is made of the oddity of Viola's disguise—she is no Castrucchio, as Orsino's Ilyria is not Volpone's Venice—but she retains a troublingly provocative physical presence, constantly drawing attention to her appearance from Orsino, Malvolio, Feste, and chiefly from Olivia. Disguise, and hence denial of sexual identity in her case, is a 'wickedness' as much as it is creative and liberating. It liberates, in fact, only for so long, and time first draws the knot of confusions tighter before untangling it. Olivia's claim on her as a husband, which she is able to corroborate with priestly authority, threatens first Viola's death and then the loss of the man she loves. So, once the appearance of Sebastian has begun to resolve the paradoxes, we have Viola's insistence, echoed by Orsino, that she resume her own clothes: 'Do not embrace me' she tells her brother, and the prohibition is implicitly extended to her future husband. As she is a man—or a eunuch—she is not ready to give herself to anyone.

Viola's superfluous disguise in Act 5 is matched by that of the humiliated Malvolio, still wearing the ludicrous costume he has been gulled into assuming by his reading of the letter—point devise, the very man. The 'notable shame' he has undergone has included his parading in the clothes and demeanour of an aspiring lover—a sexual role quite out of keeping with his peevish, repressed, sterile self-regard. One of the roles of festival customs, modern social historians agree, was to enforce communal order as much as temporarily to
subvert it. David Underdown has described the clash in seventeenth-century English society between the cohesive function of festival and the godly order of those with a new vision of and programme for social organization:

The division in the English body politic which erupted in civil war in 1642 can be traced in part to the earlier emergence of two quite different constellations of social, political, and cultural forces, involving diametrically opposite responses to the problems of the time. On the one side stood those who put their trust in the traditional conception of the harmonious, vertically integrated society—a society in which the old bonds of paternalism, deference, and good neighbourliness were expressed in familiar religious and communal rituals—and wished to strengthen and preserve it. On the other stood those—mostly among the gentry and middling sort of the new parish élites—who wished to emphasize the moral and cultural distinctions which marked them off from their poorer, less disciplined neighbours, and to use their power to reform society according to their own principles of order and godliness. 7

The church ale—at which cakes and ale were the traditional fare—was one typical site of this conflict. An ancient parish tradition—a kind of communal picnic with drinking, as well as piping, dancing, and sometimes dramatic activity—its function was to bring the parishioners together in a festive money-raising activity to support the parish's charitable works. To the Puritan eye this praise-worthy end was entirely vitiated by the displays of un-righteousness the feast gave rise to. From about the time of Twelfth Night onwards there are numerous instances from across the country of festal customs being used against local Malvolios, in the course of which the representatives of authority were both mocked and, in extreme cases, physically assaulted.

Violence is in fact an entirely traditional ingredient of many forms of game and festival, and hence could give further cause to the godly to suppress festive customs. The liminal and group-bonding functions of football games with neighbouring villages, for example, are noted by Underdown: "Tis no festival unless there be some fightings' is a contemporary saying he quotes (p. 96). Personal or communal rivalries and disputes could therefore be sorted out—more or less symbolically—under the cover of festival licence. In Twelfth Night it is Sir Toby who is the lord of violent misrule, and he is perhaps not uncharacteristic of enthusiastic seventeenth-century revellers in that during his final appearance in the play he is both drunk and bleeding. The particular contest he has just lost, begun in jest and ended in earnest, is with a young stranger over his apparent sexual invasion into territory Toby may regard as his to defend, if not to bestow. However ironically, he has promised Olivia to Sir Andrew, and his oath to his gull earlier in the play is made on the physical manifestations of his own manliness: 'If thou hast her not i'th' end, call me cut' (2.3.180-1). Once Cesario shows some fighting spirit, male prowess is at stake: 'Come, my young soldier, put up your iron. You are well fleshed … Nay then, I must have an ounce or two of this malapert blood from you' (4.1.37-43).

Malvolio's heated imaginings about Olivia in the letter scene give rise to a string of violent stage-whispers from the box-tree—'O for a stone-bow to hit him in the eye!'; 'Fire and brimstone!'; 'Bolts and shackles!' (a premonition of Malvolio's punishment); 'Shall this fellow live?'; '… does not Toby take you a blow o' the lips, then?'; 'Out scab'; 'Marry, hang thee brock'; '… I'll cudgel him, and make him cry "O!"' After this, Malvolio is perhaps lucky to undergo the relatively lenient treatment he gets, although it is certainly a fairly frequent tendency in modern stagings of the play to emphasize the physical punishment in the revellers’ teasing of him in 3.4, and since the eighteenth century the pain and privation of the dark house scene have often been stressed, to the degree that Malvolio has seemed on the edge of being mad indeed. His binding—promised by Sir Toby in 3.4—is not usually seen. He leaves the stage free, and while on Shakespeare's stage he may have been entirely invisible in 4.2, these days we tend to see an anguished face and beseeching, clutching hands as he pleads with Sir Topas and Feste. In any event, in fictional terms he must be free enough to write his letter, and when he re-emerges into the world of light he doesn't usually bear about him signs of his bondage (the far commoner stage tradition is for him to have straw sticking to his hair and clothes). Yet he is still dressed in his lover's garb, as I noted above, usually sadly muddied and ripped in performance, to signal the trials of
The absurd costume, Maria's fantastical invention, includes the restricting bonds of the cross garters, which soon after he has put them on are already making him 'sad':

This does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering, but what of that?
(3.4.19-21)

The Grocer's Wife from The Knight of the Burning Pestle could tell him; there are dangers in putting on silly costumes: 'Tll see no more else indeed, la: and I pray you let the youths understand so much by word of mouth: for I tell you truly, I'm afraid o' my boy. Come, come, George, let's be merry and wise. The child's a fatherless child; and say they should put him into a strait pair of gaskins, 'twere worse than knot-grass; he would never grow after it' (2.92-8). The innocently lubricious sense of 'grow', typical of the Wife's chatter, alerts us to one element of Malvolio's shaming: his binding is a symbolic sign of his impotence, of his having been made a festival eunuch. I think he should keep his cross garters obediently tied until he finally hobbles off to seek revenge.

I want to return to the rituals of sexual humiliation, but first to explore a second violent festive practice which has frequently been noted in commentary on the play, as seeming in some way to stand for the treatment of Malvolio. The previously unannounced Fabian enters the play in 2.5 as a further resentful victim of Malvolio's war on holiday pastimes: he has been 'brought ... out o' favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here'. 'To anger him', Toby replies, 'we'll have the bear again, and we will fool him black and blue. Once again the promised violence happens only symbolically—Malvolio is not beaten up as is Captain Otter (as bear) by his wife (as dog) in Jonson's Epicoene—but we are reminded at this moment of the strong connections between festival and brutal punishment, and the evident need to give vent to disruptive and aggressive tendencies even in the midst of celebrations which affirmed the strength and mutual support of the community. Malvolio's bearishness remains in that he sees his tormentors as a 'pack'—hounds rather than people—at the end of the play. The violent accompaniments of festive activity are everywhere apparent in the social world surveyed by David Underdown: bear and bull baitings are the invariable entertainments at church ales. While one may have been attendant on feasting—the bull was baited before being butchered—the other patently was not. That the actual torturing of animals, whatever symbolic function it may have been recognized to carry, could itself take a symbolic form in festival is proved by an intriguing reference Underdown cites from Somerset in 1603, involving some trouble while someone was 'playing Christmas sports in a bear's skin' (p. 60). Such a winter-time activity—very reminiscent of Lanthorn Leatherhead's reported feats in Batholomew Fair (3.4. 126-28)—may have as much to do with The Winter's Tale as with Twelfth Night, but the ritualized hunting that is expressed in animal baiting, and the deliberate arousal, in the case of cock-fighting, for example, of competitive sexual aggression in the animals, reveal an ambivalent fascination with purely physical power and instinctive drive as forces which must be celebrated, yet punished. Jonson, once again, more directly incorporates festive baatings and huntings into his comic structure, and his plays are to that extent crueller than Shakespeare's. Volpone's direct address to the audience following his sentence by the court—"This is called mortifying of a fox'—reminds us of the festive custom of hunting a fox or other small animal indoors, within the hall at a feast, frequently involving killing it by driving it into the fire. One of the fox's sins in Volpone, of course, is lust. The totemic sexual rituals associated with hunting and killing the stag, however, are clear enough in Shakespeare's work. The festive song in As You Like It is an anthem of male prowess and anxiety—the lusty horn is given to the victor as a sign that he is a potential victim of forces which lie outside his direct control. Falstaff's ritual punishment for lust at the end of The Merry Wives of Windsor is suffered in the disguise of a male deer—he is symbolically pinched and burnt, rather than actually butchered and cooked. Falstaff's dis-horning, George Turberville tells us, exactly follows the English practice of dismembering the stag after the kill; following the removal of one sign of the deer's maleness, 'before that you go about to take off his skynne, the fyrst thing that must be taken from him, are his stones which hunters call his doulcettes'. These form part of 'the dayntie morselles which appertayne to the Prince or chief personage on field'. In Beaumont and Fletcher's Philaster the cowardly and lustful Pharamond has paid the woodmen for the dowcets and head of a slain deer (4.2)—that he evidently needs them as aphrodisiacs hardly commends his unassisted
sexual powers. Following the scenes of actual hunting in the fourth act, Pharamond becomes the human quarry of a popular riot in the fifth, when the citizens, like Laertes' Danish supporters, mutiny to reinstate Philaster. The language with which they threaten him deliberately recalls the hunting terms of Act 4, and his proposed punishment mockingly strips him of manhood.

PHARAMOND

Gods keep me from these hell-hounds.

1 CITIZEN

Shall's geld him, Captain?

CAPTAIN

No, you shall spare his dowcets, my dear donsels; as you respect the ladies let them flourish. The curses of a longing woman kills as speedy as a plague, boys.

1 CITIZEN

I'll have a leg, that's certain.

2 CITIZEN

I'll have an arm.

2 CITIZEN

He had no horns, sir, had he?

CAPTAIN

No, sir, he's a pollard; what wouldst thou do with horns?

2 CITIZEN

O, if he had, I would have made rare hafts and whistles of'em; but his shin bones if they be sound shall serve me. (5.4.53-74)12

Symbolic hunting therefore carries within it a potential for sexual shaming and degradation. Pharamond and Falstaff are both punished for lust by public exposure, and Malvolio's treatment clearly has something of a similar purpose, although it certainly lacks the direct physical violence the two former figures suffer. At least this is so in the text; there is a theatrical tradition of varying degrees of physical torture of Malvolio by Feste in 4.2. Malvolio's punishment is to be 'propertied', but largely to be forgotten, removed, and 'baffled' until his incandescent entry into Act 5. He is certainly punished for excess, but punished by deprivation, and his physical powerlessness in the dark house is perhaps to remind him of his unsuitability for the preposterous role he has taken on. A born eunuch, in Christ's terms, he is absurdly unfitted for the position of comic wooer and bridegroom.

The impotent lover, in body, mind, and social conduct, is a stock figure of erotic comedy. The absurdly enamoured father, the old man, the stupid heir, the pretentious braggart, the rake, all are variant threats to the
union of the true lovers, and they must be outwitted, exposed, or otherwise removed in the course of the plot. In Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* the egregious ninny Cokes, the contracted bridegroom of the witty but powerless Grace Wellborn, loses his fiancée to Quarlous in the liberating chaos of a festival atmosphere. He also loses his money, but in having his purse cut—twice—he is symbolically gelded of the manhood he so ineptly represents. He half recognizes what has happened to him in the words he addresses—mistakenly—to Overdo: 'Cannot a man's purse be at quiet for you, i' the master's pocket, but you must entice it forth, and debase it?' (3.5.213-14), while Wasp scornfully tells his charge 'now you ha' got the trick of losing, you'd lose your breech, an't 'twere loose' (ibid. 221-3). Cokes, though he hardly cares in the regressively childish festive world he has entered, is symbolically shamed and neutered. His fascination with the puppets, babies, and trash is a complete identification—he, like the puppet Dionysius, has no sex. It is Jonson's disciple Richard Brome who writes the frankest version of what appears to be a submerged theme of festival and comedy when in his 1639-40 play *The Court Beggar* a doctor is held down across a table and threatened with castration at the hands of a 'Sowgelder' (4.2). His protests remind the audience of the dangerous uproar of popular holidays:

> You dare not use this violence upon me  
> More rude than rage of Prentices.  

The gelding turns out to be a 'counterfeit plot'—partly a deliberate degradation in revenge for the doctor's prior actions, and partly to scare him into confessing that the patient he is attending is, like Antonio in *The Changeling*, a sham madman. The scene could therefore be taken simply as a particularly risqué piece of farce used to enliven a rather creakily episodic plot, yet the larger question remains of why this particular action may have occurred to Brome as being suitable to a comedy filled with spurious and defective wooers.

Nothing quite so specifically humiliating or violent turns up in the court records of pre-Restoration England, although there is a good deal of material connected with disorders and outrages arising from popular rituals of sexual control. The usual individual target for the community to direct its displeasure over aberrant sexual conduct was likely to be a woman; the whore, the adulteress, the scold, all suffered ritual mockery, exposure, and varyingly violent degrees of punishment. Yet the ceremonies which marked such disapproval—ridings, parades, rhymes, lampoons, duckings, and so forth—were by no means directed at women alone. The man who suffered himself to be cuckolded or beaten was likely to be a target of mockery as an unmanly man, a man who couldn't wear the breeches. One particularly widespread custom, which has a literary record that stretches at least from Samuel Butler to Thomas Hardy, was the skimmington, a wild processional ride involving disguise, rough music, and, as Martin Ingram has written, 'mocking laughter, sometimes light-hearted, but often taking the form of hostile derision which The ritual could, into physical occasion, escalate violence'. The ritual is clearly related to symbolic hunting, and indeed could feature participants dressed in horns or animal skins. If the custom arose to mock unconventional sexuality or deviant behaviour within a marriage its scope could be far wider, as Ingram explains:

While female domination and immorality were the characteristic pretexts for ridings, there were other occasions. A simple form of riding was sometimes used in a holiday context in 'trick or treat' games, and to punish people who refused to join in the festivities or who in other ways offended the holiday spirit. At Chichester in 1586, a game of 'tables' on New Year's Eve was rudely interrupted when 'William Brunne who then played the part of a lord of misrule came in … and said that that game was no Christmas game and so perforce took [one of the players] … from thence and made him ride on a staff to the High Cross.' The use of ridings to punish people who would not give money to Lords of Misrule on holidays was denounced by Philip Stubbes. Unfortunately, when refusal to take part in festivities (or, worse still, attempts to suppress such festivities) were based on Puritan principles, such ridings were apt to become distinctly less lighthearted and more elaborate. John Hole, the Puritan constable of Wells, discovered this to his cost in 1607. Hole and his associates tried to
suppress the city's May games, which had been organised on a particularly grand scale that year in order to raise money for the repair of St Cuthbert's church. Hole's interference raised a storm of opposition, and he and his friends were savagely derided in a series of spectacular ridings performed before thousands of people. (Ingram, pp., 170-1)

The John Hole case, which was surveyed by C. J. Sisson in Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age as long ago as 1936, is particularly suggestive about the treatment given Malvolio by the revellers of Twelfth Night. Hole, like Malvolio, set out to oppose holiday revels on principle; the revellers' revenge was character assassination, as Hole was accused of adultery with another godly objector to the festival, the delightfully named Mrs Yard. None of the surviving lampooning verses make what one would think to be the obvious jokes about hole and yard (suitably inverted in good festival fashion), but Hole is simultaneously accused of lechery and impotence, like Malvolio doubly mocked for sexual ambition and incapacity. Particularly the exposure of the Wells killjoys by theatricalizing them—staging them in disguises and caricatured paintings—by making them join, in effigy at least, the very celebrations they have tried to stop, reveals a direct relationship between festive rituals and the comic structure of such plays as Twelfth Night. In the play Malvolio is more subtly tricked into staging himself as a parodic festival figure—a grotesquely inept embodiment of the energy celebrated in holidays, and as such a betsy, a guy, a Jack-a-Lent, a cockshot man, at whom people can hardly forbear hurling things. Death, darkness, sterility, and ill luck are heaped on his back, and laughed out of the play.

His scapegoat function has frequently been remarked on, but one theoretical defence of festive customs, presumably including the shaming rituals, was that they were restorative and socially cohesive. The exhibition of conflict or aberrance under the special conditions of holiday licence would lead, with luck, to resolution and rehabilitation. Thus those accused as rioters at Rangeworthy near Bristol in 1611 defended themselves by pointing out that communal feasting was for 'the refreshing of the minds and spirits of the country people, being inured and tired with husbandry and continual labour … for preservation of mutual amity, acquaintance, and love … and allaying of strifes, discords and debates between neighbour and neighbour'. This sounds remarkably like the spirit of Fabian's plea to Olivia not to let retributive justice inappropriately be applied to holiday jests:

Good madam, hear me speak,  
And let no quarrel nor no brawl to come  
Taint the condition of this present hour,  
Which I have wondered at. In hope it shall not,  
Most freely I confess myself and Toby  
Set this device against Malvolio here

How with a sportful malice it was followed  
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge  
If that the injuries be justly weighed  
That have on both sides passed.  
(5.1.352-65)

But the victims of the Rangeworthy riot, a Puritan constable and his followers who were beaten when they tried to arrest musicians and dancers, did pursue their case through the courts, and hence we happen to know about the incident. David Underdown holds up this obscure rural scuffle as an emblem of a changing world: 'The Rangeworthy revel is thus a classic example of Jacobean cultural conflict. Rituals appropriate to a traditional society, enshrining ancient values of custom and good neighbourhood, were attacked by people in authority who put individual piety, sobriety, and hard work above the older co-operative virtues' (p. 63).
Malvolio refuses Fabian's open hand. He has, after all, been most notoriously abused, and excluded from achieving greatness in any sense. Donald Sinden's entertaining account of playing the part ends with his invocation of the bitterness of Malvolio's humiliation and disappointment. There is nothing for him following his exit, Sinden suggests, save suicide. Yet surely only a particularly sensitive, late-Romantic Malvolio would be snuffed out by a device. I think the seventeenth-century man is heading for his lawyer, and Star Chamber.

To return, finally, to texts, it is worth noting that mock preaching was a recurrent element in popular revels, particularly those with a satiric thrust against a local community figure. Such was the play which Sir Edward Dymock had performed at his house in Kyme, Lincolnshire, in August 1601, and which guyed Henry, Earl of Lincoln. Following the play proper one John Cradock preached a mock sermon in a black gown and cap; a witness said that he wore 'A counterfeit beard, and standing in a pulpit fixed to the maypole on kyme greene, havinge a pott of ale or beare hanginge by him in stead of a hower glasse.' The costume sounds remarkably like that of Sir Topas, but the performance was evidently a good deal more elaborate, though entirely in key with Feste's excellent fooling. Cradock 'did represent the person of a Minister or Priests, and did … utter … "The Marcie of Musterd Seed and the blessing of Bullbeefe and the peace of Pottelucke be with you all. Amen."

Cradock's spoof text for the sermon, from 'The 22 chapter of the book of Hitroclites', led to a series of improbable romance tales and jests, possibly with further parodie reference to the formulae of the liturgy and scripture. Some years later in Wiltshire a drunken revel included the preaching from the pulpit within the parish church of a mock sermon on the text of 'the one and twentieth chapter of Maud Butcher and the seventh verse' (Ingram, p. 166). Mockery of ecclesiastical authority and liturgical frameworks for mock heroics may be thought particularly Rabelaisian revels, but they were evidently equally English, and survived to the years when they might be employed to deride Puritan earnestness. If they did not appear overtly in plays licensed for the public stage, that should not surprise us. The subter parodic text Maria includes in the spurious letter is at once a test of Malvolio's reading, a word to the wary, and a libel on his sexuality; as such it lies entirely within the English festival tradition.

Notes

1 A further interpretation of Malvolio's chosen letters has been suggested by Leah Scragg: "'Her C's, her U's, and her T's: Why That?'; A New Reply for Sir Andrew Aguecheek', RES 42 (1991), 1-16. Her suggestion that the line may have some reference to cutpurses has an interesting incidental bearing on my argument in this essay: see below.

2 This translation is superseded by the 1582 (et seq.) Geneva New Testament, which gives the word as 'eunuches', and in every other respect is very close to the King James version. The Bishops' Bible (1568) uses 'chaste'.


4 That the text was read literally as well as metaphorically is demonstrated by its citation in the discussions over the Essex divorce case in 1614. George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted the passage as clear 'warrant' for annulment of marriage. King James, arguing against too narrow a definition of 'inability', denied that Christ's categories of male impotence were prescriptive. See The Narrative History of King James (London, 1651), pp. 95, 102. I am grateful to Professor Leslie Thomson for drawing my attention to this material.

5 Harmony, p. 249.

6 Harmony, p. 249.


15 For a political reading of the play see Martin Butler, Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642 (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 220-8. The aberrant sexual behaviour in the play might be said to be a further manifestation of the madness and corruption Butler locates as its organizing themes.

16 An incident related in a letter by Robert Gell to Sir Martin Stuteville in July 1628 concerns violent revenge for rape at the siege of La Rochelle. Ten men of the town dressed up as women to lure the guilty soldiers of the besieging army, who then 'were so received that all to save their lives yielded unto ye young men, and went into the town, where, beeing most severely and barbarously punished, they were sent back to glory in the camp of their exploit, for which they were never again fitted'. The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart., ed. J. O. Halliwell, 2 vols. (London, 1845), vol. 2, p. 201.


Critical Essays: Sample Essay Outlines

The following paper topics are designed to test your understanding of the play as a whole and to analyze important themes and literary devices. Following each question is a sample outline to help you get started.

**Topic #1**

It is obvious that the play’s tapestry contains more than a single plot. Write an essay analyzing the way in which the comic plot involving Malvolio becomes a perverse reflection of the love plot involving Orsino and Olivia. Discuss Cesario’s role as go-between for the Duke.
Outline

II. Explain the romantic plot.
A. An aristocratic man falls in love with a countess.
   1. The Duke has seen Olivia and desires union with her.
   2. He initially expresses the depth of his feeling in poetic lines.
B. Cesario acts as a go-between for the Duke.
   1. Cesario forms a practical complement to the Duke’s romantic behavior.
C. Olivia rejects the Duke’s love.
   1. Olivia says that she cannot love the Duke while she mourns her brother’s death.
   2. Olivia, rather, falls in love with Cesario.

III. Explain the comic plot.
A. Maria plots to gull Malvolio.
   1. There is no genuine source for Malvolio’s love; it’s the result of a scheme.
   2. The letter left by Maria is falsified.
B. Malvolio picks up and reads a falsified letter.
   1. The letter seems to be in Olivia’s hand.
   2. It commands him to adopt peculiar behaviors.
C. Malvolio proceeds under the influence of a devious trick.
   1. Malvolio thinks Olivia is in love with him.
   2. Malvolio approaches Olivia in yellow stockings and cross-gartered.

IV. Malvolio’s love is a perversion of the Duke’s and Olivia’s.
A. Malvolio’s love is an artificial fantasy—put stress on the “artificial.”
   1. Malvolio loves on the basis of a letter and a readiness in his own mind.
   2. Malvolio’s love has no possibility of being realized because Olivia has no intention of loving him.
B. Orsino, by contrast, is truly in love with Olivia.
   1. Orsino’s feelings have a genuine source.
   2. Orsino is truly involved in an effort to court a woman.
   3. Ideally, he could possibly achieve Olivia.
C. Malvolio winds up humiliated.
   1. Malvolio isolates himself with a sense of being abused.
   2. Rather than being an accepted lover, Malvolio winds up wronged and humiliated.

V. Conclusion: To the extent that the schemers are cruel, Malvolio’s love for Olivia is perverse. Love cannot thrive in an atmosphere of ill will.

Topic # 2
Many playwrights have dealt with the theme of love. It’s a theme that carries so much interest because of the power it wields in peoples’ lives. Write an essay that explores Shakespeare’s treatment of the theme of love in Twelfth Night.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: The formal design of Twelfth Night illustrates the theme of love as having two key aspects, “loving” and maintaining the relationship.
II. The aspect of “loving” as embodied in the play
A. Define the concept of “loving.”
   1. The Duke serves as an example of the true lover.
   2. The Duke places Olivia on a pedestal.
B. Olivia falls in love with Cesario.
   1. Just as the Duke loved Olivia upon seeing her, so Olivia loves Cesario when they meet.
   2. Olivia pours forth poetic feeling for Cesario.
C. Both Orsino and Olivia are rejected in their loving.
   1. Olivia rejects the love of the Duke.
   2. Cesario rejects Olivia’s love.

III. Cesario represents the practical aspect of love that sustains a relationship.
A. Cesario goes to work for the Duke.
   1. Cesario’s speech shows that he understands the need to be realistic and practical.
   2. Cesario diligently attempts to woo Olivia for the Duke.
B. Cesario does not give himself over to sentiment.
   1. Cesario does not fall in love and utter love speeches.
   2. Cesario is a man of action, not of words.
C. Cesario has a twin brother.
   1. Cesario’s twin brother, Sebastian, will prove a similar complement to Olivia.
   2. Olivia’s love is similar to the Duke’s in its romantic nature.

IV. The two aspects of love are brought together in the final harmony of the play.
A. Sebastian enters Illyria.
   1. Sebastian is puzzled over Olivia’s immediate affection for him.
   2. The two lovers can achieve their other halves because Sebastian joins Viola.
B. Cesario reveals his true female identity.
   1. Olivia and Sebastian have married; Cesario is not a man.
   2. The Duke can propose to Viola upon learning of Olivia’s marriage.
C. The couples of the love plot complement each other perfectly.
   1. Cesario is the practical aspect that sustains the love which Orsino embodies.
   2. Sebastian, like his sister, represents the practical aspect for Olivia’s amalgam of love feeling.

V. Conclusion: Looking at a theme in an abstract sort of way, as here with love, requires that the play be seen quite like a static work of art. Characters thus become more like poetic symbols than real, dynamic personalities.

Topic # 3
The festive atmosphere is so much a part of this play that it should be considered to gain a deeper understanding. Sir Toby, as the “lord of misrule,” is the master of ceremonies and surely keeps the party going. Write an essay that explores the function of the foolery and fun within the play.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: Shakespeare weaves in a festive atmosphere that enhances the enjoyment of the love plot.
   II. Define the festive atmosphere.
      A. The title Twelfth Night indicates a holiday and day of revelry.
         1. Tradition places a “lord of misrule” in charge of the fun in this play.
         2. The holiday includes eating, drinking, and entertainment.
      B. Sir Toby handles the merriment quite well.
         1. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew eat and drink for diversion.
2. Sir Toby instigates a fight that provides high-spirited entertainment.
C. The Clown plays a remarkable role in the festivities.
   1. The Clown is a jester who is clever at wordplay.
   2. The Clown sings for the Duke and the other characters.

III. The saturnalia is absorbed in the action of the play.
A. The gulling of Malvolio as an example of high jinks
   1. Sir Toby approves of the way Maria orchestrates the scheme.
   2. The spectators take eerie pleasure in Malvolio’s humiliation.
B. Imagery underscores the awareness of a holiday
   1. Sir Toby uses dance images in a conversation with Sir Andrew.
   2. Sir Toby refers to wines and has a reputation for being a drunk.
C. Feste’s role in the festive design
   1. He impersonates Sir Topas when speaking with Malvolio.
   2. Feste and Cesario have a meeting of the minds in their conversation.

IV. The intersection of the festive element and the love theme
A. Sir Andrew as one of Sir Toby’s men has a mock duel with Cesario.
   1. Sir Toby suggests that a show of valor will entice Olivia.
   2. Sir Andrew is egged on to confront Cesario.
B. The content of the Clown’s songs relates to the theme of love.
   1. The first song Feste sings deals with true love.
   2. Feste also sings a song that expresses Orsino’s frustrated love.
C. The last act consists in a dizzying array of interludes.
   1. The act has the semblance of a large party with all the characters coming together to share in the roistering.
   2. Sir Toby marries Maria in recompense for her cleverness.

V. Conclusion: Love can thrive in almost any environment. But, perhaps an ambience that is full of fun and liveliness can best match the emotional high that being in love means for some.

**Critical Essays: Suggested Essay Ideas**

**Act I, Scene 1**
1. Does the Duke’s opening speech show praise for Olivia in particular or for the experience of love in general? Explain your answer by citing specific lines.

2. What kind of judgment would you make about the Duke’s character based on his speech and behavior in the first scene? Discuss why you get this impression. Discuss either several specific qualities or one generalized personality trait.

**Act I, Scene 2**
1. Viola comments on the deceptiveness of appearances. People aren’t always what they seem to be. Why do you think this theme would be significant in a play that deals with love? Cite evidence from the play to support your answer.

2. Why does the love object have to come down from the altar of the lover’s worship? Why, that is, can’t the Duke keep praising Olivia forever? How does Viola make it clear that there’s more to being in love than just poetry? Make sure you present your topic sentences clearly in the essay.
Act I, Scene 3
1. Sir Andrew may not be a good suitor for Olivia. Defend this thesis statement referring to specific examples from the dialogue.

2. Analyze the dance imagery found in lines 116–138. Why do you think Shakespeare included it in the dialogue? With what aspect of the play does it tie in? What does it emphasize?

Act I, Scene 4
1. Think of your efforts to win a sweetheart when you’ve fallen in love, or what you might do to win one. In what ways would those efforts be similar or different from Cesario’s endeavors to woo Olivia for the Duke?

2. Consider once again the definition of “Romantic comedy” stated earlier. Why do you think the society of a given era would desire a happy ending? Would you like to see Twelfth Night end in another way than it does?

Act I, Scene 5
1. How does the Clown prove that Olivia is a fool? Is he correct or incorrect in his assessment? Explain your answer with evidence found in the text.

2. How many love strands does the first act contain? Who is involved in them? Where do the relationships stand by the end of Act I in relation to how they will eventually develop?

Act II, Scene 1
1. Name one characteristic of poetic language and one of prose. After you state those, select one speech in the play that contains poetry and another from Act II, Scene i that contains prose, and explain the differences you notice between the two. Allow your imagination to explore the significance of the two different styles.

2. An important issue to be aware of when discussing characters’ motivations and fates is that of “free will” versus “determinism or fate.” Define these two concepts. And then, consider lines 3–8, spoken by Sebastian, in the light of that issue. Does Sebastian feel that he is in full control of things?

Act II, Scene 2
1. An important issue to be aware of when discussing characters’ motivations and fates is that of “free will” versus “determinism or fate.” Define these two concepts. And then, consider lines 3–8, spoken by Sebastian, in the light of that issue. Does Sebastian feel that he is in full control of things?

Act II, Scene 3
1. Describe the fun and festive atmosphere that makes up most of this scene. What role does Feste the Clown play in it? Cite specific lines to strengthen your description. Do you enjoy the playfulness? Why or why not?

2. Analyze Maria’s speeches in this scene. Explain carefully her motive to entrap Malvolio. Do you believe that she is justified in doing it?

Act II, Scene 4
1. Analyze the song in this scene. Who and what is involved in it? Which Twelfth Night character does it relate to? Explain your answer.

2. Why does the Duke believe that the man should be older than the woman in a relationship? Consider lines 29–39. Do you agree with his opinion? Why or why not?

Act II, Scene 5
1. Make the argument that Sir Toby, Andrew, Maria, and Fabian are behaving cruelly toward Malvolio. Is
their cruelty justified in the light of the whole play? Do you personally accept the gulling of Malvolio?

2. Write an essay on “the love letter.” First of all, define what you think it is. Does Maria’s dropped letter fit your definition? What do you think of the requests made in the letter? How would you compose your own real love letter.

Act III, Scene 1
1. Describe the way in which the Clown carries out his role as “fool.” What functions does he see himself as performing? Does he fulfill them as he thinks he should? Make a judgment at the end of your essay as to whether he is a necessary or superfluous character in the play.

2. As Olivia is in the process of revealing her feelings for Cesario, she makes use of metaphors drawn from the animal kingdom—lines 120–122 and lines 130–131. State what these animal metaphors are, and then explain their significance. How do they illuminate the depth of Olivia’s feelings at the moment?

Act III, Scene 2
1. Articulate Fabian and Sir Toby’s assumption about the strength of a man’s valor in inciting love. Then write an opinion essay on whether you think valor, “machoness,” manliness, etc. are all that are necessary to win a woman’s love. Are they sound bases to build a love on? Explain your thesis.

2. Summarize briefly all the love connections up to this point. Even sound like a gossip. Tell who loves who and who has hopes of who. Then, in the remainder of the essay, explain who you think deserves to be together with whom. In other words, you be the matchmaker. (You don’t have to agree with Shakespeare’s resolution of the complications.)

Act III, Scene 3
1. Why doesn’t Antonio find love in this play? Is it because a play can only have so many major and minor characters? Does he deserve to be matched up with Olivia, Viola, or some other woman in Illyria?

2. How does Shakespeare render the relationship between Antonio and Sebastian? Compare their relationship to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew’s. Discuss the importance of friendship in a play like Twelfth Night.

Act III, Scene 4
1. Some critics have argued that Malvolio is presumptuous and arrogant. Discuss the extent to which those characteristics are responsible for his gulling and eventual madness. Support your case with evidence from the text.

2. Analyze this play in terms of its credibility and realism. To what extent is the action credible? To what extent is it fantasy and romance? Define the concepts you work with in your essay.

Act IV, Scene 1
1. In what way do Viola–Sebastian constitute a “poetic symbol,” as one critic has said. In other words, if they are one spirit in two bodies, how does that technique help us to understand Shakespeare’s vision of love in the play? Be careful to explain the symbolism before you construct your argument.

2. Discuss Olivia’s attitude toward the brawl she comes upon. Find other places in the play where Sir Toby’s foolery is criticized and list them. Why do you think characters express disapproval for the festive behavior? How would the play stand without Sir Toby’s merriment?

Act IV, Scene 2
1. Why does the Clown insist that Malvolio is mad? Whom do you believe, Malvolio or Sir Topas/Clown? If
Malvolio is not mad, in your opinion, what does the Clown’s insistence suggest about his role in the play? If Malvolio is mad, explain why you don’t accept his contentions.

2. Analyze the song with which the Clown closes the scene. Is the allusion to the Devil in harmony with the preceding allusions in the scene? How does the song pass judgment on Malvolio?

**Act IV, Scene 3**
1. What is an “arranged marriage”? Do you know of anyone who was part of an arrangement? What motives may be involved? Compare an arranged marriage to the manner in which Sebastian and Olivia are brought together.

2. Consider the influence of “accident and flood of fortune” on Sebastian’s success with Olivia. Is the marriage just good luck and is Sebastian taking advantage of an opportunity to marry up? Discuss Sebastian’s attitude to Olivia in your essay.

**Act V, Scene 1**
1. Explain Antonio’s function in the play. Is he a minor or major character? Does he clarify or interpret what is going on with the twins? Does he oppose or support the twins?

2. Isolate the methods that Shakespeare uses to establish and reveal character. It would probably be best to do a character study of one particular character. Are the actions of the characters properly motivated and consistent?

---

**On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in Twelfth Night: Introduction**

**On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in Twelfth Night**

Lorna Hutson, *Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London*

*Elder Loveless.* Mistres, your wil leads my speeches from the purpose. But as a man—

*Lady.* A *Simile* servant? This room was built for honest meaners, that deliver themselves hastily and plainely, and are gone. Is this a time or place for *Exordiums, and Similes, and metaphors?*

"Shakespearean comedy," writes Stephen Greenblatt, "constantly appeals to the body and to sexuality as the heart of its theatrical magic." Without wishing to disparage the enterprise of writing histories of the body, or indeed to underestimate what such histories have accomplished in terms of enhancing our understanding of early modern culture, I would like in the following pages to challenge the operation of a certain kind of "body history" within recent Shakespeare criticism. I do not so much want to disagree with Greenblatt's statement as it stands, as to argue that our understanding of how Shakespeare's comedy intervened, both in its own time and subsequently, to modify attitudes to sexuality and to gender has been more obscured than enlightened by the obsession with the "body" as Greenblatt here understands it, and with the kind of body history to which he and others have prompted us to turn.

I shall focus my argument on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, a play which, for all the curiously metaphoric, even disembodied nature of the language in which it articulates the desires of its protagonists, has nevertheless become the touchstone of this "body" criticism within Shakespeare studies. Yet it is worth remarking that the current critical interest in *Twelfth Night* as a play about the indeterminacy of gender and the arbitrary nature of sexual desire actually began with the contemplation not of the materiality of the body, but with that of the signifier. In much earlier twentieth-century criticism, Shakespeare's comedies have been appreciated as temporary aberrations from an established sexual and social order for the purposes of a thoroughly conservative "self-discovery" and return to the *status quo*.4 Saussurian linguistics, alerting critics to the way in which meaning in language is always the effect of a play of differences, enabled them to challenge such interpretations on their own terms by arguing that the conservative denouement was inadequate to contain and fix the meanings released by the play of differences. This was especially the case in comedies such as *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, in which the fiction of a woman's successful masquerade of masculinity is complicated by the understanding of its having been originally composed for performance by a boy. Suddenly, instead of being about the discovery of one's "true" identity, or a "natural" social and sexual order, it seemed that what the comedies were about was the ease with which systems of sexual difference could be dismantled, and the notion of gendered identity itself called into question. This was important when it happened—the mid-1980s—because at the same time feminist critics were beginning to draw attention to the misogynistic implications of the transvestite theater, thereby throwing into confusion that venerable tradition of critical delight in the sprightliness of Shakespeare's girls-dressed-as-boys. How could we go on liking Rosalind and Viola in the knowledge that what they really represented was the denial to women of access to the histrionic exchanges in which they excelled and we took pleasure?5 Just in time poststructuralist criticism saved us from the agony of this dilemma by recuperating the double transvestitism of the comedies as a calling into question of the "fully unified, gendered subject," thereby producing, instead of a patriarchal Shakespeare, a Shakespeare who, in the words of Catherine Belsey, offered "a radical challenge to patriarchal values by disrupting sexual difference itself."6

Subsequently, the notion that what the comedies were about was really the indeterminacy of gender was given a new and historically authenticating twist by investigations into the history of biological definitions of gender which seemed to prove that, in the minds of Shakespeare's contemporaries, gender itself was a kind of comic plot, the happy denouement of which could only be masculinity. A special issue of *Representations* on "Sexuality and the social body in the nineteenth century" contained an article by Thomas Laqueur which, though primarily concerned with the politics of nineteenth-century reproductive biology, was nevertheless to have a considerable impact on Renaissance literary studies as a result of what its findings implied about the biological construction of gender in the early modern period. Laqueur drew our attention to a momentous, but overlooked event in the history of sexuality. Sometime in the late eighteenth century, the old belief that women needed to experience orgasm in order to conceive was abandoned. Women were henceforward to be thought of as properly passionless, because passive, participants in the act of sexual reproduction. What this implied was nothing less than a change in the existing physiology of sexual difference: the ancient Galenic model, according to which the hidden reproductive organs of women were merely a colder, imperfectly developed, and introverted type of the penis and testicles, requiring to be chafed into producing their seed, was replaced by the modern notion of the incommensurability of male and female reproductive organs. Laqueur's crucial point, however, was that the need to replace the old Galenic "metaphysics of hierarchy" between the sexes with an "anatomy and physiology of incommensurability" actually anticipated any real scientific understanding of women's reproductive makeup, and must therefore have been motivated not by scientific discovery, but by the need to find a new rationale for the exclusion of women from Enlightenment claims for the equality of men.7

I am ignorant of the effect of Laqueur's argument on nineteenth-century criticism, but the impact on Renaissance studies has been considerable. Writing in 1986 Laqueur cites, in a footnote, a paper on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* by Stephen Greenblatt, which was first published in 1985 in a collection called *Reconstructing Individualism*8 and subsequently included in Greenblatt's 1988 *Shakespearean Negotiations* as...
the essay, "Fiction and Friction." Both authors evince exactly the same ancient and sixteenth- and
seventeenth-century medical texts—first and foremost, Galen on the exact parity between male and female
reproductive organs ("think of the 'uterus turned outward and projecting': Would not the testes [ovaries] then
necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the neck [the cervix], hitherto
concealed . . . be made into the male member?"
9 and then Galen's sixteenth and seventeenth-century readers,
Ambroise Paré, Jacques Duval, Thomas Vicary, Helkiah Croke, and Jane Sharp.
10 They also both cite
Montaigne, who twice refers to a story also told by Ambroise Paré about the sex-change of Marie-Germaine, a
contemporary inhabitant of Vitry-le-François, who had the misfortune or good fortune to realize her manhood
by jumping too energetically over a stream, thus prompting the eruption of the appropriate genitals.
11

Where Laqueur expounded the Galenic model of woman as introverted man in order to expose the politics of
nineteenth-century reproductive biology and its denial of female orgasm, Stephen Greenblatt's identical
quotations employ the model's stress on the defective "heat" of female reproductive organs, and the "friction"
required to activate them, as an allegory for the "theatrical representation of individuality in Shakespeare."
"Erotic chafing" writes Greenblatt, "is the central means by which characters in plays like The Taming of the
Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night realize
their identities and form loving unions." 12 One might be forgiven for balking at the definition of The Taming
of the Shrew as a fiction of "identity," or at the naturalization of its highly pragmatic argument of husbandry
as a form of "erotic chafing"; Greenblatt, however, refrains from pursuing his argument in relation to this or
indeed any of Shakespeare's comedies other than Twelfth Night. He puts the question of the relation of identity
to erotic chafing—of fiction to friction—more persuasively by asking, "how does a play come to possess
sexual energy?" 13. The answer is supplied by a reading of Twelfth Night, the crux of which is a short speech
made by the male twin, Sebastian, after Olivia has realized that his double, with whom she was in love, is a
woman and his sister. "So comes it, lady," says Sebastian, "you have been mistook."

But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.
14

According to Greenblatt, the "nature" to which Sebastian refers is, precisely, the Galenic discourse of the
one-gender body. Sebastian's reference to himself as "both a maid and man" consequently invokes the
inherent instability of gender as construed by this model, which in turn enables a good, radical-sounding
assault on more comfortable readings which essentialize sexual difference. Thus, Greenblatt quotes C. L.
Barber's argument that, "the most fundamental distinction that the play brings home to us . . . is the difference
between men and women" in order to reinforce, by contrast, the persuasiveness of his view that the
fundamental physiological distinction between men and women is precisely what the play can't "bring home,"
historically speaking. At the end of Twelfth Night, as he points out, "Viola is still Cesario—'For so you shall
be,' says Orsino, 'while you are a man' (5.1.386)—and Olivia, strong-willed as ever, is betrothed to one who
is, by his own account, both 'a maid and a man.'" 15 Notice just how closely this conclusion resembles the
poststructuralist reading which found Twelfth Night calling into question, "the possibility of a fully unified,
gendered subject." And, as with the poststructuralist argument, a crucial legacy of this reading is its obscuring
of the need to account, in feminist terms, for the historical fact of the absence of women's bodies from the
Renaissance stage. In the light of the Galenic theory of reproduction, concludes Greenblatt, it is easy to see
that transvestitism actually "represents a structural identity between men and women—an identity revealed in
the dramatic disclosure of the penis concealed behind the labia." 16 And the dramatic fiction—an outrage to
belief which is nevertheless endowed with generative because persuasive power—becomes analogous to the
friction or chafing required, according to this Galenic model, both to warm women into conception, and to
stimulate their reticent reproductive organs into realizing their latent virility.
Two years after Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" was published, Laqueur's thesis on the political and cultural investments of reproductive biology was published in book form as, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. The chapter on the pervasiveness of the Galenic model in Renaissance thought and culture carries an epigraph from *Twelfth Night*:

Sebastian [To Olivia]
So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived:
You are betrothed both to a maid and man.17

And he goes on to introduce the substance of his chapter thus:

Somehow if Olivia—played by a boy, of course—is not to marry the maid with whom she has fallen in love, but the girl's twin brother Sebastian; if Orsino's intimacy with "Cesario" is to go beyond male bonding to marriage with Viola, "masculine usurped attire" must be thrown off and woman linked to man. Nature must "to her bias" be drawn, that is, deflected from the straight path. "Something off center, then, is implanted in nature," as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, which "deflects men and women from their ostensible desires and toward the pairings for which they are destined." But if that "something" is not the opposition of two sexes that naturally attract one another—as it came to be construed in the eighteenth century—then what is it?18

The answer, of course, is the one-gender body according to Galen, with all its micro- and macrocosmic correspondences. The reading of a single Shakespeare play—or rather, the reading of *five lines* from a single Shakespeare play—seems to be doing a lot of work in supporting a circular argument about the relevance of body history to the question of how the magic of theater relates to the early modern conception of the body.

In the last five years, Laqueur's and Greenblatt's arguments and examples—Galen, Ambroise Paré, Jacques Duval, Helkiah Crooke, Jane Sharp, and (especially, perhaps) Montaigne—have been repeatedly invoked and quoted to support arguments about the pervasiveness of sixteenth-century fears that women might turn into men and men into women. Stephen Orgel thus accounts for the practice of having boys play women on the English stage by means of a complex argument whereby pathological fears about the chastity of women are weighed against equally pathological "fantas[ies] of a reversal from the natural transition from woman to man," which "are clearly related to anatomical theories of the essential homology of male and female." "Many cases," he writes, "were recorded of women becoming men through the pressure of some great activity."19 The endnote to this large claim refers not to women, but to alligators, but as the previous note referred the reader to Laqueur's *Representations* article and to Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction," we can be reasonably sure that the "many cases" in question are in fact the single case of Marie-Germaine, cited by both Paré and Montaigne. It is true that both Montaigne and Paré liken the case of Marie-Germaine to other examples; these, however, being drawn from such authors as Pliny and Ovid, scarcely seem to constitute "many cases being recorded" in the times of the authors concerned.20 Judith Brown's well-researched *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* exaggerates less, but still enlarges the evidence; "in a few cases women did not just imitate men, but actually became men," she writes, citing Greenblatt.21 More recently, Valerie Traub's *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*—which contains an interesting and persuasive account of *Twelfth Night*—claims, citing both Greenblatt and Laqueur, that fear of turning into a woman "may have been a common masculine fantasy" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.22 Traub's critical project involves enlarging Orgel's contention that the homoerotics of the Renaissance stage enabled "fantasies of freedom" for women as well as men23 by deconstructing the hierarchy of hetero-over homo-erotic readings of the plays, and revealing, as she puts it, "the polymorphous potential of desire itself,
which Shakespeare so assiduously evokes and controls." Though such potential might not seem to have much to do with women in an exclusively male theater, Traub argues that boys were available to women as objects of fantasy, and in rejecting what she characterizes as the "feminist" interpretation of the boy player's significance (that is, the boy-player as instrument of the patriarchal control of female chastity) reveals her indebtedness to Greenblatt in preferring to argue that the boy-player represented, "an embodiment of the metadramatic theme of identity itself: always a charade, a masquerade, other." Laqueur provides further support for Traub's rejection of the idea that an all-male theater in itself argues either indifference to women's intelligent participation, or fear of the effects of such participation upon the reputation of women and their families. On Laqueur's evidence Traub proposes that

in spite of patriarchal control of female sexuality through the ideology of chastity and the laws regarding marriage, there seems to have been a high cultural investment in female erotic pleasure—not because women's pleasure was intrinsically desirable, but because it was thought necessary for conception to occur.24

Once again, as in Greenblatt and in Orgel, the focus on a medical discourse about the body enables a way of speaking of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatic discourse, and of the position that it offered women in the audience, as exhaustively signified by its analogue, erotic arousal.

What bothers me most about these arguments is that while they seem to be historicizing and de-essentializing our ideas about the relationship of gender to sexuality, the "fantasies" and "anxieties" that they identify in early modern dramatic texts take no account at all of the way in which, in sixteenth-century society, a woman's sexual behavior was perceived to affect the honor and therefore the credit and economic power of her kinsmen.25 Nor do they consider the way in which such traditional conceptions of sexual honor, credit, and wealth were themselves being rapidly transformed by the technology of persuasion—or "credit"—that such dramatic texts as Shakespeare's represented. None of these critics appear to entertain the possibility that the capacity to plot, write, and be able to make use of the erudition and wit of a comedy such as Twelfth Night might in itself be more central to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceptions of what it meant to "be a man" than any theory derived from Galen. Moreover, for all the emphasis on plurality, the "polymorphous potential" and the "unmooring of desire" released by the comedies, there still seems to be a commitment to the twentieth-century "lit-crit" notion that what the comedies are really all about is individual identity. Traub explores how characters negotiate their individual desires in the plays as if they were real people and not even partly figures in a persuasive discourse or agents of a plot, while Greenblatt celebrates "the emergence of identity through the experience of erotic heat" as "this Shakespearean discovery, perfected over a six- or seven-year period from Taming to Twelfth Night."26 It seems that where literary criticism, as it was once conceived, celebrated the saturnalian energies of Shakespeare's comedies for returning us to a "natural" social and sexual order, these theorists of desire want to find a historically specific concept of "nature"—the Galenic one-sex body—that mimics what is actually their essentialized notion of culture as something which is always preoccupied with the theatrical destabilization of "identities"—identity is "always a masquerade, a charade, other." But what if the errors, confusions, and masquerades of comedy were not, in their own time, thought of as dramas of identity? And what if the way in which the plays construct sexual difference in relation to the audience crucially concerned not the sexual object-choice of men or women in the audience27, but whether or not they were able to make use of the play as a discourse, an argument, to enhance their own agency? When James Shirley wrote the preface to an edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's comedies, published in 1647, he called it the collection of

the Authentick Witt that hath made Blackfriers an Academy, where the three howers spectacle while Beaumont and Fletcher were presented, were usually of more advantage to the hopefull young Heire, then a costly, dangerous, forraine Travell . . . And it cannot be denied but that the young spirits of the Time, whose Birth and Quality made them impatient of the sowrer ways of education, have from the attentive hearing of these pieces, got ground
in point of wit and carriage of the most severely employed students . . . How many passable
discoursing dining witts stand yet in good credit upon the bare stock of two or three of these
single scenes! 28

I'd like to suggest that Shirley's final metaphor of young men as prodigals, living on the "credit" of an ability
to recommend themselves to strangers, a "stock" of wit which they have learned from plays, might tell us
something about the way in which Shakespeare's plays, for all that they invoke the magic of the reproductive
body, nevertheless construct sexual difference by appealing to the male (because formally educated) mind.

On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in Twelfth Night: 2. "Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd": Twelfth Night and Gl'Ingannati

My counter-argument depends on the claim that the kind of comic plot from which Shakespeare never
wavered—the five-act plot derived from Terence and Plautus—was perceived in his own time to be
concerned, not with the emergence of identity, but with men's discursive ability to improvise social credit, or
credibility. For all its popular appeal, Shakespeare's drama had a rigorous intellectual basis in the deliberative
or hypothetical structure of Terentian comedy as it was rhetorically analyzed in every grammar school.29 The
rhetorical analysis of Terentian comedy, far from being a rigid intellectual straightjacket (as I was implicitly
taught at school, where I learned that Shakespeare transcended his contemporaries by ignoring the classical
unities) enabled the achievement of a drama that carried emotional conviction as an unfolding narrative of
events—"a kind of history," as Shakespeare himself called it—by investing the representation of those events
with the impression of an intelligible combination of causality and fortuitousness.30 Not only were Terentian
plots themselves examples of how one might dispose an argument probably; they also offered images of male
protagonists who were themselves able, in moments of crisis, to improvise a temporary source of credit
(perhaps a disguise, or a fiction of being related to someone rich) that could defer disaster until the terms of
the crisis had altered to bring in a fortunate conclusion. The commentaries of the fourth-century grammarian,
Donatus, together with those of Melanchthon and other sixteenth-century humanists, were appended to every
dition of Terence, with the effect that no schoolboy could escape noticing how the plays demonstrated that
uncertain or conjectural arguments were more productive in social exchanges—because more productive of
emotional credibility—than the traditional means of assuring of good faith by oaths or other tokens.31

The Terentian plot characteristically concerned an illicit sexual union between a well born young man and a
prostitute, which in turn betrayed a promise made between his father and neighbor that the son should unite
their houses by marrying the neighbor's daughter. Characteristically, too, the plot managed to lend emotional
credibility to the highly improbable argument that the prostitute in question was, in fact, the long lost daughter
of the neighbor, thereby reconciling in her person the laws of desire and those of social exchange. Donatus's
commentary on Terence was discovered in 1433, and its impact on the composition of European drama
evident by the early sixteenth century.

Formal effects upon sixteenth-century vernacular drama, however, were complicated by the ideological
impacts of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, both of which revolutionized attitudes to sex, marriage,
and the conjugal household in Europe. For example: Terentian comedy articulates a sense in which the space
of prostitution is prophylactic; a household of male, citizen relatives is not dishonored by the entry of the
heroine whose desirability was initially associated with her marginal status and sexual accessibility to the
young hero. The plays therefore represent a society in which official to tolerance of prostitution first sanctions
the initial violation of chastity and ensures that, once attached to a citizen house-hold, the woman will be
protected by the very institution that once made her vulnerable. The Reformation and the
Counter-Reformation, however, brought with them an end to ideologically sanctioned prostitution, so that, as
Lyndal Roper writes of Augsburg, "any sexual relationship outside marriage, and any occasion on which the sexes mingled . . . might lead to sin." The marginal status once overtly allocated to prostitutes became a covertly allocated category of suspicion embracing all women.

Nevertheless, there were differences in the way in which Catholic and Protestant Europe acknowledged this and reacted to the sexual mores of the Terentian plot. While the writers of Italian *commedia erudita* cynically substituted citizens' wives and daughters for the prostitutes of Roman comedy, northern humanists tempered their enthusiasm for New Comedy as a model of Latinity and eloquence with a distaste for its evident authorization of illicit financial and sexual transactions, that is, clandestine marriages and rhetorical and sartorial impostures of credit. Thus, while Ariosto was claiming to outdo Terence and Plautus with his brilliant *I Suppositi* in which conjectural arguments ("supposes") are manipulated by the dramatist and the heroes to facilitate and subsequently legitimize the defloration of a citizen's daughter, German and Dutch humanists were redeeming the Terentian plot of sexual and financial deception by adapting it to the New Testament parable of the talents and that of the prodigal son. The waste of money and dissipation of male sexual energy, became, in these reforming "Christian Terence" plays, analogous to the danger posed to civil society by the abuse of conjectural argument in what we might call the "technology of credit" represented by the Terentian plot.

I use the word "technology" here to stress the material impact of the pedagogic dissemination of Terentian rhetoric. A pre-capitalist society necessarily guarantees its economic exchanges—exchanges of honor and wealth—by such instruments as oaths, which bind the faith of the contracting parties. The Terentian plot dramatizes a situation in which oaths and gestures of good faith bring about such an impasse as can only be resolved by exploiting the "error" or uncertainty about motive and intention which obtains between the participants in any social transaction. At a formal level, this very exploitation of error or uncertainty was the basis of the Terentian achievement of dramatic verisimilitude. Reformation dramatists were, therefore, concerned to appropriate the power of the Terentian formula to grant verisimilitude to dramatic fantasy, or to bestow credibility upon outrageous hypotheses, without endorsing the suggestion that this rhetorical "technology of credit" be exploited to facilitate deceptive sexual and financial exchanges in real life.

Much has been made, in recent discussions of "desire" on the English Renaissance stage, of the anti-theater writers' objections to the eroticized body of the boy player. These discussions evidently misunderstand the relationship of anti-theater writing to sixteenth-century neo-Terentian drama, with disastrously simplifying effects. Thus, for example, the title of one polemic against the stage, Stephen Gosson's *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* does not go unnoticed, but its relevance is missed; Laura Levine calls Gosson's conception of his attack as a five-act play "confused," while Jean Howard simply notes that Gosson "uses the five-act structure of classical drama to wage war on theatre." The point is that the five act Terentian argument represented, for educated sixteenth-century men, a technology of credit or of probability which, in its dramatic form, was perceived to be implicated in an ethos of betrayal, sexual and otherwise. Gosson's title indicates a need to appropriate dramatic probability for the cause of reform, as it moves from mocking native English drama's ignorance of verisimilitude to condemning the probable arguments of Italian *commedia erudita* for their thematic endorsement of sexual and financial deception:

> When the soule of your playes is ... Italian baudery, or the wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught? ... the discipline we gette by these playes is like to the justice that a certaine Schoolmaster taught in *Persia*, which taught his schollers to lye, and not to lye, to deceive, and not to deceive, with a distinction how they might do it to their friends, & how to their enemies; to their friends, for exercise; to their foes, in earnest. Wherein many of his pupils became so skillful by practise, by custome so bolde, that their dearest friends payde more for their learning than their enemies. I would wish the Players to beware of this kinde of schooling ... whilst they teach youthfull gentlemen how to love, and not to love ... As the mischiefe that followed that discipline of *Persia* enforced them to make a lawe, that young
men should ever after, as householders use to instruct their families: so I trust, that when the Londoners are sufficiently beaten with the hurt of suche lessons that are learned at Plaies, if not for conscience sake, yet for shunning the mischief that may privately breake into every mans house, this methode of teaching will become so hateful, that even worldly pollicy . . . shall be driven to banish it.  

Gosson, of course, had himself been a dramatist; English playwrights were not ideologically immune to the effects of the Reformation, and were themselves torn between admiration for the rhetorical proficiency of Italian commedia erudita, and unease at its explicit promotion of an ethos of imposture and deception.

George Gascoigne thus produced an exuberant translation of Ariosto's irrepessible I Suppositi but followed it with the composition of an exceptionally harsh prodigal son play in which he argued that he would hence-forth be guilty of "no Terence phrase," since "Reformed speech doth now become us best."  

George Whetstone's two five-act plays concerning the exposition and punishment of illicit sex and the abuse of financial credit in a city like London were prefaced by an acknowledgment of the need for English dramatists to heed the Terentian rhetoric of probability, for the English play-wright "grounds his work on impossibilities." The problem, argued Whetstone, was that the available Continental models of a probable drama—commedia erudita and "Christian Terence"—were no use to the English dramatist: "at this daye, the Italian is so lascivious in his comedies that the worst hearers are greeved at his actions," while "the German is too holy: for he presentes on every common Stage, what Preachers should pronounce in Pulpets." As Shakespeare paid both Gascoigne and Whetstone the compliment of rewriting the plays in question, we may reasonably infer that he was aware of the difficulty of dissociating the productivity of the Terentian technology of probability from its implicit endorsement of violations of chastity and betrayals of household honor.

Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, for all its currency as a drama of the body and sexual desire, is in fact so remarkably chaste that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's friend, Anna Jameson, writing a political and feminist criticism of Shakespeare in 1832 could exclaim, "how exquisitely is the character of Viola fitted to her part, carrying through her ordeal with all inward grace and modesty!" Jameson was not being naïve or repressed about the sexual content of the play: a glance at the Italian or Roman models of any comedy by Shakespeare will reveal how consistently he chastened their arguments, displacing deep into his depiction of female "character" the signs of an inclination towards sexual betrayal that in his originals were explicit sexual acts. The lawyer John Manningham, seeing a performance of Twelfth Night at the Middle Temple in February 1602, noted that it was "much like the commedy of errors or Menachmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni." Although there is a play called "Inganni," Manningham was almost certainly thinking of Gl'Ingannati or "The Deceived," a play by the Accademia degli Intronati di Siena, written as an apology to the ladies for a sketch performed the previous evening, which was Twelfth Night, 1531. Gl'Ingannati seems to have enjoyed a reputation for formal excellence only second, or perhaps not even that, to Ariosto. If Machiavelli (who himself translated Terence's Andria, the play central to Donatus's analysis) could urge the Tuscans to forget their prejudice against Ferarese Ariosto, for his "gentil composizione," the French Charles Estienne, dedicating his translation of Gl'Ingannati to the Dauphin in 1549, argued that this Sienese play surpassed even Ariosto, giving the reader the impression "que si Terence mesmes l'eust composé en Italien, à peine mieux l'eust il sceu differ; inventer ou deduyer." That if Terence himself had composed it in Italian, he would hardly have known better how to express, invent or handle it.] English readers were probably aware of the play's high literary reputation; the scholarly publisher, Girolamo Ruscelli, included a collection of Italian comedies "buone degne di legersi, & d'imitarsi," [well worthy of being read and imitated] to which he appended a critical apparatus "de' modi osservati in esse da gli antichi, così Greci come Latini" [in the manner observed in the case of ancient authors, both Greek and Latin] so as to make them into a book of "eloquentia."
Behind the central plot device of both Ariosto's *I Suppositi* and *Gl' ingannati* (and remotely, therefore, behind Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*) lay the notorious play by Terence called *Eunuchus*, which concerns a young man's gaining access, on the pretext of being a eunuch, to the house in which a virgin is being kept, whom he proceeds to rape. The subsequent predictable discovery of her citizenship makes her eligible for marriage without making him guilty of the rape of a citizen's daughter, since the house where he performed the rape was a brothel. Renaissance versions of the plot, of course, have to deal with what we might call the "homosocial" aspect of the crime—that is, the outrage to fathers and kinsmen—since the virgin is no longer found in a house of courtesans. Thus, Polinesta's father in *I Suppositi* lifts the genre into pathos with his sorrow at the loss of his daughter's honor in his own house. And in *Gl' Ingannati*, though there is less pathos, the scandal of the daughter's seduction is perhaps even greater, due to the bizarre means by which she is left alone with a man in her bedroom (her father assumed the man was a woman dressed up; maybe it is a reminiscence of this scandalous plot that has Viola asking to be presented "as an eunuch" to Orsino's court at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*).

*Gl' Ingannati* begins with a contract between two old men, Virginio and Gherardo, whereby Gherardo is to marry Virginio's daughter, Lelia: "Ne pensar ch'io mi sia permutare di quel ch'io t'ho promesso" [Don't think I'll go back on what I've promised] says Virginio; a merchant's credit depends on keeping his word. But his daughter, Lelia—Shakespeare's Viola—has slipped away from her convent and, disguised as a page, has entered the service of Flammineo, with whom she is in love, but who is himself besotted with another, namely Gherardo's daughter, Isabella, the equivalent of Shakespeare's Olivia. Isabella receives letters and "embassies" [imbasciati] from Flammineo by means of his cute page, Fabio (Lelia in disguise) with whom she, of course, falls in love.

It is worth pointing out how much more explicit than *Twelfth Night* this play is about the fact that sexual desire is not gender specific. Indeed, it becomes very clear that what counts, in distinguishing those who may desire and ask, and those who must be passive, is not gender but social status. Thus, when Lelia's nurse, Clemenzia, finds out that, as Flammineo's page, she has been sleeping in the antechamber of his bedroom, she assumes he will ask her to sleep with him. And later, when Isabella's maid, Pasquella, asks Lelia, disguised as Fabio, why on earth "he" doesn't want to sleep with her mistress, Lelia-as-Fabio replies: "a me bisogna servire il padrone, intendi, Pasquella?" [I have to serve the master, you know what I mean, Pasquella?] and Pasquella does understand: "O io so ben che a tu padron non faresti dispiacere a venirci, non dormi forse con lui?" [Oh, I know very well that you don't displease your master by coming here; but you don't, by any chance, sleep with him?]. When Lelia replies, "Dio il volesse ch'io fosse tanto in gratia sua" [I wish I were so much in his favor] Pasquella is puzzled; "Oh non dormiresti piu volentieri con Isabella?" [Wouldn't you rather sleep with Isabella?], she asks. And she makes it clear, in an ensuing speech on the ephemerality of Fabio's good looks, that (as a fellow dependent herself) she regards the arrangement of sleeping with Isabella not so much as more "natural" than simply as more stable, practical, and fortunate in the long term for Fabio.

In good Terentian fashion, the denouement of the play proves that the contract between the old men is not broken, though both are fortunately deceived; their houses are united not by the impotent old Gherardo's marrying Lelia, but by the passionately consummated union of Isabella with Lelia's long-lost twin bother, Fabrizio, who, like Shakespeare's Sebastian, doesn't question his good fortune in happening accidentally upon a rich woman who ardently desires him. But where Shakespeare's Olivia finds out who her lover really is by means of the words he speaks (which, as we've seen, have been recently been read as proof of the inherent instability of gender in sixteenth-century thinking about the body), Isabella and the audience of *Gl' Ingannati* discover who her lover is in a speech which is more explicitly designed to "appeal to the body." Pasquella, Isabella's maid, emerges from the room in which the two old men have locked Isabella and someone who they think is the truant Lelia, in boy's clothes:

PASQUELLA:
Quei due vecchi pecoroni dicevan pur, che quel giovanetto era donna & rinserronelo in camera con Isabella mia padrona, & à me diede la chiave, io volsi entrar dentro, & veder quel facevano, & trovai che s'abbracciavano, & si baciavano insieme, io hebbi voglia di chiarirmi s'era maschio o femina. Havendolo la padrona disteso in sul letto, & chiamandomi ch'io l'aiutassi, mentre ch'ella gli teneva le mani, egli si lasciava vincere, lo sciolsi dinanzi, e a un tratto, mi sentii percuotere non so che cosa in su le mani, nè conobbi se gli era un pestaglioto [pestella], un garotta [carota], o pur quell' altra cosa, ma sia quel che si vuole, e now è cosa che habbia sentita la grandine. Come io la viddi così fatta fuggii, sorelle, & serai l'uscio, & sò che per me non vi tornarci sola, & se qualch'una di voi non me'l crede, & voglia chiarirsene, io gli prestarò la chiave.

[PASQUELLA:
those two old sheep insisted that young man was a woman, and shut him in the room with Isabella, my mistress, and gave me the key. I wanted to go in and see what they were doing, and, finding them embracing and kissing together, I had to satisfy myself as to whether the other was male or female. The mistress had him stretched out on her bed, and was asking me to help her, while she held him by the hands. He allowed himself to be overcome, and I undid him in front, and in one pull, I felt something hit my hand; I couldn't tell whether it was a pestle, or a carrot, or indeed something else, but whatever it was, it hadn't suffered from hailstones. When I saw how it was, girls, I fled, and locked the exit! And I know that as far as I'm concerned, I won't go back in alone, and if one of you doesn't believe me, and wants to satisfy herself, I'll lend her the key.]
[As far I understand it, they've called this comedy "The Deceived" not because they were ever deceived by you, oh no, . . . but they've called it so because there aren't many characters in the plot (favola) who don't, in the end, find themselves deceived. But there is among these deceptions one particular sort which makes me wish (for the malice I bear you) that you might be often deceived, if I were the deceiver . . . the plot is a new one . . . and is extracted from no other source than their busy pumpkin heads, from whence also came the fortunes you were allotted on Twelfth Night.]

In this context, it looks as if the most significant single departure from the Italian variants on the plot of The Eunuch in Twelfth Night is its dissociation of the effectiveness of the original imposture of credit—the original pretense of androgyny or emasculation which effectively gains access to both to the person and to the heart of the wealthy Olivia—from the identification of its triumph as explicitly sexual (Fabrizio proving his virility with Isabella), rather than chastely marital (Sebastian contracted to Olivia). To a chance member of the audience of Twelfth Night in the Middle Temple in 1601 who saw the resemblance of Shakespeare's play to Gl'Inganni or Gl'Ingannati, meaning respectively "the deceits" and "the deceived," Sebastian's speech at the end might well recall these plays' themes and titles:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.

(V.i.257-61)

"Deceiv'd" surely here recalls its Italian translation, "ingannata," and no less surely, there is an ethical distinction being made here between being "mistook" and being "deceiv'd" that turns on the question of whether or not Sebastian is a "maid." His affirmation before the audience that he is both "a maid and man" is less a signal of his inherent androgyny than an assurance that Olivia, not having experienced the same "inganno" as Isabella, remains chaste, honorable, and a prize worthy his, Sebastian's, having.

To the argument implied here—namely, that the explicit eroticism of Gl'Ingannati makes interpretations of Twelfth Night that focus exclusively on the body and sexuality look a little contrived—it could be objected that I am being literal-minded about the theatrical representation of desire. It could be argued (and I would agree) that the very reticence and fantasticality of the amorous language of Twelfth Night ensures the "circulation" of desire or of sexual energy more effectively than the gleeful voyeurism of Gl'Ingannati. If this is so, however, it must also be acknowledged that the same linguistic reticence and latency of meaning which allows us, in the 1990s, to read Twelfth Night as a celebration of the polymorphous potential of desire, equally enabled Anna Jameson in 1832 to find in Viola a paradigm of the sexual self-control that qualified women for access to education and political life. For, within Laqueur's argument, Jameson belongs to that category of nineteenth-century women who based their claims for the recognition of women's political capacity on arguments proving their inherent moral strength. If the rest of Laqueur's argument for the importance of the eighteenth-century transition from the endorsement to the denial of female orgasm has substance, then it must follow that Shakespeare's own texts belong among the discourses that have, historically, helped to construct the moral characteristics felt to be appropriate to a biology of incommensurability—sexual difference—between the male and female. And this in turn would imply that, in their own time, Shakespeare's comedies were not just—in Stephen Greenblatt's words—fictions which "participated in a larger field of
sexual discourses" but were fictions of the Reformation—that is, they were actively transformative of existing sexual discourses, tending to substitute the intimation of female sexual intention for the representation of the act which would implicate both sexes equally.58

It is, in fact, possible to trace through Shakespeare's plays a consistency of strategy (though not, of course, of effect) in his chastening of the roles and language of women. Whereas in his Italian and Roman sources, the significance of the "woman's part" to the resolution of the dilemma depends upon her having had sex, in Shakespeare this significance is translated into an implicit, or uncertain argument involving her disposition to have sex, or her "sexuality." To modern readers this can give the impression of a more complex "interiority" or "character" because its doubtfulness requires our interpretation. In the fraught context of the emergent commercial theatre of sixteenth-century England, however, Shakespeare's chastening of Italian and Roman dramatic models was motivated by the need to prove that the productively deceptive arguments of a Terentian-style theatre need not, as its enemies suggested, necessarily advocate the breakdown of trust and honor by endorsing every kind of sexual and financial deception in contemporary society.59

To attempt a reading of Twelfth Night that would seriously try to take account of the play's place in the history of sex and gender would require some elaboration of how, in common with other Shakespeare plays, this comedy makes a theme of being implicated in a humanistic literary culture which, through its privileging of skill in persuasive argument, was in the process of transforming relations of economic and social dependency. Current discussions of the subversive erotics of the Renaissance stage trivialize the economic and social issues at stake in Twelfth Night and similar plays by reducing the whole of the humanist literary culture of which the theatre was a product to the most banal version of Greenblatt's "self-fashioning"—a mere "increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process,"60 "Self-fashioning" thereby becomes synonymous with a quite unspecific notion of "theatricality," which in turn is easily assimilated to the concept of "performativity" articulated by Judith Butler in relation to the category of gender.61 The sixteenth-century investment in masculine education, which crucially enabled the very instances of "self-fashioning" or of "theatricality" so beloved of current criticism—an education which privileged the dialectical and analysis and imitation of classical texts—is simply left out of the discussion. What we have as a result is a criticism of Shakespeare, Jonson and others that is incapable of accounting for the rhetorical and affective excess distinguishing this drama of the English Renaissance from its Continental antecedents; an excess which, in the case of Twelfth Night, permits interpretations as widely divergent as those of Greenblatt, Barber, and Jameson, and which therefore (because of its contribution to the historical "instability" of the play's "identity") surely begs to be interpreted as a thematic aspect of the play's concern with disguise, deception, and "theatricality."

For an example of how even good contemporary criticism effaces the rhetorical content of the play I want to turn to Valerie Traub's argument that the meaning of Viola/Cesario resides principally in the "dual erotic investment" that the play establishes in order to "elicit the similarly polymorphous desires of the audience, whose spectator pleasure would be at least partly derived from a transgressive glimpse of multiple erotic possibilities." In order to "substantiate the play's investment in erotic duality," she continues,

one can compare the language used in Viola/Cesario's two avowals of love: the first as Orsino's wooer of Olivia, and the second as s/he attempts to communicate love to Orsino. In both avowals, Viola/Cesario theatricalizes desire, using a similar language of conditionals toward both erotic objects . . . "If I did love you with my master's flame, / With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life, / In your denial I would find no sense; / I would not understand it." ... "My father had a daughter love'd a man, / As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman, I should your lordship." (my italics)62

I would not for a moment deny the existence of the "dual erotic investment" which Traub does well to point out. However, another brief glance at Gl'Ingannati will show that Shakespeare's text is more remarkable for
resisting than exploiting the considerable dramatic potential of any such investment.

Reading *Gl'Ingannati*, Shakespeare would have come across a model for a scene between Olivia and Viola/Cesario. The scene in question requires the audience to share the voyeuristic position of Flammineo's servants who stumble across Isabella and Lelia/Fabio during an intimate exchange of words and caresses. The audience, however, knows that "Fabio" is, for the purposes of the play, a woman (though the part was probably played by a boy). For the servants, then, the scene arouses sexual feeling and a sense of scandal at the betrayal of Flammineo by the "boy" whom he loved and trusted so much; the audience, however, freed from any sense of the latter, is invited to enjoy the transgression of the scene as if it were a kind of affluence; in Traub's words, it becomes "a transgressive glimpse of multiple erotic possibilities."

Without denying the possibility of performing the equivalent scene between Olivia and Viola/Cesario in such a way as to maximize its erotic possibilities, I would want to argue that the rhetorical excess which distinguishes Shakespeare's text from the Italian model insists on a far higher level of engagement from the audience as auditors. This, in turn, reorients the dramatic meaning of the scene from pleasure in the spectacle of erotic possibility towards complicity in the act of interpretation by means of which a reader or auditor lends credibility to the figures, tropes, and fictions in the discourse of another.

Such audience complicity in the bestowal of credibility through interpretation replicates what the scene offers by way of a narrative of "desire." Olivia's desire for Viola/Cesario must become intelligible (unless we ignore the text altogether) through Viola/Cesario's progression away from formal literary models of courtship towards the affective intimacy of a more familiar mode of address, exemplified in the deservedly famous speech which begins, "Make me a willow cabin at your gate" (1.5.273). At this point we have already witnessed Olivia's unenchanted exposure of the economics of the Petrarchan argument, her parody of its facile and opportunistic movement from the praise of natural beauty to the imperatives of husbandry and reproduction: "O sir, I will not be so hard-hearted, I will give out divers schedules of my beauty" (1.5.247-48). Cesario's subsequent readiness to improvise a first-person fiction of abandonment in love represents an ability to extemporize, to seize "the gifts of moment" and so illustrate the crowning glory of classical rhetorical education.
The speech's most obvious analogue in the schoolboy literature which prepared men for such improvisations is that of the impassioned epistolary rhetoric of the women of Ovid's *Heroides*, whose vivid evocations of their writing, and of the cries that echo through the wild and lonely places to which they are abandoned, resemble (in their simultaneous acknowledgment of hopelessness and its contradiction by the emotions aroused in the reader) the curious emotional power tapped by Cesario's entry into a hypothetical desolation of ineffectual texts that nevertheless defy the premise of their ineffectuality. Like Dido writing "without hope to move you," or Oenone, telling Paris how she made Ida resound with howls ("uluati") at his desertion, Viola/Cesario imagines filling the vacant times and spaces of rejection with "cantons of contemned love" and "halloos" of Olivia's name, suddenly evoking a geography of loneliness in a play otherwise suggestive of houses, estates, and urbanity. The implied femininity of Cesario's hypothetically assumed persona here, however, merely complicates the already problematic dramatic hypothesis of a female "Viola" inasmuch as the prominence of Ovid's *Heroides* within the education syllabus for boys implied, as Warren Boutcher has noted,

a relationship between the path to knowledge and . . . the mastery of the heroic genus *familiaire*, with its base in epistolary stories which involve—both in the telling and in the action—intimate access to and power over feminine sensibility.

The "femininity" of the genre, then, is inseparable from its implication in a plot of seduction not unlike that of Petrarchism, except that in this version "femininity" itself—understood as a peculiar susceptibility to artificially induced compassion—is the emotional catalyst of masculine rhetorical success.

Olivia's desire for Viola/Cesario becomes apparent as a response to this speech and is inseparable, in its articulation, from the material expression of belief ("credit") that would exempt the unknown stranger from providing the heraldic display (the "blazon") that would put "his" gentility beyond doubt:

"What is my parentage?"
"Above my fortunes, yet my state is well,
I am a gentleman." I'll be sworn thou art;
Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit
Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast: soft! soft!
Unless the master were the man . . .

(1.5.293-98)

Olivia's desire motivates her affirmation of Cesario's somewhat evasive protestation of gentility on the grounds of "his" exceptional beauty, eloquence, and presence of mind. What this implies, then, is that the capacity to arouse desire resides less in the androgynous beauty of the body, than in the body conceived as the medium of *elocutio* ("tongue . . . face . . . limbs . . . actions . . . spirit"); that is, the apt delivery of the mind's invention. Viola/Cesario *embodies* the capacity of timely and well expressed speech to compel for a mere fiction *credit*, that is the kind of materially consequential belief (in this case, belief in matrimonial eligibility) that is rarely afforded to the "real thing."

The transgressive "glimpse" being offered to a seventeenth-century audience here, I would suggest, is less that of lesbian desire than that of the opportunity for social advancement and erotic gratification afforded by education for any servant of ability entrusted with missions of such intimate familiarity. That the entertainment of such a possibility is necessarily transgressive (though here held at bay from full recognition by the "femininity" of Viola) is evident from the care taken in the Malvolio plot to exploit the audience's revulsion at the very same idea. As a steward, Malvolio shares with Viola/Cesario the distinction of being a household servant whose "civility" of manner is qualification for a position of exceptional trust in the intimate affairs of the household. Olivia's musing, "unless the master were the man," touches the center of the play's
concern with the question of social advancement by means of skills and attractions "blazoned" in the execution of service rather than properly inhering in nobility. How can such social advancement be imagined except as an individualistic pursuit of gain, a betrayal of trust, sexual honor, economic dependency, and love?

Leo Salingar and Emrys Jones have shown how comedies of the late 1590s and early 1600s are concerned with establishing the credentials of a notion of "gentility" that operates independently of the feudal structures of lineage and affinity. "The king might create a duke, but not even he could create a gentleman," writes Jones, echoing a sentiment expressed in plays of this period. Gentility thus conceived is less the effect of lineage than of a certain affluence—freedom from manual labor—combined with the type of liberal education that might contribute a civil demeanor in social exchange. The arguments of such comedies therefore require that the discursively and morally cumbersome aspects of the humanist education bequeathed by Erasmus and the grammar schools be adapted to requirements of a style and habitus such as Viola/Cesario exhibits: a non-pedantic conversational facility appropriate to the modest enterprises of urban social encounter.

Salingar sees the conflicts played out through this redefinition of humanistic "wit" in terms of an attempt to distinguish between money values and "the values of a leisure class" whose social and financial ambitions are subliminally expressed as the civilized pleasures of courtship. Jones notes in the early 1600s the "crystallisation of a new theatrical formula":

The plays in question are comedies, usually set in some fictitious vaguely foreign court, often with a double-plot of which one part may be romantic and the other more frankly comic. The comic action sometimes takes the form of a persecution, a "baiting" extended through several episodes.

About the same time as the Chamberlain's men performed Twelfth Night, the children of the Chapel staged one of the plays to which Jones here refers, The Gentleman Usher. In the predicament of its eponymous antihero, Bassiolo, the play comments interestingly on Twelfth Night, condensing different aspects of the situations in which Viola/Cesario and Malvolio find themselves. Bassiolo is, like Malvolio, the most trusted servant in the household of Count Lasso, but, like Viola/Cesario, his being familiarly confided in and befriended by a nobleman for whom he undertakes to woo Margaret, Count Lasso's daughter, immediately puts him in a position of both actual and potential betrayal of trust: Vincentio accuses him of behaving, "as if the master were the man" in an erotic sense, but he has already done so in the sense that in his contract of friendship with Vincentio, he is wooing for himself.

Chapman's is, however, a far more conservative play than Shakespeare's. Whereas Viola/Cesario's inspired improvisation on the model of the Ovidian heroic epistle actually gains the sympathetic ear and the heart of Olivia, Bassiolo's verbose and cumbersome attempt at amorous epistles merely earns him the noble lovers' contempt, serving to prove that the adaptation of a liberal education to civilized wooing can only be managed by one whose gentleness of birth is beyond dispute. The play is nevertheless concerned to argue the necessity of complementing the hunting and riding skills traditionally definitive of nobility with "wits and paper learning" of a non-pedantic kind; the Duke's ennobling of his illiterate minion, Medice, proves disastrous, arguing against the social advancement of servants who are unable to acquit themselves plausibly in noble society. At the same time, however, the play finds, in Bassiolo's dilemma between fidelity to his master, and the opportunity offered by Vincendo's pretended confidence in his rhetorical ability, that any servant so accomplished and entrusted is liable to deceive.

The fantastic unlikelihood of the plot of Twelfth Night and its apparent preoccupation with issues of gender have distracted critical attention from the play's affinity with such contemporary comedies of civility and social advancement. Yet it might well be argued that the very fantasticality of the fiction of gender in Twelfth Night constitutes the play's strategy of engagement with contemporary debates on the legitimacy of the individualistic exploitation of service in order, in Viola's own words, to "make occasion mellow."
Twelfth Night endorses the notion of rhetorical opportunism, or individual enterprise insofar as it expresses the mastery of fortune and of the occasions of civil life as the metaphorical equivalent of heroic enterprise on the high seas. Thus, for example, the rivalry between Viola and Aguecheek for the favor of Olivia is recurrently expressed in a nautical idiom. Viola is spoken of as having "trade" (3.1.76) and "commerce" (3.4.175) with Olivia, "she is the list of my voyage" says Viola (3.1.77). The hapless Aguecheek, for lack of Viola's witty invention and attractive presence, is berated for having "sailed into the north of my lady's opinion, where you will hang, like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard, unless you redeem it by some laudable attempt, either of valor or policy" (3.3.24-28). Fabian’s reference here—to a 1598 translation of Gerrit de Veer’s report of the ordeal of Dutch explorers trapped for ten months in Nova Zembla, where they "never saw, nor heard of any man"—comically imagines Aguecheek’s conversational failure both as a failure to prove his masculinity and as meriting exile altogether from the new medium of masculine self-assertion—the profitable commerce of sociability.

The sociability thus defined as heroically masculine, however, must be purposeful as well as facile; Orsino, as Feste says, is insufficiently discriminating in the object of his discourse: "I would have men of such constancy put to sea that their business might be everywhere and there intent nowhere, for that’s it always makes a good voyage of nothing" (2.4.75-78). The pervasiveness of such oceanic metaphors, as well as references to maps and narratives of discovery (Malvolio's smiling face is likened to the 1599 map which displayed the new world "as revealed by actual voyages of discovery") invests the Renaissance synonymity of "tempest" and "fortune" with specifically economic resonances. From the analogy developed between drinking and the hazards of navigation (Feste tells Olivia that a drunken man is like a drowned man—1.5.132) there emerges a chiastic narrative of rhetorical oikonomia, in which the eloquent and beautiful twins exchange near-drowning for domestic security, while the drunken and inept or irresponsible Toby and Aguecheek—initially comfortable with cakes and ale in Olivia's buttery—are finally banished, like the "knaves and fools" they prove to be, to the "wind and the rain" of Feste's song, beyond Olivia's gates.

Oikonomia is rhetorical because linguistic ability is identified with the ability to manage wealth. Maria declares of the wealthy Aguecheek that he is incompetent with his resources, he will "have but a year to all those ducats. He's a very fool, and a prodigal" (1.3.22); this failure in husbandry is then discovered at intervals during the play as Aguecheek's recurrent inability to invent plausible arguments or "reasons" for his words or actions. Aguecheek's companions are always teasing him for the reasons he cannot give; "Pourquoi?" asks Toby when Aguecheek declares his intention to leave at once, but the question bewilders the knight (1.3.89). In a later exchange Fabian joins Toby in demanding evidence of plausibility: "You must needs yield your reason, Sir Andrew" (3.2.2). The letter which Toby urges him to make "eloquent and full of invention" (3.2.41-43) turns out to be as barren as his speech: "Wonder not. . . why I do call thee [a scurvy fellow] for I will show thee no reason for't" (3.4.152-53).

When Anna Jameson praised Viola for the moral sensibility she displayed both in the propriety of her fidelity to Orsino, and in "her generous feeling for her rival Olivia," she appropriated for nineteenth-century feminism a seventeenth-century play's concern with calling into question the assumption that eloquent servants, accomplished in the provision of reasons, and entrusted with the intimate affairs of the household, are necessarily opportunists, people who deceive. The narrative rationale of the scene I have already remarked upon in Gl'Ingannati, in which Flammineo's servants spy upon Isabella and Lelia's kiss, is to enraged Flammineo against the deceitfulness of his favorite, Fabio; a hilarious scene ensures in which the probability of the kiss is itself called into doubt by the incompetence of the servants in relaying to Flammineo their evidence of Fabio's perfidy. The point here, however, is that Lelia/Fabio has kissed Isabella; one deceit leads to another, and Lelia finds herself explaining her refusal of further favors to Isabella on the grounds that "too much love" for Isabella has already led her to deceive ("ingannare") her lord. Earlier, however, Lelia/Fabio showed a singular lack of regard for Flammineo's suit, attempting by means of Pasquella to ensure that Isabella would never respond to his affections; Viola, as Jameson notes, is remarkable for resisting the temptation to do this. In Chapman's Gentleman Usher, Bassiolo, also in the position of a go-between or an
ambassador between lovers, is tempted not only into exploitation of his position of trust, but into presumptions of equality and friendship with the nobleman who employs him, which the play then ridicules with all the fervor of profound social anxiety.

It becomes clear that the twinning of Sebastian and Viola, and the femininity of the latter, occurs in Shakespeare's play not simply (as in other derivatives of Terence's *Eunuch*) for the sake of resolving an erotic impasse by offering a means of gaining access to the cloistered woman, but for the sake of foregrounding an outrageously improbable hypothesis about the possibility of combining fidelity in service with rhetorical *oikonomia*—that is, the heroic exploitation of rhetorical opportunity, which typically achieves both economic security and erotic gratification. Terence Cave has noted that the final revelation of "Viola’s" identity remains merely hypothetical, contingent on an accumulation of probabilities beyond the scope of the play: "Do not embrace me till each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump / That I am Viola." It could be said that the femininity of Viola is the grounds upon which the fiction of the servant Cesario can prove the success of eloquence in the narrative of social advancement that Sebastian fulfills, while at the same time ensuring this narrative remains quite untainted by what would otherwise be its precondition—the betrayal of the master by his "man." Viola/Cesario, then, represents more than the "dual erotic investment" that exhausts the meaning of Lelia/Fabio, for s/he is the means by which a seventeenth-century audience could be seduced into entertaining unawares the possibility of a positive version of Malvolio, a servant able to exploit the civility that earns the trust and favor of noblewomen to the extent of achieving the "love" that promises contractual equality. When Fabian imagines himself condemning the cross-gartered Malvolio as an "improbable fiction" on the stage, he draws attention to the self-consciousness that marks the play's violation of the Terentian rhetoric of probability, which remains so near the textual surface of *Gl'Ingannati*. Any audience hearing Fabian, however, must feel that the primary violation of probability lies not in the outrageousness of Malvolio's behavior, but in the very existence of the person called Viola, who represents, as Terence Cave has written, "a particularly fruitful violation of the laws of rational discourse no less than sexual decorum," and whose name performs a number of associative tricks, as it "echoes the erotic flowers and music of the opening scene, insidiously rearranges the letters of Olivia's name, and comes close to naming violation itself."

The play's erotic investment in Viola/Cesario is less, I would argue, than its investment in the violation of probability constituted by the twinship of Viola and Sebastian, which first casts the desire and emotion aroused by Cesario into extremity, and then resolves that extremity as a miraculous disproof of the betrayal of trust that would, in the ordinary circumstances of daily life, be its explanation. Thus, for example, where the sodomitic behavior of Fabrizio's traveling companion, the pedant in *Gl'Ingannati*, merely fuels the sexual comedy of that play, the love Antonio feels for Sebastian, while equally open to homoerotic interpretation, is not sidelined by mockery, but rendered able to share on equal terms in a dramatic climax which turns less on the nuptials that unite the two houses than on the proof that not one of the lovers of a beautiful "boy"—neither his wife, nor his master, nor his friend in need—is "therein, by my life, deceiv'd." The "hints of corruption and aggression," which, as Cave notes, recur in the play, accumulate around the common sense perception that the youthful beauty of a stranger is *probably* as deceitful as it is irresistibly attractive.

Certainly Orsino, having charged his lovely ambassador with the ethically problematic obligation to make "discourse" of his "dear faith" and "act" his woes, reads the apparent consequence—Cesario's contract to Olivia—as presaging the youth's career in similar deceptions: "thou dissembling cub! What wilt thou be / When time hath sown a grizzle on thy case?" (5.1.162-63). The pathos of Olivia's case is more marked, as she interprets Viola/Cesario's love for Orsino as the "fear" rightfully aroused by the consciousness of having betrayed his master. In attempting to prevent Viola/Cesario's protestation of innocence, she exposes the instability of her own grounds for belief in the youth's continued fidelity to her. "Oh, do not swear!" she begs, "Hold little faith, though thou hast too much fear" (5.1.169-170). Most moving of all, however, is Antonio's apology for being obliged by love into an extremity that makes demands of the one he loves. "What will you do, now my necessity / Makes me to ask you for my purse?" he gently enquires (3.4.342-43), only to be
moved by Viola/Cesario's nonrecognition, into an outburst against the deceptiveness of the "promise" that was the boy's manner and looks (3.4.369-79).

A contemporary reader, perusing a popular anthology of the period known as *The Paradysy of daynty deuises*, found one poem entitled thus: "Who mindes to bring his ship to happy shore / Must care to know the lawes of wisdomes lore." By this poem he wrote, "rules of wary life," bracketing off for particular annotation a verse referring to trust in friendship. Do not bestow credit on boys, the verse advised, for, "Ful soone the boy thy frendship will despyse / And him for loue thou shalt ungrateful find." As Erica Sheen has pointed out, the protracted denouement of *Cymbeline* features a "boy" called Imogen who refuses to plead for the life of her savior and friend, Lucentio. His moralizing comment, "briefly die their joys / that place them on the truth of girls and boys" does nothing to assuage the audience's impatient desire to resolve his mistake, proving the "truth" that probability and versified common sense would deny. Just so here, in *Twelfth Night*, Antonio's sententious conclusions on beauty and deceit merely fuel the audience's desire to relieve him of the pain of believing he has loved a "most ingrateful boy" (5.1.75). In view of this, Greenblatt's observation that, at the end of the play, "Viola is still Cesario," seems not so much to argue for any specific beliefs about instability of gender, as to be a part of that complex affective structure by means of which a boy proves, most improbably, to be "true" to all the kinds of lovers he might have—right up until the end of the play.

What, then, of the play's place in a history of sex and gender? The least that should be said is that any attempt to de-essentialize and historicize gender by appealing to a Galenic theory of men and women differentiated only by degrees of body heat is of strictly limited value in the analysis of a complicated tradition of comic writing in which what distinguishes men is their privileged access to allusive and intertextual levels of meaning—in other words, their access to active participation in the historical and discursive process of defining the social roles and characteristics of either sex. But something rather more positive may be said about *Twelfth Night* in particular. For here once again Shakespeare has chastened the argument of a neo-Terentian play in such a way as to maximize the interpretative possibilities, and consequently the historical tenacity, of the English dramatic text.

That the meaning of the Viola/Olivia courtship for a seventeenth-century audience resided at least partly in its capacity to seduce them into condoning the social (rather than sexual) transgression elsewhere reviled by the play's mockery of Malvolio is suggested by the history of critical reaction to Shakespeare's conception of Viola. The probability of Lelia's dressing up as Fabio is established in *Gl'Ingannati* in an exchange with her nurse during which she admits that since being kept prisoner by soldiers, she has become sexually suspect irrespective of her conduct: ever since the sack of Rome, she says, "ne credevo poter vivere sì honestamente, che bastasse a far che la gente non havesse che dire" [I didn't see how I could live honestly enough to stop them gossiping]. In 1753 Charlotte Lennox, writing a criticism of Shakespeare, objected to the want of any similar argument of probability in relation to Viola's decision to dress as a man:

A very natural scheme, this for a beautiful and virtuous young Lady, to throw off all the modesty and Reservedness of her Sex, mix among men, herself disguised as one; and prest by no Necessity; influenced by no Passion, expose herself to all the dangerous consequences of so unworthy and shameful a Situation.

The Italian source, she notes, "is much more careful to preserve Probability" than "the Poet Shakespeare." However, by 1832 the very want of any "probable" argument for Viola's behavior (since any such would reflect upon Viola's modesty) enabled Anna Jameson to celebrate her femininity as the source of the peculiar integrity which characterizes her relations to both master and mistress. The very improbability of Viola, then, serves to break down the identification of rhetorical virtuosity (the capacity to make things probable) with the sexual conquest of women that marks the plot of the Italian play. The literal intertwining of the names of Malvolio, Olivia, and Viola has often been pointed out, but it many not be entirely fanciful to recall that the
identification of "inganni" (deceptions, probable arguments) with the sexual deception that makes Isabella unchaste is signaled in the prologue of *Gl'Ingannati* with following innuendo:

> Ma e ci son de gli ingannati tra gli altri d'una certa sorte, che volesse Iddio, *per il mal ch'io vi voglio*, che voi foste ingannate spesso così voi, et io fusse l'ingannatore.

[But there is among these deceptions one particular sort which makes me wish, *for the malice I bear you*, that you might be often deceived, if I were the deceiver.]^89

Here "il mal ch'io vi voglio" is a kind of flirtatious joke on the euphemism for fancying someone, "ti voglio bene." In entertaining ambitious fantasies which suddenly and indecorously make the audience aware that these are also sexual fantasies about Olivia (2.5.47-48), Shakespeare's Malvolio bears the trace of the erotic "mal . . . voglio" by which Fabrizio's economic success is identified as a sexual conquest and extended through innuendo to characterize the terms upon which a female audience may be imagined capable of enjoying the argument of the play.

What was positive for seventeenth-century women about the way in which *Twelfth Night* addressed them, then, was due less to the "high cultural investment in female erotic pleasure . . . because it was thought necessary for conception to occur" than to its opposite:^90 the extent to which, by refusing to subject Olivia to the "mal . . . voglio" of an explicitly sexual encounter with Sebastian on the model of Isabella's with Fabrizio, Shakespeare manages to portray a heroine whose prudence, good judgment, and ability to govern others remain uncompromised even by her contract with the beautiful youth. For in marrying Sebastian, Olivia has arguably yielded to no whim, but carried out the strategic plan first made known to us by Sir Toby Belch: "she'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit" (1.3.106-108). Olivia never wavers from this purpose, and in providing the precedent that it elsewhere pretends to deny—marriage between a noble-woman and one beneath her—the play endorses the real-life example of the highly intelligent Katherine Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, who, after having been married at fourteen to her forty-nine-year-old noble guardian, later decided to marry none other then her gentleman usher, who was "an accomplished gentleman, well versed in the study of the languages . . . bold in discourse, quick in repartee." There were, as Katherine Brandon's biographer commented, "many reasons why the clever and serviceable gentleman usher who conducted her business . . . should seem to the Duchess a more desirable husband than an ambitious noble."^91 Shakespeare’s play, around 1602, contributed to the undoing of the social and sexual stereotyping that would make of that last statement nothing but a dirty joke.

**Notes**


3 I should acknowledge here my gratitude to Gayle Kern Paster, who, on reading a version of this paper, pointed out that my concern here is more with textual criticism's historicizing of erotic desire rather than with body history *per se.*
4 For example, see C. L. Barber's still very interesting *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959).


9 Greenblatt 80; Laqueur 4-5.

10 Greenblatt 74-75, 79, 85, 181; Laqueur 12-16.

11 Greenblatt 81; Laqueur 13.

12 Greenblatt, 88.

13 Greenblatt, 87.


15 Greenblatt, 72.

16 Greenblatt, 82.


18 Laqueur, 115.


20 The examples Montaigne cites are those of Iphis, from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX, 793ff, and of Lucius Constistius, from Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* VII, iv. See Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), 110. In his chapter of "histoires memorables de certains femmes qui sont degenerées en hommes," Ambroise Paré, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1971), includes the same example from Pliny, the story of Marie Germaine, and the example of Maria Pateca, told by João Rodrigues in *Amati Lusitani Medici Physici Praestantissimi, Curationum medicinalium centuriae quatuor* (Froben: Basel, 1567), 168. Needless to say, Rodrigues also cites Pliny, confirming a certain sense of circularity and repetition in the gathering of such instances. One might want to argue for a belief in the frequency of the phenomenon from Montaigne's comment, "Ce n'est pas tant de merveille que cette sort d'accident se rencontrent fréquent" [It isn't surprising that this sort of accident occurs frequently].
However, as Montaigne attributes the "accident" in question to the power of the imagination, which elsewhere in the same essay becomes responsible for unfounded beliefs in the magic that causes impotence, it is not clear how sceptically he means this. In any case, Montaigne's version of Marie-Germaine's accident does not conform to Paré's analysis, since Montaigne attributes to the power of the imagination the capacity to satisfy itself a sexual longing by producing the desired genitals of the (opposite?) sex—"si l'imagination peut en telles choses, elle est si continuellement et si vigoureusement attaché à ce sujet, que, pour n'avoir si souvent à rechoir en même pensée et âpreté de désir, elle a meilleur compte d'inorporer une fois pour toutes cette virile partie aux filles." This would seem to argue that girls did not already possess "cette virile partie." See Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. R. Barrai (Paris: du Seuil, 1967), 54. An excellent article by Patricia Parker, which came to my notice after I had written this article, criticizes both the functioning of medical discourse and the teleology of masculinity as a "reassuringly stable ground" in the arguments of Laqueur and Greenblatt and points to the preoccupation of Montaigne's essay with the anxiety that masculinity itself requires supplementation, to repair the "defect in sex" which is impotence. See Patricia Parker, "Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germaine," Critical Inquiry 19 (Winter, 1993), 335-64.


22 Traub, 51. This seems unlikely, since Paré explicitly says that the mutation can only go one way: "nous ne trouvons jamais en histoire veritable que d'homme aucun soit devenu femme, pour-ce que Nature tend toujours à ce qui est le plus parfaict, et non au contraire faire ce qui est parfaict devienne imparfaict" [we never find in any true history that any man whatsoever became a woman, because Nature always tends towards that which is the most perfect, and does not on the contrary make what is perfect become imperfect].

23 Orgel, 10.

24 Traub, 103, 117, 141.

25 Thus, Traub, in her concern to refute or modify Orgel's argument that the transvestite theatre was at least in part motivated by a recognition of the value represented by female chastity, misleadingly represents the argument as being about "the fantasized dangers posed by women" (121), which obscures beyond recovery the notion that women's chastity was valuable because it affected male honor and, therefore, economic power. The latter argument has been well made in relation to "desire" in the ancient world by John Winkler, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece (London: Routledge, 1990), 74-75.

26 Greenblatt, 88.

27 The idea that women in the audience fell in love with the players seems to have been common enough; see Beaumont and Fletcher 1.1.46-48, of a waiting maid: "She lov'd all the Players in the last Queenes time once over: she was strook when they acted lovers, and forsook some when they plaid murtherers." Women's susceptibility to the fiction, then, seems to have been laughed at, whereas the ridicule of men turns on the degree of aptitude or otherwise with which they make use of the wit they have heard at plays.


33 "E vi confessa in questo Ā Autore avere e Plauto e Terenzio seguitato, . . . non solo ne li costumi, ma ne li argumenti ancora de le fabule vuole essere de li antiche . . . imitatore" [And the Author confesses that in this he has followed Plautus and Terence . . . because he wants to be an imitator of the ancients not just in their customs, but in their arguments and plots]: Tutte le Opere di Ludovico Ariosto, ed. Cesare Segre (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 197.


39 Gascoigne's Supposes as The Taming of the Shrew and Whetstone's Promos and Cassandra as Measure for Measure.


41 See Shakespeare, Twelfth Night xxvi-liii.


44 *Delle Comedie Elette Novamente raccolte insieme, con le correttioni, & annotationi di Girolamo Ruscelli* (Venetia, 1554), 164. Unfortunately, there are few annotations after Bibiena and Machiavelli, and there is nothing interesting on *Gl'Ingannati*.


46 1.3.56; "Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him"; compare Terence, "*Chaerea. o fortunatem istum eunuchum qui quidem inhanc detur domum! . . . Parmeno. pro illo te deducam*" [*Chaerea. o what a lucky eunuch to be made a present for that house! . . . Parmeno. I could take you instead*], *The Eunuch*, in Terence, II. 270-71.

47 *Il Sacrificio, Gl'ingannati, Comedia degli Intronati celebrato nei Giuochi d'un Carnovale di Siena* (Venetia: Altobello Salicero, 1569) 1.1, fol. 18v. There is a translation of this play by Geoffrey Bullough in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1958), 2: 286-339, but it omits or censors a fair amount.


49 "*Clem. Dimmi un poco, & dove dormi tu? / Lelia. In una sua anticamera sola. / Clem. Se una notte tentato dalla maladetta tentatione ti chiamasse che tu dormisse con lui, come andrebbe? / Lelia. Io non voglio pensare al male prima che venga" 1.3, fol. 26r.

50 *Gl'Ingannati*, 2.2, fols. 32v.-33r.

51 This isn't quite accurate as a rendering of "s'era maschio o femina," but any other way would announce the gender of Isabella's partner too soon by assigning a pronoun.

52 *Gl'Ingannati*, 4.4, fol. 58v. This is one of the passages that Bullough omits in his translation.

53 *Gl'Ingannati*, 4.8, fol. 62v.

54 *Gl'Ingannati*, 4.8, fol. 62v.


56 *Gl'Ingannati*, "Prologo," fol. 15r.
57 See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 194-205 and Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (Virago, 1983), 28. Laqueur and Taylor both refer to the use made by feminists like Jameson of texts such as John Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (Basel, 1793), which suggested that position of women in any society might be taken as a measurement of its civility and well being. Millar's influence is certainly traceable in Anna Jameson's *Sketches in Canada, or Rambles among the Red Men* (London: Longman, 1852), and is compatible with the project of *The Characteristics of Women* as outlined in the introductory dialogue, 20-31.

58 Greenblatt, *Fiction and Friction*, 75.

59 For an account of how this happens in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, see "Why do Shakespeare's women have 'characters'?" *The Usurer's Daughter*, 178-213.

60 Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing*, 11; see also Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle*, 35. Both Levine and Howard reduce the meaning of "theatricality" to the subversions, sexual and social, effected by the assumption of disguise, as if clothes themselves made the theatrical fiction credible and powerful.


63 None of the authorities on sixteenth-century Italian drama that I consulted [Mario Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento* (Venice, 1975); Nino Borsellino, *Rozzi e Intronati* (Rome, 1974); Aulo Greccio, *L'Istituzione del teatro comico nel rinascimento* (Naples, 1976); Marvin Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1960); Louise Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989)] could inform me on this question of staging. However, Pamela Benson very kindly consulted the current expert on Italian theatrical production, Richard Andrews, whose reply suggested that although plays in convents had all female casts, courtesans were famous for improvising scenes in their salons, and there is some evidence that women did play at court and in some touring companies, they were unlikely to have taken parts in a play put on by a learned academy, such as the Intronati di Siena. I would like to thank Pamela Benson and Richrd Andrews for this information.

64 *Gl'Ingannati*, 2:6, fol. 37v.


66 See Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (London: Heineman, 1977), 62-63, 82-83. *Twelfth Night* is implicitly urban, by virtue of the stress placed throughout on "civility"; Olivia, for example, berates Toby as an "ungracious wretch, / Fit for the mountains and barbarous caves, / Where manners were ne'er preach'd" before begging Sebastian to forgive the "uncivil" injury he has sustained at the hands of her kinsman. *Twelfth Night* I.v.46-52.


71 Chapman, The Gentleman Usher, 2.1.58.

72 Charlotte Lennox complains of the improbability of Shakspeare's plots in Shakespear Illustrated . . . by the author of the Female Quixote (London: 1753), 244. That Lennox's response was still commonplace in the nineteenth criticism is suggested by Jameson's comment, "The situation and character of Viola have been censured for their want of consistency and probability," Shakespeare's Heroines 130.

73 Gerrit de Veer, The True and Perfect Description of Three Voyages by the Ships of Holland and Zeland [1609] (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1970), sig. A2v. The account was entered on the Stationers' Register in 1598; see Twelfth Night xxxii.


75 See Jones, The Origins of Shakespeare, 209-10.

76 Chapman, in The Gentleman Usher, also assumes a relationship between rhetorical skill, household management, and the favour of noblewomen: "You are not knowne to speak well? You haue wonne direction of the Earl and all his house, / The fauour of his daughter, and all Dames / That euer I sawe, come within your sight," Vincentio flatters the steward (3.2.167-70).

77 Jameson, Shakespeare's Heroines, 33.

78 Gl'Ingannati, 2:8, fol. 40v.

79 Gl'Ingannati, 2:8, fol. 38v.


81 Cave, 280.

82 Gl'Ingannati, fol. 53, Stragualcia, the pedant's servant, rails, "che voi sete . . . un sodomito, un tristo, posso dire" [I could say you were a sodomite, a miserable specimen].

83 Cave, Recognitions, 280.


85 Cymbeline, ed. J. M. Nosworthy (London: Methuen, 1969) 5.5.106-108. I would like to thank Erica Sheen for pointing out the similarity of this affective moment to that in Twelfth Night.
Critical Essays: Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night

Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Overview

Harley Granville-Barker

[In an essay originally published in 1912, Granville-Barker offers his vision for Twelfth Night as a director, beginning by describing what he believes was Shakespeare's intention for the set and how he may have written some parts such as Feste and Maria for specific actors. Barker also discusses the way he thinks Shakespeare constructed the play, suggesting that he may have originally intended a different outcome, and that on the Elizabethan stage, Viola/Cesario would have been played by a young boy, not a girl. He describes the casting choices Shakespeare may have made for other characters, including Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Fabian, Feste and Antonio and in conclusion, describes the prose and verse of the play, defending his position that Elizabethan prose should be spoken quickly.]

Twelfth Night is classed, as to the period of its writing, with Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Henry V. But however close in date, in spirit I am very sure it is far from them. I confess to liking those other three as little as any plays he ever wrote. I find them so stodgily good, even a little (dare one say it?) vulgar, the work of a successful man who is caring most for success. I can imagine the lovers of his work losing hope in the Shakespeare of that year or two. He was thirty-five and the first impulse of his art had spent itself. He was popular. There was welcome enough, we may be sure, for as many Much Ado's and As You Like It's and jingo history pageants as he'd choose to manufacture. It was a turning point and he might have remained a popular dramatist. But from some rebirth in him that mediocre satisfaction was foregone, and, to our profit at least, came Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, and the rest. Hamlet, perhaps, was popular, though Burbage may have claimed a just share in making it so. But I doubt if the great heart of the public would beat any more constantly towards the rarer tragedies in that century and society than it will in this. To the average man or play-goer three hundred or indeed three thousand years are as a day. While we have Shakespeare's own comment even on that "supporter to a state," Polonius (true type of the official mind. And was he not indeed Lord Chamberlain?): that where art is concerned, "He's for a jig, or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps."

Twelfth Night is, to me, the last play of Shakespeare's golden age. I feel happy ease in the writing, and find much happy carelessness in the putting together. It is akin to the Two Gentlemen of Verona (compare Viola and Julia), it echoes a little to the same tune as the sweeter parts of the Merchant of Venice, and its comic spirit is the spirit of the Falstaff scenes of Henry IV, that are to my taste the truest comedy he wrote.
There is much to show that the play was designed for performance upon a bare platform stage without traverses or inner rooms or the like. It has the virtues of this method, swiftness and cleanness of writing and simple directness of arrangement even where the plot is least simple. It takes full advantage of the method's convenience. The scene changes constantly from anywhere suitable to anywhere else that is equally so. The time of the play's action is any time that suits the author as he goes along. Scenery is an inconvenience. I am pretty sure that Shakespeare's performance went through without a break. Certainly its conventional arrangement into five acts for the printing of the Folio is neither by Shakespeare's nor any other sensitive hand; it is shockingly bad. If one must have intervals (as the discomforts of most theatres demand), I think the play falls as easily into the three divisions I have marked as any. [Intervals after II, iii and IV, i.]

I believe the play was written with a special cast in mind. Who was Shakespeare's clown, a sweet-voiced singer and something much more than a comic actor? He wrote Feste for him, and later the Fool in Lear. At least, I can conceive no dramatist risking the writing of such parts unless he knew he had a man to play them. And why a diminutive Maria—Penthesilea, the youngest wren of nine—unless it was only that the actor of the part was to be such a very small boy? I have cudgelled my brains to discover why Maria, as Maria, should be tiny, and finding no reason have ignored the point.

I believe too (this is a commonplace of criticism) that the plan of the play was altered in the writing of it. Shakespeare sets out upon a passionate love romance, perseveres in this until (one detects the moment, it is that jolly midnight revel) Malvolio, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew completely capture him. Even then, perhaps, Maria's notable revenge on the affectioned ass is still to be kept within bounds. But two scenes later he begins to elaborate the new idea. The character of Fabian is added to take Feste's share of the rough practical joke and set him free for subtler wit. Then Shakespeare lets fling and works out the humorous business to his heart's content. That done, little enough space is left him if the play is to be over at the proper hour, and, it may be (if the play was being prepared for an occasion, the famous festivity in the Middle Temple Hall or another), there was little enough time to finish writing it in either. From any cause, we certainly have a scandalously ill-arranged and ill-written last scene, the despair of any stage manager. But one can discover, I believe, amid the chaos scraps of the play he first meant to write. Olivia suffers not so much by the midway change of plan, for it is about her house that the later action of the play proceeds, and she is on her author's hands. It is on Orsino, that interesting romantic, that the blow falls.

Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
Kill what I love?—a savage jealousy
That sometime savours nobly.

On that fine fury of his—shamefully reduced to those few lines—I believe the last part of the play was to have hung. It is too good a theme to have been meant to be so wasted. And the revelation of Olivia's marriage to his page (as he supposes), his reconciliation with her, and the more vital discovery that his comradely love for Viola is worth more to him after all than any high-sounding passion, is now all muddled up with the final rounding off of the comic relief. The character suffers severely. Orsino remains a finely interesting figure; he might have been a magnificent one. But there, it was Shakespeare's way to come out on the other side of his romance.

The most important aspect of the play must be viewed, to view it rightly, with Elizabethan eyes. Viola was played, and was meant to be played, by a boy. See what this involves. To that original audience the strain of make-believe in the matter ended just where for us it most begins, at Viola's entrance as a page. Shakespeare's audience saw Cesario without effort as Orsino sees him; more importantly they saw him as Olivia sees him; indeed it was over Olivia they had most to make believe. One feels at once how this affects the sympathy and balance of the love scenes of the play. One sees how dramatically right is the delicate still grace of the dialogue between Orsino and Cesario, and how possible it makes the more outspoken passion of the scenes
with Olivia. Give to Olivia, as we must do now, all the value of her sex, and to the supposed Cesario none of
the value of his, we are naturally quite unmoved by the business. Olivia looks a fool. And it is the common
practice for actresses of Viola to seize every chance of reminding the audience that they are girls dressed up,
to impress on one moreover, by childish by-play as to legs and petticoats or the absence of them, that this is
the play's supreme joke. Now Shakespeare has devised one most carefully placed soliloquy where we are to
be forcibly reminded that Cesario is Viola; in it he has as carefully divided the comic from the serious side of
the matter. That scene played, Viola, who does not do her best, as far as the passages with Olivia are
concerned, to make us believe, as Olivia believes, that she is a man, shows, to my mind, a lack of imagination
and is guilty of dramatic bad manners, knocking, for the sake of a little laughter, the whole of the play's
romantic plot on the head.

Let me explain briefly the interpretation I favour of four or five other points.

I do not think that Sir Toby is meant for nothing but a bestial sot. He is a gentleman by birth, or he would not
be Olivia's uncle (or cousin, if that is the relationship). He has been, it would seem, a soldier. He is a drinker,
and while idleness leads him to excess, the boredom of Olivia's drawing-room, where she sits solitary in her
mourning, drives him to such jolly companions as he can find: Maria and Fabian and the Fool. He is a poor
relation, and has been dear to Sir Andrew some two thousand strong or so (poor Sir Andrew), but as to that he
might say he was but anticipating his commission as matrimonial agent. Now, dull though Olivia's house may
be, it is free quarters. He is, it is seems, in some danger of losing them, but if only by good luck he could see Sir
Andrew installed there as master! Not perhaps all one could wish for in an uncle; but to found an
interpretation of Sir Toby only upon a study of his unfortunate surname is, I think, for the actor to give us both
less and more than Shakespeare meant.

I do not believe that Sir Andrew is meant for a cretinous idiot. His accomplishments may not quite stand to Sir
Toby's boast of them; alas! the three or four languages, word for word without book, seem to end at "Dieu
vous garde, Monsieur." But Sir Andrew, as he would be if he could—the scholar to no purpose, the fine
fellow to no end, in short the perfect gentleman—is still the ideal of better men than he who yet can find
nothing better to do. One can meet a score of Sir Andrews, in greater or less perfection, any day after a
west-end London lunch, doing, what I believe is called, a slope down Bond.

Fabian, I think, is not a young man, for he hardly treats Sir Toby as his senior, he is the cautious one of the
practical jokers, and he has the courage to speak out to Olivia at the end. He treats Sir Andrew with a certain
respect. He is a family retainer of some sort; from his talk he has to do with horses and dogs.

Feste, I feel, is not a young man either. There runs through all he says and does that vein of irony by which we
may so often mark one of life's self-acknowledged failures. We gather that in those days, for a man of parts
without character and with more wit than sense, there was a kindly refuge from the world's struggle as an
allowed fool. Nowadays we no longer put them in livery.

I believe Antonio to be an exact picture of an Elizabethan seaman-adventurer, and Orsino's view of him to be
just such as a Spanish grandee would have taken of Drake. "Notable pirate" and "salt-water thief," he calls
him.

A bawbling vessel was he captain of,
For shallow draught and bulk unprizable;
With which such scathful grapple did he make
With the most noble bottom of our fleet,
That very envy and the tongue of loss
Cried fame and honour on him.
And Antonio is a passionate fellow as those west countrymen were. I am always reminded of him by the story of Richard Grenville chewing a wineglass in his rage.

The keynote of the poetry of the play are that it is passionate and it is exquisite. It is life, I believe, as Shakespeare glimpsed it with the eye of his genius in that half-Italianised court of Elizabeth. Orsino, Olivia, Antonio, Sebastian, Viola are passionate all, and conscious of the worth of their passion in terms of beauty. To have one's full laugh at the play's comedy is no longer possible, even for an audience of Elizabethan experts. Though the humour that is set in character is humour still, so much of the salt of it, its play upon the time and place, can have no savour for us. Instead we have learned editors disputing over the existence and meaning of jokes at which the simplest soul was meant to laugh unthinkingly. I would cut out nothing else, but I think I am justified in cutting those pathetic survivals.

Finally, as to the speaking of the verse and prose. The prose is mostly simple and straightforward. True, he could no more resist a fine-sounding word than, as has been said, he could resist a pun. They abound, but if we have any taste for the flavour of a language he makes us delight in them equally. There is none of that difficult involuted decoration for its own sake in which he revelled in the later plays. The verse is still regular, still lyrical in its inspiration, and it should I think be spoken swiftly . . .

I think that all Elizabethan dramatic verse must be spoken swiftly, and nothing can make me think otherwise. My fellow workers acting in The Winter's Tale were accused by some people (only by some) of gabbling. I readily take that accusation on myself, and I deny it. Gabbling implies hasty speech, but our ideal was speed, nor was the speed universal, nor, but in a dozen well-defined passages, really so great. Unexpected it was, I don't doubt; and once exceed the legal limit, as well accuse you of seventy miles an hour as twenty-one. But I call in question the evidence of mere policemen-critics. I question a little their expertness of hearing, a little too their quickness of understanding Elizabethan English not at its easiest, just a little their lack of delight in anything that is not as they thought it would be, and I suggest that it is more difficult than they think to look and listen and remember and appraise all in the same flash of time. But be all the shortcomings on one side and that side ours, it is still no proof that the thing come short of is not the right thing. That is the important point to determine, and for much criticism that has been helpful in amending what we did and making clearer what we should strive towards— I tender thanks.

The Winter's Tale, as I see its writing, is complex, vivid, abundant in the variety of its mood and pace and colour, now disordered, now at rest, the product of a mind rapid, changing, and over-full. I believe its interpretation should express all that. Twelfth Night is quite other. Daily, as we rehearse together, I learn more what it is and should be; the working together of the theatre is a fine thing. But, as a man is asked to name his stroke at billiards, I will even now commit myself to this: its serious mood is passionate, its verse is lyrical, the speaking of it needs swiftness and fine tone; not rush, but rhythm, constant and compelling. And now I wait contentedly to be told that less rhythmic speaking of Shakespeare has never been heard.


Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Celebration and Festivity

The themes of celebration and festivity were inherent in Shakespeare's sources; the incorporation of the Twelfth Night holiday was probably suggested by the Italian play Gl'Ingannati, which contained a reference to La Notte di Beffania, the Epiphany. However, recent criticism has reached past the surface gaiety suggested in the title, and delved into themes behind the temporary release of a celebration.
Michael Taylor

[Taylor compares the passive posturing of Orsino, who reflects the acceptance of events shaped by a carefree or festive approach, to the more active stance of Viola, who aptly captures the essence of the subtitle, "What You Will." Olivia and Orsino both retreat from reality in their respective emotional indulgences: Orsino's in unrequited love and Olivia's in grief for her brother. The critic contends that Malvolio, however, believes he can change his reality through sheer force of will and therefore also acts according to the subtitle in his quest for greatness.]

Although the exact chronology of Shakespeare's plays is still in dispute, on the available evidence most commentators think *Twelfth Night* to be the last of the Romantic Comedies, close in time to *Hamlet*. The piquancy of this association has not gone unnoticed, and there is occasionally an anachronistic ring to critical judgements on *Twelfth Night*, caught best by the one that thrusts Hamlet's greatness upon Malvolio. Yet the dilemma which confounds the tragic protagonist appears also to disturb the equanimity of those in the comedy who, like him, balk at what seem to them excessively difficult situations, and who, like him also, are unable to end their troubles simply by opposing them. Even in indulgent Illyria, retreat into languor or knock-about-comedy does not muffle entirely the clamorous demands from the real world for decisions to be made and actions taken. Over the play hangs Sir Toby's great question, "Is it a world to hide virtues in?" (I.3.117-118).

In many ways, of course, Illyria, unlike *Hamlet*’s Denmark, offers its aristocratic inhabitants a life freed from the obligation to exercise their virtues. The kind of licence that the play's main title conveys can be enjoyed at its most untrammelled in the simple indulgences of the sub-plot. Although Sir Toby has as much contempt for his drinking companion, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, as he has for his puritan enemy, Malvolio, Sir Andrew's naive conception of the good life lies at the heart of their activity: "it rather consists of eating and drinking" (II.3.10-11). If it were not for Maria, who hatches the plot against Malvolio, the sub-plot would have little to offer other than the spectacle of aimless roistering. Despite Sir Toby's noisy contempt for "the modest limits of order" (I.3.8), or his lack of respect for place, persons, and time (to echo Malvolio's accusation), his belligerent claim to the hedonistic life does not amount to very much. The festive spirit, given free reign on *Twelfth Night*, depends here, as elsewhere in the play, upon an essential passivity on the part of its adherents.

Passivity in the guise of a carefree enjoyment of the good things of life may be more tolerable than in the form it takes with Orsino, whose contribution to a Twelfth Night philosophy has nothing to recommend it. Of all Shakespeare's romantic heroes his role must surely be the most difficult for any actor to make attractive. Supine in his passion, Orsino conducts his love-affair with Olivia through emissaries, Valentine initially, and then Viola as Cesario. This leaves him free to contemplate the tyrant sway of his "love-thoughts" from which in fact he longs to escape, or says he does: "And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds / E'er since pursue me" (I.1.23-24). Unable to act, he cannot take responsibility for his own feelings, as his figure indicates, divorcing himself from them as though they were external agents sent to plague him. He seems no more able to translate words into deeds than Olivia's other suitor, Sir Andrew, whom he also resembles, though on a more highly poetic plane, in his vacillation and instability of opinion. In the space of some ninety lines in Act II, Orsino moves from a conception of himself as devoted to the "constant image of the creature / That is beloved" (II.4.18-19) through an attack on the inconstancy of men's affections when compared with women's (II.4.32-34) to an attack on women's inconstancy in love when compared with men:

> Alas, their love may be called appetite,  
> No motion of the liver but the palate,  
> That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt.  
> (II.4.96-98)

Orsino's patronizing regret, here, for the crudity of women's love for men not only contradicts his recent opinion as to "giddy and unfirm" masculine fancies, but does so in language which cannot but remind us of
the play's opening lines, where he appeals on his own behalf for a medicinal "surfeiting" in order that his "appetite may sicken and so die" (I.1.3). "Surfeit, cloyment, and revolt," in fact, constitute the cycle from whose paralyzing influence Orsino escapes only in his marriage to Viola.

Subject to every fleeting whim, what can someone like Orsino do? He cannot do much more than talk about what he might do, or, at best, demand that others do urgently for him what he can only urgently demand them to do. "Be clamorous and leap all civil bounds" (I.4.20) he urges Viola, for (in a prophetic line) "It shall become thee well to act my woes" (I.4.25). "What shall I do?" (V.1.109) he asks Olivia, whose reply nicely balances courtesy and contempt: "Even what it please my lord, that shall become him" (V.1.110). Although his question may not be so inane as Sir Andrew's "What is 'pourquoi'? Do, or not do?" (I.3.83), between them they voice in comic fashion the alternative which faces Hamlet: do, or not do. In both their cases (unlike his), any attempt to take decisive action is doomed to be comically ineffectual. When Orsino discovers that Olivia believes herself to be in love with Cesario he indulges his fury in self-dramatization and empty threats:

    Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
      Like to th'Egyptian thief at point of death,
    Kill what I love?
(V.1.111-113)

Such bombast circumstance gives way to a recognition of impotence (though still phrased bombastically): "Live you the marble-breasted tyrant still" (V.1.118).

Indolence, passivity and impotence are constitutive of a Twelfth Night philosophy: care must be, indeed, the enemy of this life. With Viola's entry onto Twelfth Night's stage, the emphasis shifts temporarily (to return each time she returns) to a meaning of the play's sub-title, "What You Will" which offers itself as a genuine alternative to the main title. She supplies what those idling through an Illyrian Twelfth Night lack: direction, willed purpose, persistence and decisiveness. "I'll serve this duke" (I.2.55) she says when we meet her first, indicating how much more than simply an Orsinian lament was her original question: "And what should I do in Illyria?" (I.2.3). In her disguise as Cesario, she obeys Orsino's instructions to the letter, much to Malvolio's discomfiture. "He's fortified against any denial" (I.5.138-139) Malvolio complains to an intrigued Olivia, "He'll speak with you, will you or no" (I.5.147-148). How much her purposefulness becomes her is indicated, of course, in Olivia's admiring, "You might do much" (I.5.263). In these circumstances, Viola's perplexity over Olivia's continued rejection of Orsino's suit does not extend beyond herself. We can see quite clearly why her active involvement in Illyrian affairs should in a trice break down Olivia's self-denying and artificial barriers against natural feeling. "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?" (I.5.281) wonders Olivia. In these circumstances, even so.

Having caught it Olivia does not retire into sweet beds of flowers, even though she suffers the same treatment from Viola that she has been according Orsino. Her resilience here does not come as a total surprise to us, for she has displayed, from the outset, her own brand of willed purpose. In her misplaced determination to mourn her brother's death for seven years, we acknowledge a strength of will, however perverse. Valentine's caustic account to Orsino of her decision grasps its comic impropriety:

    But like a cloistress she will veiled walk,
      And water once a day her chamber round
    With eye-offending brine all this to season
    A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
      And lasting in her sad remembrance.
(I.1.29-33)
Valentine reduces Olivia's daily expression of devotion to an unthinking exercise in the art of sad remembrance, as mechanical as watering flowers, except that the salt in Olivia's tears hurts her eyes. His metaphor from preserving meat, the ambiguity in "eye-offending" and his pointed use of the transferred epithet ("a brother's dead love") tell us why Olivia might well have to strain hard for her tears. Her persistence is unnatural and foolish, a stubborn exertion of the misdirected will.

A determination to pursue a course of action, no matter how fatuous, obviously provides no real alternative to an indulgence of inertia. Olivia's activity in memory of her dead brother resembles Orsino's languor in behalf of love: each a retreat from reality. In Shakespeare's presentation of Malvolio (whose name means "bad will"), his conviction that reality can be transformed by an exercise of the will overwhelms all his notions of social decorum and subdues his common-sense. Malvolio has no intention of hiding his virtues, for he is, in Maria's words, "the best persuaded of himself; so crammed as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (II.3.136-139). Maria's trick against him exploits this supreme conceit, relying on Malvolio's strength of will to pursue inanity to excess and surfeit. Her letter cleverly appeals to his "blood" and "spirit," asking him to inure himself "to what thou art like to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh" (II.5.135-137). Unlike Orsino, Malvolio finds nothing difficult nor distasteful in the activities demanded of him, despite their demeaning tricks of singularity:

Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants.
Let thy tongue tang arguments of state;
put thyself into the trick of singularity . . .
Remember who commended thy yellow stockings
and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered.
(II.5.137-141)

Malvolio's performance exceeds expectation. Only a man blindly convinced of his own worth, assured that in no circumstances can he possibly appear ridiculous, could parade himself in this manner. Arrogantly self-willed, Malvolio, more extremely than Olivia, brings the notion of self-assertion in the play's sub-title into greater disrepute than Sir Toby the license implicit in "Twelfth Night." The letter speaks to his deepest convictions about himself, especially in one of its last injunctions: "Go to, thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so" (II.5.142-143) [my italics], releasing in him a flood of "wills":

I will be proud, I will read politic authors,
I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance,
I will be point-devise, the very man.
(II.5.148-150)

Such a rhapsody, despite his insistence on Jove's benign intervention, places Malvolio squarely in the second and third of the three categories of greatness the letter describes: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em" (II.5.132-134).


Thad Jenkins Logan
Logan explores the darker side of the carnival atmosphere of Twelfth Night, arguing that in the night world of the play, festivity has lost its innocence. He identifies the theme of the main plot as sexual, and the subplot, revelry, explaining that sexuality and revelry are the "two faces of the Saturnalian experience." The critic contends that the characters of the play are able to lose themselves in festivity because they, with the exception of Feste and Malvolio, are young and wealthy and literally carefree. Malvolio plays the parental role, and true to the reversal which underlies Saturnalian festivity, is imprisoned, just as those natural
impulses of restraint are locked up and ignored during the pursuits of pleasure. Feste links the plots and suggests through his melancholy songs that festivity isn’t as satisfying as it appears. Logan maintains that in Twelfth Night, love has nothing to do with personality and that Shakespeare intends to demonstrate to his audience through removing natural limits in the stage world that Saturnian festivity taken to its final extreme is not reconcilable with social or moral norms, and results in violence and indiscriminate passion.

In Twelfth Night Shakespeare presents us with a world given over to pleasure, intoxication, and freedom. Any accurate interpretation must acknowledge the thematic importance of festivity, and critics like Barber, Leslie Hotson, L. G. Salingar, and John Hollander have provided valuable insights in this respect. Yet none of these critics has dealt quite adequately with the particular nature of festivity in this play, and my concentration on the dark side of the carnival world of Twelfth Night should be viewed as a supplement to their interpretations. It is clear that festive experience permits of distinctions: a New Year’s Eve party, a Christmas dinner, and a wedding are all festive occasions, but constitute different experiences. Similarly, from a point of view of structure, the formal features which lead Barber to characterize a comedy as “festive” may be discovered in many plays, but crucial differences among the plays exist within that framework. The experience of Twelfth Night is very different from that of As You Like It or Midsummer Night’s Dream, plays in which a critic may find similar dramatic elements and a number of formal analogues; I conceive the identifying, distinctive experience of Twelfth Night to be a function of the nature of festivity in that play. As its title suggests, the world of this play is a night world, and festivity here has lost its innocence.

Leslie Hotson has noted [in The First Night of Twelfth Night, 1954] that the subtitle "what you will" recalls the motto of the Abbaye de Theleme: "fay ce que vouldras." The phrase suggests that a fundamental concern of the play is what [David Horowitz, Shakespeare: An Existential View (London: Tavistock, 1965)] has called "multiple pleasures and wills to pleasure." Jan Kott, in a brilliant though idiosyncratic assessment of Twelfth Night, asserts that sex is the theme of the play ["Shakespeare’s Bitter Arcadia," in Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 1964]; this is accurate enough but it is incomplete, since the secondary plot is highly significant in terms of stage time, and that plot is not primarily centered on sexuality, but on a set of drives that have to do with food, drink, song, dance, and fun. "Revelry" is probably as good a term as any to describe these particular sorts of pleasure, and I will use it in this essay to refer specifically to them. The relationship between the two plots is, in part, dependent on the fact that revelry and eroticism are closely allied; they are the two faces of Saturnalian experience. Twelfth Night, then, is an anatomy of festivity which focuses in the main plot on sexuality and in the sub-plot on revelry; the subtitle implies that these are what we, the audience, want.

It is crucial to recognize that the play makes an appeal to our own drives toward pleasure, toward liberation from the restraints of ordinary life. This is not, finally, an immoral play, but its authentic morality can only be discovered if we are willing to make a descent into the night world: its meaning remains opaque if we insist on seeing at every moment in every play a conservative, Apollonian Shakespeare. (We will do well to remember that Dionysus is the presiding genius of the theater.) Twelfth Night is not an enticement to licentious behavior, but it is an invitation to participate imaginatively in a Saturnalian feast.

A pervasive atmosphere of liberty and license is established by the opening scenes. The first thing we recognize about Illyria is that it is a world of privilege and leisure in which the aristocracy are at play. Goddard, whose vision of the play is in many ways similar to my own, calls Illyria "a counterfeit Elysium" [in The Meaning of Shakespeare, 1954], and characterizes its citizens as parasitical pleasure-seekers, partly on the grounds that any aristocratic society is founded on "the unrecognized labors of others". Certainly, there are only two characters in the play who seem to have any work to do: they are Feste and Malvolio, whose positions in the social world will be discussed at greater length; for most of the characters, leisure is a way of life. There are no rude mechanicals here. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria are clearly not members of the lower class, although the conventions of comedy and Shakespeare’s usual practices have sometimes led directors to make that mistake about them. That the characters of the sub-plot are themselves members of the
Aristocracy is a significant feature of this play. Olivia and Orsino are at the very top of the social hierarchy; they are young, rich, elegant, and fashionable. The captain who rescues Viola suggests something of their éclat in his initial description of Orsino [quotations from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1974)]:

> And then 'twas fresh in murmur (as you know,  
> What great ones do, the less will prattle of)  
> That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.  
> (I.ii.32-34)

Even the shipwrecked twins are well-off; Sebastian is amply provided for by the doting Antonio upon his arrival in Illyria, and Viola has somehow emerged from the sea with enough gold to pay the captain "bounteously."

The wealth and social position of the characters are important in several ways and should be established clearly in production; besides setting the action in a framework of aristocratic values, pleasures, and mores, they contribute a great deal to a sense of liberation and license. Characters are, in part, free to pursue "what they will" because they can afford to do so. The financial conditions upon which Illyrian revelry depends are made explicit by Sir Toby: "Let's to bed, knight. Thou hadst need send for more money" (II.iii.182 and 183). Along with economic freedom, the social status of the main characters allows them to pursue pleasure according to their fancy. Orsino is attended by courtiers who provide him with music, and presumably with "sweet beds of flow'rs," on command; Olivia speaks to Cesario/Sebastian from a position of power, arranging rendezvous as she chooses. Her disorderly kinsman and his guest may be threatened by her displeasure, but they are apparently in no danger from any sort of civil authority; in the brawl that follows the practical joke played on Viola and Sir Andrew, it is only the outsider, Antonio, who is arrested.

Political power is, in fact, vested in Orsino; as the Duke of Illyria, he might be expected to function as the parent-figure in Northrop Frye's model of the structure of comedy ["The Mythos of Spring: Comedy" in *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957]. From his first speech, however, it becomes clear that Orsino is not going to embody principles of law, order, and restraint in this comic world. In fact, there are no parents at all in Illyria, as Joseph Summers has cogently noted [in "The Masks of *Twelfth Night*" in *The University of Kansas City Review*, 1955]. Here, the social order is in the hands of youth, and wealth and power are at the service of youth's pursuit of pleasure.

It is Malvolio, of course, who fills the dramatic functions of the senex and the blocking figure, but what is curious about Malvolio in this respect is that he is a servant of Olivia. In a comic world noticeably lacking parents, Malvolio becomes a parent figure insofar as he performs some characteristic parental roles: it is he who tells the revellers to be quiet and go to bed. Yet Malvolio is a remarkably ineffective blocking figure; he shows himself powerless to control Sir Toby and Maria, much less to inhibit the actions of the lovers. The figure who stands for law and order in this play is not only made the butt of practical jokes, but is, in the structure of the play's society, only an employee. As such, he has no real authority: his "parenting" may be made use of by Olivia when it is convenient, and dispensed with when it is not. No one is morally or legally compelled to obey Malvolio; certainly no one is inclined to do so, nor is anyone inclined to share his stolid, earnest, workaday consciousness.

In the course of the play, the sort of consciousness that Malvolio embodies is literally locked away in the dark. His imprisonment is a striking emblem of the psychic reversal that underlies Saturnalian festivity: impulses that are normally repressed are liberated, while the controls of the super-ego are temporarily held in check. What gives Illyria its distinctive atmosphere is our sense that in this world such a reversal is a way of life. For most of the characters, everyday is holiday. Festivity is the norm here, and misrule is the order of the night.
The audience of *Twelfth Night* participates imaginatively in an experience of psychic liberation, but does not share the "madness" of the Illyrians; in Freudian terms, our ego and super-ego continue to function normally. There are modes of awareness available to us that are not available to the characters (we hold, for example, the keys to all riddles of identity in this play), and we retain an integrity of consciousness that the characters do not. Freud, of course, conceived of art as a transformation of unconscious fantasy material into a publicly acceptable form; while a Freudian theory of art tends to be limited and reductive, it provides a useful model for an audience's experience of *Twelfth Night*. Fantasies of love and anarchy, given free in Illyria, are presented on the stage, made present for our contemplation as well as our imaginative participation. It is as though we are allowed to be at once asleep and awake; our own fantasies, "what we will," are newly discovered to us. The sorts of things we learn about the night-world of the psyche are profoundly disturbing. Festivity turns out to be fraught with dangers and complications: Eros mocks the individual; Dionysius is a god of pain as well as a god of pleasure.

According to Leslie Hotson, for Shakespeare and his original audience "what the Dalmatian-Croatian *Illyria* brought to mind was thoughts of wild riot and drunkenness." In the sub-plot of *Twelfth Night*, as in the Bacchic rites, what riot and drunkenness lead to are violence and cruelty. Among all Shakespeare's comedies, it is only in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* that there is literally blood on the stage. It is characteristic of the violence in the former play to be artificial in the sense of being invented by the characters themselves rather than necessitated by the movement of the plot or brought in from outside the comic world by a villain. In *As You Like It*, for instance, violence is created by the wicked Duke Frederick or by the encounter of man and nature. Because the violence of *Twelfth Night*, at least that which we see on the stage, is directly or indirectly effected by an appetite for diversion, there is always an element of superfluous about it that is curiously disturbing; it is like the underside of play. Violence in this play is optional, chosen, "what we will."

Freud has taught us that cruelty is the genesis of practical jokes. Whether or not Malvolio deserves his treatment at the hands of Maria, it seems to me that her sadistic impulses towards him are obvious. Once he has been gulled into smiles and yellow stockings, her response to him is "I can hardly forbear hurling things at him" (III.ii.81). Her "sportful malice" creates a web of illusion that is, up to a point, very funny indeed. Yet from the moment Malvolio cries out, "they have laid me here in hideous darkness" (IV.ii.29 and 30), he begins to claim a share of the audience's sympathy. His plight is too close to our own nightmare fears, his language too evocative, for us to feel quite comfortable laughing at him. The feeling that the joke has gone too far is voiced by Sir Toby: "I would we were well rid of this knavery" (IV.ii.67-68). The game threatens to come real: "We shall make him mad indeed," objects Fabian, to which Maria responds, "The house will be the quieter" (III.iv.133-34). She has, she says, "dogg'd him like his murtherer" (III.ii.76-77), and she is in earnest in her perpetration of psychic violence. That Maria bears the name of the Virgin is another example of the reversal characteristic of Saturnalian festivity.

Once Malvolio has fallen prey to the machinations of the revellers and to his own fantasies, Sir Toby's idea of a good time is to set Cesario and Sir Andrew at one another. He does not, of course, expect blood to be spilled—certainly not his own—but he has not reckoned with encountering the energies of Sebastian. Energy is precisely what he does encounter, however, and it leaves him and his companion broken and bloody. The play discovers to us the fact that festive revelry is likely to unleash psychic forces that are not easily controlled. In the metaphorical language of stage action, the wounded revellers function both in terms of myth and in terms of quotidian experience: in one sense, they are suffering the predictable consequences of a drunken brawl; in another, they remind us that the rites of Bacchus culminate in bloodshed.

There is within the play world one character who provides an ironic commentary on revelry, who seems to know that the pursuit of pleasure can be destructive, and who leads the audience toward a recognition of the emptiness of festive excess. Paradoxically, this is Feste the jester, whose name and office closely associate him with the festive experience. Festivity, as I have suggested, is the conceptual and experiential link between the sub-plot and the main plot; similarly, Feste acts in the play as a link between different sets of characters,
moving freely from one group to another, like the spirit of festivity incarnate in the world of Illyria. But oddly, festivity itself, as incarnate in Feste, seems to participate in the principle of reversal characteristic of the play, and hover on the verge of becoming its opposite.

As Feste moves through the world of Illyria, he challenges our assumptions about festivity and foolery; he suggests not only that the fool is the only sane person in this world, but also that festivity is not as satisfying an experience as we might imagine. All three of his songs direct our attention to aspects of experience we might prefer to forget: death, the swift passage of time, and the fact that, on the whole, life is likely to bring us more pain than pleasure. Feste does not often amuse us, or the other characters; we do not often laugh with him—he does not give us occasion to do so. He seems to be, on the whole, rather an unhappy fellow. He is first discovered to us as an employee who may be dismissed; like Malvolio, Feste is a professional. Festivity is work for him, and it is evidently work which has become tiresome. He appears on stage as though he is returning from a long absence; his first words are "Let her hang me!" in response to Maria's scolding that his absence has displeased Olivia. It is easy to imagine Feste played as though he were disillusioned, cynical, and bored. Olivia herself calls him "a dry fool," says he grows dishonest, and tells him "your fooling grows old, and people dislike it" (I.v.110). Feste is distanced from the other inhabitants of Illyria because he is immune to the lures of drink, love, fantasy, and the distortions they create: he seems to have known these things and come out the other side. The festive experience is his trade; it holds no mysteries for him, and no delights.

Feste and Malvolio are, as we might expect, antagonists. They quarrel early in the play, and in the last scene Feste recalls that quarrel, taking special pleasure in Malvolio's humiliation and the part he has played in it. There seems to be a good deal of personal rancor in his "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (V.i.376, 377). The experience of dislike is not a common one in Shakespeare's comedies, and its appearance here is disturbing. Feste also does not like Viola, who makes a serious mistake about his nature; "I warrant thou art a merry fellow, and car'st for nothing." His response is a cold one: "Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible" (III.i.26-30). The straightforward statement of dislike, of a motiveless personal hostility, sounds a new note in the comic world; it is, of course, Feste who at the end of the play will lead us out of that world.

There is a similar moment of "dis-integration" when Sir Toby reveals his true feelings about Sir Andrew: "Will you help?—an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-fac'd knave, a gull!" (V.i.206-207). There is never much sense of a human community established in Twelfth Night. Friendship is not a significant structural feature of the main plot, as it is in Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It. The revellers' fellowship is broken by the end of the play, and they do not participate in the happy ending. We are, admittedly, told that Sir Toby has married Maria, but we do not see them together on stage at the end. Antonio, so far as we can tell from the script, is never released from arrest, and Malvolio leaves the stage in anger. Critical notions that the end of the play is a vision of harmony and communal integration seem to me totally unjustified. A social community based on charitable love is never created in Twelfth Night; here, erotic love does not become a figure for charity, and marriage does not symbolize a universal harmony.

"What is love?" asks Feste. The conclusions we are led toward by the action of Twelfth Night are not, on the whole, happy ones. Sexuality in Illyria is mysterious and illusive. "What are we? What would we?" are questions the play sets for its audience. In Feste's lyric, love is the immediate gratification of desire: "Then come kiss me sweet and twenty." The play, however, begins with a stalemate: desire is frustrated, and fantasies conflict. Orsino wants Olivia, Olivia "will admit no kind of suit." It is the characteristic situation of courtly love; the roles Olivia and Orsino choose to play are familiar ones. In the course of the play, Shakespeare leads us from conventional modalities of love to a discovery of other erotic truths. This discovery is effected by the relationship of the four lovers as it is played out in the stage-world.
Part of the extraordinary appeal of Viola and Sebastian (and they have been almost as attractive to critics as to the characters in the play) comes from their air of innocence. Both Olivia and Orsino explicitly use the word "youth" on almost every occasion when they speak to or about Cesario. The twins bring a special vernal quality into the play; it is their appearance that breaks the stalemate established in the first scene. They are, in a sense, the green world. A significant number of critics assume that they teach Olivia and Orsino the meaning of love, and redeem the world into which they enter. I believe that such an interpretation does not sufficiently acknowledge our experience of the erotic aspects of the play. It is important, first of all, to notice that both Viola and Sebastian are androgynous.

Throughout the play we are compelled to pay attention to Viola's shifting sexual identity. We see her first as a girl, and watch her make decisions about how to present herself to the world; the idea of disguise thus becomes prominent, and entails the awareness that we ordinarily determine gender by dress, by appearance. The possibility of disguise suggests that there is something arbitrary about identity, and a disguise that involves a change of gender similarly suggests that our apprehension of sexual identity is mutable and susceptible to illusion. After her first scene, Viola never again appears to us as anything but a boy; unlike Rosalind, she does not re-assume her "woman's weeds" at the end of the play. A number of lines in the play draw attention to her disguise. The most notable is Orsino's description:

Diana's lip is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.
(I.iv.31-34)

A modern audience perceives this as a moment in which Orsino is close to discovering the "truth" about Cesario; Shakespeare, however, must have written the lines assuming that Orsino would deliver them to a boy disguised as a girl disguised as a boy. Viola, in fact, seems to be both a boy and a girl, and is romantically involved with both a man and a woman.

Sebastian also combines characteristics of both genders. Although I have remarked on his energy, Sebastian says of himself (on parting with Antonio), "I am yet so near the manners of my mother, that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me" (II.i.40-42). In relation to both Antonio and Olivia, Sebastian takes a passive, classically feminine role; he enjoys their attentions, and allows them to present him with lavish gifts. Now in one sense Antonio is a nurturing parent-figure, and again the principle of reversal is operative; the parent is subservient to the child: "If you will not murther me for my love," cries Antonio, "let me be your servant" (II.i.35-36). Antonio not only speaks to Sebastian like a doting parent, however, but also like a lover. Against Sebastian's wishes, he has followed him to Illyria:

I could not stay behind you. My desire
(More sharp than filed steel) did spur me forth,
And not all love to see you (though so much
As might have drawn one to a longer voyage)
But jealousy what might befall your travel.
(III.iii 4-8)

Like Viola, Sebastian is involved in erotic relationships with both a man and a woman.

The twins' androgyny may be, as some critics have suggested, related to their youth and innocence, but it also makes any romantic relationship into which they enter suspect. As soon as Viola/Cesario becomes an object of desire, we are drawn into the night world. Insofar as Viola is a girl, her encounters with Olivia inevitably suggest lesbianism; insofar as Cesario is a boy, all his relations with Orsino suggest homosexuality. Barber, in attempting to deal with this issue, assures us that "with sexual as with other relations, it is when the normal is
secure that playful aberration is benign [in Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, 1959].” Undoubtedly, but what sexual relation can we perceive as normal in Illyria?

What we see on stage in the course of the play is a delirious erotic chase; Viola pursues Orsino who pursues Olivia who pursues both Viola and Sebastian, who is pursued by Antonio. Salingar has noted [in "The Design of Twelfth Night" in Shakespeare Quarterly, 1958] that "the main action of Twelfth Night, then, is planned with a suggestive likeness to a revel." Indeed. And the sort of revel it is most like is an orgy. Ordinarily, sexual experience is private, and involves two partners. In orgiastic experience, the number of possible sexual partners is multiplied, and distinctions of gender become less important. On the stage, we see Sebastian erotically linked with Antonio and Olivia, Orsino with Cesario and Olivia, Viola with Orsino and Olivia, Olivia with Viola and Sebastian. For the spectators of this "whirligig," and for the characters caught up in it, the complexities of eroticism in Illyria are dizzying.

There never is, needless to say, a real orgy; the playwright is in control of the revels, after all, and the comedy ends in marriage; sexual energy is channelled into appropriate social institutions. In Barber's words, "delusions and misapprehensions are resolved by the finding of objects appropriate to passions." Well, yes. Orsino marries Cesario, who loves him, and Olivia marries a man. But by this time passions have so slipped their moorings in terms of objects of desire (who, for example, does Olivia love?) that this finding of objects appropriate to passions seems rather like a game of musical chairs. My point is that the marriages at the end of Twelfth Night do not convince us that sexuality is ever ordered and controlled with regard to the individual in society.

In the final scene Olivia and Orsino claim their partners. There is no doubt, from an audience's perspective, who is in control here: Olivia and Orsino are older and they possess social status that the twins do not; they further control the scene in the special theatrical sense of having most of the lines. Olivia has already, by the last scene, engineered a marriage with the complaisant Sebastian. Having effected her own wedding by sheer force of will, it is Olivia who moves at the end of the play to arrange the betrothal of Viola and Orsino:

My Lord, so please you, these things further thought on,
To think me well a sister as a wife,
One day shall crown th' alliance on't, so please you,
Here at my house and at my proper cost.
(V.i.316-19)

Orsino embraces her offer, and takes Viola's hand. It is important to remember that if we saw this scene in a theater, we would see him take Cesario's hand; the actor is still dressed as a boy, as he is some moments later when Orsino leads him from the stage.

Throughout the play, Olivia and Orsino are self-absorbed, self-willed and self-indulgent creatures: there is no evidence that they change significantly as a result of their encounters with the twins. Orsino's last words, like his first, are about himself: "But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen" (V.i.387-88). He is still speaking of "fancy." Orsino's anagnorisis seems to involve only the recognition that if he cannot have Olivia he may as well take Cesario: "I shall have share in this most happy wrack" (V.i.266). Similarly, there is no reason for an audience to believe that Olivia has made meaningful discoveries about the nature of love. If she was headstrong and reckless in loving Cesario, it is hard to see her as docile and prudent in her relations with Sebastian. At the end of the play, as at the beginning, Olivia is doing precisely what she wants to do.

While Olivia and Orsino have not really learned anything about love during the play, we in the audience have. As I have suggested earlier, when external obstacles to the pursuit of love are removed, as they are in Illyria, it is the nature of passion itself that lovers must contend with. "Bright things come to confusion" readily enough
in our world without the interference of blocking figures. Love, first of all, can be unrequited. It is, horribly enough, possible to love someone who—for no good reason—just does not return that love. Olivia makes it perfectly clear:

I cannot love him,
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,
And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.
(I.v.257-62)

Orsino responds, "I cannot be so answer'd," and continues to long for what he cannot have in a particularly elegant, "poetical" fashion. Olivia, faced with rejection by Cesario, takes a more active approach; her "headstrong potent fault" finds expression in direct, aggressive confrontation with Cesario. It is Viola whose response to loving without requital has become best known:

She never told her love,
But let concealement like a worm i' the bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.
(II.iv.110-15)

It has been argued that this is not really an accurate description of Viola; perhaps it is exaggerated, but certainly Viola's reaction to loving one who loves another is of this same kind; she waits for "Time" to resolve a painful situation made more painful by her concealed identity. It seems to me very peculiar to regard this as a norm or an ideal, as some critics suggest.

At last, of course, Viola has her reward; Orsino's love for Olivia, which could "give no place, bide no delay," suddenly turns to her. That love can so turn is another of its characteristics that Twelfth Night discovers to us; again, it is an old truth. Here, in a comic structure, love's capriciousness works toward a comic resolution of the plot. Orsino can, after all, love Viola; Olivia can just as well marry Sebastian as Cesario. Yet Dr. Johnson's objection [in Johnson as a Critic, 1973] to Olivia's marriage is, as one might expect, lucid and to the point. Only in myth and ritual are twins the same person, and while the stage world is, in part, a mythic realm, theater—and Shakespeare's theater in particular—is closely bound to the empirical, naturalistic world the audience inhabits. In that frame of reference, Olivia abandons her vow of chastity to pursue the first new man she meets, marries his (her) twin brother by mistake, and seems willing to transfer her affections to a man she does not know because he looks like the one she fell in love with.

The crucial point is this: at the end of the play we perceive that love really has little or nothing to do with personality. It is, as Kott has said of love in As You Like It, an electric current that passes through the bodies of men and women, boys and girls. Passion violates identity. That this is true in terms of the individual's consciousness is a truism. "Ourselves we do not owe," cries Olivia, succumbing to her feelings for Cesario. The action of Twelfth Night suggests that it is not only the personality of the lover that is disrupted by passion: it is personality itself, the whole concept of unique, distinct identity. Cesario, the beloved, is both Viola and Sebastian; it really doesn't matter. Olivia and Viola are ultimately as interchangeable as their names suggest. As in Spenser's Garden of Adonis, forms change, but Form remains; here, however, the "Form" is not a structure or a pattern, but energy, energy which propels individuals, sometimes against their will, toward others who may or may not be so moved. Such, it seems to me, is love in Twelfth Night.
Shakespeare has made similar suggestions about the nature of love in *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, plays which also deal with psychic liberation; yet these plays do not lead us to a dark vision of the psyche. Nor do they have the melancholy tone of *Twelfth Night*; the language of this comedy is unusual in being not bawdy but grim. There are remarkably few ribald puns in *Twelfth Night*; by my count, there are twenty-nine references to madness in the play, twenty-two references to disease, twenty-five to devilry, and thirty-seven to destruction and death. The play's somber language would seem to be at odds with its festive structure; in my view, the structure and language are particularly compatible given the nature of festivity in *Twelfth Night*.

One difference between Illyria and the Wood of Athens is that in the wood, powerful and ultimately benevolent beings exist to set things right, beings who are intimately allied with, indeed embodiments of, the natural world. Illyria is a city, not a forest. In *Twelfth Night*, unlike *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, festivity is divorced from pastoral, and this is crucially important to our experience of the play, since it means that sexuality is not perceived in relation to nature.

The concept of nature which the Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages made a distinction between material phenomena (natura naturata) and an organizing principle (natura naturans); the latter was conceived as a structuring energy which, under Divine Providence, brought the physical phenomena into existence and patterned their being. As a manifestation of natura naturans, sexuality may wreak havoc in individual lives, but pursues its own ends of fertility and generation. Thus, as in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, a loss of identity can result from being subsumed in forces greater than the conscious self; personality may be blurred or erased by these forces, but finally they are beneficent in that they drive towards the preservation of life. The multiple marriages at the end of *As You Like It* provoke even from Jacques the comment (the realization), "these couples are coming to the ark." But in *Twelfth Night*, the absence of pastoral distances festivity from fertility, just as the absence of bawdry distances sexuality from a simple, homely pleasure that all humans share with the beasts. Illyria is beautiful, aristocratic, and sterile.

Festivity in *Twelfth Night* is divorced not only from nature, but, as I have indicated, from occasion. It is not a temporary release from social restraints but a permanent condition. The Forest of Arden and the Wood of Athens are places into which people enter in the course of the play and from which they will return; there is, to paraphrase Ralph Berry, "no escape from Illyria." The marriages there do not seem to place erotic love in a community, or to anchor it in a social life where impulses are ordered—not necessarily repressed, but controlled and contained.

That ordering, in a healthy society, provides more, rather than less individual freedom; the ability to control drives and impulses means, for the individual, freedom from the tyranny of the unconscious, while societal restraints ultimately protect the individual from the tyranny of others. The real tragedy of Malvolio lies in the fact that in this play the principle of order has become too rigid and too perverse to accommodate pleasure. Of course we laugh at him, he is ridiculous, yet his expulsion from the comic world brings an end to "Shakespeare's Festive Comedy," since it means that sobriety and intoxication, parents and children, workday and holiday, restraint and release, cannot be reconciled. In this way, Malvolio's exit is as disturbing as Mercade's entrance in *Love's Labours Lost* with his message of death. We feel, in the audience, the necessity of somehow making peace with him, and he is gone. His last line must certainly include everyone in the theater.

The play itself has discovered to us the dangers of life without the principle of order that Malvolio stands for; Feste's final song serves as a vivid reminder. The Rabelaisian ideal of freedom (the Abbaye de Theleme) only is possible when human nature can be trusted; doing what we will can be a horror if the forces that drive us are dark. In *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare leads us to explore the possibility that our drives to pleasure are ultimately irreconcilable with social and moral norms of goodness; it is the antithesis of *As You Like It*, which works from the hypothesis that people are basically good at heart. In *As You Like It*, the characters and the
audience arrive at a restoration of the world; in \textit{Twelfth Night}, what the characters and the audience come to are the limits of festival, and at that extremity are violence and indiscriminate passion.

The play does not so much tell us but show us that these are what we want. It is the audience who finally approve, with their laughter and applause, the actions of the characters. I do not mean to suggest that we should not laugh and applaud, or that we should become a community of Malvolios, hostile to pleasure. This is a very funny play, and nearly all the characters—certainly including Orsino and Olivia— are enormously appealing. That is just the point. What I am suggesting is this: to delight in the pranks of the revellers is to participate vicariously in a form of Dionysian frenzy; to assent to the ending, to confirm it as a "happy" one, is to embrace the possibility of erotic love as transpersonal and trans-sexual. But the play does not wholeheartedly confirm the value of Saturnalian pleasure; if it is not sentimentalized in production, if festivity is allowed to reach its limits, then the play itself will create an awareness that "what we will" is potentially dark and dangerous.


\section*{Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Role Playing and Problems of Identity}

\textbf{J. Dennis Huston}

[Huston outlines a number of "unanswered problems" in Twelfth Night. Among these are the juxtaposition of scenes which take place three months apart, Viola's puzzling reaction to the appearance of her brother, and the lack of any resolution to the matter of Antonio's imprisonment. The critic maintains that these questions arise from the sense of detachment the play creates in its audience by presenting Illyria as a kind of fairy-tale world. Huston goes on to offer a psychological analysis of Viola's masculine disguise, describing it in terms of an "identity crisis" brought about by her belief that her twin brother has died and by her arrival in a foreign land. According to Huston, Viola is reluctant to embrace her sexual identity in this new world and finds a sense of security and "masculine freedom" by adopting the identity of her lost brother.]

One of the most perplexing difficulties confronting a reader of \textit{Twelfth Night}, or any other Shakespearean play, is how to deal with what might be called its residual problems, those testy questions that critical analyses ignore or leave unanswered. Some such problems, indigenous to Shakespearean drama, are really unanswerable. And \textit{Twelfth Night} has its share of these. Partly the condition of Shakespeare's text is to blame. We shall never know, for instance, whether the fourth stanza of Feste's final song is as it should be: there surely Shakespeare's, and Feste's, sense of context is hardly given just representation by the sentence fragment passed on in the text. But, just as surely, conjecture about this problem is essentially fruitless, since the content of the stanza is clear enough without textual emendation. The bed that should be the still, fixed center of a generatively fruitful marriage is instead fractured by the drunk's unproductive activity and, like him, spun out into the unstable perimeter of one-night stands, and falls, in the company of other tosspots.

Partly, too, insoluble problems are a necessary result of the way Shakespeare wrote—swiftly and commercially, so that accuracy of petty detail is sometimes sacrificed to more pressing immediate effects. The contradictory double time scheme in \textit{Twelfth Night} is, as a consequence, neither very noticeable nor very important. It hardly matters that Sebastian and Viola collide spatially when they are temporally almost three months apart. Superficially, they meet at the same time, for Viola has served Orsino during the three months that Sebastian has accompanied Antonio with "not a minute's vacancy" (V.i.98) [quotations from the \textit{Complete Works of Shakespeare}, ed. Hardin Craig (1951)]. Viola is, however, first sent as an emissary to Olivia only three days after her arrival in Orsino's court, and her return journey to that court is interrupted by the scene in which Sebastian takes leave of Antonio after a stay of three months, though the length of this stay
is not revealed until we have forgotten its technical impossibility. Shakespeare is not so much anticipating the modern movie technique of the flash-forward as he is sacrificing consistency of detail to thematic effect, by assuring his audience that Sebastian lives, that Olivia's love can find a suitable object, and that all of the intricately interwoven complications of plot are under the guiding and beneficent control of a dramatist who means to bring them eventually to a harmonious conclusion. If in the process he can successfully employ one of his favorite dramatic sleights of hand, double time, that is only further proof of his suprahuman powers as creator.

Mostly, though, unanswered problems in Twelfth Night evolve out of the very nature of the dramatic form itself, with its carefully delimited boundaries of action and character. Such boundaries may appear almost unlimited, as the controversial complexity of a world like Hamlet's proves, but such complexity is the result of carefully controlled exclusion: we do not notice boundaries because we do not look for them. Fascinated by what we see and hear of Hamlet, we forget that what we see and hear of him is all there is. As a consequence, we often ignore problems that the dramatist ignores, although they could never pass unnoticed in real life. We may wonder briefly how Horatio could have remained a month at Elsinore without ever meeting Hamlet, and why everyone in Denmark has conveniently forgotten that Hamlet is the real heir to his father's throne, but we dismiss such queries as quibbles. Shakespeare does not worry about them, so why should we?

There are similar kinds of delitescent boundaries to the action of Twelfth Night. For example, Viola changes her plans for disguise between the time we first see her and the time she arrives at Orsino's court, where she appears as a page, not a eunuch. Her brother likewise alters his purpose after his initial appearance, for although he takes leave of Antonio specifically to go to Orsino's court, he next appears as a casual sight-seer who has apparently put aside all thoughts of count and court. Finally, Olivia could hardly marry Sebastian while confused about his identity, because the error would be exposed during the exchange of vows. Even in his euphoric state of wonder, Sebastian would have to recognize that he was not "Cesario."

But the reader fastidious enough to worry about problems like these must also wonder if he is not perhaps throwing in his lot with the likes of Pope's dunces and digging around in the fertile soil of Shakespeare's plays merely to turn up grubs and worms and bits of hair. Still, the plain fact about grubs and worms is that they often indicate where the soil is richest: trivial problems are not the only ones left unanswered in Twelfth Night. Others more substantial linger and tease us out of thought until, like Malvolio struggling to decode the cryptic content of Maria's letter, we think we glimpse the figure of a grander, yet undisclosed, design. For instance, why is Viola, who is at least once called Sebastian and who has hoped from the first that her brother is not really drowned, so slow to realize that he is in Illyria? And why, when she finally sees him, does she initiate such an unnecessarily long and artificial recognition scene? What happens to Antonio, who is conspicuously ignored in the closing speeches of pardon? How are we to interpret Orsino's insistent desire to see Viola in feminine dress before accepting her as a woman? And finally, as a corollary to this question, we might wonder just how we are supposed to feel about the betrothal of this vain, self-serving Duke to such an energetic and interesting heroine.

These questions do overreach the boundaries of explicit action in Twelfth Night, but the play itself encourages this kind of conjecturing by repeatedly calling forth the Renaissance equivalent of the Verfremdungseffekt. Almost never is the audience allowed to forget that it is watching a play whose world is manufactured out of the shaping imagination of the dramatist. That is why Sebastian first appears so early in the play, even at the cost of temporal consistency; that is why Malvolio, enthralled by Maria's letter, does not notice his boisterous deceivers, who are near enough to hear him clearly as he reads; and that is why Fabian interrupts the gulling of Malvolio to exclaim, "If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (III.iv.140-41). In addition, there are other less obvious, but equally important, promptings to detachment. Riddles and puns are dominant figures of speech in the language of Feste and Viola, who use them in part to signal their detachment from the restrictive roles forced upon them in Illyria. And in the process their detachment is passed on to the audience, which is similarly encouraged to view the action critically from its
own, even broader, perspective. Even the playwright's cursory suggestions about the geography of Illyria distance it from actual human experience by locating it somewhere in the middle distance between fairyland and reality.

At first the world of the play seems insulated like the setting of a fairy tale, which, even when its action is supposedly wide-ranging, presents us with a realm that is everywhere the same—ravaged by the same kind of giant, dragon, or wicked stepmother. Here the sea, through its mythical associations with tempest, leviathan, and chaos, laps at the edges of the land and people grounded there, threatening imminent dissolution. It already has robbed this world of considerable masculine force and left its women exposed and isolated. Sebastian has apparently drowned, and Viola is shipwrecked on a strange shore. Olivia's father and brother have died, and while her uncle drowns his days and nights in drink, she is undergoing a sea-change of her own by closing up her house and heart in order to "water once a day her chamber round / With eye-offending brine" (I.i.29-30). Even the ruling Duke is figuratively paralyzed by a love that, like the sea, swallows all that it encounters.

This world, too, seems characterized by the psychological simplicity of the bedtime story, where human motives are transparent and actions exaggerated. The Duke cares for nothing but his love or love; Olivia has resolved to honor her brother's memory by shutting herself off from the sun for seven years; and her uncle just as foolishly insulates himself against an outside world of time and responsibility by drunkenly obliterating all distinctions between late and betimes. Then there is Viola—orphaned, shipwrecked, and washed up on a strange shore—clearly an identifiable personage from fairy tale: she is the quester, the young, untested hero of uncertain origins who has come to rejuvenate the wasteland and heal its languishing, impotent ruler. To emphasize her apparently mythical role, Shakespeare makes her introduction as simply direct as "once upon a time" and her motivation as transparent as fairyland love: "What country, friends, is this? . . . Who governs here? . . . Orsino! I have heard my father name him: / He was a bachelor then" (I.ii.1, 24, 28-29). Then, further identifying her with the questing hero, Shakespeare dresses her as a young man and sends her to court, in both senses of the word.

But as the action of the play moves inland from the sea, situation and motivation become much more complicated, and the sharp outlines of the fairy-tale world dissolve. In its place appear the vague perimeters of the realm on the other side of Illyria from the sea. There men do not open their arms and gates to shipwrecked strangers; they shut them tightly for fear of knaves and thieves. There revelers who drink through the night cannot forever playfully catch the sounds of morning by claiming to be up betimes: they must eventually confront the jarring dissonances of the morning after the night before. And there marriage is not the promise of joy lived happily ever afterwards; it is a perilous undertaking which all too often ends in misunderstanding and sorrow. This world on the other side of Illyria is less well known to the characters than to the audience, which, after all, inhabits it daily and has come to the play partly in flight from its wind and rain. But the play will not let the audience forget it altogether; Feste is there to remind it that such a world indelibly marks the souls of those who have been there, even if they can regularly return to the realm of imagination and play. Like the audience, Feste is thus a participant in two worlds. And, also like it, he enters and exits from the realm outside Illyria.

At his entrance the first thing we hear of him is that he has been away, and his habitual detachment from the action of the play suggests that the world he has been visiting still has him partly in its grasp. There he has learned that language shifts meaning according to context and that, as a result, boundaries are no longer distinct: "That that is is" (IV.ii.17) at one time, but at another "Nothing that is so is so" (IV.ii.9). Like language, then, philosophy becomes for Feste a cheveril glove that can be turned at will to conceal wear and tear; from almost all that goes on around him he maintains a measure of detachment. Only once in the drama is he so completely drawn into an action that he does not manage to retain a degree of aloofness from it: he mistakes Sebastian for Viola-Cesario. And then his error may signal a confusion of identity that belongs as much to psychological complexity and the realm of the audience as to dramatic irony and the world of Illyria.
Feste's exit, though, is even more obviously out from Illyria into the world of the audience. In his closing lyric he sings of experience removed from, but relevant to, that of the play. Here also we are presented with fool's play, a closed house, revelry, and marriage, but what we are given is really the underside—or, in the spatial terms suggested by the play, the other side—of the human experience depicted in the drama. For Feste's talk of closed houses that remain locked up against outsiders, of revelry followed by collapse, and of marriage blighted by the failure of expectation can perhaps be taken as a comment upon the apparently harmonious resolution of the plot. At the very least, the song encourages speculation about a conclusion where closed houses are opened up and revelry is ceremonialized in multiple marriages, and where in the process so many troublesome questions are left unanswered.

Finally, a further complication to the original simplicity of story line and character is presented by the entrance of Sebastian, whose manner and dress resemble Viola's and whose situation is almost an exact parallel to hers: saved by a ship captain and lamenting the loss of his twin, he sets out to seek his fortune at Orsino's court. Now suddenly there are two questing heroes spawned by the same sea, appraised in the same clothes, and bound for the same court. And now too the problems facing the audience, as well as the Illyrians, are compounded almost fourfold, for with Sebastian's introduction come also the knotty questions of Viola's reluctance to admit him living to her consciousness, double time, Antonio's captivity, and Orsino's insistence on redressing his page before acknowledging her identity as woman. Sebastian's presence is no doubt dramatically necessary, since he is needed to satisfy Olivia, but for her a man like Antonio might have served just as well: all that is really necessary is someone radically different from the languishing Orsino. Why then bring on Sebastian? Shakespeare is not inalterably bound to use twins just because his source does. Once early in his dramatic career he added a set of twins to a plot borrowed from Plautus; here he might just as easily have taken one away and avoided some of the dramatic problems precipitated by Sebastian's appearance. But of course he never meant to avoid them, because what surely drew him to the story in the first place was the very presence of the twins; it is one of the few details in the source he does not alter.

Since the time of the Roman theater, separated twins have provided the dramatist with a wealth of ready-made possibilities for comedy nourished by misunderstanding and mistaken identity, and Shakespeare was hardly one to throw away a dramatic formula of proven worth. But the real reason he may have chosen to retain the twins from the source story has to do with mistaken—or uncertain—identity in a more complex way, for in this respect, as in so many things, he apparently anticipated some of the discoveries of modern psychology. Or if he did not actually anticipate them, he at least created a dramatic world expansive enough to hold them in suspension. For a moment let me, like Feste, enter the world of Twelfth Night from the side weathered by wind and rain.

One of the foremost concerns of modern psychoanalytic study—for theorists as radically different as R. D. Laing and Erik Erikson—is with problems of identity. "The patient of today," Erikson writes, [in Childhood and Society (1963)] "suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should—or, indeed, might—be or become. . . The study of identity, then, becomes as strategic in our time as the study of sexuality was in Freud's time." Erikson suggests that modern man can expand his understanding of this problem by studying its manifestations in history, for in singular moments man's struggle with identity, if he is such a man as Luther or Gandhi, has unleashed forces of immeasurable creativity and reshaped his world. But Erikson does not draw his examples of identity crises from history alone. He finds them also in art, and particularly in Shakespeare's tragedies, which give us remarkably lifelike accounts of man's struggle to understand and fulfill his sense of identity. The most obvious example is Hamlet. For surely what Hamlet experiences as he struggles to integrate his remembrance of things past with a present time that seems out of joint is, in the language of contemporary psychology, an acute identity crisis. Repeatedly he reaches out for an identity that just as repeatedly dissolves before his self-lacerating violence:

What a piece of work is a man! . . .
And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?
(II.ii.314-22)

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
(II.ii.576)

To be, or not to be: that is the question. . .
(III.i.56)

What should such fellows as I do crawling
between earth and heaven?
(III.i. 130-32)

Shakespeare's interest in problems of identity is not restricted to his tragic drama, however. It is also recognizable as a concern in his comedies, where many of the problems that rack Hamlet are filtered through a different mode and mood. For instance, Shakespeare's comic heroines are often, like Hamlet, fatherless: Viola and Portia have lost their fathers to death, Rosalind has seen hers banished, and Beatrice and Helena are conspicuously fatherless in dramatic worlds where fathers play important roles. Sometimes, also like Hamlet, these heroines are called to answer the intransigent demands of their fathers' decrees: Hermia must wed Demetrius or choose between death and a nunnery, and Kate must marry if ever she is to escape endless unflattering comparisons with her sister. Portia's situation is most obviously like Hamlet's; the charge impressed by her father upon her comes from beyond the grave. Cut loose from a childhood identity secured by paternal protection, these heroines, also like the Danish Prince, soon discover the vulnerability of their newly exposed positions: Rosalind is banished under threat of death, Helena is abandoned in the enchanted wood, and Viola is stranded upon a strange shore.

In such a position Hamlet depends upon disguise to protect himself against violation of either the physical or psychological kind, and the heroines do the same thing. Most often they hide their sex, both literally and figuratively, behind the disguise of a page, with at least a twofold purpose. First, the disguise protects them from sexual attack; second, it secures for them a physical freedom that is the complementary corollary to their sudden vulnerability: without a father each is also without a circumscribed identity as a child and thus free to venture out into the broader world of adult responsibility and ultimately to choose a husband. Sometimes the disguise that these heroines wear is not consciously assumed, but even then it bespeaks a desire to enjoy the freedom associated with adulthood, particularly with the masculine role in the adult world. Kate and Beatrice do not actually dress themselves as young men; they just become masculinely independent and aggressive—by openly rebelling against the conventional feminine behavior expected of them.

No doubt there are other interesting similarities between the experiences of Hamlet and many of Shakespeare's heroines. Both undergo physical journeys that are related to psychological transportations; both are complemented by friends, often traveling companions, who speak for more socially conventional attitudes; and both experience setbacks in love which encourage doubt about the faithfulness, and ultimately about the very identity, of the loved one. To point out such similarities is not to argue that Shakespeare's comic heroines are really like Hamlet. Between them there is a world of difference: the difference between a comic and a tragic universe, between recreative psychic play and constrictive psychic paralysis, and, finally, between life and death. What is important about these similarities, from my point of view, is that they testify to Shakespeare's abiding concern with different forms of identity crisis. One such crisis is depicted in Twelfth Night, and it begins with Viola, stranded upon the shore.

Behind her is the sea of lost identity, which has washed away the foundations of her previous existence. Gone is her childhood tie to family, for her father is dead, her mother never to be heard of, and her brother apparently drowned. Gone too is Messaline, country of her birth, now so insulated by the perilous sea of experience that she cannot even think of returning there. Her world lies all before her, in thoughts of marriage.
and fulfilled sexual identity: "Orsino! I have heard my father name him: / He was a bachelor then" (I.ii.28-29).

It is not by accident that she remembers her father as she thinks of Orsino, for she is in the process of turning from the security of parental protection to the uncertainty of sexual affection; but because the world of sexuality is also associated with pain and death—as Feste's first puns about hanging and Viola's later ones about dying emphasize—Viola is reluctant to commit herself completely to this new world. Her thoughts stray from Orsino to the softer figure of Olivia: "O that I served that lady / And might not be delivered to the world, / Till I had made mine own occasion mellow . . ." (I.ii.41-43). But occasion is not altogether under her control—Olivia will admit no kind of suit—and Viola is forced back to her original idea. She resolves to serve the Duke, though not yet with a clearly defined sexual identity. At first she thinks that she can obliterate all sexual considerations by appearing to Orsino as a eunuch; but once within his sphere of influence, she may sense that sexlessness is impossible and, still uncertain about the consequences of her female identity, adopts the disguise of a page to secure a measure of freedom and mobility. But what Viola is also doing by donning this disguise is providing herself with freedom in its manifestation as time.

In *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959), C. L. Barber made us aware of how important the concept of holiday is to Shakespearean comedy as a whole, where dramatic worlds often mirror the freedom of festival time when traditional rules are overturned and restrictions abandoned. But this kind of freedom is not limited to Shakespeare's dramatic universe in general; it may also find expression in the psyches of particular characters: an unloosening of bonds without may be matched by an equivalent unloosening of bonds within, and for similar reasons. In a time of revelry the state buys long-term obedience at the cost of short-term license; in the process of play the psyche often does the same thing, by temporarily putting away its usual restraints. The purpose of such a psychic holiday is obvious: it gives rein to impulses and energies in the psyche that might otherwise build to explosive proportions, and at the same time it allows for experimentation with, and maturation of, developing forms of identity.

In the development of the integrated human personality, modern psychoanalytic study suggests, the most important such psychic holiday occurs during adolescence. Erikson calls it a "psychosocial moratorium" and describes its crucial importance to adolescent girls:

> woman's life too contains ... a sanctioned period of delay of adult functioning. The maturing girl. . . may venture into "outer space" with a bearing and a curiosity which often appears hermaphroditic if not outright "masculine." A special ambulatory dimension is thus added to the inventory of her spatial behavior . . . the young girl tries out a variety of possible identifications with the phallic-ambulatory male.

What is most interesting about this analysis, from my perspective, is its relevance to Viola. Here is an account of psychic development that includes newly acquired freedom, adventure into a realm formerly unknown, uncertain sexual identity with a tendency toward hermaphroditic and masculine behavior, and experimentation with a variety of identifications—all important components of Viola's experience in Illyria. Much of the action of *Twelfth Night* can thus be viewed as the depiction of an adolescent identity crisis in Viola, who is struggling with the problems of transition from childhood to adulthood. And, as if to focus attention on this crisis, Shakespeare has compounded it by putting Viola in an isolated position, where she cannot turn back to parental guidance for help. She is, in short, subjected to the tyranny of freedom; liberated from her past, she must play out different roles in order to discover what her mature identity is to be in the future: to discover who she is, she has to discover also who she is not.

First she attempts to put problems of sexuality aside by proclaiming herself a eunuch, but that plan is apparently rejected as soon as she gets close enough to discover that sexual impulses cannot be negated merely by proclamation. It is an idea that Shakespeare used twice before as the starting point for comedy—in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*—and would use again with more serious overtones in *Measure for Measure*. Here, however, it is passed over quickly in Viola's experience because it is going to be
given much more thorough treatment in the characterization of Olivia.

The next role that Viola assumes, and is least inclined to put away at the end, is the one obviously associated with her disguise. It is what Erikson, in talking about the adolescent female in general, calls her "identifications with the phallic-ambulatory male"—ambulatory because she tries out the freedom of movement that society generally denies young women, phallic because such freedom and mobility enable her to penetrate into realms of experience previously unknown. In her disguise as a young man Viola is free to move first from the seashore to the court and then back and forth between the court and Olivia's house. In addition, the increasingly phallic nature of her activity in this disguise is suggested by the progression from her penetration by stealth into Orsino's court, through her more obvious verbal and psychological assault of Olivia, to her blatant confrontation of Sir Andrew with the ultimately phallic weapon, the sword. Of course both Sir Andrew and Viola assume their roles as duelists with the greatest reluctance because they are, finally, not fitted to their usurped masculine attire. Though for obviously different reasons, each is inadequately equipped to deal with the manifold social, sexual, and psychological responsibilities of mature masculine identity. But each can discover his inadequacies only by playing out his assumed role to its inevitable conclusion.

Viola must do so because her initial freedom is accompanied by a concomitant confusion of sexual identity. Partly this is a result of conflicts attending her situation in general, for confusion of sexual identity is a common problem for a young woman trying to decide who and what she is, and will become. During such time, Erikson writes [in Identity, Youth and Crisis], "the young person does not feel himself clearly to be a member of one sex or the other," and she may as a consequence experiment with a variety of sexual identities. But mostly Viola's confusion of identity results from the fact that she is a twin. Since she and Sebastian, as twins, together constitute "A natural perspective, that is and not" (V.i.224)—an apparent singleness of identity within a doubleness of form—her sense of self must necessarily include a sense of other self that is her brother. Thus when he is apparently lost, she faces the psychic extinction of debilitating inaction. In almost her first speech Viola describes the feeling of paralysis that threatens to accompany the loss of her brother; without him she wonders if she can do anything: "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium" (I.ii.3-4). As a woman, then, she may imagine herself psychically incomplete, because her female identity does not take adequate account of her missing male counterpart. Perhaps to compensate for this feeling, Viola attempts to integrate Sebastian's masculinility into her own personality: she dons his clothes and moves with the freedom characteristic of a young man. She does not, however, like her forerunner in the source story, assume her brother's name, because she is not trying to obliterate her own feminine identity; she is not trying to become Sebastian. Instead, her intention is to secure for herself a temporary psychic holiday in order to try out various modes of behavior before settling on the finality of adult commitment. She does not understand the action in these terms, but the language of delay appears recurrently in her thoughts:

O that I served that lady
And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is!
(I.ii.41-44)

What else may hap to time I will commit;
Only shape thou thy silence to my wit.
(I.ii.60-61)

O time! thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie!
(II.ii.41-42)
In her choice of name Viola emphasizes the tenuousness of her position, because "Cesario" suggests, among other things, premature birth, delivery into a world before the attainment of full growth. Whether its sound also suggests Arion on the sea, and thereby Sebastian as he is described by Viola's nameless ship captain, is a matter of conjecture. Such a suggestion, though, would underscore the idea that Viola, in putting on her disguise as Cesario, is attempting to integrate aspects of Sebastian's personality into her own. It might also help to explain why Viola is later so reluctant to recognize Sebastian as an entity unto himself. Having lived so long with him as part of her personality, she may be unconsciously hesitant to admit him to the outside world again, partly because he will then no longer be under her psychic management and partly because his reappearance signals the end to her period of play: she must then put away her masculine usurped attire, and with it a mobility and masculine freedom that she will never know again.

It is no wonder that she may experience this kind of unconscious reaction to surrendering her masculine freedom, since the only clearly feminine role she tries on as Cesario is hardly more suited to her developing sexual identity than the role of eunuch. And, like her identity as eunuch, its expression is confined to language, not action. The role is that of the silent, passive, long-suffering female, and it significantly involves time, not as delay for the germination of action, but as permanent entrapment in inaction and grief:

My father had a daughter loved a man,  
she pined in thought,  
And with a green and yellow melancholy  
She sat like patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief.  
(II.iv.110-18)

Viola may be silent about her love for Orsino—though in moments like this one she no doubt hopes he will penetrate her disguise—but she hardly sits like patience on a monument. Instead, she counters her sorrow with the almost constant activity in "outer space" that goes with her disguise as a young man. In this respect she provides a marked contrast to other characters in the play who respond to love by various kinds of withdrawal. For instance, Olivia first expresses her love for her dead brother by withdrawing into her house and closing out even the sun. Then later, when she has decided to put aside her mourning veil, she sends a servant after Cesario and bids him come to her, where they may confer in private. Even her courtship of Sebastian is essentially an act of withdrawal: what she really wants to do with her lover-husband is lock him up within her own private inner space—in her house, in her church, in her bedroom, and ultimately in her body. But during such withdrawal she at least admits another person, even if her union with him is constrictively possessive. Orsino and Malvolio cannot do even that, because their idea of love is really just a form of self-involvement. Their erotic fantasies leave no room for another person—only for a self-generated image of that person. As a result, each ultimately calls for the absolute privacy of autistic isolation. "I myself am best / When least in company" (I.iv.37-38), Orsino assures his servants, while Malvolio, as is his habit, is a good deal blunter: "let me enjoy my private" (III.iv.99). Shakespeare's pun here—it is surely his and not Malvolio's—is also instructive because it emphasizes the kind of adolescent constrictiveness that logically results from such a self-serving approach to love. Like Malvolio's other Freudian slip about winding his watch and "play [ing] with my—some rich jewel" (II.v.66), it directs us to the essentially masturbatory nature of his, and Orsino's, withdrawal. Locked in the love of vain, self-generated images, each experiences figuratively what it is Malvolio's misfortune to endure literally; imprisonment in darkness with only the self for company.

Malvolio's imprisonment, though, does more than draw attention to his and the Duke's limitations as lovers; it also gives explicit dramatic expression to a motif of implicit thematic importance throughout: entrapment. Few characters in Twelfth Night escape imprisonment of one kind or another. The most obvious victims besides Malvolio are Viola's rescuer and Antonio, who are locked forever in the limbo of indefinite incarceration. Before the ship captain can be released, Malvolio has to be relocated and pacified; before
Antonio can be freed, he must be pardoned by Orsino. Neither captive is in an enviable position, for Malvolio’s promise of revenge attests to an uncompromising bitterness hardly compatible with the reconciliations characteristic of comic resolutions, and Orsino’s failure to grant Antonio pardon is almost as conspicuous as the silence of Duke Antonio in the last scene of *The Tempest*. Both may be versions in the comic mode of Iago’s "From this time forth I never will speak word" (*Othello* V.ii.304), an intransigent refusal to communicate with those whose values one cannot accept. Whether the audience is supposed to be consciously aware of such problems is a debatable question, though surely some measure of awareness is generated by the Duke’s order to pursue Malvolio and by Antonio’s presence on the stage. What cannot be denied, however, is the fact that such problems focus attention on other examples of imprisonment, both voluntary and involuntary, in the play.

Olivia is for a time locked in her house, while Sebastian is confined first at Antonio’s and then at Olivia’s. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, rebelling against the confinement of Olivia’s exaggerated mourning plan, become imprisoned in another kind of excess as the monotonous circularity of their early-morning catch suggests. Orsino and Malvolio, each in his own special way, are trapped in self-generated, autistic love. Even Feste and Viola, who are the most mobile of Illyria’s inhabitants, are ultimately constricted by their Illyrian dress. The Fool, continually forced to adjust to the tastes of his superiors, faces as the price of possible failure the ultimate form of constriction: "my lady will hang thee for thy absence" (I.v.3-4). And Viola, who first dons the disguise of Cesario in order to secure a greater measure of freedom, finds that disguise ever more restricting until at last it threatens her with both confinement and self-annihilation: "Cesario, husband, stay" (V.i.146).

Such suggestions of entrapment qualify the happiness of the resolution. In a world so marked by constriction, marriage may also appear as another form of imprisonment, particularly when it is entered upon in such haste and for such foolish reasons. Olivia does not even know the name of her husband, Sir Toby has married Maria to repay her for gulling Malvolio, and Orsino is betrothed to Viola because he liked her when she was a boy. To the end his concerns are with surface judgments and self-generated images of the loved one: before recognizing Viola as a woman he must see her in feminine dress, and even then his intention is to make her his fancy’s queen. Perhaps as testimony to the precariousness of this union, to the violence that can at any moment transform Orsino’s totalitarian commitment from love to hate, is the figure of Antonio, whose faithful, vigorous love has not, like Viola’s, been at last rewarded by Orsino’s grace. Antonio’s fate, we know, can become hers if the outlines of her character do not match the figures of Orsino’s fancy: "Why should I not, had I the heart to do it, / Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death, / Kill what I love?" (V.i.120-22). Momentarily the energies of such potential violence threaten the apparent order of the resolution, but they are quickly pushed back down beneath the surface of things by the happy ending. In Viola’s action, however, there is perhaps some evidence of uncertainty. She ignores Antonio, as if she were afraid to recognize what his presence at her betrothal means. More noticeably, she seems to draw out the recognition scene with her brother interminably, as if, reluctant to discard her disguise, she were luxuriating for a few last, precious moments in the play world of masculine freedom. She talks about putting on her woman’s weeds, but about this problem there is more than the necessary amount of talk, and less than the necessary amount of action. Then, at the end, she is strangely silent, as if she were fondly remembering all that is past. She might, though, for all we know, be joyfully anticipating the future and her role as Orsino’s fancy’s queen. If so, we wish her luck; but we cannot share her optimism, because we remember that Twelfth Night marks the conclusion of revelry and is always succeeded, as Feste reminds us, by a long season of wind and rain.

Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Language and Communication

Ralph Berry

[Berry contends that the action in Twelfth Night centers on acts of communication—formal messages being sent and received. Most of these, in the critic's view, are not "true" communication: Olivia's message to Orsino in the first act, for example, is really an announcement to herself of her intention to continue mourning her brother. The letter that fools Malvolio is another instance of a message that fails to convey truth. In contrast, the critic describes Malvolio's message to Olivia from his confinement as the single act of true communication in the play.]

The burden of the theme of fantasy and reality is entrusted to a particular device: the message. The action of Twelfth Night is in great part the business, literal and symbolic, of communication. Each Act sees one or more formal messages—I do not count informal and oral bringing of news. They constitute the archetypal action of the play.

The first scene contains an important message: Olivia to Orsino, a declaration of her absurd vow to mourn her brother for seven years. It is not a true communication, merely the publication of a fantasy; the "message" is a self-to-self statement. The same is true of Orsino's reply to Viola (I, 4); he, too, is announcing his own fantasy: "Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith; / It shall become thee well to act my woes." (1, 4, 24-25) The resonance of "act" is suggestive. Still, the nuncio's function is faithfully carried out by Viola:

I will on with my speech in your praise and then show you the heart of my message. . . . Tell me your mind I am a messenger. (I, 5, 181-2 . . . 194-5)

Viola has the understanding and intelligence for the discharge of her office. Even so, Olivia and Orsino cannot be said to communicate. The matter is repeated with greater emphasis and clarity in II, 4, when Orsino again sends his declaration of love. He is simply not interested in any answer but acceptance.

Viola: But if she cannot love you, sir?
Duke: I cannot be so answered
(II, 4, 86-87)

In other words, he will not accept the realities of the situation. It is a manifesto of noncommunication. Olivia's message to Viola (II, 2) is no more satisfactory. The messenger, Malvolio, has no idea of what is going on, but Viola immediately apprehends the situation: "She loves me sure." (II, 2, 21) The fault lies in the sender, prey to another species of illusion.

The play's main pseudo-message is the letter, supposedly from Olivia to Malvolio. His fantasy has been penetrated, and the "message" is no more than an inflation of his hopes. The scene in which Malvolio discovers the letter is, in addition to its other qualities, pure symbolist drama. The point is that Malvolio goes for a walk in the sun.

Maria: He has been yonder i' the sun practicing behavior to his own shadow this half hour.
(II, 5, 14-15)

And "sun," in the terms of this play, is the associate of folly. Feste makes the connection, to Viola: "Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun; it shines everywhere." (III, 1, 37-38) The connection is in any case...
confirmed by IV, 2 (the structural balance to II, 5, in the design of *Twelfth Night*), which presents the complementary paradox of reason in darkness. So Malvolio's journey into illusion takes the form of a walk in the sun.

Thus the comic business develops the serious concern of *Twelfth Night*, the fallibility of human communication. And the variations on this theme continue in Act III, through Sir Andrew's letter to Viola/Cesario. That letter is totally misconceived, a triumph of noncommunication. Sir Andrew has misjudged the situation, the identity of his addressee, his language—and to crown all, his message is not even delivered. His effort ranks with Malvolio's as the non-message of the play. Sir Toby (whose role now contrasts with Viola, the ideal messenger) delivers orally two lying messages, to Viola and Sir Andrew. Their purpose is merely deception. But Sir Toby's view of the essence of correspondence has already been made plain in his advice to Sir Andrew in III, 2: the key word is "lies." (III, 2, 40)

That is as far as *Twelfth Night* can go in its variations on failure of communication. The remainder of the play shows a struggling toward the light. Act IV, 2 is the critical scene. It reveals a Malvolio purged of fantasy, and striving only to make contact with the realities of the world. Matched with the sunfilled garden of II, 5, the cell completes the pairing of symbolist scenes. The darkness that figures ignorance—a form of illusion—closes about Malvolio, but his mind is clear:

> *Malvolio*: I am not mad, Sir Topas I say to you this house is dark.
> *Clown*: Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.
> *Malvolio*: I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are. Make the trial of it in any constant question

(IV, 2, 40-48)

Malvolio's attempts to penetrate the darkness are obstructed by the clown's feignings. But Malvolio has regained a human dignity, that of a man as disciplined guardian of his faculties. His language is controlled and just: "I think nobly of the soul and in no way approve his opinion." (IV, 2, 54-55) And he has, at last, a full grasp of the priorities of human needs. "Good fool, some ink, paper, and light; and convey what I will set down to my lady." (IV, 2, 106-108) The light of reason, a just message to compose, and the means of communication, he can command. The clown cannot refuse his cooperation.

And this message, from Malvolio to Olivia, is the apotheosis of the final Act. It is the message of a man in full possession of his senses and the situation; it is mediated, not by the clown (his tone, as he himself seems to feel, would be wrong) but by the nondescript and "neutral" Fabian; it finds an understanding audience, both the Duke ("This savors not much of distraction," V, 1, 304) and Olivia, "He hath been most notoriously abused." (V, 1, 368) Malvolio's letter has the distinction of being—of all the formal messages in *Twelfth Night*—the only true communication. It is the only occasion in the play when the human mind, unencumbered by fantasy, reaches out toward another human mind and finds its message fairly delivered, understandingly received, and answered. All the other messages are deceptions or self-illusions.

The principals, however, are not compelled to face reality in the same way as Malvolio. Orsino, the premier fantasist, merely switches faces in his image of the dream-woman. His first impulse on learning of Viola's sex is "let me see thee in thy woman's weeds" (V, 1, 265); and the unabashed auto-eroticism of his humor is underscored in his final words to Viola: "But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen." (V, 1, 376-377) For "fancy," read "fantasy." His last line is a poised, ambiguous phrase. Will Viola control his fantasy, or embody it? One cannot prophesy. Olivia, too, is doubtless well off with the sensible Sebastian, but the "most extracting frenzy of mine own" (V, 1, 273) testifies to her susceptibility to the caprice of passion. As for the others, Sir Andrew's fantasy is ended. He had rather than forty pound he
were at home; the phrase is a calculated multiplication of his earlier desire to exchange forty shillings for the trappings of folly. (II, 3, 18-19) His anagnorisis is to hear the truth from Sir Toby: "Will you help? An ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull?" (V, 1, 198-199) We do not know his reactions; the audience will be able to savor his horrified face; but that truth, as with others in the play, must continue to fester. Sir Toby himself has married Maria "In recom pense thereof . . ." (V, 1, 354), and in view of Maria's talents and shrewishness one is inclined to regard "recompense" as a pregnant word.

And there remains Malvolio. Here, I think, the critics have overcompensated. We have been told with considerable frequency of late years that one ought not to feel at all sorry for him, that he deserved all he got, that Elizabethan audiences would have laughed at his final disgrace, and that compassion is a nineteenth century invention anyway. No doubt all this is true. Elizabethan audiences, like modern ones, can never have been lacking in those who find only the most exquisite humor in the final "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you." But I don't think it really matters whether one feels sorry for Malvolio, or not. The point, surely, is that he is there. Malvolio is an unassimilable element, a part of what is conceived to be the structure of comedy, that refuses to participate in the final dance. That dance is a gavotte of the realists coolly taking on the fantasists; it is scarcely the "communal integration" of the sentimentalists. The "golden time" that Orsino speaks of sounds hollowly.

The play as a whole is a masterly exposition of theme through device, that is to say of form. If we agree that the theme of Twelfth Night is reality and illusion, then this theme, obviously, is expressed through disguise, deception, and error. But the action of Twelfth Night, as I have shown, consists of a succession of pseudo-messages, products of the world of illusion. And it incorporates two scenes of startling theater, in which Malvolio receives, and sends, a message. At these points, the scenes of sunlight and of darkness, the symbolism of the drama becomes overt. Yet they are only the most compelling manifestation of an action that, in Shakespeare's way, is always reaching toward symbolism. The literal events generate their further meanings.

The form of Twelfth Night, as I maintain, should govern our interpretation. The open-ended invitation of the subtitle is no reason for disregarding the structure of the play. Its atmosphere one can in part ascribe to a particular production, and this will vary very greatly. Yet I think W. H. Auden [in The Dyer's Hand, 1962] is right to sense the "inverted commas around the 'fun.'" This stems from the nature of the action, and the questions left in the air concerning the principals. Exposure to reality has, in different ways, involved pain for the "comic" characters; Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio. But for Orsino and Olivia, the ending is illusion condoned. To speak of "unmasking" is surely misleading, for they have begun neither to understand nor confront their problems; nor need they. The cynicism of Twelfth Night lies in its acceptance of the truths that fantasy need not bring unhappiness, not exposure to reality happiness. The preoccupation with illusion and reality, madness and sanity, wisdom and folly, points unmistakably toward King Lear. The synthesis of theme and device could not be repeated within the genre of comedy.


Elizabeth M. Yearling

[Yearling contends that in Twelfth Night, language communicates truth, despite the play's deliberate deceptions and wordplay. Choice of language helps to convey a sense of character: Viola's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, for example, is reflected in her speech, which varies from courtly compliments to "rude jargon" depending on to whom she is speaking. Sir Toby mixes colloquial expressions with elaborate language, reflecting his "disorder" as a knight with questionable habits. Malvolio, even when he is alone, chooses pretentious words, reflecting his egotism. Yearling goes on to show how language supports a thematic contrast of the play: throughout Twelfth Night, characters abruptly switch from elaborate, indirect speech to short, direct, action-focused sentences, reflecting the contrast between the make-believe world of
By the late sixteenth century, it had become fashionable to decry eloquence and to praise plain, unassuming style. But theory has to be tested in practice. The greatest practitioner of the period, Shakespeare, had been to be a playwright, and drama, where the author does not directly address readers or audience, has its special problems. The dramatist needs many styles, not just one plain style. He can allow his villains to exploit deceptive words, but he must also find words for his heroes and heroines, who usually need to speak more than Cordelia's "nothing." He cannot embark on a diction which expresses the essence of things. Spenser's technique is a matter for the study, often—as with his spelling—for eye rather than ear. Shakespeare has to find ways of communicating truth which are more complex than any theoretical straightforward relationship of word and subject-matter.

His problems are aired—semi-seriously—in *Twelfth Night*. Half-way through the play, Viola and Feste meet and jest about words and meaning (3.1.1-60). The significance of their exchange is uncertain. T. W. Craik writes [in the Preface to *Twelfth Night*, New Arden, (1975)] that the encounter sounds like "a warming-up after a theatrical interval." Yet this is the only meeting between Shakespeare's heroine and his fool. Their quibbling shows the two-facedness of words. Feste comments on how quickly "the wrong side" of a sentence "may be turned outward." His own punning on Viola's description of words as "wanton"—"equivocal"—turns to absurdity the idea that words equal things. He worries about his sister's name since "her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton." He uses his theory that "words are very rascals" to avoid justifying his opinion, for "words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them." The debate itself embodies the slipperness of words, and the confusion is compounded when Feste admits to being Olivia's "corrupter of words." His trade is to use words deceptively, and what he says cannot be trusted. Shakespeare makes it difficult to take the scene seriously.

Yet often in *Twelfth Night* he shows words to be frivolous, conventional, or false. Apart from Feste's comments there is Olivia's remark about the poetical being "the more like to be feigned" (1.5.197) [quotations from New Arden Shakespeare (1975)]. Occasionally characters use words as mere decoration. The most blatant example is Sir Andrew, who stores useful vocabulary such as the "odours," "pregnant," and "vouchsafed," of Viola's greeting to Olivia (3.1.92). Feste punctures words which he finds swollen. "Vent thy folly somewhere else," Sebastian snaps incautiously, and is punished by some sarcastic variations on "vent" which must cure him of the verb (4.1.10-17). Feste's mockery can conceal further jokes. To Viola he remarks, "who you are and what you would are out of my welkin. I might say 'element', but the word is overworn" (3.1.58-60). "Welkin" too is an old-fashioned, poetic word. The overworn noun "element" is used by several characters, from Viola to Malvolio. A time-bomb has been set for Malvolio's pompous "I am not of your element" (3.4.125).

But tired or inflated vocabulary brings us to one of the play's complexities. A rich source of chiche was the language of compliment, the store of polite but often insincere coutesies which came naturally to the well-bred but had to be taught to the uncourtly in manuals which suggested the right phrases for wooing and suing. And it is the heroine who is the play's main speaker in this fossilized, conventional style. Olivia rejects Viola's address.

*Viola.*
Cesario is your servant's name, fair princess.

*Olivia.*
My servant, sir? 'Twas never merry world
Since lowly feigning was called compliment:
Y'are servant to the Count Orsino, youth.

She could also have criticized the fashionable epithet, "fair."
Viola justified her use of "servant" by explaining the word literally:

*And he is yours, and his must needs be yours.*

*Your servant's servant is your servant, madam.*

(3.1.99-104)

The sentence Viola turns into a neat excuse was still paraded as a compliment half-way through the century, in Philomusus's *The Academy of Compliments* (1646): "Sir, I am the servant of your servants" (p. 74). And Viola's "vouchsafed," so admired by Sir Andrew, is something of an affectation. The verb "vouchsafe" means "grant in a condescending manner" and was appropriate between subject and monarch but less fitting in other relationships. Its use is mocked as over-deferential by many Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Much of Viola's language, especially to Olivia, is affected, courtly, artificial, not the style we expect of a Shakespearian heroine. But Shakespeare exploits this conventional speech brilliantly. In act 1, scene 5, Viola's speeches in praise of Olivia are full of stock poetic phrases: "red and white," "cruell'st she alive," "sighs of fire," "call upon my soul," "contemned love" (11. 242-80). She borrows the standard phraseology of the sonnet-writers. But she also mocks herself. She worries about whether she is speaking to the right woman, and claims she is anxious to complete her penned speech. The scene turns on Viola's semi-serious use of conventional vocabulary and images, her knowledge of what she is doing, and our share in that knowledge. Yet there is more. The stereotyped language conveys a considerable depth of feeling. "'Tis beauty truly blent" is a genuine appreciation of Olivia's beauty and of Viola's task as a rival. "Make me a willow cabin . . ." is a powerful love speech. The strength and truth of feeling make it wrong to concentrate on the cliches and stock motifs, or on the speech's deception. Viola uses words devalued by over-exposure; she speaks them as Cesario, whose existence is illusory, but their emotion convinces. We must add to Olivia's remark that the poetical is "like to be feigned," Touchstone's ambiguous words in *As You Like It*: "the truest poetry is the most feigning" (3.3.16).

Viola's poetry shows us Shakespeare's success in using falsehood to communicate truth. She deceives Olivia. Yet the audience, though undeceived, receives from the same language a sense of shared and genuine emotion. There is another way in which Viola's words communicate a truth. Her style expresses her nature. She is a linguistic chameleon who adapts her style to her companion. Her vocabulary ranges from courtly compliment to rude jargon (1.5.205). But her variousness is not just verbal: her nature is to deal confidently with sudden changes. And the assumed registers, coupled often with sincere feelings, capture the blend of truth and illusion which Viola represents. It is difficult not to see a convincing personality breaking through the polite fiction which is Cesario. This is most notable in Viola's discussion of love with Orsino in act 2, scene 4, but even the play's less spectacular passages can take us below Cesario's surface. After Antonio, in the belief that she is Sebastian, has interrupted her reluctant duelling, he asks for his money:

```
Viola.
What money, sir?
For the fair kindness you have show'd me here,
And part being prompted by your present trouble,
Out of my lean and low ability
I'll lend you something
My having is not much;
I'll make division of my present with you.
Hold, there's half my coffer.
```

(3.4.349-55)

The last line echoes, with an important difference, Antonio's "Hold, sir, here's my purse" (3.3.38). Antonio's was a gift of unqualified generosity to a friend. Viola's is a carefully thought-out loan to a helpful but puzzling stranger. She moves slowly towards the offer. "I'll lend" is preceded by a series of subordinate clauses and phrases outlining her reasons and stressing her poverty. "My having is not much" repeats the content of the
line before, and adds to our impression that Viola feels an uncomfortable need to justify herself. Her next speech contrasts in its vehemence. Antonio reminds Viola of his former "kindnesses."

Viola.
I know of none,
Nor know I you by voice or any feature.
I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.
(3.4.361-6)

There is no delay in reaching the point here. The verbs come first, several of them, forcefully stating an immediate reaction. We are persuaded that the speaker is not the illusory Cesario. No courteous surface falsifies these emotions.

Although Twelfth Night includes Feste's scepticism and many instances of verbal folly and deception, Shakespeare's practice encourages a positive belief in the power of words. Character and theme emerge from the nature of the words and the way they are combined. Here we are a little closer to the Platonic theory of names. Several characters in Twelfth Night have an individual vocabulary and syntax. Orsino's relatively short part in the play contains a high proportion of new and often slightly pompous words. In act 1, scene 4, he praises Viola's youthful appearance: "Diana's lip / Is not more smooth and rubious; / And all is semblative a woman's part" (1.31-4). In act 2, scene 4, he contributes "cloyment" to the stodgy line, "That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt" (1.100). Act 5, scene 1 brings more new vocabulary—"baubling" and "un-prizable" describe Antonio's ship (11. 52-3); Olivia, the "marble-breasted" tyrant (1. 122), casts his faith to "non-regardance" (1. 119). New words are common in Orsino's vocabulary, especially words of several syllables ending in suffixes. His syntax is appropriate. Barbara Hardy notes his long sentences and sustained images, characteristics which are marked in the first scene. He uses little colloquial, easy speech.

Sir Toby is an interesting contrast. He also invents long words "substractors" (1.3.34), "consanguineous" (2.3.78), "interceptor" (3.4.224). And his syntax is mannered. He teases Sir Andrew: "Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em? Are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture? Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard, and come home in a coranto?" (1.122-6). The rhetorical questions and repeated "wherefore" are part of a complete repetition of meaning in the first two questions, and there is syntactical balance in the last sentence. Sir Toby likes to put nouns in pairs, which sometimes alliterate: "they are scoundrels and substractors" (1.3.34); "he's a coward and a coistrel" (1.3.40). But Sir Toby's long words and patterned syntax are not enough to elevate his speech. His long words occur in prose, not verse, and their use undercuts their impressiveness: "subtractor" is a nonce-word meaning "detractor" and it sounds like a drunken fumbling for words. Another good word to tumble over is "consanguineous" which is accompanied by a gentle parody of the scholar's habit of pairing foreign imports with simpler words: "Am not I consanguineous? Am I not of her blood?" M. M. Mahood notes that "exquisite" (2.3.142) is "a difficult word for the drunken knights to get their tongues round." The same must be true of Sir Toby's compliment to Maria: "Good night, Penthesilea" (2.3.177). The polysyllables are undermined by being spoken drunkenly, and also by the company they keep, since Sir Toby's speeches contain popular phrases and words of low origin. He is recorded as the first literary user of "bum-baily" (3.4.178), the meanest kind of bailiff, a title which must have been current in the least reputable areas of London. His first words are "What a plague" (1.3.1); he tells Malvolio to "Sneck up!" (2.3.94); he uses the vulgar phrase "call me cut" (2.3.187), and colloquial words such as "coistrel" (1.3.40) He is also the play's most frequent user of the second person pronoun "thou" instead of the more formal "you."
Sir Toby's speech mixes impressive vocabulary and mannered syntax with colloquial words. It reflects his disorder but at the same time a certain openness to experience. Malvolio's language indicates constraint. He introduces fewer new words than either Orsino or Sir Toby, but his mouth is full of pompous phrases and long words without the poetry of Orsino or the colloquialism of Sir Toby. He is at his worst in contemplation, in the letter scene (2.5.23-179). Inflated vocabulary is not simply a public front but is his very nature. "A look round" becomes "a demure travel of regard," "what do these letters mean?" becomes "what should that alphabetical position portend?" Long abstract words abound: "there is no consonancy in the sequel; that suffers under probation." The homelier words of his tirade in act 2, scene 3 are there only to signify his disgust: "Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice?" (11. 88-92). His style is noun-laden: nouns come in strings or separated by the preposition "of." The change when he woos Olivia (3.4.17-55) is interesting. He is still pompous and noun-obsessed—"this does make some obstruction in the blood"—but he throws in the fashionable word "sweet" and quotes fragments of popular songs: "Please one, and please all," "Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee." Here he uses the familiar "thou," unthinkable from a servant to his lady. The visible changes in appearance and behaviour are accompanied by more subtle changes in his language.

Other characters have personal styles. Sir Andrew, magpie-like, purloins impressive words, misuses long words (5.1.179-80), and tends to echo the speaker before him (1.3.62-3, 2.3.56). Feste parodies his superiors' polysyllables: "I did impeticos thy gratillity" (2.3.27). He demands Olivia's attention to Malvolio's letter with the words "perpend, my princess" (5.1.298), mocking—M. P. Tilley argues—the style of Cambyses [in "Shakespeare and his Ridicule of Cambyses", Modern Language Notes, 24 (1909), 244-7, p. 244]. And he produces nonsense names, "Pigrogromitus" (2.3.23), "Quinapalus" (1.5.33). His verbal whimsy complicates the debate about words. His attacks on words and their falsehood tell us more about Feste than about words.

When we read or hear Twelfth Night we learn about the characters by attending to their vocabulary and syntax. Besides expressing character, the words and sentence structure can also clarify themes. One of the play's contrasts is between holiday and the work-a-day world. Although the title suggests festivity, recent criticism has qualified C. L. Barber's treatment of Twelfth Night as a festive comedy. Many modern critics dwell on the play's melancholy mood, but in more positive opposition to festivity are the characters' working lives. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew hope that life "consists of eating and drinking" (2.3.11-12), but their fellows have more to do. Even Orsino, who has let his dukedom rule itself, at last resumes his function as ruler and magistrate. Viola is kept hard at work, Feste too—and when he is absent without leave he is threatened with dismissal. Malvolio and Maria have duties in Olivia's household, and Olivia has that household to organize (4.3.16-20).

The contrast between holiday and work results in an interesting structural device. There are repeated movements from musing or conversation back to some necessary task. These shifts are embodied in the dialogue, and centre on Viola. It is easy to note the difference between the first scene's languor and the second scene's sense of purpose, but even within scene 2 there is a distinct change of mood. Viola and the Captain discuss her brother's fate and she is encouraged to hope for his safety:

Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope,  
Whereeto thy speech serves for authority,  
The like of him.  
(1.2.19-21)

The lines are in verse, the first has a formal old-fashioned -eth verb ending, and the object is delayed by a subordinate clause. Viola then switches to practical questions about her present situation: "Know'st thou this country?" "Who governs here?" The crisper -s ending for the third-person verb belongs with the simple questions and short prose lines which contrast with the Captain's verse replies. Viola's interest in what has or
may have happened to her brother is superseded by a need to sort out her own affairs, and her style changes correspondingly. She installs herself in Orsino's service. As his attendant she has opportunities for leisurely talk, but she keeps remembering there are things to be done. In act 1, scene 5, she is Orsino's messenger to Olivia. At first she fences with Olivia but she suddenly returns to duty:

*Olivia.* Are you a comedian?
*Viola.* No, my profound heart: and yet, by the very fangs of malice
I swear, I am not that I play.
Are you the lady of the house?

Her ambiguity about herself is accompanied by an obscure oath. With her question, the conversation becomes more straightforward, only to hide in wordplay again.

*Olivia.* If I do not usurp myself, I am.
*Viola.* Most certain, if you are she, you do usurp yourself:
for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve

Viola's quibble is followed by an explanation both antithetical and cryptic. But then she changes to short statement—"But this is from my commission"—and a plain declaration of intent: "I will on with my speech in your praise, and then show you the heart of my message" (1.5.183-92). Similarly her debate with Feste is interrupted by the direct question, "Is thy lady within." Here too the preceding sentence is syntactically more elaborate and plays on words. Feste prays that Jove might send Cesario a beard and Viola replies: "By my troth, I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one, [Aside] though I would not have it grow on my chin" (3.1.45-9).

In act 2, scene 4, the discussion of love with Orsino, and the story of Cesario's "sister," draw to a close with Viola's

I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too: and yet I know not.

The riddle is couched in repeated phrase-patterns—"all the daughters," "all the brothers"—followed by a virtual aside. After this we are bound to read a meditative pause till Viola sharply changes the subject: "Sir, shall I to this lady?" (2.4.121-3). On each of these occasions brief statements and questions replace more complex syntax, often punning or patterned. Viola delights in conversation and jesting debate but is aware of her present duty.

Other characters move similarly into action. Olivia's style in act 1, scene 5 also involves syntactical contrasts although her questions are misleadingly direct. She lingers over jokes such as the inventory of her beauty, but follows with a pertinent question. "Were you sent hither to praise me?" (1.5.252-3). She continues with what seem to be the same sort of inquiries: "How does he love me?" "Why, what would you?" "What is your parentage?" (11. 258, 271, and 281). She is pursuing what has become important to her, but she has moved from the interview's business—Orsino—to Cesario-Viola, and she stops herself with crisp commands and statements which are more to the immediate purpose.

Get you to your lord
I cannot love him: let him send no more,
Unless, perchance, you come to me again,
To tell me how he takes it. Fare you well:
I thank you for your pains: spend this for me.
(1.5.283-7)
The short clauses emphasize her business-like manner. The syntax is more flowing only in the lines where she provides for a return by Cesario, who distracts her from the task of rejecting Orsino, and she couches these lines in the conditional. The lingering "unless" added to the brusque "let him send no more" captures her feelings. During her second meeting with Viola, Olivia's ears recall her from distracting thoughts.

O world, how apt the poor are to be proud!
If one should be a prey, how much the better
To fall before the lion than the Wolf! [Clock strikes.]
The clock upbraids me with the waste of time.
Be not afraid, good youth, I will not have you,
And yet when wit and youth is come to harvest,
Your wife is like to reap a proper man
There lies your way, due west
(3.1.129-36)

Again complex writing—subordination, apostrophe, extended metaphor—accompanies the musing. Simple statements interrupt it. We may compare with Olivia's "waste of time" the First Officer's short, impatient sentences when his prisoner Antonio procrastinates: "What's that to us? The time goes by. Away!" (3.4.373). These people do not have all the time in the world. Tasks and duties press on them. Even Sebastian, who has nothing in particular to do in Illyria, is not prepared just to stand talking to Antonio. Again the transition is sudden; again questions replace conditionals and balanced phrases.

But were my worth, as is my conscience, firm,
You should find better dealing. What's to do?
Shall we go see the relics of this town?
(3.3.17-19)

Note especially "What's to do?" He is later caught up in Olivia's urge to action when she decides to marry him. His meditative speech, "This is the air, that is the glorious sun" (4.3.1 ff.), is cut off by her arrival with a request formed like a command: "Blame not this haste of mine" (4.3.22).

Orsino's resumption of office is the most elaborate change in the speed of action. At last he comes to woo Olivia himself. But before he can talk to her he is brought some work. The officers enter with Antonio, and Orsino's questioning of that "notable pirate" is interrupted by Olivia's arrival. For the audience this is their first meeting. The Duke's reaction is oddly mechanical:

Here comes the Countess: now heaven walks on earth
But for thee, fellow—fellow, thy words are madness
(5.1.95-6)

Orsino's "but" sets the matter in hand against his response to Olivia. Compare these words with the equivalent passage in William Burnaby's eighteenth-century revision of the play. There the Duke has more to say about the woman he loves:

Now Heav'n walks on Earth, and Beauty round
Invades us all! Each glance devotes a Slave,
And every step, she treads upon a heart,
All of the Skies, but pitty you have brought.

Burnaby's addition is heavy-handed but shows he was aware that Orsino's brief welcome in the original is a little strange. It could be argued that since Orsino seems more interested in his own moods than in Olivia, he
can offer only a commonplace compliment when he actually meets her, and then directs his attention to the
Antonio-Cesario conflict which fascinates him. But this is not what happens. Olivia is Orsino's business.
When she appears he is needed as a magistrate and after acknowledging her briskly he returns to his case.
Then, just as briskly, he quashes Antonio's complaint and reserves judgement, so that he can attend to his
main concern:

But for thee, fellow—fellow, thy words are madness.
Three months this youth hath tended upon me;
But more of that anon. Take him aside.
(II. 96-8)

Again simple, brusque statements announce Orsino's despatching of business, and another "but" emphasizes
the transitions and oppositions of the passage. Soon, Orsino resumes his polysyllables and complex sentences.

The words and syntax of Twelfth Night are interesting for what they say and for what they are. The nature of
the characters' vocabulary tells us something about them; the sentence structure also exposes the characters
and their moods, and points at thematic oppositions. Even if their surface meaning is deceptive, words can
still communicate truthfully. Yet we are also told that words deceive. And here we might note a recurring
syntactic pattern which embodies the deceptions of Twelfth Night. Earlier I quoted "I am not that I play" from
Viola's first encounter with Olivia. This takes up her request to the Captain, "Conceal me what I am" (1.2.53)
and prefigures a cryptic exchange with Olivia in act 3, scene 1:

    Olivia.
    I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.
    Viola.
    That you do think you are not what you are.
    Olivia.
    If I think so, I think the same of you.
    Viola.
    Then think you right; I am not what I am.
(11. 140-3)

The setting of negative against positive in conjunction with the verb "to be" is repeated at the end of the play
when Orsino finds Sebastian and Viola forming "A natural perspective, that is, and is not!" (5.1.215). And it is
mocked in Feste's joking: "That that is, is': so, I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is 'that' but
'that'? and 'is' but 'is'?" (4.2.15-17). In fact here, that that is, is not. Feste is more accurate, but without
knowing it, when he tells Sebastian, whom he mistakes for Cesario, "Nothing that is so, is so" (4.1.8-9). The
repeated formula captures the confusion of actuality and fiction which these characters experience. Again the
syntax tells us a truth while agreeing that words and events themselves can lie.

We cannot be certain about reality and falsehood when the genuine emotion of "My father had a daughter
loved a man" can move us so. Shakespeare's achievement with language in Twelfth Night is to encapsulate the
conflict of truth and illusion, and to remind us that facts and truth are not necessarily the same, that the truest
poetry often is the most feigning.

Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Viola and Olivia

Lydia Forbes

[Forbes illustrates Shakespeare's theme of disguise versus self-deception throughout the story of Viola. Viola is presented as a purposeful young woman who sets out to achieve her goal through any means. She recognizes the scope of her abilities and consents to disguise to buy herself time. Likewise, Olivia adopts the veil of mourning to keep Orsino at bay, who spends most of the play lost in self-delusion, and therefore is unsuitable for her. Viola judges Olivia by what she has heard of her and proceeds to romance Olivia in a way that cannot be successful for Orsino. Consequently, Viola's approach to Olivia wins her not to the Duke, but to Viola. The critic maintains that Olivia is a reasonable woman and perceives Viola to be a match for her in independence and wit, yet Olivia confuses Viola and Sebastian because of her deeper intuitive sense. Olivia perceives similar qualities of spirit in both Sebastian and Cesario: Sebastian matches Cesario in integrity, but is as impetuous as Viola is patient.]

. . . The story of the nobly born Viola, disguised as the page boy, "Cesario," is usually considered the principal plot of Twelfth Night. She sets her heart on the Duke Orsino of Illyria, and finally weds him. He is a good man and worthy of her, but temporarily so confused by a romantically far-fetched notion of love that he would not be able to appreciate her in her own feminine dress.

Beside this story we have a series of events engineered by a gentlewoman, Maria, attendant on the Countess Olivia. Maria's aim is to marry Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch. By pretending to gratify Sir Toby's desire to be revenged on the officious steward, Malvolio, Maria succeeds in getting Sir Toby so far out of favor with his niece that he marries Maria in order to remain a member of the household.

Linking these two patterns, the Lady Olivia, as the unresponsive object of Orsino's attentions, moves briskly but with dignity, and an outstanding appreciation of honesty in respect to both the good and the bad.

In the opening scene of the play the audience is regaled with the full exuberance and verbal confusion that deception and self-delusion bring about. It is like a musical opening by Brahms, in which the themes are developed before they are stated. With the second scene, austere and isolated on the seacoast, the premises and the thesis of the play are demonstrated. The sea-captain, who rescues Viola from the shipwreck and brings her ashore in Illyria, describes the country and what he knows of its people. Viola gives us her own measure and his in her famous lines:

There is a fair behavior in thee captain;
    And though that nature with a beauteous wall
    Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
    I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
    With this thy fair and outward character.
    (I.ii.45)

While an ironic contrast exists between Viola's speech and her intention to disguise herself, her recognition of her own limitations and her own "fair behavior" after real peril clear the unreal atmosphere of the opening scene, and also put the following extravagances of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in their place.

Viola's charm and wit and continual self-consciousness about her own disguise help us understand the people she is dealing with. She is so reasonable and patient that when she trusts someone we are persuaded that her faith is justified. Only the unreasonable in human nature forces her to disguise herself. As a woman of her position, and in such a situation, she could not be a free agent, so she dresses like her brother and calls herself "Cesario." She, like Olivia, needs time to get her bearings after a calamity in her family. She and Olivia
Viola's first thought after being rescued is the hopeful one that her brother may also have survived. Her second thought is that she must now act on her own account. She has no family here. Since she has apparently heard of Orsino as a possible husband, she becomes a page in his household, to see for herself whether he might fill the bill. Though her deception serves her well, before the play is done Viola admits that disguise is, in fact, a "wickedness" wherein "the pregnant enemy [i.e. the Devil] does much."

The portrait of Viola shows that Shakespeare, in writing a stylized play, does not prevent his characters from coming alive. Their energy does not seem confined by any pattern, but occasionally the pattern becomes so clear that characterization takes second place. The two sea-captains who rescue Viola and Sebastian are a case in point. Shakespeare makes them both men of profound integrity. Antonio, who rescues Sebastian, scorns any disguise even though he knows his life is in danger here, and he is arrested by Orsino's men. Viola's nameless rescuer goes so far as to help her to disguise herself, and keeps her secret even when he is "in durance at Malvolio's suit." Both honest, both imprisoned in this odd land, these two men of the sea make a strong and arbitrary contrast to the prevailing distortions of life on shore in Illyria.

The first sight of Orsino, the Duke, should be as different from the first sound, as Viola's swaggering costume is from her very feminine nature. The reader of the play sees only the Duke's fantastic words, the actor will show the outward form of Orsino, who, in the last act, says to the sea-captain Antonio

That face of his I do remember well,
Yet, when I saw it last, it was besmear'd
As black as Vulcan in the smoke of war:
A bawbling vessel was the captain of,
For shallow draught and bulk unprizable;
With which most scathful grapple did he make
With the most noble bottom of our fleet,
That very envy and the tongue of loss
Cried fame and honor on him.
(V.i.55)

This Duke, who can recognize so well the quality of Antonio, is "noble in nature as in name." Yet for the greater part of the play he is baffled and deluded. Imagining that he is in love with Olivia, he feels both exalted and harassed by his "desires." He grants that he does not prize her riches, but he cannot see that he does not even prize her. Her beauty and her sex arouse in him a kind of emotion, conceit and mixed metaphor which he enjoys and thinks he needs so desperately that, at the end, he cries out for the heart to kill Olivia rather than lose her. So strong can the shape of fancy become!

By the fourth scene, Orsino has actually fallen in love with Viola. She wins him "liver and all" in the second act by talking to him in his own "fantastical" way. Her disguise lets him become devoted, without being confused by the erratic passions he associates with love of woman. That devotion is clear in one of the most comic moments in the last act, when his greeting to Olivia: "Now heaven walks on earth" is followed abruptly by a return to the puzzle of Antonio's identification of Cesario. The only sudden change in Orsino at the end of the play is his loss of the delusion that he loves Olivia.

Olivia's message to Orsino in the opening scene, refusing his suit, should seem like too much protestation, even without the benefit of hindsight. Here is a girl who is suddenly left all alone to manage the affairs of a great estate. She is saddled with her father's younger brother—a liability—and with an importunate neighbor who insists that she wed. She cannot accept him; so she publicly exaggerates out of all reason her natural grief at the death of her brother, so as to keep the unwelcome suitor at arm's length.
Viola, as Orsino's ambassador to Olivia, cannot help judging Olivia by what she has heard, and by the rebuffs encountered at the Countess's gate. To Viola, Olivia is like the subject of Shakespeare's 94th sonnet, one of those who "moving others, are themselves as stone," who take care to be "the lords and owners of their faces." Viola calls her "too proud" when Olivia's unveiling and itemizing of her face emphasize this attitude. There is certainly further deception, conscious or unconscious, by Viola in this first dialogue between these ladies. Viola carries out her master's orders to woo Olivia in a way that cannot succeed.

Viola's wit and aplomb, her independence and scorn for her own well-conned flowery speech are at once congenial to Olivia. When Viola, in exasperation, pulls out all the stops on her own natural poetry, Olivia dives into her bag of tricks to win "him." She tries to give "him" money, she sends "him" a ring, she wonders, when all her pleading seems to no avail: "How shall I feast him—what bestow of him—For youth is bought more oft than begged or borrowed."

Olivia is very young, then, and probably slight of figure to be suitably matched to "Cesario." Anyone as competent as she shows herself to be, as Sebastian notes that she is, and as a mistress would have to be to suit Malvolio, would not mismatch herself. She has been forced to grow up quickly in the last months, and her discovery of her own capabilities has gone to her head. But, since she is reasonable as well as practical, she can see that she is being swept off her feet and put suddenly into the position she has always objected to in Orsino (that of unrequited lover). This forces her to conceal her own nature from herself, to speak of "enchantment," and say in most un-Olivia-like tones these lines, which are noticeably difficult to say naturally:

Fate, show thy force: ourselves we do not owe;  
What is decreed must be, and be this so.  
(I.v.331)

However this may comfort her, she does not actually leave to Fate anything which she can manage.

At her second visit as Cesario, careful to seem more courtly, formal and remote than the first time, Viola is met by the full storm of Olivia's recklessness. This is not only caused by passion, but by intuitive uneasiness:

Olivia.  
Stay: I prithee, tell me what thou think'st of me.  
Viola.  
That you do think you are not what you are.  
Olivia.  
If I think so, I think the same of you.  
Viola.  
Then think you right: I am not what I am.  
Olivia.  
I would you were as I would have you be.  
(III.i.151)

Sebastian, Viola's twin, is exactly what Olivia would have him be.

The most fundamental consideration in the relationship between "seems" and "is" arises with the confusion of Sebastian and Viola. When Olivia mistakes Sebastian for "Cesario," she is seeing the same spirit in both. Her eye is not stopped at the surface by any probable difference of height and voice. She did not fall in love with a physique. This is a difficult theatrical problem, certainly, but one to be tackled with bravado rather than coyness, because it is more than a casual assumption of the plot—it is a considered criticism of what we are accustomed to call "real," the facade. Olivia must be consistently shown as a person who is wary of letting her
eye be "too great a flatterer for [her] mind." Her intuitive summing up of people is always made at a deeper level than this. As for the confusion of Antonio in mistaking Cesario for Sebastian, I believe that the only assumption the actor can make is that that honest stalwart could never entertain the suspicion of a disguise. He is far too much upset by the overwhelming sin of ingratitude to notice any surface changes in his erstwhile idol.

Sebastian has as much romantic venturesomeness, courage, charm and—all important to this play—integrity as Viola. But in his astonishing impetuosity he is a mirror image, rather than a copy, of his twin's equally astonishing patience. Their intentions are the same, their ways of carrying them out are very different.

Two such spirits as Viola and Sebastian are required as "fitting climax to the swelling act" which in the end unmasks all the characters of this play. They are needed by Olivia and Orsino as mates of the appropriate sex. They are used by Shakespeare to emphasize "what a piece of work is man".


Cynthia Lewis

[Lewis positions Antonio as a Christ figure against which Viola's moral growth, the central concern of the play, is measured throughout Twelfth Night. Viola demonstrates sacrificial qualities early in the play, but they only come to fruition through her service and ultimate sacrifice to Orsino. Her major obstacle is her fear of losing control, but her salvation, the critic asserts, is her clear-sightedness. This quality is demonstrated in Viola's interpretation of Olivia returning the ring she claimed Viola left behind as opposed to Malvolio's cloudy reasoning when attempting to decipher the letter he thinks is from Olivia. Antonio's example of sacrificing himself for Cesario, whom he believes to be Sebastian, is compared with Viola's sacrifice, when she offers to take the punishment Orsino who would like to deal to Olivia. The critic links the ideal sacrifice to the manifestation of the Messiah in the Epiphany and asserts that Christian love informs romantic love in the play.]

Viola's characterization throughout Twelfth Night reveals that the play concerns itself fundamentally with her moral growth. Shakespeare continually plays Viola off the other characters to illustrate how far she has come and how much farther she has to go. Initially, she has all the makings of an Antonio. She generously rewards first the sea captain and then Feste (I.ii.18, III.i.43), and she lashes out at ingratitude when Antonio accuses her of it (III.iv.354-57). Her willingness to woo another woman for the man she loves also indicates her magnanimity.

Yet she often appears self-absorbed. Nowhere is this trait clearer than when she offers Antonio only half her coffer (III.iv.345-47). Next to the total altruism that Antonio showed Sebastian in the preceding scene (III.iii.38), Viola's reserve seems downright stingy. Granted, Viola is not rich; nor does she even know Antonio. Her giving anything at all under these circumstances could thus be admired. But the contrast between the two characters is evident: Viola is willing to go far for someone else, but only so far. Similarly, Viola has good reason in III.iv to be stunned by the sudden possibility that Sebastian may yet live and thus to ignore Antonio's arrest; but Antonio, having intervened to save her life, surely deserves more attention from Viola/Cesario than she gives. Even if Viola exits at the close of this scene in pursuit of Antonio and the officers, she apparently does so not to aid Antonio but to discover more about Sebastian's history.

This key episode in which Viola and Antonio are contrasted reveals the major obstacle that Viola must surmount before she can grow to love completely: fear of losing control. That she loves both her brother and her master is obvious to us, but a great deal of the potential and actual destructiveness in Twelfth Night arises from Viola's refusal to expose herself openly to others—to give herself away. She is consistently associated with walls—barriers to love—throughout the play. Her disguise becomes an emblem of her and others' fear: many such walls appear in the play and must be let down or broken through before genuine love can be
enjoyed. Orsino uses cliched love language to put a safe distance between himself and Olivia (e.g., I.i); Viola refers to the hypocrisy of most people, who hide their wickedness behind the "beautuous wall" of appearance (I.ii.48); Viola herself attempts to use language like Orsino's in wooing Olivia and in protecting herself, until she finds it will not shield her well (e.g., II.ii); Olivia hides in her house and behind her wit and her veil (II.ii, etc.). The spirit of Epiphany, represented by Antonio's willingness to manifest his true self for the sake of another, is stifled behind these barriers.

Viola's brilliant repartee with Feste demonstrates her capacity for folly, for letting go and enjoying another's company (III.i.1-59). Admiring his wit, she expresses appreciation for its wisdom and thus signals her own association with Christlike folly and her own understanding that folly comes in two forms: "For folly that he wisely shows is fit, / But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit" (III.i.67-68). But when Feste cuts gently at Orsino's folly (11. 39-41), Viola resists hearing more: "Nay, and thou pass upon me, I'll no more with thee" (11. 42-43). Viola here seems reluctant to acknowledge the value of Feste's remarks. For a long time she appears unable either to admit that Orsino's attraction to Olivia is not genuine love or to deal directly with her feelings for Orsino. Her reaction to Feste's song in II.iv exemplifies the poor judgment that results from her infatuation. "Come away, come away, death" has got to be some of the most morbid verse ever set to music, as Feste kindly suggests to Orsino (II.iv.73-78), and the music that accompanies it would be anything but cheering. But Viola identifies with its gloom: "It gives a very echo to the seat / Where Love is thron'd" (II.iv.21-22). Viola's exaggerated sympathy for Orsino's pain mirrors his self-indulgence.

In its irrationality, Viola's love for Orsino resembles Antonio's love for Sebastian and Olivia's for Viola/Cesario. It is potentially good folly. But enclosed within her, it waxes overly melancholic. When she can express it in even veiled language, as she does in II.iv, it regains some of its health:

```
Vio. My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.
Duke. And what's her history?
Vio. A blank, my lord; she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
(11. 107-15)
```

Perhaps because this passage demands that Viola objectify her feelings, it is less self-pitying than her attraction to Feste's song. Furthermore, Viola's hidden love at least eventually permits her to instruct Orsino:

```
Vio. But if she [Olivia] cannot love you, sir?
Duke. I cannot be so answer'd.
Vio. Sooth, but you must
(II.iv.87-88)
```

Yet Viola herself realizes that secret longings fester within, "like a worm i' th' bud." The self must be honestly exposed to survive; Viola must reveal her inner self to become fully human.

Another of Viola's potential virtues emerges as she is compared and contrasted with Malvolio. In much the same way that Malvolio seeks to unravel the letter he finds in II.v, Viola tries to read the significance of the allegedly returned ring in II.ii. The concept linking the two scenes is interpretation. On this score Viola
obviously does much better than Malvolio. Her vision is not so dreamy-eyed as to obscure the true meaning of receiving the ring, whereas poor Malvolio's hopes absolutely blind him to the facts. Viola's visionary quality—composed of a clear-sightedness like Feste's and a power like Antonio's to perceive how others feel—will guide her through the snarls to come. Yet on this point too she fudges, when she thrusts all responsibility onto an external force: "O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie" (II.i.40-41). Notwithstanding the partial truth of this statement, Viola will sooner or later have to participate in shaping her own life. Time can and does help, but it requires a cooperation from her, a total commitment of herself to love.

Whether or not Viola learns how to make such an investment directly from Antonio, the sea captain's dramatic purpose is to provide such an example, and Viola comes to reflect his behavior. The turning point for her, when all the potentially fine qualities we have seen in her come together, is also the heart of the play. It comes in her answer to Orsino's angry threat on her life:

I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.
(V.i.130-31)

The Christian implications of the "sacrificial lamb" ought to ring clear, and Viola's sudden "willingness" to give not just some, but all, endows her with new virtue:

And I most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.
(11.132-33)

Like Antonio, who has earlier offered to protect her with his life (III.iv.312-14), Viola now substitutes herself for Olivia, in order to give Orsino "rest." She gladly takes upon herself the punishment through which Orsino would "spite" another. Here lies the Epiphany in Twelfth Night, where the meaning of Christ's birth, His sacrifice for humanity, manifests itself in the actions of human beings. Viola's commitment of her life to love is the wisest folly she can pursue. To dismiss all barriers to love, to disregard even the welfare of one's physical being, is divine.

Viola's altruistic attitude toward love, which alludes to a Christian ideal, permits spiritual love and romantic love to be linked in Twelfth Night. Ultimately, we are not shown a world in which different types of love—say, physical and non-physical—are qualitatively different or are opposed. Rather, Christian love, as epitomized in Antonio, works itself into the worldliest of relationships through the four lovers, principally Viola, as well as through Feste. Thus, Christian love can inform romantic love, and the two comic traditions that shape the play—the romantic and the serious—are joined compatibly as Viola grows to become more like Antonio. Significantly, in this final scene Olivia also grows to accept Viola/Cesario as a "sister" and Orsino as her brother (11. 326, 317). The good folly that is well on its way to triumphing over all is not limited to romantic love, but leads to general good will and fellowship.

 Appropriately, after Viola's declaration of devotion to Orsino, the majority of the characters are in some respect set free. Viola's self-sacrifice is not the single twist in the plot that accounts for every subsequent revelation: many other actions, like Sebastian's entrance (1. 208), intervene before Viola's true identity is discovered. But Viola's new openness to love sets a tone early in the scene for the series of manifestations and apparent miracles to follow. The twins are reunited; the four lovers are rightly matched; the sea captain who has possession of Viola's clothes is "enlarged" (1. 278); and Malvolio is "deliver'd" (I. 315), though that does not guarantee his freedom, which only he can claim for himself. Even Fabian, caught up in the "wonder" of "this present hour," freely confesses the joke on Malvolio and tries to ease the tension between the revelers and the steward (11. 355-68). "Golden time" is ripe for love like Antonio's.
But the play's problematic nature persists to the end, modifying and augmenting the harmonious resolution. For instance, what of Antonio? Are we to assume that Orsino will also set him free? It seems rather that the question of Antonio's future, like so many other questions at the closing, is left dangling for a reason. Interestingly, the other salient loose end here is that Viola has still not removed her disguise by the time *Twelfth Night* is finished. These two details do more than blur the play's resolution, as do questions about whether Malvolio will repair his ruined pride and whether Maria will help curb her new husband's former excesses. Most importantly, these unresolved elements involve the audience's sense of responsibility in determining their own future. Indeed, Act V would not challenge us morally if it clearly and simply showed that all ended well. *Twelfth Night* finally asks us whether we will make all well by divesting ourselves of the walls around us that shut out love like Antonio's and keep it imprisoned. Will we embrace the spirit of Epiphany, which shapes the play throughout, and thus free Christian love in our own world? By agreeing to, we will, in effect, liberate Antonio and change as radically as if we moved, along with Viola, from male to female. When *Twelfth Night* closes, it has already "pleased" us, as Feste promises (V.i.408). If it is also going to teach us when the "play is done" (1. 407), then we must respond to it by unveiling.


**Douglas H. Parker**

[Parker outlines the parallels between Olivia and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, regarding them as non-genetic twins. He begins by describing the similarities between the characters: their loss of fathers and brothers, their respective disguises, and their pursuit of unrequited love. Viola relates to Olivia's inability to love Orsino because of her own inability to love Olivia. In her frustration with the situation, she communicates to them both the consequences of refusing to accept love. The critic demonstrates how Olivia and Viola are intellectual equals and that Olivia falls in love with Viola because of the qualities in herself that she sees Viola mirror back. The women also recognize that they are both intellectually bested by Feste, accept it with good humor, and are the only two in the play who can appreciate Feste's wit. Finally the critic considers the etymology of their names, explains why Olivia is not suffering from melancholy, and comments on the fitting conclusion that Viola and Olivia should become sisters-in-law.]

. . . Shakespeare stresses the non-genetic twinning between Olivia and Viola at many points in the play in a number of ways: certain situations in which one character finds herself are mirrored in the other character's situations; particular scenes in which one character appears are repeated with slight variation for the other, or events in individual scenes in which both appear show remarkable similarities; and, finally, the outcome of the action of the play is essentially identical for both.

That Shakespeare wants us to regard Viola and Olivia's relationship as an important and close one is clear from the number of scenes in which the two appear in conversation together. No other pair of characters in the play has as many meetings stretching over as many lines as these two. Initially they meet in I.v. when Viola comes to Olivia's house to sue on Orsino's behalf; here the conversation lasts for about 150 lines; at the end of this scene we first recognize Olivia's developing love for Viola [quotations from Lothian and Craik's New Arden edition]. They meet again in III.i. and try to deal with Olivia's love for Orsino's messenger; here the conversation runs to some 70 lines. And finally, their third and shortest meeting occurs in III.iv. where the matter of Olivia's love is again discussed for about 20 lines. These frequent encounters encourage us to feel that, if Sebastian had not appeared on the scene to satisfy Olivia's love, the two women might have gone on meeting indefinitely, for at the end of this final meeting Olivia encourages Viola to "come again tomorrow" (III.iv.218).

But the relationship between the two is far closer than a series of three meetings between them can suggest. In many of the play's situations, Viola and Olivia are identical characters: both have experienced the death of fathers; both think they have experienced the recent death of brothers. Both initially appear before the
members of Illyrian society in disguise which serves a double function, even though the stress placed on each function differs for each woman. We learn early in the play from Valentine that out of respect for her recently dead brother, Olivia is "veiled" (I.i.28), and later we see this for ourselves in her first meeting with Viola. Olivia's veil serves as an obvious sign of her mourning; however, it also serves, secondarily, as a type of disguise, since it allows her to hide her face from Orsino's suitors thereby letting them know that their master is not for her. The fact that Olivia is prepared to lift her veil so quickly in Viola's presence indicates that her vow of seven years' mourning is as much an attempt to discourage Orsino's love pleas as it is an outward sign of grief. This is not to say that her sorrow for her brother's death is insincere; it is only to say that her grief is an interior sentiment which in these peculiar circumstances needs to be manifested in an outward fashion to encourage the Duke to credit it as valid. Hence Olivia's veil and the daily tearful watering of her chamber are not obvious indications, as many critics suggest, that Olivia is wallowing in melancholy as the Duke is in love; they are, rather, necessary props used to convince a love-struck Duke, who surrounds himself with his own props in the form of music and "sweet beds of flowers" (I.i.40) that her sorrow is sincere. In short, Olivia shows herself to be an admirable judge of Orsino's character by choosing his own methods of validating his experiences to convince him of the sincerity of her own. In this respect, Olivia, like Viola, has a sophisticated awareness of the importance of disguise in dealing with life's problems. And like Viola who, while sincerely mourning the death of her brother is, nevertheless, aware that she must deal with the new situation in which she finds herself after the shipwreck, since she is now a stranger in a strange land— and certainly unlike the inactive, prostrate figure of the love-struck Orsino—Olivia is also intent on imposing an order on her life, evident in her attempt early in the play to bring Sir Toby to heel (I.iii.) and to discover the whereabouts of the derelict Feste (I.v.). In short, while Orsino's love renders him "unstaid and skittish in all motions" (II.iv.18), Viola and Olivia's grief does not overwhelm them to the point that it becomes an obsession preventing them from carrying on with the necessary business of living one's life.

Viola, too, appears in disguise in the initial scenes of the play, and her male disguise, as purposeful as Olivia's veil, is used to protect her from the unknown dangers of a foreign country. But like Olivia's, Viola's disguise also serves as a sign of her mourning, if for no one but herself, since her physical resemblance to her brother coupled with her male attire must make her appear, to herself at least, very much like Sebastian. In fact, in III.iv, in soliloquy, she mentions that as Cesario she copies her brother, stating

I my brother know
Yet living in my glass; even such and so
In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate.
(389-93)

For Viola, as much as for Olivia, these disguises initially both protect them from dangers of one sort or another, and also permit them to legitimately keep their brothers' memories "fresh / And lasting, in ... [their] sad remembrance" (I.i.31-32).

The entire love situation in which Olivia and Viola find themselves entangled is also very similar. As is often the case in romantic comedy, both fall in love rapidly, Olivia after her first meeting with Viola, and Viola after only three days in Orsino's company. However, in this latter case, Shakespeare makes the three-day span seem as instantaneous as Olivia's more sudden love affliction by sacrificing chronological time to dramatic time. Although we hear from Valentine at the beginning of I.iv. that the Duke "hath known . . . [Viola] but three days" (3), their first actual stage encounter to which the audience is privy occurs in this same scene, and, as a result, Viola's love for the Duke seems as sudden as Olivia's for Viola. Both women must also endure unrequited love: despite the love tokens that each receives, Olivia cannot love Orsino any more than Viola can Olivia. And, further, just as Viola acts as the Duke's emissary, informing Olivia why she should love Orsino, Olivia herself, quite inadvertently no doubt, plays the same role as Viola as she informs her and us the
audience about Orsino's inherent worthiness as a husband. Lest Orsino has left a bad taste in the audience's mouth after his first horribly self-indulgent appearance, and lest, as a result, we cannot understand the commonsensical Viola's passion for him, Olivia tells us that even though she cannot love him, she supposes him

virtuous . . . noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,
And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
A gracious person.
(I.v.262-66)

Expecting to find Viola in I.v. suing on Orsino's behalf, the audience not only discovers this, but also the more unexpected, dramatically delightful event of Olivia serving as Orsino's spokesman and thereby mirroring Viola's role as go-between.

Viola's sense of the closeness of the two apparently hopeless love relationships is evident at a couple of points in the play. She is poignantly aware and understanding of Olivia's inability to love Orsino because she feels such an inability herself in her relationship with Olivia. Even though it is a sexual barrier that separates Olivia and Viola in contrast to an emotional one that separates Olivia and Orsino, the audience feels Viola mirroring her own frustration with Olivia's persistence when she says to the tenacious Orsino after he encourages her once again to return to Olivia to plead on his behalf: "But if she cannot love you, sir?" (II.iv.88). Also, in the same scene, perhaps reflecting on the apparent hopelessness of her own love for Orsino, she tells the Duke a story of a woman (actually Viola herself) who

never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.
(II.iv.111-16)

This sad commentary on the loveless life, with its emphasis on death and decay, mirrors an earlier warning that Viola gave Olivia about her refusal to accept love—a warning which Shakespeare had given time and again in his sonnet sequence. Complimenting Olivia on her beauty, and, at the same time, encouraging her to capitalize on it while she can, she states:

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
Lady, you are the cruellest she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.
(I.v.241-46)

It is interesting to note the important similarities between these two speeches. The reference to the decay of female beauty is poignantly expressed in both; Viola's "damask cheek" in the first passage finds its counterpart in the second in the reference to Olivia's "red and white" beauty. Both images clearly refer to the feminine complexion and both are interchangeable commonplaces in Renaissance love poetry. The image of the "worm i' th' bud" is less metaphorically expressed in the second passage through the reference to the "grave" as the final and inevitable resting place of all earthly beauty. And finally, there is an admonitory tone
present in both passages even though it is more obliquely expressed in the first. In the first passage Viola, although addressing Orsino, seems to be telling herself that pining in thought, rather than acting by expressing her love to Orsino, could lead to a life of unfulfilled wishes ending in death, as the reference to "monument" suggests. In the second passage she more straightforwardly warns Olivia that the inevitable result of not acknowledging and accepting love is personal annihilation and "the grave."

In summary, in Olivia's and Viola's love situations, Shakespeare keeps the reader's mind fixed on the way in which each female reflects or mirrors the other's character, actions, or predicaments. The initial disguises of the two are clear mirrors of each other as each woman uses masking both to defend herself from unwanted advances or happenings and to serve as appropriate symbols of mourning reflecting a true inner grief. Further, each woman can be seen fulfilling the role of go-between for Orsino. As Viola confronts Olivia to sue on Orsino's behalf, so Olivia, through her complimentary comments on Orsino's character, assures Viola and the audience of his worthiness as a future husband. And finally, Viola herself, commenting in two different speeches on the nature of the two major female love patterns, sees a close relationship between her situation and Olivia's which Shakespeare stresses by using similar images, a similar admonitory tone, and by drawing similar conclusions.

Certain scenes in the play also emphasize the twin relationship that I see in Viola and Olivia. In the early part of the first meeting between the two women, Olivia shows anger at Viola's behaviour and asks why she began her conversation "rudely" (I.v.215). Viola's reply stresses the mirroring that runs through the play by making clear that she simply responded in kind to the reception she received at Olivia's hands; she states: "The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I learned from my entertainment" (217-18). Indeed, this entire first meeting between the two women is remarkable for the skill that each shows in conversing with the other, proving that each possesses a sharp wit. Initially the conversation begins with a display of verbal wit conducted in prose by both women. The ironically posturing Petrarchan love messenger, Viola, gets as good as she gives from the determined lady of the house, Olivia, whose true skill at repartee becomes evident when the messenger introduces the imagery of the religion of love. Both instinctively seem to recognize when the witty prologue to this first meeting concludes, for after this initial period of feeling each other out, both immediately switch from prose to poetry, a switch which indicates a movement that Berry characterizes [in Shakespeare's Comedies: Exploration in Form (1972)] as one from "the language of fencing and social deception" to "the language of truth and intensely felt emotion." Unlike so many of the other scenes in this play where one character takes advantage of or capitalizes on the linguistic or personality weaknesses of another, there is no sense that there is a clear victor-victim relationship at the end of this scene. This is a conversation between intellectual equals with no clear winner emerging at its conclusion. And the fact that by the end of the scene Olivia has fallen in love with the messenger seems to prove the point that the two women are alike; after Viola exits, Olivia comments on Viola's character as revealed in this scene by stating that "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit / Do give thee five-fold blazon" (I.v.296-97). Earlier she had ironically catalogued her own beauty in a not entirely dissimilar way when she assured Viola that she would "give out divers schedules of my beauty" (247-48). That Shakespeare wants us to see that Olivia falls in love with Viola in this scene because she recognizes in her aspects of herself is evident in his uses of the word "blazon" to describe Viola's beauty and "schedules of beauty" to describe Olivia's. On the surface of it, there seems to be no apparent similarity between the two expressions, "blazon" being glossed in most editions as heraldic insignia, and "schedules" as written statements. But, in fact, the word "blazon" also has a more general meaning which the OED gives as "a description or record of any kind; esp. a record of virtues or excellencies," and adds the further meaning of "publication." Taken in this more general sense, Viola's "fivefold blazon" can be seen as the beauty she publicly displays or "publishes" in Olivia's presence; in other words, Viola's qualities serve as an obvious record of her virtues just as Olivia's qualities are ones that she ironically intends to make public by giving out "divers schedules," that is, written statements or publications of them. That Olivia should talk about the public demonstration of her beauty and then go on to describe Viola's in essentially the same terms, makes the point clear: at the end of this scene, Olivia has come to love Viola because she sees herself mirrored in her, a mirroring which we, the audience, have also been made to
see through the skillful and equal ironic verbal exchanges that have occurred in the scene. If it is, therefore, valid to claim that Olivia falls in love with Viola because the latter is, in fact, her alter ego—a view which Plato's Aristophanes would have no trouble accepting—then a new interpretation of Olivia's final words in this scene emerges. When, at the end of this scene, Olivia claims that "ourselves we do not owe" (314), she means, no doubt, as the traditional gloss of the lines states, that there are greater powers beyond us which seem to direct, shape and control us despite ourselves; but in the light of my interpretation of this scene, which sees Olivia's love for Viola emerging because of the similarities she comes to recognize between them, the line might also suggest Olivia's new awareness that her self is not something owned or possessed solely by her; it is, in fact, also part of her new love in whom she has just glimpsed characteristics of her own person.

In terms of the characters involved, methods of argumentation used and sentiments expressed by both Viola and Olivia, two other scenes in the play emphasize the character twinning with which this essay is concerned. Feste's catechizing of Olivia in I.v. in which he proves his mistress a "fool" for the undue grief she feels over the death of her brother, is mirrored in his extended verbal victory over Viola in III.i, which Viola recognizes as a type of instruction in the power and versatility of language. In the first exchange with Olivia, Feste's victory over his mistress is merely a verbal one; although by asking her the right questions he can demonstrate to her why she should not mourn her brother's death knowing his soul to be in heaven, he, nevertheless, cannot convince Olivia or the audience that her grief is unnecessary. The profound emotional effects of death go well beyond the logical conclusions derived from this form of verbal catechizing. One can find very little true consolation in Feste's argument, even as one admires its logic. The same phenomenon is evident in his exchange with Viola in III.i. Words once again appear to be infinitely capable of meaning what Feste wants them to as the skillful word crafter, or "corrupter of words" as he calls himself (37), attains victory over Viola by disabling her expectations—as he does Olivia's—and showing her his skill at turning language to his advantage. One example from this scene will suffice to make the point. When Feste tells Viola that he lives "by the church" and she asks him "Art thou a churchman?" his response undermines her line of thought. He answers:

   No such matter, sir.
   I do live by the church, for
   I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church. (5-7)

While we cannot help admiring Feste's skillful response here—as we admired his rational and verbal victory over Olivia—we must, at the same time, recognize that he is not really answering Viola's question—as earlier he was not truly convincing Olivia or us of her folly. In both cases he is merely using the symbols of thought—language itself—as tools for a clever but essentially specious game of verbal one-upmanship. What is interesting and important to notice is the women's almost identical responses to Feste's victory in each of these scenes. In Feste's exchange with Olivia, the dour steward of her household, Malvolio, is outraged at what he regards as Feste's impertinence. Obviously failing to see that Feste's victory is merely verbal and not substantial, he regards the clown's behaviour as insufferable. Olivia, clearly recognizing the true nature of Feste's "victory," takes his catechizing in the spirit in which it was intended and comments on Feste's effects:

   There is no slander in an allowed fool, though he do nothing but rail, nor no railing in a
   known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove. (I.v.93-96)

In a similar vein, at the conclusion of her exchange with Feste, Viola fleshes out Olivia's comment by analyzing the skill of the "allowed fool," a skill which Olivia has shown that she understands implicitly in the lines just quoted. Viola states:

   This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
   And to do that well, craves a kind of wit.
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time,
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art:
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

(III.i.61-69)

Of all the characters in the play, only these two women seem truly capable of appreciating Feste's verbal skill. Orsino, of course, is interested in Feste as well, but on a much more superficial and selfish level: he enjoys Feste's singing abilities because they help sustain his love mood. Viola and Olivia's good-spirited "defeats" at the clown's hands plus their comments on the witty fool's talents following these defeats, indicate their shared view of his gifts, and, in Olivia's case, at least, give support to Feste's words about his mistress to Viola when he states that "the Lady Olivia has no folly" (III.i.33). This telling comment lets us know how the wise Feste regards Olivia, and also indicates how seriously he must have taken his attempt to prove her a fool.

The sentiments expressed by both women at the conclusion of two other scenes in the play also add to the mirroring pattern that I have been tracing. At the end of I.v after Olivia has fallen in love with Viola, and, as a result, added another complication to her life, she is still level-headed enough to recognize how very much other forces are in control of an individual's situation. Hoping that her love might develop, and yet aware of her own impotence in making the outcome match her desires, she addresses fate:

Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe
What is decreed, must be; and be this so.

(I.v.314-15)

Viola expresses a similar notion at the end of II.ii. Again, like Olivia earlier, Viola is contemplating her various love entanglements. And again, like Olivia, she is prudent enough to see how powerless she is to shape her own destiny in the face of these entanglements. As a result, she places her faith in time as Olivia has earlier placed hers in fate:

O time, thou must untangle this, not I,
It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.

(II.ii.39-40)

This faith in powers beyond themselves proves valid for both women at the end of the play where the final series of mirroring events occurs. It is not enough to state—as many others have—that the apparently hopeless love relationships work themselves out satisfactorily for Viola and Olivia. This is only the most obvious example of mirroring. What is also important to recognize is that Viola's happy recovery of her brother Sebastian is also found in Olivia's situation. Fate has indeed proven itself generous to Olivia as time has to Viola. For by steadfastly refusing to marry Orsino throughout the play, Olivia has managed by the play's end not only to marry the husband of her dreams, but also to recover a brother in the person of Orsino. That this recovery is at least as important as the marriage is evident in the way in which Shakespeare stresses the notion near the play's conclusion. Once the comic complications have been resolved, Olivia encourages Orsino "To think me as well a sister, as a wife" (V.i.316), and a few lines later Orsino complies by addressing his former beloved as "sweet sister" (383). These numerous similarities between Shakespeare's two principal female characters in Twelfth Night strike me as more than fortuitous; there are far too many of them and they are far too closely related to be attributed solely to chance. Besides, Shakespeare seems to be deliberately directing the reader's attention to this second pair of twins in his play not only through the various mirroring situations and scenes mentioned above, but also through their very names: both names etymologically derive from
similar aspects of animate nature—Olivia's name originates with the olive plant and Viola's with the flower violet. Schleiner states [in "Orsino and Viola: Are the Names of Serious Character in Twelfth Night Meaningful?" Shakespeare Studies, 16 (1983)] that both of these flowers "possibly refer to purgatives" which might suggest the part that both characters play in purging the drama of its comic complications: Viola by constantly sounding the note of common sense and Olivia through her constant refusal to marry Orsino, which, of course, permits Viola to finally have him, thereby creating the play's happy ending. Is it, then, altogether surprising in light of these connections between the two women that each name—Viola and Olivia—should be essentially an anagram of the other?

In conclusion, Shakespeare's major female characters in Twelfth Night, despite their passports and their parentage, possess a dramatic kinship which makes each stand head and shoulders above the Illyrian folly in the play. If, as some credulous critics suggest, Olivia is "addicted to a melancholy" (II.v.202-03) because of the death of her brother, the spectators never see it. We only hear that she waters "once a day her chamber round / "With eye-offending brine / All this to season / A brother's dead love" (I.i.29-31) from Valentine, Orsino's go-between, who has received the information from Olivia's handmaid. Further, melancholia in this period was generally regarded as a debilitating mental disease which left its victims free to do very little more than ponder their obsessive bitterness—witness, for instance, Hamlet and Jaques. As I have suggested earlier, Olivia is clearly concerned about the state of her household, the condition of Sir Toby and the whereabouts of Feste, concerns which would not enter the mind of a true melancholic. What we can truly speak of is Olivia's sadness which is clearly legitimate and understandable, and which, as I have suggested, mirrors Viola's. It is a sadness brought about by unrequited love just as Viola's is. Against the charges of self-deceit, one might counter that a self-deceived woman could scarcely hold out as long as Olivia does against Orsino's persistent wooing which, we sense, has been going on long before the play even opens. Further, the suggestion that Olivia will not marry Orsino because by doing so she would be marrying above her station, does not sound like the sentiment of a self-deceived person. As I have suggested above, she is no more self-deceived than Viola. Finally, it is through her refusal to marry Orsino that Olivia, as much as Viola or Sebastian, helps bring the play to a happy conclusion by throwing Viola into Orsino's arms thereby fulfilling Viola's wishes. By contributing to the play's resolution, Olivia shows herself to be in the tradition of other enlightened Shakespearean female figures: the four ladies in Love's Labour's Lost, Rosalind in As You Like It and, of course, Viola in this play.

From the beginning of Twelfth Night we, as well as Viola, know that Olivia's love for Viola is doomed to failure because of the sex they share by nature. What we need to learn, however, is that this marriage of bodies which cannot be actualized, does not prevent Shakespeare from depicting a "marriage of true minds" between Olivia and Viola. It is, therefore, a fitting climax to this play that at its end each woman should become the other's sister-in-law since throughout both have been, as I hope I have shown, sisters in sentiment, intellect, and spirit.


**Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Malvolio**

Malvolio has intrigued critics more than any other character in Twelfth Night. In the seventeenth century, Charles I was so taken by Malvolio's mistreatment that he changed the name of the play in the Second Folio to "Malvolio."

**Melvin Seiden**

[Seiden examines Malvolio's role in the comic strategy of Twelfth Night, which is, the critic asserts, to divert the burden of comic scrutiny away from the festive lovers, and to lend a puritanical air which in contrast...
heightens the overriding sense of gaiety in the play. In the society of Illyria, Malvolio represents the new bourgeois, and is placed in conflict with the degenerate aristocracy of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and not with the patrician lovers, as other commentators have argued. On the contrary, Seiden explains that Malvolio strives to uphold the social standards of Olivia’s household, by which he lives and earns his keep, and is threatened by any subversion of the system. In principle, he is opposed to frivolity and to endow Malvolio with a sense of humor, as some readers have mused, would serve to make him into a tragic figure, clearly not what Shakespeare had intended. Seiden claims that Malvolio plays the bad cop not out of an excessive sense of self-love, as other critics have suggested, but out of an underdeveloped sense of self. He enforces restraint because he lacks an independent spirit within himself, and suffers an inferiority complex as a result. In conclusion, Seiden compares the comic strategies of Twelfth Night to a typical catharsis in a Shakespearean tragedy and contrasts the fate of Malvolio to that of Falstaff in Henry IV. While the clown Falstaff was sacrificed as the world of comedy gave way to the reinstitution of normal life, Malvolio, who represents law and order in Illyria, was not heralded as the returning patron of seriousness and work, but at the finale remained unsatisfied and discredited, a scapegoat sacrificed to the gods of comedy.

The miraculous, domesticated and made to serve the strategems of the dramatist, is one of the staples of comedy, especially that of Shakespeare. We recognize its power and beauty in the neatly-contrived and swiftly-executed denouement whereby the necessary "happy ending" is consummated. It is no less miraculous that the three lovers of Twelfth Night persistently escape involvement in the embarrassments and humiliations of the comic hurly-burly, and since this less obtrusive aspect of comic magic can lead us to a better understanding of what Shakespeare is up to in this play, we must examine its significance.

In the character of Falstaff and in the punitive comedy of Jonson one finds a curious phenomenon. Falstaff, Volpone, Subtle, and Face are comic impresarios; they cause others to appear ridiculous, thus ingratiating themselves without having to undergo as patients the comic action that, as agents, they have unleashed upon others. But the appetite for comedy that they have awakened in us is voracious and one not easily or quickly satisfied. Soon we want to see these impresarios sacrificed on altars of their own making. Jonson exploits this expectation, manipulating it to arouse suspense, and finally satisfying it by heaping on the heads of the comedy-makers comic punishments more extreme (and delightful to us) than anything that they, as agents, had been able to inflict on their victims. One might expect, therefore, that the pristine status of the three lovers would in a similar fashion arouse comic expectations and desires that could be fulfilled only at their expense.

Shakespeare’s grand strategy is to divert the current of our expectations into another channel, to provide us with another object for our promiscuous and destructive laughter in the figure of Malvolio. One can enumerate the various vices of Malvolio that make him a fair target, a worthy object of comic deflation. These will tell us what is ludicrous and laughable in Malvolio. But if we are concerned with the more interesting question of Malvolio's raison d'être, the answer must surely be that he exists so that Shakespeare’s lovers may preserve their status free from the nothing-if-not-critical comic scrutiny which would otherwise expose their romantic pretensions to the withering winds of laughter. It is not Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch, patricians manque, who are the true surrogates for the comic "tragedies" that are never permitted to embroil the lovers, but the puritan Malvolio. He is the scapegoat; he is the man who undergoes a sacrificial comic death so that they may live unscathed; he is the man whom, because of offensive seriousness (made to appear an antithetical ridiculousness) allows what is also ludicrous in the lovers to maintain its soberfaced pretense of impregnable seriousness.

Malvolio stands condemned of a mean, life-denying, but nevertheless principled utilitarianism. Shakespeare wants to excite our antipathy to Malvolio’s anti-comic sobriety, his sour bourgeois version of Aristotle’s ethical golden mean, and he provides us with many appropriate occasions for venting our antipathies. What Shakespeare does not want us to recognize, and what becomes clear once we are no longer involved emotionally in the play, is the fact that just as Malvolio is a creature of utility for his mistress Olivia, winning for his assiduous services only scorn and abuse, so for his creator Malvolio becomes an infinitely serviceable
comic instrument. We recognize that without Malvolio the comedy of *Twelfth Night* would be impoverished; I would go farther and argue that without him the comedy, the play as a whole, would not work, and it is precisely this indebtedness to Malvolio's multifarious utilitarianism that Shakespeare cannot acknowledge, since we are not meant to see what the old magician has up his sleeve or in his hat.

The social issues involved in the struggle between Malvolio's code of calculating utility and the comic values suggested by the title of the play (the bacchanalia, before the holiday ends) are not as clear as some critics have made them out to be. Tallying Malvolio's traits, we have no trouble seeing what these stand for. He is efficient, music-hating, fun-denying, power-seeking, austere, pompous, officious, and melancholy—in short, he is a Puritan and, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, an un-version of the man of the future, the petty bourgeois. Curiously, however, these values are not pitted against the lovers' aristocratic ones; the conflict is not between Malvolio's excessively rigid and stifling code of responsibility and that of love, leisure, music, sensibility, elegance, and the higher irresponsibility. Shakespeare is particularly careful to avoid representing a direct clash between Malvolio and his aristocratic betters. He is gulled, baited, and scourged by Maria and Feste, socially his inferiors, who are aided by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and the latter are grossly perverted specimens of nobility. We need not look any farther than Falstaff to see that for Shakespeare the fallen aristocrat can be morally worse than the erect man of lower degree. The idea of a social hierarchy necessitates such a judgment. The good man of the middle ranks is likely to have only middling virtues and vices, but he is at least in his proper place. The degenerate, of whatever rank, threatens the whole of the great chain of being.

The conflict in *Twelfth Night* is then between aristocracy at its worst (Toby and Aguecheek, aided by the roisterers)—perverted, and thus the antithesis of what is implied in the ideal of *noblesse oblige*—and a representative of the new bourgeoisie presented in its most perfect archetypal form, since Malvolio, whatever else he is not, is true to the principles he represents. He has a radical existential authenticity; he is the quintessential bourgeois.

Shakespeare's overt—but I think questionable—point is that in its purest manifestation such dour puritanism is worse even than the corrupt patrician irresponsibility of the Belches and Aguecheeks. The point that he is at some pains to conceal—or rather, what he wishes to avoid making a point of—is that he must avoid challenging the values of the patrician lovers with those of Malvolio.

Why? For one thing, the antithesis between Malvolio's grubby puritanism and the lovers' exquisite manners is not the unequivocal conflict between beauty and the beast that so many of our critics have made it out to be. We all recognize that Malvolio stands for work, order, duty, sobriety—everything, in short, that permits a society to function. Olivia clearly recognizes this. She understands that Malvolio's stewardship is necessary to the functioning of her household. As steward, then, Malvolio represents the police force: law and order. The love-making, the sweet melancholy of long leisure hours spent in contemplation, the delight in music, the poeticizing of life—all this is possible because of the mean prose of Malvolio's labors as a steward.

In the modern world, Marxist propaganda describes the police force as a contemptible tool of the capitalist system. More than that, the Marxist has tried to win over the police force to its revolutionary side by pointing up a social irony: the police, it is said, are themselves exploited by the very system which they uphold. One can imagine the Marxist pamphlet which says to the police of the capitalist states: "With every brutality you inflict upon the poor, the ignorant, the socially impotent, you brutalize yourselves; in suppressing the have-nots you only enslave those who would liberate you." One doubts whether such appeals have ever won many recruits to the revolutionary cause. Pride in work—no matter what the work may be—seems to be more deeprooted and compelling than any doubts or scruples the worker may feel about the utility or morality of his work. So it is with Malvolio. His arrogance is not the swollen amour-propre it seems to be. Clearly this is a man who believes in work and in particular in his own work. He is fanatically conscientious in trying to enforce law and order, not as the play so slyly makes us believe merely because he is temperamentally...
opposed to fun and play, but because he is also by principle antagonistic to whatever threatens to subvert the orderly social machinery of his mistress's household.

We in America have made a cult of that ambiguous virtue we call "a sense of humor." And so one hears it said, "If only Malvolio had a sense of humor, it would be possible to like him a little." What is being asked for here is that Malvolio be critical and detached, able to view his policeman's job skeptically and perhaps with the saving grace of an irony that would puncture the hypocrisies inherent in the job itself and his own seriousness. But this is impossible. Such a Malvolio would be a deeply divided man. Having the insight to see that in being Olivia's lackey he demeans himself and makes himself an object of contempt, Malvolio would indeed become what he comes perilously close to being in that extraordinary scene in which he suffers Feste's catechistic torments—a tragic figure. The so-called romantic critics assert that in this bitter, punitive scene, ending with the victim's impotent oath, "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!" Malvolio is in fact something like a tragic figure. But romantic critics and those who dismiss this view of Malvolio as sentimentality agree that it cannot have been Shakespeare's intention (or, seeking to avoid the dread intentional fallacy: that of the play) to endow Malvolio with tragic stature. Granting Malvolio the complex attitudes of a man with a sense of humor could all too easily engender tragic consequences.

There is in the American army the standard type of the supply or mess sergeant who is officious, bossy, and what is most damning, niggardly in dispensing food or clothing. "You'd think the stuff was his!" the indignant soldier cries out when his request for more (of whatever it is that he wants more of) has been turned down. The poor soldier sees only the irrationality of the sergeant's identifying his interest with Theirs (the army, the government, the taxpayers of America). From Their point of view, as expressed, say, by the officer who represents authority, it is precisely this identification between the underling, who has nothing to gain by being parsimonious, and constituted authority that makes a good supply sergeant or mess sergeant. The officer will soon want to get rid of the sergeant who recognizes that the stuff isn't his and acts accordingly.

Olivia, it can be assumed, would be the first to be displeased by a Malvolio who, winking broadly at Toby, had said, "Dost thou think because I must feign a steward's virtue I desire not the joys of cakes and ale?" Malvolio's frigid personality reflects his stern policies, and these are his mistress's. He is her surrogate, her cop; he is all superego in a libidinous society; and as we all come round to saying when we must justify whatever it is we do, Malvolio might have said, "That is what I'm paid to do." Malvolio, like the petty Nazi hireling defending himself at the Nuremberg trials, would have had to be a revolutionary to be different from what he was—not just a better man, but a radical critic of the society that created him, gave him employment, and provided sustenance.

Early in the play, in answer to Malvolio's contempt for the verbal tomfoolery with which Feste amuses his mistress, Olivia sums up Malvolio's chief vice neatly (and famously) in the line: "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite." The tag has stuck. Self-love seems to explain almost everything. But does it? Is Malvolio's behavior that of a man who, thinking well of himself, thinks poorly of others? One ought not answer Yes too quickly.

A common schematic analysis of the theme of love in Twelfth Night is the following: all of the major characters, with the exception of Viola, are seen to be motivated by some heretical or distorted version of love. Orsino is in love with love itself, Olivia is in love with grief, Malvolio is smitten with self-love, and only Viola expresses true—that is, a properly directed and controlled—love. In this account, Malvolio's narcissistic love disables him from loving others.

Now it is certainly true that more than anything else it is the passionless, calculating, mercenary fashion in which Malvolio responds to the imaginary love of his mistress that makes him so repugnant. Despite the social impropriety, we might forgive him were he to court his mistress with passion. If he were a man by love possessed, unable to control an imperious passion, he would be the type of the romantic sinner we have no
difficulty forgiving. And, so far as the proprieties are concerned, it is no accident that the witty Maria, blessed
because she is a wit, is fortunate enough to marry above her station. Only a twentieth century reader of the
play, his mind corrupted by democratic and psychological principles alien to the world of Twelfth Night, will
question Maria's good luck. For the Elizabethan, it cannot have much mattered that Toby is an ass; even as
ass, if affiliated with nobility, may be a good catch for one of the downstairs folk. The point then is that
Shakespeare's social hierarchy can, for comic purposes, be flexible enough to permit one of those who has
ingratiated herself to us by ingeniously performing her role as maker of comedy the good fortune of
succeeding as a social climber.

Malvolio's social climbing is therefore not evil per se. In comedy, success is conferred only upon those who
please us by aiding and abetting the flow of the comedy. Malvolio is the very embodiment of the anti-comic
spirit and the failure of his social climbing is due not simply or primarily to the immorality and impiety of the
aim itself, but to his not having as it were bribed us by affording us comic pleasure. If Malvolio had been an
agent of joy and comic abandon, Shakespeare would have had little difficulty in winning the sympathy of his
audience for a man who at play's end inherits rather than becomes, as he does become, dispossessed.

The critics agree that Malvolio is a loveless Snopes, and the orthodox view, based on Olivia's judgment, is
that inflated self-love incapacitates him for loving others. I want to suggest that what seems to Olivia to be
self-love in Malvolio is more likely to be a deficiency of self-esteem. Like all those whose work is primarily
that of imposing discipline, coercing obedience, enforcing respect and orderly behavior, checking "the natural
man" in whatever guise he may assume with the "civilizing" force of control, constraint, and censorship,
Malvolio is well suited to this job precisely because he does not possess a well developed, assertive ego. Plato
as well as Freud recognized that the natural man within us calls out Yes, Yes, to the heart's deepest desires,
and, whether it be called Reason or the Superego, that which makes possible comity among men must depend
heavily upon the negation of these disruptive, antisocial desires. In the dialectical tension between the
impatient affirmations of freedom and the unfeeling restraints of society every man must work out his own
never perfectly satisfactory compromise. Those whose social roles require, as does Malvolio's, that they be
constantly saying no to others must first learn to be deaf to the alluring siren songs within themselves.
Whoever does any of society's police work must either be able to silence the powerful voice of self within
himself or be so constituted as to have few or weak urgings of the kind that lead to independence of character
and freedom of behavior.

If Malvolio loved himself more one can imagine him loving his policeman's work less. If this seeming
self-love were genuine, Malvolio might have allowed himself to be caught up in the fun, the irresponsible
high jinks, the holiday mood of the revelers. True self-love, witnessing the privileged hedonism of
irresponsibility says, "Why should I be excluded? Why must I be the servant of fasting while others feast?"
Malvolio earns the enmity of the other members of Olivia's household because his over-assertiveness seems to
them to be an excess of self-love. To us, this aggressive and sullen wielding of authority and the peacock air
of superiority are likely to seem the very opposite of what they pretend to be: not the firm conviction of
integrity but a self-destructive sense of inferiority. Malvolio acts and talks like one whose show of strength is
only a fantasy, the purpose of which is to abrogate a reality that is all weakness and self-contempt. It is no
accident that in the first great scene of Malvolio's comic humiliation, where he is ensnared into ludicrous
courtship of his mistress, it is precisely the fantasist in Malvolio that is played upon so outrageously and
brilliantly by Maria and the other wits. And, if it be objected that the motives we impute to Malvolio are too
serious, too sympathetic, the reply must be that we do not necessarily sympathize more with a self-deceived
puritan than a simple moral bully, and, comedy or no comedy, Malvolio is a serious character; it is precisely
his seriousness that we are asked to see as comic in the context of the others' horse-play. It seems perfectly
legitimate and appropriate temporarily to remove that seriousness from its comic context and consider it
seriously.
I have described the comic strategies of *Twelfth Night* as devious. It can also be said that they are curiously unShakespearean. In particular, I refer to the emotional and moral implications of the mechanism for resolving a comic action that is analogous to catharsis in tragedy.

It is a commonplace of the critical tradition to find in Shakespeare's Falstaff the embodiment of the comic spirit. Modern scholarship has tended to reinforce this tradition by showing that Falstaff derives from the character of Vice or Riot in the medieval morality plays. Because he is Riot, Falstaff represents the principle of the transvaluation of all normal values. The comedy of the *Henry IV* plays inheres precisely in the subverting of the normal, sane, responsible, ordered, workaday world. One can describe this opposition between the comic and the non-comic worlds in an almost endless series of antinomies—moral, social, political, psychological; but no matter how Falstaff's comic nature is described, one is inevitably led to the recognition that the fundamental differentiating trait is in his radical transvaluating of conventional values and attitudes.

Because more than being an impresario of comedy, Falstaff *is* comedy, it is inevitable that Falstaff be banished, purged, symbolically sacrificed after he has outlived his comic usefulness. The pattern of the *Henry IV* plays seems to be an archetypal one: the sane, sober, unmagical world of work and duty is turned topsy-turvy by comic anarchy; comic anarchy flourishes, evoking in us pleasure and wonder; the forces representing what most of us unphilosophically think of as "reality" reassert themselves, thus re-establishing a world that, whatever else it may be, is always a non-comic one.

This re-establishing of a non-comic world is, of course, equivalent to the return to a non-tragic world in tragic works. Indeed, the whole pattern is more than similar in comedy and tragedy: in both there is a radical overturning of that gray reality we all know best, followed by a return to equilibrium at every level at which the disharmony and disequilibrium had previously existed. What comedy and tragedy have in common is that in both a kind of insanity (one terrible, the other delightful) has been allowed to reign and is then purged.

Everything that has given us pleasure in *Henry IV* took place under the aegis of Falstaff. No wonder we are saddened and perhaps even indignant when we are forced to witness the humiliation of the fantastic creature that made all of this possible. The tensions of tragedy become increasingly intolerable and we demand that they be resolved. But we want the holidaying of comedy to go on and on—in our dreams, even forever. In both cases, however, we understand that life always provides a Fortinbras to insure that man and society will survive and that, for a similar but antithetical reason, King Henrys, judges, wives, babies, and empty cupboards contrive to bring the raptures of a comic holiday to an end.

There is no Falstaff in *Twelfth Night*; there are only those grossly inferior comedians, Feste, Maria, Toby, and Aguecheek and—quintessential antagonist to everything that Falstaff is and represents, that harsh and melancholy voice of the anti-comic spirit: Malvolio.

How clever of Shakespeare to get us to believe that puritanism is bad or ugly—so at least hundreds of college students of Shakespeare have unanimously believed—when in fact Malvolio's fundamental sin (I am tempted to say his only sin) is that in his very being he threatens the comic, holiday world that Maria, Feste and company are so gaily creating. It is irrelevant that Shakespeare the man may have loathed puritanism and everything it stood for. In this play, Malvolio's puritanism is a pretext, a convenient catch-all for traits and attitudes inimical to the lovely anarchy of comedy. He must be humiliated, gulled, baited, scourged, made to suffer the melancholy consequences of his melancholy personality, and, above all, rendered impotent so that the fever of comedy can range with full potency. If Malvolio is not the perfect mythic scapegoat, where in our literature does one find a figure who can be called a scapegoat? No, it simply will not do to say that one is sentimentalizing in describing Malvolio as a scapegoat sacrificed to the amoral, bacchanalian gods of comedy. To insist upon Malvolio's sacrificial status is not to excuse or justify his clearly repugnant personality. Least of all is it a covert plea for sympathy. Malvolio's function is to "die" a kind of comic death so that comedy
may live. And so, throughout the play we see him "dying" in various ways. However, the immense—and in my opinion, unsatisfactorily resolved—problem arises when the comedy itself, as is always the case, must "die." What does—what can—the dramatist do with Malvolio at that point?

The logic that ought to impose itself upon Shakespeare would seem to be as follows: since the reestablishing of the non-comic world in Henry IV requires the literal and symbolic sacrificing of the patron of riot and comedy who is Falstaff, the same strategic necessities in Twelfth Night ought to allow Malvolio, by virtue of his antithetical role, to come into his own with the "dying" of the comedy. He is the patron of the non-comic and it would seem natural that he should preside over the re-establishment of the hegemony of the non-comic that ends the play. But Shakespeare has provided himself with no machinery and aroused in us no expectations that would permit Malvolio to receive the blessing of a magic (and thus appropriately comic) and symbolic rebirth. Lodged uncomfortably at the center of this genial, loving, musical comedy is the harsh, unpurged punitive fate of Malvolio. Olivia says, "He hath been most notoriously abus'd"; and that is the only soft chord in the dissonant Malvolio music.

Let us be perfectly clear about this point. If Shakespeare is "unfair" in his treatment of Malvolio it is not in the severity of the punishments meted out to him during the course of the play; it is in Shakespeare's trying to have it both ways. Denier of comedy and its claims that Malvolio is, by comedy's standards he "deserves" his fate, but, when the resolution of the action itself denies, negates, "kills" the comedy, one expects that with the return to the world that Malvolio has been immolated for upholding, Malvolio himself will have his day. But Malvolio has been totally discredited in serving this world. He is like the politician who lives to see his name become anathema while the principles that soiled his good name, having once been defeated, return triumphantly. But these principles, miraculously, are no longer associated with the man who gave them their name.

Malvolio is Shakespeare's comic Coriolanus, a man beset by the wolves who are his enemies and the jackals who are or ought to be his friends. In America no one loves a cop—even when he's called a policeman. In Illyria the natives are apparently no different, and even light-hearted Illyrian comedy turns out to be a cannibalistic affair, at bottom.


David Willbern

[Wilbern discusses the carnal side of Twelfth Night, asserting that Malvolio's repressed desire is reciprocal to the lover's indulgence. The critic maintains that Malvolio's social aspirations are motivated by a desire to sleep with Olivia. However, as Malvolio fails to keep separate his covert desire from his overt behavior, he is undone by his desire, and becomes the butt of the merrymakers' fun. The critic considers Shakespeare's wordplay in the letter supposedly from Olivia, suggesting that it provides insight into the psychology of Malvolio the censor, and into Shakespeare's erotic play with language. Malvolio's actions after his gulling resemble someone who is possessed, which is explained by the critic as a parallel to the basic scheme of a medieval Morality Play. The critic also considers the tension created by Malvolio in the final act, pointing out that it is typical of Shakespearean comedies to leave elements of irresolution in the finale. Willbern speculates on the hidden meaning of the cryptogram Sir Andrew questions, explaining that it represents a secret carnality at the heart of the play. He points out that festivity and loss are presented as reciprocal, and erotic desire and symbolic death are intermixed, creating a tone of romantic melancholy. Finally he compares Feste and Malvolio as symbolic brothers.]

Malvolio, that humorless steward, sick of merrymakers and self-love, seems almost a stranger to the festive world of Illyria. His very first words reveal his acrimonious opinion of Feste, the soul of festivity [quotations from The Riverside Shakespeare, 1974]:

SOURCE:

187
Everything about Malvolio's character sets him apart from frivolity.

Even his vocabulary isolates Malvolio. When he chastises a rowdy Sir Toby by demanding "Is there no respect of place, person, nor time in you?" Toby quips, "We did keep time, sir, in our catches" (II. iii. 91-94). For the solemn steward and the carousing knight, the word "time" has different meanings. Malvolio hears only a cacophonous violation of decorum; Toby hears only melody and lyrics. When, a few lines later, Toby and Feste "converse" with Malvolio in song, Malvolio simply does not understand (II. iii. 102 ff.).

But while Malvolio may have no use for festivity, festivity has considerable use for him. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall consider the steward's collision with the merrymakers, the nature of the damage he suffers, and its relevance to the general theme of festivity.

When Malvolio falls into Maria's cunning trap and makes his sole concession to frivolity by donning yellow cross-garters, the desires he has previously hidden beneath a staid composure suddenly emerge exultant. On the surface Malvolio's wish is to be a social climber, "to be Count Malvolio." Yet there is a deeper desire here, and even though cross-gartering "does make some obstruction in the blood," as he complains, it does not obstruct an unwitting expression of the steward's strongest yearning: to sleep with his lady Olivia. In the forged letter scene, he alludes to a daydream of "having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping" (II. v. 48-49). And he jumps eagerly at an imagined opportunity when Olivia, thinking that a man who dresses so oddly and smiles so incessantly must be deranged, suggests rest: "Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?" she asks. "To bed?" he exclaims. "Ay, sweet heart, and I'll come to thee" (III. iv. 29-31).

But Malvolio's latent sexual wishes are also evident in his reading of the forged letter. While his fantasy of leaving Olivia in their shared day-bed is romantic enough, his remark to Toby about fortune "having cast me on your niece" (II. v. 69-70) may be less so, and his spelling lesson betrays the crudest carnality. "By my life," he swears, "this is my lady's hand. These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus makes she her great P's." After thus spelling out the carnal focus of his fantasies, he sounds out the word itself, hidden within a term of disdain: "It is, in contempt of question, her hand" (II. v. 86-88). It must have been important to Shakespeare that the bawdy secret be heard, for Andrew immediately repeats, "Her c's, her u's, and her t's: Why that?"

Some fine and famous Shakespeareans have been unable or unwilling to hear the answer to this question. Arthur Innes reasoned in 1895 [in A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Twelfth Night, or, What you Will, 1901] that "probably Shakespeare merely named letters that would sound well." [In The Complete Works of Shakespeare, 1971], G. L. Kittredge considered Andrew's question "impossible to answer." Once the bawdy note is sounded, of course, the question is embarrassingly easy to answer.

In one sense, the event illustrates Shakespeare's insight into the psychology of the bluenose censor, secretly fascinated by and desirous of the eroticism he contemns. But it may also demonstrate Shakespeare's playful insight into his own wordplay, so frequently erotic. As the body lies at the basis of metaphor, bawdiness is basic to much punning: playing around with language.

But Malvolio is not playing; he is being played, for a fool. His hidden desire emerges, but only cryptically. Later, Feste, with his characteristically well-disguised perspicacity, mockingly underscores Malvolio's latent wantonness. "Sir Topas, Sir Topas, good Sir Topas," cries Malvolio from his prison, "Go to my lady." To which the dissembling Feste replies, "Out, hyperbolical fiend! how vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?" (IV. ii. 23-26). Until his surrender to festivity, Malvolio's black suit and anti-comic bearing
have concealed his "fiend"; now it is out in the open.

Up to the moment of his fall, Malvolio had been able to keep his overt behavior and his covert desires neatly separate, thereby maintaining the condition he had earlier demanded of Toby the reveler: "If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house" (II. iii. 98-99). But Malvolio's careful division between act and desire, reason and fantasy, collapses when he falls into Maria's trap, even though he himself is certain he has maintained it yet. "I do not now fool myself," he asserts, "to let imagination jade me, for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me" (II. v. 164-65). From the inverted perspective in which reason "excites" rather than informs, Malvolio finds the way to shape the letter in terms of himself, and then to reform himself in terms of the letter: "M. O. A. I. ... If I could make that resemble something in me!" (II. v. 109-20). It requires only a little "crush" to make the fit. Excited by false reasons, his reason fails him. His "madness" is thus his conviction that he is not mad, his illusion of maintaining control over circumstances when in fact he has lost control. "O peace!" Fabian cautions the impatient Andrew as they watch Malvolio drawing the net more tightly about himself: "Now he's deeply in. Look how imagination blows him" (II. v. 42-43). As he cleverly deciphers the forged letter, Malvolio believes that his supreme reason is shaping his destiny: "Thou art made," he reads, "if thou desir'st to be so" (II. v. 155). Instead of making him, however, his desire unmakes him. His efforts to reform his image lead to disgrace: a fall from grace which is not only personal and social, but has spiritual resonance as well.

Feste is not merely joking when he refers to Malvolio's "fiend." For indeed, the steward behaves, as Toby and Maria maliciously observe, as though he were "possessed." Maria claims that "Yond gull Malvolio is turn'd heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be sav'd by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings" (III. ii. 69-73). Malvolio's plight is comical, of course, but there is an undercurrent of seriousness throughout. Malvolio surely means to be saved by believing rightly, but erroneous beliefs and impure desires have placed his soul in precarious balance. A bit of Feste's seeming nonsense clarifies the situation. After paralleling himself and Malvolio (incarcerated) with the medieval figures of Vice and Devil, Feste departs with a song whose final line is "Adieu, goodman devil" (IV. u. 120-31). A typical Festean riddle, the phrase makes appropriate sense. It is a syntactic representation of the basic Morality Play scheme: "man" is centered between "good" and "devil" and should turn in the right direction, "a Dieu." This moment of mini-allegory prefigures Feste's later banter with Orsino, when the Duke tells the clown, "O, you give me ill counsel," and Feste continues: "Put your grace in your pocket, sir, for this once, and let your flesh and blood obey it" (V. i. 31-33). Feste's counsel echoes the voice of the archdeceiver, perched on his victim's left shoulder: "let your flesh and blood run free," he advises, "just for this once. Don't worry about your soul, just hide it and the possibility of grace away temporarily, 'in your pocket, sir.'" Such brief transgressions, however, will not be forgotten. "Pleasure will be paid," Feste reminds us, "one time or another" (II. iv. 70-71).

The underlying seriousness of Malvolio's fall is further suggested by the nature of the punishment he suffers. On one level, he is imprisoned for the "madness" of being rigidly sane in a frivolous world. On another level, his humbling is a direct rebuke to his social-climbing aspirations. On a yet deeper level, he is punished for his hidden concupiscence, with the punishment combining various symbolic "deaths." Malvolio is not only mortified; metaphorically he is also mortally assaulted, killed, and buried. "I have dogg'd him," gloats Toby, "like his murtherer" (III. ii. 76). The steward who wanted to possess his lady is instead thrown into a small dark hole; having wished for a bed, he finds a grave. He complains to Feste, the singer of "Come away, come away, death, / And in sad cypress let me be laid" (II. iv. 51-52), saying that "they have laid me here in hideous darkness" (IV. ii. 29-30) Malvolio does symbolically "die," but not as he had hoped; his is not the sexual death of Feste's ambiguous song, but the comic scapegoat death of a victimized gull.

Even when released from his symbolic cell, however, the unrepentant steward refuses to participate in the lovers' celebrations. Faced again with merriment, he steadfastly clings to sobriety. His letter to Olivia from his cell—signed, accurately, "the madly-us'd Malvolio"— is calm, reasonable, and correctly descriptive of his
treatment (V. i. 302-11). His only request is "Tell me why."

> Why have you suffer'd me to be imprison'd,  
> Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest,  
> And made the most notorious geek and gull  
> That e'er invention play'd on? Tell me why!  
> (V. i. 341-44)

He receives no answer, and although Olivia promises him future justice, he is not appeased. The steward who earlier declared to Toby, Maria, and Fabian, "I am not of your element" (III. iv. 124), is thus alone at play's end. While Feste remains to sing his lovely and melancholy song, Malvolio exits, snarling promised revenge.

As Malvolio departs, he leaves behind an unresolved conclusion to the play, taking with him the key to any clear resolution. For all its conventional comic devices of repaired unions, the ending of *Twelfth Night* is indeterminate. We look for the settlement of disputes and the reunion of fragmented relationships, "confirm'd by mutual joinder of their hands," as the priest says of Olivia and Sebastian (V. i. 157). But though the final scene of *Twelfth Night* is in fact constructed so as to allow "mutual joinder," no such resolution occurs. The prolonged hesitation of Viola and Sebastian to identify each other which includes a careful scrutiny of all the evidence (names, sex, moles, age, clothing) finally results not in any embrace of recognition but in Viola's odd provision of postponement:

> Do not embrace me till each circumstance  
> Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump  
> That I am Viola.  
> (V. i. 251-53)

One expects a coherence of circumstance place, time, and fortune at the conclusion of a successful comedy—and *Twelfth Night* has often been viewed as a paradigm of the form. But Shakespeare deliberately defers a denouement, and the play ends before we see one enacted. Viola maintains that the resumption of her true identity depends upon the old captain who brought her to Illyria, the captain who has kept her "maiden weeds." The captain, however, has been jailed by Malvolio, "upon some action" (V. i. 275-76). Malvolio is therefore essential to a final resolution of the plot; the ultimate coherence of time and circumstance depends upon the mistreated gull. When he stalks out, swearing revenge, he also disrupts the plot, refusing to fulfill his essential role in the final "mutual joinder." Orsino commands, "Pursue him and entreat him to a peace; he hath not told us of the captain yet" (V. i. 380-81). But we hear no more from Malvolio, nor from anyone else, for the play almost immediately concludes, with the loose ends of its unfinished plot knotted abruptly into Feste's final song.

Similar gestures of irresolution occur at the end of almost all of Shakespeare's comedies—as though he was habitually skeptical of the resolutions the genre typically provided. Whether through hints of failed marriage at the end of *As You Like It*, or the sudden mournful disruption at the end of *Love's Labor's Lost*, or the preposterous rapid-fire revelations at the end of *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare usually complicates the conventional comic ending, stressing the fragility of its artifice. As Feste's concluding song suggests in *Twelfth Night*, the momentary pleasures of plays and other toys are only transient episodes in a larger season of folly, thievery, drunkenness, and old age. To the extent that the tidy finales of conventional comedies deny such larger, extradramatic realities, Shakespeare seems to have been uneasy with them: the ending of *The Tempest* is his final manifestation of this uneasiness.

An aspect of Shakespeare's distrust of romantic conventions underlies Malvolio's spelling lesson, to return to that scene for a moment. I want to ask Andrew Aguecheek's question once more, and offer a speculative answer. "Her c's, her u's, and her t's: why that?" Why, indeed? Why does Shakespeare so carefully embed this
grossest of verbal improprieties in a play which even Eric Partridge [in *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, (1968)] calls "the cleanest comedy except *A Midsummer Night's Dream"?"

One answer involves what Shakespeare evidently considered the natural and undeniable bases of human behavior. The romantic comedy of *Twelfth Night* transmutes our basic appetites, sublimating carnal hunger into romantic yearning: food becomes music, as Orsino's opening speech reveals (but melancholy music, with "a dying fall"). *Twelfth Night* enacts an elaborate dance around a central core of carnality, which Malvolio's unconscious cryptogram literally spells out. The idealized festivity of *Twelfth Night* is to its secret erotic core as the innocent Maypole dance is to the symbol around which it revolves—except that the joys and celebrations of Maygames are muted in Shakespeare's play by wintry, "dying" tones of mourning and loss. Erotic desire and symbolic death intermix throughout the play, creating a continuous undertone of romantic melancholy best personified in the figure of Feste. Festivity and loss are presented as reciprocal: carnival is a farewell to the carnal (*carne-vale*).

What makes *Twelfth Night* ultimately so melancholy, however, is not the sounding of these baser tones in the music of love, but the futile (albeit beautiful) effort spent trying to deny the facts of desire and death with the artificial toys of romantic wish-fulfillment. Finally it won't work. In retrospect, the festive fantasy of innocent indulgence looks like another version of the puritanical Malvolio's effort to deny or repudiate base carnal desire. Illyria's romanticism is psychologically reciprocal to Malvolio's rigidity and restraint: both represent denials and sublimations. Feste's final song seems to admit the futility of both defenses against the real world.

For all their mutual antipathy, Malvolio and Feste are symbolic brothers: both estranged from yet integral to the festive yet melancholy world of Illyria. To achieve a comic world of reunion and restoration, it is necessary to omit or deny or banish their respective melancholies. But, since melancholy preceded and prompted the merriment, this is impossible. Malvolio therefore retreats to his threats of vengeance, Feste to his ambiguous lyric. Finally both characters withdraw from the comic world. But without them and the impulses of restraint and love they represent, that comic world has no motivation, no "reason" for being.

At Malvolio's fall we laughed all. Yet without the (scape) goat, there would have been no carnival to provide either the fall or the merriment attending it.


**Historical Criticism of Twelfth Night: Feste**

**Alan S. Downer**

*Downer examines Feste's role as the fool in Twelfth Night, which allows Feste to speak freely and peel away the pretenses of the other characters. He is a pivotal figure in the play, and his presence elevates the play above the level of a mere romantic farce. Feste operates in each of the three subplots to round off the action of the play: first, Orsino must understand the nature of true love so he may marry Viola; second, Malvolio's inflated sense of self must be punctured; and third, Sebastian must take Viola's place in Olivia's heart. By speaking the truth, he ensures that his lord and lady will not be fools, and he closes the play with a song.*

... Feste is disguised both in costume and in behavior. His suit is motley, the uniform of the Fool, and he carries the tabor and perhaps the bauble as his badge of office. When, however, Olivia calls him a fool-and we must return to this scene again-he points out that "cucculus non facit monachum [the cowl doesn't make the monk]." And as the man inside the monk's robe may be anything but a monk in spirit, so he, Feste, wears not motley in his brain. His disguise, like Viola's, is a kind of protection; he is an allowed fool and may speak frankly what other men, in other disguises, must say only to themselves. ...
Feste's whole art and function depend upon his talents as a "notable corrupter of words," and he has much wisdom to utter on what we should probably call the problem of semantics. He concludes one wit combat by declaring that "words are grown so false that I am loath to prove reason with them." In many ways he is the central figure of the play, the symbol of its meaning. The plot could get on without him, no doubt; his practical function as message-bearer could be taken over by Fabian, who has little enough to keep him busy. But he is no mere embellishment. Without Feste, Twelfth Night would not be the enduring comedy it is but another romantic farce like The Comedy of Errors. Twelfth Night is Feste's night.

The Fool is as conventional in Shakespearean comedy as the intriguing slave or parasite in Plautus or Moliere. But, while Feste shares some of the characteristics of Tranio-Phormio-Sganarelle, he does not, like them, dazzle our eyes by juggling the elements of the plot into a complex pattern which only he can sort out for the necessary fortunate conclusion. Until the last act of the play, he does little but jest or sing. But for all his failure to take a positive part in the intrigue-emphasized perhaps when he drops out of the baiting of Malvolio—for all that he is not, that is to say, a protagonist, he nonetheless propounds the theme which gives Twelfth Night its unity and makes a single work of art out of what might have been a gorgeous patchwork.

A brief examination of the matter of the comedy will suggest the basis for such a conclusion. Twelfth Night is compounded of two, perhaps three, "plots," more or less independent actions, each of which must be rounded off before the play is concluded. In the first, Duke Orsino's eyes must be opened to the true nature of love that he may marry Viola; in the second, Malvolio must be reduced from the deluded superman to fallible humanity; in the third, which is closely tied with the first, Sebastian must be substituted for Viola in the affections of Olivia.

The structure is skilfully contrived not only to keep all three plots going and maintain a reasonable connection among them but to emphasize the similarity of their themes. Like most panoramic drama, the play may be divided into three organic movements rather than the meaningless editorial division into five acts. The first of these movements, from the introduction of Orsino to Viola's discovery that she has charmed Olivia (I, 1-II, 3), is concerned almost exclusively with establishing the triangular love affair. Toby, Andrew, and Maria are brought on to whet our appetites for their plot, and, just before the movement ends, Sebastian appears that we may be reassured all will come right before the play is over. However, we should note a speech of Feste's made to Maria during his first appearance (I, 5), in which he refers obliquely to the common subject of the separate actions: "If Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria." If all were as it should be and according to the order of nature, Toby would wed Maria. But Toby drinks, and the Duke loves Olivia, and Olivia (as we shall see in a moment) loves Viola. All most unnatural.

In the second movement (II, 3-IV, I) the love triangle remains unchanged, and the trapping of Malvolio occupies most of the action. We observe the offense for which he is to be punished, the plotting of revenge, and the success of the scheme. Sebastian has again made only a token appearance, but in the final scene of the movement (III, 4) all three actions are brought together with the greatest of ease as the deluded Malvolio is handed over to Toby, and Andrew and Viola are inveigled into a duel from which both are rescued by the intervention and arrest of Sebastian's friend, Antonio.

The final movement, the last two acts of the play, is in a sense Sebastian's. Mistaken for Viola, he brings about a fortunate unknotting of the love tangle, rescues his friend Antonio from the clutches of the Duke, and forces a confession of their machinations from Toby and company. The point to notice here is that Feste is the character who, innocently enough, drives Sebastian into Olivia's arms. It is Feste's only direct contribution to the action of the play; it is also the single decisive action which cuts the comic knot; and it is a visual dramatic symbol of his relationship to the whole play. It is the action of a man whose professional function is to perceive and declare the true state of affairs in the face of scorn, threats, and discouragement from the self-deluded. Shakespeare has in fact prepared us for this action at several important points earlier in the play.
On his first appearance, with Maria, Feste demonstrates not only that he is able to more than hold his own in a wit combat but that he is shrewd enough to see the true state of affairs in the household. A moment later, with the license of an allowed fool, he is demonstrating to Olivia the folly of her resolution to withdraw from the world for seven years in mourning for her brother.

FESTE: Good madonna, why mournest thou?
OLIVIA: Good fool, for my brother's death.
FESTE: I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
OLIVIA: I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
FESTE: The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven.
Taken away the fool, gentlemen
[I, 5, 72-78].

The little passage is in the most artificial of dialogue forms, stichomythia, and it is perhaps only a bit of logic-chopping, but it presents the common-sense view of a sentimental and un-Christian attitude. The exposure of Olivia takes place in the first movement of the play. In the second movement Feste undertakes to tell the Duke a few plain truths, but, since the undeceiving of the mighty is ticklish business, he goes about it in an oblique manner.

Shakespeare has introduced the Duke in a most ambiguous way. To him falls an opening speech as rich in texture and sound as any love poetry in the language. To him also falls an attitude that cannot fail to win both our admiration and our exasperation. We admire his constancy, that is, but are somewhat impatient with his refusal to "take his answer." Further, if we accept him at his own evaluation as presented in his speeches, his sudden switch to Viola in the last scene becomes pure comic convention without reason or meaning, a botched-up happy ending.

But, if we have been beguiled by our own sentimentality into sympathy with the Duke, Feste will set us right, and most particularly in that romantic scene (II, 4) where he has been thrust in to sing the song which Viola seems not prepared to perform. It is as early in the morning as the love-smitten Duke would arise from bed. He enters, calling at once for music, and requests Cesario (that is, Viola) for that "old and antique song" they heard last night. While his servant Curio goes in search of Feste to sing it, Orsino proceeds to analyze it for us. The description is famous and explicit:

It is old and plain,
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chant it. It is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love
Like the old age
[II, 4, 44-49].

That is, a simple song, presumably a folk song or ballad, fit accompaniment to a household task. It is a love song, but not impassioned, not from the point of view of fervent youth. It dallies with the harmless pleasure of love as if the experience were but the memory of the old, a memory recollected in tranquillity. Whereupon Feste sings:

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath,
I'm slain by a fair cruel maid
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it! My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

In the second stanza the love imagery becomes more extravagant.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
A thousand, thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O where Sad, true lover ne'er find my grave,
To weep there.

Without the original music, which cannot be traced, it is impossible to say for certain, but, from the striking difference between the song as anticipated and the song as sung, Feste seems to have been mocking, indirectly, the Duke's passion. "Come away, death" is indeed a love song, but it can hardly be said to dally with the innocence of love. This would explain the Duke's abrupt, "There's for thy pains," and his immediate dismissal, not only of the singer, but of his entire court. Perhaps he is afraid that there may have been some sniggering behind his back as Feste sang. There is just a hint in the play that his household is a little wearied of his unavailing pursuit of Olivia.

And Feste, going off, dares a parting thrust. "Now the melancholy god protect thee," he says, and bids him put to sea to make a good voyage of nothing. In this scene, I suggest, Feste "exposes" the Duke as he has earlier exposed Olivia. By mocking them both, he points out that their loves are sentimental and foolish. And the Duke, unlike Olivia, is angry. He dismisses his attendants and sends Viola once more to "same sovereign cruelty," with a stubborn determination to act out the role he has cast himself in.

With this as a clue to his character, the actor of course has it in his power to make evident the Duke's melancholy, his fashionable love-sickness, from the start. In the first scene, even in his gorgeous opening set-piece, he is plainly worshiping love for its own sake and fostering his emotion for sentimental purposes. His first words demand that the music play on, that he may experience again his pleasurable mood of Thwarted Lover. For all the beauty of the verse, the attitude is distinctly unhealthy. He must have music for his love to feed on, even upon arising in the morning; or, for a substitute, a garden of sweet-scented flowers. And is he not, like Romeo in the throes of puppy love for the equally unresponsive Rosaline, "best when least in company"?

The parallel exposing of Malvolio, which is capped by Feste in the third movement, is the clearest statement of the theme in action, since it is unencumbered by romantic love, an element which can blind an audience to the true state of affairs as effectively as it can blind the romantic lovers. Malvolio, in this play, is plain text.

As Olivia's steward he is sufficiently in charge of her affairs to bring suit against a sea captain for dereliction of duty; as her butler, he is ready with falsehoods to defend her privacy; as her would-be husband, he has prepared schemes for the proper and efficient conduct of their household. These are all admirable traits for his several capacities: the alert businessman, the devoted servant, the careful husband. But there is a fault in him, an obvious fault. There is something too much of the cold gaze from half-shut eyes down the prominent beak, something too much of the demure travel of regard. Malvolio would not only be virtuous, he would have others so, and he would define the term. It is a cause of delight to discover that the elegant creature with snow-broth in his veins, so superior to the drunken carousing of Toby, the witty trifling of Feste, the dalliance of Olivia—that this man of virtue is only human, like ourselves. And in this exposure, that the whirligig of time may bring his revenges, Feste is permitted to play the visually dominant part.
The action is so arranged that, of all the conspirators, only Feste has a scene alone with Malvolio, in which, for nobody's pleasure but his own, he teases and torments the benighted steward and reduces the proud man to a state of wretched groveling: "I tell thee," cries Malvolio at last, "I am as well in my wits as any man in Illyria," and Feste replies, "Well-a-day that you were, sir."

This does not seem to be idly spoken. Feste is saying that he wishes Malvolio were not sick of self-love but like a normal Illyrian. Like Toby, for example, who would go to church in a galliard and return in a coranto, and whose fair round belly symbolizes his philosophy, that there is a place for cakes and ale even in a world turning Puritan. The point is made simply and emphatically, with Feste solus on the stage, and Malvolio perhaps clamoring behind the Judas window of the stage door: the Elizabethan equivalent of a motion-picture close-up-on Feste.

Thus it is Feste's function in both parts of the action to make plain to the audience the artificial, foolish attitudes of the principal figures. Malvolio loves himself, Orsino loves love, and Olivia loves a ghost. This, says Feste, is unnatural, against common sense. In this similarity of situation and Feste's single-minded attitude in each case lies the unity of Twelfth Night, its theme.

Feste states it clearly. Since he is primarily a singing fool, he states it in song:

```
What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
    Present mirth hath present laughter. . . .
    Youth's a stuff will not endure.
```

Feste's philosophy is as old as the hills, as old as the comic attitude, the acceptance of the facts of life. His philosophy, however, goes somewhat deeper than a mere sentimental optimism.

```
Journeys end in lovers' meeting
    Every wise man's son doth know.
```

As a wise man's son, or as an understanding fool, he sees to it that there shall be a meeting of true lovers at the end of the journey of Viola and Sebastian. In his scene with Malvolio he even discards his priestly disguise and appears in his own motley to restore the vision of the self-blinded man. And, by his introduction of Sebastian to Olivia, he makes possible the shedding of all disguises both physical and spiritual at the denouement.

Critical opinion has been somewhat divided about Feste. There is general agreement about his remarkable clean-spokenness; he has been called the merriest of Shakespeare's fools, and the loneliest. He has been taken to be the symbol of misrule that governs the Twelfth Night activities. Yet, when the recognition scene is over, all the characters romantically paired off, Malvolio reduced to a very human bellow-"I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!"-and Feste prepares to sing his foolish little epilogue, does he not seem to be something more than merry, or lonely, or the spirit of misrule?

Observe him, alone on the great stage which is the emptier for the departure of the grandly dressed ladies and gentlemen who have crowded it during the last scene, and the quieter after the vigorous excitement that attended the denouement: the twins united, the marriage and betrothal, the explosion of Malvolio, the brawling of Andrew and Toby. Feste is perhaps older than the other characters, "a fool that the Lady Olivia's father took much delight in." But he has been, for a fool, a rather quiet character; no loud, bawdy jokes and very little slapstick. His brain is not parti-colored: cucullus non facit monachum. As Viola observes:

```
This fellow's wise enough to play the fool,
    And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
```
He must observe their mood on whom he jests
The quality of persons and the time,
Not, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye.
This is a practice
As full of labor as a wise man's art.

It is the function of this fool to speak the truth, however quizzically he must phrase it. It is his task to persuade his lord and lady not to be fools. It is the task of comedy, too.

And now he is alone. Now he sings his lonely, foolish song:

When that I was and a little tiny boy
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain, etc.

Perhaps it is not so foolish. There is one constant thing in this world, he says, the facts of nature, the wind and the rain that raineth every day. Thieves may be shut out and evil men by bars and locks but not the rain that raineth every day. Like a true jester, he makes a little joke out of his moral. When he took a wife, he planned to be master in his own house, but nature defeated him, for it is the order of nature that men shall be henpecked, and suffer from hangovers, as surely as the rain shall fall. He emphasizes the antiquity of his wisdom:

A great while ago, the world began
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.

Then, with a quizzical smile, as if to say, "I have made my point, or the comedy has made it for me; no need to quote history-"he slips into the epilogue pattern we have been awaiting:

But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

It is, after all, as he reminds us, just a play. But it has its purpose for being, just as the great tragedies have. *Twelfth Night* is Feste's night, and we may look to be well edified when the Fool delivers the Madmen.


Joan Hartwig

[Hartwig analyzes the relationship between Malvolio and Feste, suggesting that while Feste claims Malvolio's humiliation is "the whirligig of time" bringing its revenge back on Malvolio, it is really the result of Feste and Maria manipulating Malvolio by human means to achieve their own revenge. While Malvolio praises divine intervention when he finds the letter, believing that what Fate has decreed must be, he fails to anticipate the intrusion of Feste and Maria. When Malvolio is faced with the discrepancy between what he wants, and what really is, he refuses to broaden his spectrum of reality and is confronted by the possibility of madness. In the same way that Feste manipulates Malvolio into an unpredictable position, so comic providence leads the audience to an unexpected finale.]

Shakespeare's plays frequently counterpose the powers of human and of suprahuman will, and the antithesis usually generates a definition of natures, both human and suprahuman. These definitions vary, however, according to the play. For instance, Hamlet's "providence" does not seem the same as the darker, equivocating power that encourages Macbeth to pit his will against a larger order; and these controls differ from Diana and Apollo in the later plays, *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. Furthermore, Hamlet's submission and Macbeth's
submission to non-human controls (if indeed they do submit their individual wills) cannot be understood as
the same action or even to imply the same kind of human vision.

Many of the conflicts of *Twelfth Night* seem to be concerned with the contest between human will and
suprahuman control; yet, the latter manifests itself in various ways and is called different names by the
characters themselves. As each contest between the human will and another designer works itself out, the
involved characters recognize that their will is fulfilled, but not according to their planning. The individual's
will is finally secondary to a design that benevolently, but unpredictably, accords with what he truly desires.
For example, when Olivia, at the end of Act I, implores Fate to accord with her will in allowing her love for
Cesario to flourish, she has no idea that her will must be circumvented for her own happiness. Yet the
substitution of Sebastian for Cesario in her love fulfills her wishes more appropriately than her own design
could have done. Inversely, when Duke Orsino says in the opening scene that he expects to replace Olivia's
brother in her "debt of love," he doesn't realize that literally he will become her "brother" (I.i.34-40)

As the closing moments of the play bring Olivia and the Duke together on the stage for the only time, she says
to him, "think me as well a sister as a wife" (V.i.307); and the Duke responds in kind: "Madam, I am most apt
t' embrace your offer," and a bit later, "Meantime, sweet sister, / We will not part from hence" (V.i.310,
373-74). The Duke had not understood the literal force of his prediction, but his early statement of his hope
plants a subtle suggestion for the audience. When the play's action accords with Duke Orsino's "will," the
discrepancy between intention and fulfillment is a delightful irony which points again to the fact that "what
you will" may be realized, but under conditions which the human will cannot manipulate. Orsino's desire to
love and be loved, on the other hand, is fulfilled by his fancy's true queen, Viola, more appropriately than his
design for Olivia would have allowed.

The one character whose true desires are not fulfilled in the play is Malvolio. His hope to gain Olivia in
marriage results in public humiliation at the hands of Feste, who takes obvious satisfaction in being able to
throw Malvolio's former haughty words back at him under their new context of Malvolio's demonstrated
foolishness:

> Why, 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon
them.' I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one. 'By the Lord, fool,
I am not mad!' But do you remember, 'Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? An
you smile not, he's gagged?' And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.
(V.i.360-66)

Feste's assertion that the "whirligig of time" has brought this revenge upon Malvolio neglects the fact that
Maria has been the instigator and Feste the enforcer of the plot to harass Malvolio. Time's design, insofar as
Malvolio is concerned, depends upon Maria's and Feste's will, which differs significantly from a central point
that the main plot makes—that human will is not the controller of events. The characters in the main plot learn
from the play's confusing action that human designs are frequently inadequate for securing "what you will,"
and that a design outside their control brings fulfillment in unexpected ways. Feste's fallacy, of course, makes
the results of the subplot seem to be the same as the results of the main plot, but Time's revenges on Malvolio
are primarily human revenges, and this particular measure for measure is thoroughly within human control.
Feste's justice allows no mitigation for missing the mark in human action; and the incipient cruelty that his
precise justice manifests is felt, apparently, by other characters in the play.

When Olivia and her company hear Malvolio's case, she responds with compassion: "Alas, poor fool, how
have they baffled thee! . . . He hath been most notoriously abused" (V.i.359, 368). Duke Orsino, upon hearing
Malvolio's letter of explanation, comments, "This savors not much of distraction" (V.i.304). And even Sir
Toby has become uneasy about the harsh treatment of Malvolio in the imprisonment scene: "I would we were
well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were; for I am now so far in offense with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot” (IV.ii.66-70). Actually, to place the responses into this sequence reverses the play’s order; and we should consider the fact that Shakespeare builds toward a compassionate comment, with Olivia’s statement climaxing an unwillingness to condone the actions of Feste and Maria in gulling Malvolio—at least in its last phase. Feste’s exact form of justice without mercy has always characterized revenge, and even the word “revenge” is stressed by several of the characters in the subplot. When Maria voices her apparently spontaneous plot to gull Malvolio, she says:

The devil a Puritan that he is... the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with, excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (II.iii.134-40)

Maria's successful implementation of her "revenge" elicits Sir Toby's total admiration. At the end of II.v, he exclaims, "I could marry this wench for this device" (168), and when Maria appears soon thereafter, he asks, "Wilt thou set thy foot o’ my neck?" (174). The battlefield image of the victor and the victim is mockheroic, of course; but in the final scene Fabian testifies to its literal fruition: "Maria writ / The letter, at Sir Toby’s great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her" (V.i.352-54). Sir Toby's submission to Maria’s will is a comic parallel for two actions: the pairing off of lovers, and the submission of the individual’s will to a design other than his own. Yet the inclusion of a parodic version of marriage-harmony in the subplot does not fully ease discomfort of the subplot’s conclusion. Fabian tries to smooth it away when he suggests that the "sportful malice" of gulling Malvolio "may rather pluck on laughter than revenge" (V.i.355-58). Neither Feste nor Malvolio seems to be convinced, however. Feste's "whirligig of time brings in his revenges," and Malvolio quits the stage with, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (V.i.366-67). The forgiveness that should conclude the comic pattern is "notoriously" missing from the subplot and cannot be absorbed successfully by the Duke’s line, "Pursue him and entreat him to a peace." Malvolio seems unlikely to return. The major differences between the subplot and the main plot is clearest at this dramatic moment: revenge is a human action that destroys; love, graced by the sanction of a higher providence, creates a "golden time."

Feste's "whirligig" seems to be a parody of Fortune’s wheel in its inevitable turning, particularly with its suggestions of giddy swiftness and change. It provides a perfect image for the wild but symmetrical comic conclusion of the play’s action. Feste’s speech which includes it gives the appearance of completion to a mad cycle of events over which no human had much control. Only in Malvolio’s case was human control of events evident. In her forged letter, Maria caters to Malvolio’s "will" and, by encouraging him to accept his own interpretation of circumstances as his desire dictates, she leads him not only into foolishness, but also into a defense of his sanity. The discrepancy between Malvolio’s assumption that fortune is leading him on his way and the fact that Maria is in charge of his fate manifests itself clearly in the juxtaposition of her directions to the revelers (as she leaves the stage) with Malvolio’s lines as he enters:

MARIA. Get ye all three into the box tree. . . . Observe him, for the love of mockery; for I know this letter ’will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in the name of jesting. [The others hide] Lie thou there [throws down a letter]; for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling. Exit.

Enter Malvolio.

MALVOLIO. ’Tis but fortune, all is fortune. Maria once told me she [Olivia] did affect me. (II.v. 13-22)

The gulling of Malvolio which follows is hilariously funny, partly because Malvolio brings it all on himself. Even before he finds the letter, his assumptions of rank and his plans for putting Sir Toby in his place elicit volatile responses from the box tree. And after he finds the forged letter, Malvolio's self-aggrandizing
interpretations of the often cryptic statements evoke howls of glee mixed with the already disdainful laughter. The comedy of this scene is simple in its objective exploitation of Malvolio's self-love, and Malvolio becomes an appropriately comic butt. The audience's hilarity is probably more controlled than Sir Toby's and the box tree audience's excessive laughter; still, we are united in laughing at Malvolio's foolishness. And when Malvolio appears in his yellow stockings and cross-garters, the visual comedy encourages a total release in the fun of the game-Malvolio is gulled and we need not feel the least bit guilty, because he is marvelously unaware of his own foolishness. Oblivious to any reality but his own, Malvolio thinks he is irresistibly appealing with his repugnant dress and his continuous smiles-so contrary to his usual solemnity-and Olivia concludes that he has gone mad. "Why, this is very midsummer madness," she says, and, then, as she is leaving to receive Cesario, she commends Malvolio to Maria's care.

Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to.
Where's my cousin Toby?
Let some of my people have a special care of him.
I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry.
III.iv.55-58)

Malvolio misconstrues Olivia's generous concern as amorous passion and he thanks Jove for contriving circumstances so appropriately:

I have limed her; but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful. . . .
Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes.
Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked.
(III.iv.68-77)

Malvolio's scrupulous praise of a higher designer than himself is a parodic echo of Olivia's earlier submission to Fate after she has begun to love Cesario: "What is decreed must be-and be this so!" (I.v.297). The impulses underlying Malvolio's speech (and to some extent, Olivia's speech as well) exert opposite pulls: Malvolio wants to attribute control of circumstances to Jove at the same time he wants divine identity. He attempts to simulate foreknowledge through predictive assertion: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes." As long as events are in the hands of a non-human control, man cannot destroy or divert the predetermined order. But Malvolio cannot foresee the vindictive wit of Maria (often pronounced "Moriah"), nor can Olivia foresee the necessary substitution of Sebastian for Viola-Cesario. Each must learn that he, like the characters he wishes to control, is subject to an unpredictable will not his own. Precisely at this moment-when the character is forced to see a discrepancy between what he "wills" and what "is"-the possibility that he is mad confronts him.

Feste seems to adopt the disguise of Sir Topas to convince Malvolio that he is mad, and the imprisonment scene evokes a different response than the letter that exploits Malvolio by encouraging him to wear yellow stockings and cross-garters. In the earlier phase of the gulling, Malvolio is a comic butt after the fashion of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, unaware of his foolishness; however, imprisoned, Malvolio is a helpless victim, fully aware that he is being abused. With Olivia, his extraordinary costume and perpetual smiles make him a visible clown, and, as a result, he even seems good-humored. But with Maria and Feste in the imprisonment scene, he is not visible; we only hear him and his protestations of abuse. These different visual presentations produce a notable difference in comic effect because visual comedy often changes a serious tone in the dialogue.

In the imprisonment scene, Sir Topas keeps insisting that things are not as Malvolio perceives them; but Malvolio refuses to admit a discrepancy between what he perceives and reality. Accordingly, Malvolio insists that he is not mad.
Malvolio within.

MALVOLIO. Who calls there?

CLOWN. Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic. . . .

MALVOLIO. Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness.

CLOWN. Fie, thou dishonest Satan. I call thee by the most modest terms, for I am one of those gentle ones that will use the devil himself with courtesy. Say'st thou that house is dark?

MALVOLIO. As hell, Sir Topas.

CLOWN. Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony, and yet complainest thou of obstruction?

MALVOLIO. I am not mad, Sir Topas I say to you this house is dark.

CLOWN. Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

MALVOLIO. I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are.

(IV.ii.20-48)

In the darkness of his prison, Malvolio literally is unable to see, and Feste makes the most of the symbolic implications of Malvolio's blindness. The audience perceives with Feste that the house is not dark (that hypothetical Globe audience would have been able to see the literal daylight in the playhouse), yet the audience also knows that Malvolio is being "abused" because he cannot see the light. The audience is therefore led to a double awareness of values in this scene: we are able to absorb the emblematic significance of Malvolio's separation from good-humored sanity and to know at the same time that Malvolio is not mad in the literal way that Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby insist. Although the literal action engenders the emblematic awareness, the literal action does not necessarily support the emblematic meaning. This pull in two opposite directions occurs simultaneously and places the audience in a slightly uncomfortable position. We prefer to move in one direction or in the other. Yet it seems that here Shakespeare asks us to forgo the either-or alternatives and to hold contradictory impressions together. Malvolio cannot be dismissed as a simple comic butt when his trial in the dark has such severe implications.

The ambiguities of his situation are clear to everyone except Malvolio, but he rigidly maintains his single point of view. Because he refuses to allow more than his own narrowed focus, he is emblematically an appropriate butt for the harsh comic action that blots out his power to see as well as to act. He must ultimately depend upon the fool to bring him "ink, paper, and light" so that he may extricate himself from his prison, a situation which would have seemed to Malvolio earlier in the play "mad" indeed. Feste thus does force Malvolio to act against his will in submitting to the fool, but Malvolio fails to change his attitudes. Malvolio remains a literalist-Feste's visual disguise is for the audience so that we can see as well as hear the ambiguities of his performance, a point that Maria brings into focus when she says "Thou mightest have done this without thy beard and gown. He sees thee not" (IV.ii.63-64).

In the very next scene, Sebastian presents a contrast which delineates even more clearly the narrowness of Malvolio's response to an uncontrollable situation. Sebastian, too, confronts the possibility that he is mad: his situation in Illyria is anything but under his control.

This is the air; that is the glorious sun;
This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't;
And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
Yet 'tis not madness. . . .
For though my soul disputes well with my sense
That this may be some error, but no madness,
Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad, Or else the lady's mad.

(IV. iii. 1-16: my italics)

Sebastian's pile of contrasting conjunctions ("though," "yet," "but") underlines his hesitance to form a final judgment, unlike Malvolio, whose point of view never changes despite the onslaught of unmanageable circumstances. The contradictions of his sensory perceptions lead Sebastian to a state of "wonder" in which he is able to suspend reason and delay judgment, and this signifies a flexibility of perception which Malvolio cannot attain. Malvolio is not stirred by the discrepancies of experience to consider that appearances may not be reality; but Sebastian can appreciate the undefinable workings of a power beyond the evident. Sebastian's ability to sense the "wonder" in a world where cause and effect have been severed gives him a stature that Malvolio cannot achieve. Yet the difference between them is due to the source of their manipulation as well as to their response. Sebastian is manipulated by Fate or by Fortune; Malvolio, by Maria and Feste. Human manipulators parody suprahuman control and because they do, Maria and Feste define both levels of action.

Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby are all in a set and predictable world of sporting gullery, and the rules for their games are known. Feste's "whirligig" associates Time with a toy (perhaps even with an instrument of torture) and limits Time to human terms of punishment. On the other hand, the Time that Viola addresses does untie her problematic knot of disguise. Feste's attribution of revenge to this "whirligig of Time" points up the difference between the two controls. The whirligig becomes a parodic substitute for the larger providence that other characters talk about under other titles: Time, Jove, Fate, Fortune, or Chance. Significantly, Malvolio's humiliation is the only humanly designed action that fulfills itself as planned. The subplot performs its parody in many other ways, but in Feste's summary "whirligig" it displays the double vision that Shakespearean parody typically provides. The foibles of the romantics in Illyria are seen in their reduced terms through Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew, but the limitations of the parodic characters also heighten by contrast the expansive and expanding world of the play. Love, not revenge, is celebrated.

But even Feste's whirligig takes another spin and does not stop at revenge: in the play's final song the playwright extends an embrace to his audience. Feste's song creates an ambiguity of perspective which fuses the actual world with an ideal one: "the rain it raineth every day" is hardly the world described by the play. Romantic Illyria seems to have little to do with such realistic intrusions. Yet, the recognition of continuous rain is in itself an excess—it does not rain every day in the actual world, at least not in the same place. Thus, the pessimistic excess of the song balances the optimistic excesses of the romance world of Illyria; neither excess accurately reflects the actual world. Despite the apparent progress the song describes of a man’s growing from infancy to maturity and to old age, it remains something of an enigma. The ambiguities of the first four stanzas build to a contrast of direct statements in the final stanza.

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

The first line of this stanza seems to imply that the world has its own, independent design; and it also suggests that man's actions must take their place and find meaning within this larger and older pattern. The specific meaning of that larger design, however, remains concealed within the previous ambiguities of Feste's song. His philosophic pretensions to explain that design are comically vague and he knows it. He tosses them aside to speak directly to the audience: "But that's all one, our play is done." This is the same phrase Feste uses with Malvolio in his summary speech in Act V: "I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one." In both cases, Feste avoids an explanation.
Turning to the audience and shattering the dramatic illusion is typical in epilogues, but Feste's inclusion of the audience into his consciousness of the play as a metaphor for actual experience has a special significance here. Throughout *Twelfth Night*, Feste has engaged various characters in dialogues of self-determination. In one game of wit, he points out that Olivia is a fool "to mourn for your Brother's soul, being in heaven" (I.v. 65-66). By his irrefutable logic, he wins Olivia's favor and her tacit agreement that her mourning has been overdone. The Duke also is subject to Feste's evaluation in two scenes. Following his performance, upon the Duke's request, of a sad song of unrequited love, Feste leaves a paradoxical benediction:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (II.iv.72-77)

And later, when the Duke is approaching Olivia's house, Feste encounters him with one of his typically unique and audaciously applied truisms:

*DUKE.* I know thee well. How dost thou, my good fellow?  
*CLOWN.* Truly, sir, the better for my foes, and the worse for my friends.  
*DUKE.* Just the contrary: the better for thy friends.  
*CLOWN.* No, sir, the worse.  
*DUKE.* How can that be?  
*CLOWN.* Marry, sir, they praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused; so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why then, the worse for my friends, and the better for my foes.  
(V.i.9-20)

The Duke has in fact lacked some knowledge of himself, and Feste's pointed remark makes it clear that he is using his role as fool to point up the true foolishness of others. In the prison scene with Malvolio, Feste provides a confusing game of switching identities from the Clown to Sir Topas. In each situation, Feste provides the other person with a different perspective for seeing himself. Thus, it is more than merely appropriate that at the end of the play Feste engages the audience in its own definition of self. By asking them to look at their participation in the dramatic illusion, Feste is requesting them to recognize their own desire for humanly willed happiness.

The playwright, like the comic providence in the play, has understood "what we will" and has led us to a pleasurable fulfillment of our desires, but in ways which we could not have foreseen or controlled. The substitution of the final line, "And we'll strive to please you every day," for the refrain, "For the rain it raineth every day," is a crucial change. Like the incremental repetition in the folk ballad, this pessimistic refrain has built a dynamic tension which is released in the recognition that the play is an actual experience in the lives of the audience, even though it is enacted in an imagined world. The players, and the playwright who arranges them, are engaged in an ongoing effort to please the audience. The providential design remains incomplete within the play's action and only promises a "golden time"; similarly, the playwright promises further delightful experiences for his audience. The subplot's action, on the other hand, is limited within the framework of revenge: the revenge of the subplot characters elicits Malvolio's cry for revenge.

Malvolio is the only one who refuses to see himself in a subservient position to a larger design. And possibly because that design is too small, we cannot feel that his abuse and final exclusion from the happy community of lovers and friends allows the golden time to be fulfilled within the play. Feste's manipulation of Malvolio resembles the playwright's manipulation of his audience's will, but in such a reduced way that we cannot avoid seeing the difference between merely human revenge and the larger benevolence that controls the play's
The earliest account of *Twelfth Night* on the stage comes from the diary of the barrister John Manningham, who witnessed a performance of a play entitled "Twelve night or what you will" at the Middle Temple on 2 February 1602. Scholars assume that the play was enacted by Shakespeare's company, the LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN. Manningham singled out for particular praise the character of Malvolio, whose deception he described as "a good device," thereby prefiguring the most dominant trend in the staging of *Twelfth Night* for the next four centuries. In the reign of King James I there were two further presentations of the play, both of them at court. The first was performed by the KING'S MEN on 6 April 1618; when the play was next performed, in 1623, it was known simply by the name of its most popular character, *Malvolio*. With the reopening of the theaters after the Restoration (1660), an adaptation of *Twelfth Night* was performed several times by Sir William D'Avenant's company, the Duke of York's Men. The celebrated diarist Samuel Pepys witnessed three different performances of the play between 1661 and 1669, none of which he praised. Scholars suggest that the romantic nature of the comedy failed to suit the tastes of the late seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, however, *Twelfth Night* became established as a popular favorite on the London stage. David Garrick presented the play at DRURY LANE in January 1741. The cast included Kitty Clive as Olivia, Hannah Pritchard as Viola, and Charles Macklin as Malvolio, a role which he enacted with acclaim for many years after. Throughout the rest of the century *Twelfth Night* was performed on a yearly basis at Drury Lane and COVENT GARDEN, where the principal actor invariably took the part of Malvolio.

The early nineteenth century witnessed profound changes in the interpretation of Shakespearean drama by prominent actor-managers. In particular, emphasis was placed on the playwright's fusion of festive, musical, and spectacular elements. This trend was inaugurated by Frederick Reynolds, who in 1820 presented an operatic adaptation of *Twelfth Night* at Covent Garden. The text was heavily interpolated and embellished with musical interludes derived from *The Sonnets*, *The Tempest*, and *Venus and Adonis*, among other Shakespearean works. The emphasis on pageantry and music in *Twelfth Night* persisted in the nineteenth century, but was subjected to noteworthy refinements by successive actor-managers. Samuel Phelps, the actor-manager of SADLER'S WELLS, staged noteworthy productions in 1847 and 1858. Presenting Malvolio as a Spanish Golden Age *hidalgo*, Phelps transformed the steward into what a reviewer in the *Weekly Dispatch* described as a figure of "frozen calm" and "solidified presumption." In September 1850 Charles Kean presented a scenically lavish revival of the play at the NEW PRINCESS THEATRE, with his wife, Ellen Tree, winning acclaim in the role of Viola. Far more visually stunning, however, was Henry Irving's 1884 production at the LYCEUM THEATRE. Irving cut the music and songs of the play, employing instead spectacular scenery comprised of sixteen different set designs. Irving himself took the role of Malvolio, portraying the character as a Spanish Golden Age figure reminiscent of Don Quixote. He eschewed a comic interpretation of the role, highlighting rather what he perceived to be the character's tragic nuances. Thus, Malvolio's scene in the "dark house" (Act IV), was played, according to William Archer, in a "nerveless state of prostrate dejection." Frank Benson commented that Irving's conception of the role compromised the casting of the other performances: "the ladies were too mature and, what was almost equally disastrous, the comedians were not funny; the sprightly Feste was played as a decrepit old man and Fabian was the brightest spark of the plotters." During the first performance of this production the audience responded with apathy until the finale, when Irving was interrupted by booing and hissing. Although Ellen Terry rendered the role of Viola admirably later in the season, her first night's performance was hampered by illness. Irving later took
the production to America, where, despite having replaced half the cast members, the play similarly failed to please audiences.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were several notable revivals of *Twelfth Night* on both sides of the Atlantic. Augustin Daly's staging of the play, which opened at Daly's Theatre in New York in 1893, was accounted one of the director's greatest successes. Taking extreme liberties with the text, Daly cut approximately six hundred lines from the play in order to purge it of elements that might compromise its "poetry" and "beauty." He additionally transposed and rearranged the musical scenes in the work, employing as an introduction to the first act a group of fishermen and peasants singing "Come unto these yellow sands." Daly promoted the pageantry of the play by using the elaborate costumes of Graham Robertson and by staging such memorable scenic effects as a violent storm and a moonlit rose garden. The play itself consisted of only four acts, and the character of Malvolio was reduced to the dungeon scene in Act IV. This production was in full sympathy with contemporary taste and was well received both in America and in London the following year. Ada Rehan's Viola was considered a highlight of this staging. William Winter wrote "Viola is a woman of deep sensibility: and that way Miss Rehan has comprehended and reproduced her, permitting a certain wistful sadness to glimmer through the gauze of kindly vivacity." For George Bernard Shaw, who deprecated Daly's handling of the text, Rehan's performance was the sole redeeming feature of the production: "the moment she strikes up the true Shakespearian music, and feels her way to her part altogether by her sense of that music, the play returns to life and all the magic is there." In 1894 the production opened at Daly's Theatre in London, where Rehan played Viola for 119 performances.

In 1897 William Poel presented *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple in a revival that sought to present a faithful Elizabethan version of the play. Influenced by later stage traditions, however, Poel also emphasized the musical nature of Shakespeare's language and cast the principal roles with operatic vocal ranges in mind. Malvolio, for example, was cast as a baritone, Viola as a mezzo-soprano, and Orsino as a tenor. Similarly, the American producer E. H. Sothern attempted an historically accurate presentation of *Twelfth Night* in productions in New York and London in 1905 and 1907 respectively. By contrast, Herbert Beerbohm Tree's 1901 production at HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE represented the zenith of the Victorian preoccupation with spectacle. Olivia's garden, for example, was rendered by Hawes Craven to imitate an elaborate picture in *Country Life*. In his portrayal of Malvolio, Tree departed from tradition by focusing on the farcical nature of the role. Shaw praised Tree's striking appearance as an "intolerably condescending blue-eyed peacock with a red twirl of beard." Another experimental approach to the interpretation of character was inaugurated by Harley GranvilleBarker's 1912 production at the Savoy Theatre. Henry Ainley gave a complex rendering of Malvolio as a simultaneously conceited and pathetic middle-aged figure. Similarly, Hayden Coffin's Feste centered on the role's melancholic undertones, an interpretation that was to become influential in later revivals of the play.

After a period of approximately twenty years during which *Twelfth Night* was infrequently staged, the play was revived in several notable productions at the OLD VIC THEATRE in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1932 Edith Evans gave a memorable portrayal of Viola in a production directed by Harcourt Williams. Five years later, Tyrone Guthrie staged a presentation of the play that featured a hyperbolic portrayal of Sir Toby Belch by Laurence Olivier; Alec Guinness as Sir Andrew Aguecheek; and Jessica Tandy as both Viola and Sebastian. Guinness revived the play for the 1948-49 season, focusing the drama on a grief-stricken Feste played by Robert Eddison. This staging was additionally considered noteworthy for the use of Michael Warre's revolving stage and the commanding presence of Cedric Hardwicke in the role of Sir Toby Belch. Kenneth Tynan maintained that "for delicacy of insight and shady, cock-eyed charm I have seen no performance in Shakespearian comedy much better than this."

One of the most prominent American productions at this time was the Theatre Guild's presentation at the St. James Theatre, New York, in the 1940-41 season. This production was directed by Margaret Webster and starred Maurice Evans as Malvolio, a performance that departed from tradition in making use of a Cockney
accent. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt commented that "Olivia's majordomo emerges as the correct British butler." Grenville Vernon enthused over this performance, maintaining that "Mr. Evans reaches the peak of his accomplishment in the most subtle, most beautifully articulated performance of the part I have ever seen." Joseph Wood Krutch, however, asserted that Evans's comic portrayal debased the role and was "false to Shakespeare's conception." Another portrayal that received mixed reviews was that of Helen Hayes in the part of Viola. Krutch argued that "so far as she herself is concerned there is in truth, very little left to be desired." Stark Young, by contrast, criticized her delivery of Shakespeare's blank verse, maintaining that she turned "most of all that poetic treasure into mere chirpy prose." Similarly, Rosamond Gilder commented that Hayes's performance lacked spontaneity and that only once or twice did she "release the full lyric loveliness of the part." Critics generally agreed that the production provided a splendid evening's entertainment, while nevertheless judging Webster's direction to have emphasized lively stage business at the expense of poetic interpretation.

In the 1950s several productions attempted to unify the comic and melancholic strains in *Twelfth Night*. Hugh Hunt's revival at the Old Vic in 1950 avoided traditional approaches to the play's opening by employing mournful music in the first scene and by presenting an Illyria swathed in decayed grandeur. In commenting on the sets of Roger Furse, Richard David noted that "the Illyrian streets had the peeling and water-worn dignity of a side-canal in Venice." Hunt nevertheless infused his staging with a degree of liveliness, especially in the crowd scenes and musical interludes. The focal point of the production's comedy was Roger Livesey's portrayal of Sir Toby Belch, which T. C. Worsley praised as a "rich, bursting Sir Toby, who never misses an opportunity for a bit of business, but never gives us too much." Paul Rogers's Malvolio, which similarly contained an element of buffoonery, was less well received. J. C. Trewin found the performance "strangely out of the picture here." By contrast, Peggy Ashcroft's Viola was accorded general praise, with Trewin maintaining that "it is long since I have seen a Viola so fitted to the play." In judging the production as a whole, critics tended to deprecate Hunt's reliance upon low comedy. John Gielgud's 1955 production at the SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL THEATRE was likewise received with muted praise, despite the central performances of Laurence Olivier as Malvolio and Vivien Leigh as Viola. This staging also featured a witty, gay Feste, played by Paul Daneman, and a sombre Sir Toby Belch, enacted by Richard Burton. Despite a strong cast, critics charged Gielgud with failing to unify the romantic comedy of the play within his production's espousal of realistic characterization. This was particularly apparent in Olivier's Malvolio, which presented the steward as a self-made man who had carefully studied aristocratic ways and speech. Olivier lent the character a degree of seriousness and dignity that critics found wholly original. The reviewer for *The Times* nevertheless noted that this interpretation resulted in the miscarriage of Malvolio's comic scenes.

Tyrone Guthrie's production at the STRATFORD FESTIVAL, Ontario, in 1957 succeeded in integrating the romantic and comic plots of the drama. Critics such as Henry Hewes felt this had been achieved by a careful fleshing out of the comic roles. In praising Christopher Plummer's portrayal of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, for example, Hewes commented that "making Shakespeare's clowns into real people instead of mere affectations has the advantage of keeping the audience ready to laugh as they see each new situation approaching." Guthrie further innovated in his handling of Feste, played by Bruno Gerussi, who became, according to Arnold Edinborough, "a sad, ageing fool full of the pathos of his position where he is retained not for his wit but for his length of service." A similar sensitivity to the romantic roles characterized the production. Edinborough maintained that "as the bright-eyed and shrewdly naive Viola, Siobhan McKenna was entrancing and her swaggering self-importance was beautifully undermined by the sensitive playing of Frances Hyland as Olivia."

In the following year there were two notable revivals of the play. Michael Benthall directed a romantic and bitter-sweet *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic that nevertheless provided an element of farce in Judi Dench's portrayal of Maria. Despite praising the sets and costumes, which evoked the early eighteenth century, critics generally felt that the production was poorly paced and unsatisfying. Peter Hall's revival at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was rather more successful. Hall sought to give equal weight to the comic lightness and
melancholic heaviness in the drama through a combination of visual effects and innovative characterization. Lila de Nobili's set designs were described by Robert Speaight as "a rich symphony in russet," and the court of Illyria was reminiscent of Charles II's, with costumes patterned after the portraits of Van Dyck and Rubens. Most noteworthy among the principal roles was Geraldine McEwan's Olivia, which portrayed the Countess as a sharply satirical figure incapable of seriousness. While this staging pleased audiences, critics such as Roy Walker voiced certain objections: "This was a Twelfth Night that did not altogether succeed, but a production that continually threw fresh light on a comedy about which most of us have long ceased to think freshly." By contrast, Jack Landau's 1960 AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL production was much less ambitious. Seeking to make Twelfth Night accessible to an audience unfamiliar with seeing Shakespearean plays on the stage, Landau set the play in a Victorian seaside town, thereby eliciting unintended comparisons with the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan.

The latter part of the 1960s witnessed two notable RSC productions, each of which exemplified opposing trends in interpreting the play. Clifford Williams's 1966 revival dispensed with a serious approach to Twelfth Night, "presenting it," wrote the critic for The Times, "as a hard-edged almost Italianate comedy firmly steeled against pathos and poetry." For this very reason, most critics responded without enthusiasm to the production. Hilary Spurling maintained that the set design, which evoked the Italian High Renaissance, lacked the fanciful quality typically associated with Shakespeare's Illyria. Additionally, most critics felt the performances to have been unmemorable. J. C. Trewin asserted that "Mr. Williams has been at pains … to mock the affectionate of Orsino (Alan Howard) and of Olivia (Estelle Kohler), the first a near-burlesque of romantic passion, the second a mere kitten." Jeremy Kingston, however, praised the strong performances of Diana Rigg as Viola and Ian Holm as Malvolio, hailing them as the "chief pleasures of the evening." Despite wishing for a tenderer Twelfth Night, Robert Speaight concluded that "it would be priggish not to admit that this production was enormously diverting, even if now and then it won its laughs at rather too high a price." John Barton's 1969-70 production took the very different course of providing what Gareth Lloyd Evans termed a "gravely lyrical interpretation of Shakespeare's work that derived from the text itself." Irving Wardle qualified his praise by stating "this not the funniest or most inventive Twelfth Night I have seen; but I can remember no production that held all the comedy's elements in such harmony." For many critics, the focal point of the production was Emrys James's Feste, which Simon Gray declared "a theatrical triumph." Donald Sinden's Malvolio was similarly praised by the majority of commentators. Speaight noted that Sinden's handling of the role in the vein of high comedy left "the right bitterness in the mouth when the play's flight from realism might have seemed too precipitate." In judging the production as a whole, Benedict Nightingale concluded that it was "Barton's peculiar and perverse achievement to send us out of Shakespeare's 'happiest comedy' feeling that neither [Olivia and Orsino] nor anyone else will live happily ever after."

In the period 1974-75 two productions on either side of the Atlantic offered markedly different interpretations of Twelfth Night. In 1974 Peter Gill's directorial debut with the RSC presented a sexually charged revival of the play that was dominated by the image of Narcissus. A portrait of the self-absorbed youth, gazing at his reflection in a pool of water, was the focus of designer William Dudley's otherwise spare set, and served as a continuous reminder to the audience of the themes of ambiguous sexuality and erotic self-deception. For Michael Billington, this resulted in a production that was "curiously short on social and human detail." This was further accentuated by what critics generally felt were the uncomic performances of Patricia Hayes as Maria, Frank Thornton as Sir Andrew Ague-cheek and Ron Pember as Feste. Additionally, Jane Lapotaire's androgynous rendering of Viola was faulted by Irving Wardle for serving solely as "a blank screen on to which others project their fantasies." At the 1975 Stratford Festival in Ontario David Jones's production was deemed by critics to have steered a moderate course between the excessively romantic stagings of the nineteenth century and the more cynical interpretations of such twentieth-century directors as Tyrone Guthrie. Clive Barnes characterized Jones as "one of the new-style British classics directors who are original without being outlandish and place the simple, yet imaginative interpretation of the playwright's concept as absolutely paramount." This exceptionally successful production of Twelfth Night highlighted the play's themes of love and identity, particularly as expressed through the characters of Malvolio, played by Brian Bedford, and
Viola, played by Kathleen Widdoes. Bedford presented Malvolio as a prim, self-righteous puritan and played directly to the audience. Berners W. Jackson likened the actor to a virtuoso musician playing "upon a cacophonous instrument, directly manipulating the responses, not only of the whole group, but also of individuals."

Many revivals of *Twelfth Night* in recent decades have employed the seasonal setting of the play as a guiding metaphor of the drama's action. Terry Hands's 1979 RSC production, for example, opened with an Illyria shrouded in winter and closed with the arrival of spring. This threw into relief the centrality of the play's romantic relationships, which critics agreed were rendered with energy. Benedict Nightingale commented, "in Illyria love is a sudden and alarming affliction, a variety of glandular fever virulent enough to send the mercury racing up and over the humiliation threshold." In particular, Gareth Thomas's Orsino and Kate Nicholls's Olivia were faulted for indulging in hyperbolic emotion. J. C. Trewin asserted that "we know that Orsino and Olivia are given to excess, but it was long since they had been acted with more resolute and superfluous vigour." Even more contentious was David Mamet's 1980 production of *Twelfth Night* at the Circle Repertory Theatre, New York, which also made use of a winter setting. This revival engendered heated critical comment for its bold use of costuming. Adopting an anachronistic approach that clothed characters in garb from a variety of centuries, Mamet explained that he allowed the actors themselves to choose the costumes that they felt were appropriate for their characters. Many critics asserted that this directorial choice was nothing more than an irresponsible gimmick. Michael Bertin, however, argued that it was "a fine intuition into the play's heart," explaining that "uniformity in costuming is ... a relatively modern innovation." This production further elicited contrary responses regarding Marshall W. Mason's performance as Malvolio. John Simon described Mason's Malvolio as "a prissy antiques salesman trying to screw up his courage to turn a trick on Central Park West," while Bertin characterized the performance as "elegant and reserved." Lindsay Crouse, by contrast, won unanimous approval for her rendering of Viola, which Edith Oliver hailed as "the best I've ever seen," noting that the actress spoke "her poetry ... as easily as breathing, never slighting its music or emotion or force."

In the same year as Mamet's production, the BBC Television version of *Twelfth Night* was aired in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Reviewers on either side of the Atlantic found John Gome's direction of the drama to have been competent but not outstanding. Although, G. M. Pearce described it as "cheerful" and "vigorous," and Maurice Charney called it "modest but very satisfying," almost all commentators concurred that the production failed to achieve a unique interpretation of the drama.

In the 1980s, several productions of *Twelfth Night* strove with varying degrees of success to achieve an interpretation of the play that transcended traditional approaches. John Caird's 1983-84 production with the RSC was viewed by the majority of critics as the summation of the twentieth-century preoccupation with the play's melancholy. As Irving Wardle stated, "quite a deal of poison has been seeping into this play ... but John Caird's production is the first I have seen that projects *Twelfth Night* as an all-out dark comedy." Set in the Jacobean period, the production accentuated a sense of decay and confinement by employing a ruined garden, rusting gates, and a mortuary chapel as components of the set designs. For many commentators, the strengths of this revival were the musical score of Iona Sekacz and the performances of the principal actors. Nicholas Shrimpton hailed Gemma Jones's Maria as "the most original piece of characterization in the production ... this was a high-spirited, horsey girl from a country background, now living in reduced circumstances as a paid companion." Additionally, Emrys James's Malvolio was praised for its fresh power by several critics. Richard Findlater asserted "this Malvolio is odious, even dangerous, in his moment of naked triumph, taken with splendid comic brio, and nakedly hurt in his hour of humiliation." Wilford Leach's New York Shakespeare Festival production in 1986 generated far more hostile responses from reviewers. Mel Gussow explained that it was not "a question of liberties taken but of abandonment of the play's essential nature as one of the most irresistible of Shakespeare's comedies." This production advocated an approach to the play that stressed elements of low comedy and farce. Actors were clothed in Renaissance dress, and the set featured a revolving platform with a central stage tower that flashed "Welcome to Illyria." The butt of critical disapproval,
however, was directed towards the central performances. Tony Azito's clownish rendering of Feste failed to tap into any of the role's deeper significance. Gussow described him as a "body in motion but out of sync with his character." Kim Greist's rendering of Viola fared slightly better. John Simon asserted "Miss Greist cannot act very much … but she has a tolerable voice, is not deliberately offensive, and tries hard." The sole performance to receive a modicum of praise was F. Murray Abraham's Malvolio. John Beaufort mirrored the opinions of most commentators in writing that Abraham projected "the fussy aplomb and self-infatuation that make the censorious steward all too susceptible to the cruel trick played on him."

In 1987 two English revivals of *Twelfth Night* returned to the use of seasonal stage effects. Bill Alexander's RSC production set the play in an Illyria that resembled a sun-drenched Greek island. While Michael Ratcliffe maintained that "there can rarely have been a version of this disturbing comedy so bland, humourless and cold," Gary O'Connor hailed the production as "outstanding," commenting that the use of dazzling white architectural motifs in the set design accentuated "the confusion woven by illusion and self-illusion." The most controversial aspect of this staging was Antony Sher's Malvolio. Sher, whose costume was reminiscent of the liturgical garb of an Orthodox priest, took seriously the possibility that Malvolio becomes mad as a result of his confinement in the "dark room." For Stanley Wells, this portrayal was ultimately a failure. He maintained: "Sher technically as brilliant as ever, allows the effort to be both funny and original to take precedence over the establishment of a credible character who believes in himself." Taking the opposing view, O'Connor lavishly praised the performance as "a gloriously infected piece of work," asserting that the actor's comic excess was "beautifully judged in its degree." In contrast to Alexander's staging, Kenneth Branagh's production with the Renaissance Theatre Company set *Twelfth Night* in a wintry Illyria that evoked the England of Charles Dickens. H. R. Woudhuysen cautioned, however, that this was not "the Dickens of *Pickwick* or *A Christmas Carol* but of *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, where secrecy and tragedy will eventually give birth to revelation and joy."

Making full use of the play's seasonal associations, the set of the Riverside Studios featured a Christmas tree and a snowy cemetery in the center stage that was used for Malvolio's imprisonment. Critics generally approved of the director's sole liberty with the text: Branagh transposed the first and second scenes of the drama in order to combine the charm of the play with its underlying strangeness. Audiences and critics were pleased with Branagh's direction; Kenneth Hurren declared it to have been "quite the most enjoyable production of the comedy I have seen for decades."

In recent years *Twelfth Night* has continued to prove popular on the stage. The productions of Peter Hall and Ian Judge have further demonstrated a shift away from the general trend in the theater of imposing anachronistic ideological meanings on Shakespeare's works. Peter Hall's 1991 production at the Playhouse Theatre, for example, intentionally avoided any allusion to contemporary social and political concerns. Critical opinion varied markedly as to the success of Hall's approach. Peter J. Smith argued that the production "failed to satisfy," despite having "captured both the magic and the melancholy of the script." Similarly, Eric Sams maintained that the staging was hampered by a lack of direction. Bernard Levin, by contrast, lavishly praised Hall's shaping of the drama, making particular mention of the cast's sensitivity to Shakespearean diction. Hall set the play in the Caroline period, and the stage designs presented an Illyria that Christopher Edwards described as a "glorious autumnal prospect—apple trees and falling brown leaves—which dips down to a stretch of mist-shrouded water." Among the performances, Eric Porter's Malvolio proved the subject of controversy. Irving Wardle, for example, maintained that nobody would shed any tears for Porter's "fatuously capering Malvolio," while Michael Coveney took the contrary position that "there is simply no better Malvolio in the world than Eric Porter." Ian Judge's 1994 RSC production was similarly faulted by several critics for a lack of depth, although it charmed the majority of commentators with what Irving Wardle termed its "fresh and truthful detail." The set design featured a wintry Jacobean representation of the city of Stratford-upon-Avon itself. Judge explained: "When I look through the hedges of New Place or sit in the gardens of Hall's Croft, I understand Illyria." The director emphasized the comic and wistful nature of the play, thereby softening its melancholic elements. Russell Jackson maintained that
"theatregoers who prefer their comic worlds a little more romantic may find this tame, and it will be too sentimental for those who want more bite in their comedy."

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Reviews And Retrospective Accounts Of Selected Productions

PRODUCTION:

Henry Irving • Lyceum Theatre • 1884

BACKGROUND:

One of the most visually stunning renderings of the play in the nineteenth century, Irving's *Twelfth Night* was shorn of the text's music and songs but embellished with lavish scenery comprised of sixteen different sets. Irving himself played the part of Malvolio, who became the drama's focus, and eschewed a comic approach to the character, highlighting the steward's tragic nuances instead. Irving was dressed as a Spanish Golden Age figure reminiscent of Don Quixote, and rendered the scene in the "dark house" (Act IV) in what William Archer described as a "nerveless state of prostrate dejection." Frank Benson commented that Irving's conception of the role compromised the casting of the other performances: "the ladies were too mature and, what was equally disastrous, the comedians were not funny; the sprightly Feste was played as a decrepit old man and Fabian was the brightest spark of the plotter's." During the first performance of the production, the audience responded with apathy until the finale, when Irving was interrupted by booing and hissing. Although Ellen Terry rendered the role of Viola admirably later in the season, her first night's performance was hampered by illness. Other members of the cast included William Terriss as Orsino; David Fisher as Sir Toby Belch; Francis Wyatt as Sir Andrew Aguecheek; and Rose Leclercq as Olivia. Irving later took the play to America, where, despite having replaced half the cast, the play similarly failed to please audiences.

COMMENTARY:

*Illustrated London News* (review date 18 July 1884)


A by no means inconsiderable advantage was enjoyed by Mr. Irving in ordaining the scenery, costumes, and general decorations of his superb revival of *Twelfth Night* in the circumstance that he was not tied in any sense to time as regarded the dressing of his characters and their architectural surroundings; nor, to any great extent, was he hampered by the exigencies of place. "A city in Illyria and the seacoast near it" is a geographical expression sufficiently elastic. With regard to the "seacoast," it is enough that it should have a generally Adriatic aspect; while "a city in Illyria," when it is considered that ancient Illyricum comprised apart of the modern Croatia, the whole of Dalmatia, nearly the whole of Bosnia, and part of Albania, and that modern Illyria includes Carinthia, Carniola, Istria, Croatia, Ragusa, and Dalmatia, might present, indifferently, a Teutonic, an Italian, a Greek, a Turkish, or a simply savage Slavonic appearance. All these characteristics are possessed by Trieste, the modern capital of Illyria, which in the way of conflicting styles of architecture and varied picturesqueness of costume is as cosmopolitan as Odessa, but in which the predominant key of colour, language, and manners is undoubtedly Italian. In Shakespeare's time, however, where now is the imposing and prosperous city of Trieste was probably only a humble fishing-village. The more ancient town of Ragusa, in Dalmatia, would present a more satisfactory ideal of an Adriatic seaport, liable to be visited by corsairs, and near which might be a ducal palace and the stately mansion of such a highly-born dame as Olivia. For the rest, it must be remembered that in the generation between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance Illyria passed
successively through the hands of the Venetians, the Hungarians, and the Turks—that is to say, from a condition of high civilisation among its upper classes to one of downright barbarism.

Mr. Irving has chosen the Venetian period as best suited for the illustration of *Twelfth Night*, and although there is a slight suspicion of Orientalism in the garb of the minstrels who so ravish the soul of the aesthetic Orsino, and there is an element of Slavonic wildness and uncouthness in the array of the guards who make their appearance in the last scene, the costumes and the architecture belong essentially to the period of the Venetian domination; that is to say, the sumptuous garments in which Mr. Irving has clad his company are such of which the analogues might have been found in England at a time when the Court of Elizabeth had reached its apogee of splendour. Orsino's palace and Viola's scarcely less palatial villa are sumptuously Palladian in style; while the art of landscape gardening, as pursued in Illyria three hundred years ago, appears to have reached a very high pitch of excellence. The sea-coast scenes, the court-yard of Olivia's house, the terrace, Olivia's garden, are painted by Mr. Hawes Craven; Orsino's palace, the road near Olivia's house, and the cloisters thereof, are from the pencil of Mr. W. Telbin; while Mr. W. Hann has painted the orchard scene; Mr T. W. Hall the last scene, before Olivia's house; and Mr. J. Selby Hall the scene including the dungeon in which Malvolio is immured. As a succession of beautiful pictures, the *mise en scène* of *Twelfth Night* is equal to any of the far-famed Lyceum revivals; but as a spectacle it is certainly not so brilliant nor so imposing as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Much Ado About Nothing*, or even as *The Cup*. As regards stage management, one of Mr. Irving's highest claims to commendation must be that he has not overloaded a merry comedy, dependent for acceptance on the ingenuity of its plot and the wit of its dialogue, with superfluous ornament.

**William Archer** (review date August 1884)


I.

Towards the close of 1601, or perhaps a little earlier, a new play named *Twelfth Night Or what you will*, was announced on the placards of the Blackfriars Theatre. It was by the most popular playwright of the time, and was doubtless looked forward to with interest by the playgoing world. Eccentric titles were the order of the day, and this one promised an airy comedy, after the fashion of a fantasy by the same author, which had perhaps preceded it in the spring of the year—*As You Like It*, to wit. For the first performance the prices were no doubt doubled, and 10/ or 12/ may have come into the treasury. It was probably repeated some few times, but it clearly created no great sensation. No contemporary author alludes to it with praise or blame, and it does not even seem to have been pirated. It leaves only one small trace on the records of the time, due to its having been selected (partly, perhaps, on account of its scenic simplicity) for performance in the Middle Temple Hall, on February 2nd, 1602. Manningham, the young Templar whose diary gives us this information, does not seem to have heard of it before, and treats it as the merest triviality. It probably served its author's purpose, in affording a relief from the heavier tragic, historic, and melodramatic matters which formed the staple theatrical fare of the day. Having run its little course, it was relegated to the ordinary repertory of the theatre, to be revived as occasion demanded; and, so far as the public was concerned, it passed out of sight, out of mind.

After a lapse of nearly three centuries the same play is produced at the leading theatre of London. It is a subject of eager speculation in all classes of society for weeks before-hand. Its first night is chronicled by a hundred pens as minutely, and in some cases as heroically, as a national victory. Telegraphic accounts of the great event fly to all ends of the earth. For at least a year to come the production will be a standing topic of conversation at the aesthetic teas of two nations. The manager has probably spent on it as much as would have built and fitted Burbage's Globe and Blackfriars, and Alleyn's Fortune to boot; he will probably reap from it as much as Shakespeare earned in his whole career, enough to buy New Place and a coat-of-arms, and found a family three times over.
It is the fashion to speculate on Shakespeare's astonishment could he see the luxury and completeness of illusion with which his plays are now put on the stage. I sometimes wonder whether he would not be even more surprised at the bare fact of his plays holding the stage at all.

Let us examine Shakespeare's own definition of the function of the drama—"to show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." A definition this which every one accepts without demur. But it is one thing to accept a maxim, and another thing to act and think up to it. We do not in our drama show the age and body of the time his form and pressure, any more than we turn the left cheek to him who smites us on the right. And did Shakespeare himself obey his own precept any better than we? Assuredly not. He imaged the mere externals of Elizabethan life, because the limited historic sense of his time cared nothing for painstaking reconstructions of the manners of distant ages and nations; but he had no eye for the social, political, or religious tendencies of his day: America scarcely existed for him, the Reformation was not, no one had less foreboding than he of the coming baptism in blood of our infant democracy. What he did was to show the age and body of all time his form and pressure; in other words, to see and interpret the spirit of man, unconditioned by time and space, as the great art of the Italian Renaissance had seen and interpreted his body. This he did through the medium of fables gathered from many sources—classical and national history, northern legend and southern romance. On the graver subjects he lavished his genius as a dramatist and his metaphysical clairvoyance; the lighter themes he treated as a humorist and master of lyric fantasy. Apart from anachronistic allusions, no single play of his is one whit more relevant to the material interests of the Elizabethan age than it is to the problems of today. He was not even a practically influential satirist, as Ben Jonson aspired to be. A tendency-play—and no serious play which answers to Hamlet's ideal can quite escape an infusion of tendency—is scarcely to be found in his theatre. If such a play exists, it is Coriolanus, in which one seems unwillingly to trace a personal sympathy with violent aristocratic reaction.

The English drama has never really succeeded in showing the age and body of the time his form and pressure. That is the formula of realism, not to say naturalism. We may have done better, but that particular thing we have never done. In modern France, Germany, and Scandinavia, it has been, and is being, done; it has been done to a certain extent in English fiction; but in the drama, no. We have had to content ourselves with mere social satire of varying merit, from Congreve and Sheridan to Robertson and Byron. We oscillate between farce and melodrama; probably we shall never have a great realistic drama. There seems to be something in the national character that forbids it.

Since the theatre, then, is to be a mere place of pastime, we have but to examine what sort of pastime is on the whole most entertaining and least objectionable. And here Shakespearean comedy, illustrated with all the artistic perfection attainable, certainly takes a high rank.

Our Asmodeus-Shakespeare would, on reflection, cease to wonder at finding the passing fantasy of 1601 regenerated and glorified in 1884. He would see in it an aesthetic plaything as good as any other and better than most—a thing of mere beauty, and therefore a joy for ever. Utility passes away, but beauty remains. Just because Shakespeare did not show the age and body of his time its form and pressure, his plays, in so far as they have the perennial gift of pure beauty, are acceptable to a generation which does not care, or dare, to see its own form and pressure on the stage. A realistic drama will never become classical in the sense of being equally relevant, or irrelevant, to all ages. Hamlet, as we know, acted up to his own ideal, and gave "The Murder of Gonzago" a distinct tendency; for which reason, no doubt, it failed to hold the stage, and has not been since revived at the Danish court. But Hamlet's creator was unconcerned as to whether or no the time was out of joint, or at least did not feel himself born to set it right. Therefore it is that his fantastic plays have a right to the first place on a stage which holds itself aloof from the serious problems of life, and is, as Mr. Matthew Arnold has pointed out, in its essence fantastic.

II.
Beauty and humour, then, are the two imperishable elements for which we have to look in estimating the claim of a Shakespearean comedy to hold the stage. In both qualities *Twelfth Night* ranks high, if not highest, among its fellows. It has practically only one competitor, *As You Like It*, in which I, for my part, find the beauty fresher, robust, less evanescent on the stage, and the humour at once less obsolete and more intimately blended with the beauty; but this is a mere individual impression, a question of "as you like it," and nothing more. Two other fantastic comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, are put out of court by the inherent impossibility of adequate stage presentation. *A Winter's Tale*, whose fourth act is beyond question the most exquisite of all, is marred by the repulsiveness, or at any rate the total unbeatulness, of some of its opening passages. The grouping together of these five plays may be thought arbitrary, since in the first two the supernatural plays no open part as it does in the other three. But this objection is grounded on the letter, not on the spirit. Who shall lay down the boundary between the land of faery and the land of fantasy? It is merely the line on one side of which the spirits are visible, while on the other they play their pranks unseen. Puck is as active in Illyria as in Attica, though we see him only in his works; Ariel is as much at home in Arden as in the Enchanted Island. Who does not feel that the air of our *Twelfth Night* Illyria is full of influences quite absent from the atmosphere of *Much Ado* or of *The Merchant of Venice*? This distinction cannot be too strongly insisted on, for it involves the question of what critical standard we are to apply. Our moral judgments are as inapplicable to *Twelfth Night* as to an Arabian Night; *Much Ado*, on the other hand, should stand the ethical test as well as *Middle-march*—if it does not, so much the worse.

The elements of beauty and of humour are kept very much apart in *Twelfth Night*. It contains two actions in one frame—a romantic intrigue borrowed from Italy, and a pair of practical jokes, or "good practices," as Mr. Manningham hath it, invented by Shakespeare. These two actions can be said really to touch at only one point, and then, as it were, unwillingly; for it is where Viola's blade crosses Sir Andrew's. It shows how potent is the name of Shakespeare to conjure up a mist before the eyes of criticism, when we find rationalistic German critics like Bulthaupt—critics whom the orthodox Shakespearologists regard as mere pagans—dwelling upon the admirable unity of *Twelfth Night* as a reason why it, more than any of its fellows, should hold the German stage. The prosaic analysis of Benedix contains a great deal more truth. The play has just as much unity as two spheres in contact.

The history of the romantic intrigue is curious, and affords one example of Charles Kingsley's somewhat rash generalisation as to Shakespeare's "truly divine instinct for finding honey where others found poison." The sister disguised in male attire and mistaken for her twin-brother appears in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, but it is in Bandello that the tale first takes the shape we know. Here we have the sister acting as page to the man she loves, and sent by him on embassies of love to an obdurate fair one, who becomes enamoured of the ambassadress, and ultimately falls by mistake into the arms of a twin-brother of the supposed page. Bandello's tale is rambling and very licentious, burdened with heavy fathers, confidants, and the other stock figures of the Italian bourgeois life it depicts, the separation of the brother and sister being supposed to take place at the sack of Rome. Belleforest simply translates and condenses Bandello; and to Belleforest Barnaby Rich seems to have gone for his tale of *Apolonius and Silla*, included in *Riche his Farewell to Militane profession*, published in 1581. That Shakespeare borrowed mainly from Rich cannot be doubted. He may possibly have known Bandello's tale, and all or any of the three Italian comedies (two called *Gl'Inganni* and the third *Gl'Ingannati*) founded upon it. Hunter makes out a tolerable case in favour of his having known *Gl'Ingannati*, the strongest point in it being the probability that the title of *Twelfth Night* was suggested to him by an allusion in the preface to "la Notte di Beffan." But he took little from any one but Rich. It was Rich who changed the characters of the tale from Italian bourgeois into romantic dukes and dames; it was Rich who placed the scene by the sea and introduced a shipwreck, though not as the means of the separation between Silla and Silvio. Strangely enough Rich had greatly improved upon Bandello's tale, introducing a novel comic motive towards the close, and bringing about the revelation of his heroine's sex better than any of his predecessors. This modification, however, involved two scenes of such immodesty as Beaumont and Fletcher would have revelled in. Not so Shakespeare, who rejected them even at the sacrifice of a certain amount of constructive finish. The change is due to a refined sense of tone and keeping which he did not always evince so clearly. He
felt that the love which breathes through the play must be "highfantastical," and that its grosser phenomena must for the nonce be ignored. In a fairy tale everything must be sensuous, nothing sensual; and Twelfth Night is a fairy tale.

This well understood, all the crudities and absurdities of the romance become so many inseparable characteristics of the form. The exact likeness between Viola and Sebastian, extending even to the fashion and colour of their clothes; Olivia's sudden love for Viola; the complaisant philosophy with which Sebastian consents to marry a woman he has never seen before; the Duke's barbarous whim of sacrificing "the lamb that he doth love, to spite a raven's heart within a dove;" the failure of Viola and Sebastian instantly to recognise one another—all these details are bad drama but good fairy tale. And how fresh and exquisite, how gracious and stately, are the figures which move through these fantastic mazes! Viola is a shade more ethereal and fragile than Rosalind; to take an illustration suggested by their two names, she is as a violet to a moss-rose. "Ganymede" would probably have done more credit to his "swashing, martial outside" in the duel with Sir Andrew than did the shrivelledly sensitive "Cesario." For the rest they are equally modest, yet equally frank, equally self-reliant, yet equally womanly. Olivia is a model of the gracious chatelaine, even while she is a victim to the mischievous love-philtres of the unseen Puck of the play. Lamb's remark on the tone in which she should "trifle a leisure sentence or two" with the Clown, instead of "setting her wits at him" to "vie conceits with him in down-right emulation," is not the least happy in the happiest of his criticisms. What a princely carriage has the languid egoist Orsino, in whose mouth the poet has placed some of his loveliest snatches of verbal melody! What a fine fresh buoyancy of youth do we find in Sebastian! How pleasant is the bluff tenderness of the old seaman Antonio! The play begins with a symphony, and ends with a song, and should, on the stage, be steeped in music. It is a fugue of graceful fantasies.

So much for the fairy tale: now for the farce. Its construction is entirely Shakespeare's, and affords a good specimen of his manner. Given the pompously fatuous character of Malvolio, the "practise" put upon him is a very simple invention. Much more ingenuity is shown in the second practical joke of the duel, with its recoil upon the head of its perpetrator through the intervention of Sebastian. All these scenes—the scene of the letter, of the cross-garters, of the duel and its consequences—are theatrically effective by reason of their skilful dialogue, which a little judicious pruning renders fairly comprehensible to modern ears. On the other hand there are many passages which can at no time have been reasonably good dialogue—such as the first meeting between Maria and Sir Andrew, and several of the scenes in which the Clown is concerned. Such inane word-strainings may have been true to nature, since the professional fools of the day, bound to be funny at all hazards, must often have resorted to them; but they are none the less puerile, and should drop away on the modern stage to the great advantage of all concerned. Feste is, on the whole, one of the shallowest of Shakespeare's jesters. When he says of himself that he is not Olivia's fool, but her corrupter of words, there is more than a spice of truth in the remark. Compared with Touchstone, he sinks into absolute insignificance. The parts can scarcely have been written for the same actor; Touchstone was probably designed for a comedian of authoritative genius, Feste for a mere singing clown.

As to the other characters in this portion of the play, only one of them, Malvolio, presents any difficulties. Of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, it is an old remark, but none the less a true one, that the former is a vulgarised Falstaff, the latter a caricatured Slender. It is to be noted that in the chronological sequence Twelfth Night follows almost immediately the two parts of Henry IV and The Merry Wives of Windsor. Shakespeare doubtless found the popularity of these types unexhausted, and, moreover, he had probably the actors of Sir John and Slender ready to hand. He accordingly deprived the knight of his consummate intellectual supremacy of scoundrelism, giving him a somewhat weaker head for liquor, and a somewhat stronger heart for fighting; he added to Slender a dash of Ben Jonson's Master Stephen; and he placed the two figures in his fairy Illyria as he had formerly placed Bottom, Snout, and Starveling in his fairy Attica. Knight's explanation of the presence of these English roysterers in Illyria, by supposing Olivia's mother to have been an English-woman, sister to Sir Toby, is one of the most amusing naïvetés in the apologetics of Shakespearology.
And lastly, of Malvolio. I confess that he has always been to me one of the most puzzling of Shakespeare's creations. The theory, so popular with German, and with some English, commentators, which makes of him a satirical type of the Puritan as Shakespeare conceived him, will not hold ground for a moment. It is founded on one or two detached speeches wrested from their context. Maria says of him that "he is sometimes a kind of a Puritan," only to say in the next breath that "the devil a Puritan" is he; and when Sir Andrew expresses a desire to beat him, Sir Toby derisively asks, "What, for being a Puritan? Thy exquisite reason, dear knight?" Is it likely that Shakespeare was himself guilty of the stupidity which even Sir Toby ridicules in his gull? Yet Kreyssig, as a rule one of the most commonsense commentators, does not hesitate to speak as if the poet, in this character, took revenge for the Puritan attacks upon his craft, as Molière, in Tartuffe, lashed his enemies the bigots. If this was Shakespeare's intention, he must have been a blundering satirist, for there is nothing of the typical Puritan in Malvolio. He carries out his lady's orders in remonstrating with her kinsman for making her house a noisy tavern, and by so doing he draws down upon himself the vengeance of the leagued spirits of misrule. If it be Puritanism to do his duty as a man of sense and a faithful steward in attempting to put a stop to drunken ribaldry, then the poet seems rather to eulogise than to satirise Puritanism. On the other hand, his misfortunes, so far as he is himself responsible for them, spring from defects by no means characteristically Puritan. Spiritual pride is the besetting sin of the "unco' guid"; it is physical vanity which leads Malvolio so readily to swallow his tormentors' bait. A scorn, real or affected, for the things of this life is the mark of the Puritan; Malvolio, however little taste he may have for the gross "cakes and ale" of the boon companions, has not the slightest desire to conceal his worldliness beneath a mask of other-worldliness. But such argument is futile. No one who reads the play without a preconceived theory can find in Malvolio the smallest trace of the zealot. All that can by any stretch of language be called Puritanism in his conduct redounds entirely to his honour.

To me it seems that Shakespeare, in drawing him, had not so clear an idea as usual of the precise phase of character he wished to represent. He was more concerned to obtain comic effects than to create a consistent, closely-observed type. We do not know Malvolio as we know Polonius, Jacques, Mercutio, Dogberry. This may be a mere personal impression, but I seem to trace in the commentators something of the uncertainty which has always troubled me with reference to his character. The very fact that he has been so grievously misinterpreted proves that there is a certain vagueness in his characterisation. Lamb has drawn with his usual delicacy of insight the externals, so to speak, of the part, has left directions for all coming generations of actors (happy whoso can follow them!); but his hints as to how the best comic value is to be extracted from the stage-personage throw little light upon the inward structure, the psychological basis, of the character. If I may hazard a theory, I should say that he is not a Puritan but a Philistine. The radical defect of his nature is a Jack of that sense of humour which is the safety-valve of all our little insanities, preventing even the most expensive egoism from altogether overinflating us. He takes himself and the world too seriously. He has no intuition for the incongruous and grotesque, to put the drag upon his egoistic fantasy, "sick of self-love." His face, not only smileless itself but contemptuous of mirth in others, has acted as a damper upon the humour of the sprightly Maria and the jovial Sir Toby; he has taken a set pleasure in putting the poor Clown out of countenance by receiving bis quips with a stolid gravity. Hence the rancour of the humorists against a fundamentally antagonistic nature; hence, perhaps, their whim of making him crown his absurdities by wearing a forced smile, a grimace more incongruous with his pompous personality than even cross-garters or yellow stockings. He is a being, in short, to whom the world, with all its shows and forms, is intensely real and profoundly respectable. He has no sense of its littleness, its evanescence, without which he can have no true sense of its greatness and its mystery. In common life this absorption in the shows of things manifests itself in a deficient feeling for proportion and contrast. He has no sense of humour—that is the head and front of his offending.

That his punishment, strictly considered, is excessive to the point of barbarity, cannot, I think, be doubted; but the air of the fairy tale interpenetrates the farce, and we do not demand a strict apportionment of justice either poetical or practical. It is certain that no sense of painful injustice has generally been found to interfere with the pleasure to be derived from the play, which has, until of late years, been popular on the English stage,
while German critics agree in regarding it as the comedy which, on the whole, retains most vitality for modern audiences. Nor can we doubt that its attractiveness on the stage has hitherto been due to the farce rather than to the fairy tale, whose iridescent beauties are apt to be lost in the harsh light of the theatre. Whether he clearly defined his character or not, Shakespeare evidently succeeded in making of Malvolio an effective comic figure.

III.

How, then, is *Twelfth Night* treated at the Lyceum? Is the fairy tale brought into prominence, or the farce? or do they receive equal justice? It may be said at once that the fairy tale comes off the better of the two, but that even it meets with somewhat inadequate treatment.

Not, certainly, as regards externals. Mr. Irving and his scenic artists seem to have recognised, consciously or instinctively, that they had to deal with a Kingdom of Kennaquhere, unrecorded in history, undiscoverable in geography, which must, before all else, be sumptuous and summery. The action moves through no less than thirteen scenes, seven of which take up, if not the full stage, at least a considerable part of its depth. In a popular German arrangement of the play two "sets" are made to suffice; but this is a false and inartistic economy. It is useless to talk of overburdening the action with decoration. This criticism might apply to *Romeo and Juliet*, but in *Twelfth Night* there is practically no action to be overburdened. The richer and more varied the background, the fuller is the sensuous satisfaction we receive from the whole. The Lyceum Illyria is a land where ornate Renaissance palaces with their cool balconies and colonnades and their mazy arabesque traceries, look forth among groves of palms, and plantains, and orangetrees, and cedars, over halcyon seas dotted with bird-like feluccas and high-proved fishing-boats. There is even in some scenes, such as that in Orsino's palace, an apparently intentional effort to indicate a semi-magic light, neither that of common day nor of any visible lamp, torch, or candle, but a suffused rich radiance contrasting exquisitely with the blue moonlight in the background.

The light and colour of the play is thus successfully presented, but one all-important element is lacking from its atmosphere—the music which should permeate it—

> Like the sweet south  
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
> Stealing, and giving odour.  
> [I. ii. 5-7]

It is to be regretted that Mr. Irving's arrangement, otherwise unobjectionable, removes Shakespeare's opening scene from its initial position. The first line of the play, as it stands in the text, strikes the key-note of all that is to follow:—

> If music be the food of love, play on,  
> Give me excess of it.

Mr. Irving and his musical director do not take this hint. They not only eliminate the Clown's two songs—lyrics so exquisite that one feels the criticism impertinent which proves one and probably both of them to be popular songs merely quoted by Shakespeare—but they stint us of the bursts of instrumental melody which might, and should, greet us at every turn.

Four characters move through the simple figure of the fairy tale—Viola and Orsino, Olivia and Sebastian. About Miss Ellen Terry's Viola there is certainly a peculiar charm. It is not the Viola either of tradition or of imagination; it lacks warmth and colour and soft youthfulness. As we first see her standing on the seawashed rocks in the lurid sunset, her stately figure might be that of an abandoned Ariadne or an expectant Calypso; no
one would ever suspect her to represent Viola. But when she assumes the white silk and gold-embroidered tunic with the white mantle draped negligently over her arm, we feel that we are in the presence of an individual creation, if not of the very Viola our fancy painted. This is a Viola not "painted" at all, but delicately carved in alabaster. It seems as through Patience had come down from her monument, and, still smiling at grief with distant wistful eyes, mingled for a season in the motley doings of men. Shakespeare's Viola has certainly a greater store of healthy animal spirits than this delicate, sylph-like creature; but she cannot have a lighter, airier grace, or, on occasion, a more refined and yet incisive humour. It seemed to me that Miss Terry's worst mannerisms, her love of studied attitude, and her singsong ill-emphasised delivery of verse, had almost disappeared. It will one day be recognised, I think, that her Viola is a vast improvement on her Beatrice, and in fact the best of her Shakespearean parts. Mr. Terriss, unfortunately, is a most inadequate Orsino. The dreamy egoist, wrapped up in his fantastic passion, and luxuriating in the languor of its "aromatic pain," is quite beyond the conception, or at least beyond the powers of execution, of this fatally beautiful actor. His sins are mainly of omission—lack of largeness of manner and music of utterance—but at one point he is positively and painfully wrong, namely, in the bantering tone he assumes on the revelation of Viola's sex. The Olivia, Miss Rose Leclercq, lacks, if not distinction, at least nobility of manner, and is conventional though not unpleasing. Mr. F. Terry, who plays Sebastian, resembles his sister sufficiently to make the comedy of errors not incredible, and that is as much as can be expected. His acting is manly and pleasant enough.

More music, and more aptly chosen, as well as a more musical more melancholy Orsino—these are the elements required to make the presentation of the fairy tale well-nigh ideal. As it is, the Viola makes it very charming. Let us now turn to the farce.

It would have been little less than miraculous had the characters of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew appealed very forcibly to the audience. One cannot but remember how, on the first night of *Much Ado*, Dogberry and Verges, characters much easier to play and of humours much less obsolete, were voted bores and hindrances to the action. Here, indeed, there is no particular action to obstruct, the two knights being themselves leading figures in one of the two intrigues; but it would have demanded the rarest combination of comic force and finesse to make them fully credible and comprehensible to a modern audience. Now it so happens that in casting these parts Mr. Irving has made a grave mistake, and spoiled the little chance they had of acquiring new vitality for a new and sophisticated generation. Sir Toby is played by Mr. David Fisher, an admirable comedian who, twenty years ago, might have made much of the character. As it is, he quite lacks the breadth and robustness of manner which are the first essentials for a part of the sort. Sir Toby is a large-limbed, large-bellied, large-voiced toper, certainly not past the fifth of the seven ages. To give him the least touch of senility is to strike at the foundation of the character, which surely consists of irrepressible, overmastering animal spirits. There is an in-decision in Mr. Fisher's manner, a lack of robustness and rotundity absolutely fatal to its effect. Mr. Wyatt as Sir Andrew is hopelessly out of his element, so hopelessly that criticism knows not where to begin or end, and can only assert broadly that he does not come within a hundred miles of the character. Mr. Wyat as Sir Andrew is hopelessly out of his element, so hopelessly that criticism knows not where to begin or end, and can only assert broadly that he does not come within a hundred miles of the character. It would be unjust to lay the ineffectiveness of the Clown entirely at Mr. Calhaem's door, but his forced and mechanical fooling, without a trace of spontaneous fantasy, certainly did not succeed in bringing poor Feste home to the humorous sympathies of the audience. Miss Louisa Payne was a tolerable Maria, but even had she possessed much greater natural gifts for the part, she alone could not have infused the proper spirit into the scenes of the carouse and the conspiracy. Thus those passages whose mere remembrance was like an electric shock to the mind of Charles Lamb, as he thought of Dodd and Suett and the elder Palmer, now pass before our weary eyes like the melancholy ghosts of what once was comedy.

But what of Malvolio? Did not Mr. Irving redeem these scenes from barrenness? He did in a measure, for the opening scenes of his performance were admirable; but at the close there came a sudden declension which had well-nigh wrecked the fortunes of the revival.
In the scene of his first appearance Mr. Irving's manner had much of that "Spanish loftiness" which so delighted Lamb in Bensley's conception of the part. He was the self-sufficient, sternly-formal, Jack-in-office to the life. The rebuke to the revellers, again, was an excellent specimen of his artistic method, for not only was his playing good, but its effect was heightened by a marvellously spectral night-dress and a scenic arrangement which threw into relief the grim grotesqueness of his appearance. His soliloquy before finding the letter was addressed too much to the audience, and throughout this scene his face showed one of the defects of its qualities in the shape of an inability to assume a sufficiently stolid and immovable self-consequence. When an absence of humorous expression is required to give a speech its full comic effect, Mr. Irving's restless eye-brows and obliquely twinkling eyes do him a disservice. In all his comic creations a semi-sardonic archness is the prevailing expression of his face, and when this breaks through the Castilian gravity of Malvolio, as he not seldom allows it to do, the effect is peculiarly inappropriate. Whatever may have been Shakespeare's precise intention, he certainly did not mean Malvolio to be arch. When he appears before Olivia, however, in his cross-gartered yellow stockings, the comedy lies in an assumption of the very archness which is not in his nature, and here Mr. Irving's expression is appropriate enough. From this point forward he is throughout in error. The scene of the dark room and the concluding scene are no doubt peculiarly difficult, but to treat them in a tone of serious tragedy is to introduce a discord so crying that it jarred even on the not very fastidiously critical ear of the Lyceum audience. There is a buoyancy of self-esteem about Malvolio which would necessarily prevent his collapsing into such a nerveless state of prostrate dejection as that in which Mr. Irving exhibits him, stretched on the straw of a dungeon worthy of Fidelio. The play should, after all, be treated as a comedy; if Mr. Irving could not hit the true comedy tone in these scenes he had better have erred on the side of farce than on that of melodrama. The short scene of his appearance before the Duke and Olivia in the last act was a mere repetition of his Shylock; he went off like the baffled villain of melodrama, not the befooled fantast of comedy. The mistake was all the more surprising in that it was unintelligent.

There can be no doubt that the straw which clung to Mr. Irving's dress from the mad-house scene was the last straw which broke the patience of a certain section of the first-night audience, already tried by the grave inadequacies of the comic portions of the play. The groans which interrupted his speech fell like thunder from a clear sky, and naturally bewildered him not a little. To complain so loudly of one or two mistakes of detail certainly showed an un-philosophic irritation, perhaps due to the baking July atmosphere. I, for one, should regret it less if I could trace in it the beginnings of a serious reaction against the exclusive cultivation of what Mr. Irving frankly calls "the ancient drama" at the Lyceum.
cadences of the familiar verses lingering in the ear, one hesitates to admit that the performance had its dull moments and that these were very dull. It will not do, either, to attribute this dullness to the vapidity of the Elizabethan small-talk—the slang of the poet's day—which besprinkles the speeches of that droll old vagabond, Sir Toby, and his companion rogues. When we go to see a Shakespearean play acted we would not lose a word of Shakespeare's that has not grown with lapse of centuries too coarse for modern ears and, moreover, the actors treated the quaint passages of the text with facility, as if they were used to it, as indeed they are. But the performance lacked variety and bustle in some parts, and although the cast was nicely balanced and harmonious, there were no characters exceedingly well acted except the Viola of Miss Terry and the Malvolio of Mr. Irving, and these two in a very different degree.

For the Viola was redolent with the charm of the actress, and was not only beautiful to the eye, but infused with the spirit of the poem in which she figures, and graced by intellectual power and womanly devotion. Indeed, we do not hesitate to place Miss Terry's Viola beside her Beatrice, as one of the performances in which her temperament enables her to conspicuously shine. Her conception of the character, as may be imagined, is not founded altogether upon tradition, although she has accepted what pleases her of the old, and subjected it to her own admirable methods. The earlier scenes with the sea Captain and Orsino were natural, but in these the actress was noticeably subdued: her sorrow for the loss of Sebastian took the form of dejection, and there was a plaintive wail in the delivery of the lines:

What do I in Illyria!
My brother, he's in elysium.

But from the moment of the first encounter with Olivia, Viola was vivacious or tender by turns, sparkling with woman's wit or sorrowing o'er her untold love. The love scene with the Duke has surely never been rendered with more beauty, and the lines beginning "She never told her love," were given with much feeling and no striving for effect, the surreptitious dashing away of a tear, as the lament for the imaginary sister was finished, being the only gesture added by way of emphasis. On the other hand; the duel scene was deliciously droll, and the wonderment and scarce formulated hope that Sebastian has been saved, in the subsequent passages were depicted with delightful effect.

Mr. Irving's Malvolio is a striking and interesting impersonation. His makeup is excellent, and the overweening egotism of Olivia's steward is shown with many skillful touches. The interruption of the revelers, in act II., and the famous letter scene may be cited as the two passages in which this Malvolio is seen to the best advantage, the interpretation of the incoherent nonsense of the mysterious billet being marked by quaint comicality and imperturbable complacency. Mr. Irving does not force the character out of its proper place in the play by over-elaboration, and if there is any fault to be found with the impersonation it is because it lacks variety, both in speech and action. This was the fault also of some of the other actors in last night's performance. Miss Payne, for instance, was a merry Maria, but she was too inclined to pitch her speech in one key, and therefore produced a monotonous effect. Mr. Wenman as Sir Toby, and Mr. Forbes as Ague-cheek, although their impersonations were otherwise meritorious, had the same fault. Mr. Alexander was Orsino, Miss Emery Olivia, and Mr. Howe Antonio. Mr. S. Johnson was the clown, and sang the verses

When that I was a little boy,

at the conclusion of the play.

William Winter (review date 19 November 1884)


[This review was first published in the New York Tribune on 19 November 1884.]
There is an uncertainty of dramatic drift in the comedy of the *Twelfth Night*—a kind of whimsical recklessness, sufficiently denoted in the subtitle, *What You Will*—which, in practical experience, has generally had the effect of making this piece a little tiresome upon the stage. Nobody can care much for anything that it contains, aside from the gentle, piquant, lovely character of Viola; and the charm of this is not essentially dramatic, but resides almost exclusively in the delicious sweetness of her temperament as displayed under the mournful light of her patient and outwardly cheerful resignation to the pangs of unrequited love. There is but little dramatic incident in her experience or of dramatic effect in the development of either her story or her character. The love-lorn Orsino—a gentleman far too easily reconciled to the loss of one love, so that at last he may obtain another—is almost insipid. The episode of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew is little more than a tipsy frolic. Malvolio, though strong and complex as a character, interests rather as a curiously carved and grotesque image of humanity than as a typical man: he amuses and he stimulates analytic reflection upon the possible oddities of human nature, but he does not awaken sympathy. The discomfiture of "an affectioned ass" and "contemplative fool" is a comic spectacle, and yet the laughter to which it incites is rebuked by a kind of humane regret that any man should be so absurd, and should, in his infinity of conceit, encounter such cruel treatment. As often-as the *Twelfth Night* has been seen here (and it has been seen often since the old days of Burton), it has proved a trial to patience, except for two or three impressive beauties. Mr. Irving's revival of it, although distinguished by rare beauty of scenery and fidelity of detail in dress and "business," met with the usual fortune of calm respect. Its chief features were Miss Ellen Terry as Viola and Mr. Irving as Malvolio—the latter being the first embodiment of this eccentric person seen here of late years, or since the time of Walcot and Gilbert in the character, that has made him an actual human creature, capable of feeling passion and of suffering pain as well as of causing mirth and pointing a moral. Mr. Irving presented him with distinctness and firm execution, and with a wealth of subtle mechanism. Miss Terry in Viola was a beautiful image of boy-like grace, and she delivered the text with a fine intelligence that penetrated and illumined every line. But her performance had little of that half-concealed sadness which, mingled with Viola's glee, makes her pathetic as well as bewitching. Sweet without insipidity and gay without coquetry, Viola is the most piquant female character in Shakespeare, and, excepting Imogen, the most tender and delicious of his women. She is ture but not intense; ardent but not powerful. She loves and she suffers; but she is bright, gentle, and submissive, and she typifies neither misery nor passion. Shakespeare's lapses from verse into prose are always significant because always made to serve a purpose in the art of acting; and it is notable that he seldom allows Viola to speak aught else than the language of poetry. She is a rarefied character, slighter alike in mind and will than Rosalind, though kindred with that luxuriant, sparkling, beauty, but equally affectionate and noble, and more lovely. There is not much of the character, but it is as precious as diamonds. The chief dramatic necessity in the acting of Viola would seem to be the revelation of her wistful sadness, her rueful, charming melancholy, under the repose of innocent glee—the half-checked tear that is momentarily visible through the guileless, patient, unselfish, eager smile of childlike happiness. Miss Terry's expeditious treatment of the part gave such emphasis to its brilliancy as quite concealed its sorrow. But, while deficient in the transparency of acting, it was a delightful image of gladness, sweetness, and beauty.

Frank Benson (essay date 1939)


Irving had far too strong a personality for Malvolio. To the best of my recollection his Malvolio was distinctly a gentleman, not a buffoon; he was dignified, not heavy. It was inconceivable that that commanding presence should be a mere steward. He looked like some great Spanish hidalgo—a painting of Velazquez; never could he have become the butt of his fellow-servants. For surely Malvolio graduated in the kitchen or the buttery; he is an old retainer, privileged as old servants are and abusing that privilege as so often they do, domineering over the rest of the staff till he provokes them to revolt. He apes the manners of his superiors with the inevitably grotesque results. With Irving one felt it impossible that he could have superiors. There is no element of greatness in Malvolio, only meanness; there is no intellect, merely a numskull, he is a proper butt
for the rest of the household. But in Irving's hands the part became so transmuted that you marvelled how they dared, and no doubt having some such notion in his mind, he cast the play unfortunately; the ladies were too mature and, what was almost equally disastrous, the comedians were not funny; the sprightly Feste was played as a decrepit old man and Fabian was the brightest spark of the plotters. They were indeed a pusillanimous crowd who, one felt, would shrink abashed at the frown of this majestic Malvolio; one could never imagine him their gull. His scenes with Olivia were marked of course with the most courtly grace; with Cesario he was duly arrogant, but with his fellow-servants he was so masterful as to defeat comedy altogether. In the final scene: 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of ye!' one felt he would, and the whole gossamer fabric of the play was rent. Malvolio should gain sympathy, for mere peacocking hardly deserved the humiliation he suffered, but this is no case for tragic intensity and Irving in a passion suggested no less. But, though possibly marred by the elaboration of eccentric touches, it was an excellent performance.

At the end of the performance on the first night there was an unusual demonstration. Strong as the anti-Irvingites were, I do not believe that there was anything in the nature of an organized opposition. I believe that the pit and gallery were frankly bored with the performance and disappointed to see their favourite actor in a part so inadequate and one, moreover, that could never suit him, and they expressed their dissatisfaction in the usual ill-mannered way, though I am bound to say I prefer that to the stony silence that greets failure across the Atlantic and across the Channel.

Irving for once was irritated out of his calm and in his perfectly dignified speech of remonstrance—though he had done better to have faced the situation in smiling silence—he used an illuminating phrase; he spoke of his company 'having exercised their abilities on one of the most difficult of Shakespeare's plays. 'I cannot help thinking that it was the very simplicity of Twelfth Night that baffled Irving; he had prepared it looking all the time for profundities that he imagined must be eluding him. He was always at his best when faced with introspective and psychological difficulties; he sought them in vain in Twelfth Night for the simple reason that they are not there.

I have felt it very keenly being 'at odds', so to speak, with my old manager and most venerated Chief, so I have looked up old verdicts of professional critics hoping to find one well argued in opposition to my own opinion and I think I have found it in Mr. William Winter's review of the production when it had reached New York. Mr. Winter wrote:

> The formalism of Malvolio, his scrupulous cleanliness, his precise demeanour, his constitutional habit of routine, his inordinate self-complacency—over which, nevertheless, his judgment keeps a kind of watch—his sensitiveness of self-love, his condition of being real in all that he feels and suffers—these attributes Mr. Irving combined into a distinct and rounded personality, of which the humour is—as it should be—wholly unconscious. His sustained preservation of the identity was especially impressive, and he was most characteristic in his dry, distinctly articulated, unconsciously pompous delivery of the text.

This compares feebly with Charles Lamb's panegyric on Bensley in the part, but I always felt that the mild humours of Twelfth Night and the gentlemanly puritanism of Bensley's Malvolio were just of a piece with the smiling spirit of the gentle Elia; the subdued chuckle becomes him; it is impossible to conceive him indulging the vulgarity of a guffaw.

I have said above that I did not consider Malvolio worthy of Irving. That is the fact. He was, to use a metaphor, so great an athlete that only the highest hurdle, the broadest ditch was worthy of his attempting. He needed stimulating by difficulties, easy conquests were beneath him: the complexities of a Glo'ster or an Iago challenged all his intellectual forces and ensured his greatest triumphs; the purely physical was beyond him and my metaphor of the athlete cannot be literally applied; the madness of Lear out-thundering the storm; the call to arms by Macbeth, the towering rage of Othello were beyond his physical strength. But who could
surpass him in tenderness to Cordelia? Whoever has more subtly indicated the disintegration of spirit in Macbeth?—or shown us the innate nobility of the Moor in his defence before the Senate? It was so always with Irving; no matter what part he attempted he gave you always something to think about, there was always some one great outstanding point of originality if not of inspiration in his performance. It is for that reason that his memory lives; that even in these days when the theatre tosses like a rudderless ship in stormy seas without a chart and without a skipper we still remember him who guided her fortunes so skilfully and steered her into the happy haven of respect and dignity.

His artistic conscience was more highly developed than that of any of his predecessors. His singleness of purpose, his profound respect for his calling, taught the world to respect it also, and under his leadership it gained a higher place in the world's estimation than it had ever known or is like to know again. He identified himself with all that was finest, all that was most artistic, all that was most progressive in an age of remarkable expansions and developments. He brought the Theatre into line with the other arts by his association with artists, writers, and musicians, such as Rossetti and Burne-Jones, Tennyson and Swin-burne, Sullivan and German.

My first introduction to him was characteristic. He had come to see our performance of the Agamemnon. "This Greek play of yours," said Irving," said Irving, "was most interesting and if you will let me say so remarkably carried out. Should you think seriously of the stage as a profession I will do my best for you." What had appealed to him was the selflessness of the players and the simplicity of the production. When I decided shortly afterwards to try my fortunes in the theatre I went to him and the result was my appearance as Paris in Romeo and Juliet. From the first I was impressed by his dynamic force. Nobody could work with him without catching the spirit of his enthusiasm, which penetrated to every department. He was indefatigable. In the days when I knew him first he lived not only for the theatre (that was true of all his life) but in the theatre. No detail escaped him and no detail was insignificant.

In truth Irving was the Lyceum; his complete knowledge of his craft and of its every tradition gave him an authority that no one ever attempted to dispute.

To return to Malvolio: Ellen Terry says in her book that Irving's performance was 'fine and dignified, but not good for the play,' which corresponds exactly with my own impression. All that Irving did was 'fine,' so fine that, at times, it came near to defeating his end. Doctor Primrose, for example, was too fine for a country parson; Lesurques again was too fine for the bourgeois son of a village post-master in the same way that Malvolio was certainly too fine for the servants' hall. His dignity pervaded his personality—exuded from it, and for many made him unapproachable. This was their loss, for it deprived them of knowledge of the man—of his innate gentleness and kindliness, qualities that made him so staunch a friend and won for him the reputation not only of a great actor but a manager, reliable, just and liberal in all his dealings.

Nothing impressed me more than the story of Ellen Terry's interview after the Abbey Service in October 1905. "What have you to say of him?" asked the interviewer. "He was a great actor, a great friend and a good man," she answered. "What more is there to say?" What more' indeed!

Laurence Irving (essay date 1951)


Twelfth Night was produced on July 8th [1884]. Londoners were enduring a heat wave and those of them who made up the audience at the Lyceum were inclined to be as sultry as the night. Irving had spared no pains to match the decorative beauty of his Much Ado—perhaps in this respect he erred in overloading delicate comedy with stage effects. His Malvolio was the outcome of long and original study, for he had never seen
the play performed. Phelps had revived the play at Sadler's Wells in 1848; his Malvolio was a masterpiece of make-up and elaborately studied; nevertheless, he did not appear in the part again. Lamb, in his vivid appreciation of Robert Bensley's performance of Malvolio at the end of the eighteenth century, recorded that the actor came near to being the perfect Don Quixote. Many critics drew this parallel in writing of Irving's performance, proving that either he or they had been polishing up their Elia. Undoubtedly Irving interpreted the part in the light of Bensley's conception of a steward whose 'bearing was lofty, a little above his station but probably not much above his deserts'.

Irving must have been bewildered by the contrary opinions his Malvolio provoked. Those critics, who usually handled him harshly, now applauded him, while his adulators hung their heads, embarrassed by their unaccustomed tepidity. For certain, his instinct as a producer had failed him. Afterwards, he confessed to Ellen Terry that he should have engaged three great comedians to play the clowns. As it was, their shortcomings were fatal to the balance of the play, even if the Victorian audience had been ready to be amused by the robust humours of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby.

Ellen Terry should have been, and indeed became, a perfect Viola. But on the first night she was sick with pain from a whitlow in her thumb, had her arm in a sling and was forced to play many of her scenes sitting down. Had not Stoker's brother, a doctor, lanced her thumb during the performance, blood-poisoning might well have caused the loss of her arm.

All these misfortunes and the marked apathy of the audience did not prepare Irving for the demonstration of disapproval which greeted his appearance before the curtain at the end of the play. His speech was interrupted by booing and hissing from the pit and gallery—a sound as painful and unfamiliar to the faithful in the more expensive parts of the house as cat-calls would be to worshippers in a cathedral. For once the gods were demonstrative but not appreciative; the effect upon their humble servant was galvanic. He rounded upon the malcontents and sharply rebuked them, expressing his bewilderment at the presence in his theatre of a strange element which he was at a loss to understand. In defence of his fellow-players, he asked how a company 'of earnest comedians—sober, clean and word-perfect' could fail to have given gratification and pleasure. Though, in his fury, his sense of humour deserted him—for of all men he would have been the last to offer the hygienic or moral excellence of an actor as an excuse for his poor performance—he quelled the rebels and, with his final appeal—'In your smiles we are happy, prithee smile upon us'—he restored the traditional rapture of a Lyceum first night.

Though Twelfth Night ran until the end of the limited season, public interest in it steadily waned. Archer, who praised Irving's performance as 'always adequate and sometimes masterly', particularly in those scenes which seemed to puzzle most of his colleagues, put his finger on what was probably the cause of the play's unpopularity. 'Queen Elizabeth,' he wrote, 'is more dead than Queen Anne. The spirit of her age is not alive in the public … who are, after all, but the abstract and brief chronicle of the tastes and habits of the times.' Even though the text had to some extent been expurgated, a Victorian audience were unable to relish in public the bawdy innuendos over which they might chuckle in private. Moreover, even the most ardent lovers of Shakespeare can find his clowns, when they are not well played, infinitely boring. The very qualities which made Irving's Malvolio one of his most memorable parts to playgoers of discernment, bewildered the ordinary public to whom comedy and tragedy were two entirely separate things. They delighted in Irving's clowning, but when they found themselves moved to tears by Malvolio's imprisonment, which he rendered tragic and piteful, they failed to see that it was the very perfection of high comedy.

Charles H. Shattuck (essay date 1987)

Irving’s *Twelfth Night* was unfortunately short-lived. At the end of the first London performance (July 8, 1884), the unbelievable happened: when Irving stepped forward to deliver his customary opening night address to the audience, he was interrupted by a scattering of boos and hisses. Startled and angered, he treated the audience to a scolding, which of course helped not at all. Some of the critics, attempting to account for the audience’s displeasure, blamed Irving’s Malvolio as “too tragical.” Irving himself, speaking to friends, blamed the “failure” on the lack of great comedians to play Sir Toby and his circle—indeed, he replaced half a dozen of the company before bringing *Twelfth Night* to America. Secretly, though, he seems to have doubted his own rendition of Malvolio. This was a pity, for by many accounts his Malvolio was superb. Joseph Knight of the *Athenaeum* called it "the best Malvolio the stage has seen." According to William Winter [in his *Henry Irving*, 1885], Irving was the first in modern times to make Malvolio "an actual human being, capable of feeling passion and suffering pain as well as causing mirth."

He made himself up to look as much as possible like Don Quixote—his tall gaunt figure clad in close-fitting black satin with gold stripes, with diamonds in his ears, the chain of office around his neck, and in his hand a long slender staff which he swung erratically. He was nearly bald; his eyebrows, painted high on his forehead, gave him a constant look of superciliousness (or surprise); his cheeks were sallow and sunken; he wore a skimpy brown mustache twisted at the ends, and a narrow pointed beard. Malvolio being such an extravagant creature, Irving’s naturally grotesque physical movements and vocal quirks could enhance his characterization rather than damage it. And since Malvolio is utterly self-centered, deliberative—"alone," so to speak—Irving could move through the language of the part freely and according to his own patterns, without destroying Shakespearean patterns of pentameter verse or speedy-witty prose. Malvolio is a "slow" role, affording countless opportunities for the "delicate touches" of behavior that were central to Irving’s ideas about acting. This Malvolio was a man of parts and breeding, intensely aware of his superiority. Irving did not gag or play for easy laughs, but was desperately in earnest at every moment, and thus profoundly amusing. Unfortunately, as a result of his self-distrust, Irving not only abandoned *Twelfth Night* after its run in America, but never again undertook a comic role in Shakespeare.

Ellen Terry, who played the boy Cesario charmingly in her cream-colored satin tunic and a little blue cap that rode perkily on her golden curls, was not unhappy when the play was dropped from Irving's repertory. She thought the production as a whole was "dull, lumpy, and heavy." She may have noted the wonderment of several American critics that she and Irving had both let themselves be consigned to such relatively "unimportant" parts, and this would have confirmed her own recognition that Viola cannot take command of the situation she is thrust into. Then, too, in America at least, she was bested by a ghostly competitor—Adelaide Neilson, so lately dead, whose lovely Viola haunted the memory of the reviewers. The *Herald* critic thought it fair to note that Miss Terry had other parts "more exacting, more pathetic, and even more merry."

Scenically this *Twelfth Night*—with its array of seascapes, ravines, luxurious gardens, mansions à la Palladio, and a gloomy dungeon for Malvolio’s imprisonment—was not only splendid in itself, but occasion for the *Spirit of the Times* to attempt to shame our American managers into emulating Irving’s production methods. Nothing like it had ever been seen upon the New York stage until Mr. Irving came—but "the public will hereafter insist that the same completeness of accessories and unity of action shall be displayed by all professionals, and the sooner the Irving system is generally adopted the better for all concerned.… Mr. Irving has shown us that what our own managers have claimed to be impossible is easily done with the requisite tact and taste and skill."

**PRODUCTION:**

Augustin Daly •Daly's Theatre, New York •1893-94
Daly's staging of the play, which opened at Daly's Theatre in New York, was accounted one of the director's greatest successes. Taking extreme liberties with the text, Daly cut approximately six hundred lines from the play to purge it of elements that might compromise its "poetry" and "beauty." He additionally transposed and rearranged the musical scenes in the work, employing as an introduction to the first act a group of fishermen and peasants singing "Come unto these yellow sands." Daly promoted the pageantry of the play by using the elaborate costumes of Graham Robertson and by staging such memorable scenic effects as a violent storm and a moonlit rose garden. The play itself consisted of only four acts, and the character of Malvolio was reduced to the dungeon scene in Act IV. This production was in full sympathy with contemporary taste and was well received both in America and in London the following year. Ada Rehan's Viola was considered a highlight of this staging. William Winter wrote "Viola is a woman of deep sensibility: and that way Miss Rehan has comprehended and reproduced her, permitting a certain wistful sadness to glimmer through the gauze of kindly vivacity." For George Bernard Shaw, who deprecated Daly's handling of the text, Rehan's performance was the sole redeeming feature of the production: "the moment she strikes up the true Shakespearian music, and feels her way to her part altogether by her sense of that music, the play returns to life and all the magic is there." The other performances were generally considered to have been undistinguished and included Creston Clarke as Orsino, James Lewis as Sir Toby Belch, George Clarke as Malvolio, and Lloyd Daubigny as Feste. In 1894 the production opened at Daly's Theatre in London, where Rehan played Viola for 119 performances.

COMMENTARY:

William Winter (review date 22 February 1893)


"I'll serve this Duke." In those simple words the bereaved and shipwrecked Viola, who must begin life anew, reveals something more than her intention, because she also reveals the steadfast quality—blending patient endurance with buoyant self-control—of her lovely character. Concerning the Duke Orsino she knows only that he is reputed noble; that he is a bachelor, and that he loves the Lady Olivia, who is mourning the death of her father and brothers, and will admit no one to her presence. Viola is not impelled by passion, or by sentiment, or even by curiosity. She must find a new home, and she must obtain subsistence. Her first impulse is to serve the Lady Olivia; but that plan is rejected as impracticable. She will seek service in the household of the Duke—for she can sing, and can speak to him in many sorts of music—and she will hide her sex, and proceed thither in disguise. A happy chance has saved her from the sea, and meanwhile the same happy chance may also have saved Sebastian, her brother. She will be hopeful and will go forward, and the events of her future shall be trusted to propitious time. She is a sweet, constant woman, and she is especially blessed with that cheerful courage, as to worldly fortune, for which good women are usually more remarkable than men. And she is young, handsome, alluring, and—quite consciously—well fitted to prove victorious.

In Twelfth Night the dramatic art of Shakespeare, always felicitous, operates with an indolent ease that is delightful. The touch is invariably light. The mood—now tender, now joyous—is invariably natural, careless, seemingly almost indifferent. You are provided with all essential knowledge as to the two households of Orsino and Olivia; and yet you hardly perceive how it was that you came to know them, or how it is that they are made to dwell in your mind as pictorial and typical of so much diversified character, so much human nature, and so much representative experience. The scene is shifted frequently from one house to the other, but not with violence or caprice. The changes come about simply and aptly. The persons, almost imperceptibly, drift into their places and into your acquaintance and favor. The style varies, with charming flexibility, from verse to prose, and back again from prose to verse, preserving an absolute harmony with the variations of the theme. All is unforced. All is free and careless—a profusion of wild flowers—an ordered medley of whimsicality, and drollery, and sentiment, and grace, with abundance of kindly satire and a wealth of genial philosophy involved in it. Both the houses are stately, and over both the poet has thrown a hale of romance. In the palace of Orsino that Prince is suffering with the melancholy of hopeless love. In the sober
hall of Olivia that cloistered beauty is suffering with grief for her dead brother and father. At the side of
Orsino stands the disguised Viola—the page Caesario—love-lorn for her master's favor. At the side of Olivia
stands the saturnine, self-worshipful Malvolio, nursing his conceit that the great lady may yet become his
wife. And around those serious figures eddy the vinous revels of stout Sir Toby Belch, the puling capers of
silly Sir Andrew. Aguecheek, the antics of mischievous Maria, and the romantic adventures of rescued and
mystified Sebastian. It is a picture in little of the way of all things. Love is blind and will not see its own
comfort, which is close at hand. Self-opinion makes itself a fool, and comes, amid inextinguishable laughter,
to utter and irremediable disgrace. Frolic and revel sparkle, for their little moment, and turn to nothing.
Irrational fortune scatters her favors wholly without logic. Truth and devotion are rewarded by chance. And
motley smiles over all.

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.

After the action of the piece has opened several comical situations are devised for Viola, together with several
situations of serious perplexity, which mostly tend to create a comic effect for the auditor. In those situations
Viola's gleeful spirit is liberated—her irrepressible hilarity, on being expected to play the part of a masculine
lover, and her feminine consternation, when confronted with the necessity of combat, being artfully
contrasted, for the sake of humorous results. The true note of the character, however, is serious. Viola is a
woman of deep sensibility: and that way Miss Rehan has comprehended and reproduced her—permitting a
certain wistful sadness to glimmer through the gauze of kindly vivacity with which, otherwise, her whole
bright and gentle figure is artfully swathed. That was the pervading beauty of the impersonation. Those frolic
scenes in which Viola participates are perfectly consonant with Miss Rehan's propensity for mirth and with
her faculty for comic action. She rejoiced in them, and she made the listener rejoice in them. But the great
underlying cause of her brilliant success in them was the profound sincerity of her feeling—over which her
glee was seen to play, as moonlight plays upon the rippling surface of the ocean depth. In this embodiment,
more than in any assumption of character previously presented by her she has relied upon a soft and gentle
poetry of condition. She discarded all strong emphasis, whether of color, demeanor or speech. Her action was
exceedingly delicate, and if at any moment she became conspicuous in a scene it was as the consequence of
dramatic necessity, and not by reason of self-assertion. Lovely reserve and aristocratic distinction blended in
the performance, and dignified and endeared it. The melody of Shakespeare's verse—especially in the passage
of Viola's renunciation—fell from her lips in a strain of fluent sweetness that enhanced its beauty and
deepened the pathos of its tender significance. In such tones the heart speaks, and not simply the warmth of an
excited imagination, and so the incommunicable something that the soul knows of love and sorrow finds at
least an utterance, if not an intelligible expression. Subtlety of perception naturally accompanies deep feeling.
Viola, when as Caesario she has captured the fancy of Olivia, although she may view that ludicrous dilemma
archly, and even with a spice of innocent mischief, feels a woman's sympathy with the emotions of her sex;
and all her conduct toward Olivia is refined and considerate. Miss Rehan was admirably true to the
Shakespearean ideal in that particular, as also she was in expressing the large generosity of Viola toward
Olivia's beauty. It is only a woman intrinsically noble who can be just toward her prosperous rival in matters
of the heart. Miss Rehan, in her embodiment of Viols, has obeyed the finest of all artistic impulses—the
impulse to make no effort. Her performance was as natural and as sweet as the opening of the rose. She
allowed the pensive tenderness and the sweet gravity which are in her nature to drift into her portraiture of the
character, and to express themselves honestly and simply. Her elocution was at its best—concealing all
premeditation, and flowing, as the brook flows, with continuous music and spontaneous and accidental
variety. She wore the boy-dress with all her usual grace. No woman plays the boy better. Few actresses have
played it so well. The local public has seen other impersonations by Miss Rehan, more complex, more
elaborate, more powerful; no other impersonation so alluring, so essentially poetical, so significant of artistic
growth, and of the rich resources of spiritual nature. Her by-play alone, in the scene wherein Viola attends
Orsino while he is listening to Feste's song, was a sufficient evidence of the true inspiration of genius. Her
success with the house was very great, and she was re-called with enthusiasm many times. The dresses, three
in number, are of exceptional beauty.

Persons who insist upon reading into the works of Shakespeare meanings that they do not contain often place many obstacles in the way of their enjoyment of a Shakespearean representation. Mr. Daly's revival of *Twelfth Night*—which was marked in every particular of it with simplicity, sense and taste—may not entirely satisfy judges of that exigent order. Nevertheless, it is a thoroughly well-appointed and most intellectual and scholar-like reproduction of that delicious comedy, and it was greatly enjoyed by one of the most numerous and most cultivated audiences that have been assembled this season. Remembrance of previous presentments of *Twelfth Night*, while it recalls much pleasure, recalls also some weariness—for the piece has usually been given with its explanatory narrative as well as its vitally dramatic passages. The performance on this occasion never once flagged. One reason is that the Malvolio episode has been condensed, and another reason is that the talk and action were skilfully diversified with delicious music. The scenes of Sir Toby's carnival and of Maria's plot were likewise carried with such an affluence of vivacity as could not fail to animate even the least festive of auditors. Mr. Lewis enacted Sir Toby. There is, in that character, underneath the sensuality and the humor, much shrewd knowledge of the world and a most capable, resolute and expeditious mind—albeit not devoted to a worthier end than that of appetite and personal comfort and advantage. The humor of Mr. Lewis is dry, quizzical, whimsically droll, waggishly sapient, and at times not without a sub-acid flavor of satirical pungency. He is not of the unctuous order, and he was not destined by nature for Falstaff or any of that kindred. Nevertheless, he suggested, most adroitly, Sir Toby's exultant animal delight in his own capacity of appetite, and in his bibulous diversions; while to the mental quality of the knight—the comic sagacity of a selfish good-natured worldling, the inveterate purpose of predominance and profit—he rendered the most ample justice. The relation of Sir Toby to Sir Andrew Aguecheek (a part that was intelligently and neatly acted by Mr. Herbert Gresham) is not unlike that of Falstaff to Justice Shallow—for in both cases the knight seeks, from the gudgeon, the replenishment of his purse. The preservation of that attitude by Mr. Lewis, and of the amatory attitude toward Maria, might be named as a sufficient denotement of his intellectual grasp of the character. He laid all possible emphasis, however, on the mirth, and in the scene of the midnight revel he was the incarnation of tipsy jocularity. The cooperation of Miss Catherine Lewis, as Maria, proved of great value to that scene, and indeed to the general effect of the humorous portion of the comedy. That actress has an abundant flow of animal spirits, a superlative talent for merry mischief, an inherent capacity of vivacious action, and a himble and crisp method of speech; and those attributes make her presence entirely adequate and delightful in characters—like Maria—of brittle sprightliness and roguish duplicity. She was cordially welcomed. Mr. George Clarke presented Malvolio, and therein he obtained professional honor such as an old actor may well cherish with pride. The ripe repose and adequacy of his art have not at any time been more explicitly manifested, or with more authority or more absolute power. Mr. Clarke embodied Malvolio as a very serious and even formidable person—as he is in Shakespeare—making the absurdity of the situation subordinate to the portentous gravity of the Don-like character, and thus largely augmenting the resultant merriment which accompanies his discomfiture and disgrace. That saturnine quality in Malvolio is of great value. He is not to be mistaken for a mere gull. "His own opinion was his god," as Queen Katherine said of Cardinal Wolsey. He came to grief through his colossal conceit, but he is not a booby. "He hath been most notoriously abused," says Olivia, at the last, and the command of Orsino is explicit and significant: "Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace." The scene of Malvolio's justification has been omitted in Mr. Daly's carefully condensed four-act copy of the comedy, but these who know the original will not forget its bearing on the story. Mr. Clarke's impersonation very clearly revealed a scholar-like grasp of the whole subject, and his execution was remarkable for symmetry and point. The other characters are in good hands, and they were adequately given. Olivia must be handsome, proud and stately—and that was not difficult for Miss Adelaide Prince. The requisite element of mirthful relish was readily supplied by Mr. William Gilbert, to the part of Fabian. Antonio was made picturesque and fervent by Mr. Charles Wheatleigh. The musical portion of the clown's part was admirably done by Mr. Lloyd Daubigny, who does not yet, however, claim attention as an actor—for there is more in that clown than melody. Sebastian—not a very grateful part but an important one—was most discreetly played by Mr. Sidney Herbert. Mr. Preston Clarke acted Orsino with princely dignity and refinement, and made every picture effective in which he appeared. The piece has been dressed in
Greek and Italian garments of seventeenth century styles, and the pageantry of it was beautiful. No Shakespeare play has hitherto been produced with scenery at once so suitable and so magnificent. The colors and groupings made a feast to the eye, and the melodious accompaniments were a soothing comfort to the ear. Dramatic art receives a distinctly favorable impetus in this magnificent revival of a classic comedy, and the public gain in it is obvious and of much value.

E. A. Dithmar (review date 26 February 1893)


In the chronicle of the theatrical week the Viola of Ada Rehan holds the first place; in the record of her artistic career that lovely embodiment of one of Shakespeare's simplest but most beautiful creations will not be far from the first. Remembering Katharine, Julia, and Helena, it might be rash to say that her latest is her best work, but certainly she has done nothing better, for she realizes this heroine not only in her outward aspect, in form and bearing, and in melodious speech—she is surely the loveliest page that ever served an impossible Prince of Dalmatia, but that was to be expected—but in every shade of feeling, in every impulse, in every change of facial expression, she completely identifies herself with the role, and it with her own personality. She is so surely and entirely Viola as to make us forget all the other portrayals of this character in recent times, which was not the case with her Rosalind. Truth to tell, Miss Rehan's reading and conception of this part—using that tiresome word "conception" under protest to signify her comprehension of it as expressed in her performance—seem to us more lucid and convincing than her treatment of Rosalind.

One of the most charming of all the Essays of Elia, one of those that are best remembered by the readers of Lamb, is devoted to his memory of a performance of this very play he saw in his youth, and the description he there gives of the Viola of Dora Jordan now reads like a faithful account of the Viola of Ada Rehan. How closely this passage in it applies to the portrayal we saw first last Tuesday night!

There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech that she had foreseen so as to weave it into a harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music—yet I have heard it so spoken, or, rather, read, not without its grace and beauty—but when she had declared her sister's history to be a 'blank' and that she 'never told her love,' there was a pause, as if the story had ended; and then the image of the 'worm in the bud' came up as a new suggestion and the heightened image of 'Patience' still followed after that as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought. I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. She used no rhetoric in her passion or it was Nature's own rhetoric, most legitimate then when it seemed altogether without rule or law.

In the future there may be some critic of Lamb's worth and geniality and young heart and golden pen to thus record his memory of the performances of Shakespeare's heroines by the Dora Jordan of the English-speaking stage in these our little times.

Miss Rehan's elocution in this part seems to us absolutely beyond cavil. The cadences of her speech fall as gratefully upon the ear as sweetest music, yet she speaks, she does not read or recite. If speech upon the stage has ever sounded better or expressed a poet's meaning more clearly than her delivery of that fine passage of rhapsody Viola addresses to Olivia,

And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia'!
We have no knowledge of the time. The voice of Ada Rehan is the rarest and loveliest voice raised in public amid the ceaseless clamor of these times, and it is perfectly attuned to all the notes in this comedy of Shakespeare.

The tone of this impersonation is not continuously plaintive; she does not bear with her through all the mazes, in moods of frolic as well as those of sentiment, an air of melancholy; no Viola ever has. The girl is young, the spirits of wholesome, healthy youth are not always depressed even when youth is suffering from blighted affection. Presumably Viola would never die of love, even if Duke Orsino married his Countess; perhaps she would not even sit "like Patience on a monument" very long; but Miss Rehan's Viola, joyous when occasion demands it, sparkling with animation in the gayer scenes, with a delicate touch of irony in her vicarious lovemaking, is still dominated by pensiveness—the memory you bear away from it is a tender memory, the echo of her voice is gently sorrowful. She makes less of the comic scene with the roysterers than any other Viola we remember, even than Ellen Terry's or Modjeska's.

The charm of those two exquisite artists in everything they do is potent; but Miss Terry's Viola was what Miss Rehan's never is, monotonous, and its sweetness was rather cloying, while of Helena Modjeska's impersonations of Shakespeare's women we treasure in mind most strongly her Rosalind, Isabella, and Ophelia. Much is said in current talk about the Viola of Adelaide Neilson, and those who honestly and vividly remember the acting of that charming and ill-fated artist are to be congratulated, but some of us who remember all she did remember keenly, also, that, until almost the last year of her brilliant career, the glowing plumage of her genius was the constant mark of the small, ill-tempered birds who can always peck, even if they cannot sing.

But no memory of the past whatever can cast a shadow on the Viola of Ada Rehan. It is successful in the popular sense; it is a work of stage art of the finest quality.

Little more remains to be said about the revival of Twelfth Night. It is tiresome after all to be compelled so often to use the superlative; it is not in accord with the spirit of these times. The gibe and the jest and the sneer are much more popular, but in the old comedy revivals at Daly's Theatre the effect of beauty in color, form, and melody is cumulative. We thought only a few years ago that this high-minded, far-reaching manager could never do anything better than his production of *The Taming of the Shrew*; London expressed the same opinion a little later. It seems only a few days ago that we thought he had at last reached the limit with *The Hunchback*, but to describe *Twelfth Night* as it is given on his stage one needs a new vocabulary.

Much of the text is omitted; the Clown, for instance, is shorn of much of his antique wit, for which we have a fondness, and is principally of interest as a singer, and Malvolio, a part taken by Mr. George Clarke with the judgment and skill of an experienced and able actor, loses some of his scenes—if the Sir Topas episode is omitted after a while we shall not regret it, for though Shakespearean students esteem it highly, it has never seemed entertaining upon the stage, and was even duller in Mr. Irving's production of *Twelfth Night* than it is at present.

In much of the scenery and costuming of the new production an Oriental effect is secured. We doubt very much if Shakespeare knew where Illyria was or cared, but the coast of Dalmatia is close to the border land of the Orient. Greek forms and fashions have controlled former elaborate productions of this play, but the touch of Oriental warmth and languor now appropriately imparted to it adds greatly to its pleasing effect. The humor is well preserved by Mr. Lewis and his associates, and the music, which is all in keeping, is rendered with extraordinary ability for the singing forces of a theatre not devoted to music alone.

"Realism" has nothing to do with such a play as *Twelfth Night*. It all belongs to fancy. No one under its influence thinks of the horrors of shipwreck; the perfume of rare flowers, the echo of soft music pervades it. It is not needful, in presenting it on the stage, to befoul the atmosphere with the odor of bilge water or to give to
any one of its characters the appearance of bodily suffering.

The production of a poetic drama is not an easy task. The manager who undertakes it should possess the highest and best qualities. No one in America in our time has equaled Augustin Daly in this kind of work. In London Mr. Irving, like Macready before him, has been obliged to submit throughout his brilliant career to the caviling and sneers of the gadflies of the press. In New-York, for nearly a quarter of a century now, Mr. Daly has had more than his share of that sort of abuse. The enormous pecuniary success of his present season, the most noteworthy, in some respects, of any in the history of his theatre, is therefore all the more gratifying to people who cherish a high ideal of the dramatic art.

Jeannette Gilder (review date 4 March 1893)


Although Mr. Daly has expended much labor and money upon his elaborate revival of Shakespeare's delightful comedy of Twelfth Night, and is entitled on that account to credit and gratitude, it must be confessed that the result is disappointing, inasmuch as the general richness of the setting excites expectations with regard to the acting which, unfortunately, are not always realized. The eye of the spectator is pleased continually by a series of glittering and attractive stage pictures, and by many evidences of artistic taste and profuse liberality in the matter of scenery, accessories and costume, but the intelligence is unsatisfied and the lover of the poet is forced to the conviction that more thought has been taken of the spectacle than of the play. If this representation had been offered at a minor theatre by a manager of smaller experience, capacity and accomplishment, it would have been worthy of hearty commendation as an effort in the right direction, but Mr. Daly has earned the right to be judged by the highest standards, and his best friends will scarcely be bold enough to assert that he has approached that of Mr. Henry Irving, not to speak of others that have been set in this city.

It may be admitted at once, and readily, that in mere sumptuousness of decoration he has done all that could be expected reasonably of any manager. There can be no question of the costliness of his preparation or of the skill with which he availed himself, as a rule, of modern theatrical resources. It is true that his system of lighting is deficient, that he has turned night into day and day into night, that the sky illumination in the opening set is an impossible phenomenon, that his costumes belong to no one place or period and that his architecture is curious in more respects than one; but it would be unfair to insist too strongly upon such lesser points of detail as these, considering the fanciful nature of the work—which affords plausible excuse for license—and the fact remains that such sets as the interior of Orsino's palace, with its array of courtiers and musicians, the hall of Olivia's house and the garden scene are beautiful and striking, while the costumes are extremely brilliant and picturesque—sometimes, indeed, a little too brilliant as in the case, for instance, of Viola just fresh from shipwreck. In all these spectacular features of the entertainment there is much to praise and little to complain of, while the incidental music, all of which by the way does not belong to Twelfth Night, is very sweetly and tastefully rendered, although occasionally in too slow time. But in the most vital part of the representation, the acting, this high level of excellence is not maintained. Correct as most of it is in form and detail it is sadly devoid of spirit or imagination. Miss Ada Rehan, when in her proper element, which is one of archness, or frolic or pretty petulance, is a most charming actress who need fear no rival; but in characters whose very essence is romantic, poetic and sentimental she is misplaced. Her defects are those of temperament, not of intelligence. Her delivery of verse is monotonous and unsympathetic, and her style of acting lacks the delicacy, refinement and grace necessarily associated with the heroines of poetry and imagination. In interpreting them she is compelled to restrain her own natural vivacity, which is her most potent weapon, and to substitute for it a colorless demeanor which is necessarily ineffective, and often dull. Her Viola, compared with the performances of such artists as Modjeska, Ellen Terry or Adelaide Neilson, was curiously insincere and unimaginative, except in those passages which gave something like free play to the merry mood in which she excels. She did not fall absolutely, of course—her experience as an actress and
her natural charm as a woman prevented such a catastrophe as that—but most assuredly she fell very far short of success.

The most satisfactory performance was the Malvolio of Mr. George Clarke, which, although without the inspiration and distinction of Mr. Irving's masterful impersonation, was a humorous, consistent and exceedingly well-executed sketch. Mr. Lewis's Sir Toby was quaint and funny, but lacked breadth, vigor andunction, and the carousal scenes passed very tamely. The Olivia of Miss Prince was an uncommonly meritorious bit of work, admirable in dignity and grace, and especially notable for good elocution. Of Maria's spontaneous and infectious humor Miss Catharine Lewis suggested little. The only other part deserving a word of special mention was the Orsino of Creston Clarke. Doubtless the general representation will improve with rehearsal, but the future of it will depend chiefly upon the scenery and the music.

*The Athenaeum* (review date 13 January 1894)

The production of *Twelfth Night* is the most interesting feature in Mr. Daly's programme since his memorable revival of *Taming of the Shrew*. As in most recent Shakespearean representations, too much stress is laid upon the setting, and accessories are elevated into undeserved and, in a sense, inartistic prominence. Yet only when similar conditions prevail are we likely to see Shakespearean comedy at all, and to complain of means when the result is delightful would be churlish. For delightful the representation is. The perfume of the love scenes is preserved, and the whole is shown to be comedy, and not farce. To no character is allotted undue prominence; the whole is even, artistic, fragrant. In the scenes in Orsino's palace the grouping is, perhaps, a little too formal, and the sustained chorus to Feste's songs, though agreeable, is unimaginative. The result, however, as has been said, is pleasing, and lovers of Shakespeare should not fail to visit the performance. They must be prepared to see Shakespeare's disposition of the scenes "knocked about," and to find some occasional extravagances. Mirthful as it is, the laugh with which Maria more than once quits the stage is conventional and out of place. Still the right atmosphere is preserved, and the performances generally are excellent. Miss Ada Rehan's Viola is bewitching. Miss Renan looks surprisingly well in her page's costume, and delivers her lines with admirable music and with that sense of humour which is necessary to bring out their full significance. Nothing in which this actress has been seen conveys a higher estimate of her powers and endowments. Miss Violet Vanbrugh gives the right rendering of Olivia; and Miss Catherine Lewis, with the reservation before mentioned, leads off the revels with admirable spirit. Mr. James Lewis is the best Sir Toby Belch we can recall; Mr. Clarke's Malvolio is full of spirit; and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Orsino, Feste, and the characters generally are modestly and well sustained. Mr. Daubigny's singing is excellent, and the general musical effects are delightful. Those who fail to see the representation will have cause for regret.

William Archer (review date 17 January 1894)

At last, at last! The long series of disappointments has ended at last, and we have to thank Mr Daly for an evening of rich and keen, if not absolutely unmixed, enjoyment. The performance of *Twelfth Night* has the one supreme merit which, in a Shakespearean revival, covers a multitude of sins—it really "revives" the play, makes it live again. There is nothing mechanical or academic about it. We feel we are in a live playhouse, not a historical museum. Not that I, personally, object to seeing the theatre turned now and again into a historical museum. When we have our Endowed Theatre, at which Mr Sydney Grundy scoffs (but "come it will, for a' that"), some twenty to fiveand-twenty nights in the year (not more, Mr Grundy!) will probably be devoted to the merely historical drama,—to plays which interest us, not for their living merits, but because, like those people with whom Mr Browning parleyed in one of his last books, they were of importance in their day. *The Country Girl*, despite the freshness and charm of Miss Rehan's Peggy, belongs on the whole to this class. It is
pleasant enough to parley with Garrick for once in a way (since Wycherley is out of the question): but his work gives us pleasure, not because it is absolutely and perdurably beautiful or witty, but because the mediocrity of long ago acquires a certain charm in the very act of growing old. Here, I take it, lies the explanation of the difference between Mr W. S. Gilbert and Mr Clement Scott. Mr Scott, perhaps, does not quite thoroughly analyse the pleasure which he receives from *The Country Girl*, and mistakes for inherent superiority what is really an "un-earned increment" of quaintness due to mere lapse of time; while Mr Gilbert, not making sufficient allowance for this unearned increment—as inevitable, under certain conditions, in literature as in economics—is inclined to compare new plays and old on their absolute merits, weighing wit against wit, and invention against invention, as though the pleasure we received from wit and invention were, or ought to be, strictly commensurate with the sheer brain-power involved in it. *Twelfth Night*, on the other hand, is a work of inherent and permanent vitality. Poetry is the one thing imperishable, and Shakespeare has never written more tenderly and exquisitely than in the romantic scenes of this comedy. The fable has all the charm of a myth of the elder world, when instinct spoke to instinct unashamed, and when love found its sufficient sanction in beauty, with "no d—d nonsense about merit," about spiritual affinity, or harmony of souls, or friendship, or even mutual esteem. Someone in Paris has recently produced a pantomime-play in which Juliet awakens before Romeo has drunk the poison, and they set up house together, quarrel, and lead a cat-and-dog life. What wanton vulgarity of imagination! In *Twelfth Night*, only Malvolio, the would-be "bourgeois gentilhomme," associates love with domesticity. Malvolio, a born major-domo, dreams of ruling Olivia's house, bidding others know their place as he knows his, and, in short, fulfilling the social duties of marriage. To the noble and beautiful children of fantasy, marriage is only a spell or charm to be recited "for luck," as it were, as they cross the threshold of love. They are pagans in a pagan world, and we no more care to imagine them "married and settled," than we want to follow the figures on Keats's Grecian Urn into their workaday life in the

Little town, by river or seashore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel.

We leave the lovers in each other's arms, beyond the reach and time of destiny. It is in this etherealising of the material, this elimination of all after-thought from life, all doubt and fear and shame, that the perennial charm of the poem consists. These "high-fantastical" beings are so frankly absorbed in the passion of the moment that they make the moment an eternity. Since Shakespeare left the comedy without an epilogue, Keats might have supplied it, in the shape of a fantasia on the theme: 'For ever shalt thou love, and she be fair.'

Mr Daly and I will never quite agree, I fear, as to the proper way of treating Shakespeare's text. We differ in our fundamental principles. To me it seems that the aim of the artistic manager should be to present any given play with as little cutting and rearrangement as possible, having regard to the altered conditions of the theatre both before and behind the curtain. Mr Daly seems rather to cut and rearrange as much as he possibly can, without absolutely going the length of Dryden, Tate, and Cibber, and rewriting his author. My rule would be, "When in doubt, play Shakespeare;" to which Mr Daly would probably reply that he is never in the least doubt as to the superiority of his own ideas. For instance, nothing shall ever reconcile me to the barbarism (of which Mr Irving was also guilty) of opening the play with a seashore tableau, instead of with that bewitching speech of Orsino's, "If music be the food of love, play on," in which Shakespeare (who occasionally knew what he was about) strikes the keynote of the whole comedy. Mr Daly is not content with running Shakespeare's first and fourth scenes together as the second scene of his production: he actually cuts the six loveliest lines in the Duke's speech:

Give me excess of it: that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die,—
That strain again!—it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south;
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing, and giving odour.

This is so incredible, that I almost hesitate to make the assertion; my wits may have been wool-gathering for the moment; but I certainly did not hear the lines. The running together of the two scenes, Mr Daly may say, was necessary because of the deep stage required for the Duke's court. Well, if the retention of Shakespeare's arrangement had involved the sacrifice of a few of the odalisques strewn about the floor of the ducal seraglio, we need not have been inconsolable. But I do not even see that any such sacrifice would have been necessary. If the re-sources of the modern theatre are unequal to the changes of scene required in following Shakespeare's arrangement, all I can say is, the more shame to it. There are many cases, of course, in which judicious rearrangement is quite permissible; but a rearrangement which displaces and mutilates what Shakespeare obviously intended for the opening chord of his romance is surely the reverse of judicious. The text throughout is treated very cavalierly, not only in the omission of important and characteristic speeches (such, for instance, as Viola's reply to Antonio, "I hate in-gratitude more in a man," &c), but in the curtailment and alteration of some even of the best-known phrases in the play. Why should the Clown's part be docked of the protestation that "Ginger shall be hot i' the mouth, too"? Why should Viola stop short at "By my troth, I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one" (i.e., a beard), and omit "though I would not have it grow on my chin"? Is Mr Daly of opinion that Shakespeare "rubbed in" the jest inartistically? Perhaps; but what we want is Shakespeare's lack of art, not someone else's art. What possible authority is there for "And dallies with the innocence of love like ripe old age"? The emendation is as stupid as it is unnecessary. Finally, to pass over many more important matters, and descend to a very trifling, but not uncharacteristic, detail, why should the Clown modernise the line "Youth's a stuff will not endure," and sing "that won't endure" instead? This may seem the very pedantry of fault-finding, but the alteration serves no conceivable purpose, and to the ear which is familiar with the phrase in its quaintly archaic form (and what ear is not?), the modernisation is a quite sensible annoyance.

There now; I have had it out with Mr Daly, and can now return with an easy conscience to my original statement that, whatever his lapses of taste, he has truly revived the play, making it, as it ought to be, a thing beautiful, enjoyable, and lovable. I shall not even quarrel with the omission of "Come away, come away, Death," and the interpolation of one or two other more or less appropriate airs. In an ideal revival, the play would doubtless be less operatically treated; but the musical portion of the present performance is too beautiful to be otherwise than gratefully accepted. I don't know where Mr Windmer found the setting of "Oh, Mistress Mine!" which Mr Lloyd Daubigny sings so charmingly. It seems curiously unlike the words, converting the Clown's light-hearted ditty into a solemn and plaintive dirge: but it is beautiful, exquisitely beautiful and touching. "Who is Sylvia?" treated as a serenade at the end of the third act, is perhaps not strikingly appropriate, but it, too, is perfectly rendered, while the stage, by an original and ingenious arrangement of lights, presents one of the loveliest pictures imaginable. The performance, take it all round, is capital. In the very first scene, Mr Hobart Bosworth, as Viola's sea-captain, led off by speaking his lines not only with perfect verbal correctness (alas, that we should have to remark on so simple and mechanical a virtue!), but with excellent phrasing and accentuation. Similar praise must be accorded to Mr John Craig, who did full justice both to the metre and the meaning of Orsino's lines. Miss Violet Vanbrugh made a pleasant and intelligent Olivia; and the other blank-verse parts, if not excellently treated, were at least not notoriously maltreated. Mr George Clarke's Malvolio lacked fantasy, but was otherwise quite respectable; Mr James Lewis was an admirable Sir Toby, incomparably the best I have ever seen; Mr Herbert Gresham, as Sir Andrew, was quite worthy of his partner; and Miss Catherine Lewis, though she somewhat over-elongated the sprightliness of Maria, was not so very florid in her humour as she is sometimes apt to be. The comic scenes, on the whole, had the true "festivitas," without which they are a weariness of the flesh. By the way, why does Mr Daly take all the humour out of Viola's appeal for "Some mollification for your giant, sweet lady," by making it apply to Malvolio instead of Maria? The contrast between Miss Rehan's stature and Miss Lewis's is quite sufficient to give the thing point, though Shakespeare no doubt intended Maria to be played by a mere "wren" of a boy.
Lastly, of Miss Rehan's Viola. It is a beautiful, a fascinating, a truly poetic creation—on the whole more pleasing, to my own personal taste, than her Rosaline. Its one prevailing defect is slowness. Strange that one should have to say this of a performance of Miss Rehan's, but it gives all of Viola except her sparkle, her vivacity. A large exception, you may say; but until you have seen Miss Rehan you don't know what liberal compensations she presents in the shape of tenderness, delicacy, and quiet, subdued humour. At the same time, there is every reason why she should try to bring her achievement up to the point of perfection by hastening the movement of several passages. She has adopted a curious sort of psalmody in her treatment of verse. She exaggerates her pauses, and lengthens out her vowel sounds, caressingly, beautifully, but, as I cannot but think, immoderately. I first noticed this tendency to what I then called grandiloquence in her performance of Maid Marian in *The Foresters*. It is an error on the right side, and gives a peculiar, dreamy, languorous charm to many passages of her Viola; but an error it certainly is when carried to excess. Now and then, too, she misses what I may call syllabic perfection in the wording of her lines, baffling the ear, for example, by saying, "I'm the man, if it be so 'tis," instead of "I am the man." Her worst slip of this nature occurs in the very first lines of her part. Can anything be more beautiful than the echoing cadence of—

> And what should I do in Illyria?  
> My brother, he is in Elysium,

which Miss Rehan ruins by omitting the "he"? But, after all possible deductions, this Viola remains a creation of in-describable beauty and charm—a thing to be seen, and never to be forgotten.

**Charles H. Shattuck (essay date 1987)**


For 1893 Daly determined to surpass all his previous Shakespearean accomplishments: in *Twelfth Night* he found stuff that appealed with extraordinary intensity to his "creative" instincts. He disassembled the play and rebuilt it, cleansed it of every grossness, doubled the amount of music that Shakespeare called for (but canceled that too gloomy song "Come away death"), hired Graham Robertson to costume it in the high esthetic mode, and invented the most striking scenic effects, from violent storm to rose garden by moonlight. By cutting more than six hundred lines he got rid of everything that might endanger the "poetry" and "beauty." His efforts hit popular taste exactly as he intended. In New York *Twelfth Night* ran for six weeks (February 21 to April 8); it finished the season in Boston; a year later it enjoyed over 100 performances in London; it stayed in Daly's repertory to the end.

Most of the publishing critics echoed or even promoted the popular enthusiasm. Yet there were deep divisions. Consider only the responses to Miss Rehan's Viola. Out of William Winter's review [in *The New York Tribune* (22 February 1893)] (some two thousand words, all evidently composed in advance) we may cull such sentences as these:

> Viola is a woman of deep sensibility: and that way Miss Rehan has comprehended and reproduced her, permitting a certain wistful sadness to glimmer through the gauze of kindly vivacity with which, otherwise, her whole bright and gentle figure is artfully swathed.… The great underlying cause of her brilliant success was the profound sincerity of her feeling—over which her glee was seen to play, as moonlight plays upon the rippling surface of the ocean depth.… Lovely reserve and aristocratic distinction blended in the performance, and dignified and endeared it. The melody of Shakespeare's verse—especially in the passage of Viola's renunciation—fell from her lips in a strain of fluent sweetness that enhanced its beauty and deepended the pathos of its under significance. In such tones the heart speaks.… Her elocution was at its best—concealing all premeditation, and flowing, as the brook flows, with
continuous music.… Her performance was as natural and as sweet as the opening of the rose.

Jeanette Gilder of The Critic [4 March, 1893] thought quite otherwise:

Miss Ada Rehan, when in her proper element, which is one of archness, or frolic or pretty petulance, is a most charming actress who need fear no rival; but in characters whose very essence is romantic, poetic and sentimental she is misplaced. Her defects are those of temperament, not of intelligence. Her delivery of verse is monotonous and unsympathetic, and her style of acting lacks the delicacy, refinement and grace necessarily associated with the heroines of poetry and imagination. In interpreting them she is compelled to restrain her own natural vivacity, and to substitute for it a colorless demeanor which is necessarily ineffective and often dull.

These opinions confronted each other everywhere in the press. Dithmar of the New York Times wrote two long reviews praising every aspect of the production, defending Daly from "the jibe and the jest and the sneer" so often directed against him, and declaring that "surely the actress never before seemed so lovely as she did in her page's garb, or spoke so well, or mingled in her acting archness and sentiment, the passion of womanhood, the unquenchable spirit of youth so deftly." Against this Towsie of the Evening Post declared that "in the more delicate, sentimental and purely poetic interludes her droning singsong robbed the familiar lines of almost all their familiar beauty." In Boston Arthur Warren of the Herald found nothing to blame; Clapp of the Advertiser and Mrs. Sutherland of the Transcript were reluctant to praise.

In The Critic Miss Gilder isolated one weakness of the production very clearly: "the general richness of the setting excites expectations with regard to the acting which, unfortunately, are not always realized." Daly's company, or what was left of it, was not right for the play. John Drew, who might have played Orsino, had defected. Otis Skinner was gone. Arthur Bourchier rehearsed Orsino but quarreled with Daly and resigned. The part was then taken on short notice and played without distinction by Creston Clarke (a nephew of Edwin Booth). Perky little James Lewis would be nobody's idea of a proper Toby Belch, but Daly padded his thighs and belly and instructed him to be jolly but not at all vulgar: the "carousal scenes" passed very tamely, said The Critic. Except for Winter, not even friends of the management were much amused by these scenes. George Clarke's Malvolio started off well enough, but his Yellow Stockings Scene lost its point because he was dressed in a dainty costume of pastel colors, pretty but not ridiculous: his cross-gartering consisted of bands of white ribbon on pale yellow hose. Feste, which Lewis might have made a good thing of, was relieved of most of his speeches and assigned to a sweet-voiced singer, Lloyd Daubigny, who was no comedian and was hardly called upon to "act" at all.

As for Miss Rehan's Viola, it appears that although she was adored for her personal beauty, she had great difficulty at first in finding what to make of the part. Her situation was much the same as that when Daly cast her as Helena in the Dream. There was no room in Viola for the explosiveness of her Katherine nor for the wit and merriment of her Rosalind. Viola, confined to a dramatic situation which she cannot dominate, has to be rescued from it; and Miss Rehan, thus prevented from lifting and carrying the play, was subdued by it. Happily, there are signs that in time her performance improved. When the production went to London, William Archer, A. B. Walkley, and [George Bernard] Shaw—though they could not abide Daly's arrangement of the text—were all delighted by her Viola. The Athenæum called it "bewitching." Archer took mild exception to the slowness of her speaking, her exaggerated pauses and excessively lengthened vowels, but both he and Walkley actually preferred her Viola to her Rosalind. For Shaw [in Our Theatres in the Nineties, 1932], "the moment she strikes up the true Shakespearian music, and feels her way to her part altogether by her sense of that music, the play returns to life and all the magic is there." When Clapp of Boston saw the play a second time in the autumn of 1894, he withdrew his initial objections and declared she had "accomplished a wonderful advance," was now "almost beyond praise." By 1898, Norman Hapgood, a hard man to please, sounded as deep in love with her Viola as everyone else: "As Viola her varied voice is
kept at its sweeter, easier, more natural tones, her face is quiet with a sad love, an expression across which the lighter humor flits from moment to moment. It stands as one of the best Shakespearean interpretations of the time" [New York Commercial Advertiser (January 27, 1898)].

Daly was far more interested in creating spectacular stage effects than concerned for Shakespeare's play, and his tamperings were so outrageous as to deserve the compliments of a certain philistine critic named Vance Thompson, who declared that "he is doing what Colley Cibbâr did for his generation, and he is doing it quite as well." According to this Thompson, Daly's "method of ameliorating and remodeling the Shakespearean plays is the only feasible one." Every generation must take from the plays those qualities which are "in the line of its own fashionable modes of amusement," and what the modern amusement hunter wants is "pretty faces, pretty music, pretty pictures." Thompson is aware that the attitude he is expressing is not that of a superior person: "but you and I, it is to be hoped, are not superior persons and have learned that when we cannot get the moon it is well to put up with the substitute of wholesome green cheese" [New York Commercial Advertiser (December 2, 1893)].

Shakespeare's opening scene sets theme and tone for the play as Duke Orsino, accompanied by sweet music, broods over his unrequited love for the lady Olivia; next Shakespeare presents Viola at the sea shore, just rescued from shipwreck, hoping desperately that her beloved brother has not been drowned. Daly was not the first nor would he be the last to "improve" the play by reversing these two scenes, but his improvement is the most radical that anyone ever perpetrated. He had read The Tempest and discovered there how to get the evening going with a bang. With darkened stage and Storm Music he worked up his theatre's full potential of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. Gradually the storm subsided, the music calmed, the rising dawn revealed through mists a boat lying alongside the rocky shore. The mists cleared. A Chorus was heard in the distance singing Ariel's song, "Come unto these yellow sands." When the lights were up to full, who should arrive but Viola's brother Sebastian and his rescuer Antonio, who were not supposed to be seen until Shakespeare's second act. When they explained themselves and went their ways, the Chorus, a band of happy Illyrian peasants, danced across the stage singing "Come unto these yellow sands" at top volume. Then at last came Viola with her Captain, sailors, and baggage, the Captain singing another snatch from The Tempest—Stephano's "I shall no more to sea, to sea. Here shall I die on shore." Viola's worry about her brother may have seemed a bit pointless, since the audience had just seen him in perfect health, but probably at that moment the audience was less concerned with plot than Viola's glorious costume. Though just arrived out of the stormy ocean, she appeared to be on her way to a fashionable soirée—a white gown embroidered with delicate gold patterns, the deep sleeves trimmed with wide gold fringe, a full-length rose-red cape draped from her shoulders.

When she heard about Orsino, and went off to "serve this duke," Daly then turned back to Shakespeare's opening scene. Probably he was uneasy about the boldness of his "improvement," for he consulted the leading American Shakespearean, H. H. Furness, about it. Furness's response [in a letter to Daly of January 27, 1893] must have gratified him hugely, and encouraged him to commit even further violations of the text:

In the name of sanctity why do you think I'll be shocked at any changes which a modern playwright thinks best to make in the omission or transposition of scenes in Shakespeare? His stage is not our stage, his audiences are not our audiences.' Tis only additions like Dryden's, Tate's or Garrick's that are lèse majesté. Your partial combination of the two seacoast scenes strikes me as excellent.

Furness urged him, too, to eliminate the final appearance of Malvolio, a suggestion which Daly would accept and improve upon.

When he finally got round to the Orsino Scene he had quite lost sight of its Shakespearean significance, and after the Storm Scene it must have seemed to him impossibly thin and feeble. He glamorized it. When the
curtain rose on the love-lorn bachelor in his palatial quarters, he did not strike one as love-lorn at all: nine pretty girls—musicians, singers, and dancers—stood or knelt or lay about the stage. When he called for music they treated him not to a brief strain with a dying fall, but a full concert rendition of Sir Henry Bishop’s setting of the twenty-fifth stanza of *Venus and Adonis*, "Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear." After the song they performed an Oriental dance.

There was a technical reason for thus stretching out this first Orsino scene. At the end of it Orsino would cut ahead to scene four, calling for Cesario, and Miss Rehan had to be ready at the entrance in her green doublet and hose (identical with the costume in which we have already seen her brother). As Shakespeare arranged his narrative, she would have had the long Sir Toby scene (I. iii) in which to make the costume change, but in order to reduce the amount of scene-shifting Daly postponed the Sir Toby scene and tacked together two Orsino scenes (I. i and I. iv). Thus, in order to give Miss Rehan time enough in her dressing room he had to pad the first Orsino Scene with song and dance.

The "carousal" scenes (Shakespeare's I. iii and II. iii, also tacked together) were not played below stairs, as had long been the custom, but in Olivia's beautifully appointed drawing room—dainty furniture, a bronze chandelier, gilt statues on tall pedestals—and through a wide archway at the back a view of a pretty garden. It was hardly the ambience for Shakespeare's low comedy. But Daly did not want it to be very low. William Winter had urged from the beginning that "Sir Toby will not be made a foul & dirty Sir Toby—for that is not necessary." Business with tobacco pipes and flagons was kept to a minimum and nobody got very drunk or very amusing. In the second of these scenes, the late night one, there was a great deal of singing of "catches," all those named by Shakespeare—"Hold thy peace," "Three merry men be we," and "There dwelt a man in Babylon." Daly added two more that had crept into the play a century earlier:

> Christmas comes but once a year  
> And therefore we'll be jolly

and this one, probably sung as a round:

> Which is the properest day to drink,  
> Saturday, Sunday, Monday?  
> Each is the properest day I think.  
> Why should I name but one day?  
> Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,  
> Saturday, Sunday, Monday.

Feste did not sing "O mistress mine" in this scene but at Orsino's court in place of "Come away, death."

The gulling of Malvolio—the Letter Scene—took place in a spectacularly beautiful garden in front of Olivia's house. The house, a two-story structure, which one entered by mounting steps at either end of a high porch, stood at an angle at stage right. Downstage of the porch and near it was a garden chair, and across at stage left a stone bench. While Malvolio strolled about center stage, musing and preening himself, the pranksters hid behind a massive bank of very pink roses at upper left center. Across the back of the garden was a kind of picket fence with an arched opening at center, beyond which lay another flowered garden and beyond that the sea.

To mark the transition between the Letter Scene and Cesario's second visit to Olivia, which followed without intervening dialogue, Feste sang the first stanza of "It was a lording's daughter," the fifteenth item in Shakespeare's *The Passionate Pilgrim*. 
The sentimental climax of the play was entirely a Daly intervention—a tableau sustained by a serenade. After the farcical violence of the Cesario-Sir Andrew duel, Viola heard words from Antonio that intimated that her brother was alive. Sinking into the garden chair near the porch she soliloquized, "O, if it prove, Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love." Dusk was gathering, the new moon rose over the sea (in the west!), and music sounded. Through the archway up center came Orsino, followed by his band of girl-musicians, who half-hidden behind the bank of roses sang "Fair Olivia, what is she?" (Schubert's setting of the Sylvia song from The Two Gentlemen of Verona). Olivia appeared on her high porch, and looking down discovered Orsino gazing up at her. Turning away in annoyance, she discovered Cesario, and fixed her gaze lovingly on him—who was, of course, gazingly lovingly at Orsino. "The garden was all in moonlight," wrote William Winter [in his Shakespeare on the Stage, 1911] "The delicious music flowed on, and over that perfect pageant of romance the curtain fell." Even Bernard Shaw allowed that this Dalyism was both permissible and seductive, "thanks to Schubert and to the conductor, Mr. Henry Widmer, who has handled the music in such a fashion as to get the last drop of honey out of it."

All that remained of the play (Acts IV and V) after this feast of music and moonlight Daly packed into a single act. Not much remained that served Daly's purpose: a bit of sword play between Sir Toby and Sebastian, Olivia's drawing Sebastian offstage to marry him, the recognition between brother and sister, and Orsino's taking Viola for his "fancy's queen."

There was no room for Malvolio in this world of happy lovers. Everything after his Yellow Stockings Scene—the Prison Scene, his demand for retribution, his furious exit ("I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you")—was eventually canceled. Furness had urged Daly to omit Malvolio's very last appearance: "We really do not want to see Malvolio again—the laugh has died out & it can with difficulty be revived." Furness as much as Daly appears to have been oblivious to the ambivalence, the irony, the weight of the Malvolio story: Malvolio was a joke or he was nothing. And Daly objected to Malvolio even more strongly. As he told Winter, Malvolio's ordeal was painful and tiresome. He had got all the laughs that could be got out of the foolish gull, and these bitter passages only undercut and destroyed the "poetical" climax which he had so cunningly created. Though he printed the Prison Scene, he cut it from the performance. He sped the love affairs to their joyous conclusion, and while Feste and Maria sang the three most "innocent" stanzas of "Hey, ho, the wind and the rain," the company of lovers danced a galliard.

Of the many reviews of this Twelfth Night that I have seen, surprisingly few have been troubled that Daly smashed the play in order to turn it into a musical entertainment. Arthur Warren of the Boston Herald [April 18, 1893] offered an apologetic nod to those devoted Shakespeareans who might regard it as sacrilegious to cut lines, dispense with scenes, and subordinate characters in order to suit the tastes of modern audiences. "Malvolio has been somewhat slighted," Warren admitted, "and he is not as prominent a figure in the comedy as the author intended he should be, but, after all, there is much matter concerning this character which usually has the effect of wearying an audience." That idiot, before mentioned, who would give up the moon for wholesome green cheese, defended Daly with the argument that "it is no compliment to Shakespeare to make art dull." When the play got to England, William Archer reminded us that he disapproved of Daly's method, but as if weary of the struggle he only cited a few absurd misreadings and omissions (Feste was denied his "Ginger shall be hot i' the mouth too"), and borrowed a few neat whacks from Shaw, who, as Corno di Bassetto, was responsible only for covering the music.

Only Henry Clapp of Boston, after a second viewing, was sufficiently annoyed to enter sustained complaint. The best parts of the performance, he acknowledged, were "almost beyond praise," but there was "much which could scarcely be endured." The singing was abundant and excellent, and the choral rendition of "Bid me discourse" was pleasant to the ear—"even if the eye was a little amused by the resemblance of the court of Orsino, the 'bachelor' duke, to a Turkish seraglio." But in order to make room for so much music, and as a concession to scenic arrangements, "characters are made to march in and out with utter unreason," and Daly
found it necessary to tear and pare and clip and snip Shakespeare's text… with a frankly insolent recklessness which would not have discredited Colley Cibber or Nahum Tate. Passages memorable in every line are presented in scarcely recognizable fragments; many of the most familiar are sacrificed altogether; and not seldom a cruel telephone abridgement is practised upon splendid pieces of wit, and the audience are treated to an exact half of some immortal world-famous joke. Turning *Twelfth Night* from a comedy into an operetta, even in a half dozen scenes, is certainly illegitimate. But the most extraordinary defeat of the spirit of comedy achieved by this version must not escape being noted. For the first time in who can say how many centuries, the entire revels of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and the Clown are conducted without the assistance of apparent drinking and smoking,—perhaps for fear of spoiling the scenery.

The revelry concluded with a noisy dance and no words: it was useless for Sir Toby to shout "it's too late to go to bed now" when there was neither wine nor tobacco to stay up for.

But not even Clapp takes exception to the dismissal of Malvolio from the play after the Yellow Stockings Scene. All that seriously mattered, even to Clapp, was that "the evening was made beautiful and delightful by Miss Rehan's Viola."

And that, of course, was Daly's whole intention—to feed the public appetite for prettiness and sentiment. He gave them lovely scenery bathed in atmospheric sweetness, pretty costumes designed by the delicate artist Graham Robertson (and to Robertson's dismay, redesigned them to make them prettier), beautiful women, nothing to embarrass or worry anyone, and over all a wash of lovely music gathered *ad libitum* from anywhere. And Daly was rewarded. The historian and diplomat John Hay, for instance, thanked him [in a letter of March 29, 1893] for "this beautiful and masterly presentation of one of Shakespeare's most poetical works." Hay had come up to New York from Washington especially to take his children to it, and his own delight had been heightened by theirs. "It is hard to estimate the good you are doing in putting before the public such a magnificent result of combined industry, liberality, intelligence, and taste," he wrote. "Your *Twelfth Night* is saturated with beauty and poetry; the most enchanting dreams of fairyland are there, incarnate before our eyes. I hardly see how scenic art can go farther."

**PRODUCTION:**

Margaret Webster • Theatre Guild • 1940-41

**BACKGROUND:**

One of the most prominent American stagings of *Twelfth Night* in the first half of the twentieth century was the 1940-41 Theatre Guild production at the St. James Theatre, New York. Directed by Margaret Webster, the production starred Maurice Evans as Malvolio, a performance that departed from tradition in making use of a Cockney accent. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt commented that "Olivia's major-domo emerges as the correct British butler." Grenville Vernon enthused over this performance, maintaining that "Mr. Evans reaches the peak of his accomplishment in the most subtle, most beautifully articulated performance of the part I have ever seen." Joseph Wood Krutch, however, asserted that Evans's comic portrayal debased the role and was "false to Shakespeare's conception." Another portrayal that received mixed reviews was that of Helen Hayes in the part of Viola. Krutch argued that "so far as she herself is concerned there is in truth, very little left to be desired." Stark Young, by contrast, criticized her delivery of Shakespeare's blank verse, maintaining that she turned "most of all that poetic treasure into mere chirpy prose." Similarly, Rosamond Gilder commented that Hayes's performance lacked spontaneity and that only once or twice did she "release the full lyric loveliness of the part." Critics generally agreed that the production provided a splendid evening's entertainment, while nevertheless judging Webster's direction to have emphasized lively stage business at the expense of poetic
interpretation. The cast included Mark Smith as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Donald Burr as Feste, Sophie Stewart as Olivia, Wesley Addy as Orsino, and June Walker as Maria.

COMMENTARY:

Joseph Wood Krutch (review date 30 November 1940)


Presumably Shakespeare's contemporaries had no difficulty in knowing just how to take Twelfth Night and the other romantic comedies. But it has not always been so. In the next age that indefatigable playgoer Mr. Pepys witnessed a revival of the tale of Viola's misadventures, and he was probably speaking for most of his contemporaries when he called it "one of the weakest plays that ever I saw." Even today it would not be hard to find intelligent people ready to agree with Mr. Pepys, or with Bernard Shaw, who professed himself so unable to find in the whole group of comedies anything except brainless inanity that he was compelled to suppose titles like "As You Like It" and subtitles like "What You Will" were intended by Shakespeare as disavowals of responsibility. Neither can it be denied that the question of the ultimate artistic intention of these comedies presents a problem in a sense that the great tragedies do not. One may, to be sure, argue endlessly over the proper interpretation to be put upon Hamlet, but there is at least no doubt that it must be presented as tragedy in the grand style. There is, on the other hand, a real doubt as to what kind of comedy Twelfth Night is, a real doubt as to the seriousness of its artistic pretensions and the general nature of its comic intention. Is it, as apparently the Victorians presumed, romantically naive, sentimental, and whimsical to an extent which renders it almost literally brainless? Is it a merely random mixture of somewhat precious poetry and low comedy? Or do the two sets of characters bear some real relation to each other; so that the play as a whole means something more than the mere sum of its poetic and farcical elements?

For all these reasons the new and elaborate production of Twelfth Night (St. James Theater) with Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans is a bolder undertaking than any of the other recent revivals of Shakespeare. The play is not, as Hamlet is, fool-proof—at least to the extent that it cannot fail to be in some degree interesting. Audiences are probably less disposed to take naturally to it, and under the circumstances the first thing to be said is simply that it is, without question, the best production of this or any of the romantic comedies seen here in many a day and that it deserves the success which it is pretty certain to enjoy. Considered simply as an evening's entertainment, it is rich and unflagging; where it falls short of everything one could wish, it falls short because it manages almost too skilfully to avoid facing fundamental questions, because it never even tries to suggest what all the romantic posturing and all the simple fun add up to; because, indeed, it seems to assume that the whole means no more than the individual parts.

Of the performances the best is certainly that of Helen Hayes, and so far as she herself is concerned there is, in truth, very little left to be desired. Her Viola is not only charming and richly inventive; she is also mischievous, and she is dominated by a sense of fun which saves her from the mere cuteness which some performers have made cloying. Miss Hayes is superb in the scene of her first appearance before Olivia, and all through the play she delights one by striking just the right note—as she does, to cite a single example, in the soliloquy leading up to the conclusion that to her the proud Olivia has lost her heart. Here Miss Hayes, instead of being wistful or tender, exclaims, "She loves me!" with an accent of half-delighted and half-incredulous astonishment which makes completely evident the "Well, I'll be damned!" mentally accompanying it and thus keeps the mood of exuberant fun in which the whole part is played. Mr. Evans's Malvolio, considered simply as a comic characterization, is almost as good, even though his interpretation of the role debasea it almost to that of a mere comic butler and therefore seems to me to be not only false to Shakespeare's conception but incompatible with that interpretation of the play as a whole which I believe to be the best one. June Walker's Maria is delightfully comic, and Margaret Webster's direction, as it was in Henry IV, is highly competent in
purely theatrical ways though almost too ready to put before everything else amusing business and mere liveliness on the stage. She manages to make every moment active and amusing enough so that an audience is never aware that anything more is possible or even desirable, but her solution of the problem of how to hold the play together is largely a theatrical rather than a poetic or imaginative one.

I can only wish that she had read—and pondered—Mark Van Doren's recent *Shakespeare*, in which he so illuminatingly and persuasively states the case for the assumption that the whole group of romantic comedies of which *Twelfth Night* is one are alike in that each is a poetic whole integrated by the same problem or at least the same contrast, that the central theme in each is the clash between an aristocracy which is cultivated, self-consciously exquisite, and fundamentally decadent and the representatives of some cruder but more full-blooded or more wilful group. In *The Merchant of Venice* Antonio's first speech announces luxuriously that he knows not why he is so sad; in *Twelfth Night* Orsino demands more of the musical food of love, only to announce a few seconds later that he has now achieved the surfeit he was seeking. But Antonio and Antonio's friends have to reckon with Shylock and something which threatens their world of finicky gentility just as Orsino and his friends have to reckon, not only with Sir Toby, but also—in the person of Malvolio—with a middle class just learning to be ambitious. Out of the balance of sympathies between these two groups the finest music of the plays arises, and yet the fact that in the present production the first scene ("If music be the food of love, play on") is the poorest in the whole play and quite pointless except in so far as it provides a factual exposition, shows how completely the deepest theme of the play has been missed. As here played, *Twelfth Night* is a delightful evening's entertainment. But it could conceivably be better, not merely quantitatively but qualitatively as well.

Stark Young (review date 2 December 1940)


It is only fair to say of the new production of *Twelfth Night: or, What You Will* that some of our best critics have found it an occasion of great merit. They have found in it a deal of sweet enchantment, fun, loveliness, and wit and merriment. If you can get that from the occasion, you are lucky; for that was Shakespeare's intention undoubtedly.

To my mind the event is very dull, not to say banal, unromantic and pedestrian. And in the familiar manner of the Theatre Guild is without joy. It does not seem to rise on pleasant exercise. Culture has the relation to pleasure or satisfaction that any other access of vitality has. We should not be led to wonder, as I was at the Guild production of *Twelfth Night*, why the producers took so much trouble or ever bothered with this play at all. Culture or no culture for the joy of it, the producers here have indeed taken a great deal of trouble, and labored to bring to their enterprise many a rich resource—for example, Mr. Paul Bowles's music, which underlies the play, delicate but firm, suggesting the antique but not going stale, and seeming at times more visible than heard note by note, Une by line.

The star of this Theatre-Guild-Gilbert-Miller-Helen-Hayes-Maurice-Evans production is Mr. Stewart Chaney. This youngest wren of nine carries off the majority of the honors; his décor has a beautiful richness that ought to be obvious and expected—the sources being what they are for theatre design within this period—but that is, among our designers, very rare and unfamiliar. One thing only I would suggest; it involves lighting. In the lines of the play three days are spoken of and also three months, so that we may assume some changing of the clock. More variations in the hour of day, the tone and assertion of the light, on Mr. Chaney's part would add to the scenes’ dramatic value. Otherwise his settings have a certain lightness for the play, and a Renaissance splendor and knowledge. The costumes provide an admirable reminder of Veronese, Tintoretto, Tiepolo—what you will—and are especially effective for the minor characters, who very likely do what they are told. Mr. Evans' costume for Malvolio has something too much of style and elegance for its right dramatic
purposes; though this might be forgiven as court-masque if it were not that Shakespeare's motif of the yellow
ing stockings and cross-gartering gets no chance. There is no costume whatsoever that is worth killing the
dramatic point to such an extent. Maria's costumes, with their stripes and fine tones and surfaces, go wrong
dramatically, unless, that is, this whole event be conceived as pure masque, free revel and artifice. That
conception, however, the acting completely denies.

A point to keep in mind about Twelfth Night is that it is one of those theatre works that can do as it pleases, all
glancing light, artificial device, lyric departure from cold fact. At the same time, however, we can suffer no
harm in remembering that by way of Barnabe Riche (1581) and in turn from the thirty-sixth story in Part II of
Bandello's Novelle, the play descends from those novels of later Greece that circulated endlessly in the classic
groves but that are rarely mentioned in our schools. It happens to be the case just now, however, that history
repeats itself and that we can comprehend more readily the way in which this Greek source was not so
arbitrary and fanciful as might be supposed. Taking up the newspaper any day almost, we may read how
people are ordered out of a country with half an hour's notice, bag and baggage, scattered over the earth,
forwarded, gutted, misplaced or lost. Your sister, your twin, your traveling companion or adventurous helper
is who knows where and may turn up when, by chance? The Greek novels, those romances and vagaries so
different from the high-horse business of college Greek departments, rested partly on a foundation in fact, on
the actual-incredible, something as the figures in Balinese sculpture come back finally to a certain anatomy in
that race. We are not obliged, therefore, to be too wholly incredulous as to the fable in Twelfth Night, too
scornful of the tale's improbability, any more than we need doubt, trim down and be afraid to risk its freedom,
quirs and lyric romance.

So far as the verse goes, Twelfth Night has the elements of Shakespeare's middle period: boldness and
freedom of the metrical scheme, keeping on the whole the older form. For the most part the reading of the
company in this new production is inadequate, frightened of, or slurring, the metrical values, and without
precision for the stresses that convey the sense. Few of the players are less successful in the reading of
Shakespeare's lines, in their poetic and metrical values, than Miss Helen Hayes herself in that starry script
Viola has to speak. Miss Hayes turns most of all that poetic treasure into mere chirpy prose. The poetic line, a
living thing on the stage, can survive only a certain amount of so-called naturalness, conciliative, perhaps, but
mistaken. In general Miss Hayes brought her usual, highly honorable professional application to her role, but
Shakespeare's Viola is not for her.

Nothing is served by bringing up the matter of Duke Orsino, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby—all fine
roles—and the performances given them (Orsino had a superb costume). How Miss Margaret Webster, who is
one of our most literate directors, turned such matters over in a heavy heart, may be left to conjecture.

With his Malvolio, Mr. Maurice Evans, choosing to adopt a sort of Thackeray squire make-up and a cockney
accent—brings to the whole occasion a touch of the professional that is to say the least refreshing. Malvolio is
a part that has been done by a number of illustrious players—Irvin for example—and is easily within any
actor's ambition. It is one of the darkest and most terrific things in Shakespeare and too strong, I have always
thought, for our present-day stomachs. Granted the toning down of the bite, of the shadowed and the ominous,
of the raw, distraught and eloquent, the Renaissance complexity, Mr. Evans' Malvolio is good and will be
better. He is still searching for the plane he wants to have it on and the exact breadth and extravagance of the
style he wants for it.

Grenville Vernon (review date 6 December 1940)


If Twelfth Night has ever received a New York production in which the acting level was higher or the staging
more vital, it has not been in the memory of my generation. There are many to thank for this, the real opening
of the season of 1940-41. There are the Theatre Guild and Gilbert Miller for sponsoring it, Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner for supervising it, Stewart Chaney for designing the settings and costumes, Margaret Webster for directing it, and the magnificent cast for playing it. *Twelfth Night* is a play that needs to be produced with vivacity, yet with poetry; with humor, yet with romance. This Miss Webster has accomplished, and in accomplishing it clinches her position as our most vital and original Shakespearean director. But Miss Webster had magnificent material to work with. Let me speak first of Maurice Evans.

In Malvolio Mr. Evans reaches the peak of his accomplishment in the most subtle, most beautifully articulated performance of the part I have ever seen. His Malvolio is a Cockney, a head butler raised to sublimation; not a figure of farce, but one of high comedy. E. H. Sothern made Malvolio an aristocrat in decadence, Evans makes him a butler in ascendent. In face, in walk, in gesture, in the gradations of his voice he is superb; to hear him utter the one word "Run?" in reply to Olivia's injunction is to hear him project his whole character in that single monosyllable. Mr. Evans's Malvolio is the Prince of Snobs, delightful, pathetic, unforgettable. Miss Helen Hayes's Viola is exquisitely human and humorous. In her scenes with Olivia and especially in her duelling with Sir Andrew, she is inimitable, and throughout is captivating and utterly sincere. What she lacks is in the poetic reading of her lines, and in romance. Hers is not an aristocratic Viola, but it is within its own conception an exquisitely thought out and executed figure. If she doesn't make one forget Jane Cowl or Julia Marlowe, she makes you remember Helen Hayes. The Olivia of Sophie Stewart is the best I have seen, a lady who combines charm and humor with the grand manner, and who knows how to speak her lines exquisitely. Wesley Addy fails to make Orsino effective because he tries to make him sensible. Orsino's lines are music, and nothing else, and they must be read as such. Mr. Addy attempts to make them express ideas, and succeeds only in making the character and the lines alike flat. Donald Burr is superb as Feste, both in his singing and his acting. His is the way a Shakespearean clown should be played and rarely is. June Walker is perfectly cast as Maria, acting with sprightliness and charm. It is a pity that Mark Smith's Sir Toby Belch shouldn't have been funnier, and the same applied to a lesser degree to Wallace Acton's Sir Andrew Aguecheek. A word of commendation too should be given to Ellis Irving for his Sebastian. In short with *Twelfth Night* the theatrical season at last bursts into life.

**Rosamond Gilder (review date January 1941)**


With a Presidential campaign behind us and preparedness ahead, with Europe's capitals in flames and war spreading like an insane octopus all over the habitable globe, Broadway takes time off for comedy, more comedy, nothing but comedy. As though fearful lest the dark thoughts that shadow us by day, that blacken newspaper headlines and blare at us through the air, should cross the threshold of the twenty-odd playhouses now open along Broadway, producers, authors, musicians and actors have united in a conspiracy of laughter. The latest recruit to the army of good cheer is no other than Shakespeare himself. *Twelfth Night* is true holiday fare, a light-hearted masque full of music, lovers, clowns, absurdities—*What You Will*—as its author cheerfully indicates. Written three hundred years ago as a divertissement for the January Sixth festival, the name of which it bears, it is perennially young. As Orsino says, it is, indeed,

Silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love
Like the old age.

To do justice to this antique song, the Theatre Guild has assembled a formidable array of talents. The billing is as complex as a musical comedy. In this their first production of the season, the Guild joins hands with Gilbert Miller as producers; Margaret Webster, past-mistress in Shakespearean governance, directs; Stewart Chaney designs; there is music by Paul Bowles, supervision by Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner, an impressive array of stars of the second magnitude—June Walker, Mark Smith, Sophie Stuart, Wesley
Addy—and, shining bright in the mid-firmament, the twin planets Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans. The result of all these combined excellences is indeed a feast for holiday makers, colorful, smoothly articulated, inventive, engaging. Miss Webster orchestrates her scenes ably, using all the resources of the theatre—settings, music, movement, grouping, costumes, properties—with her customary resourcefulness. She has been well served by her collaborators. Mr. Chaney's settings in the manner of the Stuart masques and of the early Restoration theatre are happily in the spirit of this playful fantasy. His false proscenium, decked with billowing painted curtains, frames an inner stage which, when its curtains are drawn, can be set in the twinkling of an eye. With backdrops painted in perspective a set piece or two, the scene changes from Orsino's palace to Olivia's garden, from the buttery to the street or to my lady's chamber. Miss Webster, abetted by Shakespeare, has devised innumerable ways of bridging the gap between scenes: sometimes Feste repeats a verse of his song, sometimes a lamp-lighter passes, sometimes Viola is seen marching Olivia-ward with Orsino's gentlemen in attendance. It all flows freely through a theatrical, never-never land where candelabra hang on curves of sky, where conspirators hide behind realistic bushes half their size, where all the make-believe of yesterday and today meets in a merry jumble.

Following the Stuart pattern, Mr. Chaney costumed his actors in knee breeches, his actresses in the tight-waisted free flowing dresses of the period. The play, incidentally, was very popular at the time of the reopening of the theatres under Charles II. Betterton gave it as his second production, Hamlet being his first. It provided one of the first 'breeches parts' for a woman and ran with 'mighty success' for many performances, though Pepys, never an enthusiastic Shakespearean, did not like it. He called it a 'silly play not related at all to the name or the day'. But he would have liked the current production. Its bright colors, its frills and furbelows, its little blackamoor carrying a pink parasol, its glitter and gaiety would have appealed to him. He would have enjoyed its pretty girls with their low-cut dresses without bothering to question why Olivia's household, steeped in mourning and ruled by a near-Puritan, should go thus accoutred. He would have enjoyed 'mightily' Paul Bowles' music though he might have been confused by our modern convention which accepts the fact that actors on the stage do not even twang their guitars while the music of the 'consort' floats up from a hidden orchestra pit. The music in this production is, indeed, all-important. It supplies the tender, lyric mood which is as much a part of the play as its more obvious fun. For Twelfth Night is not all foolery. Its theme is love frustrated, even its clown's songs are plaintive—they have a dying fall.

When Shakespeare wrote his play he posed a pretty problem to his boy-actors. He called upon them to be boys pretending to be girls pretending to be boys, undoubtedly the jest within the jest of Viola's impersonation added spice as well as some faint degree of verisimilitude to the original performances; the boy-actor could reasonably pass for a boy. But modern Violas are unfalteringly feminine even when they are as slim, youthful and bright-eyed as Miss Hayes. She makes a charming picture with her hair curled about her piquant face, her cocky hat on the back of her head, her striped knee breeches and rosette trimmed shoes. She wears her 'man's attire' without aggressive swagger and gives the kind of honest, direct performance that we have come to expect of an artist of her integrity. But she is not entirely at ease in the play itself. Many of her attitudes, positions, gestures, movements seem the result of direction, not the outgrowth of situation. Her performance lacks spontaneity, as it lacks real poetry; it is occasionally humorous and it is always gay and sweet and lovely as is everything Miss Hayes touches; there is about her an unaggressive, but an irresistible appeal; yet only once or twice throughout the evening does she release the full lyric loveliness of the part. One of the high points is the scene when Malvolio gives her Olivia's ring and the subsequent soliloquy with its direct, unaffected address to the audience.

As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman,—now alas the day!—
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O time, thou must untangle this, not I:
It is too hard a knot for me to untie!
But her finest moment is at the end, when, her identity at last discovered, Orsino turns to her with

    Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
    Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.

and Viola answers:

    And all those sayings will I over-swear,
    And all those swearings keep as true in soul
    As doth that orbed continent the fire
    That severs day from night.

As Miss Hayes stands very quietly before the duke, looking up at him with a complete, absorbed concentration, tenderness is made manifest; her voice, her attitude, her expression glow with that inner fire, that lambency which is the essence of the actor's art.

If Miss Hayes' attack on Shakespeare is somewhat pedestrian and lacking in style, Mr. Evans as Malvolio has enough of it for a whole cry of players. His entrance in the pompous black of his steward's office, his gold chain about his neck, his high flared collar setting off a face unexpectedly adorned with goatee and sideburns, his high-soaring eyebrows expressing a noble self-complacency, an invincible hauteur, is an event in itself. He registers at once Malvolio's enormous conceit, his high seriousness, his disapproval of frivolity. In order to break away from the ordinary pattern of Shakespearean speech, and from the confines of his own successes in it, Mr. Evans has provided Malvolio with a genteel cockney accent. He scans his speech with care, avoiding h's where they do not belong, breathing upon them lovingly in their right places. This amusing trick keeps his voice well away from the music of the bard's blank verse with which his audiences have associated it so closely during these last years. The accent makes Malvolio's dream of Olivia's favor more ridiculous than ever and it adds yet another note to the chorus of colloquial speech with which American productions of Shakespeare are afflicted, but it is justified by Mr. Evans' use of it as a comic device. His performance is sprinkled with genuinely witty moments, as for instance, when Olivia bids him

    Run after that same peevish messenger,
    The county's man: he left this ring behind
    him…

Mr. Evans interjects a 'Run!!' which is as full of comment as a whole speech could be. In that one word he expresses his outraged dignity, his shock, his surprise and disapproval of the whole procedure. The subsequent scene with Viola is a delightful vignette of wit in performance. He is less successful in the latter part of the play and fails to rise to the final dignity of a man who has been 'notoriously wronged'. Malvolio becomes in the end, thanks to the all-embracing humanity of Shakespeare, a moving as well as a ridiculous figure. Though he is the grotesque pendant to this trilogy of misplaced loves, he is also a poignant example of the sin against the 'holy ghost' of human dignity. Mr. Evans does little with this aspect of the character, but the technical skill, the dash and accuracy of his acting, sets his performance high in his gallery of Shakespearean portraiture.

The play as a whole suffers from the usual problems that face any classic production which must be brought together in a short three weeks. Individual performances are un-even in themselves and often unconnected with their surroundings. Wesley Addy's Orsino is handsome and has a bold, Renaissance flourish, but it is dry, sharp. He hammers his lines in his effort not to sing them. June Walker suffers from the necessity of filling a big theatre with a voice that tends to become shrill when it is forced, but she has a natural sweetness and gaiety that help her interpretation of an unkind part. The chief comics, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, played by Mark Smith and Wallace Acton, labor not too successfully with the scenes of
Elizabethan revelry, which require more gusto and comic relish.

Since this is so lyric a play—full of lovely sounds and songs—voice, speech, diction, delivery are all important and difficult to achieve in a theatre that provides its actors with no steady opportunity for development and experience. Miss Webster has cast the Feste from the ranks of musical comedy and has thereby obtained a fine voice for the songs with which it is studded. Donald Burr is husky and high-spirited. He sings easily and well and plays with vigor if without subtlety. The production as a whole shares this fault. It never coheres around a central mood; it lacks intention except the obvious one of achieving a smooth-running, vigorous performance. It has beauty, energy, competence, charm, but its lyric pulse beats low. This reservation accepted, the *Twelfth Night* at the St. James is a merry revel indeed, a feast for the eye and ear, a joy to the mind.

**Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt** (review date March 1941)


"A Great while ago the world began" and ever since men and women have been making their own dream worlds while poets, who set boundaries to dreams, show what may happen on that far Illyrian shore where Shakespeare has set his comedy. Twelfth Night was the old English name for the Feast of the Epiphany and it marked the close of all the Christmas festivities; the minor note that is sounded in the title is the minor note of Elizabethan music and of all real comedy—the wishfulness of dreaming. Comedies of manner have their brief passing season but comedy written round the vagaries of human dreams is timeless. Have there not been young men since the world began who fancied that they were dying of love? Have there not been rich ladies who desired only the unobtainable? And when have girls ever ceased to want heroes, or conceited men to see themselves distorted? Because he, himself, was too much a part of the British scene to keep it out of Illyria, Shakespeare has interposed between his dream makers some hearty British clowning and blended them together with one of his favorite and mysterious types of philosopher, the Jester. Feste is the link between the palace and the kitchen; between the homely folk who laugh at their own foolishness and the clever people who sigh over it, and when Malvolio tries to rise from the lower to the higher level, they pull him back with a robust brutality that grates on modern squeamishness. Augustin Daly, by the way, fearlessly removed from his *Twelfth Night* the baiting of Malvolio in the madhouse. Unless Shakespeare meant it to give a touch of macabre pathos to the comedy, there seems small point in retaining it now as, to play it for humor, only makes for general discomfort.

William Winter points out that King Charles I. drew his pen through the title, *Twelfth Night*, on the Second Folio in the royal library and substituted *Malvolio!*

To hear Malvolio, that cross-garter'd Gull,
The Cockpit, Gallery, Boxes all are full —

In adding Malvolio to his repertory, Mr. Evans has followed the tradition of Macklin, Sir Henry Irving, Sir Beerbohm Tree and E. H. Sothern, but he has also brought to the part a new vision. For the first time, the solemn steward speaks in solemn Cockney as, disdaining all pretense of Dalmatian attributes, Olivia's major-domo emerges as the correct British buttler. Mr. Evans has also cornered a new laugh when, at Olivia's command,

Run after that same peevish messenger
The County's man —

he interrupts the pentameter and interpolates his now famous
Run?

which integrates his whole character.

He and Miss Hayes also make the most out of the large stiff nosegay which Viola holds as she makes her first speech to Olivia and finally thrusts into Malvolio's hands. When he is sent "running" after her with the ring, which he presents with the usual business of the staff, he turns back and, dragging the nosegay out of the coattail's pocket, flings it at the feet of the boy for whom he has the full bureaucratic contempt of a minor official. After the garter scene, Mr. Evans removes the long black lacings which Maria surreptitiously ties to his belt and he stalks off with them trailing behind him. His costume, in accord with his characterization, has the stiff white shirt front, black tie and "tails" of butlerdom but his top hat carries cocksfeathers for the fantasy.

Viola, one of the gentlest and most unselfish of all Shakespeare's ladies, can cloy if played without humor. Mrs. Jordan was the first of the celebrated Violas, then came Mrs. Kean (Ellen Tree) and Adelaide Nielsen who was likened to "April sunshine." I never saw the Viola of Ellen Terry but she was always dissatisfied with herself in the part. Viola was born for me with Ada Rehan, glowing and romantic. Modjeska and Margaret Anglin were disappointments, so was Viola Allen but the poetry, of which Viola is the embodiment, was recreated by Julia Marlowe and Jane Cowl. Miss Hayes's Viola is not so much a lovelorn maid as a delightful urchin. So heartily and bravely does she assume the boy that the audience almost shares Olivia's mystification. As the boy has all of Miss Hayes's sensitive honesty, he is the nicest boy imaginable and, in her neat gray breeches, forsaking majesty, Miss Hayes affects the easy postures but never the swagger of young manhood. She is really funny in her first scene with Olivia and very, very funny in the duel but equally real is her solicitude for the Duke and Olivia. The strength of her passion for the Duke is less convincing. In Daly's production, "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?" was transposed to the scene between Orsino and Viola and at the line "Journeys end in lovers' meetings," Ada Rehan in her quick glance at the Duke, revealed her suffering. Miss Hayes, who kneels in a charming but complicated attitude by the Duke's couch, as the musicians sing "Come away death," lets her cheek touch his hand as it rests on her shoulder. The gesture would have been completely out of character for Ada Rehan.

Well known in London, Miss Sophie Stewart is an Olivia of incomparable grace and elegance, with a delicacy of movement and gesture that reveals her early training as a ballerina. Nearly a century ago, Feste was played here by a Mark Smith and now a descendant is the present Sir Toby Belch but he lacks the quizzical twinkle which made James Lewis so famous at Daly's nor does he carry off the part with quite the aristocratic bearing one expects from Olivia's kinsman. If Betterton was happy to turn from playing Hamlet and Othello to play Belch, there must be elements in the character that have been permitted to slip by. There is only one way to make comedy alive and that is to give it some contemporary connotation. Ferdinand Gottschalk once played Sir Andrew Aguecheek without overstraining the farce or the make-up but simply showing the pettiness of a very shallow mind. He had such distinguished predecessors as Lester Wallack and John Drew. One advantage of playing Shakespeare occasionally in modern dress is that it brushes off some of the accumulated cobwebs. Sir Toby as the decayed Union Club member and Sir Andrew as the cautious Yankee might re-acquire lost values. Feste takes the honors of the trio in Donald Burr who has stepped out of musical comedy for a part which demands a singer, a dancer and an actor of quick intelligence. Wesley Addy, who won his spurs as Hotspur, plays Orsino without enough imagination, but as Maria, June Walker is everything that she should be in overflowing measure. Her Maria is so full of contagious high spirits that she supplies the vitamins to every scene of the conspirators.

Stewart Chaney's designs are as elusive of place or period as Illyria. They verge toward the baroque, and the blacka-moor page is a happy touch for Olivia's household, as is the boudoir in which we first meet her. One of Chaney's most effective backdrops is a stylized perspective of angry cliffs for the seacoast. Paul Bowles has written an original score for six musicians—flute, oboe, percussion, muted trumpet, harp and an imitation
harpsichord—and, opening with a serenade and closing with a round dance, the poetry of the whole comedy is woven on a musical background, unobtrusive but sustaining. As is distinctive with Miss Margaret Webster's productions, the whole is harmonious. But Miss Webster—to use an annoying modernism—is extravert in her outlook. Her Twelfth Night is forthright and the genuine entertainment it offers has made it the spectacular success of the season. As it should be.

PRODUCTION:

Hugh Hunt • Old Vic • 1950

BACKGROUND:

Hugh Hunt's revival at the Old Vic in 1950 avoided traditional approaches to the play's opening by employing mournful music in the first scene and by presenting an Illyria swathed in decayed grandeur. In commenting on the sets of Roger Furse, Richard David noted that "the Illyrian streets had the peeling and water-worn dignity of a side-canal in Venice." Hunt nevertheless infused his staging with a degree of liveliness, especially in the crowd scenes and musical interludes. The focal point of the production's comedy was Roger Livesey's portrayal of Sir Toby Belch, which T. C. Worsley praised as a "rich, bursting Sir Toby, who never misses an opportunity for a bit of business, but never gives us too much." Paul Rogers's Malvolio, which similarly contained an element of buffoonery, was less well received. J. C. Trewin found the performance "strangely out of the picture here." By contrast, Peggy Ashcroft's Viola was accorded general praise, with Trewin maintaining that "it is long since I have seen a Viola so fitted to the play." In judging the production as a whole, critics tended to deprecate Hunt's reliance upon low comedy. Other performances included Alec Clunes as Orsino, Ursula Jeans as Olivia, Robert Eddison as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Leo McKern as Feste.

COMMENTARY:

T. C. Worsley (review date 25 November 1950)


The best criticism I have heard of Mr. Hugh Hunt's production of Twelfth Night—with which the Old Vic make a welcome return to their old home in the Waterloo Road—was contained in a remark by a friend who listened to a description of it and then said: "I see, in other words, it managed to be both arty and hearty." It is just that. Its best bits are the hearty bits, centred round a fine scarlet-faced, broad-bottomed, big-bellied, rasping Roger Livesey as Sir Toby. Its worst bits are the arty framework which the producer has thought fit to provide. There are the simpering attendants on Olivia. There is a chorus of boys in beards and girls in urchin cuts, who round off each scene with a skip of dancing, lots of hurraying, clapping of hands, smashing of knees, and who are always there at the dramatic moments to "back up" the action with a concerted snarl or a burst of mocking laughter or a shaking of fists. Then there are the clowns who turn themselves over at the dropping of any one of the inaudible jokes; or keep striking attitudes taken from early theatrical engravings, or jumping over a bench before you know where you are.

Commedia dell'arte, we are doubtless meant to feel; and I am bound to admit that I start with an ineradicable prejudice against this kind of posturing and mumming, while those who enjoy it may not feel so strongly as I do. I think that all this belongs not merely to another age which cannot be revived, but also to a different zonal temperament, which we cannot ape. Twentieth-century English boys and girls, even when they are dressed up Guardi-Italianate, only make one sweat with embarrassment as they huzzah around, trying to be uninhibitedly Latin. Obviously none of this framework is necessary—Twelfth Night is not so bad a comedy as all that. On
the other hand if it came off it might be a pleasing enough addition. But it is not in any case a substitute for getting a little nearer the heart of the play. *Twelfth Night* runs through a wide gradation of mood, from the lowest farce with Sir Toby Belch, to the highest comedy with Orsino and Olivia, and even touches a disturbing chord or two beyond that, with the humiliation of Malvolio, for instance. Mr. Hunt's production misses most of the shades except the lowest, and the arty intrusions, being strictly irrelevant, do not obscure the loss and cannot compensate for it.

Most of the low comedy is inventively and amusingly put over. Mr. Roger Livesey is a rich, bursting Sir Toby, who never misses an opportunity for a bit of business, but never gives us too much, never a belch or a stagger in excess, and he remains—that priceless attribute in an actor—always in perfect command. Then he and the producer have thought of some delightful new devices. The ladder balanced as a see-saw over the wine barrel in the first act is a splendid invention, and the fight between Aguecheek and Cesario-Viola in the second is another piece of perfect comic production. Mr. Eddison's Aguecheek has, by this time, settled into something faintly feasible; all the same I found the kind of death's head stuck on the end of a gangling broomstick which he made of himself a curiously pointless fantastic, which fitted in nowhere. We were surprised to find Malvolio played by Mr. Paul Capon as a comic, with a red nose and a touch of George Robey. And though he carried out the conception amusingly (at least up to his assault upon Olivia in the cross-gartered yellow stockings) the conception itself is so obviously wrong that one wonders why it was left in; it necessarily takes out of the ending that hint of the world of shadows which is an important ingredient of this romantic comedy. Not that anyone coming to the play for the first time through this production would think of classing it as a Romantic Comedy. The Romantic note is almost studiously avoided from the very first moment when Mr. Alec Clunes as Orsino delivers "If music be the food of love" with a jaunty smile as if he were handing us an arguable proposition. No, coming to it for the first time through this production, one would class it as a Fantasticated Farce, a very enjoyable, brisk and romping one. Even so one might think that there was altogether too much movement on the stage too often. Weren't, one might innocently object, some of the lines rather funny too in their own right—if only one could catch more of them?

And this is born out by the fact that apart from the broad comedy the best scene is the stillest: the scene in Orsino's palace where he talks of love with Viola while Feste sings "Come away, Death," and the page-Viola stands intensely watching him, referring his passion to herself. Miss Peggy Ashcroft was at her best here too, acting the scene with a charming unforced gentleness, and speaking the lovely language beautifully. Otherwise the Orsino-Olivia thread was sadly missing; and it was here that the producer might have concentrated his attempts to find a style. Herbert Farjeon called these two characters "Creations in the subtlest comic vein, the one in love with love, the other in love with death," and he added (his notices are full of such pregnant condensations):

> If this were realised by the actors the flexibility of their affection manifested in the final scenes would stay within the bounds of comedy, instead of edging over the borderline into something almost Sophoclean.

I should not like to end without re-emphasising that this production, for all its shortcomings and misplacements, comes over to the spectator with enormous vitality, verve and high spirits. In the battle between its predominant elements at least the hearty holds its own against the arty, and less sophisticated playgoers will enjoy themselves immensely. I have concentrated on the defects for this particular reason: it strikes me that if the commercial theatre is always liable to the infection of vulgarity, the besetting danger of our subsidised theatre at the moment may very well turn out to be artiness.

**J. C. Trewin (review date 9 December 1950)**

At any revival of *Twelfth Night*—frequent though they are, there are not enough of them for my liking—I bring with me a bristle of anxious question-marks. "Look here," says Dickens's character, "upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know." Maybe; but there is much to ask in *Twelfth Night*. I found the old questions circling round me in Lilian Baylis's famous and beautifully renovated theatre, the Waterloo Road Old Vic, now back to service at last.

Trivial things, no doubt. I would like to know how Viola, who, as a page, went in the same "fashion, colour, ornament" as her lost brother, managed to get herself so accurately fitted. I would be interested in the true age of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. I wonder why Olivia's jester happened to be "about the house" in the Duke's palace. I wonder who Fabian can be, the man Malvolio brought out of favour with Olivia "about a bear-baiting." I wonder at the odd Elizabethan sense of humour that could see nothing to jar in the scene of the imprisoned Malvolio. I would like to hear more of that sea-fight when the Duke's nephew Titus lost his leg. And I wonder always why Shakespeare should have imperilled the lovely recognition scene by the exchange: "My father had a mole upon his brow." … "And so had mine."

There are other questions, even less to the purpose. Some of these will never be answered. We shall hear nothing more about the Duke's nephew Titus: indeed, there is no reason why we should: he is one of the shadows fated, like Hisperia, Marcus Luccicos, and Valentinus, to stand only on the margin of Shakespearean drama. We shall never know more about Viola's disguise: this is Shakespeare in his what-you-will mood. The prison scene we have to endure, and it is run through as quickly as may be at the Vic.

To our surprise, Hugh Hunt, the inventive director, gives a new answer to the Fabian puzzle. He, too, must have bothered about this man: a fellow who turns up in the fifth scene of the second act, observing (with the baiting of Malvolio in mind): "If I lose a scruple of this sport, let me be boiled to death with melancholy." Mr. Hunt has now decided—and it speaks for his ingenuity—that Fabian is a potential rival to Feste, the jester. Feste is a "fool that the lady Olivia's father took much delight in." He is not always around when needed. ("My lady will hang thee for thy absence," says Maria.) We can assume that, being tired of his struggle to keep going in a dull household ("I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal"), he gets away when he can to more appreciative company, no doubt at the Palace. As presented at the Old Vic, where the actor is Leo McKern, Feste is in faded motley. The Fabian (Paul Hansard) is young, spry, forever on Feste's heels. We sense that the older man's fortunes are thinning, and that, in the final business with Malvolio's letter, Olivia's impatient "Read it you, sirrah" to Fabian shows the way things must go. Feste will strive to please us every day, but his day wanes.

It is an idea and it does explain Fabian, though I shall continue to believe obstinately that the fellow is a groom or an undergardener, and that Shakespeare wrote him into the piece in a hurry to make room for a neglected actor. The Vic reading takes something from Feste. The part can be done in innumerable ways. We have escaped, thank goodness, from the conventional cap-and-bells stencil, the clown likely to observe at any given moment (in the phrase of Gilbert's parody): "I would as lief be thrust through a quicket hedge as cry Pooh to a callow thrrostle." But for me a Feste should have the queer latent melancholy of a high summer afternoon: I miss this special feeling at the Vic.

Here we are; side-tracked as usual in any discussion of Illyria. *Twelfth Night* is not primarily about Feste. For that matter, it should not be primarily about Toby and Andrew, though the Illyrian knights are the richest company: they have seldom been funnier than in this revival, with Roger Livesey as a Toby cheerfully in the Upper Fourth and Robert Eddison as a lean and withered Andrew who finds his stay at Olivia's cumulatively embarrassing. Yet he has an abounding resilience. Mr. Eddison has his own views about the "dear manakin's" age: whatever we think of this—and I would put Andrew at, say, thirty-five to forty—we must agree at the Vic that the knight is in good fooling. And Andrew has a queer, twisted pathos when Olivia runs from him before his "No, faith, I'll not stay a jot longer."
This production has been called an Illyria of the drolls. Truly they have more than their share. But when I reproduce the revival in the mind, I shall call up first, not the roaring-boy Toby or the human-skeleton Andrew; not the ageing Feste, or the Malvolio who, though Paul Rogers plays him with competence, is strangely out of the picture here; not the Olivia or the Sebastian, who lack any special colour; not the adaptable quay-cum-garden set which wants a flood of sunlight to warm up its greyness: none of these things, but the wholly enchanting Viola of Peggy Ashcroft. That is right and proper. Illyria belongs to Viola: one day she will be its Duchess, and she will be fortunate in her Duke, the high-romantic Orsino of Alec Clunes.

It is long since I have seen a Viola so fitted to the play. Peggy Ashcroft is never brisk or pert, never self-consciously disguised, more of Boxing Night than Twelfth Night. She is very quiet, very loyal. She does not juggle with words. When she says:

If I did love you in my master's flame,  
With such a suffering, such a deadly life,  
In your denial I would find no sense;  
I would not understand it.…

it is no more than truth. This Viola realises what love can be—she is not toying with it—and the "willow cabin" speech comes from her with an absolute sincerity, with no kind of elaborate preparation. (We know, that in her heart Viola is making the babbling gossip of the air cry out 'Orsino!') And this is not Peggy Ashcroft's finest moment: that comes at the very end, when Viola, her lost brother before her, answers his question, "What countryman? What name? What parentage?" with the barely-breathed "Of Messaline." Now the play is played. Viola has her reward at last in the strange bittersweet Illyrian world. The Old Vic can be happy indeed to have had such a performance as this at its opening.

Richard David (review date 1952)


For some years before the war there was one theatre in England, and perhaps only one, which could be confidently relied upon to produce Shakespeare for Shakespeare's sake—the Old Vic in the Waterloo Road. When in 1941 the building was damaged by bombs, the company moved to another theatre, in London's west end; but though there were still individual productions of distinction and star performances of particular roles, something of the special glory of the Old Vic seemed to evaporate with the change of quarters. The post-war reorganization of the Memorial Theatre at Stratford, of old the double shrine of Ham and Whimsy, and the startling emergence there of a true Shakespearian style have since provided another stage on which authentic productions of Shakespeare's plays may be expected. Yet even with this second stronghold in being, there are many who have waited anxiously for the reopening of the theatre in the Waterloo Road, in the hope that with it might reappear the old qualities, of faithfulness to the text and to the spirit of the plays, of star turns subordinated to team-work, and of stage-craft inventive but never fanciful or perverse.

No one who, little more than a year before, saw the still derelict building, with sagging galleries and the cleared pit vast and dreary in its dilapidation, would have guessed that the reconstruction could be so quickly carried through, or that the result could be so charming. By some feat of the original designer the theatre, which holds 500 people on the ground floor alone, gives an impression of great intimacy. It seems to assume good relations between stage and auditorium. The new décor, of crimson furnishings and patterned crimson panels contrasting with the French grey of walls and balustrades, is at once festive and cosy. The audience settles immediately into a mood of cheerful expectancy. Here once more is at least a perfect setting for Shakespeare.
The season opened gloomily with a production of *Twelfth Night* by Hugh Hunt. The gloom was in one sense actual. Roger Furse's costumes and settings for the play were on the grand scale, but it was a decayed grandeur. The Illyrian streets had the peeling and water-worn dignity of a side-canal in Venice, Olivia's garden the evergreen frowsiness of some great mansion where the family is seldom in residence. The dresses were of rich and weighty stuffs, but their colours were blacks and russets and sombre browns, the dash of scarlet in Antonio's cloak (and Malvolio's garters) positively swearing with the subfusc of the general effect. All this for the gentry; when the "members of the commonwealth" appeared on the stage (and, as will be seen, they did so only too often) it was in the garb of convicts. Seldom can the most high-spirited of Shakespeare's comedies have been presented against so glum and portentous a background.

What was the point of this drabness? If we are charitable we may take it as a reflexion of the producer's belief (more cynical by ten years than Lytton Strachey's) that Shakespeare was bored with comedy by the time he came to *Twelfth Night*, and in it exchanged his youthful delight in excess for disillusioned satire, his comic verve for perfunctory horse-play. This would explain the mechanical slickness with which the more farcical scenes were thrown off and thrown away, the absence of any pleasure (save malicious pleasure) in the raillery, and two staggering instances of miscasting. Ursula Jeans, for all the accomplishment of her acting, and the fluency and control of her speaking of verse, could not give Olivia precisely that un-worldliness without which she must appear (at least to a modern audience) a monstrous bundle of vanities and affectations; and Leo McKern delivered both the lines and the music of Feste in an offhand style that said plainly "there is nothing to be made of this stuff".

Now *Twelfth Night* is certainly a mature comedy by comparison with, say, *The Merchant of Venice* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it is a wry mind that finds in it either disillusion or distaste. The alternative title *What You Will* is surely a token rather of the author's benevolence than of his boredom. As for Feste, we happen to know precisely why his part is what it is. In 1599 William Kemp, who had created the more orthodox clown roles of Dog-berry and Touchstone, resigned his connexion with Shakespeare's company to become a free-lance entertainer, and his place as comic lead was taken by Robert Armin. By comparison with Kemp, Armin was a lightweight and an intellectual (he himself wrote comedies) whose strong points were his singing and his "slipper tongue". It was for this reason that Shakespeare wrote in for Feste not only the songs but the patter and word-play that depend for their effect on an unusually smooth and glib delivery. Such a gallimaufry of puns and nonsense might still be brought off by a virtuoso speaker with immense vitality and self-confidence.

But perhaps it was not so much Shakespeare that was bored with *Twelfth Night* as the producer himself; and indeed we have all seen and read the play so often that there is some excuse for feeling it to be hackneyed—why then present it at all?—or so easy and straightforward that little trouble need be given to its presentation. In fact, however, though familiarity may disguise it from us, *Twelfth Night* is (as far as language goes) an extremely difficult play, full of current slang and topical allusions beyond Shakespeare's other comedies. As the most mature of his essays in this genre it is also his nearest approach to the colloquial plays of London life and character for which Jonson at the turn of the century was beginning to set the fashion. Line after line of the dialogue makes a topical point that can be grasped today only with the aid of an erudite note. Yet the general drift is always clear, and the types portrayed so striking and universal that we tend to set up in our minds a precise picture of Malvolio, Sir Toby, or Sir Andrew, without any very exact remembrance or perhaps understanding of the words out of which they are formed. Hunt's production made the most of this tendency. The 'characters' were writ large in make-up and action, while the words, when not omitted, edited, or misapplied, were allowed, nay, assisted to go hang. Thus Paul Rogers's Malvolio, impressive at his first appearance, degenerated with the donning of his yellow stockings into pure butt and buffoon. Roger Livesey, made up as the pop-eyed military man on the cover of *Lilliput*, played Sir Toby with the good-humour and engaging reasonableness of Colonel Chinstrap, and might have carried it off; but the scene of his midnight carousal (to mention only one) was obliterated beneath the antics of the two knights with a ladder brought on, for no plausible reason, by Sir Andrew. They were certainly funny, but if we want such fun the place to go for
it is the circus, where ladders are longer, the clowns are trained to the job, and buckets of whitewash are provided extra; where, too, we are spared the uneasy feeling that somewhere in the background a play is proceeding, which, could we but catch a word of it, might be worth the hearing.

This buffoonery overflowed every scene of the play and even the gaps between them. The sets had been admirably designed for rapid change without lowering the curtain, but their over-elaboration of detail made the operation, though speedy, a complicated one and quite an effort of adjustment to the new environment was required each time of the audience. To cover the physical and mental break the producer brought on a crowd of Illyrian peasants who capered and roared in chorus before the dissolving background. The same horror of gaps presumably inspired in him another piece of invention, though it was frequently employed even where no shift was to be made. This was the introduction in one scene of a character from the next who linked the two together like a held note in music. Unfortunately these 'suspensions by anticipation' often produced an unpleasant discord in the earlier scene. Thus when Maria arrived to congratulate the eavesdroppers she brought with her (all ready for the subsequent encounter with Viola) Feste. This called attention in the most blatant manner possible to the oddity of the substitution of Fabian for Feste in the box-tree (probably due to Armin's being, as we have seen, unsuited to knockabout), and to cover this a great deal of unnecessary and distracting byplay—surprise, resentment, malignant satisfaction—was required of the two. Similarly Aguecheek was present all through Olivia's declaration of love to Viola, and though this may be defended in the light of his subsequent assertion that he himself had witnessed Olivia's favours to the page, the actual sight of his face poking out of the box-tree is a discordant interruption in a scene of poetry. In planning such ingenuities, such irruptions of supers, such elaborations of 'business' a producer must ask himself three questions. Are they required by Shakespeare's text? No. Are they nevertheless a part of the necessary machinery of production on a modern stage? No—for where, after an indoor scene, the 'chorus' could not plausibly be introduced, the shift was made quite happily without it. Are they required for the translation of Shakespeare's intention into modern terms? No. Then away with them.

From a generally disastrous production it is all too easy to collect examples of how Shakespeare's comic points were missed, or masked, or bungled; but it is time to turn to the other, by many held the more important, the romantic half of the play. In this the producer seemed equally at sea. The miscasting of Olivia has already been noted, and Alec Clunes, playing Orsino with a fine blend of genuineness and affectation, had some ado to live down a series of misrepresentations and indignities. An opening scene in which the music was presented not as Orsino's self-indulgence but as a serenade to Olivia made an entirely false impression; and surely the Duke might have been allowed more than three attendants before he offered, as escort to Viola, "Some four or five … all, if you will." Hunt would have spared himself (and his Orsino) a titter if he had sent on a few of his redundant supers here instead of between the scenes. Yet all such faults were more than redeemed by the exquisitely moving performance of Peggy Ashcroft as Viola. How far she herself controlled her own part in the production cannot be guessed, but at least her presence on the stage seems to have influenced the producer and dissuaded him from the worst extravagances. Where some 'bright idea' for the reinterpretation of Viola was admitted, it was in keeping and effective. Such was the impulsive variety of her speech and movement in her first scene; or the taking of the cry "Olivia" (the climax of the "Make me a willow cabin" speech) as a hastily remembered substitution for the "Orsino" that possessed her own thoughts. This was a performance that brought out every subtlety of music as of meaning in the part, and but for this many more seats must have stood empty after the first interval.

Hugh Hunt (essay date 1954)


[In the following essay, Hunt explores the directorial issues that informed his production of Twelfth Night, focusing in particular on balancing the play's lyrical and comic elements, setting and costume, and the
This play is, in the grave parts, elegant and easy, and, in some of the lighter scenes, exquisitely humorous. Aguecheek is drawn with great propriety, but his character is, in great measure, that of natural fatuity, and is, therefore, not the proper prey of a satirist... The marriage of Olivia, and the succeeding perplexity, though well enough contrived to divert on the stage, wants credibility, and fails to produce the proper instruction required in the drama, as it exhibits no just picture of life.

Thus does Dr. Johnson criticize the play we are to perform. We recognize that this is purely literary criticism and has no bearing on the effect of the play upon an audience. Twelfth Night has always been one of the most popular comedies in the language. The frequency of its performance by girls' schools and women's clubs has tended to make it a little too familiar in the eyes of the audience—too familiar for its magic to work easily on them.

But Johnson's criticism is interesting to the producer, if only because it takes as its criterion of judgement an entirely irrelevant standpoint, and so teaches us what not to do with the play. Johnson was steeped in the neo-classical tradition and judged this play by the standards of eighteenth-century comedy. Such standards demanded that the duty of comedy is to portray the excesses of human behaviour and to cure those excesses by laughing at them. Such comedy must have a moral and, however salacious its subject matter, a didactic purpose. What the critic is complaining about in this play is that there is no obvious moral to be drawn from Twelfth Night, and it cannot be regarded as a true picture of the way people behave. But it is, in fact, not a comedy of manners; it is a poetic comedy. Our job is not to caricature reality, but to create a world of fantasy. It is the poetic and, indeed, the fantastic quality of Twelfth Night that I want to emphasize in this production, for how else, except in terms of fantasy, are we to explain the delightful improbabilities of this story of a girl disguised as a boy and the incredible love story which ensues?

To emphasize the poetical quality of this play does not mean that I want the lines to be intoned in the manner of romantic acting, but it does mean that the sound of the play must be given its value, and that poetry must not be treated as an unnecessary decoration which comes between the actor and the characterization of his part. The modern tendency in Shakespearian performance to submit the characters to overanalytical treatment can be as harmful to the flow of the play, as the nineteenth-century tendency to intone the poetry and tear a passion to tatters with a fine display of oratory. Poetry must be spoken with meaning, but also with feeling; gestures and movement in a poetical play must be eloquent, and characterization must be kept within the bounds of poetic creation and not stray into the realm of naturalistic imitation. This play is a fantasy, it must hang in the air somewhere midway between earth and heaven.

Not all of Twelfth Night is written in poetry, and there may appear to be a large gulf between the lyrical characters of Orsino, Viola, Sebastian and Olivia, and the comic, earthy characters of Toby, Andrew, Malvolio and Maria. Too often in productions of Twelfth Night we see the clowns walking away with the play; in consequence, the lyrical people appear pale and even a little dull beside their boisterous, prosaic companions.

THE BALANCE OF THE PLAY

Our main tasks must be: firstly, to balance the lyrical people with the comic people so that the latter do not out-weigh the former; secondly, to weld these two elements together by creating a poetic world in which both can exist side by side.

Let us start with the problem of balancing the lyrical and the comic. The important thing to realize about the lyrical side of Twelfth Night is that it is comedy and not sentimentality. So often we see the characters of
Orsino and Olivia played as sentimental, or straight, parts; as such they will appear poor acting material, particularly Orsino, and be easily submerged by the strong characters of Toby, Andrew, Malvolio and Maria. If this is the case, the play will be thrown off balance, the love story of Viola will lose our sympathy, and as for Olivia, she will become frankly a bore. Now, Orsino and Olivia are intended as satirical parts. Their satire is not, I admit, the full blooded comedy of the clowns which caught the fancy of the groundlings, but a more delicate comedy which delighted the gallants and their ladies in the galleries.

In the characters of Orsino and Olivia, Shakespeare is satirizing two affectations of his time. Orsino is the Elizabethan gallant who is in love with love, spending his time lolling on sweet beds of flowers' and contemplating an ideal mistress of his fancy. (The same type of self-indulgence is satirized in the young Romeo.) Olivia is the chaste Elizabethan beauty who is in love with grief, vowing she will never enjoy the society of man. Both these are, in Shakespeare's philosophy, unnatural states of mind and as such are laughable, and both were common enough affectations of court life in Shakespeare's time, as we find it reflected in Elizabethan and Jacobean love poetry. Neither Orsino nor Olivia are, in fact, sincere in their dedication, though both think they are. In contrast to their insincerity, Viola represents sincere love; the true, unaffected, natural, human passion which comes like a fresh breeze to blow away their conceits.

Now, once we have accepted this satire, the problem is how to make it tell without exaggerating the characters in such a way as to destroy their charm, for neither Orsino nor Olivia can be treated in the caricature fashion of Restoration drama. Shakespeare's satire is gentle satire, unlike the strongly marked satire of Dr. Johnson's ideal of comedy. The wistful smile graces his lips, not the full-throated laugh which we direct at the extravagant creatures of the comedy of Johnson's day. This satirical comedy is essentially human, and sympathy is extended to the affected persons. This gentle satire must, however, be marked, and both Orsino and Olivia must be accepted as part of the play's comedy. We will find, once we accept and play this satire, that the gulf between the lyrical people and the broader comics is not nearly so wide as would otherwise appear. Moreover, in playing this satire of insincerity, the sincerity of Viola stands out in its proper place as the embodiment of Shakespeare's own philosophy. This is a big step forward in balancing the seemingly diverse elements of the comedy.

To complete the balance of the play, however, there remains the problem of welding the comic and lyrical elements together by creating a poetic world in which both can exist side by side. The provision of a harmonizing background, in which the lyrical character can exist beside the boisterous ones without hurt to either party, is of the utmost importance, otherwise we shall have two separate styles existing inside the comedy. If the two groups—the satirical and the broad comedy group—are not properly balanced, then, however much satire we infuse into the lyrical group we shall always find the comedy group pre-dominant. The wittiest comedy by Oscar Wilde will fail to get its legitimate laughs if one of the characters spends his time slipping up on a banana skin, and no matter how discreetly we play Sir Toby Belch, we cannot escape the fact that he is the sort of person who has a predilection for the type of humour which borders on farce. The background and atmosphere of the production must, therefore, provide the unifying factor and make it possible for broad comedy and satirical comedy to exist side by side. I will now turn to the way in which I intend, with the help of the designer, to treat the question of unification.

SETTING AND COSTUME

In Twelfth Night, as in all Shakespeare's fantastic comedies, there is no accepted, normal state of society—the 'just picture of life' required by Dr. Johnson. In nearly every English comedy from Congreve to Coward the scene is laid in a contemporary setting, but in Shakespeare's fantastic comedies the author creates his own society, his own country and his own conduct of life. In these comedies we enter the kingdom of the high fantastical where the rules of behaviours and reason, in the eighteenth century or neo-classic sense, are left behind. It is significant that in only one of his comedies, The Merry Wives of Windsor, does Shakespeare choose an English background. Everywhere else we enter a fantastic country which is either an invention of
his own—such as the Forest of Arden, Illy ria, the Sea Coast of Bohemia—or a corner of the world sufficiently unknown to him and to his audience for a fantastic or unrealistic state of afiFairs to exist. In such a land of fantasy girls may be mistaken for boys, twins mixed up, lovers go to bed with each other without being aware of each other's identity, and many other incredible happenings take place. For such purposes his preference is for the old Italian romances which are laid in such places as Syracuse, Messina, Athens, and medieval France. He purposely avoids the contemporary society and the topical background, perhaps because it would have fettered his imagination and prescribed rules of behaviour too precise for his searching, poetic spirit. In this created world of fantastic comedy, anything can happen: Olivia can fall instantly in love with Viola and not be unduly perturbed when she finds that she has married Sebastian; Orsino can discover his love for Viola the moment he knows her to be a woman without any loss of the credibility so treasured by Dr. Johnson.

Twelfth Night is like nearly all Shakespeare's comedies, a comedy of love. But what distinguishes Illyria from the other fanciful countries of his comic genius is that it is a land of music. But Illyrian music is not only the food of love, it is also the food of every other kind of fancy; it sets free man's spirit to rove into the land of imagination, it opens the door of the kingdom of poetry, it induces melancholy and roisterous merriment and even tames the drunken clowns into a state of sentimentality. This land of Illyria, which is unfolded to us in Orsino's music with the dying fall and folded up again in Feste's song of the wind and the rain, rises like a magic island out of the sea, only to melt out of our grasp at the end like the land of fancy it is:

But that's all one,
Our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.
[V.i.406-07]

To produce the true effect of this magic land of music on the stage we must free ourselves from the conventions which have stamped this play too strongly in the audiences' mind. We must try to find a new form in which to present the play. This form is all important, for to the modern playgoer it is not sufficient to return to the Elizabethan stage. We can no longer clothe the rush-strewn boards with our imagination, nor turn the Hall of the Middle Temple into the magic island of Illyria, as our Elizabethan ancestors were apparently able to do. Soaked as we are in the realism of the cinema and television, we require a greater impetus to set our imaginative faculties in motion and soar into Shakespeare's world of 'high fantastical', than did the playgoer of the Renaissance, to whom even such common objects as potatoes and pipes of tobacco were things of wonder, suggestive of incredible adventures. For us a spade is a spade, and the magic of Illyria can no longer exist in the Globe any more than it can exist in the box hedges of the overworked conventional setting of this play. The job of the modern designer of Twelfth Night is to find the right theatrical aids in order to allow his audience's imagination to reach across the centuries and find the magic world of Shakespeare's Illyria. The scenery of our production must be, therefore, neither conventional, nor realistic, nor purely Elizabethan, if it is to provide the right release for the imagination. It must be fresh, evocative and lyrical. This all important question is the designer's particular problem.

In searching for the form in which to present the play we have decided that certain principles must be born in mind: firstly, we must avoid unnecessary and cumbersome changes of scene; secondly, the poetic nature of the play can best be served by keeping as much of it in the open air as possible; thirdly, our scenery must be atmospheric without being realistic; lastly, we must give the play a sense both of intimacy and fantasy. This we have tried to do by placing Illyria on a small island off the Dalmatian coast. We realize it is an unconventional setting for the play, which is usually set among the trim box hedges of a typical Elizabethan garden—well enough, but no more than a recent theatrical convention when all is said. There are times when theatrical conventions should be broken; when the producer and designer should seek new visual aids for Shakespeare. Twelfth Night is, I believe, a case in point, for it is one of those plays which have become too familiar to the audience and it needs to be seen in a fresh light if its magic is to work again. But why choose
the Dalmatian coast? First, because Dalmatia and the Aegean islands are probably Shakespeare's own geographical conception of where Illyria was, and, secondly, because when Viola and Sebastian are wrecked on a sea coast, we need some sort of fantasy island for them to arrive at. Moreover, though I place no great store by the source of the play, it is more than probable that it was derived from an old Italian play called Gl'Ingannati which stems from Venice and something of its Adriatic origin still lingers about it.

In pursuit of the principles outlined above we have arrived at the following three locations for the scenes:

1. **Act I, Sc. 1-4; Act II, Sc. 1-3; Act III, Sc. 3, and Act IV to end**

These scenes will be played in the piazza of a little seaport with streets leading to the sea, down which the shipwrecked travellers—Viola and Sebastian—will come. On either side of the piazza are the houses of Olivier and Orsino; neither of them very large or imposing, so as to maintain the feeling of a small, out of the way island, in which these two persons are the sole representatives of the aristocracy. In the middle of the piazza is a raised platform under which is the town prison.

2. **Act, I, Sc. 5; Act II, Sc. 5; Act III, Sc. 2, and Act III, Sc. 4**

These scenes will be played in the garden of Olivia, a secluded spot screened by cypress trees, where this affected and wealthy lady can escape from the unwanted attention of her suitors.

3. **Act II, Sc.4**

This most lovely of all the lyrical scenes will be played in the palace of Orsino, which we will treat in an airy Italianate fashion so as to preserve the open air character of the play.

We have given serious thought to the location of the drinking scene (Act II, Sc. 3). This is by tradition set in some kind of kitchen or cellar. Apart from our desire to avoid unnecessary scene changes, there is, as far as I can see, no indication in the text that this scene should take place in any definite locality. It can be played just as well immediately outside the door of Olivia's house, where the caterwauling of the knights would disturb the household no less than in the cellar. We have, therefore, decided to place this scene in the piazza at night, causing Toby and Andrew to enter as if returning from a carouse in the town, bearing a barrel of wine and a ladder with which Toby purposes to enter his niece's locked house through an upper window. Here they are joined by Feste, and the carouse becomes the merrier for a ladder and a barrel make an excellent see-saw. Maria and Malvolio issue from the house in a fruitless endeavour to prevent them from waking their mistress and causing Toby to be turned out for good.

Now the background we have described, revolving around the piazza of this small seaport, is reflected, though not in any pedantic sense, in the costumes. I would like you to imagine the inhabitants of Illyria as a gay, feckless, music-loving people, whose main occupation is the sea and all that pertains to it. If seafaring is the main occupation of the island, we can understand Orsino's anger with the pirate, Antonio. In such a community we will expect to find the common people dressed in simple, practical costumes, and the aristocrats in so small an island will be well-dressed but not over-ornate. Between the two households of Olivia and Orsino, there is not much to choose as far as wealth is concerned, and it is the natural expectation of the town that Olivia will in time ally herself with Orsino, there being no other suitable match for her on the island.

So much for what we might call the realism of our setting. I have, however, already indicated that the play cannot be treated realistically and must always move in the realms of the 'high fantastical'. The community we have outlined, therefore, only exists in the realms of the imagination. It is for this purpose that the designer has expressly avoided any definite period in the costume. It is for this purpose, too, that he has avoided any
complete realism of setting, to which he has given an insubstantial quality in keeping with the fantasy of the
story, for the play must remain timeless. To maintain this sense of timelessness and for the purpose of welding
the lyrical and comic characters into a world where they can exist together, the designer has introduced into
the costumes of Toby, Andrew, Feste, Malvolio and Fabian a marked note of the Commedia del Arte. In doing
this we are not so wildly extravagant as it might seem, for the origins of this play were, as we have said, taken
from an Italian source. This costume resemblance to the stock figures of Italian comedy is most predominant
in the costumes of Feste and Fabian, about whom I shall have more to say later.

Having described the way in which we will try to give the play a unity and a fantastical atmosphere in keeping
with its lyrical feeling, I will now pass to the question of characterization, which I will treat together with
some indications of how I see the play appearing on the stage in this sort of setting.

ORSINO

It is early morning when the curtain rises on the piazza of Illyria; the houses that surround it are silhouetted
against the light of the rising sun. On our left is Olivia's house, on our right Orsino's palace. Asleep by the
fountain in the centre is Feste, who, of course, has been out on the loose and has found himself locked out.

Nay, either tell me where thou hast been, or I will not open my lips as wide as a bristle may
enter, in way of thy excuse. My lady will hang thee for thy absence. [I. i. 1-4]

In the distance a clock chimes and Feste wakes up, looking apprehensively at Olivia's windows. He takes out
his pipe and with a flourish summons the townspeople, who, as arranged, are to serenade Olivia on this fine
summer's morning at the orders of Orsino; for Feste, as we find in Act II, Sc. 4, works for Orsino as well as
Olivia. As the serenaders arrive and the music which is the 'food of love' is played beneath Olivia's windows,
the door on the opposite side opens and Orsino, followed by his small retinue, enters.

The Duke of Illyria is the embodiment of the traditional lover with his sad, pale face, his Byronic collar, and
his rich, flowing cloak. His eyes are fixed upon his mistress's closed shutters as he leans elegantly against the
platform in the centre of the stage. He is the picture of an Elizabethan lover, but we must not imagine Orsino
to be a spineless individual, nor purely a sentimental romantic. He is, in fact, a typical nobleman of
Renaissance poetry and romance. He hunts, he likes music and poetry, he has a will of his own and a good
deal of stubbornness. He is a man in search of the ideal. In his case this ideal takes the form of ideal love, and
he has mistakenly embodied this ideal in the person of the dedicated virgin, Olivia. His love for her is as 'all
embracing as the sea', and his passionate spirit is so absorbed with his imaginary ideal that he lives, acts and
breathes love at every minute of the day. He requires only a good dose of liver salts, after which we shall find
him a capital fellow and well worthy of Viola's love.

The music ended and the serenaders departed, he indulges in his favourite pastime of extolling his mistress:

O! when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me …

[I. i. 18-22]

The typical opening for one of those allegorical love sonnets, which were such favoured pursuits of the
Elizabethan gentry. But he is interrupted by Valentine who, issuing from Olivia's house, comes to tell him that
the chastity of his mistress has once again prevailed. Having received the daily refusal to his protestations of
love, there is nothing to do but to spend the morning reclining on a nice bed of flowers, where the lover in
love with love can indulge himself by reflecting on the cruelty of his ideal, and wholly imaginary, mistress.

**VIOLA**

And now as he passes across the stage a very different procession enters at the back, toiling wearily up the narrow streets from the sea. This is Viola with the sailors and the Sea Captain. 'What country, friends, is this?' Viola asks, as she stands in amazement watching the departure of the handsome, love-sick Duke and his dejected followers. The little group which has entered present a strong contrast to the previous occupants of the piazza. Wet-through, tired and dispirited, having spent the night struggling with the elements after the loss of their ship and of their dear ones, we see in them, and in particular in Viola, a sincere grief nobly borne, as opposed to the affected grief of Orsino. We notice how Viola is so overcome at the loss of her brother that she has no further wish to live. But how gradually her own courageous nature, awakened by the cheerful practicality of the Sea Captain, gains the upper hand, and she bravely determines to face a new life. It is this contrast between sincerity and insincerity, between true grief and affected grief, between true love and self-indulgence, which is the main theme of the play. These first two scenes are delicately balanced to emphasize this contrast. If we reverse them—which is sometimes argued to be theatrically effective—we destroy the delicacy with which the author has balanced his opening situation.

Now, so far we have pointed at Viola as being the acme of perfection in matters relating to the emotions in contrast to Orsino and Olivia. It is important, however, that, as well as recognizing her emotional sincerity, we also realize that she is a human being with a natural desire to gain the love of her lord. Viola is already on the way to being in love with Orsino when the play begins; for she has heard her father talk of him and she has conjured up a vision of this handsome bachelor Duke to which her girl's heart has responded. She is not, therefore, completely without ulterior motive in her decision to offer herself to his service. Does she hope to supplant Olivia in his affections? That would hardly be true at first, for she deliberately disguises herself as a boy. But Viola undoubtedly hopes that something will come of it all, and that the adventure, which is certainly a very bold move on her part, may prove rewarding. I do not mean that, when entrusted with her various love embassies on behalf of her master, she will lack diligence or prove deceitful, but once she sees that Olivia is adamant in her determination to reject her suitor, Viola does not hesitate to counsel Orsino to give up his useless passion, and there is more than a hint that he might look elsewhere for an outlet for his love in the mysterious tale:

> My father had a daughter lov'd a man,
> As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
> I should your lordship.
> ![II. iv. 107-09]

Like the real woman she is, Viola likes to surround herself with a sense of mystery. Who is this strange youth who talks in riddles? She deliberately places a puzzle in Orsino's way for him to think out. It is the feminine side of Viola which makes us love her. She is not just an angel, incapable of the little decepts of human life. She is a woman in love. Her other human frailties only help to make her perfections more lovable. She is struck, for all her courage, with a very natural terror when asked to fight a duel. She has a delicious sense of irresponsibility which she assumes when things become too complicated and she finds that Olivia has fallen in love with her:

> O Time! thou must untangle this, not I;
> It is too hard a knot for me to untie!
> ![II. ii. 40-41]

Of all the characters that Shakespeare created, Viola is the most lovable, the most human.
SIR TOBY BELCH

And now that we have seen Viola off on her great adventure we can turn to the scene that follows. Sir Toby enters from Olivia's house, suffering from a bad hang-over, and thoroughly fed up with this endless state of mourning which pervades his niece's household. Seizing an opportunity to slip off unnoticed to the nearest hostelry, he is called back by Maria who has been watching him from Olivia's doorway. The two important points about Sir Toby Belch's character are: firstly, he is a gentleman who has run to seed; and secondly, he is quite determined he is going to enjoy life no matter what other people want to do. The idea that he should confine himself within the modest limits of order is abhorrent to him:

Confine? I'll confine myself no finer than I am: These clothes are good enough to drink in, and so be these boots too. [I. iii. 10-12]

Toby is completely selfish, and hopelessly unsubtle in his selfishness. He plans to marry off his niece to the unsuitable Sir Andrew so that he can borrow money from the latter. He persuades this ninny of a suitor to fight Cesario so as to provide himself with a good entertainment. Anything that comes between him and his pleasures must be swept out of the way and the principal obstacle to his enjoyment of life is the sour face of the puritanical Malvolio.

We might conclude from this that Toby is an unlikeable character, but in fact we like him because he is such a thorough rogue, and because he has such a constant, irrepressible sense of fun.

But with all his boisterousness, Toby must always remain a gentleman. In his most drunken moments we must see his ludicrous attempts to maintain his dignity. He is genuinely furious with the steward, Malvolio, for presuming to set himself up as a gentleman. The very fact that Toby was born a gentleman is his undoing. He has never had to work; he has been spoilt from his youth, and he has always managed to bluster his way through life. The new regime of cloistered virginity, which has been adopted by his niece since the death of her brother and the consequent dominance of Malvolio, has caused him to break out more wildly than ever as a protest against petticoat government in particular, and puritanism in general. For this we cannot wholly blame him; and for the understanding of Toby's behaviour we see one more reason why Olivia's character must be gently satirized. It is her affectations as much as Toby's own weakness which causes his excessive behaviour. You cannot confine Sir Toby Belch in a cloister of affected grief, where the vows and company of men have been abjured. He has learned to spend his money recklessly, to drink, to quarrel, and to dance. His trouble is that he is now penniless and dependent on his niece for his clothes and food. No wonder he cultivates Aguecheek for the sake of a little financial independence.

MARIA

For Maria, who tries to keep Toby on the rails, we may say that, apart from being Olivia's gentlewoman, she is the brains behind Toby. We imagine her as a high-spirited and neat person. She has come to be a little mother to Toby, trying to conceal his worst extravagances and save him from Olivia's tongue. But she is no doormat to be walked on by him, which would undoubtedly be her fate were she not possessed of a ready wit, a considerable courage, and a great sense of mischief. All these features make her into an indispensable prop for the rather helpless, old rascal for whom she cannot help but feel affection.

Although Maria has plenty of sound sense she is by no means beyond encouraging Toby to mischief, especially where Malvolio is concerned. We can easily imagine that the position of overbearing authority, which this intolerable steward has assumed in the household since the death of Olivia's brother, has not only made Toby far more truculent than usual, but has also made the servants, Maria, Feste and Fabian, ripe for revolt. They are all ready for mischief and Maria is determined to use it to bring about Malvolio's downfall. For this purpose she encourages Toby and supplies him with a device to overthrow this household tyrant. The
fact that Toby marries her out of gratitude was probably a nice piece of calculation on Maria's part. But their marriage is as happy an augury for Toby's future as we can imagine, for it is highly unlikely that anyone else would have accepted the penniless, old reprobate, and, if anyone could keep Toby within the confines of some kind of order, Maria is the person to do it. Their marriage will undoubtedly be considered a misalliance in aristocratic circles. I hardly imagine Maria will be received at Orsino's court, but I feel quite sure that they never wanted for company round their hearth, nor did the company ever want for a 'stoup of wine', or a witty word from their hostess.

SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK

And 'here comes Sir Andrew Aguecheek' on his way to pursue his preposterous courtship of Olivia. A more unlikely suitor for that temperamental Prima Donna's hand we cannot imagine. Perhaps Sir Andrew lives on the other side of the island of Illyria, but more likely he lives in the more cultured city of Venice, where he has learned to play the viol-de-gamboys and to speak 'three or four languages word for word without book'. At all events, he has plenty of money and is, as Maria says, 'a very fool and a prodigal'.

He has come to the little town of Illyria to woo the rich heiress, obviously at the instigation of Sir Toby, who hopes to reap a rich harvest from the match; for Sir Andrew is completely under the thumb of his boisterous companion. Toby is a fatal attraction to the timorous, weak-brained Andrew. In Toby's presence Sir Andrew feels himself a bit of a blood. Such is his need for an inflation of his ego that he will follow this bully-boy round like a spaniel, no matter how many kicks he receives; rejoicing in any little spark of encouragement that may fall from the old rogue's lips. He is one of those totally vacant-brained gentlemen who can be counted on to put his foot in it on every occasion; yet there is no malice in him, but rather a pathetic desire to please everyone and above all a wish to be thought well of, which invariably results in his making a fool of himself. He is aware that he is a bit of a failure, which occasionally makes him melancholy, and without the constant encouragement of Toby's companionship, he would give up at once.

This companionship between the old rogue and his fatuous hanger-on is not purely a matter of a desire for money on the one side and for inflation of ego on the other. Toby and Andrew have a strange affection for each other, and always back each other up when either is criticized. We should feel that, despite the difference of age and temperament, they are firm friends. But Andrew has just enough spark in him to revolt occasionally against Toby's dominance. Unfortunately it never comes to anything, for his courage is very slight, and a comforting word from his idol makes him a 'dear mannikin' once more. The quality which really endears Andrew to us is that he knows what a pitiful fellow he is. His desire to take part in everything, his valiant attempts to impress Toby with his courage, his happiness when Toby praises his prowess in dancing, his pathetic confession that he was 'loved once, too', all make of this poor num-skull a thoroughly lovable, if always ludicrous, creature.

So Toby and Andrew dance away from the piazza to set about some revels and for a few hours Andrew will bask in the sunshine of Toby's companionship. They are followed by Viola and Orsino's lords and there is more than a hint of jealousy in Valentine's lines to Viola:

If the Duke continue these favours towards you,  
Cesario, you are like to be much advanced.

[I. iv. 1-2]

For she has won Orsino's confidence, and now it is Viola and not Valentine who will be entrusted with the embassies of love. Viola goes off on her first embassy to Olivia accompanied by 'some four or five', and as they go the scene is changed from the piazza into Olivia's garden. When the music ends and the change is completed, we see Feste trying to elude Maria as she chases him in and out of the Illyrian boys and girls who have aided the change of scene. By the device of changing the scene in front of the audience, using the
inhabitants of the island to move the pieces around, we will hope to maintain the flow of the play, and at the
same time by the use of music maintain its fantastic character.

FESTE

I will begin by describing what is realistic about the character of Feste before I pass to what à might describe
as the fantasy of his part. Feste is a sort of half-way person, belonging partly to the plot of the play, and partly
to the strange musical atmosphere in which it is wrapped. The realistic Feste is the Feste of Olivia's
household. He is a little, middle-aged creature who lives by his clowning, by his songs, by his ability to amuse
his patroness. The existence of a licensed fool was probably a most precarious form of earning a living, for to
be successful a fool has always to be able to produce the required distraction, no matter what his private
feelings might be. Professional fooling required a daring and an impudence of approach which, if taken amiss
by the uncertain temper of a patron, resulted in a beating at the best, or a hanging at the worst. More often
failure to strike the right note entailed dismissal and we may be sure that a fool had little ability to earn his
living at anything else.

Feste lives under this constant threat of dismissal; for Olivia with her affected grief is a very uncertain
customer to serve. Moreover, it is clear that he is no longer quite equal to his job; perhaps he is growing old
and a little stale.

Now you see, sir, how your fooling grows old, and people dislike it [I. v. 110-11]
says Olivia to him, and Feste, unable to make any reply to this, quickly changes the subject. Now, if Feste is
in danger of losing his job because his fooling is beginning to pall, he has two additional pitfalls to contend
with: one is Malvolio, and the other his own irrepressible nature. Between him and Olivia's steward there is a
constant feud; for not only is Malvolio bitterly jealous of any intimacy between his mistress and another
servant, but as a Puritan and a man completely devoid of humour he has an inborn distaste for, as well as a
strong distrust of, Feste's jests. Feste is quite aware of Malvolio's hostility and he knows, too, that the steward
will do his utmost to get him thrown out of service. Feste's ultimate cruel mockery of the distracted Malvolio
is only understood if we realize how serious a threat the steward is to Feste's livelihood. In the first scene
when we see them together Malvolio administers a stinging insult to the ageing jester:

I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool, that has no more brain that a stone.
[I. v. 84-85]
Feste is at once touched to the quick; his professional pride has been badly wounded—put down by an
ordinary fool! Is he losing his grip on his job? He is haunted by this cruel gibe and, when it is Malvolio's turn
to lose favour, back comes these words out of Feste's mouth:

But do you remember? "Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal?" [V. i. 374-75]

and so 'the whirligig of time brings in his revenges'.

The other pitfall that Feste has to contend against is his own irrepressible high spirits. Like Toby, Feste cannot
confine himself within the modest limits of order. He is always out on the loose, not necessarily drinking, like
Toby, but enjoying himself, flitting from place to place, sometimes at Orsino's house, sometimes in the
company of Toby and Andrew. We shall see him in this production dancing with the music-loving crowd,
mocking Orsino's sentimentality and getting into every sort of mischief, when he should be at home pandering
to Olivia's whims. At the end he has gone too far—Olivia promises to right Malvolio's wrongs:
But when we know the grounds and authors of it, thou shalt be both the plaintiff and the judge of thine own cause. [V. i. 353-55]

This threat of an investigation into Malvolio's imprisonment cannot fail to produce fatal evidence against Feste, who is not only Malvolio's main enemy, but is also the most vulnerable of his mockers; for he cannot be allowed the liberty of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and Maria is safely married. Thus it is that when the happy couples go off to celebrate their 'solemn combination' Feste is left behind, and his last song has an ominous significance in its refrain of 'the wind and the rain'.

About the fantasy of Feste's part I shall have something to say later, but I will now turn to Olivia as she enters her garden accompanied by her dutifully sad ladies.

OLIVIA

I have already spoken of Olivia's insincerity, but I do not wish to give the impression that she is incapable of sincere love. We must imagine that this chaste lady is confronted with a considerable problem owing to Orsino's insistent wooing of her. She comes of a proud, rich family and we maintain that on this island there is no other suitable husband at hand, for she cannot take Sir Andrew's suit seriously. Unfortunately she does not love Orsino, and it is partly in self-defence that she affects a use of cloistered seclusion, hiding behind vows of everlasting mourning for her dead brother. She is, of course, quite aware that this form of prevarication makes her the more attractive to Orsino; aware, too, of her personal charms, as she clearly shows when she makes an inventory of her beauty to Viola:

Item, two lips indifferent red.
[I. v. 297]

Olivia has no intention of remaining a nun all her life, but it is a pleasant conceit for the moment, and, whilst holding Orsino at bay, she can, from behind her veil, be on the lookout for a nice personable young man. The joke of this situation is, of course, that she falls head over heels in love with Cesario, who is unable to respond. Thus she is placed in the most embarrassing position of having to endure the same scornful rejection of her own love as she has dealt out to Orsino.

This gentle comedy of the scornful beauty who rejects and is rejected will only become apparent if from the first the actress has struck the right note of affectation. If, on the contrary, the audience have been led to accept Olivia as a charming, straight juvenile, the comedy will be lost, the part appear insipid, and the pursuit of Viola-Cesario indecent and undecorous. Olivia is, of course, dressed in black and heavily veiled, her manner is one of assumed grief, which she manages to make very attractive. Behind the veil there is more than a hint of a self-willed, temperamental flirt and we should find no small degree of comedy in the haste with which she whips Sebastian off to church, before he has time to look round. The secret of the acting of Olivia is to balance affectation with attraction, and to underline the gentle, but unmistakable comedy of this capricious young woman, who woos so assiduously a girl under the impression that she has found a gallant, young gentleman.

MALVOLIO

In her steward, Malvolio, who accompanies her into the garden, we recognize the mixture of the Puritan and the proud servant who aspires to greatness. Since the death of Olivia's brother, Malvolio has clearly seen a golden opportunity for advancing both his authority and his social position. Olivia's affected grief has placed some good cards in his hands; for, as her principal male confidant, he is able to exert his authority over her household without interference, and who knows how far his advancement may carry him:
Malvolio is in love with his mistress, or at all events he has imagined himself to be so. He is a very ambitious person and, in his determination to keep Olivia to himself, he encourages her to reject all suitors with the utmost diligence. But although he concurs with Olivia's affectation of chaste seclusion, he does not entirely approve of his mistress's taste. He thoroughly disapproves of her championship of Feste, her tolerance of Toby and her dangerous interest in Cesario. We can well imagine his dislike at being asked to carry a ring from his mistress to this young stripling, Cesario, after his visit to Olivia. We can understand with what excitement he reads the letter that Maria drops in his path, and we can see how completely his ambition and pride are overthrown when he discovers the hoax that has been played on him.

Malvolio is, however, not a figure of tragedy, nor yet a fearsome villain. He is an intolerably pompous person, and as such he is exceedingly funny. He is puffed up with pride, credulous to a degree, full of affectations and fine airs and utterly lacking in any sense of humour, the absence of which makes him an easy butt for the 'lesser people'. He is, in fact, the sort of person who always gets his leg pulled, because he never seek a joke, and deserves to get his leg pulled, because he dislikes any form of fun in others. His gait, his dress, his speech, his pride, his 'austere regard' and his officiousness earn him the mockery that is meted out to him, and although his punishment is a little cruel by our standards, we must remember that these Elizabethan Illyrians were more full-blooded than we are.

We picture him as a middle-aged governess of a creature who folds his clothes meticulously when he goes to bed, and probably pins up his hair. No doubt he suffers severely from corns and objects very strongly to being told to hurry:

Run after that same peevish messenger. [I. v. 300]

We can imagine with what a look of surprised hauteur Malvolio receives this instruction from his mistress to un-bend his dignity and take to his heels! He passes from the play like an enraged hen with his feathers not a little ruffled, but with his self-conceit untouched.

SEBASTIAN AND ANTONIO

I will now turn from the group in the garden to two other figures who later enter the piazza: Sebastian and Antonio. About the former there is not a great deal to say, except that he is a thoroughly likeable young man who shares the same sort of directness that we find in his twin sister, Viola. Sebastian has an openness about him, an innate honesty, and a freshness which immediately endears him to his older companion. Like Viola he is deeply affected by the loss of his twin, but he has the same courageous determination to start life again and to seek his fortune cheerfully. He is the sort of person who responds very quickly to his emotions. He warms at once to Antonio's kindness; he falls head over heels in love with Olivia, and he does not hesitate to draw his sword on Andrew and Toby. The very quickness of his emotional response make him hot tempered as well as warm-hearted. Above all, the actor who plays Sebastian must approach the part lyrically. The joyous soliloquy 'This is the air, that is the glorious sun...' and the infinitely tender recognition of Viola demand a lyrical approach to the acting of this part which is of great importance to our acceptance of what might otherwise appear improbable.

There must be something about these twins that makes them specially attractive to the tougher type of male, for just as Viola wins the devotion of the Sea Captain, so Sebastian captures the affection of the pirate, Antonio. The secret of this attraction lies, I think, in the directness and warmth of their youthful affections. There is nothing complicated or affected in them to make the rough sea-dogs feel out of their depth. They bring out the fathering instinct, which is often a very endearing characteristic of the hardened seaman.
Antonio is a thorough seaman; honest and straightforward in his personal dealings, generous with his purse, despising meanness and ingratitude, brave in combat, incapable of cloaking his feelings when angered, and a devil when it comes to a scrap. He has, like Drake and Grenfell, been a notable pirate attacking with his 'bawbling vessel' the 'most noble bottom' of Orsino's fleet. Antonio denies this charge of piracy. To his way of thinking he won his prizes in fair combat with the odds against him, but he realizes that he may be justly regarded as Orsino's enemy, for, whereas his compatriots handed back their pirated gains in order to conclude an advantageous trade pact with the government of Illyria, Antonio refused to do so. He is, therefore, a marked man in Illyria; well knowing the danger he runs in accompanying Sebastian through the streets. It is clear that he must not walk, as Sebastian says, 'too open'; there must always be a cautiousness in his movements, as if he were constantly on the look-out for trouble. It is only when he sees what he thinks to be his young charge in bodily danger that he throws caution to the wind and rushes headlong into action and so into the arms of Orsino's officers. From then on he behaves as we would expect him to, in a fearless and courageous manner. We know he would walk with his head up to the gallows, were he not ultimately rescued by Sebastian.

**FABIAN, THE CLOWN?**

So far we have covered all the main characters of this play with the exception of Fabian. Here lies a problem. Who is this unexpected and unexplained character?

We had been led to believe from the plot concocted by Maria and Toby that the clown would make a third in the trapping of Malvolio. It is, therefore, not a little surprising that Shakespeare discards his clear intention that Feste should accompany Toby and Andrew in the letter scene, and deliberately replaces him with a character called Fabian, whose sole explanation of himself is that Malvolio 'brought him out of favour' with his mistress, Olivia, about a bear-baiting. Many explanations have been offered for the inclusion of this apparently unnecessary party, which seems to have been intended at one stage of the writing to be contained in the part of Feste, the clown. Perhaps the reason is that the actor who played Feste got a little beyond himself at rehearsals, and, as a result, the original Malvolio complained about the number of pranks that were being played behind his back whilst he was reading the letter, and insisted that Feste's part be given to another. Let the actor of Feste take note! Whatever the truth may be, we are now forced to accept the inclusion of Fabian, since from the letter scene onwards he takes an integral part in the action. It remains for us to find an explanation for him.

Licence, if it be in keeping with the spirit of the play, is perhaps allowed in the interpretation of Fabian. I propose to play him as a second clown—a rival to the ageing Feste. Like Feste he is a member of Olivia's household, but he is younger and less extravagant in his behaviour. If he be a clown, then with reasonable luck he may hope to succeed his rival, for his high spirits are more strictly under control. When Feste is asked to read Malvolio's letter to Olivia in the last scene of the play, he earns her rebuke for his ridiculous way of doing so, and she tells Fabian to read it instead. We can imagine how Feste's professional pride would bridle at this rebuke, which coupled with the facts that it is to another clown the letter is given and that this rival has already supplanted him in Toby's affection, will do much to emphasize Feste's final bitter clash with Malvolio, as being the only person on whom he can vent his hurt feelings.

This interpretation will help, too, in making Feste's last song of the wind and the rain more poignant, for not only has he lost his place, but his successor has probably already been found.

**FESTE, THE PIVOT OF THE PLAY**

I would like, at this point, to return to Feste as I said I would, and point out that although this song of the wind and the rain has a special poignancy when related to Feste's position, I do not want it sung sentimentally. Feste is not a sentimentalist. If fortune has dealt cruelly with him, he does not mope and die like Jack Point in *The
Yeomen of the Guard. He should attack it with a pace and bravado which make it all the more poignant, for
we know that his situation belies his words. We must know, too, that this song is half-way between the
realistic Feste, the licensed fool of Olivia, and the fantastic Feste, the commentator upon the play.

Shakespeare wrote Twelfth Night with music sounding round him, and Feste with his songs is the author's
principal instrument for introducing music into the play. To this extent, therefore, he has a role outside the
normal characterization of his part. Moreover, the clown in the Elizabethan tradition was half-way between a
straight actor and a licensed comedian, a relic of the devils of the mystery plays on the one hand and a
borrowing from the Italian comedies on the other. I do not wish to pursue this theme beyond explaining why I
intend to use Feste in his guise of Arlechino to punctuate the action. In this sort of dual role—realistic and
fantastic—he is supported by the crowd of Illyria girls and boys who represent both the inhabitants of Illyria
on the realistic side and convey, as creatures of fantasy, the atmosphere of music and dance which will
characterize the treatment of this production.

To these people falls the task of conveying Viola on her journeys to and from Olivia's garden and at the same
time changing the scenery as they pass along their route. At the same time, like Feste, they have a realistic
role to play, and as Orsino's subjects they take part in the action, more especially in the latter part of the play,
where the excitement of the final discoveries will be enhanced by their presence. Now the use of a crowd of
this nature in Twelfth Night will need careful and tactful handling if it is not to degenerate into the chorus of a
musical comedy. Our task will be to use the music and dances to enhance the fantasy without allowing them
to become extraneous to the flow and action of the play. The success of their presence will depend on our
ability to keep the whole play within the realms of the 'high fantastical' without losing touch with the true
characterization of these delightful creatures.

This balance of fantasy and reality is important. I have already stressed that Twelfth Night is a lyrical comedy,
not a comedy of manners. It Uves in the half-way house between reality and unreality, and although I have
tried to describe the characters to you from the realistic point of view, I want you to play them with a lyrical
approach so as to lift them off the ground and allow the whole play to move in the sphere of poetry.

For Twelfth Night is a magic play, written by the poet at the height of his powers before the intense bitterness
of his great tragic period swept over him. It is withal a completely mature play. We do not have to contend
with the obscure conceits and puns of Love's Labour's Lost, nor the paste-board characterization of The
Shrew. The plot is carefully balanced, the characters warm and alive, the verse and prose have the rounded
character of an author who is writing in full control of his pen. The playing of it is a challenge to our
imagination and to our powers of delicate and subtle distinction of comedy. It demands the full intelligence
and acting experience of a company—no more than that, of a team of first class players.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:

PRODUCTION:

John Gielgud • Shakespeare Memorial Theatre • 1955

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Background:

BACKGROUND:

John Gielgud's 1955 production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was received with muted praise, despite
the central performances of Laurence Olivier as Malvolio and Vivien Leigh as Viola. This staging also
featured a witty, gay Feste, played by Paul Daneman, and a sombre Sir Toby Belch, enacted by Richard
Burton. Despite a strong cast, critics charged Gielgud with failing to unify the romantic comedy of the play within his production's espousal of realistic characterization. This was particularly apparent in Olivier's Malvolio, which presented the steward as a self-made man who had carefully studied aristocratic ways and speech. Olivier lent the character a degree of seriousness and dignity that critics found wholly original. The reviewer for The Times nevertheless noted that this interpretation resulted in the miscarriage of Malvolio's comic scenes. Although Leigh's Viola was complimented for her boyish charm, several critics faulted her handling of the verse. Other performances included Keith Micheli as Orsino, Alan Webb as Sir Toby, Michael Denison as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Maxine Audley as Olivia.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Commentary:

COMMENTARY:

Eric Keown (review date 20 April 1955)


It seemed fair to expect a great deal of a Twelfth Night produced by John Gielgud and containing a Malvolio by Laurence Olivier, a Viola by Vivien Leigh. This opening production at Stratford is, of course, an improvement on anything we saw there in last year's meagre season, but considering the talents now assembled it remains strangely disappointing. Sir Laurence has chosen to give Malvolio a rather tortured lisp, as of an aspiring barrow-boy earnestly improving his English at night-school; and though the trick of speech is mastered with the utmost skill, it is difficult to see how it helps. Again, his Malvolio is subdued in the early scenes to nothing more than a reasonable disciplinarian, and is therefore not a man whose pretensions in any way justify the hatred of his fellows. He is very funny in the letter scene, and in his final interview with Olivia pathetic with a most touching dignity; but it is only intermittently the full Malvolio.

As a boy Miss Leigh is charming, as Viola herself curiously unromantic. Her performance is as clear as crystal, and as cold; it conveys with precision everything except emotion. Alan Webb's Sir Toby goes only some of the way; raffish and lovable, certainly, but on a minor scale that stops short of robustness. Michael Denison's Aguecheek is more complete, an amusing study of a jittery ninny that would seem better in a production where the interior scenes were lit well enough to get the effect of the actors' faces, and not so darkly as they are here. Neither Angela Baddeley's Maria nor Keith Michell's Orsino have the force one would have anticipated, the latter losing in an unnecessarily affected manner.

On the other side, a really beautiful Olivia from Maxine Audley, full of grace and feeling, and an honest Feste from Edward Atienza, who sings the songs memorably. And visually there is much to delight in Malcolm Pride's dresses and in his delicately architectural sets, where all kinds of gentle felicities can be discovered, such as the glow of light on the slanting roofs of shadowed buildings. This is exceptional work, refreshingly unobtrusive, and marred only by the lowering of the shipwreck gauze in front of a lovely curtain of the Illyrian seaport—a perplexing montage presumably intended, since it happened twice. Leslie Bridgewater's music adds to the pleasures of an evening which, judged on the level of such a cast, also misses a sad list of opportunities.

Peter Fleming (review date 22 April 1955)


There is a certain lack of heart about this elegant and well-paced production. The play (as Johnson very mildly put it) 'exhibits no just picture of life,' and we cannot expect to have our withers wrung by the pangs of the
lovers or the humiliations which Malvolio brings upon himself. Yet we ought, at times, to be touched by them, however lightly or quizzically; and here we are not.

Miss Vivien Leigh's Viola is trim, pretty, poised and resourceful; but to the qualities which distinguish an air-hostess something must be added—warmth, uncertainty, a capacity for being embarrassed—if she is to lead this improbable dance through Illyria in the way it should be led, and Miss Leigh's performance, though talented and charming, has too strong a bias towards what politicians call non-involvement. Miss Maxine Audley's unashamedly romantic Olivia and Mr. Keith Michell's handsome Orsino are more partisan and more satisfactory.

Sir Laurence Olivier presents a brilliant and deeply considered study of Malvolio; yet here again some inner quality of reserve or detachment intervenes, like Cellophane, between actor and audience, so that we do not quite relish to the full either the folly or the pathos of the steward. It is a performance of extraordinary virtuosity, yet it leaves us feeling vaguely unsatisfied. Of the trio who gull Malvolio, Mr. Michael Denison's Aguecheek is easily the funniest and the best. Sir John Gielgud's production hardly makes the most of the class-distinctions with which Olivia's household is riddled. Maria, in dress and speech, is almost as great a lady as her mistress, and Mr. Alan Webb is allowed to make Sir Toby Belch a sort of bedizened and befuddled tramp. This is often, and I always think wrongly, done. The point about Sir Toby is that his position is precarious; the discreet, the instantly regretted hiccup is better comedy than the thunderous and unregarded belch, and it is more interesting to see how long a tipsy man can stand up than how often he can fall down.

Mr. Edward Atienza's Feste (for the cut of whose motley some acknowledgement ought, I feel, to have been made to Dr. Leslie Hotson) is serviceable and pleasant, and Mr. William Devlin's impulsive sea-captain seems to belong to a warmer-blooded world than this Illyria. Mr. Malcolm Pride's scenery has very great beauty and distinction, and altogether the Stratford season can be said to have opened with considerable grace and lustre.

The Times (review date 22 April 1955)


Sir Laurence Olivier's interpretative resource is such that there was no guessing beforehand how he would choose to treat Malvolio; and the choice actually made—whether or not given theatrical validity—certainly took the Stratford first-night audience by surprise. It did not fall on the Puritan, whose portentous gravity is in itself a standing provocation to the fool-baiting Illyrians, a stiff spruce figure of preposterous pretensions. Nor on the insolent jackin-office, over-ambitious and overweening, properly put to his purgation. And not on the fantastic complex creature, twitching with distempered self-esteem and tortured by ambition, who gradually steals our sympathies from the over-zealous tricksters. The actor turned from these familiar personages to present a plain unlikeable man.

Sir Laurence's Malvolio is a shaven and cropped Round-head among laughing Cavaliers whose breeding he envies and whose frivolous manners he despises. He is an efficient steward who in the discharge of his duties may show ill-nature towards his fellow servants, but he is never preposterous. Those about him may dislike his starchiness; there is no particular reason why they (or we) should laugh at him. He hardly seems a natural butt. Even his manner of interrupting the midnight revels is more that of a man reasonably annoyed at being wakened from sleep than of an officers' steward. It requires the introduction of a red hot poker—manipulated with much realistic delicacy—to make the interrupter stir his comic stumps. While Malvolio's day-dreams swell towards realization the actor suggests the depths of social misgiving from which they rise at the artful Maria's enticement. He winds up the scene with an inimitable piece of by-play in which the grave steward after several wry attempts to smile into a mirror achieves a satisfied asinine grin. We have leave to laugh at him once more as "the yellow-legged stork," but it is not laughter but pathos that Sir Laurence is primarily concerned to produce—the pathos of a plain unlikeable man misplaced in a land of misrule and cruelly
abused. Unfortunately the prison scene, with Malvolio lifting a stubbornly sensible head, crowned with a single straw, above floor level, miscarries. We have missed much of the laughter that springs from more conventional readings; we should miss the pathos also were Sir Laurence not able to cry "I'll be avenged on the whole pack of you" in a way that hushes the whole theatre. This cry, so exquisitely studied and so poignantly accusing, is one of the things—alas, not many—that we shall remember of a performance in which a well considered intention somehow fails of its full theatrical effect.

The scenery and the costumes of Mr. Malcolm Pride are always lovely to look at, and so is the Viola of Miss Vivien Leigh. She is like some happy hunting boy on her ways between Orsino and Olivia, but in speaking her contemptuous or tender rebukes of the lovers' poses she gets little variety into the verse. She is in her romantic way a little too "knowing" to convey the natural and transparent honesty which is designed for those who are the dupes of their own sentimentalism. Sir John Gielgud's production has to keep a difficult balance between his realistic Malvolio and the play's comic and romantic elements. He is inclined to hurry the roystering Illyrians. This is a pity since Mr. Alan Webb and Mr. Michael Denison are both wonderfully well suited as the two knights. Miss Angela Baddeley puts a somewhat shrewish edge on Maria's tongue. Delicate, imaginative grouping adds to the loveliness of the setting and costumes, and the romantics are well served by Miss Maxine Audley's gracious and elegant Olivia and by Mr. Keith Micheli as an Orsino who fairly revels in the pomp and circumstance of courtship. It must be said, however, that the loveliness of colour and the lightness of movement cannot altogether conceal the absence of feeling and humour that are of the essence of Twelfth Night.

J. C. Trewin (review date 23 April 1955)


Malvolio, Olivia's steward in that Illyrian world of May, has been many people on many stages: I have seen him as a sombre precisian, an icy Cardinal in reduced circumstances, a blend of bullfrog and fretful porpentine. None would have recognised any other. Indeed, we could have a whole cast of rival Malvolios; and fun it might be.

What, in a speech, is the true man? Maria has set him down for us:

The devil a Puritan that he is, or any thing constantly, but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself, so cram'd, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his ground of faith that all that look on him love him [II. iii. 147-52].

And Olivia said of her steward: "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite."

I have been thinking of Malvolio in this early morning calm after the Twelfth Night that has opened the Festival season at Stratford-upon-Avon. With Sir John Gielgud to produce, and Sir Laurence and Lady Olivier (Vivien Leigh) as Malvolio and Viola, this has been the most eagerly-awaited première of the year. Now it is over I have been defending Sir Laurence's Malvolio—not that it needs any defence—against some of my colleagues, who have not found in him the Illyrian steward of their imaginations.

Let me say at once that it is a performance I shall remember for its fresh approach and its unselfishness. Malvolio, as Olivier acts him is not just a part for a comedian barnacled with antique "business." The man takes his proper place in the Illyrian household; he does not wantonly split the pattern of the play. Here, indeed, he is everything that Maria says he is: certainly an "affectioned ass" and a fellow that one (most properly) detests from his first appearance. He may be a competent steward, and no doubt anatomical
dissection would show that his heart is in the right place. But, superficially, he is sour and thin-lipped; his eyes are contemptuous; he has a toxic glance for Feste, and he tastes with a distempered appetite. We realise at once why the household hates him; why Maria finds it easy to frame the plot. (If we consider it too deeply, the May-night plot for the May morning does lead to a scene, the imprisonment, that is as endearing as a bull-fight. Still, that was the Elizabethan sense of humour, and Twelfth Night has glory enough elsewhere for us to forget that sudden cruelty.)

The Stratford Malvolio has clearly worked his way up: an ambitious man whose ambitions still leap. Olivier suggests Malvolio's origin by his intonations, by the affected lisping veneer that flakes away suddenly to reveal the barrow-boy vowels. (I do not follow an argument that Sir Laurence should not have adopted this intricately-managed accent simply because it is intricate. Doubtless he would be criticised just as strongly if he did nothing. Do let us beware of fault-finding for its own sake.)

The supercilious fellow, day-dreaming about the respect to be shown by "my kinsmahn Tobay," turns naturally in the Letter scene to the turkey-cock blown by his imagination; the actor points subtly and richly the "affectioned ass" in his practice with the hand-mirror. From the first, Olivier has established the part firmly. He is theatrical without being blatantly so. Malvolio's character is as consistent as Shakespeare allows it to be: the vain, consequential prig, ashamed of his station, who can be transformed at a hint to the capering fool before the Countess ("Alas, poor fool! how have they baffled thee!"), and who moves to a figure oddly tragic when he is in the dark room and bound. Laurence Olivier has one great moment—and I observe the epithet—when, at the last, he comes from below in pitifully tattered dignity and blinking from the darkness. Cut to the heart, he asks for no more than revenge; it will be work indeed to entreat him to a peace.

I have seen Malvolios by the score. Some have been more immediately comic. None has been developed more logically and with less apparent effort. To those who say that Olivier toils for his humours, I can merely reply that there are as many variations in the "sense of humour" as there are in readings of Malvolio. Perversely, I refuse to believe that Olivier fails because he has not offered the part to us in poster-colours. He is, very simply, Malvolio: he takes us back to the man's past and makes us speculate about his future. (I have known younger images of Malvolio with the same contemptuous eyes, the same thin sneer, arrogant self-love.)

There is little more space. Sir John Gielgud, with settings by Malcolm Pride, has produced, lightly and elegantly, a romantic-wistful Illyria. The last moments, with the windows of the great house lit beneath the moon, are blessedly serene. Vivien Leigh's Viola has a still gravity; Maxine Audley hints at the shallowness of Olivia; Alan Webb—in a part that Sir Laurence once acted superbly—is an amiably ruffling Toby who never forgets that he is "consanguineous": he is also a good hand at mulling sack. The Andrew (Michael Denison) needs only a horse, a beehive and a useful little box to be another kind of knight. I did not much care for Keith Michell's Orsino, altogether too ardent a swooner even for the lovesick Duke, and the Feste (Edward Atienza) does not hold the mind. But I shall remember Malvolio and the May morning foolery; the "affectioned ass" wavering over the pronunciation of "slough"; Olivier's unfaltering technique, and the closing moment when I had the rare shiver one feels when a major personality is on the stage. It would be long before this Malvolio returned to his lady's house.

T. C. Worsley (review date 23 April 1955)


The new Stratford season which opened last week gives every promise of being extremely interesting. In contrast to last year the Directors have gathered a powerful cast to support the leading players, Sir Laurence Olivier and Miss Vivien Leigh: it is to include Angela Baddeley, Joyce Redman, Maxine Audley, Anthony Quayle, Alan Webb and Michael Denison. The two tragedies are to be the rarely staged Titus Andronicus as
the last play and, as the third, Macbeth, in which there is good grounds for hoping that Sir Laurence will conquer a part which defeats so many good actors. The season has begun with a beautifully mounted Twelfth Night, elegantly and poetically produced by Sir John Gielgud. If, on the first night, there was some disappointment over this, the reason is to be found, I think, in expectations having been pitched a little out of key. Inevitably such a resounding first night creates a demand for the extra fizz of the great occasion. But Twelfth Night is not the right play to give that sort of satisfaction, and especially when, as here, the production is designed to stress and preserve a unified mood. In such a case there is no room for extravagances and fireworks, and individual performances must be toned down so that no excrescences are visible on the perfect polish of the surface.

I suppose the most obvious manifestation of this was in Mr. Alan Webb's Sir Toby Belch. Sir Toby, with a heavy actor playing the part, is often a dominating rollick, first cousin to Falstaff, and painted in the primary colours of knock-about. Mr. Alan Webb lost none of the points in scaling him down, and the play as a whole gained in cohesion. He and Miss Angela Baddeley and Mr. Michael Denison make a trio merry rather than noisy, credible servants of the grave Madonna in their off-hours. Perhaps in aiming at this they erred a little on the side of quietness; in the kitchen scene especially where they were placed very far back on the stage they lapsed into inaudibility—but they will soon get the feeling of the house and the expertness of all their timing and fooling will tell. The scaling down here meant a consequent muting of Malvolio, too. Sir Laurence Olivier is a superb comedian capable of those touches that take the breath away in admiration; and these touches were on show on all the edges of the part, lighting up some quite unemphatic phrase like "Madam, I will" with all the chiaroscuro of character—pomposity, self-importance, servility. We may have seen Malvolios who seem to make more of the part, but could anyone else make so much of it so unobtrusively, as loyalty to the general conception demanded?

For in this production the romantic element is to be kept dead centre, centre, and Mr. Malcolm Pride's decor, simple but sensuous, set the tone beautifully. (I personally rejoice to see Sir John breaking the fetish of the permanent set which has been responsible in its time for a full share of absurdities.) The rival houses are kept at just the right romantic pitch by Miss Maxine Audley's accomplished Olivia and Mr. Keith Michell's excellently spoken Orsino (though he alone in the cast was inclined, I though to "press" as they say of golfers). Miss Vivien Leigh achieved so exactly the stance and "set" of the page boy that she can afford to relax it a little as she plays herself in—an assured and valuable performance. Finally Mr. Edward Atienza, the excellent clown, pleasantly voiced, bridges the comedy and romance without any of the arty affectations which have lately overtaken our Festes. Altogether this was a most distinguished production with which to open.

Ronald Barker (review date June 1955)


Even Nature combined with the Memorial Theatre to make this production of Twelfth Night an auspicious occasion and held back her blossom and fragrance until it had settled down. I saw the play in the third week of the season and found it one of the most interesting productions of the play I have seen.

John Gielgud, the director, has seen the play not as an Elizabethan romp but as a quiet romantic piece. The tone is set by the exquisite opening lines of Orsino and held until Feste has let the last notes of his song die away.

There is a sad dying fall about the production, sustained on almost a single note, which makes it an almost touching experience because we believe in everything that happens. The fight for love is a life and death struggle, with the clowns remaining human beings and not set pawns of pernicious fun.
When most of us have been prepared to accept this play as a rather dull Renaissance oil painting done in glowing tones with broad strokes, it has been cleaned and all the old paint is peeled away, leaving a tender water colour with each line carefully moulded to sustain the atmosphere. But this painting would have been more welcome at the court of Victoria than that of the first Elizabeth.

Gielgud, for his inspiration, has gone to Granville-Barker's preface and the recent study of the play by Leslie Hotson, who has with infinite pains and scholarship given an indication of the type of person who inspired the parts.

The one which most differs from pre-conceived notions is that of Malvolio. He is not seen as a pompous bore but as a tight-lipped effeminate Shylock with an inferiority complex. The Merchant of Venice presented in this light would be a revaluation.

The clowns have the riotous merriment knocked out of them. They are all basically well-bred people and we chuckle with them, rather more than at them.

As to the poetry, Gielgud has managed to retain most of the lovely music and given his actors time to let the words have their full significance.

The director, then, having determined the style of production and interpretation must accept responsibility for his actors. They have responded superbly. This is the most interesting production of Twelfth Night to be seen since Michel Saint Denis did it at the Phoenix before the war.

Laurence Olivier as Malvolio may not be the general conception of the character, but the part is played with such panache and style that it is bound to influence all future interpretations of the part. His timing and technical control could not be equalled by any other actor in England.

Vivien Leigh gives a technically irreproachable performance. With her studied grace she looks incredibly beautiful, but is without heart or humour.

Michael Denison makes Sir Andrew into a queer delicate type. He has a lot of funny business which suits the interpretation perfectly. It is the best performance I have seen from this actor.

Angela Baddeley's Maria and Alan Webb's Sir Toby have lost all of their vulgarity and earthiness, but remain always in the picture. Orsino is beautifully played by Keith Micheli, and Maxine Audley's Olivia is warm, human and always feminine. Feste is played as a dull-witted clown.

But having accepted the romantic dominance, surely it was a mistake not to make more of the last song. Each verse should get slower and more profound until the sad end is reached.

This is a production that London should have the opportunity of seeing. It is a credit to our theatre.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:

PRODUCTION:

Tyrone Guthrie•Stratford Festival, Ontario•1957
Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Background:

BACKGROUND:

Guthrie's 1957 production at the Stratford Festival, Ontario succeeded in integrating the romantic and comic plots of the drama. Critics such as Henry Hewes felt this had been achieved by a careful fleshing out of the comic roles. In praising Christopher Plummer's portrayal of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, for example, Hewes commented that "making Shakespeare's clowns into real people instead of mere affectations has the advantage of keeping the audience ready to laugh as they see each new situation approaching." Guthrie further innovated in his handling of Feste, played by Bruno Gerussi, who became, according to Arnold Edinborough, "a sad, ageing fool full of the pathos of his position where he is retained not for his wit but for his length of service." A similar sensitivity to the romantic roles characterized the production. Edinborough maintained that "as the bright-eyed and shrewdly naive Viola, Siobhan McKenna was entrancing and her swaggering self-importance was beautifully undermined by the sensitive playing of Frances Hyland as Olivia." Commentators further praised the performances of Lloyd Bochner as Orsino, Douglas Campbell as Sir Toby, and Douglas Rain as Malvolio.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Commentary:

COMMENTARY:

Brooks Atkinson (review date 4 July 1957)


Give Tyrone Guthrie a trap door and he is as happy as two larks. In Twelfth Night, which opened in the new Festival Theatre last evening, he has a heavy, thumping trap door in the center of the platform stage and four of his actors put on a harlequinade around, in and out of it—into it feet first at a headlong speed that is always good for a roar from the audience.

Don't expect much from the romantic scenes. Although they are affably played by Siobhan McKenna as Viola and Frances Hyland as Olivia, Mr. Guthrie is not much interested in them when he has a buffoon like Douglas Campbell on the staff. Inevitably, Mr. Campbell is Sir Toby Belch, top banana of the revels; and inevitably Mr. Campbell is very funny. No one can immerse himself more cheerfully in drunken festivity—a little weary from long dissipation and no sleep but always ready for one more tankard of ale and one more prank.

He is in good company. Christopher Plummer's gangling, chuckleheaded Sir Andrew Aguecheek, whose eyes are as befuddled as his brain; Amelia Hall's tiny, insinuating, mischief-making Maria; Bruno Gerussi's convivial Feste with good singing voice and more enterprise than is usual to the part—all these reel ing characters conspire with Sir Toby in keeping the humors low, slapdash and entertaining.

Mr. Guthrie does go on endlessly. This is a Twelfth Night that runs to three hours and a quarter, if the two intermissions are included. Having made his points two or three times, Mr. Guthrie makes them two or three times more with the same boyish enthusiasm. When the comic mood is on him, Mr. Guthrie can never bear to stop. This time he has conspired in long pantomime when Feste is taunting Malvolio in the dungeon. It is fairly unintelligible all the way through; it is also longer than Mr. Guthrie, who is the tallest stage director in the Western Hemisphere.

In the circumstances, the poetic interludes in Twelfth Night get short shrift. It is a pity. In the first place, they complete the symphonic or operatic design of this artificial comedy. In the second place, the actors are
capable of making them charming. Miss McKenna is a pleasant Viola. There is something of the stolid St. Joan peasant in Miss McKenna's Illyrian maiden, which doubtless the author did not foresee, for he was a great toadier of ladies and gentlemen. But Miss McKenna's Viola has an expansive good humor that is good for the play. And Miss Hyland's Olivia—frail but willful, all grace and womanliness—gives the romantic scenes a core of meaning.

Douglas Rain's Malvolio is the finest piece of acting in the performance. The character is drawn at full length with admirable economy of means—rigid, neat, superior, lonely, this Malvolio, like Shylock, has a keen mind in a company of idlers and triflers. At a time when a theatregoer is just convincing himself that faulty theatre acoustics are responsible for the unintelligibility of parts of the performance, here comes Mr. Rain with perfect speaking. Every word is clear, precise, fully-formed and articulated.

Not being as heartless as the Elizabethans, Mr. Guthrie gives Malvolio a few moments of sobering dignity in the last scene. Both Malvolio and Mr. Rain deserve them. But Mr. Guthrie is chiefly interested in the comedy; he has lost his heart to the rolls and clowns, which results in a Twelfth Night that is funny but also formless, over-extended and tone-deaf.

Tanya Moiseiwitsch has designed costumes that seem to be in the Charles II period when men wore spiked beards and lace shoulder ruffs. It is an interesting period and Miss Moiseiwitsch's costumes are lively. An independent-minded director, Mr. Guthrie is a great hand for shifting centuries. If memory serves, he has only the eighteenth left.

Henry Hewes (review date 20 July 1957)


The fifth summer of the Shakespeare Festival Theatre of Canada is notable, not only because the most unique and exciting theatre in North America has moved from a temporary tent to a beautiful permanent building, but also because it presents two stars many consider the finest classic performers of the younger generation. One, twenty-eight-year-old Christopher Plummer, is instantly recognizable as a potential Sir Laurence Olivier. He is even recognizable as such in this, his first Hamlet, which, though deficient in some important respects, courageously explores the softer side of the role and its opportunities for humor.

The second star, whose Saint Joan has already earned her stage immortality, is Siobhan McKenna. As Viola in Tyrone Guthrie's production of Twelfth Night, Miss McKenna successfully applies some of the qualities that made her Joan so great. With economical grace and shining eye she creates Illyria out of bare boards as divinely as if she had had a vision of Heaven. When she disguises herself as a man or as half a man, there is the familiar boyish pleasure at being free of the necessity to act feminine. When she falls in love with Orsino it is as complete as a religious conversion, and when she prays that her brother may still be alive God would answer if Shakespeare didn't. Finally, when near the end of the play she volunteers to be tortured and killed by Orsino if it will bring him comfort she walks through him into the hearts of the audience.

Dr. Guthrie has astutely used the Irish actress's unrivaled capacity for sudden surges of spirit to transfuse high emotional voltage into a rather arbitrary love-masque. He has bid her use a higher than natural voice, which helps us to differentiate between this role and Joan. Vocally, Miss McKenna is at her best in the short speeches which she fills with intense emotion and sadness. Her "Was not this love indeed?" is unforgettably moving. Somewhat less effective is her delivery of the famous "willow-cabin speech, for by trying to fill each line with personal truth her own highly-individual rhythms and emphases sometimes clash with Shakespeare's measured lyrical flow.
With the security of Miss McKenna’s power, Dr. Guthrie feels free to play his clowns as less silly than is the lamentable tradition. Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew are well-defined characters. In the latter role Mr. Plummer is again reminiscent of Olivier, as he balances comic tricks with a characterization we can believe in. Really funny is the moment when Sir Andrew says of fooling "But I do it more natural," and involuntarily demonstrates by suddenly plummeting out of sight through an open trap-door. Making Shakespeare’s clowns into real people instead of mere affectations has the advantage of keeping the audience ready to laugh as they see each new situation approaching. However, Dr. Guthrie does not completely abandon his predilection for the superimposed piece of farcical business. In this Twelfth Night his niftiest invention is a double stairway one-and-a-half take. By having Viola coming down one side while her twin brother is whisking up the other, and allowing Malvolio to see both just a fraction of a second too far apart to realize that he has seen not one but two, he creates a quick stunning laugh and adds a feeling of speed to the proceedings.

Another fine innovation is Dr. Guthrie's decision not to play Feste as an effete, prancing jester. Bruno Gerussi's wise fool is earthy and never lets us forget that he has a daily problem of earning food and shelter in a world that can be very cruel. Since the puritanical Malvolio threatens his livelihood, Feste is partially justified in his cruelty to him, just as Shylock was in his hatred of Antonio. Douglas Rain plays the pompous steward very straight, which though it detracts somewhat from the hilarity improves the balance of the play. When at the evening's end the cast joins with Feste in the singing of "the rain it raineth every day" (with new music by John Cook that makes it resemble a rhythmic Yiddish lament) we feel we are experiencing life instead of the traditional cultural exercise that Shakespeare's plays so often become.

Arnold Edinborough (review date Autumn 1957)


After four very successful years in a tent, the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario, is now housed in an exciting new theatre. From the outside, with its circular scalloped roof fluting into deep folds like some great nun's coif and topped by a jaunty coronet flying two flags, it still retains the carnival atmosphere which the tent had. Inside, the stage designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Tyrone Guthrie remains relatively unchanged.

There is a large main stage jutting thirty-four feet into the audience and a triangular balcony at the back with steps leading up to it on each side. There are four large steps round the main stage and two platforms halfway up the stairs. There are thus seven levels of playing in the open and a large trapdoor which gives access to an invisible but very effective eighth.

The auditorium has been enlarged by the addition of an 858-seat balcony, but the arc of the pit has been slightly lessened so that no spectator has his sightline interrupted by the pillars of the balcony. Surprisingly enough, though the theatre now seats over two thousand people, no one in the audience is more than 70 feet from the stage.

The aisles through the audience are used for entrances and exits, three aisles running down to the stage and two running down from the stage under the audience. This makes a total of nine major entrances to playing areas on seven different levels.

In a word, then, this is an Elizabethan theatre. It does not slavishly follow Hodges or Cranford Adams or any other of the scholars who have taught us so much about the Globe and its fellows, but it does reconstruct a stage which has the essential facilities for the production, in its own idiom, of a drama which demands close identification of the actor with the audience, a variety of levels for the playing of eavesdropping and discovery scenes, ease of entrance from all sides to cope with the rapid swirl of battle or the more stately pomp of royalty in progress, and a sufficient cellarage for ghosts, prisoners, and other infernal beings.
Walter Kerr, summing up the theatre in his review in the *New York Herald Tribune* on July 7th, said: "The authorities responsible for the Canadian Festival have created something more than a dazzlingly handsome and superbly functional playhouse. They have given us the only really new stage and the only really new actor-audience experience of the last hundred years on this continent."

Those same authorities were aware that they must this season offer a program worthy of their new playhouse. So far, they had staged the less popular comedies, *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*; they had given us a pantomime production of *The Taming of the Shrew*; there had been two histories, *Richard III* and *Henry V*. The nearest Stratford had been so far to a major play was a superb production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1955 with the late Frederick Valk as Shylock.

The choice this year could not have been more "major". No Shakespearian theatre could aim higher than to baptise itself with *Hamlet* and bless its future with *Twelfth Night*. And both productions in their respective fashions were notable: the comedy for its overall direction by Tyrone Guthrie, the tragedy for its concentration on the story relieved by some sparkling individual performances.

... *Twelfth Night* is a blend of poetry and prose with the prosiest of all Shakespeare's fools linking the two groups of characters. More than in any other of the great comedies, it is possible to divorce the comic scenes from the romantic ones completely, making a self-sufficient sub-plot out of the gulling of Malvolio and the antics of the roisterers who arrange it. Such a director's trick, all too commonly done, forces Sir Toby and Sir Andrew to become lowlife clowns despite their titles, makes Maria's part cheap and Feste's unplayable. Another result is that the romantics are left to survive on the poetry alone—a diet on which the modern appetite can soon surfeit and its interest so die.

Tyrone Guthrie, who has done strange and wild violence to the text at Stratford on occasion, chose to integrate the play in a manner which is rare and delightful. Feste became a sad, ageing fool full of the pathos of his position where he is retained not for his wit but for his length of service. His melancholy, honestly come by, thus makes Malvolio's even more priggish, rendering his gulling and final turning-off not only poignant, which it always is, but even credible, which it seldom is.

On the opposite side of the court we have Viola retained with no recommendation other than her wit and youth, qualities which get her, without asking, the same licence as Feste has to plead for in the first scene with his mistress.

Thus Viola and Feste link together, and through that link the Duke and Olivia are seen to be alike in humanity if not in affection. This humanity goes on to embrace the comics who, though foolish, are yet nobly born. In their own way Sir Andrew and Sir Toby are no more nor less self-indulgent than Olivia in her rejection of love and the Duke in his advancing of it.

With this solid pattern behind the production, *Twelfth Night* was one of the best comic performances that many people will ever see. As the bright-eyed and shrewdly naive Viola, Siobhan McKenna was entrancing and her swaggering self-importance was beautifully undermined by the sensitive playing of Frances Hyland as Olivia. Lloyd Bochner made even the opening lines sound fresh and there was a clarity of diction and a poetic timbre in these three voices which was a joy to hear.

The sheer inventive fun of Douglas Campbell as Sir Toby and Christopher Plummer as Sir Andrew was inspired. Sir Toby was a rich portrait somewhat in the Rubens tradition with, from time to time, a Franz Hals fastidiousness which reminded us of his kinship with Olivia and of his knighthood. Sir Andrew was a ninny nonpareil. His falling into the trapdoor at the end of the cakes and ale scene and his massively ineffectual interruptions as Malvolio read the limed letter, on more than one occasion lifted the circular roof, even on the opening night when one assumes that dignity is more often indulged in than delight.
Bruno Gerussi, linking them all as Feste, was sad but industrious. True, his industry consisted mainly of tying invisible pieces of string from one stage pillar to the next, but this symbolic web was spun all round the play and the separate scenes glowed like dewdrops on it.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:**

**PRODUCTION:**

Peter Hall•Shakespeare Memorial Theatre•1958

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Background:**

**BACKGROUND:**

Hall's revival of *Twelfth Night* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre sought to give equal weight to the comic lightness and melancholic heaviness in the drama through a combination of visual effects and innovative characterization. Lila de Nobili's set designs were described by Robert Speaight as "a rich symphony in russet," and the court of Illyria was reminiscent of Charles IPs, with costumes patterned after the portraits of Van Dyck and Rubens. Most noteworthy among the principal roles was Geraldine McEwan's Olivia, which portrayed the Countess as a sharply satirical figure incapable of seriousness. Dorothy Tutin's Viola received unanimous approval; Peter Jackson commented that her portrayal was "wonderfully boyish, breathless, and bewildered and always completely audible." Other performances included Richard Johnson as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Cyril Luckham as Feste, Michael Meacham as Orsino, Miranda Connell as Maria, and Douglas Rain as Malvolio. While this staging pleased audiences, critics such as Roy Walker voiced certain objections: "This was a *Twelfth Night* that did not altogether succeed, but a production that continually threw fresh light on a comedy about which most of us have long ceased to think freshly." The production was revived by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960 with several major cast changes.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Commentary:**

**COMMENTARY:**

**John Wain** (review date 27 April 1958)


In the world of the cinema, the pundits are fond of telling us, a technical advance has usually been accompanied by a backslide in imagination and intelligence. I hope it won't turn out to be true of the theatre as well.

Last Tuesday's *Twelfth Night* (Stratford on Avon: director, Peter Hall) was a perfect example of how a Shakespeare play can be ripped apart by the twin steel claws of naturalism and gimmickry. The basic assumption of the modern Shakespearean theatre ("We've got to put on this dull stuff, which most people—ourselves included—find only half-intelligible; so let's see how we can import some fun into it") was evident from the first moment.

It isn't the actors' fault; that should be said at once. They all played quite brilliantly, and the packed audience seemed as delighted by their virtuosity as by the sumptuous staging and handsome scene-painting. Mr. Richard Johnson's Aguecheek was one of the cleverest studies I have ever seen; he turned the character into a
paranoid manic-depressive, strongly reminiscent at times of Lucky in Waiting for Godot. His interpretation was a splendidly original play-within-the-play, besides making the perfect foil to Mr. Patrick Wymark's Sir Toby—a more robustly conventional interpretation, this, meaty and zestful.

Even those performances which most set one's teeth on edge were, as acting, very intelligent; in any other setting—as a series of revue turns, for instance—they would have been most enjoyable. Miss Geraldine McEwan's Olivia, played as a kittenish typist on holiday from a City office, was a charming study; it isn't her fault that Shakespeare made Olivia a countess, full of authority and aristocratic hauteur. Mr. Hall presumably told her to be coy and simpering, and coy and simpering she was. Just what his motives were in getting her to use her professional skill against the play, rather than for it, must remain his own secret; she did her job.

As for naturalism, it ran riot throughout. Even Miss Dorothy Tutin, whose instinctive grace and intelligence protected her, for the most part, against the over-literalness of the production, was side-tracked into playing the first of the scenes in which Viola acts as emissary to Olivia as if it had been written by Tennessee Williams. It was fascinating; but the scene would have made its own impact if it had been spoken quite simply—and that impact would have been Shakespeare's. And if the all-pervading naturalism handicapped even Miss Tutin, what it did to the scenes in which she did not take part is simply indescribable. Malvolio in his dungeon was allowed to give us ten minutes of pure tragedy, complete with hysterical laughter, anguished groaning and broken appeals for pity.

Feste, singing his final song, had to break down and sob in case anyone had missed the point that his character was meant to be rather sombre. When Sir Andrew offered to give Cesario his horse. I half expected to see a real one trot on to the stage.

It remains only to say that the audience showed every sign of being pleased; the applause was thunderous, the curtain-calls infinite; this production, clearly, will be a money-spinner. But does Stratford need to compete on this level? The next morning, the sky was pale blue, the sun warmed every stone, the town seemed one enchanting garden, the swans floated on the river, the beer flowed in the pubs—and it was Shakespeare's birthday. Wouldn't people (I mused) still come here even if they had to watch the plays put on quite straight?

Alan Brien (review date 2 May 1958)


I sometimes wonder what would happen if our bright young directors took the same impertinent liberties with the work of other dramatists which they now invariably take with Shakespeare. Early Noël Coward could be played as Restoration comedy. Ibsen could be played as Aldwych farce on a permanent set with nine doors. Accept the principle that the less the audience understand of the dialogue the more they will enjoy the horseplay, and any play can be treated as an abandoned old clothes shop only fit to be burgled by the next band of strolling players.

There is no doubt that much of our drama would be vastly improved by being set aside as a training area for the young commandos of the theatre. But what are they training for? To alter the period of the action, to rejig the entrances and exits of the characters, to distribute among the cast an ingenious assortment of grotesque mannerisms, is really a kind of forgery. If a producer is so confident in his ability as a renovator, he should have the courage to start with the text and rewrite the whole play as Dryden did with Antony and Cleopatra.

At Stratford, Mr. Peter Hall has set out to revarnish and retouch the surface of an old peeling canvas known as Twelfth Night. He has pushed it forward into the Caroline age—but it is the Caroline age seen through the eyes of a Victorian anecdotal painter so that among all the pageboy bobs, coaching-inn furniture and greetings-card flower gardens the unspoken question always seems to be 'When Did You Last See Your
Father?' Olivia and Orsino should be a parody pair of aristocratic Arcadian lovers out of Sir Philip Sidney who drop their masks and fumble their lines when their conventional charade gets mixed up with real passion. Both their gentility and their genteelity are clearly signposted in the lines they are given. But under Mr. Hall's guidance Geraldine McEwan plays Olivia like some pert, perky middle-class flapper out of The Boy Friend. Michael Meachum's Orsino is nearer the target—but he is still a romantic Edwardian schoolboy Duke who has not yet quite made the transference from girlish boys to boyish girls.

The subplot of Malvolio, Aguecheek, Sir Toby and Maria was intended as a bass counterpoint theme to the tremulo treble passions of Orsino and Olivia. It is Shakespeare's method of giving depth of focus and an extra dimension to the nonrealistic, almost operatic, lay figures of a dramatic poem. Here again Mr. Hall has obtained brilliant performances from his cast and each individual character is theatrically a striking creation. Mark Dignam's vowel-gargling, proud-nosed Malvolio is a degraded pro-consul exiled among the white trash, Lord Curzon gullied by the beachcombers. Richard Johnson's stricken mental defective, with his heron legs akimbo and sheep face aghast, gives Aguecheek an insane pathos which the part can hardly bear. Such ingenious interpretations can hardly exist side by side. Once more Mr. Hall's determination to avoid dullness succeeds in atomising Shakespeare's play.

Mr. Hall is wrong and I am right. And yet how I enjoyed every moment of his wrongness. Scene after scene explodes like a Roman candle—the patterns are arbitrary, unconnected, perverse and dazzling. And throughout it all, defying Shakespeare with every gesture, struts the funny, touching, huggable, nervous Viola, triumphantly incarnated in Dorothy Tutin.

Peter Jackson (review date June 1958)


What a rib-tickling, refreshing Twelfth Night Peter Hall has conjured up for the second production of the Stratford season; a production that is smooth and gay and brimming with new ways to play old tricks.

Dorothy Tutin's golden Viola is wonderfully boyish, breathless and bewildered and always completely audible. She is alive, and to be alive in a cast like this means working double overtime.

To force Olivia to play for laughs while surrounded on all sides by comedians with far better lines does not give the actress a fighting chance, but Geraldine McEwan, with her piping voice and plaintive little gestures, draws such sympathy from the audience that the approach is almost justified.

Richard Johnson plunges from the high tragedy of Romeo to the foppish, foolish Andrew Aguecheek and scores brilliantly, creating—by movement and facial expression as much as by words—such a sad schoolboy of a knight that we have to weep with him.

Everyone in this cast is full of youth and vigour, even Patrick Wymark's Toby Belch; not a scruffy old dotard with one foot in the ale barrel but a pot-bellied musketeer with a clear mind and a good sword wrist. Miranda Connell's Maria is a delicious impression of fresh-faced laughter and sparkles at the expense of the stove-hatted, white-ruffled pompous prig of Mark Dignam's Malvolio.

The Feste of Cyril Luckham has grown old and grey in service and puts away ducats for his retirement but he is so deep in song and prose that I thought he must know every secret of life. As Orsino, Michael Meacham is suitably handsome, gallant and melancholy.

Lila de Nobili is an Italian and Italy is reflected in her mellow settings by rich blends of browns and golds, like old Renaissance tapestries.
On the first night of this revival the happy couples danced away into nothingness behind the gauze while Feste closed the chapter and then came such a well-won storm of applause that the illuminations by the river must have shaken in their sockets.

Roy Walker (review date 1959)


[Twelfth Night] has not a 'personal' title, and it hardly seems to have a central character, prominent or retired, unless we follow, as most star actors and modern productions do, the theatrical logic of opportunity that led to the comedy's being called, as early as 1623, 'Malvolio'. It has, of course, the two elements usual in a Shakespeare comedy, a romantic plot and a comic plot, usually played for contrast and counterpoint rather than brought to any final resolution and harmony. In the programme note to Peter Hall's production at Stratford in 1958, Ivor Brown speaks of the comic plot as 'secondary' but that hardly does justice to what may have been the producer's intention in keeping Malvolio in his place. Yet to select any one of the endearingly familiar characters as central and to balance the comic and romantic plots accordingly may seem, at best, an arbitrary attempt at novelty. Something of the sort, however, was what Hall seemed to be attempting. In making Feste the centre of the whirligig of time that brings in its revenges he had, at any rate, the authority of the New Cambridge edition. "We must hold," declared [New Cambridge editor A. Quiller-Couch], "and insist on holding Feste, Master of the Revels, to be the master-mind and controller of *Twelfth Night*, its comic spirit and president…." In the absence of a full supporting argument the assertion may seem arbitrary. A parallel to stimulate imagination in this direction might be found in the comparison of the bitter-sweet figure of Feste alone on the stage at the end, when the three couples go off, with that of the Merchant at the end of the earlier comedy when three other couples go off leaving alone the man to whom they owe, in some degree, their wedded happiness. There is also the fact that the title of *Twelfth Night* may be more indicative than it seems to us, who have lost any sense of twelfth night as a red-letter day in the calendar, the time of the Saturnalia which was also once the true date of Christmas. As John Stow tells us [in *The Survey of London*, 1912],

In the feast of Christmas, there was in the king's house, wheresoever he was lodged, a lord of misrule, or master of merry disports; and the like had ye in the house of every noble man of honour, or good worship, were he spiritual or temporal.

Is there more to that ubiquitous comic-sad spirit of Feste, a fool who lives by the church and masquerades as a veritable Abbot of Unreason, in this saturnal comic romance of the snobbish steward who aspires to be his mistress' master and the faithful servant who becomes her master's mistress, than was apparent to Pepys when he wrote it off as "not related at all to the name or day" (and as "a silly play") and to such moderns as J. Q. Adams when they agree with him, on the first point at any rate? The merit of Peter Hall's production, tentative rather than definitive, aspiring rather than assured, was that it gave new life to such a question. Perhaps Feste, whose song of the wind and the rain is heard next on the lips of Lear's Fool, has grown in the succession of Shakespeare's jesters, from the Touchstone who matches the motley of court and country to something more like the sadly wise Old Clown of such a modern Christian artist as Rouault?

Peter Hall's focus on Feste met the audience entering the theatre, on the drop-curtain painted by Lila de Nobili, who designed his 1957 Stratford production of *Cymbeline*. The central feature was a silvery aureoled figure in clown's costume descending into a dark world in which the faces of other characters seen in shadow were touched with the radiance. With his ass's ears he might well have been a disguised Mercury whose winged cap enabled him to go into whatever part of the universe he pleased with the greatest celerity. As music sounded a front spot focused on this coolly glowing figure, which dissolved as lights came up behind to make the curtain transparent. There a small group of musicians harmonized the music which is the food of love and, on the forestage, a group of gentlemen stood motionless in silhouette. The tableau of the drop had
been transposed from the vertical to the horizontal, but nothing went well for love until Feste (Cyril Luckham) appeared. As soon as his quicksilver wit proved his young and feather-brained Olivia (Geraldine McEwan) a fool, this mature Feste gave us a shrewd hint that this was not altogether fool. "There is no slander in an allowed fool" [I. v. 94] and "Now Mercury endue thee with leasing, for thou speakest well of fools" [I. v. 97] responds the wise fool whom Mercury's winged cap fits.

From the romantic mistress to the comic kinsman; at the end of the first 'act' Feste found out the bully-boy Sir Toby (Patrick Wymark) and the fool absolute, Sir Andrew (Richard Johnson) for the drinking-scene, set not in a wine-cellar but in a glowing Warwickshire walled garden where these laughing cavaliers were rebuked by Malvolio (Mark Dignam)—"the devil a puritan that he is" [II. iii. 147]—kill-joy of comic and romantic plots. As has been observed [by New Cambridge editor J. Dover Wilson], Maria's plan to 'let the fool make a third' [II. iii. 174] in the gulling of this peacock is contradicted later, in the letter scene, when Fabian unaccountably deputizes for Feste. This production minimized the inconsistency by letting Feste feign sleep, head on arm, at a table. As the others went out he raised his head and stared thoughtfully after them. The stage darkened rapidly on this picture, wood-pigeons cooing amorously in the distance, for the 'act' interval. That at least left the emphasis on Feste, but what could he have been thinking so seriously about, unless it was why Fabian had been allowed to usurp his place later in the play? The present writer wonders if this was not the actors' doing at some time before 1623. Might not an actor of Malvolio object that besides having more than his share of the comedy, and songs besides, Feste was stealing his best scene by business behind the box-tree? All Fabian's lines and entrances are somewhat suspect, and the problem is not solved, as in this production, by introducing him with Olivia in I, v.

The second 'act' began with the Duke's "Give me some music …" acceptably echoing the opening of the first. Feste's sad song seemed to woo Orsino to accept the death of a hopeless love that new and true love might be born, he is lost unless the melancholy god make his doublet of changeable taffeta. After the letter scene, from which Feste was so unaccountably absent, Viola met the fellow "wise enough to play the fool" [III. i. 60] whose keen eyes seemed to penetrate her disguise. But then Feste was, as usual, missing from the mock duel. Surely he, and not Fabian, was to be Viola's second, well assured this cock would not fight? Was not that the point of Feste's shock when, taking Sebastian for his sister in the next scene, he finds the young man now has mettle enough? This scene, ending with Olivia suddenly smitten with Sebastian, closed the second 'act' and the brief final 'act' began with an abbreviated version of Feste's visitation of Malvolio, in rapid succession as Sir Topas and as himself, the dungeon being a cellar in the garden.

The play ended as it began, with music, all the romantic and comic characters, except Malvolio, dancing together in a golden distance behind a gauze curtain in love's now triumphant harmony, with Feste, the goer-between of the worlds of romance and comedy, and perhaps also of the gods and human kind, seated on the fore-stage in gathering dusk, sadly remembering how the world began. Now it was their light that just touched his figure, forlorn at the thought that there was no more for him to do in this world. Even a god who plays the wise fool may be left lonely at the dance of human love.

The producer had made the romantic plot more consistently light comedy by treating Olivia as a feather-brained little goose: he had kept the comics well on the subtle side of farce, and so made it possible for his Mercury to modulate between the two worlds of the play and make them one. His choice of Cavalier costume gave the maximum thematic contrast with Malvolio's Puritan habit, served the opposition of amours and austerity, and brought out what is most English in Shakespeare's Never-Never Land of Illyria. It also eased the problem of the identical twins with a hair-style equally suitable to boy and girl. He had, in Dorothy Tutin, a Viola of irresistible freshness and charm. The rest of a Stratford company for once not starstudded was of its own fairly high standard with none out-standing. This was a Twelfth Night that did not altogether succeed, but a production that continually threw fresh light on a comedy about which most of us have long ceased to think freshly, which we too easily accept as a cherished but somewhat shapeless romantic-comic routine.
Eric Keown (review date 25 May 1960)


It is always interesting to see a successful production revived with a different cast, and from Peter Hall's 1958 Stratford *Twelfth Night* only Dorothy Tutin, Patrick Wy-mark and Ian Holm remain. This makes the third in Mr. Hall's sequence of Shakespearian comedies. Its performance is considerably stronger than it was two years ago.

In particular Miss Tutin's Viola has grown up immeasurably. I admire very much the way she has overcome her inability to speak verse. To the most taking sincerity which is natural to her she now adds maturity and confidence; her Viola, fresh and spirited and full of humour, is altogether delightful. From Eric Porter Malvolio gets a new complexion. Instead of the fantastically butt who must always have been a poor steward, he plays him as a grave and responsible administrator with no shred of levity in his composition but with all the signs of ruthless efficiency; one can imagine him going through the housekeeper's accounts with a fine comb. Mr. Porter makes this reading very funny, and his threat of general revenge at the end has a chilling ring, for this Malvolio clearly means business.

Patrick Wymark's Sir Toby is younger than the average, and all the better for that; his enjoyment in baiting Malvolio is the more robust, and he carries off Maria with greater conviction. The Aguecheek is another triumph for Ian Richardson, a recruit to Stratford who is making his name rapidly. He avoids the extremes of eccentricity, and, not working too hard for laughs, gets them all the time. Derek Godfrey makes an admirably romantic figure of the lovesick Duke, and Max Adrian a haunting Feste who seems, in his engulfing sadness, beyond comfort. As Maria, Frances Cuka is improved.

The weakness of this production is the Olivia. In 1958 Mr. Hall, greatly daring, allowed Geraldine McEwan to chirp her way through the part, and being Miss McEwan, and an original, she brought something to it that had never been there before. Trying the same line again with Barbara Barnett, he fails. This Olivia is simply a minx without dignity, and not at all the sort of girl to command a household and engage in steadfast mourning.

For me a very minor weakness is the gauze hung about midstage for most of the scenes. This has a door cut in it, through which the actors stream on their way downstage, and the pattern of their movement through this bottleneck becomes monotonous. But on balance the production is another winner for Stratford, and Lila de Nobili's sets and seventeenth century dresses stand up well to a further inspection.

A. Alvarez (review date May 1960)


The revival of his 1958 production of *Twelfth Night* shows Peter Hall settling more comfortably than before on the throne of the Stratford Memorial Theatre. And it looks like being a good reign. When the season started, I suggested that his great virtue was his prime concern for Shakespeare's poetry. This means that the verse-speaking is neither hammered into rant and ripe elocutionism nor is it ironed out into prose; it is, instead, a medium for the feeling intelligence and demands nothing less from the actors. So the plays emerge less as galleries of types and characters than as creative statements, worlds of values. But at the same time, Hall is a great one for technical panache and high production: elaborate costumes and stage business, dim facades, period music—he proliferates the theatrical means into a kind of visual parallel of the play's complexities. The results are always striking but can easily slip into the fussy and merely ornamental.
Twelfth Night, however, is a good example of a production controlled by a critical reaction to the poetry. Like Lila de Nobili's Caroline costumes, it is geared to the play's faint air of over-lushness: speeches so cadenced and beautiful that the speakers sound as though they were not so much expressing what they felt as exploiting the moods they would like to feel, and jokes pushed so far that they slide close to brutality. Hall makes his cast keep tight control over the excesses. Derek Godfrey's Orsino is less romantic than romanticising, faintly comic under all his folds of dignity. Barbara Barnett tries to do the same for Olivia, but hasn't, for the time being, the acting resources; so she grimaces, twists her hands and bites her lip like some graceless Joyce Grenfell schoolgirl in fancy dress, more farce than fantasy and the only wrong note in the play. In contrast, Eric Porter as Malvolio resisted every easy temptation to parody the part: he was conceited, full of self-righteous Puritanism, insufferable in his way, but with an underrcurrent of seriousness that made him genuinely moving at the end. In the same way, Patrick Wymark's Sir Toby Belch was tougher, more drunken, less amiable than the usual thigh-slapping chunk of Merrie England, and Ian Richardson managed to slow down Aguecheek so that he could be comic without ever twittering.

The prizes, however, go to Dorothy Tutin and Max Adrian. Miss Tutin has exactly the odd combination of sensibility and immaturity that Viola needs. She is bright and cheeky, yet full of feeling and poetry. Where her Portia lacked weight and substance, her Viola is simply light in touch, all youthful fine feeling and delicacy. She is the nearest one will probably see to the original conception of a boy-actor playing a girl playing a boy. Max Adrian's Feste was the reverse of all this. No clown has ever been so melancholy. He hovered permanently on the edge of weeping, stricken, desolate, like King Lear after his madness. It seemed, heaven knows, disproportionate to the part, as though one had walked into the middle of things and missed a whole private tragedy. But granted Feste might conceivably be a man with a history—a neurotic case-history, in this instance—the rest came naturally and with extraordinary coherence of melancholy detail. And he certainly set the tone of the production: of comedy become wistful and enervated, of the lyric falling into the decadent, of jokes on the edge of turning sour. It was not for nothing that every scene was played through a filter of gauze drops; the play, too, came across darkened and unexpectedly serious. It was an impressive interpretation.

Caryl Brahms (review date July 1960)


I wish I could quote the whole of Hazlitt's analysis of the character of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, the whole of Agate's Brief Chronicle of Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson's Viola (and of that I would sacrifice the rest, if need be, for the three words in which this great critic lights a candle to her quality for all time: "This grave baby"). I wish that I had read CE . Montague for your delight. And that good crusty (in the sense that he will surely have produced some judgements for us to chew on) critic, Alan Dent, must sometime, somewhere, have written passages that would be infinitely quotable. And then too, the illuminating first string of The Times—to read him is always to be dumb-founded by his quiet authority, perception and thoroughness. (No skipping the plot at Printing House Square where it will be recounted in such a manner as to form a comment.) And has not Kenneth Tynan anything of pith and vision to say of this zany piece? Well, then, I wish I could quote the lot of them, preferably in toto, and leave it at that for they would write like all the angels where I shall carp and complain and tear a strip off what was rarely less than enchantment.

GRAVE AND GAY

But perhaps more than any of these sensitive and accomplished quill-dippers I would like to quote one who was not professionally a critic in the Theatre at all; one who was torn between reading Twelfth Night in the garden "with no sound but the thud of an apple falling to the earth, or of the wind ruffling the branches of the tree..." and seeing it enacted at the Old Vic 1933—the year of Colonel de Basil's Baby Ballerinas; the year, recalled Old Vic-wise, of Leon Quartermain's Malvolio and Athene Seyler's Maria. The year I read about (but
did not see, fool that I was) Madame Lopokova's Olivia. What a grave baby this great artist would have been had she played Viola—grave and gay by turns, like any baby pushed out in a pram, ignoring the world. "Many apples might fall without being heard in the Waterloo Road." mourns the writer, who is of course Virginia Woolf (that "of course" is just the Present Writer being maddeningly superior). Her essay is to be read in *English Dramatic Criticism* published by the University of Oxford Press in the quietly handsome, dark blue uniformity of the *World's Classics*, which I shall give to everyone I know this Christmas if it is still in print.

No one knew better than Shakespeare that every comedy is a day in May in England with overtones of April showers; that every silver lining has its cloud. No producer is more aware of this soft spring sunshine and the changing skies than Mr. Peter Hall. And if *Twelfth Night* were nothing but a poem how acceptable would we find this revival of the 1958 production at Stratford-upon-Avon. (Now that the Stratford-Atte-Bowe has its Theatre Workshop, and those at Toronto and Connecticut their festivals, we have to be a little pedantic about locations.)

The scenes which take us with them to a Warwickshire Illyria are seen in a smudge of trees as, lifted by the breeze, they shift and whisper and return to basking, each one a bronzed enchantment by Lila de Nobili, through which the burnished costumes gleam. These costumes may be something too lush, like a plum at the plop or a tea-rose with all its golden wealth extended and about to fall.

"Let there be light" was the order on a certain great occasion in the world outside the theatre. Inside the theatre. Mr. Peter Hall no doubt commanded "Let there be Mr. Michael Northen". And there he is, stopping time to catch a moment for us, making a minute memorable, gilding not the lily but the mood.

Add to this Mr. Eric Porter's Malvolio, the best that I have seen since Gielgud's puritanical steward; a very real and fiery Sebastian (Ian Holm), spoiling to be up and at 'em; and Mr. Dinsdale Landen's clearly-etched Fabian, The Threat to Feste. And what more do I want?

**GINNED-UP DOVE**

Well, first a Viola whose appearance does not remind me of the picture of the little boy standing before the Round-head at the table: "When did you last see your father?" Agate called Jean Forbes-Robertson's Viola "this grave baby", as we have seen: I would say of Miss Tutin's Viola that she is "this ginned-up dove". She is not my Viola—it is only fair to say she seemed to be everyone else's in the intervals—since to my mind quite the most perfect Viola I have ever seen was that of Miss Barbara Jefford at the Old Vic, being boyish and girlish, staunch and true and merry and grave and so very much in love and brimming over with the fun of it all. Miss Tutin was a huntress out for her man from the moment they carried her ashore and laid her safe on his soil. An only child, Miss Tutin, play-acting weddings up in the attic with all the confidence of one who is born to be and means to be and has no other aim than to be the bride. And the sooner the better. And yet, the memory of the poetry, the little show-off found in the part persists and is still with me. Ah well, let's dot her down as a bride who takes a book of poems on her honey-moon, having been with difficulty coaxed to leave her dog in the porch.

And the Olivia—what can I find to say that is not too discouraging to a young actress about this miscasting of Miss Barbara Barnett in the part? Well, I could begin by saying that Miss Barnett is not Virginia Woolf's Olivia:

**SOMBRE COMPLEXION**

"Our Olivia is a stately lady of sombre complexion, slow-moving and of few sympathies." (All, you will note, what Madame Lopokova, who prompted the analysis, is not likely to have been.) The Stratford-upon-Avon Olivia was a dizzy girl—and though this may have worked in the case of Miss Geraldine McEwan, the 1958
Olivia I did not see, it certainly did not work in the 1960 variorum, in less accomplished hands. And but for disheartening a pretty young player who was, I suspect, obeying her producer, I would leave the matter to Olivia there. Fortunately, there is a part of another kind to which Miss Barnett would be admirably suited and any management looking for a juvenile lead to enter the drawing-room with a tennis racket in Act I and leave it with a cocktail in Act III, need search no further.

The Orsino of Mr. Derek Godfrey found its true length at once. He made a fine striding figure of a lover who would certainly have had the guts to do his own wooing with that persuasive voice.

And now, we must come to Mr. Max Adrian, the most neurasthenic Feste since Mr. Robert Eddison was manicdepressive at the Old Vic.

**OLD MAN FESTE**

Mr. Adrian clearly subscribes to the school of thought that sees its Feste as an old man. He did his best to wring these iron withers with his old fool who is past playing the fool. And was it that he could not sing or that he did not wish to sing Feste's difficult songs but characterised and acted them instead? Be the reason what you will, on the first night *Come Away Death* was death.

But it is not Miss Barnett nor Mr. Adrian who are to blame for the off-key notes they pipe—it is the producer. Why did a director of Mr. Hall's distinction and gifts go in for 'amusing' casting? Did he remain amused, I wonder, when he took his place in the auditorium on the first night and saw what he had done? Mr. Adrian was born to play Aguecheek (Mr. Ian Richardson did more than well in the part and though it may seem to weaken my argument I must in fairness emphasise this) but he is cast in the one part that calls for an actor who can sing (as distinct from an actor who can "put over a number"). This wilful casting comes so often between the brilliant vision Mr. Hall has of his play and the effect he finally achieves in it. And yet so gifted a producer is he that he could make a bare stage sing and play a consort of viols in an ecstasy of harmony if he so minded. He is perhaps less able with a laugh—but this does not mean that he is a solemn producer—just, I suspect, blind and bone-headed when it comes to his cast-lists.

**MOCKING MARIA**

Still, he might take time off to chide Miss Frances Cuka gently away from the easy laugh she gets by sending up the accents of Maria's betters and all the artificial effects she cannot yet command and bid her content herself with honest, earthy fun. No young actress can be funnier than Miss Cuka in a natural way and that way is Maria's way and Shakespeare's way with Maria.

Have I left anyone out? The friendly, rather everyday Sir Toby of Mr. Patrick Wymark. But Sir Toby is Olivia's close kinsman and as such should have at least a silken lining to his nature, an inner aristocracy, even though it may be ivied-over with crummy cakes, and stale ale and the hiccoughs. Yet so friendly an understanding with his audience has Mr. Wymark that I was won over to him, seamy side and all.

Remains Mr. Raymond Leppard, Music Adviser to the Theatre, and composer of the incidental music. Hey there! You with the stars in your eyes and a cast of actors to write songs for—not singers who can act or even actors who can sing, as must be all too clear to you by now—won't you play a little safer until they can spare time for you to coach them?

And yet …

And yet I came away like a gourmet from a single perfect dish, knowing that this night I had feasted even though the feast was served al fresco in an autumnal garden something under the cloud.
"Viola, Malvolio, Olivia, the Duke—the mind," wrote Virginia Woolf, "so brims and spills over with all that we know and guess about them, as they move in and out among the shadows of the mind's stage" …

I do not doubt but that a large portion of Mr. Peter Hall's mind—and heart—is a stage, a shadowed stage; and that he dwells much thereon. And he has set his Illyria a lui, not in cloud cuckoo land, perhaps, but under a cloud; nor yet in Lopokova's land where everything suffers, not a sea-change, but "a change into light, into gaiety:" where "birds sing, the sheep are garlanded, the air rings with melody and human beings dance towards each other on the tips of their toes possessed of an exquisite friendliness, sympathy and delight". For though the garlands and the birds are there, we see them in the dim light that is shaded from the psychiatrist's couch. On it lies Feste. And what Mr. Hall has shown us may be the sweet and bitter memories of Feste's ailing world which once was young.

Robert Speaight (review date Autumn 1960)


*Twelfth Night* was the first of the productions that I saw this year, and on it I began to form the general impressions that I am recording here. I had seen the production two years ago, when it left me divided between delight and dissatisfaction. Mr. Hall, as it seemed to me, had started off with a good idea and had then gone some way to spoil it. All those cavaliers grouped around Orsino in a panelled hall straight out of Nash's *English Mansions*—this announced a *Twelfth Night* very much to my taste. And it is still a lovely thing to look upon, thanks in great part to Miss de Nobili's designs—a rich symphony in russet. But Mr. Hall, as usual, had plenty of surprises up his sleeve. The first was Miss Tutin. Not that one ever imagined she would be anything but an exquisite Viola, but the seasoned playgoer was hardly prepared for her entrance. Violas usually enter in a voluminous maternity gown from Dior, concealing the immaculate doublet and hose in which they will appear five minutes later, and a graceful hood protecting an unruffled wig. Miss Tutin went to the astonishing length of wearing two wigs, one of which showed distinct signs of having been touched by salt water. And instead of landing in Illyria like a leading lady, she actually clambered ashore as if she were in some doubt as to whether she would ever get there.

Just as Nash's panelling had easily given way to the cloud-capped towers of a transitory Adriatic, so these quickly dissolved into an English garden; and there was Mr. Wymark enjoying an obviously continental breakfast. The scene is always difficult to get under weigh, and Toby needs his cue. He gets it here from the chaplain to Olivia's household processing through the garden, followed by two *dévoutes*, and singing the "Gloria in excelsis". Now it is highly probable that Olivia had ordered a Mass for her brother's soul that morning; but if so, she would certainly have attended it herself. And it is inconceivable that the chaplain would have emerged from it singing the Gloria which is carefully excluded from the Liturgy for the Dead. If Mr. Hall had got hold of the right end of his bright idea, he would first of all have given Olivia her place in the procession, and then he would have set them all chanting the "De Profundis", antiphonally, as they walked back to the house and to a breakfast even more continental than Sir Toby's.

If Olivia had been to Mass that morning, Sir Toby would just as certainly have not, and Mr. Wymark got things moving briskly in the contrary direction, reminding us that however thickly the late September mists might be gathering, ginger would be hot i' the mouth before the night was over. And it was in the second garden scene that Mr. Hall sprang his next surprises. Mr. Adrian's Feste had drawn his pathos from a canvas by Georges Rouault. Here was the saddest but one of Shakespeare's clowns nursing the secret of an insoluble melancholy. I wondered if Mr. Adrian had found the clue to Feste where I have always found it—in his remark to Viola that he lives "by the church" [III. i. 3]. In other words, Feste is neither of Olivia's world, nor of Orsino's. He drifts from one to the other, inhabiting a world wholly of his own. In the end he is left to sing his melancholy *envoi*, casting a shadow behind him on to a distant and elegant pavane, and perhaps a slight doubt as to whether Miss Turin's Viola will ever settle down in Illyria. I thought Mr. Adrian might have made
his point with a little more speed and a shade lighter emphasis, but his performance was one of exceptional originality and power.

The second surprise was Miss Bennett's Olivia. Here, once again, I felt that Mr. Hall was letting a good idea run away with him. I understood what he was aiming at—to inject melancholy into the comic scenes and comedy into the serious ones. I also realize what he was reacting against—the stately contraltos whom a sudden bereavement has distracted from the organization of the Hunt Ball. Miss Bennett would have been incapable of opening a Flower Show, and that, as they say, was the point of the operation. But Olivia should be the competent mistress of a great household; a serious young woman capable of great silliness—or, if you prefer, a silly young woman capable of sudden seriousness. What we were shown was a silly young woman incapable of any seriousness whatever. And this makes nonsense of Viola's impact on her fantasy. It is right that she should appear younger than Viola, but to play her persistently for comic effect is to rob the "roses of the spring" of all their perfume—and I cannot believe that this was Shakespeare's intention. In here casting passion with sentiment to the wings, Mr. Hall came near to cutting out the heart of his play.

That it still continued to beat was largely due to Miss Tutin. She steered her way to Orsino's bosom, a creature not altogether of his element even when her gaze was anchored on him. The recognition of Sebastian was beautifully managed—no stage can ever be wide enough for that miraculous coming together. And, for once, Mr. Ian Holm provided a plausible twin. Mr. Porter, playing a less stiff Malvolio than usual, gave us a genuinely human being; he won our sympathy by not asking for it. Mr. Allen was a splendid Antonio. Rarely can this short but significant part have been adorned with such an appropriate panache. And Mr. Godfrey's Orsino, as so often happens, came into its own in the last act.

The minor tactics of the production were full of good things; Sebastian and Viola nearly meeting in the street, and the chaplain's tactful and embarrassed aversion of the head while Sebastian and Olivia are exchanging their first kiss, and Malvolio's exit from the drinking scene. So, in the end, they all go their separate ways—Antonio to refit his galleys in Cork or Limerick, and Feste to vanish into an eccentric solitude. It is the measure of Shakespeare's genius that however neatly his plays are rounded off, his characters live on to perplex our questioning. This is increasingly true as he approaches the meridian of his achievement; and it was the merit of Mr. Hall's production that he allowed one or two of the shadows to gather here.…

T. C. Worsley (review date 20 December 1960)


For the Christmas season (up only until February 1) the Stratford Company bring into the Aldwych the Twelfth Night from the 1958 and 1960 seasons. The production is one of Mr. Peter Hall's, and, in my view, one of his best. But it flouts some of the traditions, and has to pay the penalty of being disliked by the Old Guard, not all of whom it may be found are very old.

It is a Caroline Twelfth Night, and this works very well for the "breeches parts." Miss Dorothy Tutin, who has now learned to speak beautifully, makes a thoroughly convincing Caroline page boy. Then, Miss Lila de Nobili had produced a lyrical décor, but it glows with autumnal browns and golds and greens, and the tradition stresses that this is a spring-like comedy.

These, however, are only minor counts against Mr. Hall. The major one is that he has allowed a spirit of gentle guying to pervade a comedy which is commonly taken very seriously indeed. Traditionally Twelfth Night is sharply divided into two moods. An intensely serious poetic mood in the love passages (The Orsino-Olivia sections) interposed with low comedy scenes from Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and the rest, with Malvolio left somewhere in the middle.
The disadvantage of this traditional handling is that the two parts never come together and that none of the disguise scenes ever quite makes convincing sense. Mr. Hall’s solution is not to take the lovers half so seriously at one end of the comedy fine and to cut down on the buffoonery at the other. And, for me, it works admirably. There is a cohesion in the performance now that is not often there.

INTERESTING CONCEPTION

The treatment is shown at either end of the extreme by the handling of Olivia and Sir Andrew Aguecheek respectively. Miss Geraldine McEwan's Olivia is pert, gay and sly. She is very far from the usual sloppy love-lorn drooper. She is agile-witted and alert for laughs. Unlike the traditional character she is in fact the kind of person whom we can readily believe would instantly swap a Sebastian for a Caesario. I might allow the criticism that Miss McEwan sometimes plays it a little too pert. But the conception seems to mean interesting solution of difficulties which the Old Guard often shut their eyes to.

At the other end of the scale, Mr. Richard Johnson, makes Sir Andrew Aguecheek a figure of pathos as well as a figure of fun. Every now and then there are flashes when this ridiculous poop suddenly realises what a ridiculous poop he is, and we get a laugh on the other side of our faces.

The pathos is to be found among the clowns (in Mr. Max Adrian's highly intelligent superbly articulated Feste, too): and comedy is discovered among the lovers: for Mr. Hall is surely right in reminding us that Orsino's form of hopeless love is not "serious" at all: it is the acting out of a period convention. He is right to mock it gently: and by doing so he produces in the whole play a tone into which the absurdities of the plot fit congruously, and he unifies the different elements.

 Needless to say these minutiae of criticism, important though they in fact are, will not affect an average audience. They, blissfully unaware of traditions broken and sacred principles violated, will enjoy this Twelfth Night immensely. It is beautiful to look at, it is gay, it is swift. Mr. Eric Porter repeats his excellent Malvolio and Mr. Patrick Wymark his excellent Sir Toby. Miss Patsy Byrne comes in to bring great high spirits to Maria.

Peter Hall (essay date 1966)


In the following essay, originally published in 1966, Hall describes his handling of Twelfth Night on the stage, commenting that it is "impossible to cut a word" of the play.

It is impossible to cut a word of Twelfth Night. Even its obscure jokes are brought alive by the exuberant rhythm of the scenes. It belongs to that small group of Shakespeare's plays (Macbeth and the Dream are others) that are sinewy and compact. They have no excess fat. Twelfth Night is complex, ambiguous, and heartbreakingly funny. It is the masterwork among the comedies.

It was written in 1600—or so we think—the date is only important in understanding its place in the canon. Its mood is ripe and rich. It springs from a heart now fully capable of compassion—an emotion which is rare in the earlier works. Twelfth Night has a view of men which is objective and realistic. But it can be terrible in its honesty because it is so understanding—just like Shakespeare's presentation of that uncontrollable Vice-figure, Falstaff.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and the national epic of the histories are in the past. We are moving into maturity; the great tragedies, the romances, and those plays of such ambiguity (Measure for
Measure, All's Well, and Troilus and Cressida) that scholars have always found them 'Problems'. A bitterness of spirit is about to inflame the rest of Shakespeare's work.

Twelfth Night is significant as a transitional play, and there is something of this bitterness in its comedy. But the comedy is rich, because there is darkness and disturbance. The comedy is defined by tragedy, the folly and the illusions by sincerity, the joy by anguish.

The play deals with the theme common to all Shakespeare's comedies: the journey by means of experience to maturity—a maturity which it is necessary to crown by a marriage. Twelfth Night is a critique of illusions. A very young countess (Olivia), who is more in love with grief than with the true memory of her dead brother, is courted by a duke (Orsino) who is more in love with the idea of love than with the countess. Both of them have emotions which are modish and self-regarding. Their lives are invaded by a young girl (Viola), a realist who is in love with life, and has been freshly rescued from the sea and from the true anguish which she feels for the loss of her brother. Her presence when she becomes an illusion herself, a girl disguised as a boy, forces Olivia and Orsino, and all the self-deceivers who surround them into an understanding of reality. By the end of the play the deceivers have all suffered retribution for their faults. They are then capable of maturity.

This is the main and comic action of the play. It is set in a never-never land suited to such heady illusions, Illyria; a place, whatever its actual geography, that is a complete country of Shakespeare's imagination. It has music and flowers, buttery-bars, ancient monuments, box-trees, a very London puritan, Elizabethan court-jokes, and an abundance of cakes and ale. It has a relaxed climate in which sharp practice can easily disguise itself as friendship, and hypocrisy can masquerade as idealism. And it is all lapped by the sea, that image of opposites that haunted Shakespeare throughout his life. Tempest and sudden death are countered by calm seas, miraculous salvation and regeneration.

All Shakespeare's thinking, whether religious, political or moral, is based on his concept of Order. There is a just proportion, a necessary balance, in all things; Man above Beast, King above Man, God above King. It is the job of existence to seek out this order and abide by it. Revolution, whether in the family, the State or the heavens, breathes disorder and ultimate anarchy. Sometimes this chaos may be necessary, as the fever of rebellion is the way to health for the sick state, or as the young must repudiate their parents to reach maturity. But the action is still wrong, and some retribution will follow any act of disorder. Bolingbroke has to depose Richard II to weed the garden of England, but he and his family will suffer for the action.

For it is wrong to depose a king; just as it is wrong for the heart to rule the head, or for extremes in anything to be victorious. Balance is the only sure basis of life. Cakes and ale are just as dangerous in excess as the intolerant zeal of a high puritan.

It follows, then, that Man must govern himself as precisely as an army or a state, and strive for the just balance of opposites, the mean:

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows.
[Troilus and Cressida, I.iii. 109-10]

All the characters of Twelfth Night save Viola are creatures of excess, agents of disorder. Orsino is in love with love, Olivia is in love with grief, and Sir Toby is overdrinking, behaving merrily below-stairs, and gulling a fool of his money. Sir Andrew is blinded by pretension, and Malvolio by egotism and hypocrisy. Even the cryptic Feste is self-indulgent in his bitterness and his melancholy. Sebastian is unwittingly churlish to the man who loves him and does not know how to express it. And we feel some criticism of Antonio because of the secrecy of his private and public life. Fabian and Maria lack tact; they behave out of their station and are thus disorderly.
All the main characters are treated critically, even Viola herself, overzealous to disguise herself as a man, suffers from the reality. But none of the critical spirit kills the joy of the comedy. It is for the audience to enjoy and then judge. For these characters are rich and complex. They are not simple Jonsonian humours.

I have space only to talk of one character in depth. I pick what is to me the most important character in the play—Feste. He is a deliberate enigma, poised uneasily between the two worlds of the court and the great house:

![Image](II. iv. 12)

He is bitter, insecure, singing the old half-forgotten songs to the Duke (for nostalgia is predictably the Duke's favourite musical companion), his jokes now tarnished and not very successful. He is the creation of a professional entertainer, and we may perhaps remotely relate him to John Osborne's Archie Rice, or to that fearful misanthropy which overtakes most comics when they begin to despise their audience. He is suffered by all, and liked by few. He is the most perceptive and formidable character in the play. Viola brings reality to the play by her instinct, but Feste could often do it if he wished by his shrewdness. I believe he penetrates Viola's disguise:

![Image](III. i. 49)

He is left alone at the end of the play singing bitterly, and more obscenely than most people realize, about the transient nature of life.

And he is the main character of the play's most extraordinary scene. He is a strange kind of fool, when disguised as Sir Topas he cruelly tortures the imprisoned Malvolio. He is very perceptive about Orsino, and offers a penetrating judgement:

![Image](II. iv. 74-5)

Feste is the critical centre of the play, the Thersites, the Jacques without eloquence, the malcontent, the man who sees all and says little, the cynic. It takes an idealist to be such a cynic.

I would like now to speculate. It is known that many of the professional fools were, in fact, defrocked priests. If the poor boy who was educated up to be a cleric failed to get a benefice, or if his reason or his morals dragged him away from the true faith, there was not much open to this medieval outsider except professional foolery. The education, the mental agility, and the Latin tags could all find a professional use. The destructive resentment of the failure could help his professional personality. Such a hypothesis is impossible to prove, but it is certainly a useful background to the actor playing Feste. It leads him without difficulty to the malice of Sir Topas's scene. Men are very bitter about the professions that fail them.

Only one of the other characters of the play, in my opinion, lacks three dimensions, and the life-enhancing inconsistency with which Shakespeare regularly surprises us. This is Malvolio—after Viola, the most famous character in the play. I find the character drawn from the outside and slightly caricatured. The plot makes it appear a great part—or at least offers an actor of genius the opportunity of making it flesh. But it is
two-dimensional. Shakespeare's professional enemies were plagues and puritans. Perhaps he could not be
objective; perhaps his hatred was too intense.

The structure of *Twelfth Night* repays careful study. There is no play with a surer exposition. In forty lines we
meet the Duke, learn of his frustrated love for Olivia, and savour his court of music and flowers. His opening
speech is justly one of the famous lyrics of our language. But when it is spoken by Orsino, the love-sick
character in action, it is ironic *because* it is so beautiful. This capricious man ('Enough. No more! Tis not so
sweet now as it was before'), with his indulgent love of fancy, is hardly fit to rule a state when he cannot rule
himself. The excessive beauty of this first scene reveals all.

There is, in fact, very little that is *purely* lyrical in dramatic Shakespeare. Henry VI's pathetic yearnings to be
a shepherd on the battlefield, or Oberon's lustful and malicious 'I know a bank', are critical of the characters
who utter them.

In the second scene of *Twelfth Night*, the storm delivers a grieving and sincere Viola to this country of false
love. But she has courage, and springs quickly to new life. She resolves on disguise—as a man. Then, with the
tempo of the play still racing, we meet the sunshine comedy of Sir Toby and the foolish Sir Andrew (a
contrast to the stormy sea coast). The tone is reckless, dangerously irresponsible.

One scene with Viola in the court hoist with her own disguise—

> Yet a barful strife!
> Who e'er I woo, myself would be his wife,
> [I. iv. 41-2]

and we are back in Olivia's house meeting the strange clown, Feste, the superior Malvolio with his promise of
a comic fall to come and Olivia herself.

The comic exposition is now complete. Shakespeare has dealt himself a perfect hand for misunderstanding
and complication. We expect the arrival of Viola's twin brother, and a pattern of misunderstanding, just as we
expect the pretensions of these comic characters to be exposed.

Let us also look at the last scene, where predictably all the follies come home to roost, and all the
misunderstandings are cleared up. Everything can then end in the fullness of marriage, and only Feste is left
outside with his bitter song.

Shakespeare relishes denouements. His last scenes in which order is restored have the counterpoint and
balance of music. In *Cymbeline*, indeed, he permits himself the delights of some two score discoveries. This is
no incompetence. Information is withheld and arranged so that the dance can go on as long as possible.

The most beautiful thing in the last scene of *Twelfth Night* is the twin recognition of Viola and Sebastian.
Each knows that the other is truly their nearest and dearest, yet their joy is deliberately prolonged while they
confirm to each other what each already knows.

This is the lyrical heart of the scene, and around it is woven a comic pattern of discovery and retribution until
all is known:

> and golden time convents,
> A solemn combination shall be made
> Of our dear souls …
> [V. i. 382-84]
The imagery of *Twelfth Night* is as rich as its humanity. It is drawn from music, from the appetites (their yearnings and their uneasy surfeits), and, of course, from the inevitable image of human love, 'the worm i' the bud'. The imagery is sensual but transitory. The predominant image is that of the sea. It is an image of life and love, ranging from 'capacity receiveth as the sea' through the colloquialisms of 'board her', 'hoist sail', the prose precision of 'determinate voyage is mere extravagancy' and finally to the joy of 'share in this most happy wreck'.

The play is deliberately and delightfully erotic. We must remind ourselves that the original Viola and Olivia were boys, and that Shakespeare conceived his play in these terms. The pattern is then as follows: a boy playing a girl disguised as a boy is sent on a mission of love to a boy playing a girl, when his real emotions must be centred on playing a girl who is in love with Orsino. The second boy-girl then falls in love with the boy-girl-boy. Aphrodite can ask for no richer situation. Shakespeare had explored the possibilities of such a situation in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, but here he uses it to the full. It is hard on a modern actress to find this deliberate ambivalence.

The play bored Samuel Pepys, but in spite of this has held the stage successfully ever since. There are three dangerous traditions of the stage. Malvolio is by custom played by the leading actor. But the star in this role cannot help playing for sympathy, and even if he wishes to avoid it his public will insist upon giving it. A sympathetic Malvolio raises questions which should never be asked. We must still laugh at his final exit. The play only works if a brilliant actor can play the part in order to be completely detested, laughed at, and finally understood.

Olivia is generally played too old: doubtless a tradition which comes from the stock companies where the part belonged by right to the character lady who also played Gertrude. *Twelfth Night* is a play of youth and Olivia must be much younger in wisdom and experience than Viola.

The other dangerous stage tradition prevents us from clearly seeing Sir Andrew Aguecheek. He is always played as an effeminate. The text would rather indicate the opposite. He is a man with manure on his boots rather than ribbons in his hair. He is an unattractive, pretentious knight from the country—a man of money who loves dogs and hunting and who yearns to make a good match, though he is too much of a coward to try. Elizabethan literature is full of such empty roaring boys, such gentlemen bumpkins.

But the stage has not dealt badly with the play, and assuredly the play has always brought joy to the theatres. If the comedy is kept true to character and the lyrical emotions are expressed clearly and musically, but with no false resonance or oversentiment (unless the character positively demands it), then the miracle will always work. The period of the play should not be specific. But in Shakespeare's Illyria you must not think it strange to meet Sea Captains and Puritans, Counts, Priests, Fools, Country Parsons and English aristocrats.

These ideas of mine cannot pretend to be original, I write this short essay from a study of the play over more than twenty years, and the happy experience of three stage productions. I cannot honestly remember whether the ideas I have expressed are my own or somebody else's. But I do know they have stood the test of experience. To those that I have pillaged, I therefore offer my apologies and thanks.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:**

**PRODUCTION:**

Clifford Williams • RSC • 1966
BACKGROUND:

Williams's 1966 revival dispensed with a serious approach to *Twelfth Night*, "presenting it," wrote the critic for *The Times*, "as a hard-edged almost Italianate comedy firmly steeled against pathos and poetry." For this very reason, most critics responded without enthusiasm to the production. Hilary Spurling maintained that the set design, which evoked the Italian High Renaissance, lacked the fanciful quality typically associated with Shakespeare's Illyria. Additionally, most critics felt the performances to have been unmemorable. J. C. Trewin asserted that "Mr. Williams has been at pains … to mock the affectation of Orsino (Alan Howard) and of Olivia (Estelle Kohler), the first a near-burlesque of romantic passion, the second a mere kitten." Jeremy Kingston, however, praised the strong performances of Diana Rigg as Viola and Ian Holm as Malvolio, hailing them as the "chief pleasures of the evening." For the critic of *The Times*, Rigg's Viola was a "delicious" fusion of "comic embarrassment and vulnerable feminity." Holm played Malvolio as a petty and irascible bureaucrat "swelling," in the words of J. C. Trewin, "with bullfrog fury, obsequious to his betters, a bully to his inferiors, and drilling the language until it must shriek for mercy." Despite wishing for a tenderer *Twelfth Night*, Robert Speaight concluded that "it would be priggish not to admit that this production was enormously diverting, even if now and then it won its laughs at rather too high a price."

COMMENTARY:

*The Times* (review date 17 June 1966)


Clifford Williams, who directed the Royal Shakespeare's vastly successful *Comedy of Errors* has now tackled *Twelfth Night* on similar lines, presenting it as a hard-edged almost Italianate comedy firmly steeled against pathos and poetry.

This may seem a perverse style to adopt for one of the most musical of the comedies, but at least it is carried through consistently. Sally Jacobs's set establishes the tone exactly: a simple facade of four up-stage arches, and, above them, a musicians' gallery whose occupants behave more like a town band than a courtly ensemble. This is no atmosphere for voluptuous fancy; and, sure enough, Orsino (Alan Howard) enters the first scene at a run and conducts his campaign against Olivia's affections more in a military than romantic spirit.

As a whole, the production is distinguished by its cleanness of line. For major changes in situation, such as Olivia's declaration to Cesario and the final reunion, the stage is cleared to allow maximum freedom of movement and concentration on the essentials. There is no superfluous business (the drinking scene, for instance, is hardly given a chance to get under way): but what there is has strong dramatic point. Viola's duel is an excellently elaborated set piece (with Aguecheek going down, convinced he has been killed), and another well imagined stroke comes in the dungeon scene when Feste addresses his lines to a puppet fitted over Malvolio's hand through the bars.

There are no outstanding performances, though Diana Rigg, returning to base after her television spree is a delicious Viola; she alone brings some music into the production, and sheds the armour of Emma Peel to display her old gifts of comic embarrassment and vulnerable femininity.
Ian Holm's Malvolio, made up to resemble the Droeshout Shakespeare, cultivates a complex mongrel accent—with a top-dressing of eccentric gentility and a basis of raw bullying cockney—that also has unmistakable echoes of Olivier. His, nevertheless, is the strongest male performance.

Brewster Mason's Sir Toby and David Warner's Ague-cheek do little more than go through the accepted motions of the parts; and Norman Rodway's Feste, in the anti-poetic context, is out in the cold. There is an unusual and persuasive Olivia by Estelle Kohler; not, this time; a gracious lady, but a vain and conquestgirl recently released from male protection and briefly favouring the novelty of power before submitting once again to male authority.

Hilary Spurling (review date 24 June 1966)


Columns are to architecture what melody is to music,' says Stendhal somewhere on his travels through Italy, and would have been pleased with both in the first minutes of Twelfth Night at Stratford: Orsino stands before a row of slender columns, listening in an attitude of conscious ecstasy—a rose in one outstretched hand, one foot poised on a stool in the centre of an empty, polished marble floor—to 'That strain again; it had a dying fall.' Orsino is a prince of the Renaissance; and Clifford Williams's production is built round that assumption, which is perhaps why it has been received with such a notable lack of enthusiasm. The chief complaint seems to be that it lacks 'poetry and pathos'; the answer is that this is not our kind of poetry, nor our kind of pathos.

Part of the trouble is no doubt a sentimental disappointment. There is nothing fanciful about this particular Illyria: that severe colonnade, that gleaming floor, the tall, slim, sallow-featured gentlemen of Orsino's court, all belong specifically to the Italian High Renaissance. Even the lighting, by John Bradley, recalls the soft, powdery light of quattrocento Tuscan painters, and Sally Jacobs has used their warm reds and browns, with an odd splash of peacock blue or a painted orange tree, for her sets and costumes. And Alan Howard's delivery of the famous first speech—dealing out the syllables as Beerbohm would have said—shows a Renaissance delight in luxury and artifice. Also more than a hint, in his glistening eyes and sensuous lips, of Renaissance barbarity—my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, E'er since pursue me.'

Twelfth Night down the ages has acquired a misleading reputation as an elegant and amiable piece of nonsense, 'never straying into lewdness, as Quiller-Couch has it, a romp in short and wishy-washy to boot. It is an impression this production should go far to counteract. The play was, after all, as Dr Hotson argues, very likely first performed on January 6, 1601, before Queen Elizabeth and in honour of the real Duke Orsino—who, as a child of four, had watched Webster's hideous tragedy of The White Devil acted out in real life; who was son to Brachiano and his murdered duchess, stepson of the White Devil herself; and who was passing through London on his way home to the Pitti Palace in Florence after accompanying Maria de'Medici on her bridal journey into France. At all events, Twelfth Night was written for a magnificent and a savage age. One is apt to forget that it ends with bloody coxcombs and broken heads and a surgeon blind drunk at eight in the morning; that of the two sea-captains who happen to land in Illyria, one is swiftly imprisoned and the other goes in well-justified fear of his life; also that strange, prophetic passage near the end of the play, when Orsino's 'thoughts are ripe in mischief and, like Othello and in much the same words, he threatens to kill the thing he loves. Viola's reply is not Desdemona's but it is given in the same spirit: 'most jocund, apt and willingly's she accepts death at her lover's hands.

The difference is, of course, that Orsino is only playing at jealousy, as he has played all along at love. It is not even clear whether it is Olivia or Viola he means to kill. But, throughout, their triangular relationship—delicately brought out, on two sides at least, in this production—is the central ambiguity of this strangely ambiguous play. An aura of desire, narrowly and deliciously averted, hangs over all the scenes.
between Orsino and his 'dear lad,' Viola/Cesario. At one point, as his page, she undresses him, draws off his gloves, takes his hat and cloak, half-caressing, half-shrinking from the touch. For both, pleasure and pain are intensified by the rôle she plays as go-between in his formal courtship of Olivia.

The cruelty latent in Orsino is blatant in Brewster Mason's Toby—none of your tedious, potbellied knights, this Sir Toby is a dangerous smooth man, much given to cocking one booted thigh across the other as he lounges in his large armchair. Jolly he may be, but there is nothing innocent in his jollity. If Sir Toby says it is the moneybags he wants from Aguecheek, Mr Mason makes it plain it is, in fact, the exercise of power. Drink with him is a prelude to a peculiarly subtle form of baiting, in which Sir Andrew is his victim and Feste both audience and partner.

Norman Rodway is a white-haired Fool, still agile but with a suspicion of stiffness in the joints; he gives the impression that the wind and the rain can't hold off for long. The favourite device, in their mutual pastime of twitting Sir Andrew, is, of course, the innuendo. It is perfectly possible to miss much in this play, but, faced with this Feste, even the most gullible would be hard put to it to share 'Q's' faith that he is 'the cleanest-mouthed' of Shakespeare's fools. In what strikes me as a distinctly Hotsonian production, Mr Rodway and his bauble have found double meanings where even Dr Hotson saw none. They fly to and fro above the head of David Warner's Sir Andrew—an anxious beanpole, following with dog-like eyes the shafts he can't follow with his mind. It is not for nothing that Sir Toby chooses to go through life under the sign 'legs and thighs.'

Not that this production is either goatish or brutal. But precisely because these two elements are present—and the three performances, Orsino, Toby, Feste, do more than anything else to set the tone—other, simpler charms come up brighter, like colours in a newly-restored picture. Chief of these is Diana Rigg's Viola, an exquisite performance which justifies all the compliments paid her within the play. 'Dian's lip is not more smooth and rubious' indeed. Shakespeare was, so far as can be guessed, thirty-seven when he wrote Twelfth Night, last of his comedies before the great tragedies. Mr Williams's production—and here the comparison which has been so freely bandied about, with the same director's Comedy of Errors, is meaningless; an obvious parallel is Peter Wood's sour and sweet Love for Love at the National Theatre—gives above all the Proustian impression, of looking back across time at the sweetness and self-deceptions of youth, equivocal, evanescent and all the more piercing for being beyond recall.

'I am not what I am,' says Viola. But nothing that is, is (to reverse what the old hermit of Prague so Wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc), and they are none of them what they think they are—save only Sir Andrew who promptly and proudly recognises himself in Malvolio's description: 'I knew 'twas I, for many do call me fool.' Anyone who, seeing this production, can still think Twelfth Night a simple play might do worse than try Sir Andrew's cap to see if it fits.

I have no room for the remaining trio—Olivia, Maria, Malvolio. Ian Holm's Malvolio, an amazing performance, has been done justice elsewhere; Patsy Byrne is more of a Mopsa or a Dorcas than a Maria, but she has a pleasant line in hearty laughter; Estelle Kohler's Olivia is unfortunate, a boisterous, pushing schoolgirl—a born games captain in fact—disastrously out of her depths among this collection of wry sophisticates.

J. C. Trewin (review date 25 June 1966)


I used, in the primeval years, to attend a parish council meeting with a member who was so like Ian Holm's Malvolio that when this actor appeared in the Royal Shakespeare Company's Twelfth Night at Stratford-upon-Avon, I expected him to make an impassioned speech about footpaths. The aspect was similar:
the same baldness with the straggling lock, the same smudge of moustache, the odd comic resemblance—as of a very distant cousin—to the Shakespeare portrait.

Most of all, the likeness to my lost parish councillor was vocal. When Malvolio ballooned the ends of his sentences, pinched his vowels, barked suddenly like a choleric sergeant-major, or pressed the Letter speech through the mangle of his idiosyncratic pronunciation, I suddenly heard again those forgotten debates in which a village senate would send defiant resolutions to the Rural District Council. The resolutions never did any good, but at least they let off a good deal of steam.…

Malvolio, in this production by Clifford Williams, blows off steam furiously. He is a small man who, like some other small men, is resolved to be seen and heard: he goes through life, as it were, on tiptoe, snarling officiously when anyone larger impedes him. How he has trampled a path towards his current post, as Olivia's steward, nobody can really suggest. But there he is, always present, swelling with bullfrog fury, obsequious to his betters, a bully to his inferiors, and drilling the language until it must shriek for mercy. We do not sympathise with him, as we have to with some Malvolios: there is no room for regret even when, constricted by his cross-gartering, he moves before Olivia like a goose-stepping robot. And I cannot say that I felt strongly for him at the première when, having cried "I'll be revenged upon the whole pack of you," he plunged away in the Illyrian sunlight, one shoe on the other off, in a kind of urgent shamble. What the man's revenge will be, I have no idea. Possibly, red with rage, he will propose a devastating motion in some dim conclave or other, strutting stiffly to the front of the platform, every vowel and consonant jangling.

It is a comfort to think of this dire fellow because he is among the pleasures in a Twelfth Night that never gets very far. Visually, it has a certain elegance. The stage looks well, an uncluttered acting space with its musicians' gallery and its imaginative lighting. Besides Malvolio, the revival has Diana Rigg (back from television) as Viola, an actress who is loving, spirited, and true, even if she lacks the wistfulness of Jean Forbes-Robertson that must stay forever in the mind.

This said, little of the other acting will remain permanently burnished. Mr Williams has been at pains, I think, to mock the affectation of Orsino (Alan Howard) and of Olivia (Estelle Kohler), the first a near-burlesque of romantic passion, the second a mere kitten. Neither performance really works for me; and I cannot report that the Illyrian humorists are overwhelming in their sport royal. Sir Toby (Brewster Mason) and Maria (Patsy Byrne) are, for once, of the right Shakespearan rank—it is a relief to get away from the housemaid-Marias—but they are not particularly funny, in spite of Mr Mason's bright eye and Miss Byrne's contagiously shrilling laugh. David Warner's Sir Andrew is meagrely commonplace, except in the duel, when he and Miss Rigg seem to do everything but swallow their swords, and the musicians above look on with enthusiasm.

Though any collector of Twelfth Nights must cheer a new revival, I do wish that this one had more for the record book. It is not enough just to see Toby scribbling in haste a postscript to the letter from the Fortunate-Unhappy, or Andrew growling his way out to write the challenge to Viola. The speaking, generally, is mediocre. Possibly the night's most fruitful notion is the use of the musicians who are always there to observe the play and to aid its progress when needed.

Jeremy Kingston (review date 29 June 1966)


Clifford Williams directed a joyous Comedy of Errors a few years back and more recently extracted much hilarity from Marlowe's Jew of Malta. His Twelfth Night (Stratford-upon-Avon), altogether a trickier play, comes across as an uneven, rather lollipping affair. Excellently inventive at times—even making fresh sense of some obscure Shakespeare allusions—too many scenes give an impression of under-rehearsal. It was as if we
were watching a run-through a week before opening night at the end of which the director would hop on to the stage with a file of notes and advise the cast where to give what bits the extra fillip. Perhaps in a week or two the fillips and the finish will be there.

Sally Jacobs' setting is a courtyard bounded by a line of high arches with a minstrels' gallery above. This leaves a large, generally bare acting area which the drawing of tapestries or the introduction of bushes or statues transforms into an inner room, garden or public square. So far, so sensible. Oddities of the production are an excessively languid Orsino and a far from proud Olivia (Estelle Kohler), coy, actively coquettish from the start, who literally flings herself at Viola/Cesario. I didn't care for the intention behind either of these interpretations. Brewster Mason's Sir Toby is a rounded performance but in a more restrained and thoughtful, more courtly vein than is customary. (Since he is Olivia's uncle, incidentally, there must be a fifty-fifty chance that her surname is Belch too, I suppose.)

The chief pleasures of the evening are provided by Diana Rigg's Viola and Ian Holm's Malvolio. Returning to the stage after her Emma Peel activities, Miss Rigg is persuasively shy and sweet and touchingly disarming in her direct addresses to the audience. Ian Holm is made up with bald dome and wispy whiskers to look like the Shakespeare head in the current "Heads of Fame" series on a well-known breakfast cereal packet. His strangled vowels and sharp barks of command are those of a diminutive sergeant-major who will always be passed over for RSM. I can't remember a Malvolio so short in stature—there is some comic byplay between him and David Warner's lofty Sir Andrew—and Mr. Holm's interpretation of the part as a man embittered by his lack of inches as much as by his lack of breeding is convincing as well as new. His resentment of festivity and heartiness is the envy of a wouldbe athlete too puny to jump over the horse, too unsure of his calf muscles to turn a cartwheel.

\textbf{Hugh Leonard (review date August 1966)}


An heroic Sir Toby, a grimly disenchanted Feste, a Snudge-like Malvolio, and a Viola who strides boyfully around Illyria with the bemusement of a twentieth-century Alice in a medieval rabbit warren: these are the ingredients of Clifford Williams' new production of \textit{Twelfth Night} at Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare's alternative title for \textit{Twelfth Night} was \textit{What You Will}: which Mr Williams has evidently taken as a message personally intended for himself. It is not that he mixes his styles—at least not any more than Shakespeare did in inventing a fairyland with back-streets: what he has done is not to elect for any style in particular … certainly insofar as ensemble acting is concerned. An ill-assorted bunch of fools, decadents, swingers, melancholies, time-servers and transvestites is dropped into the deep end to sink or swim in defiance not only of dramatic unity but of the guiding principles of the Royal Shakespeare Company. The immorality of it all is that the mixture succeeds. Apart from the very occasional dull patch, the evening is an enchantment.

Illyria is England as seen through the eyes of a happy drunkard: or, rather, two drunkards—one above stairs, the other in the kitchen. (Despite the stage instruction which reads 'A room in Olivia's house', I have always imagined the Belch-Aguecheek-Maria scenes as happening deep in the sunless bowels of the house, under beamed ceilings and with the firelight glinting on pewter; everything here should be as darkly brown as ale.) Sally Jacobs' setting was most unEnglish: a coolly austere row of Roman arches which combined the merits of elegance and utility, and—more important—acted as a drawstring, so that the wildly incompatible elements of the play were united in a kind of shotgun marriage. The only real incongruity was that the musicians, although delightfully placed on what looked like the upper level of the aqueduct at Tarragona, found themselves pressed into service as the town band, given to playing in all the local stately homes in their spare time. No ale-brown corners here; but the set, if not atmospheric, was one of the things that saved Mr Williams' Bacon.
There were some magnificent touches: Sir Andrew's ecstatic dance, for example, which ended when he discovered that he was somehow partnering the enraged Malvolio. And when Maria says of Malvolio: '... he will come to her in yellow stockings, and 'tis a colour she abhors', everyone looked sorrowfully at Aguecheek, who at that moment realised that he had been fruitlessly wooing Olivia while dressed from head to foot in vilest yellow. Somehow, most of the innovations seemed to concern Sir Andrew, who was beautifully played by David Warner as a sheep that had been overlooked at slaughter-time. It is impossible to assess Mr Warner's performance without considering Brewster Mason's Sir Toby and Patsy Byrne's Maria. Mr Mason unaccountably chose to play Sir Toby as a nobleman first and a drunkard second. The fact is that, as suggested by his name, Belch is a malicious old swine, as illiterate as most of the nobility were in Shakespeare's day and for long afterwards. Mr Mason plays him like Sir Francis Drake between voyages … far too knightly and too British to provide any sort of comic contrast with Mr Warner's visiting Englishman. And Miss Byrne's Maria was over-familiar: we seem to have seen this performance from Miss Byrne before: and perhaps it is time for the RSC to start casting her against type. In the low-comedy scenes it was left to Mr Williams' inventiveness, to Mr Warner and to Ian Holm's Malvolio to get the laughs.

Mr Holm—whether revealed mercilessly in hair-curlers, paralysed by vicious cross-gartering or convulsing us with a phoney-genteel accent which Paul Scofield's government inspector would have envied—was magnificent. This Malvolio was not so far removed from the joyless little time-server who yelps for silence in a public house and is savagely beaten up, simply because his tone of voice begged for it. Mr Holm managed to be hateful, comic and tragic all at once, which is quite a feat. Norman Rodway as Feste gave us a man halfway out of a job. In his battle between expediency and principle, he almost taunts Olivia into dismissing him. His jokes are double-edged; he is saying to the observers: 'See how uncaring I am,' and, to Olivia: 'See how my humour suits your sadness'. Mr Rodway's performance is geared towards his dungeon scene with Malvolio: an acrid sequence which strikes a proper balance for the whole production. It is a nastily excellent piece of work, which began shakily as if Mr Rodway had temporarily forgotten just how fine an actor he is.

Then there was Diana Rigg as Viola. Nearly all of the critics have taken pleasure in reminding us that since Miss Rigg has played in a more ephemeral entertainment than Twelfth Night her performance here must be accorded the same indulgence as that shown to Samuel Johnson's walking dog. It is true that she is a modern Viola, just as Ian Holm has given us a modern Henry V. And so what? If her tightly-tailored behind is not that of a pageboy, Miss Rigg is all too comically aware of the fact. She speaks verse beautifully, precisely and with intelligence, and was far too good for the gloomy Orsino: she should have gone off with Malvolio and taught him a few songs and how to drink ale. Alan Howard's Orsino was fine, considering how dull the part is; as Olivia, Estelle Kohler showed plenty of life, but lacked polish; while there was a nicely dumbfounded Antonio from Godfrey Quigley. Guy Woolfenden's musical settings were splendid, as always.

The critics have complained that this production is variously too languorous, too harsh, too downbeat, too leisurely and too knockabout (one who apparently can't count described the setting as consisting of four arches). The play does, in fact, contain all these alleged shortcomings: they were in it when Shakespeare wrote it. If Mr Williams deserves criticism it is not for mixing his styles, but for failing to make palatable the mixture that was there to begin with. In the last analysis, what Shakespeare wrote was a superb piece of entertainment; and this, or very nearly, is what Mr Williams, his cast, musicians and designer have given us.

**Robert Speaight (review date Autumn 1966)**


Nothing that I had heard or read suggested that Mr. Clifford Williams' production of Twelfth Night was a good one. It seemed that he was trying to repeat his success with The Comedy of Errors by applying the same method to very different material. If you are out to debunk romanticism—a fashionable pastime in the contemporary theater—you will find that Shakespeare has already gone a good way in this direction, and that
it is dangerous to out-pace him. As always, Shakespeare holds the balance, and the first business of the
director—before he gives rein to his invention, and Mr. Williams' invention is exceedingly fertile—must be to
hold the scales even. In this production they were not held quite evenly. There was no doubt of Viola's love
for Orsino or of his for her—though he doesn't know it; no doubt, either, of Antonio's love for Sebastian' or of
Viola's and Sebastian's for each other. Viola was quite right to play the "ring" soliloquy for high comedy; but
Olivia's infatuation should be seen in three slightly different perspectives; as it appears to Viola, as it appears
to the audience, and as it appears to herself. She must not be so absurd that we resist the notion of Sebastian
succumbing to her charms, because Sebastian is an entirely serious person. The truth is that Olivia is a very
solemn and very charming young woman with little sense of humor and rather more money than is good for
her. Like many such people, she is something of a fool. Miss Kohler was less ostentatiously foolish than Miss
Geraldine McEwan in the last Stratford production, but I still thought she could have done with an inch or two
more of dignity and a more imperative hint of the châtelaine.

In the first part of the play the comedy was happily unforced, but there were moments, later, when it was
either misplaced or toppled over into farce. Sebastian's bewilderment must be transformed into pure rapture
by the time Olivia is leading him to that clandestine marriage. The duel can arguably be treated as slapstick,
but not to the extent of turning these very real people into marionettes. Similarly, in the letter scene there must
be some lingering pretence that the conspirators are neither seen nor over-heard. So the bias of Mr. Williams'
production was certainly towards comedy, broader than the purist would approve of. That the balance was not
altogether upset was mainly due to Miss Diana Rigg's gallant and resourceful Viola. At once vulnerable and
adventurous, humorous and high-spirited, she had a kind of helpless humility which I found extremely
moving. Only a tendency to start a sentence at the top of her voice and end it inaudibly marred the perfect
execution of what had been perfectly imagined.

The best Viola is always worth more than the best Orsino, but here Mr. Alan Howard was a shade
"o'erparted". Orsino is a difficult and not altogether rewarding role, and it demands a certain maturity of
personality and technique, a certain elegance of address, a certain effortless authority. Mr. Rodway's Feste
very wisely did not ask us to think that he was funny, for the whole point of Feste is that he exhausted his
jokes years ago and has been sensibly pensioned off in a cottage for retired clowns. Having played the part
myself, I sympathize with anyone attacking it who is not a singer. Mr. Rodway's discreet recitative was at
least in tune, which mine was not. Mr. Mason's Toby was genially well-bred, and even when it was light in
the head was never too heavy in the hand. In fact it could have done with rather more weight; one never quite
felt that Toby was in charge. Mr. Warner's Aguecheek would have been better for "straighter" playing—this
was casting such as a director dreams of, and it needed little or no embellishment. Miss Patsy Byrne was a
splendid Maria, and there was a quite remarkable Fabian from Mr. Wylton. Fabian is as dull a part as
Shakespeare wrote; yet here was Mr. Wylton lighting up not only his own corner of the stage, but several
square yards around him. And what an example he set of rich, racy, rightly characterized, flexible, and easily
audible speech!

Mr. Quigley's Antonio had a fine resonant romanticism, and for once the idea occurred to someone that if you
are a pirate hoping to escape arrest the last thing you do is to look piratical. So instead of Long John Silver
with both his legs on, we had a nondescript appearance and an anything but nondescript performance. But the
masterpiece, and also in a sense the key, to this production was Mr. Holm's Malvolio. An old theatrical
convention used to insist that Malvolio must be tall. This was knocked on the head some years ago at the Old
Vic by Mr. Alec McOwen. His Malvolio was a fussy little wasp of a man; but where he suggested the sudden
sting of a wasp, Mr. Holm, with even fewer inches, suggested the murmur of innumerable bees. He had his
sting, of course, but it was anything but sudden. It emerged from a mysterious vocal gestation, of which Mr.
Holm's larynx alone has the prescription. The new convention insists that Malvolio comes from the "suburbs
by the Elephant". This was conceived by Maurice Evans in 1939: carried on at Stratford by Sir Laurence
Olivier; and has now been consummated, with sublime comic effect, by Mr. Holm. The result is that the play
oscillates between an exchange of vows and an exchange of vowels.
We were promised, in one of the theater publications, "a deeper look" into *Twelfth Night*. Mr. Williams had not looked as deeply or as subtly as Mr. Hall in 1961, and my own taste is for a tenderer *Twelfth Night*. Where Mr. Hall was prepared to be as romantic as Shakespeare would let him, Mr. Williams did not avail himself of all the necessary permissions. But it would be priggish not to admit that this production was enormously diverting, even if now and then it won its laughs at rather too high a price. Miss Sally Jacobs' décor and costumes were rightly and handsomely Elizabethan, although they lacked Miss Lila de Nobili's russet autumnal glow; and it was a pleasure both to see and hear the musicians. I have never seen the conventions of the Elizabethan stage more dexterously adapted to modern usage.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:**

**PRODUCTION:**

John Barton • RSC • 1969-70

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Background:**

**BACKGROUND:**

Barton's 1969-70 production took the course of providing what Gareth Lloyd Evans termed a "gravely lyrical interpretation of Shakespeare's work that derived from the text itself." Irving Wardle qualified his praise by stating "this is not the funniest or most inventive *Twelfth Night* I have seen; but I can remember no production that held all the comedy's elements in such harmony."

For many critics, the focal point of the production was Emrys James's Feste, which Simon Gray declared "a theatrical triumph." Donald Sinden's Malvolio was similarly praised by the majority of commentators. Speaight noted that Sinden's handling of the role in the vein of high comedy left "the right bitterness in the mouth when the play's flight from realism might have seemed too precipitate." Critics further praised Judi Dench's Viola and the Scottish eccentricity of Barry Jackson's Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Most reviewers, however, faulted Lisa Harrow's Olivia as a depressing portrayal that jarred with Illyria's reputation as a "sunny place." In judging the production as a whole, Benedict Nightingale concluded that it was "Barton's peculiar and perverse achievement to send us out of Shakespeare's 'happiest comedy' feeling that neither [Olivia and Orsino] nor anyone else will live happily ever after." In 1970 the production was transferred to the Aldwych Theatre in London with several cast changes, including Richard Pasco as Orsino, and Tony Church as Sir Toby Belch.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Commentary:**

**COMMENTARY:**

**Irving Wardle (review date 22 August 1969)**


Having shown *Troilus and Cressida* through the eyes of Thersites, John Barton now gives us Feste's version of *Twelfth Night*: and again the fool proves himself the best guide to the play.

This is not the funniest or most inventive *Twelfth Night* I have seen; but I can remember no production that held all the comedy's elements in such harmony. Played amid fragile white properties, against a sombre background, it is in key with Feste's last song: its humour and melancholy both springing from a sense of transience underscored with music and the sound of the waves that lodged the two castaways on Illyria.
At present some parts of the production are not fully assimilated in the general pattern. Muted though the atmosphere may be, it could stand a less subdued Sir Toby than Bill Fraser's whose big moment comes only with the wintry dismissal of Aguecheek (which almost suggests Falstaff rejecting Hal). Conversely Donald Sinden's Malvolio seems to have wandered in from another production. It is an extremely knowing performance, avoiding the old tricks and finding new ways of getting laughs (struggling to get Olivia's ring off his finger): but anything as actorish as this jars against the prevailing mood.

A Scottish Aguecheek also stirred initial doubts. Why turn a prodigal into a bagpipe-toting tightwad grudgingly rummaging in his sporran for tips? However, Barrie Ingham amply justifies this reading by turning the Knight into a fully fledged clown capable of gymnastic feats (including a sensational back-fall) and for ever trudging after Olivia (Lisa Harrow) with pathetic little bunches of flowers. The presence of Feste is felt even in his absence. When he does appear he polarizes the action, creating those moments at which Shakespeare touches hands with Chekhov as in the "Catch" scene, which reduces Sir Andrew to tears and brings back Brenda Bruce's aging Maria after a false goodnight in the hope of luring Sir Toby to bed; or in the Tabour scene with Viola, where cross-talk gives way to music and unspoken communion, as the two characters sprawl out together ruefully surveying the human scene from some other plane.

Emrys James's grizzled Feste would hardly have commanded such effects, if the rest of the show had not been working for him: but he gives a most musical performance that blends the senses of long-term melancholy, and present pleasure. Judi Dench's Viola, suited seductively in olive green, is attuned to the same broken harmony and matches it with her characteristic inflections, that combine a chuckle with a catch in the throat.

**Simon Gray (review date 29 August 1969)**


Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek sit collapsed, their eyes rheumy with retrospection, while Feste, as he sings 'What is love?' Tis not hereafter', watches them with tender irony. Later the three of them, spurred on by a Maria of real feeling, are baiting Malvolio when suddenly, as if overcome by shame, they pause to stare at each other aghast. Finally, at the end of his performance as Sir Topas, Feste takes off his beard with a weary disgust, and so permits the audience to be completely charmed by him once more. In other words John Barton, who has achieved at Stratford an intelligent and sensitive account of this notoriously difficult play, has done so by filtering into its darkest corners some of the spirit that moves his fool, a fool so touching in his lapses that we easily forgive him his complicity in the Malvolio plot, and so enchanting in his tone that we forgive him even his appalling jokes. But Mr Barton's production is more than morally good and unusually coherent. It is also robust, funny and warm, full of shrewd observations and genuinely poignant moments. His conception of Feste has led him to a theatrical triumph.

Nevertheless his Feste is not Shakespeare's. The fool of the text is in places wryly wise and always consciously a dependent, a hack with a spiritual life; and his songs, of course, are beautiful. He is also malicious, with the malice of a man who cannot tolerate others knowing what he knows about himself. This Feste *enjoys* tormenting Malvolio, whose cold insights ('I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a tavern rascal … unless you laugh and minister to him, he's gagged') constitute a real threat to his powers of enchantment, and thus to his vanity. Mr Barton's Feste agrees in a tone of self-redeeming compassion to bring 'the light and paper, and ink' for Malvolio's letter, and so helps us to forget that Shakespeare's fool subsequently and callously fails to deliver the letter itself. Mr Barton's Feste touches us into more than tolerance with his gesture of shame, and so helps us to forget that Shakespeare's Feste crows triumphantly over the released and now publicly humiliated Malvolio. It is not that in these places Mr Barton has molested the text—rather that by placing the stress elsewhere, by humanely filling in Shakespeare's brutal blanks, he has created a fool who is incapable of doing and saying what he actually says and does; and the audience, like the production, can then pretend he hasn't.
As it is with Feste, so it is with every character in the production. Judi Dench's Viola, for instance, is far too delightful to take advantage of Olivia or in any other way embarrass the audience. When she comes to woo for Orsino's sake, she chortles out the great love passage in a spirit of exuberant parody; and when Malvolio brings her the ring, she receives it with an innocent astonishment that deftly prepares the way for her tremulous 'Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness'. From then on, and perfectly consistently, she reacts to Olivia's overtures with a cleansingly comic gaucheness. But that initial speech—'Make me a willow cabin'—is not a classic of romantic persuasiveness for nothing. If it is ironic in its exaggerations, it is also insidiously enticing in its rhythms—rhythms that Miss Dench's rendering inevitably coarsens. And though Shakespeare's Viola may act out a sly astonishment when she is left alone to contemplate Olivia's confusion, she has already been too revealingly quick-witted with Malvolio—'She took the ring of me, I'll none of it'—and given something about herself away. Shakespeare's Viola, in fact, is a much more knowing girl than Mr Barton's, much more complex, and consequently the comedy in her relationship with Olivia is both more intensely erotic and altogether more dangerous—it's a comedy that cuts cynically through all our illusions about the nature of romantic love to the amoral and chaotic emotions that merely adopt romantic postures as a disguise and for self-disguise. Only Shakespeare's nerve, the elegant confidence with which he defines the limits of his Illyria and the aplomb with which he converts his analysis into seeming playfulness, prevents us from finding the comedy as a whole repellent. We are, in other words, seduced into believing that the instinct for order in comic art will always prevail over the anarchy of our inner lives. But still he lingers in the memory to remind us that Illyria is after all an illusion that has been fashioned out of much potential, and some actual, pain.

Well, it probably seems perverse to blame Mr Barton for not going far enough into the dark when almost every other review has only qualified its praise in wondering whether he hasn't gone too far. And above all it would be ungracious to end without again saluting a production that is informed in its every moment, and by every member of its cast, with intelligence and humanity. If we haven't got a *Twelfth Night* that has met the play's most disturbing challenges head on, then we can at least be grateful that we have been given one that has profited richly from the way in which it has avoided them.

**Hilary Spurting** (review date 30 August 1969)


Devotees of the spectacular, or for that matter of pantomime and magic spangles, must have been especially pleased by the light, fantastic style devised this year at Stratford for *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. Clearly a scheme based on these two plays, with *Henry VIII* to come, should ideally have included *Cymbeline* or, failing that, *The Tempest* and preferably both. Clearly, on the other hand, the kind of audiences who flock enthusiastically to Stratford might reasonably be expected to stand for only so much of Shakespeare's unfamiliar, and comparatively abstruse, last things. However entrancing they may be in practice, in theory the late romances are not what one might call box office gold. And so we have *Twelfth Night* which, one can't help feeling, must have been envisaged as something of a spanner in this season's works.

Whatever the reason, John Barton's production shows sinister signs of compromise. 'This comedy prefigures the final romances', explains a programme note; and, in the sense that the plot turns on freaks of time, on storm and shipwreck, supposed death and a family reunion at the end, it well may do. But the play's gaiety is not much enhanced by Mr Barton's jettisoning all the simpler jokes in favour of a kind of wintry melancholy. The gravity which, against the opulent stagings of the earlier productions, seemed delicately austere, here seems merely drab, not to say pedantic. And I cannot see that, just because the sea pervades *Pericles* and figures largely in *The Winter's Tale*, that is any reason why waves should pound and gurgle in the wings throughout *Twelfth Night*.
Admittedly, this device works handsomely the first time: when, after the music of the opening scene, Orsino vanishes, the court is whisked away and doors fly open at the back on Viola, appearing in a puff of smoke—which, on second thoughts, turns out to be a wisp of sea spray curling round her ankles. Christopher Morley's set is a magnificent great hall, receding according to the symmetrical perspective of which the Renaissance was so fond, dwindling to a point and built of wooden slats. Barred sunlight, trellised walks and neat silvery trees in tubs suggest the costly artificiality of Illyrian manners, in sharp contrast to Viola coming ashore in rags, attended by a captain and two seamen, all piratically louche. This moment, like the plot itself, has an unreality at once theatrical, mysterious and fetchingly bizarre. One has glimmerings of what might have been—indeed, considering this company's flair for reshaping its productions in performance, what still may be—a remarkable conception.

Certainly Charles Thomas, as Orsino, has the right combination of sensual grace and elaborate fatigue, of youth and spirits hopefully concealed beneath a studiously frowzy front. And Judi Dench's Viola, so humorous and dapper, so attentive to her master and so composedly distressed, is a charming creature. As for Donald Sinden's Malvolio—a portly soul struggling to get out of an absurdly spindly body—it is the masterpiece of this production. To switch, as Mr Sinden has done in the past three years, from Lord Foppington to Not Now Darling—in which he was an incomparably smooth and bland farceur—and now Malvolio argues him, in every sense, a man of truly formidable parts.

But even Mr Sinden's road winds uphill much of the way in Olivia's unaccountably depressed, and often positively morbid, household. Brenda Bruce's Maria—a leathery lady with scraggy bun and snappish voice—shows small sign of the pert flirt; her advances to Sir Toby suggest rather the despondency of one sinking fast into a lonely and embittered spinsterhood. Bill Fraser as a despised, unwanted and dependant elderly relative is both accurate and sad but not, I think, Sir Toby Belch. Emrys James's Feste is picturesque and wistful, as well he might be on this job, and Lisa Harrow makes a shrill and unimpressive Olivia. The best of this glum bunch is Barrie Ingham's Andrew Aguecheek, a lank Scotsman nourishing the huge, secret and surprising vanity which sometimes breeds in northern parts.

Nothing, in short, becomes this production—unless perhaps its magical opening sequence—like the leaving of it: a splendid formal confrontation in which, when Viola finds Sebastian, she also finds, in this gay and dashing brother (Gordon Reid), for once her mirror image.

Jeremy Kingston (review date 3 September 1969)


For the young lovers in Twelfth Night the last scene brings them all their hearts desire. Twins are reunited, boys turn out to be girls, a double marriage is arranged. Then the mood is interrupted—though not so much interrupted as permanently modulated into something profounder than the conventional happy end of romance. With one terse, tremendous line—"I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!"—Malvolio flings himself out of the play. And lest we think this scene merely is an interruption in the happy story the clown Feste stays on the otherwise emptied stage to give us his ambiguous song about the wind and the rain, man's estate and the sadness of life.

Because Twelfth Night, a play full of mirth, is shot through with sadness. John Barton's superb production at Stratford-upon-Avon realises this melancholy chiefly through the person of Feste, the white-faced clown wandering between Orsino's court and Olivia's household, commenting upon their follies in banter and song. The other characters are all familiar with his songs; they hum the tunes quietly to themselves when alone. Emrys James's "Come, mistress mine," brings tears to the eyes of the knights. His "Come away, death," does the same to Orsino. During the second verse of this song Mr. James circles Charles Thomas (Orsino) with a curious dragging walk, pressing his hand to his brow, excessively underlining the melancholy until one
realises that the grief expressed is excessive. He is using the song as a reproof. Orsino, of course, is too wrapped up in self-pity to notice but Judi Dench's Viola is sharp enough to see what he's on about.

Miss Dench's Viola is a beautifully imagined performance. Brave and firm from her first appearance on the Illyrian shore she shows touchingly her understanding of love's sorrows, whirling the poignancy away by following a catch in her throat with a light laugh—smiling at grief, something this actress has always been able to do perfectly. Tender comedy sparkles between her and Lisa Harrow's gravely charming Olivia.

The knightly revels are sad too. Barrie Ingham's Sir Andrew is a knight of a woeful countenance. Bill Fraser's Toby is more often gloomy than not. Even Maria (Brenda Bruce) trails pensively after him, always hoping he will raise her from mistress to wife.

The comedy chiefly accompanies Donald Sinden's Malvolio. Absurdly humorous in his demand for formality his characterisation can be guessed from his reaction to Olivia's, "Run after that same peevish messenger." "Run?" he echoes (a director's addition) in accents of appalled amazement. Then slowly, high-stepping, he runs. Mr. Sinden is so powerful a comic actor he must adorn and decorate any part he plays. The result is very funny indeed but by making us enjoy his company so much he goes dangerously near tearing the play open.

The sourest joke in Shakespeare is the locking of Malvolio in the dark cellar but it indicates (as does the title) that Shakespeare's golden view of the world has come to an end. Twelfth Night is the last in a string of comedies and histories: after it comes Hamlet. At the end of this production Mr. Barton shows the four lovers stepping back along the airy tunnel of wicker lattices to their own happy wonderland. Malvolio, Antonio, Feste veer sideways into the wings.

Robert Cushman (review date October 1969)


But tell me true' asks Feste of Malvolio 'are you not mad indeed or do you but counterfeit? A strange emphasis, and not, I think, one which many actors would employ of their own accord. It jerked me out of the stupor into which I had been cast by the slackest Sir Topas scene in my recollection, and set me wondering what Feste could possibly mean by it. A reference to bis own masquerade as Master Parson perhaps, but Malvolio is hardly in a position to see the joke. Anyway that seemed much too simple, too specific. There was about the delivery the weighty self-consciousness which Royal Shakespeare actors are apt to signal that though they cannot quite fit this reading into their characterisation they will do it this way to oblige the director who thinks that it has great thematic significance.

What in fact was happening, I decided, was that John Barton was digging me in the ribs and remarking that this was a play in which everyone was a madman or a pretender or both, and in which sanity and frenzy, reality and illusion, were so intermixed that only a jester could hope to distinguish them. All of which is true but out, surely, of Feste's ken (I would say consciousness but the word is overworn) as a participant in the action, which is how, when engaged in discourse with another character, he must be regarded. For moments like these the actors should perhaps be equipped with portable 'thinks' bubbles.

The madness theme is assiduously pursued. When Sebastian enters and canvasses (weakly) the possibility of his own or Olivia's insanity his meditations are counterpointed by the offstage howling of the madly-used Malvolio. When Olivia appears to waft him to the altar she brings with her, as the priest demanded by the text, the very Sir Topas Feste has just impersonated. I would rather it had been the old hermit of Prague that never saw pen and ink, but Sir Topas will do. During the final scene all references to madness or to being and seeming are approached with wary reverence while any mention of the sea (and, give them their due, I had never realised before just how many there are in Twelfth Night) is enough to bring the proceedings to a dead
In turning on the sound-effects even for such fleeting references as Orsino's description of his love ('as hungry as the sea, And can digest as much') Barton is taking Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us altogether too solemnly. Such punctilious underlining can only render the words ridiculous. (And if that is the idea it is hardly necessary in a production which already has Charles Thomas as Orsino writhing on the ground in an ecstasy of love-sick self-indulgence so heavily accentuated as to outpace the text.) But even those who find the device acceptable must grant that it bulks larger than it should, not so much through its own forcefulness as through lack of challenging interest elsewhere.

For if you take Twelfth Night to be a dramatised Feast of Misrule, if you carefully emphasise all the relevant lines, and if your learned lady-wife backs you up in a closely-argued programme note, the one quality your production cannot afford is tameness. But here inertia, so to speak, runs riot. Sir Toby (Bill Fraser) enters, turns downstage, and informs the world in general that he is sure care's an enemy to life. That's him taped, but at no point thereafter does he behave as though he believed in his admirable axiom. His best moment is his very last, his scornful rejection of Sir Andrew. In accordance with current Stratford practice this is played to the hilt; but how much crueller it could have seemed, with half the effort, had there been any contrasting warmth in their earlier scenes. Barrie Ingham's Andrew, a scion of the clan MacAguecheek, is at first blush an admirable conception; he is clearly marked out as a stranger in town (London must have been full of him as the Tudors gave place to the Stuarts) and he does some funny things with bagpipes. But where Shakespeare intended dialect comedy he invariably made ample phonetic provision in the lines.

Brenda Bruce is a tart, efficient Maria. Incidentally, how does Mrs Barton work out that her marriage to Toby is 'the coldest of off-stage bargains'? Since it does take place off-stage, we are hardly in a position to judge of its warmth anyway, but Toby makes enough admiring not to say possessive remarks about the future Lady Belch for us to assume some willingness on his part. The match is announced in a speech whose general tone is festive and conciliatory. The Barton view gives Miss Bruce a whole new man-trapping subtext to play out; she is plainly out to provide for her old age, only too well aware that youth's a stuff will not endure. Feste's warning is hardly needed; indeed, finely though Emrys James speaks and sings the part, he is doomed in this company to seem a tireless stater of the obvious.

But Feste's fate is nothing compared to what has befallen Malvolio. Pity the killjoy without a sport to spoil. The whole comic balance of the play has been tilted for there is more joyousness in Donald Sinden's pride of office than in any of those who oppose him. His first word—a massive, sneering 'Yes'—rocked the theatre; not only was it magnificently funny, it was the first laugh of the evening, a cathartic release for the entire audience. The Puritan, it was evident, was our true Lord of Misrule and to him alone could we look for cakes and ale. Here, if only by default, was a reading of staggering subtlety. There were more jewels to come but they were strung increasingly thin; lacking adequate support (the box-tree conspiracy can never have gone for less) the performance foundered. It serves though as an interesting reminder of the extent to which this company depends on virtuoso performances (by Sinden or Ian Richardson or David Waller) for success in broad comedy. As a group they're no fun at all.

In the comedy of sentiment they are generally much more adroit, and doubtless when Orsino has picked himself up and Olivia has developed a firmer line and Sebastian has been replaced, these scenes will come into their own.

Judi Dench is ahead already; her untarnished freshness has never been more welcome. She alone is fully mistress of those strange RSC inflections: 'Who'er I woo myself would be his … WIFE' she exclaims and for once we are listening not to an academic demonstration of the paradox of Viola's situation but to the girl herself. The rest of the production owes it to her to improve.
Robert W. Speaight (review date Winter 1969)


When after 50 years of playgoing you cast your eye down a program of Twelfth Night, pick out the characters of Orsino, Feste, Maria, Aguecheek, Malvolio, Viola, and Olivia, and conclude that you have never seen these parts better played, and rarely played as well—when you leave the theater with tears in your eyes and laughter on your lips—then the performance you have seen bids fair to be definitive. Of course the bid fails because there are always other things to say, and another generation of actors and directors knocking on the door to say them. But John Barton's Twelfth Night of 1969 was the best, absolutely, that I remember. Peter Hall, in the first year of his directorate, was aiming at very much the same effect, but in the case of Olivia and Feste pushed his theory too far. Olivia was silly, but she was not as silly as all that. Feste was passé, but he was still a professional clown—knowing his business well enough to amuse Olivia, enrage Malvolio, and earn a testril from Aguecheek. If you push Olivia too far in the direction of silliness, and Feste too far in the direction of melancholy, you distort the balance of the play.

Mr. Barton's production has been described as Twelfth Night seen through the eyes of Feste. It is the right perspective. The mood was autumnal, the costumes Elizabethan, and the place a purely fanciful Illyria with white trees and perfectly contemporary garden chairs in a gold setting—as timeless as the play itself. Here Emrys James's Feste was quietly in command—seeing everything and through everything, and singing with delicate accomplishment about many of the things that he saw. Lisa Harrow's Olivia was a spoilt innocent, whom Viola and Sebastian between them matriculated into life. Judi Dench's Viola, vulnerable, resourceful, gallant and gay, brought the realities of emotional as well as physical shipwreck into a world where Orsino was reading too much Spenser and Sidney for the good of his soul, and where Olivia had too much money. Charles Thomas brought out better than I have ever seen it brought out before the therapeutic effect of Viola's arrival at his court; and Judi Dench—who is one of the half dozen best actresses on the English stage—stabbed his heart, and ours, with a matador's certainty of aim. One is always waiting, in any production of Twelfth Night, for the great moments—Aguecheek's "I was adored once too" [II. iii. 181] Viola's "Willow cabin" and "It gives a very echo to the seat where love is throned" [II. iv. 22] the recognition of Sebastian—and each time the blade struck home.

If the mood of this production was autumnal, and therefore attuned both to poetry and emotion, the humours were given hilarious rein. Feste earned his laughs as well as his testrils, and a Scots Aguecheek trailing his bagpipes was a brilliant invention, and brilliantly executed by Barrie Ingham. Brenda Bruce was a sparkling, and properly mature, Maria—accepting Sir Toby with certain legitimate misgivings. In a sense more than physical, Donald Sinden's Malvolio towered above his persecutors—a bigger man than they, for all his grotesque infatuation. This was a superb performance in the vein of high comedy, leaving the right bitterness in the mouth when the play's flight from realism might have seemed too precipitate. Toby's repudiation of Aguecheek had the same salutary sting. It was one of many original touches which brought the play to us as if we were seeing it for the first time—like the howling of the gale outside the gilded cage of Orsino's palace; reality at odds with romanticism—each claiming its rights. They were distributed here with a quite exquisite impartiality, meaning distilled and melody carefully conveying it. All comedies are comedies of errors, and in Twelfth Night the mistaken identities are only the least of them. Mr. Barton and the Royal Shakespeare Company left us thinking very hard about the others.

Irving Wardle (review date 7 August 1970)


Substantially recast since its first appearance a year ago, John Barton's Twelfth Night arrives at the Aldwych having undergone one of those transformations that often overtake productions on the road from Stratford to
London.

Originally this seemed to be Feste's *Twelfth Night*: a shifting perspective of romantic ardour and romantic folly seen through the eyes of the Fool against an everpresent sense of the effects of time.

The main emphasis has been displaced to a contrast between the play's lyricism and broad comedy: and with much of the fun knocked out of the comedy. You might almost describe the result as an economic interpretation: on one side Orsino and Viola with money enough to surrender to delicate emotion; and on the other, the creatures of Olivia's household, all (including Barrie Ingham's Scottish skinflint Aguecheek) materially enslaved to the queen bee.

If anyone earns the central place it is Donald Sinden's Malvolio: the agent of so much fear in the household, and finally the most wounded member of all—broken double under the weight of his humiliation, and stumbling off stage after handing Olivia his chain of office. It is not a happy household.

Aguecheek trudging hopelessly after Olivia with a withered bunch of flowers is a dilapidated, balding wreck, at least as pathetic as comic. While Leslie Sands's Sir Toby (replacing Bill Fraser) is a joker as much obsessed with profit as Feste: a broken-winded old pug who exerts himself as little as possible (he is continually reaching out a great paw to grab passing victims without himself moving an inch) and drops all pretense of fun as soon as there is no more to be gained from it: as in his collapse into fearful apprehension in the Sir Topas scene, and in his final vindictive casting-off of his wretched companion.

Most startling and persuasive of the group is Elizabeth Spriggs's Maria: no longer the usual bundle of fun, but a prim Edinburgh housekeeper in gold rimmed spectacles, besotted with Sir Toby and only mounting the Malvolio intrigue with the purpose of luring him into marriage. She has sudden, instantly suppressed, burst of indecorous humour.

But the essence of the reading appears after the carousel scene where she steals back hoping to catch Sir Toby alone, only to be packed off blubbering by the selfish old brute ("It is too late to go to bed"); or, right at the end, in the glare of possessive indignation she throws at Sebastian for having clobbered her hero.

Blindly supervising this fearful, mean-spirited household is Lisa Harrow's Olivia: a Shakespearian Marie Antoinette, quite oblivious of everything taking place outside the range of her amorous obsession, and caressing her people like stray dogs.

This is the most austere *Twelfth Night* I have seen. It does permit an all-out comic treatment of some passages: notably Malvolio's letter scene, which Mr. Sinden has worked out in beautiful fresh detail, picking out the commas for clues in M.O.A.I., and automatically correcting the sun-dial in the midst of his fantasies of greatness. It does not fare too well with the romance.

Richard Pascos Orsino gives that awkward part a welcome male vigour. But Judi Dench's Viola, although backed up with a murmuring ocean and seductively set off in olive velvet, works too hard to extract new harmonics from the familiar lines. She responds with great sensitivity to the continual changes of mood and colour: but it is all done in slow motion, and for much of the time one just longs for her to get on with it. In the surrounding context, though, she has to put up a solo fight against the dominant anti-romantic bias.

Christopher Morley's set, a latticed cell illuminates from outside, undergoes beautiful transformations from pannelled interior to pastoral sunshine. It is one of the RSC's happiest variations on its current visual model.

*Benedict Nightingale* (review date 21 August 1970)
If we're to believe Simon Gray, who reviewed it for the NS from Stratford last year, John Barton's *Twelfth Night* was a notably gloomy business, dominated by a Feste so black and brooding he'd make Lear's Fool look like a maypole. The production has now moved south, to the Aldwych, and thawed; though not quite enough, perhaps, or not in the right places. Illyria is not yet the cosy, irresponsible place Shakespeare is generally agreed to have postulated. Indeed, there's no difference in kind between the visiting twins and the natives of the place. Those who would take them to stand for realism and romanticism respectively will not receive much comfort from Barton's production. Everyone exists on or near some middle level of feeling: there are no extremes of gaiety or torment, no highs or horrible lows. The atmosphere is that of a party after the most amusing guests have left, and the survivors are beginning to sober up—edgy, querulous, still slightly sottish, but no longer sottishly happy.

It is Olivia's household that seizes the attention and sets the tone. Leslie Sands's lumbering Belch has a half-drowned look, and carouses more from habit than enthusiasm. He feels his age, and so do Barrie Ingham's Ague-cheek, a scrawny, loveless highlander, dandling bagpipes, and Elizabeth Spriggs's Maria, a governness from the genteel lowlands. All this Scotmanship is no more than a lazy way of tickling gratuitous laughter out of a situation that ought to be funny enough already; nevertheless, Miss Spriggs's performance does have distinct merits of its own.

The 'beagle, true-bred' is usually played as a game young bitch whose affection for Toby is entirely inexplicable: why burden herself with a lopsided old soak, even if he has a title of sorts? But Miss Spriggs's beagle is older, plainer and visibly hunting for a man, any man. Sands's Toby knows this, and bullies her meanly; she tricks Malvolio into his yellow stockings, less for revenge than to ingratiate herself with this insensitive lover. Miss Spriggs's achievement is to reconcile all this with a ladylike, indeed prim exterior. She is the kind of embryo old maid who wears a hip-flask under her garter and daydreams of bawling 'bloody' at her employer; if her spectacles glint, so do the eyes underneath them. One senses depths of vulgarity in her, long repressed, determined to find expression.

It is somewhat the same with Emrys James's malicious, gleeful Feste and Donald Sinden's Malvolio, who looks and sounds like some archetypally Eminent Victorian, heavy, stern and physically unable to smile. Both are well individualised performances, but neither they nor the others generate much fun. Barton seems not nearly so interested in mounting entertaining practical jokes as in exploring the character of their inventors and emphasising the cruelty of their effects. He makes far less of Sinden's amorous posturing before Olivia than of Sinden imprisoned: a great black bull, tethered and roaring from his pen; and then half-emerging, white-faced and disconcertingly human, to rail, like Dr Arnold, at those who ought to be his prefects' fags. But then Barton is an unusually serious-minded director, even by the solemn standards of today, and we should not be surprised by this—or, for that matter, by his handling of Orsino's court.

This is even more depressing than Olivia's household fundamentally is. She, Olivia, is played by Lisa Harrow as a skittish, smug girl who would scarcely command the respect she's inexplicably accorded by her brawling retinue; he, Orsino, played by Richard Pasco, sits hunched among candles, scowling unhappily at the darkness beyond him and thoroughly bewildering such as Judi Dench's Viola. Is this really the pleasant country her father told her of? The love-sickness of this Orsino, if less than suicidal, certainly seems greater and madder than that of the conventional swain Shakespeare actually created. His threat at the end to 'kill what I love' isn't just another romantic excrescence: it looks genuinely murderous for a moment. Well may Miss Dench, a vivid, sweet, pained, misused girl, steel herself for the slaughter. It doesn't happen, of course: they get married instead—but for what? It is Barton's peculiar and perverse achievement to send us out of Shakespeare's 'happiest comedy' feeling that neither they nor anyone else will live happily ever after.

Peter Roberts (review date October 1970)
A Freak Thunderstorm on the second night of the London showing of John Barton's revival of *Twelfth Night* at least ensured one experienced the production in a way denied the many enthusiasts who had queued to see it at last year's Stratford-on-Avon season. And if they think they were fortunate not to have to sit in the Aldwych with empty ice cream cartons bobbing like miniature gondolas around their damp feet, as Malvolio (Donald Sinden) stood, fearful of being electrocuted, waist deep in the water engulfing his pit, then all I can say is they never had it so good.

At least, I doubt very much whether any of them found themselves being applauded at the end of the performance by the cast. I doubt, too, whether their appreciation of the revival's use of seacoast sound effects could have been quite as extraordinary as ours when it was realised that nature had taken over from art: that the thunderclaps out-side the theatre had replaced the taped sound of an Illyrian sea coast inside. In the circumstances a unique audience/actor contact was understandably set up as the play closed to the familiar words:

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
> A foolish thing was but a toy,  
> For the rain it raineth every day.

Well, they don't make such perfectly timed rain like that every day in London just as revivals such as this *Twelfth Night* are a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence.

Its subtlety is what I am going to have to settle reluctantly for as the overall quality that makes this revival so satisfying. I say 'reluctantly', because subtlety is a hard quality to convey in a few hundred words as well as sounding awfully like an OK word for implying you enjoyed something in a complex way without being bright enough to explain the hows and whys.

Anyway here goes. Christopher Morley's slatted set is subtle because it seems to be merely an enclosed empty space of the sort approved by Peter Brook. In fact, it serves many purposes. At times exterior lighting transforms it from a solid Tudor Chamber into a frail fairytale structure that looks as though it might float away on the next whiff of poetry. Stephanie Howard's Tudor costumes, Michael Tubbs' music arranged from traditional sources and Brian Harris' impression of candle-lit presentation all help to reinforce the suggestion of an Elizabethan production in one of the capital's Great Halls, whilst at the same time avoiding a cumbersome reproduction of some imaginary revival of *Twelfth Night* that might have been watched by the Virgin Queen herself or perhaps her successor who, of course, was no virgin.

John Barton's direction is subtle, because he has thrown no one blanket interpretation over the play and forced the words and the cast to conform to that single viewpoint. Rather he and his cast keep a tight rein on the more familiarly beautiful passages so that the production's highlights are not confined to sections that find their way into Golden Treasuries or Anthologies of The Best of Shakespeare. Sometimes the lines are emphasised to underscore points that tend to get lost in productions more bent on bringing out the mellow beauty of the verse. For example the parallel of Olivia's lamenting the death of a brother and Viola's trying not to grieve the loss of hers is pointedly made. Elsewhere the lines are stretched to accommodate meanings they do not obviously hold. The example here is that Sir Toby and Maria (a vulnerable middle-aged country housekeeper in Elizabeth Spriggs' performance) have slept together for years and their plot-tying marriage in the play is thus the making official of something that's long been looked at with a blind eye.
The play's manic-depressives go to Lisa Harrow and Richard Pasco. The torment Olivia has already begun to experience a sharp swing of the pendulum when Judi Dench's sunny Viola comes to perk her out of her gloom, whilst Richard Pasco's Orsino remains in heavy-lidded and long-coated abstraction until the flurry of weddings at the play's close. The sane man, taken for mad, Malvolio, is given interesting treatment by Donald Sinden who makes the fellow look like Michael Hordern, though the audience, which is taken into the character's confidence in an uncamp Frankie Howerd style, gets the treatment in Sinden's best basso register.

There are no weak links in the cast, though one has to say that Emrys James, who made so notable an impression as the Boss in The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising, now shows that he has the versatility to make an impressively gentle Feste. And Barrie Ingham, currently this season's Leontes in The Winter's Tale, switches effortlessly to Sir Andrew Aguecheek who is given bagpipes and a Scottish accent, and works wonders with them without resort to scene-stealing eccentricities.

Go and see this production, then, for though I cannot promise you rain other than that mentioned in the text, I think you will be struck by Barton's subtle treatment of the androgynous paths here depicted for love's fulfilment, which I have not even mentioned crudely here. …

Gareth Lloyd Evans (review date 1970)


The penultimate production of the season—Twelfth Night—was awaited with interest and perhaps some trepidation, in view of the published announcements that it was to be linked with the last plays. Expectation was utterly confounded. John Barton has created the most visually graceful, most intelligently ordered production of this season. The vast stage area is gone, replaced by an elegant set, resembling an angular tunnel in perspective, but, with its candelabra and suggestion of wattle, redolent of an Elizabethan Hall. Illyria, unlike Bohemia, is somewhere. No musique concrète or 'pop' astound the air; the aural background to Orsino's part of Illyria is the dim sound of the sea and curlews crying.

Mr Barton has taken his interpretation from the text and not dressed it in contemporary reach-me-up-or-downs. It seems a simple thing to declare that when Shakespeare is allowed to speak to the director, the actors themselves seem to find it easier to 'give' without worrying about how much of Shakespeare they are expected to withhold; yet, on the evidence of Twelfth Night this would seem to be almost a law of nature. There is indeed a distinct contrast between the general acting standard of this production and the others of the season—much to the detriment of the latter.

The tone of the interpretation is gravely lyrical. The comedy is an obbligato and not a raison d'être. Andrew Aguecheek's zanniness is here encased in a Scots accent—a procedure which itself gives a quality of lurking melancholy to the character. His by-play with the bagpipes is stridently funny, but always controlled. This Aguecheek (Barrie Ingham's finest performance at this theatre) is no mere daft gull. His hopeless affection for Olivia is emphasized by pathetic gifts of flowers; his need for friendship, devoid of Toby's commodity, is suggested by his pathetic but curiously dignified appeals in the eyes and his occasional snatchng up of the nearest female hand to kiss. Toby Belch is very much the black sheep of a noble family, aware of his precarious station and, indeed, of his alcoholic fecklessness. He spends his time in Illyria on a slippery slope and has much of self-reproach in him. Maria stands, either actually or in spirit, at his side, throughout. She herself, is ageing, left on the shelf; she waits desperately for the word from him, and what she often gets is a dusty answer. The words 'Tis too late to go to bed, now' are spoken to her. Olivia is bewildered and very young, giving the sense that unexpected family responsibility has sapped her youth of the opportunity to learn judgement and, indeed, real love. Orsino broods upon his love with dark melancholic brows. In the end he seizes his chance, not like a covetous and peremptory prince, but like a youngster (a Romeo) who has mewled…
about ideal love and compromises with a sweet actuality which, unknown to him, is as near to the ideal as he will ever achieve.

Love, of all kinds, gravely finds its own places in Barton's Illyria. Even Viola seems to be part of an inevitability rather than, as is customary, a prime agent in the ordering of Illyria's heart.

Time and time again the production illuminates the text, not only by the intelligent and lyrical speaking and the sharpness with which the wit is observed, but in by-play and the intelligent placing of lines. Malvolio (who, alone, is unsought by the spirit of love and therefore Illyria can have none of him) cannot remove the ring from his finger to give to Viola; 'We three' are hear, speak and see no evil; Viola's hand intermittently pulls her doublet down over her pubic areas with shy fright.

This production is a superb demonstration of the difference between imposed and acquired interpretation. The truth is that, in this case, because the director himself has 'experienced' the text rather than forced it to experience him, we in the audience 'share' the production. This 'sharing' is an important matter. One of the weaknesses of the kind of directorial interpretation which is more imposed upon, than acquired from, the text, is that it often places a gap between audience and realized performance. On a simple level this can be described as a process in which the audience is forced to come to conclusions on matters which do not grow from the text—hence they are sometimes left darkling. On another level, an audience sometimes feels that, after leaving the theatre, something has been 'taken away' rather than 'added to' them. Imposed interpretation almost always diminishes not only the quality of audience experience but also the potency of the play.

Twelfth Night is not the sort of play which induces actors to make the fire bells ring and the horses run. Yet, in Barton's production, because the play is respected, the actors find faith in themselves, and we hear, from them, the sounds of lutes and viols—this is as it should be.

Donald Sinden (essay date 1985)


[In the following essay, Sinden analyzes his performance as Malvolio for Barton's 1969-70 production of Twelfth Night.]

Why is it so difficult to record in words a theatrical performance? Critics such as Hazlitt, Coleridge, Agate and Tynan have given us their own responses to certain performances; and we have some heavily annotated scripts of actors and actresses such as Sarah Siddons and Ellen Terry. But I cannot recall an attempt by an actor to analyse his own performance, to set down what he thought and did, what he tried to achieve, where and how he succeeded, move by move. That is what I am attempting here. Not that I think my interpretation of Malvolio in 1970 was definitive—no Shakespearean performance ever is. I do think it fitted John Barton's conception of Twelfth Night, however, and it was well received by the public.

I first saw Twelfth Night at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1947, and in the following year appeared as Sebastian in the Old Vic production directed by Sir Alec Guinness. I fully appreciated the charm of this delightful play, so much so that when early in 1969 John Barton telephoned to ask me to play Malvolio I unhesitatingly said 'yes'. It was to be the penultimate production of the season, to be followed by Henry VIII in which I was to play the King. Rehearsals were begun two days after I left my current play Not Now Darling. When I reread Twelfth Night, however, I soon realized that this was not the play I thought I knew. Troubled, I telephoned John Barton: 'I am afraid you may have to recast Malvolio—I find him tragic.' Thank God for that', he replied, T thought I would have to talk you round to it.' I was committed. Before rehearsals started I read the play some ten times. Slowly, oh so slowly I hammer myself into the character until by the time of the first
performance I can step in and out of his shoes. I look for any character-building phrase in the script, and try to analyse his attitudes to circumstances both in the play and out of it. Though I have read most books on the theory of acting, I subscribe to no one method but try to judge performances by a tenet of Ellen Terry's: 'To act you must make the thing written your own; you must steal the words, steal the thoughts, and convey the stolen treasure to others with great art.'

What kind of man is Malvolio? What is his background? I see him as a military man; unpopular at school, he joins the army and, while he displays no quality of leadership, he is so damned efficient that he now finds himself, at forty-five, a Colonel in the Pay Corps, embittered, with no prospect of further promotion. He has bored every woman he has met and he stays unmarried. A certain widowed Count I suppose needed a major-domo to manage his Mediterranean estate, and who better than this totally efficient and honest teetotaller? When Malvolio arrives in Illyria he is shocked by its asolare mood and its sponging layabouts. There is Sir Toby (perhaps the English brother of the dead Countess), but there is nothing easier to manage than a drunk; then the Fool, whose tasteless jokes fail to amuse Malvolio, who goes Absent Without Leave, and must be disciplined; and Maria (aged fifty in Barton's production and sometime governess to the Count's daughter) could be brought to heel if only she wouldn't consort with people above her station. As for the suitors, Aguecheek, that eccentric fifty-year-old Scot (Barton's version), and the arty Count Orsino—but I am already thinking as Malvolio!

As I rehearse, the muscles of my face and my whole body begin to react to the tensions within Malvolio. The military years have left their mark: an erect stance, nearly always at 'Attention', and when 'At Ease' never fully relaxed. Originally I had wanted to carry a short cane, but being persuaded that it would evoke quite the wrong period I settled for the long staff of office, but always felt that to Malvolio it was an encumbrance. He has a small, tight, mean mouth, the corners of which turn down. The inner ends of his eyebrows are elevated and the outer pulled down in an expression of permanent supercilious scorn for his minions. He is thin—too thin—from his years of austerity. Now, I as an actor am not thin enough! Yet the actor in the comedy must tell the audience as much as he can at his first entrance. What can make-up and costume do for me? I spend a great deal of time observing my fellow creatures, trying to find 'copy' for the character I play, and frequently I find my 'face' in an art gallery. On this occasion I visited the Tate and found my Malvolio in Graham Sutherland's splendid elongated portrait of Somerset Maugham. The eyebrows, the mouth, the wrinkles—every one of them vertical, and that is what I must be: vertical—the knees close together, the hair very thin on top but grown long in an attempt to cover the balding pate, above all the colour—yellow, jaundiced. I take a postcard; I have my make-up.

Now for the costume. The designer has placed the setting for this production at about the year 1603, Late Elizabe-than, early Jacobean. The costume designer and I agree that Malvolio should be dressed in black: high-heeled shoes (adding height), black stockings (shming), breeches, doublet (very tight), and the black only relieved by very narrow, plain, white collar and cuffs. I choose a period hat like a black flower pot (height again and vertical line), and an overcoat with a large raised collar which in silhouette continues the line from hat-to-shoulders-to-hip. Malvolio must have a chain of office (a thin one with a large circular disc). This could run across the chest, but no—better run it round the neck and down as near vertical as possible. Somerset Maugham's hair would be quite out of period so we make a wig with long straight hair faintly curled at the bottom all round the head, with a few strands to cover the dome, now padded to give an egg-like look. All this was not thought up in advance, of course, but day by day as rehearsals were under way.

In performance the character must move in specific stage conditions, in this instance on a permanent set designed by Christopher Morley. It represented a long room or gallery running away from the audience in deep perspective, with double doors at the far end and entrance Downstage Left and Right. I have always thought that a stage should be mapped out on graph paper so that a prompt-script could denote somewhat more precise positions. As it is we merely write, for example, 'X D R' which assumes the knowledge (previously recorded) that we were formerly 'U C. Quite often one will shift weight from one foot to the other;
while this can change emphasis it is very rarely recorded. In the account that follows I have used this simplified convention but have added one of my own. Laughs are not normally recorded, but the comic actor is always striving for them, and I would like to be able to rate their size from 1-9, between the largest that can be expected (9) and the smallest (1) still worth trying for.

'If music be the food of love'—the play has started, and I shall try to give you my thoughts and Malvolio's, objective and subjective, at key points of its performance.

Before the start of Act 1, Scene 3 the Olivia household is returning from church; entering Left and straight to the centre of the stage, a sharp Right turn, Up and out of the door U C leaving Toby behind with his first line. As I move toward the centre carrying my staff I look to my left—people! What are they doing there? (Laugh 3.) Again leading a procession in Scene 5, but no coat and hat, I enter this time R. I glower at Feste, for I have persuaded Olivia that he must go and she has promised to dismiss him; I assist Olivia to her chair D R. None of this is exaggerated and only a tiny fraction of the audience notices it. Fabian and another servant are in attendance slightly Up-stage C. Fabian has a drink on a tray which he hands me and which I proffer to Olivia; she doesn't want it so I return it to Fabian, take a book from him and give it to Olivia, glance at its cover and see it is not at all suitable. 'Take the Fool away', says Olivia. If only she wouldn't personally give orders to the servants. She ought to do it through me. But with a quick jerk of my staff to them I think I can make it appear that that was the original intention. But what is the Fool saying? 'Take away the Lady.' Good God, he should be shot. What a bore he is, but she gives in to him and I walk L and turn my back to the populace, who again seem to have gathered. 'What think you of this Fool, Malvolio? doth he not mend?' Wham! Right into my court and in front of all these people. What can I say? The most grudging, sour, nasal 'Nyeas' (laugh 4). The actor needs a laugh there, as his next line is vicious, 'and shall do till the pangs of death shake him'. Feste answers with a feeble joke at which Maria dares to laugh—a glower, a rap on the floor and a jerk of my staff and she is sent scurrying. 'How say you to that, Malvolio?' From a great height and with positive delight I can reply 'he is out of his guard already, unless you laugh' (pronounced as one might say 'vomit'). Then, with a look across the theatre circle, 'I take these wise men that crow so … no better than the fool's zanies.' Did I see a smile on Fabian's face? 'I'll have his guts for garters.' I am now one-hundred-percent Malvolio, but in a comedy I, the actor, must remain one-hundred-percent myself, standing out-side my character, my ears out on stalks listening for the very slightest sound from the audience, controlling them, so that I am able to steer a 'cue', 'punch' or 'tag' line clear of any interruption. If on any night Malvolio takes over, the precision, the immaculate timing, the control suffer. If the actor takes over, the performance becomes 'technical' and the audience is always aware of it. (This last is often a fault of mine and my wife lets me know it.)

Malvolio's next entrance shows him at a loss, foot faulted, off-guard, vulnerable, outfaced by a mere chit of a boy. Ostensibly to ask for further instructions I enter from L rapidly, the staff now out of control, and on arriving C my mouth opens—but to say what? My finger tips to my lips (does he bite his nails?) and Olivia is looking at me waiting. I must try to say something, pull myself together: 'Madam' (pronounced Mairdom; laugh 3), producing it from a stutter of B's D's T's and P's to make the word much more incongruous. I finish in desperation, 'What is to be said to him, Lady?—he's fortified against any denial.' She answers, 'Tell him he shall not speak with me.' This solution seems never to have occurred to me. With a civil inclination I start off quickly L but after four steps I am caught in mid-air and turn towards Olivia, for I had quite forgotten. 'Has been told so' (laugh 3). 'What kind of man is he?' What an extraordinary question! 'Why, of mankind' (laugh 1). 'What manner of man', 'Of very ill manner' (laugh 2). I look off L. Then Olivia, as to a child, 'Of what personage and years is he?' A great light dawns—at last I see what she is getting at. Here I interpose 'Ahhh!' (laugh 2), and speak grudgingly on. But Olivia answers, 'Let him approach.' I must obey; I turn and begin to exit quickly L but I am again caught in mid-air by 'Call in my gentlewoman!' Oh dear! One thing at a time, please. A sharp about turn and my staff is Jove-like banged on the floor and the voice that roars 'Gentlewoman' is of the parade-ground (laugh 4). Maria comes scuttling on from R. 'May Lady calls', I explain, with the implication that the voice that thundered 'Gentlewoman' was Olivia's (laugh 4). With scornful dignity and elegant use of my staff, I exit L. No sooner out of 'the presence' I am faced with that.
maddening Cesario again. As I return to announce 'him', before I can utter a word, I am shaken to discover that Olivia and Maria have both lowered their veils.

As Cesario is shortly to play upon this point, I must not as an actor forestall it; however, as Malvolio, I cannot allow it to go unnoticed; my reaction is therefore infinitesimal.

While I am still undetermined about whom I should speak to, Cesario enters and says to Olivia: 'The honourable lady of the house, which is she?' Can I believe what I hear? This chit of a boy takes incredible liberties, and suddenly Olivia says: 'Give us the place alone.' Leave a young man and young girl alone! But that is an order, so a rap with my staff and pointing it R, I indicate that Maria must leave—and before me. She does so and I look Cesario over from head to foot and slowly, very slowly; with efficient use of my staff exit R.

Every night at this point I would wait in the wings for my next entrance—partly because I personally enjoyed listening to the enchanting scene between Cesario and Olivia and partly because I felt that Malvolio would do precisely the same—his ear glued to the keyhole. 'What ho, Malvolio!' His military reflex action is to reply: 'Here, Madam', patently betraying the fact that he is, to say the least, lurking (laugh 2). I came into view from the R entrance and under cover of a laugh from the audience I made my way to C. Malvolio recovers dignity en route—his attention riveted on the 'door' L through which Cesario has just left. He is hardly aware that he then adds: 'At your service.' Olivia begins: 'Run after that same …' This is too much! Never in my life—at least not for many years have I been ordered to do anything so indecorous; shocked, shattered, I echo: 'Run!?' (laugh 8). John Barton always disapproved of this. He did not mind my reaction or that I should mouth 'Run', but I was not to vocalize it. The difference for me was between a titter and a theatre-shaking belly laugh. We finally agreed, 'Matinées only'. Subsequently in Australia Trevor Nunn found himself having to rehearse some replacements to the cast—John Barton being detained in Stratford-upon-Avon. When we came to this scene he asked me why I no longer got a laugh at this point of the play. I explained that John Barton had said that my 'run' was not in the text. 'Ah; but', said Nunn equivocally, 'it is in the subtext.' So back it went for the rest of the tour! Malvolio only half hears the rest of her instructions and is not quite sure when she has finished. She gives him the ring which he has to almost force on to his much larger finger while couching the staff in the crook of his elbow. A pause, then she adds: 'Hie thee, Malvolio.' I am deeply hurt that she should speak thus to me—but what am I to do? Pained and distressed I reply: 'Madam' (I'm sorry you should behave like this) 'I will.' I turn L, the staff is held by its centre, horizontally, in the right hand and I execute what must be the slowest run ever (one critic called it 'a Zulu lope'), as if crossing a series of puddles just wider than an extended pace. I exit L (laugh 8, and round of applause).

John Barton here transposed Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2. The chair and sunshade were replaced by a long bench, the door U C opened and we are in a street. Cesario enters Up-stage having come straight from the house and seats herself, perplexed by her own encounter with Olivia. Immediately Malvolio appears from the same U entrance; still 'running', he is tiring visibly (laugh 2); he 'runs' down to the R corner of the stage and stops; he looks out towards the audience 'Where can be?—not there.' He 'runs' across below Cesario to the L (laugh 2), and is about to exit when he becomes aware that Cesario has risen and is now standing. It looks like him, but is it? I point the top end of my staff: 'Were not you e'en now with the Countess Olivia?' 'On a moderate pace I have since arrived but hither.' (Is that a veiled criticism that he walks faster than I run?) However, 'She returns this ring to you, sir.' The staff regains its normal vertical position but upside down—damned thing! Reverse it, embarrassing (laugh 1), and again couched at the left elbow to facilitate the removal of the ring while saying, 'You might have saved me my pains to have taken it away yourself.' But the ring has stuck (laugh 3). A heave. No good. A quick look to Cesario, don't let him think I am embarrassed; 'She adds moreover that you should put your Lord into a desperate' (that word is coloured by his own desperation) 'assurance she will none of him.' Another tug and an attempt to un-screw the ring—but it is still stuck. What a terrible thing to happen! (Laugh 5.) But play for time: 'And one thing more …' The mind has raced: he remembers his mother removing a ring by sucking it and the surrounding finger and so lubricating it; he does so. He succeeds, and by
the end of 'unless it be to report your Lord's taking of this' it is off!—'Receive it so.' I hold it out at arm's length with R hand finger tips, but Cesario says, 'She took the ring of me, I'll none of it' and he crosses D R. Out of all patience I shout, 'Come, sir!' He turns back. 'You peevishly threw it to her and her will is it should be so' (i.e. 'peevishly') 'returned' (laugh 4). Affecting a 'peevish' stance, L foot raised and L arm half-raised for a rather feminine throw he inadvertently appears effeminate as he throws the ring at Cesario's feet. Cesario makes no move. 'If it be worth the stooping for, there it lies [lays] in your eye [aye]; if not, be it his' (and I know very well that you will pick it up the moment I am out of sight) 'that "finds" it.' Staff to the horizontal position and I eject myself into the air to continue 'running'—Upstage. It takes three or four steps to realize that I no longer have to run; put on the brakes! A quick look back to glare at Cesario for a moment of embarrassment (laugh 4) which of course I won't admit and with more dignity than at any other time in the play I stride, like a galleon in full sail, straight U and off centre.

Lying in bed that night, having read a few pages of St Thomas Aquinas and wondering what attitude to take to the proposed new Prayer Book, at around midnight I hear sounds coming from the garden; they increase in volume: what is it—a riot? I leap out of bed wearing my new night-gown. It reaches just to my knees. Slippers on, putting my chain of office around my neck, symbol of authority, what would I be without it? my fur-collared coat over the top and my hat on my head—it's a cold night and I am bald—I race off down the stairs and out to the garden. I can now see Sir Toby and Maria dancing and singing while Feste plays his wretched guitar and Sir Andrew his bagpipes!! At my very fastest walk I eject myself from the R (in fact I always stood several paces offstage at the 'start' position in order to achieve maximum propulsion at the moment of entry onstage). Arriving in the centre of the group, Feste on my left, Aguecheek D C, Sir Toby U C and Maria standing on the chair R, the 'music' continues until one by one they become aware of my presence (laugh 8); first Feste, then Maria who signals to Toby who sits C, then Aguecheek who subsides on to the floor. Again, John Barton disapproved of the hat in this scene, but I felt it quite legitimate to wear it. Malvolio would have felt un-dressed without hat and coat. I am furious! Passing my glower from Aguecheek back to Feste I suddenly become aware that my coat has flown open exposing my 'shorty' nightgown and my bare legs beneath it! With a lightning movement I cross the coat over my shame (at the same moment one knee slightly crosses the other resulting in an 'unintentional' attitude of effeminacy (laugh 6)—a middle-aged Susannah surprised at her bath). A snatched look at them all—did they see my nightgown? I cannot openly attack Sir Toby or Sir Andrew, but I can attack Feste and Maria, my minions, and through them the other two, so I address Feste. He has gone too far. Far too far. I walk above him to C and strike an attitude, left hand on the back of the deck-chair and right hand pulls back my coat and rests on my right hip (laugh 6). Quite forgetting that I now expose nightgown and legs and look totally absurd while telling Sir Toby I must be round with him. Sir Toby and Feste are untamed. Right, then—I will break it up by removing their supplies. Andrew has placed his drinking vessel on the floor as he subsided, so on my way to collect it, moving round L and D C, I pass Feste and say, 'Is it even so?' (if it is, that is your lot). I pick it up—Good God! it is one of my Lady's best glass goblets. I say to Sir Andrew, 'This is much credit to you:' I take the glass U and behind the table where I find that they have all been using glass goblets—not only that, but also one of my Lady's best decanters and a silver tray and a silver candelabra on which are burning three candles. They cost a great deal of money and I am responsible for the household accounts! This will never happen again! I pick up the tray and all its contents. Suddenly I hear Sir Toby at my L saying, 'Art any more than a steward?' My lips tighten, my eyes narrow (stop before you go too far). 'Rub your chain with crumbs', he says, and 'A stoop of wine, Maria.' My chance. He cannot, he shall not, involve my servants. My head lashes round to Maria who is about to follow Sir Toby's request. 'Mistress Mary' is spoken quietly but menacingly; there is no doubt about it meaning 'stand still'. 'She shall know of it' (tell-tale) 'by this hand.' A final sneer at them all—particularly Sir Toby, for my last remarks were as much for his benefit as Maria's; my head erect, tray held carefully, sharp R turn I march off R (an imperceptible half step backwards before L, R, L, R) (laugh 5).

I like to think that the letter scene (2.5) was originally played with Toby, Andrew and Fabian (where does he spring from?) hidden in the upper balcony over an inner stage. Maria could then get a laugh with, 'Get you all three into the box—tree.' The box tree has been treated in different ways; sometimes three individual trees can
be carried round the stage, and sometimes there is a series of trees with the three moving from one to another. In this production Maria placed the letter on a deck-chair and the spectators hid behind a hedge (breaking the convention which normally does not allow soliloquy to be overheard by other characters). Barton thought of it as Malvolio's scene and left him the rest of the stage unencumbered. When we began work on the scene we found we had to give some thought to the letter. What type of letter? A scroll? A single sheet? Folded?—once, twice? All we knew is that it is 'sealed'—or has upon it a seal.…

Malvolio has been strolling in the garden and even loosened the neck of his tunic! ('Practising behaviour to his own shadow' I took to mean 'As his only audience' rather than 'Making shadow-shapes'.) His arms behind his back at waist level he appears U C but looking off L as Maria says 'for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling', before leaving. He walks very slowly straight D C imperiously surveying his domain. Half-way down he involuntarily breaks into a little dance step (feet only) (laugh 3). I had in fact learnt the step for Henry VIII from which it had eventually been cut and I thought it a pity to waste it! Suddenly the thought that he may be seen stops him and almost in panic looks, quickly, first L, and then R, into the exits. No, all is well; so proceed D C. Arriving below the hedge his attention is caught by something L; it is 'my Lady' in imagination. He affects a most elaborate bow and extends his L hand on which to place 'hers', gives 'her' a sickly, ingratiating smile and 'they' turn to move R but—who is that skulking in the shadows D R? (One of the common people.) He glowers, his R hand shoots out and an imperious finger beckons the varlet—'he' approaches—the finger gestures 'him' to kneel—'he' doesn't—the glower deepens—again 'Down' says the finger. 'He' kneels. Malvolio draws an imaginary sword and violently decapitates him, replaces sword and smiles benignly on his 'consort' (laugh 3). Such is power! This has evoked a laugh and to his great consternation he is aware that he is overlooked by the theatre audience. Horror; his left arm is still holding 'my Lady's' imaginary hand! Consternation: this requires an explanation. 'Tis but fortune—all is fortune.' (The following part of the Une I found terribly ambiguous; 'Maria once told me she did affect me and I have heard herself' etc. sounds as if 'she' and 'herself' applied to Maria rather than to Olivia. John Barton suggested I should say, 'Maria once told me my Lady did affect me', which certainly clarifies it though the purists will object.) 'It should be one of my complexion' (of which he is very proud!), and on that happy note he can amble R above the chair on which he places his L hand. 'What should I think on't?' causes him to move slightly D R. A smile breaks; his eyes narrow and glisten, 'To be Count Malvolio'. The audience have laughed at Andrew and Toby's following lines as he is about to sit on the chair on which the letter has been placed. Malvolio thinks the audience must be laughing at him; he is arrested in a halfsit—"There is example for't. The Lady of the Strachy married the Yeoman of the Wardrobe'—so there. He completes the action of sitting and becomes involved in his reverie—'Having been three months married to her, sitting', as thus, 'in my state'—while Toby speaks, Malvolio notices his 'officers' off R and gestures them forward, 'calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown', described with a gesture 'having come from a day bed where I have left Olivia', and such is my prowess—he looks at a knowing colleague in the circle—'sleeping', his eyebrows flicker to underline his point (laugh 4). 'And then' with Olivia safely tucked up, 'to have the humour of state; and after a demure travel of regard', he looks along the circle from L to R and selects one person to whom to address with an accusatory finger, 'telling them I know my place as I would they should do theirs, to ask for my kinsman' (as he is now!) 'Toby' (that pig). A slight pause and he rolls the letter into a 'tube'; 'I frown the while and perchance … wind up my watch … or play with my …' The letter is now held upright on his lap somewhat suggestively; the audience is about to giggle (laugh 3)—(filthy minds these people have)—an explanation is necessary, 'some rich jewel' (laugh 2). 'Toby approaches' from L, 'curtsies there to me…I extend my hand to him thus', an imperious L hand is extended palm down and as an afterthought he adds, 'quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control' (laugh 2) (why should they think that funny?). 'You MUST amend your drunkenness', the head relaxes slightly R but cracks back with, 'Besides; you waste the treasure of your time with a foolish knight … one Sir Andrew' (a second-class Christian name). The daydream is over; his attention wanders; what is this in his hand? A piece of paper; put it where? Down beside the chair—someone else will clear it up. But—it has writing upon it—'What employment have we here?' The writing is upside down, he turns it round.
"BY MY LIFE": he leaps from the chair and speaks directly to the audience 'this is may Lady's hand!' He studies the writing and finds confirmation. He shows the writing to the audience and illustrates with his L hand 'These be her very c's, her u's 'n her t's' (Naughtily I abbreviated the original text of 'and her t's'), 'and thus makes she her great P's' (laugh 3). I must forestall the audience's reaction. Malvolio doesn't intend the bawdry, but Shakespeare does (there is no 'c' or 'P' in the superscription). He throws the letter aside and starts to move U. His eyes roam the audience (I would not dream of reading someone else's letter). His fingers run along the back of the chair R to L. As it reaches the end … did his foot slip? or how is it that he has now lost 18 inches in height and has the back of the chair under his R armpit? (laugh 4). He can now read the superscription, 'To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes'. As he picks it up and moves D C he tells the onlookers, 'Her very phrases … By your leave'. (Excuse me for a moment while I open this.) But there is a great seal. Foiled! Showing it to the audience who will now understand the reason for this stoppage he says, 'Wax' (laugh 2) and illustrates with a finger. 'Soft' (therefore only recently sealed!), 'and the impressure her Lucrece.' As he squeezes the sides of the letter so that it resembles a tele-scope, he says, 'With which she uses to seal.' Tis may Lady.' After asking, 'To whom should this be?' with one eye closed he peers through it as if it were the most natural way of reading a letter (laugh 1); again he fails to discover the contents. The letter is now flat again. He tries to raise one corner of the flap, now the other corner, and the wax gives way! He emits a high-pitched, almost effeminate 'Oh' (laugh 4) (or what is shorter than 'Oh'? 'O'?). As he looks at the audience (what an awful thing to happen) the look develops into a 'You will probably think that I did that on purpose.' A third of the letter is snatched open …

The postscript is upside down so is impossible to read. What meets his eye is 'Jove knows I love, but who? Lips, do not move. No man must knoo' (laugh 2). Incredulous he repeats, 'No man must knoo?'; to the audience (silly me)'No man must know!' Ah. 'If this should be thee … Malvolio'. You will notice that I cut 'What follows? The numbers altered.' Arrogantly I thought this gives away the MOAI point too soon, and I inserted 'What follows?' before reciting in a tee-tum, tee-tum fashion:

I may command where I adore  
But silence like a Lucrece knife  
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore  
Moai doth sway my life.  

[II.v. 107-07]

And puzzled, I ask if the audience know the word—'MO AH-EE?' (laugh 2). While Fabian and Sir Toby speak I try to work it out; ""MO-AH-EE doth sway my life." Nay, but first let me see, let me see'; the next two lines being cut he continues, ""I may command where I adore." Nay, but first let me see, let me see'; the next two lines being cut he continues, ""I may command where I adore." Why, she may command me', he tells the audience, 'I serve her; she is may Lady. Why this is evident to any formal capacity, there is no obstruction in this—spoken so quickly it elicits a laugh. 'What should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me... "M" comma "o" comma "A" comma', and he shows the commas to the audience the while; what a fool he has been not to notice before! So what does it all mean? 'M', he queries. A great light dawns. The eyes pop. The "M" dissolves into 'M' m MALVOLIO', he ventures in a whisper. Don't they understand? ' "M" … why, that begins MY NAME!' SO that is clear for the 'M', 'but then there is no consonancy' (no consonants) 'in the sequel. That suffers under probation ... "A" should follow but "o" does! The "I" comes behind.' More thought: '"M.O.A.I." etc.

After picking out the word 'crush', the other third of the letter falls open. 'Soft!' A silencing finger is raised while his R hand holds the letter, 'here follows prose'. (Thank God, after all that poesy.) 'If this fall into thy hand, revolve'; a look at the audience, 'it can't mean that! If it does, I won't. 'But as he continues he involuntarily walks in a tight circle, making sure that the resulting laugh (3) does not obscure the lines. 'In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness; some are born great' (not me) 'some achieve greatness' (not me) 'and some' (wait for it) 'have greatness thrust upon 'em. 'He flashes a plea to the audience. Do they understand the importance of that? His speech now becomes faster and faster, growing in excitement as the
truths reveal themselves. 'Remember who commended thy yellow stockings' (yellow stockings, to the audience) 'and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered' (cross-gartered?). 'I say remember. Go to, thou art made if thou desir'st to be so. If not, let me see thee a...' (does it? Yes it does! Joy can know no bounds!)—to the gallery, 'STEWARD still.' They obviously don't believe him, so he shows them the very word and mouths it a second time (laugh 3). Fools! He is patently wasting his time on them—they only laugh. The fellow of servants and not worthy to touch fortune's finger farewell she that would alter services with thee the fortunate unhappy.' He is breathless (so am I), but up, up, exultant, 'Daylight and champagne discover not more. This is open.' He strikes the letter on 'this' and on 'open'. Right, then! 'I will be proud. I will read politic authors. I will baffle Sir Toby. I will wash off gross acquaintance. I will be point devise the very man!' The voice drops in pitch and intensity and slowly begins to rise again, 'I do not now fool myself to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites to this... that may Lady, loves, ME!' The voice drops again, only to rise again, 'I thank my stars' (and there they are somewhere above the gallery); 'I ... am ... Happy' (laugh 3) and never has a face looked more gloomy although ecstatic. So, resolved and fast, 'I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings and cross-gartered' (if that is the way She wants it) 'even with the swiftness of putting on.' He turns to run upstage but before taking a step he turns back and down on one knee, 'Jove and my stars be praised', he crosses himself (laugh 2). Oh! A quick look at the populace, 'don't think that I just crossed myself', and he is off upstage looking down at the letter. A scream! 'Ahyyyyyyyy', he turns and beckons to the audience: 'Here', and by way of explanation he races back to a 'friend' who happens to be sitting in the front row of the stalls and shows him, 'is yet a postscript!' (laugh 2). (All right. I'll read it to you.) 'Thou can'st not choose but know who I am! If thou entertainst my love, let it appear in thy smiling...' a squeal of brakes—poleaxed! (laugh 2). Look for a friend—None? (Gloomily.) 'Thy smiles become thee well, therefore in my presence still smile.' The word becomes 'manure', the mouth a gash; 'dear, O my sweet, I prithee'. Total dejection!—but mounting larks should sing. There is iron resolution in this man, so in the voice of Job he calls upon his God, 'Jove! I thank thee! I will "smile"' (and what is more I'll try it now)—the corners of the mouth extend some two inches towards his ears, but that is all (laugh 3). He can do it. Given time. 'I will do everything that Thou'—and his extended arm nearly touches Jove himself—'wilt have me!' Malvolio floats swiftly upstage and off (laugh 9 and round of applause).

I don't mind admitting that I used to collapse sweating in my dressing-room. The necessary ebullience was the most ecstatic I have yet been able to produce as an actor. In my Malvolio wardrobe I find a pair of black and yellow slashed breeches; they are Elizabethan rather than Jacobean, however. And here is a large yellow ruff, and a hat—very similar to my other but with a wide brim. With today's top-lighting in the theatre this would shadow the face, so the designer agreed that the front of the brim should be flattened and attached to the crown. This is topped by a large yellow feather. Our designer pointed out that cross-gartering merely implied that the normal garter, from below the knee, was crossed at the back of the leg and continued up and round again above the knee before being tied in a bow. Never having attempted this before, Malvolio has tied them far too tight and they are serving as a tourniquet, a fact that is to colour the whole scene. He has spent some hours creeping around the house and garden in an endeavour to find Olivia. Is she evading him? And he must try not to be seen by the servants. The gaiety with which he donned the garments is now wearing rather thin—was it, will it be, worth this masquerade? Where can she be? My legs are killing me. Legs which were so straight, almost knock-kneed, are now bowed with the agony. I have literally to hold on to the gatepost UC as I am about to come down into the garden (laugh 6).

Shakespeare very cleverly allowed his Malvolio to be totally outrageous in this scene, excusing all by making Fabian say 'If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it for an improbable fiction.'

My face is grimacing with the pain. I hobble forward and half-way down (laugh 4) and there she is!—standing D R with her back to me. Pull myself together, the pain has gone! or has it? Twinges every now and again, I make my way to the L of the sundial—I can lean on it if necessary. I 'prepare' myself for the total effect. I have her letter in my L hand—both arms are lifted effectively above my head; I succeed in looking rather like the famous Faun of Pompeii and filled with the same euphoria. But she doesn't turn! (Maria is there L but I
don't see her.) A discreet cough. She turns! 'How now, Malvolio?'; not quite the reaction I expected; but of course! I have forgotten the smile! Here goes (laugh 4). Very musically, almost sung, 'Sweet Lady', and then—as written—flatly, with no humour at all, 'Ho. Ho' (laugh 4). The parallel fingers of my R hand punctuate both 'Ho's' like castanets; Burbage never produced such an effect! 'I sent for thee upon a sad occasion', she will have her little jokes; 'Sad, Lady? I could be sad … This', I lift my L leg and point to it, 'does make some obstruction in the blood' (the increased pressure on the R leg causes me to clutch, and lean on the sundial) (laugh 5), 'but what of that?—If it please the eye of one, it is with me as the very true sonnet is, "Please one and please all".' (John Barton discovered that this was a lyric of a popular song of the time so I attempted to sing it, un-musically, while illustrating that 'one' applied to Olivia and 'all' to the audience.) 'Not black in my mind though yellow in my legs' (laugh 2); my best joke for years! I fail to notice that no one laughs at it. I hold the letter aloft; 'It did come to his hands and commands shall be executed! I think we do know the sweet Roman hand'; and I speak as one who can recognize a Gill Sans Serif at ten paces as I face away to peruse the contents of the letter. (In reality, to allow myself the required reaction on the next line.) WHAT has she said?? My reaction is shock. Horror. Panic (laugh 7). The audience see him in full face. 'To bed?' Good God! So soon? But what must be must be: 'AY!' (laugh 4) is a battle cry: the challenge is accepted, 'Sweet heart and I come to thee.' Valentino was never in better form: endless kisses are exploded and my finger tips flick them in her direction. Suddenly from my left, the voice of Maria. How dare she! I am committed. I must play this through. 'Be surly with servants'—'At your request?! Yessss', what do I mean by that?—I don't know, but it gives me time to think my next quip: 'Nightingales answer daws', and a glance at Olivia for approbation. But Maria goes on. She must be quelled. I will quote to her a line which should be to her totally incomprehensible while at the same time impressing 'may Lady', so, in portentous tones (Abandon Hope All Ye, etc.), 'Be not afraid of greatness', and a quick aside to Olivia, 'twas well writ' (laugh 1). Oh goody. Olivia is joining in the game, pretending she doesn't understand, so with rising tones 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them' (laugh 2). I don't hear her intervening lines; I now take her by the arm and cross L. I will show her that I have memorized every word of her letter and at the same time sweep her off her feet to a climactic 'If not, let me see thee a servant still!' (laugh 3). Unbeknown, a servant has entered behind me L and as I open my mouth to say—perhaps—'Madam this is it', he says 'Madam, the young gentleman of the Count Orsino's is returned.' I register him but I am now sitting on a cloud—nothing can deflate me. They all exit.

'Oh ho' is triumphant and straight at the audience, 'do you come near me now!' 'Cast thy humble slough' is from memory, but while I speak I open the letter and read—for proof positive—the rest of the quotation. I cut the next twenty-eight words because in the letter as we have it 'sad face', 'slow tongue', 'reverend carriage' are not mentioned at all. Also, theatrically I was able to leapfrog to 'I have limed her!' (of course I must not forget) 'it is Jove's doing and, Jove!' (a call to attract His attention just above the back row of the gallery) 'make me thankful.' I address the audience again—orchestra stalls now, 'and when she went away now, "Let this fellow be looked to"'(you realize the importance of that?). I look around—surely someone out there does! Idiots! "Fellow" '(laugh 2); they still don't get it, 'not Malvolio, nor after my degree, but FELLOW' (laugh 3).

I am saddened to record that it took me nearly a hundred performances to evolve the next piece of 'business'. The turning-point was a matinée in Adelaide while we were on a tour of Australia. The local company, whose performance of The Seagull we had seen the week before, came to the Twelfth Night matinée. I tried to think of something that, while not in any way disturbing the rest of the audience, might please a very charming group of fellow Thespians. I was quite unprepared for the result—one of the best laughs in the play. As I have stated, bang in the centre of the stage was a designer's gimmick: a sundial—all very charming but of no use at all; all movements were restricted to circling round it. I had already discovered some use for it in the succeeding part of the scene, of which more anon, but I now thought that if the disc at the end of my chain were a watch and if at this moment I were to look at the time indicated on the sundial and if on checking my watch against it I should find a variance, Malvolio's meticulous mind would automatically assume that his watch would be correct and that it was the sundial that showed the incorrect time. It should be therefore put to rights. The sundial, being made of stone, would be heavy but under pressure could be twisted (I tried it on a
real one and unless cemented to the ground it can be done). So, I assume the sun to be shining from the R
corner at the back of the gallery. 'Why everything adheres together' (glance at sundial) 'that no dram of a
scruple' (look at watch) 'no scruple of a scruple' (back to sundial) 'no obstacle' (look at watch). Check
'sunbeam' to sundial and adjust it until correct time is shown during—'no incredulous or unsafe circumstance'
(laugh 9).

But who comes here? Toby. Begin as I mean to go on: complete hauteur. I hear him but am heedless of his
words. As Toby says 'How is't with you?' he attempts to lay a soothing hand on my right forearm—how dare
he! I knock it away as one would a mosquito one hears approaching the face and bring my hand sharply back
to nearly where it was, but impale it upon the finger of the sundial!—'Ah!' (laugh 5). It is pure trickery: the
flat of the hand merely strikes the angle of the 'finger'. In considerable pain Malvolio shakes his hand, looks at
the wound and determines to brave it out, but Sir Toby, startled, produces a crude crucifix and advises
Malvolio to 'defy the devil'. In his confused, euphoric state Malvolio believes this drunkard to be embarking
on a theological dissertation—'Do you know what you say?' is a rhetorical reprimand. It is all too much: the
euphoria, the agony of the cross-gartering, the pain of the impaled hand, the insults; one must make a good
exit, hence 'Geow. Hang yourselves all! You are idle shallow things. I am not of your element. You shall
know more hereafter' is split between my adversaries (laugh 3). Malvolio turns, but the tourniquet has done its
work, his R leg has quite gone to sleep, he nearly falls, staggers and hobbles in great pain U C and off.

I will admit to a dissatisfaction on this exit—I never really succeeded in bringing it off theatrically, even if I
did truthfully.

Apart from the almost incidental 'We'll have him in a dark room and bound' Shakespeare in no way prepares
his audience for the shock of Malvolio's next appearance. The play was written when bull- and bear-baiting
were common sports, the pillory entertained jeering crowds, idiots were part of 'the public stock of harmless
pleasure' and the populace thronged to public executions. In John Barton's production, the so-called prison
scene took place some-where at the end of the garden where there could have been some type of primitive
septic tank covered firstly by an iron grille and over that a trap door to keep out some of the disgusting smell.
In this Malvolio has been placed. We are to imagine that the floor of this sewer is some eight feet below
ground level, so only by gripping the bars and pulling himself up will Malvolio be able to just get his head
through the bars. His hands and head will be the only parts visible.

Feste stamps on the trap. Who, what is it? 'Oh!' Feste opens the trap as he says "What ho I say, peace in this
prison.' Are 'they' about to taunt him again? Defensively, 'Who calls there?' It is practically dark outside but
the faintest glimmer of moonlight attracts Malvolio as he grips the bar and pulls his head through (laugh 4);
his eyes are starting from his head, he is hysterical. 'Good Sir Topas. Do not think I am mad' (but I think I
am)—'they have laid me here in hideous darkness', and Malvolio is weeping. 'Say'st thou that house is dark?'
'As Hell, Sir Topas.' Hell to Malvolio is a very real place, but Sir Topas then tells Malvolio that the
clerestories are 'lustrous as ebony'. Malvolio looks from R slowly to L, trying to fathom what to a sane man is
nonsense but to him is surely proof of his own madness. Like King Lear's 'Let me not be mad!' Malvolio then
slowly and tearfully tells himself, 'I … am … not … mad … Sir … Topas', and clinging to reason, 'I say to
you this house is dark!' In reply to Sir Topas, Malvolio then explodes, 'I say this house is as dark as ignorance
though ignorance were as dark as hell and I say there was never man thus abused.' That spurt has exhausted
Malvolio who realizes that he is merely antagonizing Sir Topas; the tears are held back, 'I am no more mad
than you are—make the trial of it in any constant question.' (I am not mad. I am not mad. I am not mad.)
'What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?' Ah, I know, I know the answer! 'That the soul of
our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.' 'What thinkest thou of his opinion?' As a true Catholic, 'I think nobly
of the soul and no way approve his opinion.' During his next line Feste makes to lower the trap door; Malvolio
is aware of this manoeuvre; he is to be left to the rats and spiders. Sheer panic sets in. His last chance is going.
While crying 'No. No. No', Malvolio tries to ward off the closing trap. 'Sir Topas, Sir Topas', are hardly
'words', but pleas running into sobs.
For what must seem hours Malvolio is left until a voice is heard—is that Feste? 'Fool?' It is! 'Fool!' He hasn't heard me! 'Fool!! I say!!' Feste lifts the trap and at the same instant Malvolio hauls himself up like a drowning man clutching the bars, causing Feste to back hastily R and fall to his knees; 'Who calls, ha?' As if there had never been any misunderstanding between them, Malvolio continues, 'Good Fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle!' Malvolio's voice breaks—this is the nearest he comes to admitting his terror of the dark, 'and pen, ink and paper'; no answer. 'As I am a gentleman' (and as soon as I get out of here) 'I will live to be thankful to thee for't.' Feste advances on his knees cautiously. 'Master Malvolio?' I can quite understand that he would never recognize me in this condition, but, believe it or not, it is me: 'Aye, good Fool.' Thank God, he seems to understand. 'Fool, there was never man so notoriously abused'; and as one sane man to another, 'I am as well in my wits, Fool, as thou art.' I am unable to take in his reply. My predicament dominates all. 'They have here propertied me. Keep me in darkness.' (Each time on that word the voice breaks and the body shudders.) 'Send ministers to me!' 'Asses!' is screamed off to the L. The exertion is again too much. 'And do all they can to face me out of my wits', is deflated.

Feste has apparently seen someone and with 'Advise you what you say' he seems to indicate that I should hide. I drop to the bottom of the pit out of sight. It sounds like the priest! 'Sir Topas'—my words are cautious yet accusatory; apparent silence; the priest has gone, I can now come up; but has Feste gone? Please God no. 'Fool! ... Fool!!!... Fool, I say!!!', panic again. But he is still there. 'Good fool; help me to some light!'; Malvolio is weak and near to collapse, 'and some paper.' 'I tell thee' (and myself) 'I am as well in my wits as any man in Illyria', but he doesn't believe me. As a lion's paw that would drag a victim through the bars of its cage a hand whips out and grabs Feste, all of whose strength is needed to prevent his being pulled through the grille. 'By this hand I am!' Where did that vicious strength come from? Feste whimpers. But again the exertion is too much and the relapse greater. Now I have alienated him, too—he never liked me in the first place—he is sure to take revenge. 'Good Fool' is now a begging for forgiveness, 'some ink, paper and (please) light; and convey what I will set down to may Lady.' I don't think I have succeeded in winning him over—perhaps bribery? 'It shall advantage thee more than ever the bearing of letter did.' He is abject. Feste agrees but asks two questions which are answered consecutively, 'Believe me', with the voice breaking, it is almost the prayer of a sinner, 'I am not'; their heads move from side to side to underline the statement. 'I tell thee true', my grip is relaxed; Feste makes one more taunt but extricates himself at the same time and eludes the claws which futilely try to catch him again. How I dislike that man. Hypocritically I call after him 'Fool, I'll requite it in the highest degree.' A nod of dismissal—for God's sake, go!—but I mustn't upset him—'I prithee, be gone.' Feste picks up his guitar and begins inexplicably to sing! What is he saying? He has tricked me! As the song gets faster and faster he begins to run round and round the trap, back and forth, across the grille, over my head; I try to follow the direction of his antics; the world swims; I am mad; faster and faster; round and round; a mumbled series of cries which could be defined as 'No. No. No ...No ...No ...No ...No ...'; I am still holding myself up by the bars; Feste stamps on my hands; I hold on; he slams the trap closed while my head is apparently still in view above the grille; with a scream I fall to the bottom of the pit. Silence; daylight comes; Sebastian enters, 'Yet 'tis not madness.' A very weak cry of 'Help' comes from below ground, unheard by Sebastian, 'That this may be some error but no madness'. An almost incoherent sentence containing the word 'help' is heard. Sebastian talks on, 'To any other trust but that I am mad'. A faint sound of nonsensical gibberish can be heard trailing off into sobs.

I will admit that I would not have liked this interpolation had I been playing Sebastian, but John Barton allowed me to produce this most terrifying effect.

In the next scene Malvolio speaks verse, and continues to do so through the rest of the play. Why? Is it that in this most poetic of plays he is a very prosaic character? Certainly the use of verse in this last scene is extremely valuable to the actor because it is easier to 'take off'.

Malvolio is as mad as it is possible for a sane man to be. Hours later Fabian and another have been sent to release Malvolio and escort him to the presence of Olivia. They try to control him—how dare they touch me!
With a bellow like a wounded bull Malvolio erupts through the centre entrance (laugh 5). A large number of people are gathered. Oblivious, Malvolio has eyes only to seek out Olivia. There she is D R. He staggers forward and there is no one else present for him, as he explodes (from C) 'Madam, you have done me wrong./'Notorious wrong!' She contradicts: I have now nothing to lose, so can answer back 'Lady, you have. Pray you peruse that letter'; she takes it, 'You must not now deny it is your hand' (look at it!), 'Or say 'tis not your seal' (look at it!), 'not your invention./You can say none of this. Well' (have the grace to) 'grant it then./And tell me—in the modesty of honour,/Why you have given me such clear lights of favour...’But soon he falters and begins to break down, 'Why have you suffered me to be imprisoned, /Kept in a dark house'—this line he tells to the others who are standing L (she did that to me); 'visited by the priest', a maniacal look around—(where is he!), 'And made the most notorious geck and gull/ That e'er invention played on.’ He can hardly get the words out through the sobs—'Tell me—why?'

'This is not my writing', she says. Malvolio snatches the letter and looks at it—of course it's her writing; 'But out of question 'tis Maria's hand.' Malvolio's jaw drops, the eyes start; an 'Ugh!' (meaning What!) and he checks every word of the letter. Can this be so? It is so—Fabian confirms it is. As he unravels the story Malvolio sinks to his knees and sobs. As Fabian finishes, an attempt at a plea of justification breaks out as, 'I—I—I', which Olivia assuages with, 'Alas, poor fool'. And now Feste rams the knife home, he kneels R beside the kneeling Malvolio and sadistically twists the knife. He was in the plot. He was Sir Topas. My own words are thrown in my face, but there is no fight left in Malvolio, he can only await the coup de grâce: 'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.' Malvolio staggers to his feet and the wounded bull looks about him. They are smiling at him, a kindly smile. But the degradation is too great; so, pathetically like a small boy who knows he has lost but cannot leave without an exit line, says to them all 'I'll be revenged', he pauses and pouts, 'on the whole pack of you.' It is a totally empty threat. The House, Illyria, the World, will shortly be laughing at his predicament. I believe there is but one thing for Malvolio—suicide.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:**

**PRODUCTION:**

Peter Gill © RSC © 1974-75

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Background:**

**BACKGROUND:**

Peter Gill's directorial debut with the RSC presented a sexually charged revival of the play that was dominated by the image of Narcissus. A portrait of the self-absorbed youth, gazing at his reflection in pool of water, was the focus of designer William Dudley's otherwise spare set, and served as a continuous reminder to the audience of the themes of ambiguous sexuality and erotic self-deception. For Michael Billington, this resulted in a production that was "curiously short on social and human detail." This was further accentuated by what critics generally felt were the uncomic performances of Patricia Hayes as Maria, Frank Thornton as Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Ron Pember as Feste. Additionally, Jane Lapotaire's androgynous rendering of Viola was faulted by Irving Wardle for serving solely as "a blank screen on to which others project their fantasies." Two dissenting opinions came from Bernard Crick and Michael Coveney, both of whom witnessed Gill's staging after it moved to the Aldwych Theatre in London in 1975. The former lauded Gill's "confidence in the comedy of Viola, Olivia, and Orsino;" and the latter praised John Price's "versatile and powerful" rendering of Orsino.
Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Commentary:

COMMENTARY:

B. A. Young (review date 23 August 1974)

SOURCE: a review of Twelfth Night in Financial Times, August 23, 1974, p. 3.

The programme quotes R. D. Laing on Jill, a distorting mirror to herself, who has to distort herself to appear undistorted to herself. You can make any number of such games from Twelfth Night "You do think you know not what you are," says Viola to Olivia. "If I think so," says Olivia, "I think the same of you." "Then think you right, I am not what I am," Viola confesses. But it's no more than a game; as an identical twin, I've experienced enough mistaken-identity complexes to recognise the results in others, real or fictional.

If Peter Gill in his production for the RSC has worried too much about such things, at least it doesn't show in the play, which emerges as no more than the familiar black-edged comedy, in which the mistaken identities are exaggerated by Shakespeare's use of boy actors as girls and of girls posing as boys. Short of deliberate eccentricity, in fact, nothing need be added to the instant mix but talent, and that is amply available here.

Jane Lapotaire makes a very boyish boy, though I have to say that at her first entrance, when she was still a girl, she drove me mad by her continual breathless trotting round the stage when she was supposed to have just come ashore from a shipwreck; nor do I think she should be quite so ready with her fists. Robert Lloyd as Sebastian duplicates her prettily.

The weight, as usual, swings in the direction of Malvolio, to which Nicol Williamson brings all his individual talents. This is a tall, crane-like steward, moving with the stiff efficiency of a well-programmed robot and speaking in haughty tones from which the native Welsh is being carefully squeezed. (It returns in full flood when the unhappy man is tied up in the cellar and all his dignity is gone.) Perhaps Mr. Williamson having had such a success with it in Coriolanus, is over-generous with his long Pinteresque pauses, but he can move a house to heartbreak at a stroke, and duly does so by his delivery of his final un-forgiving words through the hands with which he is covering his face in name.

David Waller is a tough old Toby, perhaps a retired colonel in the Illyrian cavalry, and Frank Thornton, an Ague-cheek rather more unambitious than we have grown used to. Neither John Price's Orsino nor Mary Rutherford's Olivia is much more than handsome; the director seems purposely to have kept them in low profile, as the politicians say, to retain the more important characters in the limelight.

William Dudley's set is little more than a square box with a mural of Narcissus on the back wall and graffiti framing the front arch. (They read: "O learn to read what silent love hath writ" and "O know sweet love, I always write of you.") Orsino's court spends much time lying on cushions on the floor caressing one another, but if Orsino is meant to be gay, as the text may be taken to suggest if necessary, how is it that he spends so much time and passion courting Olivia?

The music that feeds his love is a Bohemian-sounding romance played on the violin. Surely it should have been a viola?

Michael Billington (review date 23 August 1974)

Peter Gill made his name as a director with his meticulously realistic productions of D. H. Lawrence; yet paradoxically his Stratford production of *Twelfth Night* (his first for the RSC) seems curiously short on social and human detail. It is intelligent, well spoken and boasts a superlative Malvolio in Nicol Williamson; but at the moment it looks more like an X-ray plate of the play than the living article itself.

The dominant image is of a nonethereal bisexuality. William Dudley's plain box set confronts us throughout with a sketch of an ambisextrous Narcissus figure gazing into a pool; and there is nothing at all equivocal about the physical relationships. Orsino hugs Cesario to his breast with rapturous abandon: Antonio is plainly Sebastian's longtime boy friend: and Viola all but tears her hair in anguish at Olivia's unfulfilled passion for her. All this is fully in keeping with the play's serpentine sexual complexity; but in stressing this one theme, Mr Gill neglects the characters' social function. It is hard to imagine Mary Rutherford's lightweight Olivia as the head of a hierarchical household or to see how Patricia Hayes's scuttling, funny, busybee Maria could be anyone's gentlewoman, let alone Sir Toby's putative bride. In short, the almost novelistic detail that characterised Barton's magnificent 1969 production is here totally lacking.

In compensation, however, there is an unforgettable Malvolio from Williamson. His snarling, peremptory dismissal of Feste at the outset for once completely justifies the plot against him: and his lovesick, lopsided looks at Olivia suggest it stems from cruel observation of the truth. But what Williamson does so brilliantly is blend high comedy and deep emotional pain: he distends his mouth into the most unearthly, agonising shapes in the garden trying to make the cryptic letters form a meaningful word and in the last scene he tears Maria's epistle into miniscule fragments before departing in his own permanent, private hell, all dignity destroyed. This is superb acting.

None of the other performances match this but Ron Pember's savage, sardonic teeth-baring Feste rasping out his songs as if it were *The Threepenny Opera* is startlingly effective and Frank Thornton's balding, knock-kneed Ague-cheek is a neat study of a superannuated manic depressive. Jane Lapotaire's Viola, however, lacks lyricism and Tutinesque wit and the romantics as a whole come shakily off.

**Irving Wardle (review date 23 August 1974)**


The main intention of Peter Gill's production is inscribed on the back wall of William Dudley's bare set: the figure of Narcissus gazing down into his pool.

Never has Illyria been more remote from the outside world. John Price's Orsino lounges on cushions to languorous violin music fondling whichever favourite happens to be lying closest. Mary Rutherford's Olivia is with-drawn into complacent self-regard as an ice-princess. Malvolio, in his own way, is the greatest narcissist of the lot (and the only one who finally resists cure). All are intoxicated with their own reflections, and the function of Viola and Sebastian is to put them through an Ovidian obstacle course from which they learn to turn away from the mirror and form real attachments.

The emphasis is on the play's erotic metamorphoses, and this means underplaying the comedy. Even visually, the show regularly contracts for the funniest scenes. The drinking party takes place in a cramped little room with Toby putting his feet up on a chest marked "Sir T. Belch"; solid box hedges are trundled into the dreamlike environment for the gulling of Malvolio.

Given the production's aims, I suppose these proportions are right. But it means losing a lot of fun and leaving some areas unexplored. For instance, Patricia Hayes plays Maria as an elderly nurse-like figure with no evident attachment to David Waller's lazily free-loading Sir Toby. Nor does Sir Andrew show much interest.
in Olivia: Frank Thornton plays him as a dejected White Knight with no will of his own, who scores downbeat laughs on lines like "Shall we set about some revels?" while looking down at his inturned toes.

Unfunniest of all is Ron Pember's Cockney Feste, a most unmusical Fool who rasps the songs out in defiance of voluptuous accompaniment, and plays more as an unshaven malcontent than as a paid entertainer who has to watch the moods of his audience. This Feste would not have waited for the whirligig of time to bring in its revenge.

Stranded between the two worlds, Nicol Williamson's Malvolio towers over the production as its main comedian and main erotic victim. He is an eternal outsider wearing the uniform of someone who belongs. In his black steward's suit and chain he looks like some heavy piece of antique furniture, and you can almost hear him creaking when he moves.

He prefixes his early lines with sagacious pauses, and then the voice comes out—reedy, Welsh, and ridiculous. The garden scene, where he tortures the MOAI conundrum into experimental Welsh words, has an almost unbearable privacy. And his cross-gartering fits poignantly into the production's scheme as a planned metamorphosis that fails to work out.

Physically Jane Lapotaire and Robert Lloyd supply a close piece of doubling as Viola and Sebastian: with the oddity that the usual sexual balance is reversed. Both are much fondled: Viola by Orsino, Sebastian by Antonio. But where Miss Lapotaire comes on as a neutral androgynous presence, a blank screen on to which others project their fantasies; Mr Lloyd radiates his often dull part with erotic vitality. His verse speaking is also among the best in a not noticeably eloquent production.

J. W. Lambert (review date 25 August 1974)


Best To make clear at once that the Royal Shakespeare Company's new production of Twelfth Night at Stratford is entirely enjoyable, even to one who found their last version, especially in its second year, the most alertly beautiful of the last thirty years or so. That one, directed by John Barton, was glowingly elegiac—as, by and large, was Toby Robertson's recent re-creation for the Prospect Theatre Company.

I hear murmurs of discontent as I talk of these performances in terms of their directors. Well, we all gird at perverse notions imposed upon a play; "director's theatre" is a well-worn term of abuse. But the theatre in general, and Shakespeare in particular, has gained far more than it has lost from the emergence of overall guiding minds to meld individual actors with the play, so that alert audiences can absorb the work's underlying themes.

Interesting, therefore, at the least, to see what Peter Gill—best known so far for his bringing to life of D. H. Lawrence's miners' plays at the Royal Court—and a company new to Stratford and its ambience would find for themselves and us in this much-loved comedy.

The stage, in William Dudley's setting, is a great golden-tawny box; the Illyrians, in Deirdre Clancy's costumes, play out their dreams and follies in a graceful Hilliard world dominated by the image of Narcissus gazing into the pool. It is not only Malvolio who is sick of self-love, though it is only Malvolio (and perhaps in this production Feste) who cannot smash the mirror and at last look outward lovingly to other people.

The romantic quartet are Youth incarnate, even Orsino and Olivia. Physical energy keeps bursting through sentimental withdrawal—suddenly they dash off in pursuit of this or that like puppies on a sunlit lawn. Freely and generously handled, too, is that element of comradeship or soul friendship, going in no terror of physical
contact, which is merely demeaned by bleakly oversimplifying words like bisexuality. We make very heavy weather of these enriching bonds today; Mr Gill and his players embody them with a welcome ease.

It is a rare *Twelfth Night* which calls for particular praise of Orsino and Sebastian; but John Price (despite an addiction to bent knees) and Robert Lloyd, young actors to watch, make them startlingly three-dimensional. Mary Rutherford's Olivia (despite a predilection for beating time on tiptoe) gives the mourning girl more than a touch of her delicious Hermia in (that strain again) the Brook *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and clutching hold as the shipwrecked Sebastian clutched his mast, lets us feel how she has to turn to Malvolio in place of her lost father and brother. Fine-boned, wide-eyed, a slim gazelle of a girl, Jane Lapotaire's Viola balances her romantic longings with a delectable common sense.

At Orsino's court the lord may be bewitched but the rest are merry enough; as we return from the interval his people are having a delightful party in the garden, trying out a song, launching into a dance, laughing and happy. At Olivia's house, of course, the case is otherwise. Age, failure and fear throw their shadows. I wish I could say that David Waller's Sir Toby, Frank Thornton's Sir Andrew and Patricia Hayes's Maria had found more to offer than competent stereotyped performances. But this trio, even though they pull off their shabby trick, are no match for the puritans whose shadow darkens this potential earthly paradise.

Puritans—yes, for there are two. Nicol Williamson's splendid Welsh (what's he got against Wales?) Malvolio, with pinched dough face and currant eyes, his matchstick legs liquefied by cross-gartering, marvelously mouths the MOAI of the letter scene, and constructs a smile as a child builds a house of cards. His bewildered "Tell me why" to Olivia exactly catches that familiar yelp of pain from the heart of the egotist; and his parting cry of revenge, snarled through hands clasped to his face, echoes the piercing epitome of all self-lovers and life-haters.

The other puritan? Feste, no less. Not here the sad, lovingly sharp, wittily defeated figures drawn by, say, Emrys James or Ronnie Stevens; Ron Pember gives us a clown (and a successfully funny one) much closer to Thersites and Apemantus than to Touchstone or Jack Point, an embittered cockney idealist, angrily banging his drum and baring his teeth in "Come away, death"; another life-hater, infiltrating the hedonists like a member of the Angry Brigade at a coming-out ball; never letting up, even in the last reconciling verse of "The Wind and the Rain"; but never tearing the texture of the play apart either, I should add. This is the *Twelfth Night* that Shakespeare wrote, freshly illuminated.

**Peter Ransley (review date 29 August 1974)**


Peter Gill's beautifully clear production of *Twelfth Night* for the RSC at Stratford is played against a sketch of Narcissus gazing at himself in a pool. And throughout the play, the precision of the direction keeps the pool clear, so that we can see not only the characters, but their endless reflections in one another.

Viola disguised as a man conveying Orsino's love to Olivia who falls in love with what she imagines Viola to be, *ad infinitum*, can get pretty tedious stuff unless it is as controlled and accurate as a Magritte painting. This control has to be at the expense of some life and virility, and the production's main source of energy is a tremendous Malvolio from Nicol Williamson. Its other, quieter source of life is a touching and moving Viola from Jane Lapotaire….

From the moment Nicol Williamson enters, soberly black, self-satisfied, stiff-legged as if he walks on virtue, we anticipate a spectacular performance. The way in which the walk alone changes from exit to exit—from the stiff-legged, to the strutting coxcomb, to the humiliated suitor—is worth going to Stratford to see. And in
the letter scene, where he is tricked into believing that Olivia is in love with him, he is superb as he ponders, sweats and puzzles, until he finally sees himself reflected in the letter and assumes the greatness thrust upon him, swelling up into a triumph, which he momentarily drops as he thanks Jove with a suddenly-remembered humility: 'Jove, I will smile, I will do everything that thou wilt have me'.

Much less spectacular, but equally vital to this production, is Jane Lapotaire's Viola. Keeping off the higher slopes of lyricism (thank Jove), she makes the words sound as if they were written last week. It must be a maddeningly complex part for any actor to have to begin to think about: what's my outside doing when my inside's feeling this (oh, and, of course, it's not my own outside anyway); I must be true to my lover in conveying his love to her; thank God she rejects it … how dare she reject it! It's a tribute to Jane Lapotaire that she makes Viola sound so simple and so fresh.

If what is lost in this approach is some of the comedy, then that does not particularly distress me. In fact, the comic setpieces of Toby Belch (David Waller) and Aguecheek (Frank Thornton) never really take off, although Pat Hayes as Maria flutters about energetically. Ron Pember's Feste works in this production, precisely because it is more sardonic than comic.

Robert Speaight (essay date Autumn 1974)


For the seasoned playgoer any production of *Twelfth Night* has to compete with invincible memories, and it will be a long time before John Barton's treatment of the play a few years ago finds an effective challenger. Peter Gill is a newcomer to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. His vision is honest, if uninspired; and he took his cue from Narcissus—alias Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio—gazing at his own image. Indeed the figure of Narcissus in the background was the only pictorial element in the bleakest decor that can ever have been devised for this highly decorative play. The same square box that served for *King John*, *Cymbeline*, and *Richard II* served again, with the difference that the roof had disappeared and the black walls had turned to russet. Cushions for Orsino, a seat for Olivia, a box hedge for the practical jokers, and a hut for the drinking scene, were whisked on and off with desperate rapidity. Otherwise the actors were stranded on a stage several sizes too big for them and seemed unable to speak three lines without starting out for a long walk. The scenes between Viola and Olivia suffered a good deal from this dispersion. The Stratford stage can do anything one asks it to, and I cannot understand why so little is done with it. The memory of Lila de Nobili's autumnal setting for Peter Hall's production returns to haunt one with the scenic possibilities on which Stratford seems resolutely to have turned its back.

Nevertheless the 1974 *Twelfth Night* was full of good things. Nicol Williamson's Malvolio—immensely tall, tight-lipped, softly and hesitantly spoken—was a creative performance of the first order. Indeed a classic of its kind. His vanity was as ridiculous as his discomfiture was painful; and his authority, theatrically speaking, was unquestionable from first to last. The performance had moments that one will not forget; his smile in the letter scene came like a winter sun breaking through the clouds, and his ultimate agony was such that there was no need for the four-fold repetition of "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you." David Waller's Sir Toby was also the best that I have seen for a very long time. The breeding was preserved with the belching, and the comedy was all the surer for being unforced. Frank Thornton's Aguecheek was exquisitely vapid, and Brian Hall's Fabian made a great deal out of what is wrongly regarded as a dull part. Ron Pember's Feste, on the other hand, was mistakenly costumed and much too coarsely conceived. Feste is the linchpin that holds the play together, for he has the entry both to Orsino's gilded cage and to Olivia's cloistered garden. He is in touch with everyone; and his last song conveys the dramatist's warning that, shine the sun never so brightly, the rain will fall. This was cleverly reinforced in the Stratford production by the exclusion of Antonio from the pré-nuptial party.
Jane Lapotaire and Robert Lloyd were as convincing a pair of twins as I remember. Unfortunately, neither Miss Lapotaire nor the production's Olivia, Mary Rutherford, had quite the experience or the style to project performances from a stage which was threatening to swallow them up into an auditorium which demands that acting, however subtle, shall be a fraction or two larger than life. In a theater half as big their performances would have been twice as effective; but both these young players have personality and address, and in each case youth was an asset. Patricia Hayes is a highly accomplished comedienne, but she proved too mature for Maria, who is Olivia's lady-in-waiting, not her nurse. John Price was a passionate rather than a languorous Orsino. One would have liked a stronger hint of the man who was reading too much Spenser and Sidney for the good of his soul and the health of his affections; and the dressing-gown in which he chose to spend his days suggested anything but a ducal ward-robe. All in all, though, the right balance was struck between fun and fantasy, poetry and prose, sentiment and satire; and the music helped discreetly to keep the production in tune. The erotic undertones of the play would have been audible from the opposite bank of the Avon.

Michael Coveney (review date 6 February 1975)


Even though it had little serious competition, this production by Peter Gill struck me as far and away the RSC's best offering at Stratford last year. And, re-staged for London by Colin Cook, the play still comes across with its original vigour and vitality. Quite simply, Mr. Gill has gone straight to the heart of a magical and mysterious Illyria, revealing the lovers to be a responsive and complex quartet, continually fascinated and drawn on by the miracle of identity. No romantic twaddle, no coy aside here; when Cesario tumbles to the possibility of her white, androgynous exterior having charmed the Countess, the implications are both humorous and disturbing. Words do indeed prove rascals, but outward appearances are doubly dangerous—and, therefore, doubly exciting.

Similarly, I have never before experienced the Olivia/Cesario and the Orsino/Cesario scenes so sharply. They positively crackle. The cue is taken from the dominating painted Narcissus on the upstage wall; Orsino not only concentrates passionately on the reflectively "male" apparition that is the disguised Viola, he all but disappears under her skin. John Price as the Duke, volatile and powerful, is unstintingly sworn to his latest passion. His other languid courtiers are ignored and finally dismissed as he breaks down at Cesario's tale of distanced grief. Melancholy is usually the province of Feste. But there is no more crucially poignant moment in this production than when Jane Lapotaire, knocked sideways by Orsino's energetic surrender to her, moves away and chokingly admits that she is "all the daughters of her father's house; and all the brothers too."

The passions and outbursts are deeply felt in the speaking of the lines. I cannot remember a production of a Shakespearean comedy where so much actual *sense* was made of the verse. On another level. Paul Moriarty makes an impressive Antonio, devotedly trailing an ebullient Sebastian (Robert Lloyd) with offers of servitude and expressions of loyalty that are oddly out of tune with the harmonies of the air. Antonio sees things as they are, deals in the everyday realities of a relationship, while the lovers discover perhaps more heady and ambiguous truths by dalliance and impulse. Antonio is as much an outsider in his way as Feste and Malvolio are in theirs (a point brilliantly elaborated by Leslie Fiedler in *The Stranger in Shakespeare*), and this is here stunningly, emphasised at the play's conclusion. The lovers swirl and exit, perhaps still wrongly paired, it matters not; but they leave Antonio stranded in front of the painted Narcissus, a baffled figure, while Feste spits out his final song.

The casting of Ron Pember as Feste is inspired. He goes through the motions reluctantly not only when pressed into Orsino's service; but whenever called upon. "Youth's a stuff will not endure" is sung, at first for Belch and Age-cheek but, eventually, as an expression of disgust, a hopeless, shrugged epitaph for his own pointless function. He is a Cockney sloucher, hating his repertoire as much as others seem to like it, openly scavenging for coppers with a routine flippancy that barely veils a total contempt. Mr. Pember sings
wonderfully, and he even manages to explain why he does not join in the gulling of Malvolio—he has fallen sound asleep on the floor as Maria (Patricia Hayes, neat and bouncy) unleashes her plan on the befuddled aristocrats.

Nicol Williamson's Malvolio remains a superbly rounded piece of acting. Squeezing his Welsh puritanical whine through thin, bloodless lips, he walks painfully on lifted shoes even before the cross-gartering. Still yellow-stockinged, he emerges from dungeon to sunlight with hair standing on end, eyes shielded from the general gaze. It is a grand and intelligent performance that restates the play's general themes of vanity and over-reaching desire in vivid style. The resolution is marvellously handled, a comic climax magnificently achieved as Mary Rutherford's Olivia confronts, with indecorous hunger, the brief prospect of a married life with two beautiful men. The design by William Dudley and the costumes by Deirdre Clancy are coloured in ravishing gradation of yellows, browns and oranges. The music by George Fenton is, appropriately, exquisite.

_Benedict Nightingale (review date 14 February 1975)_


One only has to look at the set to know what Peter Gill thinks of most of the characters in the _Twelfth Night_ he's directed for the RSC. There, on a rust-coloured wall, is a sketch of Narcissus, gloating over his reflection; and there he remains, while John Price's Orsino palpitates, Mary Rutherford's Olivia postures behind her veil, and Nicol Williamson's Malvolio falls so massively sick of self-love that 'distempered appetite' seems as inadequate a diagnosis of his symptoms as telling a leper he has dermatitis.

Even those who affect to care for other people are curiously unconvincing, as if they were more interested in their own emotion than in its supposed objects—or, indeed, than in the precise gender of those objects. Orsino vaguely fondles the boy Cesario, and Olivia, at the end, eyes Viola and Sebastian as if they were already two-thirds of a swinging threesome.

But Peter Gill comes from the Royal Court, not a theatre where narcissists are allowed to sport with moral impunity. Disapproval must be registered—but how? Why, through Feste, who is played by Ron Pember as something much harsher and more severe than the usual 'melancholy clown'. He mutters at Olivia, growls at Viola, rages at Orsino, sneers at Malvolio, and then turns on the audience with such savagery that the closing line, 'we strive to please you every day', comes across as a promise to flay us en masse in the foyer.

Mr Gill's hints of bisexuality are, of course, a way of making a merit of the stage convention that says girls may become boys at the twist of a slip. It is not his interpretation which is objectionable, but the editorialising emphasis he gives it. Everything suffers from overkill, not least his Malvolio. Let me say at once that in many ways Williamson is magnificent—feverish and hilarious in the letter-reading scene, and so carried away by the subsequent encounter with Olivia that he's constantly having to leap up and apologise to 'Jehove' (as he pronounces it) for his maniac glee. He is, in fact, the worst sort of Jehove's Witness, sour, self-satisfied, supercilious, and capable of stunning pettiness: notice the little, righteous nods, as if to say 'so there!', with which he dismisses the 'lighter people'. But Williamson never does anything by halves that can be done by doubles. He dominates the action, partly because he's six or seven feet taller than anyone else and, with his padded, stately haunches, looks more like an upended sofa than a mortal man—and partly because his contempt is even more virulent than Mr Pember's. That 'distempered appetite' becomes terrible indigestion: he hawks up words from an acid maw, and spits them out as if their fumes were burning his nose. It's the sort of performance that really should be fenced off, like anything else that seems to be leaking dangerous chemicals on a large scale.

The acting is uneven. There are some surprisingly feeble performances to balance this colossus and, somewhere in between, a sweet, downright Viola from Jane Lapotaire and a sly, predatory Belch from David
Waller. Mr Waller, though soberer than most of his predecessors in the part, also manages a memorable drunk-scene, a floundering muddle of mumbles, silence, sudden shouts, idiot laughter and painfully enunciated syllables. There remains just one objection, and a rather serious one. What possessed Mr Gill to allow his social comedy to lurch into farce, with knockabout officers arresting Antonio, Feydeauesque leaps and gasps from Miss Rutherford, and the cast openly mugging at the awkwardly shifting scenery? I can precisely date the beginning of the decline. It occurs when Williamson, apparently tiring of lumbering about like a removal man with a three-piece suite on his back, sprints gaily around the stage in pursuit of Miss Rutherford. How odd that, confronted with this blatant absurdity, Mr Gill didn't come to his senses and remember that, with Shakespeare, effective comedy always emerges from carefully observed character and can never be gratuitously imposed upon it.

Bernard Crick (review date 14 March 1975)


[The] Twelfth Night that has come from Stratford to London is the test of my claim that this is a great era of theatre. Here is the greatest and yet, in some ways, the most difficult of English comedies. And here is a superlative production of it, yet without a name, either of producer or actor, that would pull the public in, yet full of universal, simple joyful competence.

Well, Nicol Williamson is perhaps of star quality, although more like an actor to actors, not ever likely to stop the play with applause on his entry—as audiences used to greet great Larry even in Strindberg: Williamson's knobbly knees, croaking voice, craggy head and sharp theatrical intelligence will not draw fans from afar. For a moment his Malvolio wobbled on the brink of hog-it-over-acting, but only for a moment, and after all it is a solo, certainly a lonely part: the censorious Puritan is a lonely and persecuted outcast in the rational utopia of permissive happiness that is Illyria. The world is upside down. The twelfth night is a night of misrule, and he is the only—well almost the only—outsider.

And it is a straightforward production, no great tricks or reinterpretations, no signs that the producer is obsessive in any way, only many marks of thought about every line, of bringing out things not often noticed, of playing down some things too often over-noticed.

I have seen swings, saws, custard pies, coloured bladders, weak bladders, pails of water and God knows what beside swing into action as heavy comics and producers show their lack of trust in the Bard as a script writer. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste and Maria have often emulated Fred Karno's army in defeat. But Peter Gill, the director, is quite clear that the comedy of the play is one of playful pursuit amid sexual ambiguity and ambivalence, it is between Viola and Olivia, and the household drunks are very much the sub-plot. This Sir Toby, played by David Waller with ever-commendable restraint, is not Falstaff to up-stage the king. He is an ex-army cadger, a crooked gentleman, certainly, like Falstaff, but not a very nice one, quite unloveable except as an ageing Maria's last chance.

He preys upon a simple-minded Scot, not the quick-witted son of a king, not fair game. Sir Andrew indeed, does not overdo it. He relies solely on the simple incongruity of an inhibited, melancholy and provincial man trying to play the role of a cosmopolitan courtier. Frank Thornton injects a quite shattering melancholy into: "Shall we set about some revels?" Sir Toby blenches and heavily complies. Feste wishes he had another job, but he soldiers on being funny—if he didn't, he'd be whipped and workless. Sir Andrew's joylessness in revelry reminds us of what Malvolio might have been like had the letter been genuine, had they really been her "Cs, her Us and her Ts".

329
The simple strength of this production is that it has confidence in the comedy of Viola, Olivia and Orsino. Is this a banality? But I've seen so many productions in which Sir Toby and crew are the comedy and Viola and Olivia are romantic, even if light romantic, for a few quips are allowed, a certain humour is to be got out of the girl in boy's clothing ("Get tickets for the theatre, Miss Beal, Twelfth Night is playing again").

Here from the start it is clear that Orsino is fooling himself, is too madly extravagant to be taken seriously in his passion for Olivia. He is not guyed as a person, on the contrary: the cult of hopeless love is guyed. And Olivia, here a read and important new reading, is no longer the stately, majestic beautiful Portia type; Mary Rutherford is very much like the merry tom-boy Hermia she played in the great Dream, and also fooling herself, like the Duke, by plunging into the game of an equally fashionable cult—that of extravagant mourning.

She is a much more plausible foil for Viola than the grand dame reading. Jane Lapotaire, looking for all the world like Jean Louis Barrault or Marcel Marceau in the sharp profile and white make-up of mime, plays Viola as radiating up to the hilt (if that be the word) bisexuality. She does fall in love with the Duke. She is appalled at Olivia falling in love with her, but she knows what's going on and is no prude. When Feste asks that God "in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard", she says, "I am almost sick for one—though I would not have it grow on my chin", but the stress falls not on "my" but on "chin". ("I think we'll have to return the tickets, Miss Buss.")

The Duke is young and lolls about panting and sighing, half-dressed, a sexy man, all male comradely affection with his courtiers, arms around them, head on shoulders in the huge Habitat cushions. And among them, Viola, small, white and utterly frozen as he fondles her/him while he talks about his other love—frozen not just with horror but with tense, deliberate, fraught repression. This is a marvellously funny scene, both ribald and pathetic. There looks down on them all the time from the otherwise simple back-cloth, a painting of Narcissus gazing down at his reflection.

Illyria is the kingdom of self-love. In Illyria, there is nothing else to do but to amuse oneself. Illyria is more removed from the real world than even The Importance of Being Earnest, which is certainly a tract against being earnest. But amusing others, that is a harder graft.

Feste is the one, at first discordant, surprise. He is not the "sweet fool" we have come to expect; the gentle, witty zany, someone to fit easily in a great lady's entourage, more like a naughty domestic animal, a Christopher Smart's cat or John Skelton's parrot, than a wilful human servant. No, Ron Pember is a hardbitten, professional comic, working at it all the time, watching the audience's reaction, fearing that the fashion for him will pass and that he will prove boring, but equally fearing that he will one day go too far.

He speaks with the accent of a Petticoat Lane salesman, or the last stand of the dregs of the music hall. Far from powdered and pretty, he is perpetually half-shaved. His voice has a rough, sardonic, cutting edge. He is most unIllyrian, a reminder of the outside world—of employment, servitude and even death. He sings: "Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty, Youth's a stuff will not endure" harshly, almost mockingly, a profane version of the Duke's idyll of true love thwarted; more than an erotic encouragement, a reminder of old mortality. He is closer to Rahare than to Touch-stone.

At first this reading grated, but then it grew on me. In Illyria the pursuit of love must lead to comedy: there is always a closeness between the comic and the erotic.

But the pursuit of comedy for its own sake, as in the cruelty to Malvolio—justly reproved, but the joke goes too far—or as in Feste's having to stake all on making Olivia laugh herself out of what looks like deepest mourning, is a dangerous matter. One mistake, one gag mistimed, one insolence too close to the bone, and his next job may have to be as porter with the Macbeths in Scotland.
Viola's lines become, in this reading, not just a compliment but a profound analysis:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;  
And to do that well craves a kind of wit.  
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
The quality of persons and the time,  
And, like the haggard, check at every feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practice  
As full of labour as a wise man's art.  
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;  
But wise men, folly-fallen, quite taint their wit.

This one blast of cold, outside air apart, Illyria is self-contained and the production needs no great tricks or surprises. Only a multitude of little pleasant inventions. Cesario/Viola skips boy-like about the stage, punches playfully Curio or another gentleman in attendance; but when she tries to do the same, in male camaraderies, to the Duke, to divert his full-steam of misdirected love, the punch falters, the deception becomes almost too hard—it is almost a love-pat, not a playful punch, or what's the difference anyway?

Even at the end, the marvellous ending, Olivia's cry, "Oh marvellous", at seeing the twins revealed to themselves and all, is no banality but an explosive gurgle of sexual pleasure—as if "Oh, two for the price of one, both boy and girl". Orsino's remark to Sebastian: "Be not amazed", then gets guyed as sententious understatement. But not her: "Oh marvellous". And he at first tries to lead out Sebastian instead of Viola—purely a mistake, of course, "Oh marvellous!"

Marvellous indeed, that the situation we know so well, the inherent improbability and silliness of it, the two twins mistaken for each other and now recognizing each other, yet still plucks at the heart strings, seems like real surprise and tension: the Platonic halves are rejoined.

But surprise and tension about what? Some things may be said in comedy that are still hard to say in life. "I am not what I seem indeed." Orsino does, after all, have it both ways. Then comedy is not unreality. Nor is it happy endings. "Exeunt all but Feste." Here the producer takes a liberty. As the cast of great ones swirl off-stage to begin to prepare for the double wedding, Antonio, who plainly loved Sebastian, is left standing alone outside with his back to the audience, while Feste sings his merry song with the sad refrain: "For the rain it raineth every day." But yet this is not overdone. It is just there, the dying fall amid the perpetual merriment. I cannot imagine a better presentation of Illyria, but there are always new things to be found in it. Indeed, I felt just that the last time I saw this greatest English company play the greatest English comedy.

Peter Thomson (essay date 1975)


Twelfth Night was Peter Gill's first directing assignment for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and is unlikely to be his last. Stratford needs this kind of work, easy of access to a theatrically uninquisitive audience, and eager to display the talents of its leading actors. The Company had changed completely now that the first three plays had moved to London. That fine Stratford stalwart David Waller was Sir Toby Belch, but Jane Lapotaire (Viola), Frank Thornton (Sir Andrew Aguecheek), Patricia Hayes (Maria), and Ron Pember (Feste) were as new to the Company as their director. Where is the proud 'sixties talk of a company style? There is none. Each play must establish its particular style during the rehearsal period. Outside that and the players' prior skills, there is no resource. When the work of a single playwright is so persistently performed, this 'one-off' quality is regrettable. There is an undeniable sense that some possibility is being missed, a sense that is deepened by the
nagging presence of Peter Brook's name among the Directors of the Company.

The designer, William Dudley, had surrounded the *Twelfth Night* stage with slatted, wood-textured walls, constructed in isolable blocks. A pale portrait of Narcissus decorated the central block of the back wall, which slid forward to create two upstage entrances very much in the position of the Elizabethan stage doors. The long entrances and exits, especially of Nicol Williamson's Malvolio, were made a feature of the production, whose physical norm was choreographed movement on a bare stage. As a variant on this, there were the pretty setpieces—two box-hedges, three potted trees, a quaintly small wall as background for the drinking scene (II, iii), benches—and the cushions on which Orsino and his favourites dallied and fondled. Orsino's bisexuality and the unexplained involvement of Antonio in the dénouement were the production's most dangerous statements. Given his fondness for petting, it seemed unlikely that Orsino would not have felt through Viola's disguise, but Jane Lapotaire's nicely mixed response in I, iv and II, iv made the point worthwhile. The director's concern to emphasize the play's sexual confusion was exemplified in the timing of Viola's soliloquy after Malvolio has brought her Olivia's ring:

She loves me sure; the cunning of her passion  
Invites me in this churlish messenger.  
None of my lord's ring! why, he sent her none.  
I am the man.  

(II, ii, 22-25)

She paused there in obvious confusion, then recovered with a smiling shrug, and the audience laughed delightedly. She was such a lively, boyish boy—the kind of fourth-former the heterosexual prefect has a crush on (I was adored once too!). Jane Lapotaire is, indeed, a Shakespearian actress of the highest quality. Her vocal range and her sensitivity to mid-speech shifts of emphasis reminded me of the young Dorothy Turin in the part; and she backed up her director's concept by reaching the audience's bisexuality. Mary Rutherford's Olivia, busy and thoroughly middle-class, with an almost northern bluntness and a cuddly body, was an adequate foil, but neither Orsino nor Sebastian could sustain the idea at this Viola's high level. 'O thou dissembling cub' ought more strongly to have embodied Orsino's fury, not only that Cesario should marry his Olivia, but also that *his* Cesario should marry at all.

It was largely through individual performances that this production recommended itself. Nicol Williamson's Malvolio was a studied grotesque—a pinched, Scottish elder of the kirk with the distorted sexual aspirations of the 'unco' guid'. He held his voice in the back of his throat, and only his bottom lip was mobile. The walk was a heron's prance, and, at times of supreme self-satisfaction, his head leant towards his shoulder and his eyes glinted like an alert bird's. The run was an absurd lope, which carried his legs as far sideways as forwards and left the top half of his body almost static. His black costume was striped with white lines of various thickness and density and topped with a ruff. It had a *trompe-l'oeil* effect, seeming to hold a tiny head an impossible distance from the bottom of the long, mean legs. He was happiest in this costume. Comically night-shirted in II, iii, and villainously cross-gartered in III, iv, he was willing to let the absurdity of the dress usurp his comic force. But in the gulling scene he was brilliant. He explained 'play with my—some rich jewel' [II. v. 60] by a gesture sharper than a footnote, lifting his chain of office then slapping it down with self-annoyance. His attempts to twist his mouth into a meaningful pronunciation of M, O, A, I, were as hilarious as his sudden, irrational conclusion that they said 'Malvolio'. Remembering his dignity, he just resisted the invitation to 'revolve' contained in the letter, but 'smile' he would, and did. First he had to remember how to do it, and then, almost imperceptibly, force his lips wider and slowly wider into a look of such joyless jollity as might have been worn by Miss Hotchkiss at the ITMA office party. His subsequent entrance to Olivia, pushing Maria aside and 'smiling' as he smeared his body along a property tree, was perfect, but the scene declined into ungainly knockabout and was only saved by the soliloquy. Twice, then, he stood to acknowledge with reverent hypocrisy Jove's hand in his well-merited glory, but for the rest of the time he sprawled beside a table in gangling self-love.
The tone of Frank Thornton's Aguecheek was set by the long face and longer silence that preceded his lifeless question, 'Shall we set about some revels?' (I, iii, 135-36). He was thin and melancholy, devoid of energy, dyspeptic and consumptive. There was a consciousness of real loneliness beneath the surface of the comic scenes, that affected not only Aguecheek but also Feste and Sir Toby. David Waller was, on his first entrance with Maria, dignified and relaxed, but drink depressed and depraved him. He made his reading of the character clear to his [Guardian [18 September 1974] interviewer:

Toby's first line is: 'What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life.' That suggests to me a man who is, as it were, protesting too much. He is protecting himself, a wounded man—hence the drinking … Nearly his last words are 'I hate a drunken rogue'. And it seems quite clear to me that he's referring quite consciously to himself.

That, expressed with admirable clarity, was the key to Waller's playing of Sir Toby. Patricia Hayes's perky Maria was a decade older and too happy below stairs to give credibility to her standing in Olivia's household. And Feste? How fascinating that it can be played so variously. Ron Pember spoke like a Londoner, dressed like a faded Harlequin now reduced to busking, and hinted always at a radical's social distaste for the antics of privilege. He despised the effete of Orsino's court, and his angry assumption that Viola considered him a beggar (III, i, 9) had all the spikiness of class-pride. But there was more than this. One member of the audience interestingly compared him with Bosola, another joker who declines to laugh at his own jokes. He was discomforting, an outsider, almost malevolently saturnine, defying the sentimental response to Malvolio's plight by pressing home his final accusations with heartless accuracy in Act V. (Yet he, with Fabian, guided Sir Andrew off the stage after Sir Toby's cruel last rebuff.) The majority of George Fenton's music for the production had a 'Victorian Elizabethan' tone. Against that, Pember sang his songs with the gritty voice of the modern, unaccompanied folk-singer. He was a working man among the leisured classes, deeply critical of their behaviour and bitterly dissatisfied with his own. The rough-and-ready air of the curtain-call was, perhaps, his triumph over the formality of Illyria. The four lovers had whirled and weaved their way around, involving Antonio in their dance, but leaving him bemused and lonely when they went out and the stage wall slid shut behind them. And there Antonio stood, upstage alone, while Ron Pember sang his song of mutability to us. I shall never forget this Feste.

**PRODUCTION:**

David Jones Stratford Festival, Ontario 1975

**BACKGROUND:**

Jones's production was deemed by critics to have steered a moderate course between the excessively romantic stagings of the nineteenth century and the more cynical interpretations of such twentieth-century directors as Tyrone Guthrie. Clive Barnes characterized Jones as "one of the new-style British classics directors who are original without being outlandish and place the simple, yet imaginative interpretation of the playwright's concept as absolutely paramount." This exceptionally successful production of *Twelfth Night* highlighted the play's themes of love and identity, particularly as expressed through the characters of Malvolio, played by Brian Bedford, and Viola, played by Kathleen Widdoes. Bedford presented Malvolio as a prim, self-righteous puritan, and played directly to the audience. Berners W. Jackson likened the actor to a virtuoso musician playing "upon a cacophonous instrument, directly manipulating the responses, not only of the whole group, but also of individuals." By contrast, Stephen Macht's Orsino was censured for his strident tones. Jackson complained that "during his opening speech he banged a book shut, stomped around, and growled or shouted out the lines in a way that made it evident Shakespeare hadn't written the part as he wanted to play it."

**COMMENTARY:**
Clive Barnes (review date 12 June 1975)


[David Jones's staging of] Twelfth Night proved to be a beauty—one of the lightest, most luminous and elegant things to be seen in Stratford for some years.

David Jones is one of the two directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Britain—he triumphantly staged Gorky's Summer Folk and Love's Labour's Lost for the company at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this season—and in this Twelfth Night he escapes from the Canadian tradition of Guthrie into something far more substantial and poetic.

Mr. Jones is like Mr. Phillips, one of the newstyle British classics directors who are original without being outlandish and place the simple, yet imaginative interpretation of the playwright's concept as absolutely paramount.

It is a far more pragmatic method and not nearly so stylized as the old Guthrie approach, which was aimed at pleasing an audience rather than presenting a play. Mind you, if the new way is successful, the audience will be pleased, as it was abundantly with this Twelfth Night.

The zest of Mr. Jones's interpretation of these crisscrossing patterns of love and identity, shone out from the first. He takes Orsino's opening speech, "If music be the food of love," as if it had just been written by the playwright, and throughout he is devilishly imaginative in his readings of the text, for this is a subtle, supple view of the vagaries of love.

It is exquisitely acted—you could hardly have told that this was largely the same company that had marched, with leaden-footed competence, through Shaw's Saint Joan the night before.

The two principals, indeed, were new, and they were iridescent. Brian Bedford as Malvolio and Kathleen Widdoes as Viola had just that definition of Shakespearean style that has been lacking at Stratford these last few seasons.

Mr. Bedford's dignified beetle of a Malvolio, talking like a genteel minor civil servant, grinning inordinately at his own feeble jokes, and looking like a plump, self-satisfied Richelieu, makes a formidable character.

Mr. Bedford—and Mr. Jones—take a considerable risk in frequently addressing the audience directly. Style wards off the threat inherent here of vulgarity, but at the end perhaps Mr. Bedford, who has been the consummate comedian throughout, does at present miss the full morose possibility of Malvolio's final malediction.

But this is a rich Malvolio, and Miss Widdoes with her tempestuously passionate Viola is its equal. Saucer-eyed and trigger-spirited, Miss Widdoes is absolutely credible. The other performances were all in their own way admirable—Marti Maraden made a pretty and unusually vivacious Olivia; Leslie Yeo a belchingly amusing Sir Toby, obviously more concerned with ale than cakes; Tom Kneebone, the histrionically ineffectual Dauphin of Saint Joan was wryly and bitterly effective as Feste, and Frank Maraden had a nicely lank despondency as Aguecheek. It shows what direction can do—and I also like the Caroline period design of Susan Benson.

John Pettigrew (review date February 1976)
Over at the Festival Theatre, David Jones of the Royal Shakespeare Company directed an enjoyable *Twelfth Night*, straightforward and sunny, a production that left the more sombre areas unexplored—only once, I think, in Sir Andrew's response to Sir Toby's contemptuous rebuke, did one of the flat characters for a fleeting moment become round. Much better than Stratford's first *Twelfth Night* (one twisted out of shape by Tyrone Guthrie's obsession with the play's darker side), it was less generally satisfactory than David William's jewel of a production in 1966. But if in some respects it was very remarkable indeed, and attained levels that Stratford had probably not reached before, it was made extremely uneven by extraordinary variation in the quality of individual performances. Tom Kneebone's Feste seemed to me to lack the kind of imagination that went into his Dauphin in *Saint Joan*, and to be no more than adequate, though it is only fair to add that I don't pretend to understand Feste, that I find him less interesting than most critics do, and that what I think I found missing was the kind of bitterness that would have been discordant in the generally harmonious world of this production. A good deal less than adequate was Denise Fergusson's Maria. I find it difficult to be fair to Miss Fergusson because I admired her Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera* of 1972 so very much that I keep expecting her to rise to that level again and keep getting disappointed. As I have pointed out before, I regard myself as an authority on Marias, having once given the worst performance ever given anywhere in that role (or in any other role for that matter). What the part needs is the kind of pert and joyful zip that Molière's soubrettes have (Miss Galloway would be a definitive Maria), but Miss Fergusson was flat rather than bubbly, and seemed bewildered. The major disaster, however, was the Orsino, Stephen Macht's abysmal failure in the role, posing problems for other actors and especially Viola, on whose taste in men Mr. Macht's casting cast the most serious doubts. Mr. Macht's Proctor showed that he's a good actor, but he should avoid Shakespearean roles except those requiring Brooklyn Jews or oriental thugs of an acrobatic bent. Never again, I trust, will I hear the play's first word ("If") so underlined as if there is philosophically every reason to doubt that music be the food of love, and never again, I trust, will I be led to find myself thinking in the first scene of Orsino as an understudy rehearsing King Lear in his opening scene, or as a Tigger in an absolute frenzy to be even more bouncy than usual. Mr. Macht leaped about the stage, slammed books shut for no apparent reason, held fielding practice, went through a complete repertoire of damnable faces before beginning, threatened to transfix a horrified messenger with a crossbow, and generally seemed determined to o'erdo Termagant and to out-herod Herod, and to need a strait-jacket. I did not enjoy Mr. Macht's performance, and that the production survived it is a tribute to most of the others involved.

There were some nice bits of business, some of them none the worse for not being original. Sir Andrew's yellow costume gave special point to Maria's remark that yellow is a colour Olivia abhors. Sir Toby Belch, anxious to prove his sobriety, tried to walk a straight line but became naturally bewildered since the line he chose to tread was that marking a difference in stage levels. Feste remarked, "Did you never see the picture of We Three," to Toby, Andrew and himself, who, for reasons that escape me now, but which seemed convincing at the time, had somehow become "See-no-evil," "Hear-no-evil," and "Speak-no-evil."

There were also excellent performances. Leslie Yeo had and gave a good time as Toby, and Lewis Gordon was an admirable Fabian. Last year I insisted in these pages on the evidence of Marti Maraden's Katharine in *Love's Labour's Lost* that she was a young actress of enormous promise whom the Festival must grapple to itself with hoops of steel; this year her Olivia was one of her several fine performances, and Frank Maraden's Sir Andrew was also as good as any I've seen. Violas I am quite incapable of judging since I always fall in love with them within about two minutes of their arrivals in Illyria, and I tend to think that Siobhan McKenna or Joan Darling or Martha Henry or Judi Dench is the finest I've seen until I see the next one. This year I fell for Kathleen Widdoes who did everything superbly and who, I think, better at communicating the sheer joy of being vital and in love than anyone else I've seen. And her girlish squeal of delight as she finally flung herself upon Orsino was a supremely lovely moment.
But this was Malvolio's *Twelfth Night* It is true that Brian Bedford overacted disgracefully, and that economy was not a word that he appeared to have heard of, true that the performance may have thinned the role since it was quite impossible ever to sympathize with this Malvolio, true that he kept inventing new gags which not only broke audiences up but kept his fellow actors on their toes since they were never sure what he would come up with next (Sir Andrew's completely unsuccessful efforts to restrain his hysterics at one new bit of business one night were alone worth the price of admission). But if Mr. Bedford's performance was naughty indeed and very far from being definitive, it was also memorable and marvellous, the kind of thing that only the finest actor can get away with.

At the centre of Mr. Bedford's Malvolio were supreme self-satisfaction, snobbishness, and smugness incarnate. All that is conventional enough, though I don't think I've ever seen a Malvolio who disliked others' jokes so much, or who derived such terrific enjoyment from his own even when they weren't funny ("By your leave, wax" reduced him to tears of laughter). What was certainly fresh was this Malvolio's revelation that his Puritanism is only skin-deep, or rather, perhaps, that he thinks Puritanism good for others, but not for himself. He moved with a kind of built-in snigger, possessed of a dirty little mind beside which a London sewer would be crystallinity personified. The thought of the daybed where he had left Olivia sleeping filled him with pornographic delight, the thought of her making "her great P's" was exquisitely geared to tickle his smutty little mind. Lost in daydream, he remarked to in imaginary Sir Toby, "My fortunes having cast me on your niece," and then became wildly gleeful at the thought of being literally cast there. Olivia's "Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio" practically precipitated an orgasm. His unlimited capacity for self-approval went along with an equal capacity for disapproving of others: "as a squash is before 'tis a peascod" would have withered Viola had she heard it. Again Jove's name was certainly to be invoked, but only, where Malvolio himself was concerned, as that of a social inferior to whom some curious social ritual suggested the desirability of paying homage if only because the best people do so and because to defer to him is to show oneself as truly humble.

There was some lovely business: an interior struggle as to whether or not to revolve on reading Maria's instruction to do so; a grotesque slow bend to pick up Maria's letter; an entrance with Malvolio playing "She loves me, she loves me not" with a flower, then suddenly realizing that the number might not work out, cheating by counting ahead, and then pettishly discarding the flower. And while I suppose he ought not to have done it, I could not help dissolving as Mr. Bedford played to particular members of the audience, sharing his jokes with them, and even on one occasion pausing until some kindly gentleman in the audience prompted him with "have greatness thrust upon them," whereupon Mr. Bedford nodded his gratitude and chalked up the debt for the help.

**Berners W. Jackson (review date Winter 1976)**


The *Twelfth Night* directed by David Jones at the Festival Theatre was thoroughly agreeable Shakespeare, lively, full-bodied, and a pleasure to look at. Dressed by Susan Benson in costumes that were near-Renaissance, neither aggressively nor archly period, the production struck a subtle and convincing medium between the sunshine piece that we are told our forefathers relished and the acidulous attempt at black comedy that some modern directors have pursued in producing this play. Leslie Yeo's Sir Toby Belch was jovial enough for a workaday Lord of Misrule. His bluster, his belches, his pranks, and his slap-and-tickle with Maria were his continuing lifestyle, but the strength of his animosity toward Malvolio betrayed a sourness of spirit, a sense of self-waste. A sort of pinched, incomplete Falstaff, he was a forgivable man, more easily liked by others than by himself. Denise Fergusson gave Maria considerable bright-eyed malice. A strong-bodied lass excited by her ability to be one of the boys without losing sexual identity, she disarmed the audience by the gusto with which she relished her own cleverness. Frank Maraden was an attenuated, ungainly, dim-witted Aguecheek of watery affability. Prompted to action he became a dancer of excruciating absurdity, designed to trip over feet, his own if no others were available. In a suit of lemon yellow as
remarkable as the fact that he existed, he claimed the kind of unguarded affection that one must feel for the
last specimen of a species otherwise extinct. The remote singularity of Feste was emphasized by a costume of
pale, uncertain gold, the dress for Tom Kneebone's harsh and metallic clown, burnished by wit, but unhappy.
This was a tough, professional Feste, his eyes quizzical and disenchanted, his distaste for his fellow men
beginning with himself.

For those who have sometimes wondered, as I have, why Shakespeare wrote in the part of Fabian, Lewis
Gordon's performance in this production may offer a suggestion. Nearly every Fabian I have seen has
appeared to believe that, as a late-comer to the comic company, he must exhibit some striking eccentricity in
order to hold his own with Sir Toby and the gang. Since the part doesn't give an actor with that particular
ambition much to work with, the result has invariably been more puzzling than effective. Mr. Gordon played
the role as an ordinary fellow who rather enjoyed his odd companions but would not have wanted to be
thought like them. In so doing he provided them with a foil of normalcy that Shakespeare may have intended,
and at the same time demonstrated why Feste could not have effectively performed Fabian's function and
remained Feste.

Kathleen Widdoes was a sweet-faced, candid Viola, who did the Cesario part with a nicely judged
unmasculine attempt at masculinity. One admired, for instance, the hearty way she got her right shoulder into
a thrusting handshake, because the result obviously caused her physical pain. The subtle variety in her gait
and stance suggested that she was having continually to remind herself of what she was supposed to be. This
was a winning performance because Miss Widdoes was able to make the audience feel, to the point of sharing
in it, Viola's pleasure at being alive and in love. Since she is also an actress capable of expressing great joy
what appears to be a process of inner radiation, Miss Widdoes made the recognition scene totally memorable.

Olivia, so often played as a rather dreary lady who seems to suffer from a permanent asthma of the spirit, was
given character and wit by Marti Maraden. Her vow of long mourning for her brother did not prevent her
handling her household competently, and all evidence of overindulged sentiment evaporated when Viola
appeared. Love, however ironically mistaken, came as a challenge to this Olivia, and brought out the best in
her, making her a force to be reckoned with. However, Stephen Macht's Orsino struck me as irritatingly
perverse. Mr. Macht seemed to have conceived Orsino as a tigerish spirit caged in boredom and maddened by
unrequited love. During his opening speech he banged a book shut, stamped around, and growled or shouted
out the lines in a way that made it evident Shakespeare hadn't written the part as he wanted to play it. Thus he
failed to conjure up what I take to be the atmosphere of Illyria, and though he did make some amends later on
by his glad acceptance of Viola, it was not until after he had grabbed Olivia by the throat and given other
evidence of serious instability.

Brian Bedford's Malvolio was an unlovely and unlovable prig of a man with a monumental capacity for
self-approval, who nevertheless managed to make himself totally agreeable to the audience. Dignity had
starched his face into a mask of disapproval, but it could crack into a mirthless smile for public consumption,
or rumple into a private snigger of delight when he was soliloquizing upon his own character, fortunes, or
undertakings. In these moments Mr. Bedford encouraged the participation of the audience; he affected to be
puzzled by their reactions, he asked for their approval, he took them into his confidence. This was an
astonishing virtuoso performance with the actor playing upon the audience like a musician upon a
cacophonous instrument, directly manipulating the responses, not only of the whole group, but also of
individuals. It was all so skillful and so hilarious that an adverse criticism seems merely grumpy, and yet,
although this Malvolio remained in character throughout, Mr. Bedford's familiarities with the audience did, I
think, make it impossible for him to achieve fully the effects that ought to attach later in the play to Malvolio's
bewilderment, anger, and pathetically outraged dignity.

PRODUCTION:
BACKGROUND:

Employing the seasonal associations of *Twelfth Night* as metaphors for the play's action, Hands's RSC production opened with an Illyria shrouded in winter and closed with the arrival of spring. This threw into relief the centrality of the play's romantic relationships, which critics agreed were rendered with energy. Benedict Nightingale commented, "in Illyria love is a sudden and alarming affliction, a variety of glandular fever virulent enough to send the mercury racing up and over the humiliation threshold." In particular, Gareth Thomas's Orsino and Kate Nicholls's Olivia were faulted for indulging in hyperbolic emotion. J. C. Trewin asserted that "we know that Orsino and Olivia are given to excess, but it was long since they had been acted with more resolute and superfluous vigour." John Wood-vine's Malvolio received more favorable reviews; Sally Aire commented that "his use of the physical constraints of his preposterous cross-gartering [gave] opportunity for some unexpectedly enjoyable clowning." Similarly, Geoffrey Hutchings's Feste received critical acclaim for his handling of the role's melancholy and music. Aire wrote that Hutchings played Feste "with a privateness, the whimsy is there to hide a sadness which is revealed only in his music-making, a dimension of the performance which is as skilfully accomplished as the rest of it."

COMMENTARY:

**Sheridan Morley (review date 20 June 1979)**


Short of making it into a musical, which amazingly seems never to have been tried, there's not a lot that even the most wilful or determined of directors can do with *Twelfth Night*. Unusually, almost alone among the later comedies, it defies any kind of social or political or historical comment and therefore is inclined to become an actors' rather than a producer's play.

Having already staged it to considerable acclaim at the Comedie Francaise, with his wife as Viola, Terry Hands now brings to a new RSC production at Stratford the same designer (John Napier) but a homegrown cast and, from all Parisian accounts, a somewhat broader interpretation. We start off in a wild and wintry wood, as though the play were actually set on Twelfth Night rather than merely written for it; enter thereto a curiously irate Orsino (Gareth Thomas) bellowing instructions about more music to a semirecalcitrant court, and from here on it is clearly going to be every actor for himself and devil take the hind-most.

Thus we have a jolly-hockey schoolgirl Olivia (Kate Nicholls), an unusually seductive Maria (Jane Downs), a gargantuan Toby Belch (Willoughby Goddard) and John McEnery as Aguecheek camping around like Moley in a woolly balaclava. None of them seem to have a lot to do with each other, but all are maniacally intent on making the most of their several moments—not least John Wood-vine whose Malvolio is unusually desperate to get all the established laughs and then some.

By the end of the first half we seem to have moved from *The Wind in the Willows* through *Mary Rose* to *Rookery Nook*, no mean achievement in an hour and a half; by the beginning of the second half we've also acquired a Fabian (Norman Tyrrell) out of some mediaeval episode of *The Archers* and increasingly Cherie Lunghi's Viola is getting to look like the principal boy out of some especially eccentric pantomime.

But *Twelfth Night* is reasonably indestructible, its twinning plot being both simpler and infinitely more touching than that of *Comedy Of Errors*; thus it doesn't much matter that what we appear to have here is fifteen actors racing round each other in search of a common style. They never actually find one, but they have a lot of fun along the way and so on the first night did an audibly delighted audience. By the end of the
second half Spring has been sprung, as has Malvolio, and Feste (Geoffrey Hutchings in the performance of the evening, unless you count an interesting stage debut from Stephen Rashbrook as Sebastian) is as usual allowed to walk away with the end of the play on a stage he has never for an instant left. He alone has realised that Twelfth Night should have been a musical all along.

Benedict Nightingale (review date 22 June 1979)


For some time now our directors have been conscientiously darkening what used to be regarded as Shakespeare's happiest comedy. We have had glum and scabrous Festes, and we have had Malvolios so cruelly teased that even the Belches—mean drunks and unprincipled predators to a man—have proved mildly shocked by their maltreatment. But these prison-house productions have obviously missed much, not least the interestingly erratic and even violent behaviour of some of the more romantic characters. In Illyria love is a sudden and alarming affliction, a variety of glandular fever virulent enough to send the mercury racing up and over the humiliation threshold:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

It is, however, precisely such sentiments that give Terry Hand's revival of the play its tone, style and extravagant originality.

Roger Bisley's Antonio seems much more than ordinarily besotted with Sebastian, and Gareth Thomas's Orsino is not the usual droopy musicophaghe but a grizzled gentleman-pirate dangerously likely to succumb to his unpredictable impulses and cut a throat or two. As for Kate Nicholls's Olivia, she has no sooner swept on stage than she has thrown aside her mourning veil to reveal a lavish auburn mane that at once justifies her overwhelming vanity and gives due warning of her torrid temperament. Before long this pre-Raphaelite beauty is proclaiming her loves and hates with a flamboyance that must be audible halfway across Illyria, and enthusiastically matching voice with movement and gesture. She flirtatiously rubs up against Malvolio, flings aside the wretched Aguecheek, and proceeds to astonish Cesario-Viola with the physical frankness of her unruly emotions. 'To one of your receiving enough is shown', she cries, and promptly disproves her own words by leaping at her, cuddling her, and pursuing her pelimeli through the garden. At one moment of high excitement she seems actually to be trying to rape her, and at another she blunders into and very nearly knocks flat one of the spindly, woebegone trees that cower onstage, like crones in a gymnasium. It is as if defloration were not enough: this rampaging lady will be satisfied with nothing short of deforestation. This is more than a little absurd, and certainly very hard to reconcile with the staid melancholic who threatens the carousing Toby with banishment; but it is also an overdue corrective to theatrical tradition, since Olivias have long tended to be wet and anonymous, uniformly incapable of feeling the flames to whose heat their words attest. It unbalances, but does not up-end, a production that seems sensible enough elsewhere and can claim several 'better-than-average performances: Willoughby Goddard's Belch, physically piggy and morally swinish; Cheril Lunghi's sweet and affectionate Viola; and, especially, John Woodvine's Malvolio, whose private hobby is practising the vindictive kicks-upthe-bum he will one day give the undeserving Goddard. Watch this baleful puritan, who may well never have smiled in his life before, grimacing wolfishly into his hand-mirror as he prepares to charm Olivia, or doing battle with yellow stockings whose cross-garters don't so much impede the circulation as mummify the legs. Only rarely, I have found, is Twelfth Night even remotely as funny on the stage as in the study. That this time performance comes close to matching bookish imagination is substantially due to Mr Woodvine's wickedly silly solemnities.
Sally Aire (review date July 1979)


In this new production Terry Hands seems to be seeking to direct us to a reappraisal of the traditional view of this piece as a simple Christmas divertissement, and in so doing gives us a production which in places seems perverse in its interpretation of characters and their narrative functions. Yet one of the happiest consequences of this rather wilful treatment is a re-think on Orsino and Olivia, neither of whom, traditionally played, is the most enlivening of Shakespeare's creations: Orsino, who usually droops about the stage like a withering love-lies-bleeding, is here driven by his lovesickness into a bitter aggression, and rants (and raves) like the proverbial bear with a sore head which his name suggests. The opening scene of the play, therefore, came as something of a shock to the audience, amongst whom I thought I detected a rather uncomfortable reaction at this point, as well as a feeling of discomfort from the stage. But Orsino's ego-trip had made itself clear from the start, and we were all aware of the firm directorial hand. The object of Orsino's passion, Olivia, soon revealed herself as a barely feasible mixture of flowing pre-Raphaelite beauty and rather pukka lacrosse captain. She projects such qualities of heartiness, hautiness and downright lust as would scare the pants firmly onto any man less macho than Orsino or more awake than the bemused Sebastian. Both these interpretations bring into focus one feature common to both characters—emotional, psychic immaturity, and in doing this cast what, for me at least, was new light on the play.

Viola, too, is in search of an emotional wholeness, grieving for her drowned brother. (Olivia, too, we remember at the beginning of the play is supposed to be in mourning for her brother.) Malvolio, who seems flattered rather than fulfilled by what he believes to be Olivia's admiration, is 'sick of self-love', and, unable to achieve his emotional wholeness, he slides out of the play and into the next dramatic generation—'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you', to evolve into the corrupt villain of Jacobean drama. The other characters are resolved and so, in terms of dramatic history, die a quiet, happy 'mythic death'. Whilst the various lovers in the play are all falling in love with appearances, all in their own particular stages of transition between the mature and the infantile state, with all its attendant regression and narcissism, there does appear to be one character who has achieved his own psychic wholeness before the play has even started.

Feste is no longer a young man, he is a wise Fool—beginning to approach the Fool of Lear—who has learned his craft through some sort of suffering; a private man, sufficient unto himself and, incidentally, in this production looking disturbingly ill. This apartness from the other characters is emphasised in this production in that from the opening Feste never leaves the stage (except at the very end, to hasten Sebastian's arrival); and he remains often in the shadows, motionless by one of the trees which constitute the set. But although always present, listening, and so in full knowledge of all the misunderstandings the plot gives rise to, the text never makes it possible for him to try to sort them out. This does make a very real narrative problem for the audience, if not for the actor. Geoffrey Hutchings plays Feste with a privateness, the whimsey is there to hide a sadness which is revealed only in his music-making, a dimension of the performance which is as skilfully accomplished as the rest of it.

If Feste is less overtly comic an interpretation than we are used to, Malvolio is more so. He is ludicrous rather than repugnant, and John Woodvine's use of the physical constraints of his preposterous cross-gartering gives opportunity for some unexpectedly enjoyable clowning. Cherie Lunghi's Viola exudes an air of guileless innocence. She plays the role with a straight directness and childlike charm, but I missed the toughness Jane Lapotaire brought to the role five years ago.

The production sets Part One of the play in winter. John Napier's trees are bare of leaves, everyone is shivering (Orsino seems to hold court permanently out of doors) and everyone is wrapped in furs and leather (again!). The Spring of Part Two is a little more convincing. The trees have sprouted a few leaves and cold yellow primroses and daffodils have appeared. It gives us something different to look at, but does seem really
rather predictably schematic. The costume design is one of light shades—pale grey, white, black dominate, with browns and yellows supplied by the early autumnal Belch, Aguecheek and Maria. The music is for once a happy fusion of early Tudor filtered through a modern ear. The catch 'Hold thy peace' and Feste's 'Come away Death' work particularly well, whilst the tune for Little Tiny Boy is very close to the traditional one. There is an all too rare sense here of the actors being at ease with the music and enjoying it.

A last, small, practical point: there is some difficulty with sightlines, and I noticed a couple of annoying maskings in some of the scenes involving Sir Toby Belch. I imagine these have been sorted out by now.

J. C. Trewin (review date Summer 1980)


Illyria has often been a strange place; yet though it is a world just over the horizon, it must not be fantasticated beyond belief. Terry Hands joined the various directors who have used the secondary title, What You Will, as an invitation to adventure. At Stratford he also accepted a hint from the calendar. At first it was obviously a hard Illyrian winter, snow powdered beneath the leafless trees, everyone muffled up but (for all the low temperature) staying perpetually and unpersuasively out of doors. Until Malvolio's letter-speech the play was unwarmed, though Orsino did his best by carrying infatuation into near-frenzy. So intelligent an actress as Kate Nicholls was obliged to present Olivia as a coquette with a wild comingon disposition, a director's tiresome caprice. We know that Orsino and Olivia are given to excess, but it was long since they had been acted with more resolute and superfluous vigor. Anything that distracts us from the language in Twelfth Night must be false. When spring at length appeared, for some of us that early shiver stayed.

John Woodvine's Malvolio was plausible, a domestic regimental sergeant-major in trouble with his vowels; Cherie Lunghi's Viola had a forth-right charm that suited Cesario. I was unhappy with a Toby like a bullying Friar Tuck, and a Feste (there could be a book of Festes) like an intermittently electrified dormouse.

Roger Warren (review date 1980)


John Napier's set was … the most striking feature of the new Twelfth Night, … [it consisted of] a sloping platform with bare trees in large square tubs and snow on the ground; the sun came out in time for Malvolio to practise behaviour in it, and Maria's grey winter shawl was decked out with green leaves and suspended from one of the trees to provide extra 'cover' for the eavesdroppers in the letter scene; from III, i daffodils blossomed in the tubs, and green leaves had sprouted on some (but by no means all) of the bare trees, so that the stage picture for the second half was a mixture of winter and spring: but if this matched the mixture of harshness and happiness in the play, it also, less happily, reflected a certain confusion in Terry Hands's production.

Through the trees, characters were often seen upstage, preparing for the next episode: Sir Toby meeting Cesario at the gate; Viola and Olivia in conversation before coming downstage centre for their exchange in III, iv as Sir Toby moved upstage to meditate upon some horrid message for a challenge; Viola even loosening her hair upstage and draping a shawl around her male breeches to give some semblance of being Orsino's mistress while the others listened to Malvolio's letter downstage. During Feste's final song, the lovers in a happy group centre were isolated from those who felt the imminence of the wind and the rain, sitting underneath the trees at the shadowed edges of the platform: the wounded Aguecheek, head in hands, the isolated Antonio, and the sobered Maria and Toby, separated and facing away from each other.
If Mr Hands gave us contrast here, he gave us contradiction elsewhere, especially in his presentation of Feste and Malvolio. Feste was on stage virtually throughout, an ill-licensed Twelfth Night Lord of Misrule, even cueing character's entries in the finale; but since he had seen both Cesario and Sebastian, 'your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither' had to be made to mean the reverse of what it in fact does mean, to the extent of Feste actually removing a false nose to emphasise knowingly that 'nothing that is so is so'. This was the most blatant example of Mr Hands's typical habit of sacrificing the plain meaning of the text to the interests of some imposed 'concept'; but text and performance tend to resist such concepts, and Geoffrey Hutchings's quietly rustic Feste was among the least dominating I have seen.

John Woodvine (Malvolio) seemed at first to be carefully building a consistent characterisation of a humourless puritanical steward, self-conscious about social gaffes, having immense difficulty with the pronunciation of 'slough', speaking with a nasal twang specifically mocked in Feste's line 'Malvolio's nose is no whipstock', and grimly resolving 'I—will—smile' as if his life depended upon it. The resulting physical contortion was legitimately very funny, but the antics with the cross-garters seemed to come from a more farcical character, equipped with a huge yellow codpiece for gross phallic humour at 'greatness thrust upon them'. 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' was charged with deadly menace; but as he turned away upstage, the long cord which had tied his feet snaked along the floor after him out of the trapdoor from which he had emerged. What we were finally to think about Malvolio was not clear.

The most original interpretation was of the lovers, who expressed what they were feeling with unusual direct emphasis, without either lyricism or affectation. Gareth Thomas tore into Orsino's lines rapidly, roughly, even aggressively, as if he was basically a man of action who felt obliged to use conventional wooing styles and disliked them; at the end he wore a flowing white Saracen-style robe with a scimitar at his belt (looking rather like Byron in oriental costume), turning the knife violently on both Olivia and Viola, thus wringing from Viola the passionately emphatic declaration 'after him I LOVE'. This interpretation had the merit of bringing real weight to his imaging of his fierce desires as 'fell and cruel hounds' at the cost of gabbling more reflective passages ('longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn'), but its vigour was refreshing.

So, too, was that of Olivia. Interpreting a figure of speech as a statement of fact, Mr Hands did not merely 'veil' her 'like a cloistress', but dressed her in flowing black and white nun's robes; when Viola asked to see her face, Olivia removed not just the nun's veil but her entire head-dress, revealing long red tresses which made her look an odd mixture of Mary Magdalen and Salome; but at least it emphasised Olivia's vigorous coming alive, as did the force with which she virtually assaulted fate on the line 'Fate, show thy force'. But the actress lacked the experience to vary her subsequent delivery, and her very emphatic style ultimately became tiring.

It was Cherie Lunghi's Viola that really gained from this approach. At the start a scared waif, she gradually worked out her disguise ('an eunuch!' was a sudden inspiration), and also thought her way through the 'willow cabin' speech, which began as a genuine, thoughtful attempt to answer Olivia's question, and gradually acquired great power as she built up the plan bit by bit. In the central scene [II. iv. 88-110] with Orsino, their passionate, almost violent exchanges ('Sooth, but you must!', 'Ay, but I know—' 'What dost thou know?'), flung backwards and forwards, built up to a tingling 'She never told her love', which was charged with real emotional frustration. During 'Come away death', she draped her cloak caringly around Orsino's shoulders, and their mutual absorption was so great that they virtually forgot about Feste; Orsino broke the spell with the next instruction about Olivia, thus increasing her frustration, but at the end of the scene he returned to her to give back her cloak, and this held moment between them underlined their development during the scene and prepared for their final union. Miss Lunghi also played the humour with impish lightness, and she alone brought distinction of style and personality to a production generally lacking in the subtle undertones and detailed humanity achieved in previous Stratford productions of this play.

**PRODUCTION:**
David Mamet Circle Repertory Theatre, New York 1980

BACKGROUND:

Mamet’s 1980 production of *Twelfth Night* at the Circle Repertory Theatre, New York engendered heated critical comment for its bold use of costuming. Adopting an anachronistic approach that clothed characters in garb from a variety of centuries, Mamet explained that he allowed the actors themselves to choose the costumes that they felt were appropriate for their characters. Many critics asserted that this directorial choice was nothing more than an irresponsible gimmick. Michael Bertin, however, argued that it was "a fine intuition into the play's heart," explaining that "uniformity in costuming is ... a relatively modern innovation." This production further elicited contrary responses regarding Marshall W. Mason's performance as Malvolio. John Simon described Mason's Malvolio as "a prissy antiques salesman trying to screw up his courage to turn a trick on Central Park West," while Bertin characterized the performance as "elegant and reserved." Lindsay Crouse, by contrast, won unanimous approval for her rendering of Viola, which Edith Oliver hailed as "the best I've ever seen," noting that the actress spoke "her poetry ... as easily as breathing, never slighting its music or emotion or force." Colin Stinton's Feste was also praised by the majority of critics. Oliver in particular singled out his deft handling of Shakespeare's language: "struck with much of that tormenting dialogue, he somehow makes it sound witty, and his voice and speech are worthy of the haunting songs he sings." The cast additionally included Jay O. Saunders as Orsino, Michael Lerner as Sir Toby Belch, Trish Hawkins as Olivia, and Marceli Rosenblatt as Maria.

COMMENTARY:

**Mel Gussow (review date 17 December 1980)**


David Mamet's lighthearted production of *Twelfth Night* at the Circle Repertory Company features two outstanding Shakespearean performances—by Lindsay Crouse in the pivotal role of Viola and by Colin Stinton in the usually subordinate role of Feste the clown.

As played by Mr. Stinton, the clown is a deadpan wit who nimbly takes the measure of everyone else on stage. He orchestrates their cheerful deceptions and always has a palm extended to solicit a donation. He is such an articulate and engaging performer, acting and singing ("O Mistress Mine") that one wishes his character could have had an even fairer share of Shakespeare's choicest speeches, beginning with Orsino's opening entreaty, "If music be the food of love, play on."

In this production, the first of the Circle's seasonal two-part repertory (Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Beaver Coat* is staged in tandem), Mr. Stinton shares the evening's honors with Miss Crouse. She is a beacon of loveliness as the willful Viola. While pretending to be boyish, she magically retains a feminine radiance. She would be perfectly suited to play all of Shakespeare's girl-boy roles, and womanly characters as well.

Exuding charm along with intelligence, she convincingly becomes the object of all affection. When she looks up in unabashed admiration at Orsino, she makes us believe that the man is worthy of her, although Jay O. Sanders, who is playing the role, lacks that customary regal air of command. Mr. Sanders is one of several actors who fall somewhat short of the full fathom of fun in *Twelfth Night*. Michael Lerner and Jack Dengel offer rather rudimentary approximations of those two domestic buffoons, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, although they and others improve in the course of the evening.

The primary debits of an otherwise enjoyable show are Clifford Capone's costumes, which are, to say the least, capricious. They seem to have been thrown together from different productions and different periods.
Mr. Stinton, for example, wears chinos and a reindeer ski sweater and looks as if he had just wandered in from watching a football game in *Good News*. At one point he lights up a Kool. Miss Crouse and the Duke's other minions are dressed like military-school plebes. Robert Lupone wears a pirate's bandanna as large as a turban. Marshall W. Mason, the Circle's artistic director, playing Malvolio in tails and top hat, needs only a pince nez to make the picture complete as a portrait of The New Yorker's Eustace Tilley.

Fred Kolouch's drab setting has a vaguely Mediterranean aspect and a short staircase that leads up only so that it can immediately lead down. The director has also unwisely used blackouts after short scenes, which slows down the play and emphasizes the episodic nature of the evening.

However, once the devious subplots fall in place, Miss Crouse takes charge of the romance and Mr. Stinton takes charge of the comedy, and this *Twelfth Night* begins to sprint. Trish Hawkins is a vivacious Olivia and W.H. Macy is bedazzled but eager as Miss Crouse's look-alike brother. The scenes among the three of them, with a tumult of mistaken identities and sudden infatuations, are both antic and romantic.

According to the program, Mr. Mason first attempted the role of Malvolio 20 years ago, and it remains his favorite acting experience. He has remembered the character well. He is funny and properly fussy, although he lacks the pyrotechnic comic dexterity that Brian Bedford brought to the role at the Stratford Festival, Canada. Mr. Mason's Malvolio is a man of high standards, sincere intentions and pinched emotions, easily badgered into making a foil of himself.

As this Malvolio picks up the planted letter containing a bogus confession of love to him from his lady Olivia, the dastardly plotters peer down from atop a wall. With only their faces visible, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian (Charles T. Harper) are a trio of laughable, head-bobbing Toby jugs. Later, when Mr. Mason returns, riotously cross-gartered, with his yellow stockings glaring like sun-spots, this austere puritan amusingly abandons his inhibitions and unleashes a grin.

Mr. Mamet's frothy version of *Twelfth Night* proves three things: some artistic directors can easily double as character actors; contemporary playwrights can be at home directing in Illyria, and Miss Crouse and Mr. Stinton are actors to be applauded.

**John Simon (review date 29 December 1980)**


Nowhere in the western world, I daresay, do the classics fare as badly as in our theater. I don't know whether it is the teaching or the learning—more properly the lack of teaching and the unwillingness to learn—that is to blame. In any case, American theater seems to be equipped only for the latest American plays; there is no sense of other times and other places—as what follows shockingly demonstrates.

The Circle Repertory is about as good an institutional theater as we have, possibly the best; but only for contemporary Americana. Now, alas, we are getting *Twelfth Night*, staged by the playwright David Mamet as Friday the thirteenth. Start, if you will, with the costumes of Clifford Capone: unlovely, uninventive, and, on top of that, inconsistent. While most characters wear dull modern clothes—Orsino's men in West Point uniforms, Sir Toby in a corduroy sport jacket, Feste in a reindeer sweater—Aguecheek is out of Restoration comedy and Antonio out of *The Pirates of Penzance*. These costumes are cheap in both senses of the word, and show it, again in both. The Circle Rep's small stage is inhospitable to Shakespeare, but Fred Kolouch's set neither makes full use of the available space nor conjures up a poetic vision of Illyria. It does, however, conjure up a vision of a highschool production of *Twelfth Night*. 
Now, take the staging. For no good reason, Mamet will have Feste doing a crossword puzzle or lighting up a cigarette. If there were consistent modernization throughout, or if that cigarette would shed light on a character or situation, very well; but these gimmicks are desultory, arbitrary, and sophomoric. When three plotters are spying on Malvolio and he looks up at them atop a wall, two sink out of sight and one impersonates a statue—meaning that he can see them. When Malvolio next looks up at them, they blithely stay put—meaning he cannot see them. The staging abounds in this sort of inconsistency. When Sebastian finally comes on at the same time as Viola, Mamet has her gazing at him expressionlessly for a long time. Clearly, the director must find a way to justify the delayed recognition; but this, like much else that is not mere surface stuff, Mamet fails to provide.

Seven performances are heartbreaking if they are meant to be funny, riotous if they are meant in earnest. Jay O. Sanders, as Orsino, declaims Shakespeare's poetry as if it were "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," and moves like a trolley conductor. Trish Hawkins, as Olivia, flutters like a dinner-theater Blanche DuBois and delivers blank verse as if it were a tremulous, flower-child dither. As Sebastian, W. H. Macy is an aging Dead End Kid trying to make like Andy Hardy. Marshall W. Mason's Malvolio is a prissy antiques salesman trying to screw his courage to turn a trick on Central Park West; Charles T. Harper's Fabian, far from being his adversary, is his fruitier younger brother. The Antonio of Robert Lupone has a delivery as rich in variety as the knock-knock of a woodpecker. Most offensive of all is Colin Stinton as Feste. Looking like a baby Charles Durning, he rattles off his lines with smart-ass condescension and displays what the French so admirably characterize as a tâte à gifler. As for his songs, they come out as tuneless improvisations by a laughing hyena.

Jake Dengel at least looks right as Aguecheek; Marceli Rosenblatt (Maria) and Michael Lerner (Sir Toby) at least try to act, but turn Illyria into the Bronx. As Viola, Lindsay Crouse is superb. She is both womanly and boyish, separately and together; she is both ingenuous innocent and, when called for, precocious judge of character; she can, even at the breakneck speed at which she is directed to speak, make her verse signify and sing. In any production of Twelfth Night, even the best, she could easily hold her own. If Sara Sugihara, listed as musical director, actually composed what passes for music here, let her music be the food of fish.

Edith Oliver (review date 29 December 1980)


Twelfth Night, which opened last week at the Circle Repertory, under the direction of the dramatist David Mamet, is deliberately informal and moves briskly from beginning to end. Every moment is clear—which takes some doing—and the preposterous story, called by Wolcott Gibbs "as irritating as a raspberry seed in a back tooth," becomes acceptable (or is easily ignored), in spite of the pun-cluttered dialogue, which impressed Mr. G. as "a torment to all but the exceptionally devout." Devout or not, I've always found the play a moonstruck and enchanting blend of friskiness and beauty, with credibility the last thing on its mind. There is no skimping (God knows) on the friskiness in this production, but what remains in the memory is the beauty and gravity and humor and mischief of Lindsay Crouse's Viola, who sets the tone of the best of the evening; without ever declaiming, Miss Crouse speaks her poetry—some of the loveliest of Shakespeare's poetry—as easily as breathing, never slighting its music or emotion or force. Even the most familiar of the set pieces—"Make me a willow cabin at your gate" and "My father had a daughter lov'd a man"—sound freshly minted. Her young, ardent Viola is the best I've ever seen (and I start with Jane Cowl), and so is the funny, lyric Feste of Colin Stinton. Stuck with much of that tormenting dialogue, he somehow makes it sound witty, and his voice and speech are worthy of the haunting songs he sings. His "Hey, ho, the wind and the rain," at the end, after all the shenanigans, with the entire cast behind him, is surprisingly moving.

Miss Crouse and Mr. Stinton are totally at home in Shakespeare. The same cannot be said for that entire cast. Although Marceli Rosenblatt's slyboots Maria is funny and in keeping, the other performances vary from the
barely acceptable to the terrible. The Malvolio of Marshall W. Mason, the artistic director of the Circle Rep, is so limp and unsure (or was on the evening I was there) that it is impossible to summon up any pity for the character as the victim of a cruel practical joke—much less any laughter. The shenanigans get damned trying.

The scenery, by Fred Kolouch, is spare and unobtrusive. The costumes, by Clifford Capone, while becoming enough, look like a kind of come-as-you-are masquerade. Miss Crouse, disguised as a boy, wears the customary Shakespearean, doublet and hose (I guess); Mr. Stinton wears slacks and a sweater. The other women are in what is usually called "period" dress, but of what period I cannot tell you; as for the other men, there's a hunting cap here, a riding habit there—that sort of thing. Yet even the clothes are appropriate, in their way, to Mr. Mamet's un-conventional yet never slapdash production, which makes not the slightest attempt to be British.

Michael Bertin (review date Summer 1981)


David Mamet's production of Twelfth Night opened with the sound of a distant flute. Orsino and Curio were leaning against a wall, and were lost in thought. The flute stopped and all was still as we experienced the vacancy of Orsino's expression and the stasis that engulfed him. Life without love, it seemed, was more than sad; it was plainly dull. The mood was right for the opening; both serious and laughable, it pulled us in as it offered a perspective. Mamet was careful not to rush or force his effects. He allowed each scene to search its form. Seeing, for example, that there is much talk in the opening acts, he enabled this talk to occur with an unhurried confidence, establishing character, nuance, and theme as he proceeded. New colors were added to what fast became a crisp, textured, and cumulative stage experience. In the end, Mamet's production offered a fleeting glimpse of the play's metaphysical bounty.

… [The Mamet-Circle Repertory Company staging of Twelfth Night took place in] a theatre that seats 160. The trestle stage cannot measure more than six by twelve yards. Mamet, however, mastered the limitations of his stage, and extended the space through a vision of the play that related festivity to life. Furthermore, he grounded that vision in a close reading of the text.

Fred Kolouch's deceptively simple setting was outlined by a high and decaying stone wall that broke off to blend with distant cuffs. The time seemed Mediterranean winter, and we were either in Olivia's garden or just beyond the garden gate. The gate itself was arched, fixing the scene with the prospect of a far and swelling sea. The green-blue sky and sea made the gray-brown rocks colder still. Though a potentially tragic land, however, the place held fast to hope and life, as did the lone and undulating rose vine that worked along the mountain path straining for the sun. The wall contained a mysterious empty statuary niche which was perhaps a muted echo of the unfulfilled life Viola—as "patience on a monument"—would miraculously evade. This was Illyria: antique yet modern in its ambiguity, beautiful yet potentially harsh, illusory yet real, informed by seriousness but happy in an unblinking way.

Mamet made one choice that could be labeled as gimmickry. But I thought that his adoption of a manifold costume metaphor was a fine intuition into the play's heart. Quite simply, the clothing spanned the range of modern history. There were among others, an Edwardian Malvolio, an eighteenth-century Sir Andrew in three-cornered hat, a buccaneer Antonio in bandanna with sword, a Napoleonic Officer with fixed bayonet, a military-cadet Cesario, and a modern Feste sporting Hush Puppies, chinos, and a blue ski sweater adorned with prancing deer. Some in the New York press attacked the approach as irresponsible eclecticism. But uniformity in costuming is, as we know, a relatively modern innovation, and the thought of consciously returning to the older convention for Twelfth Night was intriguing. Why then did Mamet want his costumes "visible" in so unexpected a way? He answered that since he had no idea how people dressed in Illyria, he had
allowed the actors to determine their costuming on the basis of their character's needs. (The play is located sympathetically in Shakespeare's England, of course, but Elizabethan garb is not really the issue here.) Mamet's answer seemed evasive, or at best partial. This may have been the idea but, in Eric Bentley's phrase, what was the idea behind the idea?

I think there were two: the costumes functioned as emblems of consciousness and as masks. As emblems they revealed how different characters saw themselves. Some, like Feste, were free and wore whatever suited them; others, like Sir Andrew, were imprisoned in outdated modes. Malvolio wore his aspirations; Viola/Cesario wore her/his division. Fascinating perspectives in consciousness evolved when, for example, a "modern" character would address one historically older. But what exactly was modern here? What was old? In a play concerned with illusion and reality, the costumes united with the setting to create an aura of controlled ambiguity.

But as the performance progressed and its poetry took hold, the costumes began to function as masks. The differences in styles of dress dissolved in a deepening coherence of mood, implying that sexual differences were dissolving in the fundamental unity of human passions. The interpretation was not oppressively stated; rather, it seemed to breathe with the play. Mamet was not implying that men and women were the same; he was rendering the nature of their differences problematical in order to relate the mask-before-the-face to the denouement's face-before-the-mask. And when, at the end of the performance, the unity of the denouement evolved into the unity of actors donning street clothes, the happy implication of the play's ending spilled into New York's Sheridan Square, with the ultimate irony being the nature of the world they fell into. The production's philosophy could be stated in the phrase: an image of happiness and love created and questioned.

The unforced thoughtfulness of the interpretation was joyously experienced in the immediacy of performance. If Sir Toby and Olivia lacked some definition, and if Orsino had trouble with some of his verse, the other principals were excellent. But of them all, a beautifully balanced quartet stands out: Malvolio, Maria, Feste, and Viola…. Malvolio (played by the company's artistic director, Marshall Mason) was elegantly and reserved. He walked on the balls of his feet as if fearing contact with the common clay. Fastidiously attired in Edwardian style, sporting top hat, tails, and white gloves, he allowed himself the small sartorial excesses of the would-be dandy. He was given to modest coughs, and had a smile that broke just beyond nature into insincerity. There was a serious point to his elegance; he wore his ambitions on a brocaded vest. Here was a steward: efficient, respected, trusted, and true…. reading of the letter was restrained, leisured, and logical. He was a calm man reasoning his way to ridicule, and he held onto dignity a little while longer, which made his eventual fall a little more painful. Our laughter was insured, however, by his insufferable conceit. When he spoke the line "Jove, I thank thee," he thought of himself as addressing an equal.

Marceli Rosenblatt's Maria was more Olivia's gentlewoman than her chambermaid. Diminutive and fiercely loyal, she would interpose herself between her lady and dangers like Malvolio. Gracious, sane, and substantial, with a touch of effervescence, she was the sparkling club soda, if you will, to her lady's darker wine. She was a friend and future wife to Sir Toby and not … his mere brawling mate. Her comic timing was first-rate, heightened by understatement. Instead of yelling in an obvious and guttural way, "He's in yellow stockings," she allowed herself a degree of seriousness that recoiled into extended laughter as she broke into a grin…. 

On a very different level was Colin Stinton's Feste. He can be best described in a bit of staging. After Malvolio has insulted the revelers in the "kitchen" scene, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria plot their revenge. Feste has no lines at this point, for Shakespeare seems to have overlooked the exit. Feste's duration in the scene is thus open to interpretation, and some directors have kept him on the stage asleep. Mamet keeps him there awake with telling results. Feste sits apart listening to the plot, and does not approach the rest until Maria's "and let the fool make a third." His silent presence offers an unobtrusive witness to the festivity, and
simultaneously makes a fine character point. Feste can be played as the secret keeper of hard truths, and his silence here contributed to that aura of private knowledge and existence. Since his singing could hold the stage unaccompanied, and his speech had the precision and command of wit, Stinton was also funny and touching. When Sir Toby and Sir Andrew departed to continue their carousing, they left this modern Feste alone working a crossword puzzle.

Finally, Lindsay Crouse. Her Viola was, I think, the spirit of the Circle Repertory's *Twelfth Night*. When playing Cesario, she did not insist on reminding us that she was a woman, or try to play at being a man before Olivia. She played the passion of the verse instead, and stressed the truth of feeling within the sexual role. Her playing was reinforced by some shrewd staging. For example, as Viola, she responded to the Sea Captain's kindness by placing her hand on his knee in a gesture of reciprocal warmth (I. ii); as Cesario, she echoed the gesture by placing her hand on Orsino's knee (II. iv). In this way the human being shone through the particular instance of disguise, a disguise which, in any event, was rendered less restricting when viewed against the multitude of "disguises" on stage. The approach made Olivia's response to Cesario credible. Olivia was not falling in love with a woman dressed as a man; she was falling in love with another passionate human being. During the "willow cabin" speech, for instance, Olivia approached tears and paused before saying in a hushed whisper, "you might do much." With Orsino, Crouse simply expressed a restrained love which he could take as friendship and which we could see as more. The ease of the performance was a pleasure, and it was sane for today.

The image of Lindsay Crouse that remains is of her gaze. It was unsentimental, clear-eyed, and brave. It was searching…. Mamet and company took us to a new realm of experience: Shakespeare's land of Illyria.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Production:**

**PRODUCTION:**

John Caird • RSC • 1983-84

**BACKGROUND:**

Caird's 1983-84 production with the RSC was viewed by the majority of critics as the summation of the twentieth-century preoccupation with the play's melancholy. As Irving Wardle stated, "quite a deal of poison has been seeping into this play … but John Caird's production is the first I have seen that projects *Twelfth Night* as an all-out dark comedy." Set in the Jacobean period, the production accentuated a sense of decay and confinement by employing a ruined garden, rusting gates, and a mortuary chapel as components of the set designs. For many commentators, the strengths of this revival were the musical score of liona Sekacz and the performances of the principal actors. Nicholas Shrimpton hailed Gemma Jones's Maria as "the most original piece of characterization in the production … this was a high-spirited, horsey girl from a country background, now living in reduced circumstances as a paid companion." Additionally, Emrys James's Malvolio was praised for its fresh power by several critics. Richard Findlater asserted "this Malvolio is odious, even dangerous, in his moment of naked triumph, taken with splendid comic brio, and nakedly hurt in his hour of humiliation." Mirroring the bittersweet texture of the production, Zoë Wanamaker won favorable reviews for what Shrimpton characterized as her "touching, husky, gamine of a Viola, capable of shrewd comic touches." Despite its sombre tone, the production as a whole was well received by both critics and audiences. Christopher Edwards maintained that it was "a triumph of stagecraft, of acting and direction." The cast additionally included Miles Anderson as Orsino, Daniel Massey as Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Richard O'Callaghan as Feste, Sara Berger as Olivia, and John Thaw as Sir Toby Belch.

**COMMENTARY:**
Irving Wardle (review date 21 April 1983)


Quite a deal of poison has been seeping into this play over the past few years, but John Caird's production is the first I have seen that projects *Twelfth Night* as an all-out dark comedy.

This is good news not only for jaded old spectators who have seen the piece too often. There is a limit to the amount of fun that can be extracted from the drinking scene and permutations of Malvolio's letter in a play that was never more than intermittently uproarious. And there is everything to be said for muting the comedy for once and giving full attention to the central matter of the illusions and frenzies of love.

Illyria in this version contracts to a love shrine. Robin Don (making his Stratford debut) offers a gloomy rock-strewn promontory flanked by an overgrown gateway to Olivia's estate and surmounted by the bare ruined boughs of a towering tree. Here the obsessed Orsino is permanently encamped: and the only modification for the other scenes is the withdrawal of the gate. The air is filled with the surge of the sea and melancholy sea music (by Ilona Sekacz), sometimes projecting an atmosphere of heart-break, sometimes swelling into operatic violence as for the first appearance of the shipwrecked Viola.

What emerges in this setting is a tragicomedy of erotic errors. All those involved in it are possessed and hurried on to a fate over which they have no control. Mr Caird's company show most of the character, even the lucky ones, to be mismatched. There could be no more hopeless union than that between John Thaw's swaggering, bullying Toby and Gemma Jones's Maria, not a merry prankster but a prim household official, every bit as status-conscious as Malvolio, who characteristically dusts the tree stump before sitting down.

Sir Andrew is obviously a non-stater, but that news would be wasted on Daniel Massey, his face breaking into pathetically eager smiles at every sight of the icy Olivia. As for Olivia herself she speaks for all the others in her lines on catching the plague.

Sarah Berger plays her as a sharp-featured heiress to whom disdain comes easily, who is then reduced to naked vulnerable desire; and when she intervenes in the duel (Toby just having landed Sebastian a blow in the groin) she falls on the aggressor fists flailing and pummelling him to the ground.

Most pitiful of all is Emry James's Malvolio a strutting velvet uniformed grotesque who sheds all his self-love once his mistress seems to be within reach, and finally appears before her to put simple half-broken questions. When he gets his cruel answer, he bows respectfully to the company and only screams his last line after making a dignified exit. And it is no threat of revenge, simply an explosion of intolerable pain.

As one of the few who benefit from the happy wrack, Zoe Wannamaker's Viola is at a disadvantage in a show that reserves its main sympathy or the losers. Her Viola, blank-faced and inwardly suffering, encompasses lyricism and fun, but never takes over the emotional centre.

Of the non-lovers, the most interesting is Richard O'Callaghan's Feste. We have grown used to seeing Feste as the soul of *Twelfth Night*, but Mr O'Callaghan presents him as a razor sharp and spiteful observer of the surrounding follies: making a living out of them, and cherishing grievances with a real zest for revenge. The Topaz scene is the ugliest I can remember—even with the comic addition of the real Sir Topaz wandering bewildered over the back on his way to marry Sebastian to Olivia.

The set finally comes into its own at the news of the marriage and Orsino's (Miles Anderson) attempts to sacrifice Cesario. The madness is such that at that moment the shrine almost does become a sacrificial altar. As it happens, there is marriage instead of death, but as the nuptual parties take their leave there is a crash of
thunder and Feste begins his song in the pouring rain.

**James Fenton (review date 24 April 1983)**


So, *Twelfth Night* (RSC Stratford) is, in fact a revenge play, in which the Clown's resentment of Malvolio provides the pivotal theme. Sir Toby Belch is the kind of bluff fellow whose bluffness is a cover for considerable nastiness. When things get out of hand, lives are not merely threatened—they are in real danger. Both the weather and the time of day are hable to change abruptly, just as love may turn to hate or the dead be restored to life, to the terror of their loved ones.

It is a reading which makes a virtue of what is often taken to be merely a worrying appendix to the piece—the unresolved resentment of Malvolio. When Emrys James delivers his last line, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you", from the wings, he rather makes one believe that in any sequel to the piece the revenge would be as out of proportion to the insult as the Clown's retaliation has been.

The Clown (Richard O'Callaghan) is only once given his name, Feste, and it is worth, considering him as a type rather than an individual in order to test the production's hypothesis. Most clowns get insulted pretty liberally in Shakespeare, and most seem to bear their insults pretty well. This one, exceptionally, takes grave exception. Malvolio in the First Act calls him a rascal, and points out to Olivia that unless she encourages him he tends to run out of gags.

Perhaps it is the professional nature of the insult which rankles. At any rate, Mr O'Callaghan conceals his hurt behind a dry manner and a gentle, unforced delivery of his lines. He bides his time, and while he does so his behaviour must be for the audience something of an enigma. The enigma is solved as soon as the Clown has Malvolio at his mercy. Then his behaviour becomes quite vigorously horrible. Playing the exorcist with a hand-bell, he goes to extreme lengths to convince Malvolio that he is possessed of the devil. Mr James has previously held the stage as a man of absurd pretentions. He emerges from the confines of his prison in a state of extreme shock. The society which the play's director, John Caird, has depicted, is one which will not scruple to kick a man when he is down.

The Clown tells Malvolio why he has had his revenge, and in the last song (the music is largely new, set by Ilona Sekacz) tells us why he is vengeful. When he was a child, he was greeted with indulgence. But when he grew up, he found that, being a knave and a thief, he was an outcast. At the time of his marriage, he learnt that he could not make his living as a bully. So he took to drink.

This is, or appears to be, what the song says. The wind and the rain of the refrain are an invitation to the sound effects which Mr Caird so generously employs. The whole tendency of the production is towards a consistent increase in dramatic tension.

Obviously the trick could not be pulled off merely on the basis of a strong reading of Malvolio and the Clown. After all, the centre of the comedy is Viola, and the main matter of the piece is the tale of mistaken sexual identity. The story is a romance in which the sea miraculously yields up its dead alive, and in which love is a magic element. But there is nothing mere about this magic. Viola learns in the course of the play what both sides of unrequited love are like.

The programme, which offers none of the usual critical gobbets, is strewn with Shakespearean sonnets—a gentle way of reminding the audience that the telling of such a romance is a way, for Shakespeare, of talking about love as experienced in his world, and indeed in ours. The richness of Viola's experience, the ambiguity of Orsino's feeling towards her, the pain she must undergo in her dealings with the doting Olivia—everything
requires a most truthful kind of acting. The romance is really a mechanism to bring you up against the harsh truth.

For me, the decisive moment in Zoë Wanamaker's performance as Viola came when, reunited with Sebastian, she showed her deep fear that her drowned brother had returned as a ghost to frighten her. She had suffered enough already, and now, on top of everything, the spirit world was playing an unforgivable trick, trifling inexcusably with her deepest feelings of loss and grief.

Miss Wanamaker is a richly gifted comic actress, with a pert and eloquent nose and the ability to raise a laugh through the most modest twitch of her body or inflection of her voice. Secure in this ability, she concentrates upon the sad truth of Viola's experience. She truly makes us feel.

Orsino is played by Miles Anderson, with ease, authority and a beautiful voice. The household of Olivia (Sarah Berger) consists of John Thaw as the strikingly nasty Sir Toby Belch, Daniel Massey, cleverly cast against expectations as the loopy, passive and very funny Aguecheek, and Gemma Jones, who strains perhaps a little to contain her great gifts within the role of Maria.

Robin Don's set, evidence of the way in which Stratford designers are now diverging stylistically, provides a rocky hillside and the largest box tree I have ever seen (an Illyrian species, of course). The fights by Malcolm Ranson look, as usual, very dangerous.

Ann Pasternak Slater (review date 6 May 1983)


John Caird's production of Twelfth Night opens in an atmosphere of brooding impasse. Torpid thunder rumbles intermittently, achieving downpour only at the play's end—cued by Feste's "The rain it raineth every day". A sapless tree of wrinkled polystyrene overhangs the stage. Barren rascals and dry fools roister and languish beneath it, or climb its leafless branches. It dominates both the action and the programme notes. Evidently it symbolizes the fruitless love-quests in the play, where Aguecheek loves Olivia who loves Viola/Cesario who loves Orsino who loves Olivia—a neat little one-way system of Cupid's arrows, designed to keep characters and audience going round in circles. Only time can release us from the irrational directives of the heart: "What else may hap to time I will commit", says Viola towards the end of her first scene, sounding a dominant motif which she echoes later ("O time! Thou most untangle this, not I;/It is too hard a knot for me t'untie").

However, the whirligig of time brings in its revenges most pointedly on Malvolio, and it is Emrys James's Malvolio who is at the centre of this production. With justice, he takes the final solo bow and, indeed, the other players emerge as the merest weak echoes of his misguided, elephantine passion. His transformations are sillier, he suffers greater degradation, and exits (in the Lamb tradition) with the greatest pathos. The folly of love is embodied in him most grotesquely, but all the other lovers are touched with madness too. Olivia, for instance, is quickly proved mad for mourning her brother; later she admits baldly enough that she is as mad as Malvolio. Sebastian, too, constantly mistaken for Cesario, and set upon, comments: "Are all the people mad … ?" Yet, when he is propositioned by Olivia, a perfect stranger, he accepts the offer on hardly firmer grounds than Malvolio, saying, "Or I am mad …. Malvolio's mad pretensions are significantly modified in our minds by this fortuitous match and it is a virtue of John Caird's production that this parallel and others are brought out so dearly.

Failure to engage, embrace, or even understand is underlined in the fatuous non-encounter between Aguecheek and Viola/Cesario. Their fight (brilliantly arranged by Malcolm Ranson) is a hilarious parody—of a fight and of the events of the main plot. The contestants flourish their weapons, discard appropriately limp
sheaths, grunt a great deal in Japanese style—yet come to no firm conclusions. Other equally good vignettes underline the burden of the play. liona Secacz's fine setting of "O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?" is at once beautiful and tinged with absurdity, as Aguecheek and Sir Toby add their muted, maudlin chorus. The atmosphere of painfully pointless infatuation recurs when Orsino listens to Feste singing "Come away, come away, death". He lies with his head in the startled Viola's lap—visibly suffering, laughably pathetic.

In this careful production the play's homosexual subtext also emerges unexpectedly poignantly. It is plain enough in Antonio's pursuit of Sebastian, and, mistakenly, of Viola/Cesario. But Caird also contrives to bring out (more clearly than any reading of the text could achieve) the harshness of Viola's assertion to Olivia. As the boy Cesario, she says, "I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,/ And that no woman has, nor never none shall mistress be of it." For a moment, it sounds like a passionate vow of homosexual celibacy and we are precipitated into a darker, less comically tractable world, in which amorous impasse is finally insoluble. Once again, too, this theme of unrequited barren love is reiterated in the programme's lavish quotations from the Sonnets.

Yet if this makes the production sound over-schematic—a diagram of futility—one should add that the comic business is brilliantly staged in a pleasingly unbusy way. Emrys James's strangled attempts to vocalize the inconveniently arranged initials, MOAI, into something remotely resembling Malvolio is very funny. The cross-garters are excellent, too: not much to look at in the way of sartorial extravagance, but evidently tight as a tourniquet, they cause Malvolio to punctuate his sentences with unpredictable winces, little semicolons of sciatica, in all the wrong places. His final exit is also well-managed: dignified, dirty, discomfited, he bows stiffly and silently to an embarrassed court. Off-stage, we hear his shouted threat of revenge—a sad display of l'esprit de l'escalier he could not otherwise afford to risk.

Daniel Massey's Aguecheek is another excellent performance. Sheepish, pouchy-eyed, his upper lip an unbut-toned flap, doggily ambling, he has a vivid tic of tentatively touching back his dead straw hair. In fact, Malvolio and "the lighter people" dominate the evening, and you leave the theatre wondering, with a mild surmise, why you had ever thought Orsino and Olivia such important characters. Unfortunately this isn't entirely a function of the play's structure. Orsino (Miles Anderson) is best when he speaks little and confines himself to looking ugly and miserable. Olivia (Sarah Berger) looks beautiful, wilful and imperious, but her verse-speaking is nervous and unnatural. Shakespeare is partly to blame, though; he does badly by both of them in the last act. Only a natural could make "A sister! you are she" sound natural, and little can extract the jingle from "I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love / To spite a raven's heart within a dove". Viola (Zoë Wanamaker) has also caught some of the Stratford vocal mannerisms, but improves as a pert little Cesario with credibly ambivalent attractions. The set is steeped in atmosphere, but there are too many fussy alterations to indicate different locations. The sky, too, is unnecessarily well-endowed with a selection of swirling clouds, sunsets, crescent moon, lightning, and an extraordinarily crowdy Plough. David Hersey's lighting is equally busy—hurrying the audience through a bewildering scurry of nights and days with little evident logic or justification.

But not all the theatrical dressing is over-intrusive. One piece of non-Shakespearian business seems to epitomize Caird's reading of the play. When Olivia sends her ring after Viola, Viola hangs it on the tree that dominates the stage. It hangs there, the only fruit, till the play ends. As thunder breaks and the rain falls. Feste plucks it, singing pointedly. "A foolish thing was but a toy". In this sombre production love is, in Larkin's words, a "wrangle for a ring"—a foolish thing, a toy for a fool to play with.

Richard Findlater (review date July 1983)

After six years with the RSC John Caird, one of its four resident directors has staged his first major production in the main Stratford house; and it is surely a good augury for the future that this is an all-round success in an older Avonside tradition. No gimmicky sound scores, fancy dress or constructivist sets: not a hint of agitprop or alienation; no gabbling or garbling of the text; no patronising of the characters in the play. Here be, in profusion, clear voices, lush feelings, rich sunsets, starry skies, storm light, moonlight, and the light of true Shakespearian romance. Everything happens near the sea where it all started, whose murmur we sometimes hear, and whose imminence we sense. A rocky path winds down from a mid-stage horizon to the shelter of a vast autumnal box-tree whose tangled branches, writhing upwards towards the flies, make convenient hiding places for 'the lighter people'. At its base lolls Orsino, fathoms deep in love with love, in the opening scene; and here, at the end, Feste curls up with his revenge. On the left are wrought iron gates to Olivia's house. A Cupid / Eros may be seen on one of the tall, leaf-wreathed pillars. This looks, from the first, as if it might be Illyria; with premonitory wisps of 'the wind in the rain' in the subtly pervasive music, it sounds like Illyria; and before the cast have been long at work, we know that we are there to stay.

John Caird's production combines reality with romance, visual pleasure with psychological insight, a respect for the text with a flair for theatrical effect which does not disdain the obvious, and it shows a fine company at their level best. It projects the authentic pain behind the games and deceptions of the key characters, but never permits a misplaced loyalty to realism to scrape the bloom from the bitter sweet lyric artifice. It uncovers the play's darkness without stilling its fun. With the help of Robin Don's set, Alix Stone's costumes and David Hersey's lighting it satisfies the eye as well as the mind and the heart. The pleasures of the play's language are not overwhelmed by Ilona Sekacz's music, and the songs—carefully and tunefully sung by Richard O'Callaghan as Feste—are given the right simple settings. There are perceptive reinterpretations of social context (like Maria's determination to soar out of her class by marrying her mistress's uncle) and unfussy inventions of comic business (like Sir Andrew's sudden horrified embroilment in the fight between Sebastian and Sir Toby).

Two prime reasons why Twelfth Night comes alive yet again with such fresh power lie in the performances of Emrys James as Malvolio and Richard O'Callaghan as Feste. This Malvolio is odious, even dangerous, in his moment of imagined triumph, taken with splendid comic brio, and nakedly hurt in his hour of humiliation: I shall long remember that last, lacerating hesitation in venturing a half smile at Olivia before he makes his final exit. A moustached, ear ringed, sardonically assured and almost piratical Richard O'Callaghan achieves his debut in Shakespearian repertory with an unforced mastery of his role: he imbues Feste with that inescapable here-and-now humanity, that existential presence, for which optimists wait patiently in vain from all too many classical productions. In this one, optimists will be exceptionally lucky. High praise to Daniel Massey, for his clumsy (and very funny) Sir Andrew, a smiling, gentle innocent at large: John Thaw, whose strong, callous, and resonant Sir Toby shakes off sentimental stereotypes; and Zoe Wanamaker, a pertly resilient Viola who makes up for her lack of vocal music by her abundance of comic intelligence and emotional truth. Bouquets are also due to Miles Anderson's Orsino; Christopher Neame's Antonio; Gemma Jones's Maria; and to Sarah Berger, an icily beautiful Olivia whose sudden thaw by the unrequiting Cesario is, like her treatment of the deluded Malvolio, surprisingly and winningly plausible.

Robin Don's set creates a few obvious anomalies. The buttery revels seem to happen alfresco like everything else in Illyria which makes nonsense of Maria's threat that she will turn the carousers out of doors; and it is inconceivable that a man like Malvolio would sally out of the Countess's house in his nightgown to venture forth down a rocky path in quest of Sir Toby and his fellow boozers.

I have a few other tentative quarrels with Mr Caird's production. Socially this Feste is, I feel, just a bit too conspicuously his own man even for an all licensed Shakespearean Fool. And my one reservation about Emrys James's Malvolio is that the full impact of that final cry I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' is lost by being shouted off stage (in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Olivier). Still, if Malvolio had to do it in full view of the audience, they might well have missed that final look at the Countess.
John Caird's reading of *Twelfth Night* was extremely serious, especially in interpreting the lovers. Instead of quoting the usual tedious contemporary parallels and literary criticism, the program printed fourteen of the Sonnets, including sonnet 20, about the "master-mistress of my passion." Orsino spoke his first scene slowly and weightily; his obsession with Olivia might have seemed an affection to his lethargic courtiers, but was real enough to him. So was Olivia's grief for her brother, although this did not prevent her from accepting with a good grace Feste's proof that she was a fool to mourn for her brother's soul being in heaven, a point neatly underlined when she put on his fool's cap and he her mourning veil.

Viola was distracted with grief for her brother, but a warm light came up on her as she resolved to "serve this duke." She had obviously had an immediate impact on Orsino, for his next entry was not lethargic but vigorous, attended by halberdiers. Strong, clear light, as if to underline a moment of truth and genuine relationship, came up on Orsino and Viola as they listened to "Come away, death": Orsino lay with his head in Viola's lap, nuzzling her thigh; she was agitated, afraid to respond in her page's guise. "A blank my lord" was intense and desperate rather than bittersweet, and she broke down in tears at the thought that she might be "all the brothers" of her father's house; Orsino caught her in his arms to console her, so that she had to use "shall I to this lady?" to break free. He, for his part, spat out "Ay, that's the theme" almost wearily; he was tired of pursuing the countess and frustrated because he couldn't have the page instead.

The seriousness in the first half became violence in the second. Olivia actually struck Malvolio for his presumption in the cross-garters scene, as Maria foretold that she might, something I cannot remember ever seeing before; and as Maria also foretold, Malvolio took it "for a great favor." The duels were very extended and very violent, with vicious blows to the groin: Viola accidentally nicked Sir Andrew, but Sir Toby deliberately and repeatedly kicked Sebastian, thus provoking Olivia to strike him again and again. The atmosphere became so dark, and the rhythms so sluggish, in Feste's interrogation of Malvolio (imprisoned down a well) and at Malvolio's exit, that the production almost broke down altogether: after bowing dutifully to his lady and to his duke, Malvolio left the stage and bawled "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you" from the wings. The circumstantial detail in Viola's meeting with Sebastian ("My father had a mole upon his brow" and so on) was not a delighted savoring of the joys of reunion, but a genuine wish to establish the truth, arising from a real fear that Sebastian might indeed be a spirit "come to fright us." The pent-up tensions between Viola and Orsino were released in a final impassioned kiss between Orsino and the master-mistress of his passion—at which there was a tremendous clap of thunder and a flash of lighting, heralding the rain which accompanied Feste's final song.

This was not a production for half-tones, for bringing out the mixture of sweetness and sadness, laughter and tears, in the play. Zoë Wanamaker was a grave Viola, with real tears in her eyes at the end, not so much "smiling at grief" as overwhelmed by it. Both she and Miles Anderson as Orsino spoke eloquently of their passions and frustrations, but Sarah Berger's attractive, clearly-spoken Olivia, like several other members of the cast, could make no headway against the cumbersomely Elizabethan costumes and the stifling realism of the set. The resonances established by the Sonnets in the program—"Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?" and "Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye"—might have echoed on the stage itself in a more airy, spacious setting that allowed the play room to breathe. Gemma Jones's Maria was genteel rather than a "gentlewoman," anxiously trying to please Sir Toby. Emrys James (Malvolio) had been more suitably cast as Feste at Stratford in 1969; here he simply borrowed Donald Sinden's effects from that version (pronouncing "M.O.A.I." as a complete word, showing the audience the letter, and so on) without a hint of the masterly use to which Sinden put them. In the early scenes, this was at odds with the seriousness of the production; in the later ones, his sobbing and shameless playing for sympathy embodied its excesses.
Christopher Edwards (review date 1 September 1984)


John Caird's production of Twelfth Night is a delight. It is a triumph of stagecraft, of acting and direction; interestingly it is a triumph despite its own melancholy view of Shakespeare's comedy. Gone, probably for good, is the idea that the Comedies can be played as if they were regions of warmth and sunshine. The knowledge of Shakespeare's dramatic career as a whole seems to oblige the director to hold in view the tragedies and 'dark comedies' that lie ahead whose shadows must be seen to fall across the earlier work. In Stratford the harshness of this production seemed almost wilful, as if Caird had taken literally the acerbic view put out by Auden that 'Shakespeare was in no mood for comedy'. On its transfer down to London the bitterness and discomfort are there still, but they have been allowed to mellow. The mood of comedy prevails, albeit in a minor key.

Robin Don's set keeps boldly in step with Caird's interpretation. Orsino's and Olivia's palaces are perched on the rocky edge of a stormy Illyrian sea-board, fringed with ruined columns, and dominated centre-stage by the looming withered tentacles of a huge box tree. Viola enters pursued by storm, as the skies and seas behind her writhe in flashing yellows and greys, and Iona Sekacz's apocalyptic strings and percussions erupt above. This talented composer's incidental music is always arresting, even if you take the view that chamber music ought not to be made to fight intergalactic battles with quite such abandon. Her searing dissonances, laid over pleasing string harmonies, sometimes blot out the mood carefully created by the actors and verse. That said, Feste's melodies are nicely wrought, and the original 'hey-ho the wind and the rain' theme is subtly threaded through much of the evening's music as a running motif.

The cast is strong, and includes a virile Miles Anderson as love-sick Orsino, and Zoe Wanamaker as Viola. Stephen Moore's Sir Toby Belch is a burly bully of a knight, designed to repel sympathy. The scenes with Daniel Massey's wonderfully credulous sot of a Sir Andrew Ague-cheek provide some of the funniest and most humane comedy I've seen from the RSC, in particular the wild midnight abandon as they dance accelerando to the utterly misnamed catch 'Hold Thy Peace'. Gemma Jones too gives a performance of the highest calibre as Maria—genteel, mischievous, an honorary chap and a true sporting beagle. However, Caird never lets high spirits in without a corrective dose of the caustic, and in this respect Richard O'Callaghan's Feste is the prevailing mordant spirit of the evening. O'Callaghan scorns the wistful zany put forward by Bradley; he has no illusions, and no heart either. He provides an excellent study of bitter fastidious poise but, of a sudden, touches a note of sad humanity in his wind and rain song, cowering pathetically into a crevice of the tree like an abandoned waif as the storm blows in again to close the play.

As with Shylock, the treatment of Malvolio is a question of focus rather than interpretation. There is no avoiding the cruelty of his gulling, and I cannot think of a single production which has underplayed the ugliness of the Sir Topas scene where he is treated as a madman. The decision, for modern sensibilities, is whether we should just sympathise with him as a victim, or take a robust view of the whole thing. It is surely important to show that, as a petty-minded bureaucrat, thick with self-love, Malvolio is repellent to himself and opposed to the good things in life, to the jollity and revelry represented by Sir Toby Belch. In other words Malvolio is wrong and deserves to suffer. John Caird doesn't share this view as Sir Toby is never allowed to get away with just being funny; his savagery and self-regard are underlined too and we are invited to side with Sir Andrew when Sir Toby rejects him at the end. The good things in life are not just fugitive, they are tainted as well.

For different reasons this is not the view shared by the actor Emrys James either. James plays Malvolio as an absurd, suffering all the loathsome features to be comically exaggerated until the character becomes almost lovably silly. He runs with a ridiculous springing motion and pompously sniffs the air about him with the cartoon expression of a self-righteous mole. All this is well done, but in the letter scene James suddenly enrols
in the Derek Jacobi school of self-indulgent campery and turns this important exposé of his character into a virtuoso turn. It is an appeal to the audience's affections and succeeds in cocooning him from our contempt. Up in the box tree Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian rattle the branches in indignation at Malvolio's fantasies of preferment, but the result is one-sided and moralistic; Malvolio is not punished by an objective code of values, his incarceration appears vicious tout court. What is more, his departing howl, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you', disturbs the harmonious resolution at the end. This, of course, is the intention; there is no harmony. Orsino finds Viola, and Olivia Sebastian, but they no longer enjoy the sanction of the world of romantic comedy; the knot of marriage guarantees nothing in Shakespeare's bitter Arcadia.

Sheridan Morley (review date October 1984)


Ever since Derek Jacobi's Cyrano spent the last act of that great production trying to keep his head above a sea of fallen leaves, the RSC has been obsessed by autumnal melancholy. Twelfth Night which has now come to the Barbican from last year at Stratford (with a couple of major casting changes) does admittedly begin to approach winter, but not the winter of indoor and jovial court charades generally suggested by the title. Instead the lights go up on Robin Don's wonderful set to reveal a bleak and wind-swept cliff-top with, at left, a huge wrought-iron gate from behind which you half-expect to see emerge not the gently mournful Olivia but instead the Baron Frankenstein or at the very least Mrs Danvers with news that Manderley is on fire at last.

The director John Caird has found here one of the late and barren travelogues rather than one of the early comedies: a Tempest or a Cymbeline rather than a mistaken-twin farce like Comedy of Errors, and in this the text very often bears him out. Moreover the casting of Miles Anderson as Orsino gives us from the very beginning of the play an indication of the way things are going: not the usual lovelorn prince but a grown-up Peter Pan, a character of strange obsessional love for men and women camped permanently outside the gate of a sinister never-never land. A melancholy God does indeed watch over this production, suggesting that Illyria is a lost kingdom to which have been sent the world's misfits, people nice enough in themselves but totally unable to relate coherently to anyone or anything around them.

Thus Daniel Massey's Aguecheek is not the usual wittering fool but a failed song-and-dance man forever trying to get his act together in front of an audience unable to work out what he really wants to achieve: Stephen Moore's Toby Belch has yet to settle in (Moore is replacing John Thaw in the Stratford original) but also suggests something altogether rare—a thin, intelligent fellow hoping that maybe there will be a party after all. Zoe Wanamaker is a marvellously touching and convincing urchin-Viola, Joanne Pearce (also new casting) a blandly imperious Olivia and Richard O'Callaghan an intriguingly ambivalent Feste, gentle enough until he gets the chance to turn the screws on Emrys James's manic Malvolio.

But the true star of this production, apart from Don's ruined-temple setting, is Liona Sekacz whose score soars through the Barbican underlining the play's themes of shipwreck and imprisonment. It is brave to have Malvolio's final cry for revenge played offstage, braver still to have Viola and Sebastian (Nigel Cooke) make not the faintest attempt to look like identical twins: those, you feel, are not in Mr Caird's view the issues at the heart of a play which emerges here as a matching set of personal tragedies. Only at the last, and largely by accident, do people start to get what they really want and even then it looks to me as though they may soon be going to discover that they don't want it after all. Is Olivia really going to be happy with a monosyllabic refugee like Sebastian? Is Orsino really going to settle down with a wife who was infinitely sexier when disguised as a man? Already we are starting to drift back to Peter Pan and not, I suspect, entirely by accident: this may not always have been a play about the impossibility of sex, but Mr Caird has successfully turned it into one about a group of exiles who can support anything except reality.

Nicholas Shrimpton (review date 1984)
The set [of Twelfth Night] was part ruined garden, part graveyard. A vast autumnal tree overshadowed (for Orsino's court) a pair of rusting gates and (for Olivia's house) a mortuary chapel. Sarah Berger's black-gowned Olivia was ostentatiously in mourning for her dead brother, while Miles Anderson gave us an appropriately violent, sombre, and austere Orsino. Fabian was an old man, Feste a pensive intellectual.

Malvolio apart, the other clowns were correspondingly subdued. Daniel Massey played a gawky but soft-hearted Aguecheek, afflicted by fits of depression and easily moved to tears. John Thaw, as Toby Belch, was an upper-class thug, hearty rather than jovial, more cruel than comic. The drunk scenes were very drunk indeed and the uproar so uproarious that it could only be curtailed by blasts on Maria's pocket whistle.

As that detail suggests, Gemma Jones's Maria was the most original piece of characterization in the production. She was as tall as her mistress and substantially taller than Viola, so the references to her as a 'wren' and a 'giant' went for nothing. But her lanky elegance gave the clue to her social role. This was a high-spirited, horsey girl from a county background, now living in reduced circumstances as a paid companion. Part games-mistress, part romp, her worship for this Flashman of a Sir Toby was pure reversion to type.

Zoë Wanamaker was a touching, husky, gamine of a Viola, capable of shrewd comic touches (a wild shriek of panic on 'She loves me', for example) but very much in tune with the pervasive melancholy of the production. 'I am all the daughters of my father's house' reduced her to tears and prompted a disturbing cuddle from her handsome master. Unfortunately her Olivia was not up to her weight. Rushed and sometimes squeaky, Sarah Berger's lack of subtlety significantly reduced the erotic tension of their interviews.

Malvolio's extravagance of manner had a similar effect on his exchanges with Sir Toby. 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' was delivered with great weight and force, but to such a fool of a steward that the clash between profligacy and puritanism remained elusive. Emrys James's interpretation of Malvolio involved a great deal of comic biz ('If this fall into thy hand, revolve'—spins round on the spot). The audience clearly adored it. But he and Olivia between them gave an oddly coarse-grained effect to what was otherwise a memorably picturesque, sensitive and sad production.

**Zoë Wanamaker (essay date 1988)**


In the following essay, Wanamaker discusses her performance as Viola in John Caird's Production of Twelfth Night.

I had played Viola some ten years before John Caird's Stratford production of Twelfth Night, in a version directed by Richard Cotterill for the Cambridge Theatre Company. The sense (the constant sense in doing Shakespeare) that that version had not come up to expectations left me, however, quite ready to accept a second invitation to attempt the part. I had been in the Stratford company only once before, in 1978, mainly to play in new work at The Other Place (Piaf and Captain Swing) though I had been on the main stage as Bianca in Michael Bogdanov's production of The Taming of the Shrew. Now I was back, dauntingly, for two major Shakespearean roles, Adriana in The Comedy of Errors, and Viola.
To undertake a major role at Stratford is to be haunted by the past. As you go into the Royal Shakespeare Theatre you are faced with twelve-foot high pictures of other actors who have done other performances of your part, and their history and their triumphs loom over you: 'Follow that!' It's like coming to Mecca; the ghosts are all around and the fear of failure is very great. Having been brought up through the sixties when new work by new writers was the prime objective in my kind of theatre, the thought of speaking Shakespeare's verse on the Stratford stage was inevitably frightening.

This sense of insecurity remained when the production opened. Was I speaking the text as it should be spoken, was I being true to it, to the production, to the character? After a year in Stratford, a year of struggle to be relaxed in the role and yet to keep it fresh, we moved to London, to the Barbican, where, with some modifications to the set and alterations to Viola's costume (and some cast changes too, including a new Olivia and a new Sir Toby), and some new ideas that I had been mulling over during the break, I found myself much more confident in the words and began to enjoy myself in the part. Confidence in the text as a springboard, an innate sense of not having to think about the words or about saying them right, these things allowed the play to become a conversation in which I was at home, to become organic. But a year to find that sense is a long time.

The basic aim of John Caird's production was to focus on the pain of love. *Twelfth Night* deals with many kinds of love: Viola's, the most pure, constant as the sea is constant, the sea that gives her her life, and her brother his, and her brother back to her; Malvolio's love, self-deluding, ultimately self-centred; Olivia's love of mourning, for her father and, reflecting Viola, for her brother; Orsino's adoring love, which puts woman on a pedestal; Antonio's faithful, painful love of Sebastian; Maria's dogged love of Sir Toby; Sir Toby's love of wasting time; each character disguising the truth about himself and from himself. The play is a fairly simple one, really, a story about time, about growing up and growing old. It has the concentrated quality of a chamber piece, and its form is a complete circle, a point we tried to mark in our production, which began with the sounds of storm and rain and ended with Feste singing of them as these sounds returned. Illyria seems to be a place that is frozen in time, where the social order is locked, where self-delusion, disguise, and hierarchy create an impasse for the people who live with them. And then Viola arrives and her presence disturbs everyone and moves the play through chaos and at last into seeming harmony but with that last strange coda of Feste's song, and Malvolio still locked in self-delusion, disguised even to himself. The catalyst, the driving force of the play is Viola; and the responsibility of that was on me.

To have played the part before was not helpful, not relevant. I wanted to come to it as a blank sheet of paper, to let it sit in my head while I was reading it, reading it once and just trying to find where my instincts were on that first reading, what my first impressions of the play were, trying to wipe out the old tunes of the way I had done it before. Much of that early reading, too, was for the sounds, the rhythms, the movement of the iambic line, which to me is not instinctive but something I have to work at, a secret code to be penetrated, like music; but for this text, certainly, a wonderful route to the deeper flow of the play—and, indeed, to the simple process of learning the words, which for me (touched with dyslexia) is not an easy process at all. In these early stages I was looking for all the clues I could find about what kind of person Viola is, what other characters say about her, what would happen to the story of the play if she were taken away, but always concentrating on the actual structure of her text, the precise choice of words. I also did a Utile research into the twin syndrome, though time, and the sense that Shakespeare's insistence on brother and sister twins being indistinguishable means that he is not thinking very realistically, left this avenue only partially explored. Rehearsals were, as ever, a tough and arduous search, a fumbling with the labyrinthine twists and turns of the script, a slow process of getting to know the other actors and their ideas, their interpretations of their roles; of argument and discussion and trying to fit it all in and to make the story of these people understandable and the play's ideas, wonderful and extraordinary, clear to an audience.

Eventually we got onto the set, designed by Robin Don and lit by David Hersey, a rocky landscape next to the sea, dominated by a tree, an autumnal-looking tree, its branches fanning out like a sea coral, above and
beyond the proscenium arch. Costumes too were autumnal, in rusts and browns and olives, and traditionally
Elizabethan. From the auditorium it was, I'm told, a very beautiful set, but for us, as we discovered at the
technical rehearsals, there were huge problems, particularly with the terrain. The tree, and the rocky inclines,
left an acting area only a few feet across, and though there was some levelling following the technical
rehearsals, difficulties remained throughout the Stratford season. The set was partly supposed to represent a
sort of nightmare, and the lighting was subdued to give an atmosphere of emotional turmoil, discovery of self,
growing up, but the translation of these concepts into practical stage terms was not without difficulties for us.
It was hard to find your light, and the unevenness of the floor was exacerbated by the eight-inch wide trough
for the safety iron, in which many an ankle was in peril of being turned during the season; getting down from
the top of the rocks at the back was hazardous; and the tree, which had looked so delicate on the model, the
Utile veins of the coral like a lovely leaf-skeleton, had to be made much more substantial because of the need
to dismantle it so often during the season for changes of play in the Stratford repertoire system. All these
things were part of the disappointment (not unusual) of turning initial concepts and ideas into concrete, and
sometimes cumbersome, reality. At the Barbican I think the set worked better, partly, no doubt, because we
were more used to it, but also because the wider stage allowed more room on either side of it, and there was
some more levelling out, and altered lighting. In London I was much happier, too, with my costume, which
had been such a disappointment when I first wore it at the Stratford technical rehearsal. The thick corduroy
trousers and waistcoat, which to me had always seemed lumpy, were changed to a light suede and I found
myself much more relaxed and easy, able to use the pockets. I felt much more like a boy in it, and the sense of
greater ease was increased by cutting my own hair very short and so discarding the wig which had always
bothered me. Audiences, I think, enjoyed the literal quality of the set, the tree, the rocks, and the
thunderstorm, and the music by Ilona Sekacz, beautiful and magical, and the sound of the sea which was ever
present, the giver and taker of life, dark and threatening yet at the same time mysterious and romantic.

The young woman who enters this Illyrian world from the shipwreck I took to be about seventeen or eighteen
years old, brought up with her twin brother Sebastian by their father (their mother is never mentioned in the
play), a man, I felt, of great intelligence and warmth, since her relationship with her brother is so close and
trusting. She has already learned (or inherited) that straightforward common sense, that unclouded attitude to
life, that sense of being a person without prejudice—the qualities that are so wonderful about her. I suspect
that the death of her father has been a great blow to her and that her relationship with her brother is all the
stronger because of it. With him she is taking a summer cruise, we imagined, a tour in the royal yacht, and
then the storm, and separation, and the rocky shore of Illyria, and the memory of her father's talk of Orsino
and the decision to serve him as the sole link with the lost past.

Viola's disguise allows her to know Orsino in a way that would never have been possible otherwise. In three
days he confides everything to this boy, this stranger, something he would never have done to a woman. The
intimacy of confidence disturbs him—and this was something we tried hard to bring out in the
production—the strange love for this boy is something that he cannot understand or explain. Viola is let into
his mind, his confidence, his imagination, in such a way that inevitably she falls in love with him, with this
extraordinary, erudite human being. The strange inevitability of Orsino's love for her was something we
constantly tried to explore. Viola's greatest quality, her directness, is in one sense liberated, in another trapped,
by her disguise, through which Viola not only reveals Orsino to himself, but also discovers herself. In three
days she has 'unclasped the book' of his 'secret soul', has herself fallen desperately in love with him, and now
allows the audience to follow her secret, and to be led through the play observing her journey and the
increasing burden of her hidden love: 'Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife'[I. iv.
41-42]. This sense of Viola entrapped by her disguise intensifies as the play goes forward, increasing the
audience's eagerness for the resolution and Viola's own sense of helplessness. The character who has released
others from self-obsession finds herself imprisoned. But it has been that ability to awaken others that has
created the play. Without her nothing would go forward. Through her clarity, her simplicity, she releases from
self-absorption, from death-obsession, Olivia and Orsino—by confronting them with themselves and what
they are. Into the locked-up stillness of Illyria she brings life, and chaos, and hope; she is the catalyst of the
play, stirring up the place, forcing them all up into a spiral, to wake up, to discuss, to learn about themselves, turning their world upside down. She arrives in Illyria like a life-force: 'What country, friends, is this?'

The moment of Viola's entry changed significantly for me between Stratford and London. I tried to make the audience witness, as it were, to that terrible moment of loss, of parting from someone so close to her as her brother, by introducing a hopeless, helpless scream, almost of an animal, to bring focus immediately onto the pain of this person. In this short scene we see not only the initial pain, but also the positive qualities, her hope, her perception of others, her belief in the power of Time. In listening to the captain's story of Olivia, shutting the door, shunning life, I used to think that this could never happen to Viola, she would never do that, she does not think of men as a threat, emotionally or physically. Life for her is not to be lived behind locked doors. So from the idea of serving Olivia she turns to Orsino, to her memories of her father's talk of him, and then, instinctively, to the idea of disguise. She does not really know who she is—having lost her past she is in search of herself—she does not want to leave the place that provides the only hope of further news of her brother, and there in front of her is (or was in our production) Sebastian's trunk, which has been washed up with her. She opens it and finds his jacket, his doublet, and puts it on. And the smell of it, and the memory of him, means that in some way she keeps alive something of her brother, not just a piece of clothing but part of his soul, and by having that, through some sort of osmosis, the hope that he really is still alive is carried with her, always. 'Conceal me what I am', and her hope begins to flow back and she decides to wait, to trust to Time, to use the confidence and hope that is in her to change the situation. And so from the despair of its opening this little scene moves to its wonderfully optimistic conclusion: 'What else may hap, to time I will commit … Lead me on'[I. ii. 60,64].

The meeting with Olivia, and the 'willow cabin' speech, were always difficult for me, rather like a horse going up to a jump, I used to feel. The scene is a conversation between two women, very different women, though similar in age, Olivia perhaps a little younger than Viola. It is just two women talking and you see the different perceptions of both of them, especially of Viola, who associates very strongly with Olivia's emotions (she too has lost a father and, she fears, a brother) and understands them. The apparent finality of Olivia's 'I cannot love him. / He might have took his answer long ago'[I. v. 262-3] forces Viola into her big wooing speech; she has to make it, she has to do her appointed job, and she just happens to get carried away with it and so applies it to herself. And thus she admits to herself her love for Orsino by saying it out loud to another woman. The springboard for the willow cabin speech is her want, her need, to talk about her own love; it comes from the depth of her own imagination and she gets so carried away with it that she surprises herself. She has reached a new stage of self-awareness by the end of it.

On her way back from Olivia's house she is overtaken by Malvolio with the ring. She recognizes Olivia's motive, her self-delusion, immediately: 'She loves me sure'[II. ii. 22]. What to do with this ring was the source of some discussion during our rehearsals, for it is never given back or referred to again. Eventually it was decided that I should hang it on a twig of the stage tree where it was found again by Feste at the end of the play. (Some members of the audience saw this as further evidence of Feste's secret love for Olivia, which they also thought they discerned at other points in the production.) As far as Viola is concerned, the significance of hanging the ring on the tree was primarily to be rid of something which she cannot accept without compromising herself. She cannot accept the responsibility of that ring, for the love which it implies is not truly given to her, should not be to her, and she does not want it to be to her. So she leaves it there for Time (or whoever) to discover, and with its rediscovery at the end we have the sense of the play coming full circle again. 'Time, thou must untangle this, not I'[II. ii. 40], she says as she takes stock of her situation, not a reckless surrender, but a declaration of trust and faith that Time, or something, is going to make things change. When we reach her next scene, however, her longest conversation with Orsino, she is losing that faith and touching her lowest point in the play.

The conversation between Orsino and Viola after the singing of 'Come away, death' I always felt a wonderfully close scene and an absolutely heartbreaking one. For here are two people in love who should love
each other but cannot do so because one is incapable of seeing through disguises, not just hers but his own. Orsino deludes himself; he is blind about women and how they should be treated; supposes that they cannot be spoken to honestly or share the thoughts and feelings of men. Viola in this scene is, I think, in despair about her situation. All that Orsino says about women is so terrible for her to hear, so mistaken:

\[
\text{no woman's sides}
\]
\[
\text{Can bide the beating of so strong a passion}
\]
\[
\text{As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart}
\]
\[
\text{So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.}
\]

[II. iv. 93-96]

Her reply, I felt, was defensive, and angry—'In faith, they are as true of heart as we'[II. iv. 106]—and the argument that follows catches her almost unawares. 'Ay, but I know’… 'What dost thou know?', and there she is nearly found out; through her unhappiness and frustration she has started into something and she has to explain: 'My father had a daughter lov'd a man’… to explain in the best way that she can … 'as it might be' … she's so close … 'as it might be, perhaps, were I a woman’ … she is so close, so close to saying 'I am a woman, and I love you', but she has to disguise it, to disguise it in a way that tries to say to him that love is not about dying and despair, as he seems to perceive it. 'And what's her history?', he then asks, and that's when she realizes her situation: 'A blank, my lord; she never told her love.' That's something important, the difference between him and her; this is what might happen to her—never to speak, to remain silent and patient, for ever. 'But died thy sister of her love, my boy?' (line 119). He wants only to know about the misery of it all and she is trying to educate him, to take him in another direction that he has never perceived. But he cannot see, and she has to go around: 'I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too.' She is here, I think, near to despair. 'And yet I know not': the glimmer of hope is still there, but this always seemed to me her darkest moment. For Orsino, too, it is a strange moment, when he cannot decide, when he's nearly turned, and then habit, and confusion, and obsession take over again and he returns to his self-delusion: 'To her in haste … my love can give no place'(lines 123-4). At the end of the scene we see Viola, for almost the only time in the play, really depressed.

On the way to fulfil this gloomy mission, however, she meets Feste. The scene came after the interval in our production, at the top of the second act. Her relationship with Feste is another of the small joys of the play. He too is one of the play's outsiders: Malvolio, Feste, Antonio, Ague-cheek, the Sea Captain, Viola—the play is full of loners. Feste, like all of Shakespeare's fools perhaps (but surely more so), has an extraordinary perception of life, an aptness of observation especially apparent in his scene with Orsino: 'changeable taffeta … thy mind is a very opal'[II. iv. 74-75]—he is exactly right about Orsino. And here, interrupted on her way to Olivia's, Viola contemplates the skill of the man who is 'wise enough to play the fool'[III. i. 60], and finds the diversionary pleasure of playing with words. She is always discovering things about life, and taking time off during the play to talk to the audience about them (now look at this person, isn't that interesting, isn't that wonderful, or odd), to share her sense of humour with them. Her relationship with Feste is an enjoyment of the mind—like her relationship with Orsino, if only they could break through to full understanding.

The chance of that comes by way of the recognition scene with Sebastian after her disguise has taken her through the comic absurdities of the mock duel with Aguecheek—comic and absurd for the audience, at least, though increasingly embarrassing and dangerous for Viola. The wonder of the recognition comes at an awful moment for her, as she is accused of having married Olivia, of beating Sir Andrew, wounding Sir Toby, denying the open-heartedness of Antonio's love, a crescendo of everything piling on top of her. And then, there is her brother like something out of a fairy story—just like a fairy story, indeed, that is what is so wonderful about it, the sudden appearance of Sebastian, the apple cleft in twain, the mirror of herself. It is a magical moment, the resolution of confusion, the meeting of self, of each other; the whirlpool and the tempest that brought them to Illyria die down and suddenly there is wholeness again, the magical moment of seeing someone you thought was dead, the other half of yourself. 'Do not embrace me', she says [V. i. 251], unable
quite to make that contact whole until she knows again who she is by putting on her 'maiden's weeds',
rediscovering that other half of herself through the ritual of dressing again as a woman.

After that comes Orsino's strangely hearty, and rather awkward, declaration:

Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.

[V. i. 267-8]

Viola's reply is open and direct, honest and truthful as she has been throughout the play. In front of all those
people she says:

And all those sayings will I over swear,
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orbed continent the fire
That severs day from night.

[V. i. 269-72]

They are almost her last words in the play. I always thought it difficult for Orsino to make this sudden change
from his obsession with Olivia, however carefully we had tried to prepare for it in the 'patience on a
monument' dialogue. Viola (unlike Rosalind in As You Like It) is denied her 'woman's weeds'; there is no
marriage ceremony, not even a formal offer from Orsino. 'Let me see thee in thy woman's weeds' he simply
says, and a little later the bald statement that 'a solemn combination shall be made / Of our dear souls'(lines
383-4). The scene is a difficult one to make work, a director's nightmare (like the last scene of Measure for
Measure, perhaps), and I do not think that our production ever really found it, though we worked hard at it
and discussed and argued about it for two years! Perhaps the problem was just being a woman in 1983:
putting out a hand to say I am going to marry you seemed an anti-climax. Whatever it was, our final scene
never seemed to me thorough enough; it was never fully clear to the actors so could not be to the audience. It
is a very public scene, everyone gathered together, a royal event with high and low characters all present and
all their stories coming together, and I don't think we ever resolved its complexity or found the play's real
ending. But then came the clap of thunder that marked the end of our production, and the returning darkness,
and Feste finding the ring on the tree and singing of the wind and the rain. Things have come round full circle;
they have reached a point of happiness—for some of the characters at least—but will they be happy ever
after? It is the last verse of Feste's song that is so extraordinary.

I do not know how successful our production was; to be so involved in a play means that you can never fully
know its effect on those watching. Like my first attempt at Twelfth Night, this one did not quite come up to
hopes and expectations. Trying to write about it now I feel inadequate, and a little pompous. I am no
authority; I can only try to do my best given the materials I have, the director, the set, the costume. Twelfth
Night is a story about Time, and growing up, and growing old, beautiful, and elusive; and whichever way
people try to direct it or to focus it so that it becomes a '1983 production', or so that you do it standing on your
head, or hanging from the rafters, whatever you do as you dig and dig, and get deeper and deeper, the text
remains for another attempt. I shall always be wanting to try it again.

PRODUCTION:

Wilford Leach New York Shakespeare Festival 1986

BACKGROUND:
Leach's New York Shakespeare Festival production in 1986 generated hostile responses from reviewers. Mel Gussow explained that it was not "a question of liberties taken but of abandonment of the play's essential nature as one of the most irresistible of Shakespeare's comedies." This production advocated an approach to the play that stressed elements of low comedy and farce. Actors were clothed in Renaissance dress, and the set featured a revolving platform with a central stage tower that flashed "Welcome to Illyria." The butt of critical disapproval, however, was directed towards the central performances. Tony Azito's clownish rendering of Feste failed to tap into any of the role's deeper significance. Gussow described him as a "body in motion but out of sync with his character." Kim Greist's rendering of Viola fared slightly better. John Simon asserted "Miss Greist cannot act very much … but she has a tolerable voice, is not deliberately offensive, and tries hard." The sole performance to receive a modicum of praise was F. Murray Abraham's Malvolio. John Beaufort mirrored the opinions of most commentators in writing that Abraham projected "the fussy aplomb and self-infatuation that make the censorious steward all too susceptible to the cruel trick played on him."

**COMMENTARY:**

**Diane Solway (essay date 29 June 1986)**


Despite the sultry midday heat, all was astir in Central Park. At the Delacorte Theater, seemingly a world away, the actor F. Murray Abraham strode about the stage in straw hat, T-shirt and shorts reciting Shakespeare.

The actor—best known for his Academy Award-winning portrayal of Salieri in *Amadeus*—was rehearsing a scene from *Twelfth Night* in which his character, the vainglorious steward Malvolio, gets his comeuppance.

Behind him, stage hands were quietly transforming the Delacorte stage into the mythical dukedom of Illyria, set in 16th-century Yugoslavia. A figurehead was being affixed to the frame of a ship, a sign was being painted, and tiles were being secured to the roof of a yellow and lavender housefront, whose Slavic design was inspired by a book on Bulgarian monasteries. Undaunted by the activity, the actor gamely read the forged love letter that Malvolio assumes his mistress Olivia has penned to him, a letter that leads to his ludicrous appearance before her in cross-gartered yellow stockings.

"Don't forget your chicken walk," counseled the director, Wilford Leach, trailing behind the actor.

"Oh, yes, that's lost, isn't it?" replied Mr. Abraham. "It makes him seem grand," he added, as he stuck out his chest and broke into an exaggerated strut, much to his own amusement.

This Wednesday, the latest interpretation of *Twelfth Night*, directed by Mr. Leach and produced by Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival, officially opens the 31st season of free theater in the park.

As Malvolio in this knotty comedy of love, shipwreck and multiple mistaken identity, Mr. Abraham, 46, makes his debut in a leading Shakespearean role. It is his first major stage appearance since winning the best-actor Academy Award in 1985 and playing a rabbi in *The Golem* at the Delacorte two seasons ago. The *Twelfth Night* cast also includes Peter MacNicol—last seen in *Rum and Coke* at the Public Theater—as Sir Toby Belch, Kim Greist as Viola. Tony Azito as Feste and Kathleen Layman as Olivia. The production reunites Mr. Leach and the composer Rupert Holmes, both of whom recently won Tony awards for their collaboration on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, a Public Theater production that moved from Central Park to Broadway.
Mr. Abraham wound up in this production of *Twelfth Night* partially through a chance meeting about a year ago with Mr. Leach, to whom he expressed his longing to do comedy. Though Mr. Leach had never seen the actor in a comic role, months later, when casting the play, he easily imagined him as the farcical, yet sympathetic Malvolio.

"When Wilford suggested Murray, I thought 'Perfect!'" recalls Mr. Papp. "Murray has an air of comedy about him. There's always something slightly comedic about his manner and demeanor even if he's doing something quite serious."

Mr. Abraham, in turn, describes the experience of playing in Central Park "Camp Delacorte" and says he savors the opportunity to perform before a live audience. "On stage, I must rely on myself and that's why I love the theater, and comedy in particular. No one has to tell me if I was good or not. Either they laugh or they don't."

"'Present mirth hath present laughter,'" he says, quoting a song in *Twelfth Night*. "It's only funny if the laugh comes. Shakespeare would not be pleased if his lines didn't get any laughs. That's why updating Shakespeare's comedy is legitimate."

To make Malvolio ridiculous to a contemporary audience, the actor decided to play him with a stiff upper-crust British accent. He considers Malvolio "a pompous right-wing politician" whose puritanism, lust for power and lack of humor he sees reflected in modern-day religious extremists. "We may laugh at them, but they are really quite dangerous."

Mr. Leach also sees a value in approaching a classic with fresh eyes. Ignoring prevailing theories about *Twelfth Night*, he decided to examine it anew.

"The play is usually seen as a melancholy comedy," he says, "but I don't think it's in the material, and I don't think the Elizabethan audience experienced it that way. The play is much closer to the raw virile tradition of early street pageants than is generally thought."

In an effort to highlight the play's vibrancy, Mr. Leach opted for lavish color in the costumes, rather than the muted tones predominant in the contemporary theater. "Lindsay Davis told me he hadn't used colors like that since grade school," says Mr. Leach of the costume designer. The director likens the probable effect of his interpretation to the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel. "Now that they've removed the dirt from the ceiling," he says, "it's completely different, and many people find it too bright. I think that's what happens when you do a classic this way. To many people, it won't seem properly golden, it won't have that patina they associate with Shakespeare."

He credits Mr. Holmes's original music with capturing the mirth he feels is often missing from performances of the play.

"Comedy can be serious without being solemn," says Mr. Leach. "To me, the clown's final song says, 'Yes, death is a reality, so life should be lived with gusto,'" adds the director, who eschewed traditional approaches by choosing young actors for most of the roles. "One of the play's major themes is the madness of love. When your hormones are acting up, of course you're crazy. That's the way I understand the play—as mad kids going through all the torments and hell over love and then being able to flip right over to someone else."

In working with the actors Mr. Leach tries to remain as unobtrusive as possible. Says Mr. Abraham: "Simple directions take me very far, such as 'faster,' 'funnier.' That's why I love working with Wilfred. I trust my instincts and if a suggestion is made, I just go with it, I don't analyze it and discuss it. He let me pull out all the stops."
Mel Gussow (review date 3 July 1986)


Given Wilford Leach's record for brightening so many al fresco evenings with Shakespeare, as well as The Pirates of Penseance and The Mystery of Edwin Drood, anticipation about Twelfth Night was as high as the Belvedere Castle that shadows the hospitable Delacorte Theater. In addition, the show was headlined by that Oscar-winning actor, F. Murray Abraham, turning to Shakespeare and returning to comedy in the choice role of Malvolio.

Sad to say, almost everything is awry in this Illyria. It is not a question of liberties taken but of abandonment of the play's essential nature as one of the most irresistible of Shakespeare's comedies. Productions have, of course, artfully departed from, or reinterpreted the original text. Last season, for example, Twelfth Night was pleasurably transformed into a Cole Porter party by Mark Lamos at the Hartford Stage Company. However, Mr. Leach, principal director of the New York Shakespeare Festival, has simply unmoored the play in the interest of unmannerly broadness.

The director has chosen to set Twelfth Night in 16th-century Yugoslavia, a fact that would have remained the deepest secret had it not been so reported in an article in last Sunday's edition of this newspaper. The atmosphere is, instead, hugger-mugger, or Tatar-Cossack. Some of the actors look as if they are outfitted for a bus and truck tour of Kismet. Flouncing stands in for stage movement and mugging might be seen by a hovering helicopter.

As the evening begins, there is a hint that the performance is intended to be artificial, a play within a play, as in Edwin Drood. Actors roam through the audience and those on stage declaim their lines as if they are amateurs auditioning for a provincial company. Any minute one expects—and hopes for—a character such as that played by George Rose in Edwin Drood to step out and stop the performance. This does not occur; the imitation of bad acting is an end in itself, and, in some instances, it is totally successful.

One could perhaps chalk up the ineptitude of the actors in the romantic roles to inexperience. This is not possible with the character roles, for these are filled with actors of proven merit. First of all there is Tony Azito playing Feste as a kind of carnival roustabout. As this rubber-limbed clown has demonstrated on countless occasions (most notably as a policeman in The Pirates of Penseance), he can be a droll vaudevillian.

Here he is overcome by his own hand wiggles. He is a body in motion but out of sync with his character and when faced with the challenge of pretending to be two people (taunting Malvolio in captivity) he hopelessly blurs the voices while affecting an accent of unknown derivation. His singing—words by Shakespeare, music by Rupert Holmes—is closer to the mark. Together with William Duff-Griffin's Sir Toby Belch and Peter MacNicol's Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Mr. Azito is the hypotenuse of an effete triangle, each missing the ineffable shenanigans of these allied troublemakers.

Mr. MacNicol has chosen—or been encouraged—to play the persistent suitor, Sir Andrew, with a falsetto and a foolish grin. Though as misguided as his colleagues, the actor does earn a few smiles and in a less cavalier production his concept might be defensible. But, surrounded by fellow campers, he loses individuality.

Before the play begins, Mr. Abraham makes a brief appearance. Patiently we wait for his reentry, for him, in effect, to save the sinking show. In goatee and pantaloons, he looks something like a fakir. He is, however, merely a mildly aggrieved misanthrope. Except for some eccentric affectations—an unfunny chicken walk and a habit of prissily lifting the tails of his costume whenever he exits—his performance seems oddly uncommitted. It is as if the actor had been cross-gartered by his character.
In his principal set piece, when he spies the bogus love letter from his mistress, Mr. Abraham's Malvolio is passingly amusing, which is insufficient for a scene that, even in the hands of lesser actors, often rises to hilarity.

The production's variations offer no comic solace: Olivia holding up a cross to ward off Malvolio; the italicizing of innuendo; the sound effects that accompany the reaction of the actors. At the critics' performance on Tuesday, at times I felt as if I were at Wimbledon watching seeded players on an off day; every volley struck the net. The only relief could come, perhaps, from rain, which would curtail the match and allow for a revamping of one's resources.

About 40 minutes into the evening, rain briefly fell. The actors responded with an aplomb that was otherwise lacking. During and after the rain, the performance continued, sacrificing both "present mirth" and "present laughter" as well as the darker Malvolian side of the comedy.

**John Beaufort (review date 9 July 1986)**


"What country, friends, is this?" asks the ship-wrecked Viola in the second scene of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

"This is Illyria, lady," replies the captain of the sunken vessel.

And so it is, in a manner of speaking, Shakespeare chose the name of an Adriatic city with a history rooted in antiquity as the setting for this comedy of mistaken identities and love at cross purposes.

Taking his cue from the play's full title, *Twelfth Night or What You Will*, director Wilford Leach has given the production a 16th-century, Eastern European touch. Costume designer Lindsay W. Davis has met the challenge with a colorfully exotic wardrobe that turns out to be the most fanciful and picturesque feature of the New York Shakespeare Festival production at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park.

Possibly in an effort to offset an evident lack of classical experience among his players, Mr. Leach has settled for a broad, colloquial, low comedy style of playing.

The revival abounds in horseplay, sight gags, and gimmicks. Bob Shaw's neatly efficient scenery (a central stage tower atop a revolving platform) features occasional signs like "Welcome to Illyria." Sir Andrew's horse, Capilet, is heard to neigh offstage. (A critic, perhaps?) And when Malvolio struggles to smile, his painful efforts are accompanied by the amplified creak of a rusty gate. Such are the hey-nonny-nonny features of the Leach approach.

When it comes to the serious business of comedy and the even more delicate business of light romantic comedy, this *Twelfth Night* is not equal to the sum of its better parts.

As Malvolio, the admirable F. Murray Abraham (seen in the film *Amadeus*) projects the fussy aplomb and self-infatuation that make the censorious steward all too susceptible to the cruel trick played on him. Kim Greist's very modest experience has scarcely prepared her for the demands and rewards of Viola. The best that can be said of Miss Greist is that she perseveres. Kathleen Layman doesn't fare much more happily as Olivia, that "lady of great beauty and fortune" temporarily smitten with Viola disguised as Cesario.
The comics work hard and energetically to fulfill Leach's notions of *Twelfth Night*. Peter MacNicol makes a sunnily silly booby of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. William Duff Griffin minces through the role of Sir Toby Belch. Tony Azito—affecting one of the several pseudo-cockney accents encountered in this Illyria—clobbers Feste out of all recognition.

Other principals include Thomas Gibson (Orsino), Perry Lang (Sebastian, Viola's twin brother), and Meagen Fay (Olivia's serving woman, Maria, who sets the subplot in motion).

The pleasant incidental music and song settings are by Rupert Holmes. Stephen Strawbridge lighted the production, which is scheduled to continue the usual free Central Park performances through July 20. Perhaps this revival should have been retitled, *Twelfth Night or What You Wilford*.

**John Simon (review date 14 July 1986)**

Is it cynicism, insensitivity, or merely total benightedness that prompts the New York Shakespeare Festival to mount the kind of travesty of *Twelfth Night* now on view in Central Park? The subtitle *What You Will* was surely not meant as an encouragement to cast rank amateurs or equally rank professionals, and to camp up a high comedy into the lowest, most effete farce. Either Joe Papp and his director, Wilford Leach, think that a non-paying audience enjoying a night under the stars does not know any better or ask for more (which may be true, but is no excuse) or else they are incapable of responsible thinking and don't know any better themselves. Neither hypothesis is particularly cheering.

It is, of course, possible (though not advisable) to turn the more broadly comical scenes into outright farce, but a production in which almost everything is horseplay and bad acting, so that you don't even know where romance and poetry might come in, may be anything you will but isn't *Twelfth Night*. The tacit assumption here is that anyone can play Shakespeare, regardless of lack of training, lack of experience, or lack of basic suitability. Also, that it is fine to cast very young actors as the lovers, even if that most dubious of qualifications, youth, is all they've got, and that the director's vaudeville ideas will take care of the rest. With the kind of casting Leach has perpetrated, he could not have swung it were he ten times the director he is.

There are four major performances here that are beneath anything constituting acting. Kathleen Layman's Olivia, aside from having not the slightest style, timing, or stage presence, rattles off words without the faintest indication that they might have such a thing as meaning. As Orsino, Thomas Gibson is a simpering, mealymouthed, lowborn youth who perhaps could wait on tables in a lesser Columbus Avenue restaurant. Marco St. John's Antonio, rather than a noble sea captain, is a brutish stevedore who, instead of delivering a line, heaves it into the hold of the ship he is loading. As Sebastian, Perry Lang merely looks and acts cretinous, resembling his twin sister, Viola, as little as he does an actor.

A step higher is that dreadful clown Tony Azito, to my mind one of the more offensive presences in the New York theater, who turns Feste (exactly as he does every part) into an oleaginous lout with undertones of viciousness who adores himself every step of the way. It is the crudest kind of camp, mistaking ugliness for wit, but at least it is done with self-assurance and conviction. A step above is the Viola of Kim Greist. Miss Greist cannot act very much—she uses her arms, for example, as obsessive semaphores—but she has a tolerable voice, is not deliberately offensive, and tries hard.

Somewhat above this is the low-grade professionalism of William Duff-Griffin, whose Sir Toby is the sort of performance you get in provincial reps or summer theaters: correct as far as it goes, but wholly uninspired. Slightly better—more straightforward and well spoken—is the Fabian of James Lancaster, who, however, had the benefit of quite a bit of acting experience at Dublin's Abbey Theatre. I vastly prefer the Aguecheek of
Peter MacNicol: Though as yet no Shakespearean, he has a great natural sweetness and intuitive playfulness. Much the best supporting performance is Meagen Fay's Maria, who, with better direction, could have been impeccable.

As Malvolio, F. Murray Abraham—an actor so enamored of himself that self-adulation oozes from his every pore and syllable—is properly cast and gives a thoroughly professional performance. He, too, could have profited from better direction, which would have eliminated, say, his holding up his coattails like a Trockadero ballerina while chasing after Viola. But he has a rich, fruity voice and a certain spontaneous oiliness that, in this role, come in handy. Even handier, however, is the huge incompetence of most of the actors around him.

Although Bob Shaw's scenery and Lindsay W. Davis's costumes are cute mostly in the likable sense, Leach's staging revels in the wrong sort of cuteness. If Leach has any notion of the historical, philosophical, social, and poetic concepts in this play, he certainly manages to keep it well hidden. Even the idea of turning Illyria visually into Greek Orthodox, Turkish-influenced Serbia is wrong; if anything, it would be Catholic, Italianate Dalmatia. But what Shakespeare had in mind was, clearly, England. And music—often verbal—as the opening Une makes plain. Significantly, this production switches the first two scenes and begins with the shipwreck. Talk about omens!

PRODUCTION:

Bill Alexander RSC 1987-88

BACKGROUND:

Alexander's RSC revival set Twelfth Night in an Illyria that resembled a sun-drenched Greek island. This feature, like the production as a whole, elicited contradicotry responses from critics. While Michael Ratcliffe, for example, maintained that "there can rarely have been a version of this disturbing comedy so bland, humourless and cold," Gary O'Connor hailed the production as "outstanding," commenting that the use of dazzling which architectural motifs in the set design accentuated "the confusion woven by illusion and self-illusion." The most controversial aspect of this staging was Antony Sher's Malvolio. Sher, whose costume was reminiscent of the liturgical garb of an Orthodox priest, took seriously the possibility that Malvolio becomes mad as a result of his confinement in the "dark room." For Stanley Wells, this portrayal was ultimately a failure. He maintained: "Sher technically as brilliant as ever, allows the effort to be both funny and original to take precedence over the establishment of a credible character who believes in himself."

Taking the opposing view, O'Connor lavishly praised the performance as "a gloriously infected piece of work," asserting that the actor's comic excess was "beautifully judged in its degree." Other principal performances included Harriet Walter as Viola, Bruce Alexander as Feste, David Bradley as Sir Andrew, and Deborah Findlay as Olivia. In 1988 the production transferred to the Barbican Theatre in London, where John Carlisle replaced Antony Sher as Malvolio.

COMMENTARY:

Michael Ratcliffe (review date 12 July 1987)


The current RSC production of The Merchant of Venice at Stratford, directed by Bill Alexander, designed by Kit Surrey, lit by Robert Bryan and starring Antony Sher, grapples with the savagery of the play more powerfully than any Merchant in recent years. The same team has moved straight on to Twelfth Night (RST, Stratford) and the difference is extraordinary. There can rarely have been a version of this disturbing comedy
so bland, humourless and cold. Its destruction is completed by a star performance from Sher whose effect is about as subtle as a run-away truck.

Surrey sets the play, handsomely enough, on the little square of a white Greek island against a brochure-blue sky, but this architectural setting, which abounds in door-ways, roofline steps, windows and climbing-joists, is hardly used at all. It is mere scenery. There is little sense of time, heat, day, night, Greekness or any sort of enjoyed theatrical space.

The comedy is performed by an ensemble which, with one exception, has no natural comedians in it. The exception is David Bradley who plays Aguecheek like some grim and irritable newt, muttering all his remarks as though he would rather have snatched them back before releasing them to the sure mockery of the world. Bradley apart, the best performance comes from Deborah Findlay, the strange, ruminant colouring of whose voice makes something intelligent and sympathetic of the often tedious Olivia.

It is an evening of actors in distress. Three of the company's best struggle for firm ground beneath their feet: Bruce Alexander is a wilfully blank Feste (albeit exceptionally well sung); Harriet Walter is a gentle and self-effacing Viola confined to the outer edges of the play by the gross central performance and kept there by a drily conventional Orsino (Donald Sumpter); Roger Allam, who would make a Toby Belch of fastidious unpleasantness (and for that matter a marvellous Malvolio) elects instead to roar and bellow Sir Toby like Bottom seizing the lion's part, an offence against his own gifts. There is no attempt to illuminate the interesting and awkward conjunction of venality and pride which modern productions of Twelfth Night usually do.

It so happens there have been two exceptionally interesting and contentious ones, both playing to packed houses earlier this year. The touring Cheek by Jowl company explored the sexual ambivalence in the play, suggested that every character at some point or other runs slightly mad, and plumbed a well of deep feeling beneath the exuberant techniques of vulgarity, anachronism and shock. The text emerged with a glittering sharpness that has become rare in main house productions of the RSC. (Titus Andronicus in the Swan is another matter entirely). A Sheffield Crucible production set the play in some waking nightmare on the twelfth day of Christmas before Feste dowsed the crackling fiery tree in water and plunged the carnival back into night. Figures dreamed one another into existence and observed one another's confusion. Disorientation—territorial, sexual, social—is the master key to Twelfth Night. 'What country friends is this?' 'This is Illyria lady' but we all know there is more to it than that. Maria, for instance, does not have to be a tearful saxophonist (Cheek by Jowl) or a vengeful housekeeper bent on Malvolio's destruction (Crucible), but there is surely more to her than the dull soubrette Pippa Guard makes of her here.

Sher plays Olivia's steward like a mad holy man on the run, a corsetted hysterical with gobstopper eyes, stiff with terror at the prospect of losing his place, flipping his lid at the slightest reverse. It is a loud, violent desperately unfunny and miscalculated performance. Barren of genuine physical inventiveness and low on textual wit, it aspires to sensational tragic stature without earning it and passes clean through the middle of the play like a missile that destroys whilst leaving no trace.

Robert Hewison (review date 12 July 1987)


In the main house at Stratford the Royal Shakespeare Company presents ... Twelfth Night. Bill Alexander has chosen a specific Aegean setting, with mock-Mykonos architecture by Kit Surrey and superb costumes by Deirdre Clancy, which create a romantic but entirely consistent late 17th-century Greek world.
In spite of blazing white walls and blue sky, however, the initial atmosphere in Illyria is decidedly chilly, and only gradually do Alexander's intentions become clear. Thus the belligerently broad playing of Roger Allam's Sir Toby and the infinitely subtle silences of David Bradley's Ague-cheek are bright lights against a deliberate shadow, first cast by the pathos of Bruce Alexander's unaccompanied singing as Feste, a bitter clown, and then by the treatment of Malvolio.

Antony Sher, who has transformed himself into Simon Callow—or how Callow might look as a Greek majordomo—at first seems to be straining for laughs, but the stress turns out to be Malvolio's incipient madness. And unlike most Malvolios, once maddened, he stays mad. Alexander has borrowed the device of Peter Shaffer's Black Comedy, and presents the prison scene, not in darkness, but a blinding light. Malvolio is chained like a rabid dog, the object of real cruelty.

The strength of this conception, which eschews easy laughs, makes up for weaknesses elsewhere: as Viola, Harriet Walter has adopted a strange, adenoidal, mincing voice, effective in the first scene, when she is about to burst into tears, but distracting for the rest of the play. Donald Sumpter lacks all sex appeal as Orsino, and there is little passion, though some petulance, in Deborah Findlay's Olivia. But the moral tone of the production, under the baleful eye of Feste, is refreshingly right.

Stanley Wells (review date 17 July 1987)


I was once taken to task for describing Twelfth Night as the most elusive of Shakespeare's comedies, but Bill Alexander's new production confirms me in my opinion. Much about it feels right. The setting—an open space half-surrounding a mounting jumble of white, sunbaked archways, receding alleys, little steps, windows, and benches fixed to walk—permits one scene to flow into the next with an easy continuity. Although the firmly Adriatic setting (this is Illyria, Lady) sacrifices the sense of two distinct households, the ethnic costumes and customs provide a useful compromise between fantasy and localizing actuality.

In the opening scenes, the world of the play authentically establishes itself. On her first entry Viola, carrying her brother's clothes, is still choking back sobs for his apparent loss. Roger Allam's Sir Toby, younger and handsomer than usual, finds an easy unforced humour in his opening passages with Maria and Sir Andrew. Olivia's entry with her black-clad train, headed by Malvolio as an obsequiously zealous director of mourning, on her way to pay tribute to her brother's memory at a shrine let into the wall, helpfully establishes the resemblance between her situation and Viola's. And the production's heart seems to be in the right place during the wordless interplay of emotion within and between Orsino and Viola, as Bruce Alexander's unaccompanied singing of Feste's song "Come away death" moves Orsino with thoughts of his despairing love for Olivia and relaxes the disguised Viola to a point at which she comes close to revealing her love for Orsino. This is beautifully conceived and executed.

But as the action continues, the mood is too often broken. Sir Toby drunk is too like Sir Toby sober, except that he belches louder and longer and plays tricks with the smoke from his cheroot. Harriet Walter's Viola, though gently appealing in her wistfulness, lacks comic drive, vocal mannerisms obtrude, and her eyebrows develop a nervous life of their own. But the wrongest-headed performance is Antony Sher's, as Malvolio, because it seems more concerned to make a series of points about the character than to find a way of presenting him from his own point of view.

This stands in direct contrast to David Bradley's brilliant Sir Andrew, a coherent, self-consistent portrayal of a recognizable individual. Bemused, bedraggled, energetic in his efforts to keep up with his more sophisticated companions, he is touchingly uncomprehending in his failure to do so. Merely to contemplate him is enough to induce sympathetic laughter. On the other hand Sher, technically as brilliant as ever, allows the effort to be
both funny and original to take precedence over the establishment of a credible character who believes in himself. As a result, his performance seems no more than a collection of actorish points, whether he is turning his hat and his pockets inside out to show that they too are yellow, or popping up unexpectedly close to Olivia in response to her call, or exposing himself to her attendants in gleeful self-satisfaction. The performance is based on a theory: that Malvolio goes mad as a result of the tricks played upon him. In the prison scene he emerges through a trap, tethered to a stake, visibly suffering. The darkness that surrounds him has to be mimed by Feste, who torments him with exploding caps, and a half-naked Sir Toby and Maria are seen at a window, more absorbed in their love-making than in what is going on beneath them. At the end Malvolio is distressingly insane, a broken man flailing out at "the whole pack" of those on stage like an enraged bear. This is as forced and sentimental as the efforts of actors other than Sher to provide a tragic conclusion to the role of Shylock. If Malvolio has a tragedy, it is that he is irremediably sane.

Sheridan Morley (review date 22 July 1987)


Stratford's new main-stage Twelfth Night, directed by Bill Alexander, has one of those sets (here by Kit Surrey) that do most of the acting before the players have a chance to take up residence. "Which country, friend, is this?" "Illyria, lady" is thus an odd opening exchange, since we are clearly in downtown Paxos or on some neighbouring Greek island where you constantly expect to find Zorba setting up a dancing academy for the tourists. A hugely picturesque, sunbaked and white-walled little square, with its own functional water pump and a candlelit shrine to Olivia's dead brother, might not appear to be the most likely location for this traditionally chilly play, and its permanence means that we cannot actually move with Feste from Orsino's court to Olivia's mansion or Malvolio's gaol: in order for anything to happen or anyone to meet, the cast have instead to assemble around the pump. But once you make that geographic leap, and get acclimatised to the heat, there emerge certain distinct advantages.

First of all, Antony Sher can play Malvolio looking like Groucho Marx dressed as a Greek none-too-orthodox priest, with black fez and pointed beard in a performance which allows for a reversal of the usual character development; this steward starts effectively mad, pursuing Viola around the square with Olivia's ring like a manic travelling salesman, and only becomes increasingly and alarmingly sane as he is incarcerated in a prison for lunatics. Yet, although he is single-mindedly taking on all the great Olivier roles in his time with the RSC, first Richard III and in this season a Shylock as well, Sher seems to recognise that he is not a natural or leading comedian: when the going gets tough, he neatly replaces Malvolio somewhere down the castlist in what then becomes a company play about mutual deceit.

The rest of the casting is equally offbeat: a thin and distinctly unjovial Sir Toby Belch from Roger Allam, an unusually meek Olivia from Deborah Findlay and a Viola from Harriet Walter who looks as though she would far rather be leading a troupe of Girl Guides on an archeological dig around the island than sorting out the complex romantic obsessions of Orsino and Olivia while disguised as her own missing twin brother.

Orsino himself (Donald Sumpter) is an aged, melancholic loner, out-classed even in this specialist category by David Bradley's superb Aguecheek, a man of such total exhaustion under a burning sun that he can barely drag himself to the end of a sentence, let alone the beginning of a duel. Add to them a Maria (Pippa Guard) who instead of the usual chubby housekeeper is far and away the most sexily glamorous character on stage, and it becomes clear that Mr Alexander wishes us to consider the play not only in a new setting but also peopled by eccentrics we have never really met before.

The result is a kind of holiday romp shot through with dark and scary moments when the sun suddenly goes behind a cloud and it gets unexpectedly chilly: there is no attempt to pretend that, even when all the partners do get sorted out into their correct sexes and couplings, the general happiness will last for much longer than
the average summer romance, and we are left alone with Feste singing of the wind and the rain presumably somewhere well away from the offices of the local tourist board.

**Garry O'Connor (review date September 1987)**


Shakespeare may have had the taste of olives in his mouth when he wrote *Twelfth Night*. Viola, Malvolio, Olivia not only have an anagrammatical closeness of sound, but during the play they are lovingly crushed, and while one yields pure oil, another a bitter taste, the three as characters have flavour rather than depth. The lovesick Orsino, his name a cross between arse and obscene, is himself as about as enticing as a whole bowl of olives; Feste, with his callous wit and melancholy songs, spits out the stones.

This outstanding production has been set by the director, Bill Alexander, and designer Kit Surrey, far from the Jacobethan box-hedges and well to the east of Illyria in a sun-baked village square whose Greek Orthodox *ikon* is tucked away in a wall niche. The confusion woven by illusion and self-illusion gains considerably from the dazzling whiteness. Olivia's entourage, when they cast away their mourning, wear alluring brocades of the traditional myrtle and vine. Feste, dressed in more sombre shreds and patches, benefits from the surreal indeterminateness of period: Malvolio, a character on the fullest Byzantine scale, disports himself in the neo-clerical black of Constantinople.

Given the stark setting the players themselves have to find the resources to show the comic and emotional changes wrought by so much mixed-up identity. Harriet Walter aims at and hits Viola's gruff and gritty side, offering escape to Olivia and Orsino by her managerial competence, and neatly sidestepping their narcissism. Orsino becomes, in Donald Sumpter's performance, a balding *fakir* of love, a Gandhi on the nailbed of desire. Deborah Findlay as Olivia, in her mixture of imperiousness and self-aware silliness, has rather more character, and therefore humour, than one might expect of Olivia. Bruce Alexander, as Feste, projects wit and songs alike with perfect pitch and acerbic modulation.

As engineer of the Malvolio subplot Pippa Guard portrays Maria as an enticing Machiavel: the passion between her and Toby Belch, not usually as torrid as this, is fanned by the sight of Malvolio cross-gartered and consummated when the poor steward, condemned as mad and tied to a stake, is abused by Feste in the disguise of Sir Topaz. This cruel and juvenile scene is heavily underlined and goes a bit far, yet the actors can hardly be blamed for a current taste for violence as primitive as that in the playwright's day. A youthful Belch, Roger Allam, played with excoriating variations on the activity enclosed within his name, is the best I've seen. No less funny is David Bradley's Aguecheek, who cunningly and intricately faceted, gives off glimmers of light as, like a shrunken planet, he revolves round Sir Toby.

'His very genius hath taken the infection of the device', Toby says of Malvolio. Antony Sher's interpretation of the steward is a gloriously infected piece of work, a blot or extravagance on the face of humanity. His self-deceit defies sexual limits as he flaunts the concealed stockings as much like a male flasher as like a French can-can girl. The comic excess is beautifully judged in its degree and if Sher effortlessly reaches the peaks of laughter it is because he is a master of the art of preparation. He can conceive himself as a theatrical image, climb in and out of himself, and stand the image on its head. This is a production the public will love without reservation.

**François Laroque (review date October 1987)**

Illyria this time has moved down to the shores of nineteenth century Greece, with cobalt blue skies, white blocks of houses, arched narrow streets, splashing fountains and open-air benches on both sides backstage.

The play opens on a frozen tableau-vivant. Orsino (Donald Sumpter), oldish, bald on top, with a curious, Chinese kind of plait of hair hanging on one side, holds a double lute to speak the first famous lines *If music be the food of love....* The men wear hats, baggy breeches, and boots.

Sir Toby Belch (Roger Allam), wears a brown velvet coat, looks both young and very red in the face and he is courting a young, pert, and pretty Maria (Pippa Guard), which is a welcome change from the tradition of the nightgowned spinster. Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a very tall, awkward fellow with long hanging yellow hair (David Bradley) also wears baggy trousers, complemented by green stockings and leather slippers. He and Roger Allam form a wonderful comic pair, catching the audience's attention and raising laughter very early on in the performance.

Viola (Harriet Walter) finds no apparent difficulty in her change into a man and when she reappears as Cesario she wears deep bottle-green trousers and jerkin with her ginger hair now cropped short. Being rather tall, she will manage to carry the illusion of her transformation fairly well throughout. One may add here that the choice of the actor to play her brother Sebastian (Paul Spence) seems to have obeyed the same desire to lend credence to the central notion of the comedy of errors as the resemblance between them is fairly close.

Feste (Bruce Alexander) wears batik style motley, with hanging stripes, and he has rouge on his cheeks and a crew cut. He looks deliberately out of touch with the rest of the cast, but he will slowly, and with great talent, make himself part of the entertainment.

The tolling of the church bell prepares for the slow entrance upon the stage of the Lady Olivia (Deborah Findlay), who is followed by a mourning procession of women in black. They all have black veils on their faces and wear dresses of black and golden brocade.

Malvolio (Antony Sher) has a trimmed, pointed beard, and is dressed in black from toque to gaiters and has the appearance of an orthodox priest. His stiffness is reinforced by a thin straight white collar and the chain of office that hangs around his neck. He shouts a lot and seems to boss everybody around, but executes his mistress's orders with extreme zeal, as when he literally runs after Cesario to give him Olivia's message and ring. When Cesario arrives at Olivia's house, the black mourners that all walk round her convey the impression of an oriental harem.

Toby expectedly belches his way along for most of the play and he is sometimes answered in this by Aguecheek's as it were absent-minded farts, but this is more funny than vulgar and it represents a human and almost inevitable sign of their horrible abuse of food and drink in this period of festivity and excess. To keep up the atmosphere of carousing and merry-making, here more genuine than forced or sad (probably because Toby and Aguecheek look fairly young) Feste sings—with an excellent voice and without musical accompaniment. The three men then fall to their catches until Maria is woken up and joins in a dance that appropriately turns out to be a form of sirtaki, making for a highly entertaining moment in the production.

It is an empty bottle which Feste throws through his open window that rouses here the soundly sleeping Malvolio from his bed rather than the racket of the revellers. When he suddenly emerges on the stage to restore order, he comes with a net holding both his hair and beard into place, so that the contrast between the severity of his speech and his pompous stance on the one hand and his ridiculous aspect on the other is irresistible. This is the beginning of a series of astonishing transformations. In the letter scene, he becomes almost hysterical and starts jumping around, red in the face as he discovers the contents of Olivia's letter. When Toby and Fabian come on stage, just before the interval, they are split double with a contained laughter that seems so painfully intense that it takes a while before it breaks out into sound.
After a twenty minute interval, Feste arrives and starts beating on his drum in a rather maddening way. This raises our anticipation as the joke on Malvolio is about be taken a step further.

Toby now has a beard and Olivia wears a veil about her headgear. As for Orsino, with his Leeds accent and his bald patch, he seems to overindulge in his melancholy humour. He is probably too much of a foil to the rest of the company so that it is easier to understand why Olivia (who is here more of a coquette than a rich, cold aristocrat) rejects his suit than why Viola-Cesario secretly falls in love with him.

When Malvolio comes to sport his yellow crossed garters under his black coat, which he keeps flashing at Olivia with leering eyes, the comedy of love's misunderstandings reaches a farcical climax. His black toque, when turned inside out, also appears to have been lined with yellow. Then, like some eerie juggler, he pulls out more lining—from his pockets this time—which hangs like long yellow scarves, and follows Olivia around in a frantic and mysterious erotic dance. When his Lady has gone he splashes his face with water at the fountain as the cicadas begin to pulse louder in the heat of the day—a clear enough indication that Malvolio suffers from sun-stroke and midsummer madness.

Then Toby, Fabian, and Maria arrive with crosses and garlic garlands to exorcize him: Greece, as it seems, has how turned into a Transylvanian hotbed of vampires … But next comes a more straightforward medical allusion to madness with the urinal which Maria carries with her and deftly manages to have filled quickly during one of Malvolio's fits.

In the madness scene, Malvolio, pilloried, is brought up from below. He gives the impression of groping around in darkness while his voice is amplified to suggest a hollow cellar. When masquerading as Sir Topaz, Feste goes down a ladder which leans against the window where Sir Toby and Maria are watching the scene while exchanging love kisses. Malvolio is tied to a stake like a bear and he whirls round it like some mad animal. At the end of the scene, he presses Olivia's crumpled letter against his cheek, with a tormented, hallucinated look on his face. This is an extremely powerful scene, which suggests, in a pathetic way, that the borderline between the light abuses of festive misrule and real madness has now become an extremely thin one.

When Malvolio reappears on stage at the end, he is totally bedraggled and, red-eyed, tries to shield his sight from the recovered daylight. But after Feste has once more taunted him with the whirligig of time speech, Malvolio says the expected I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you in a curiously slow way that ends in a singsong. When he goes away, with a strange smile on his face, one understands that the joke has really been pushed too far and that he has become truly mad. This last, dark note is in keeping with Antony Sher's remarkable interpretation which manages to reveal the dark potentialities of Shakespeare's last comedy.

So, all in all, this is a superb and memorable production which brings out the festive as well as the serious dimension of the play. While Antony Sher as Malvolio gives an astonishing performance that sheds new light on the character, Roger Allam and David Bradley are no less remarkable and funny as Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Pippa Guard, who was revealed by the parts she played in the BBC Shakespeare series and has now made a very welcome appearance on the Stratford stage, plays a lively, arch, and beguiling Maria. Feste also gives a strong performance and the rather disappointing Donald Sumpter and Deborah Findlay, who seem to have been miscast in the roles of Duke Orsino and Olivia, do not finally detract too much from our pleasure.

Edward Pearce (review date November 1987)

British theatre audiences who holiday in such places when they can. Most critics were reminded of Mykonos; I was inclined to see Lindos on Rhodes. But there, chacun à son goût.

The change of setting is valid. Geography, unlike poetry, was a hazy matter for most Elizabethans. Shakespeare tended to put Italian-named characters down in places like Bohemia or Illyria about which he knew gloriously little, and set them speaking English. *Twelfth Night* has, thank God, escapist tendencies. It asks for a faraway, faintly exotic Levantine place in which to set up Italianate Englishmen to play against women as English as cucumber sandwiches, and generally to get on with the show. A fancy, sparkling-white, island Greece will do very nicely—especially as it gives Anthony Sher a chance to play Malvolio as Archbishop Makarios in buttercup tights.

There are defects and weak performances—an Orsino (Donald Sumpter) as limp and perfunctory as a flannel dipped in lukewarm water, a Viola/Cesario (Harriet Walter) with a touch of the plucky lady lacrosse-player about her, and in Anthony Sher's Malvolio we go clean back in time to Actor's Theatre. Sher, a South African with application and talent in unstable proportions, has a lot to give. But we have to understand that with Sher we are back with Sir Donald Wolfit, a double-jointed, speeded-up, mocking and flailing Wolfit, without the old man's Churchillian pomposity but with the same carnivorous, team-despising presence on stage, very old-fashioned, *an actaw, laddie*, and no messing about.

Bill Alexander, the director here, likes nuance and refinement. Antonio and Sebastian are drawn to one another, Antonio knowing, Sebastian not; we are given to understand this, but nothing is done to make us wince and Mr Alexander famous.

Sir Toby is played as a coarse conman getting by on his wits. The part at all times hangs betwixt sympathy and dislike. This Sir Toby is at the dislikable end. He would be one of those marginal chancers raising money for the Conservatives before they are arrested. Sir Andrew is a grass-green innocent, a lame self-doubting shadow—funny in a way, but funny-pitiful.

Mr Alexander dithers happily between tragic and comic elements. He has an angelic Maria in Pippa Guard—too good and psychologically right, with the proper vivacity for this cousin of Beatrice's, to get the notices she deserves—but it is harder than ever to see why she would want to marry this one-jump-ahead-of-the RECEIVER Toby.

The tragedy acts out Feste's description of Malvolio in confinement, "*Truly, madam, he holds Beelzebub at the stave's end*", in a way which suggests that the stave has snapped. Malvolio (an insistence of the actor, or Mr Alexander's idea?) is noisily mad in a way which draws a lot of attention to Anthony Sher. It all hangs rather perilously between a moving pity and comic business. The overt jolly cruelty of the Elizabethans, who set dogs on to bears as well as writing sonnets, leaves a nation of compassionate souls with tin ears understandably jarred by the treatment of Malvolio. Lacking their rough complacency, we usually go overboard the other way. Sher's fraught freak simply goes crazy in spades.

The production, then, doesn't quite work. The limp premiers are more remote than usual from a comic plot which seizes power and declares a state of emergency, and Sher is allowed out on his own in a way never wise. Yet it falls honourably short. There are beautiful things in the bouquet of inconsistencies: Maria, for one; a sweet-singing Feste permitted the Morley tune, another. And anyway a production full of contradictions does no harm to a play which in all its manifest glory is full of them itself.

**Irving Wardle (review date 11 April 1988)**

John Carlisle's Malvolio (replacing Antony Sher) is the only major cast change in Bill Alexander's production since Jeremy Kingston reviewed it in Stratford last July; but the immediate impression is that its characters are meeting for the first time.

Nothing quite fits. There is a distracted, hollow-eyed Viola (Harriet Walter) who suggests more the last act of a tragedy than the opening of a comedy. Donald Sumpter's Orsino is a grizzled autocrat with none of the expected marks of a romantic lover. In years, at least, he is a match for Deborah Findlay's Olivia; but it then comes as a shock to meet her uncle Toby (Roger Allam) who could be half her age.

Feste (Bruce Alexander) is another middle-aged figure who pushes the privileges of folly to the limit of sardonic bombast and haunts the Illyrian courts in rags; though even his costume is more prepossessing than the bedraggled rompers in which the well-to-do Augucheek (David Bradley) hopes to seduce Olivia.

Illyria this time appears to be a part of the Greek hinter-land, represented (by Deirdre Clancy and Kit Surrey) with baggy trousers and embroidered full-length skirts; and a village setting with a bell tower at the apex of a honeycomb of massive walls, perspectives of deep blue sky through rough-cut archways, and benches on the the house exteriors. It is on those benches that the show starts taking shape.

Toby and Maria (Pippa Guard) flop down on one of them and start gossiping while she feeds him slices of melon. Olivia sits Feste down to advise him that his jokes are offending people. An intimate atmosphere at once springs up in this public square. It may not be the usual interior world of Twelfth Night—traditionally a play of mirrored rooms—but if affords the characters a means of coming to life.

On this occasion it is less an exquisite lyric comedy than a boisterous piece for the market place, animating every inch of the space. In particular, it excels in false exits, prolonged down narrow alleyways and out of sight, and then brought hurtling back like a ball just before the elastic snaps.

Harriet Walter shows signs of wilting in the face of all the full-blown ruderies, and comes into her own only when her knees turn to water before the Aguecheek duel. But the multiple intrigues go off like a bomb.

Allam's Sir Toby is a virile young hell-raiser, equipped with all the gentlemanly graces which vanish in a roar when the drink gets to him. Bradley's Aguecheek hovers round him as an grim-faced pleasure-seeker, always missing the point, and trying to preserve his dignity by pretending he understands perfectly.

It is a cruelly funny relationship, and the cruelty runs riot when it fastens on Carlisle's Malvolio, an invincibly stately personage who then arrives in the likeness of a Greek dancing girl before being chained up by the neck in a dripping dungeon. Seldom has the horror of the farcical climax been projected with such impact.

There is also comedy in the most unexpected places; as where Orsino's musicians flock round to give him lute therapy when Olivia finally rejects him; and in Toby's last act line, "I hate a drunken rogue" delivered straight to his patroness as a plea not to throw him out of the house.

PRODUCTION:

Kenneth Branagh • Renaissance Theatre Company • 1987

BACKGROUND:

Kenneth Branagh's production with the Renaissance Theatre Company set Twelfth Night in a wintry Illyria that evoked the England of Charles Dickens. H. R. Woudhuysen cautioned, however, that this was not "the Dickens of Pickwick or A Christmas Carol but of Bleak House and Little Dorrit, where secrecy and tragedy
will eventually give birth to revelation and joy." Making full use of the play's seasonal associations, the set of the Riverside Studios featured a Christmas tree and a snowy cemetery in the center stage that was used for Malvolio's imprisonment. Critics generally approved of the director's sole liberty with the text: Branagh transposed the first and second scenes of the drama in order to combine the charm of the play with its underlying strangeness. Audiences and critics alike responded favorably to Branagh's direction; Kenneth Hurren declared it to have been "quite the most enjoyable production of the comedy I have seen for decades." This staging was further praised for several fine performances; outstanding among them was Richard Briers's Malvolio, which Hurren characterized as "as fine a realisation of that famous role as you could wish to see." Reviewers additionally praised the performances of Abigail McKern as Maria, Frances Barker as Viola, Anton Lesser as Feste, James Saxon as Sir Toby, and James Simmons as Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

**COMMENTARY:**

**Martin Hoyle (review date 5 December 1987)**


There's no stopping Kenneth Branagh. No sooner has his face disappeared from our Sunday night television screens and *The Fortunes of War* than it reappears on the large screen in *A Month in the Country*. The West End is already enjoying his production of John Sessions in *The Life of Napoleon*, and now Branagh's bravely named Renaissance Theatre Company opens its first full-scale Shakespearian enterprise at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith. A dankness has seeped up from the Thames; for this *Twelfth Night* is a chill affair, sober, respectful and curiously mirthless.

Branagh as director opens the play with Viola enquiring of the sea captain what country this is, from behind a gauze. The ensuing scene is decently spoken, if fitfully visible, and sets the tone for the rest of the production. When the curtain rises (or rather falls to the ground) it reveals a spacious set, by Bunny Christie, that rather dwarfs the performances. Balustrades, broken masonry, scattered statuary, ivy-twined gates, bare trees, the odd piece of furniture—all combine for a cemetery with terraces and ramps, on one of which four musicians (wind, cello, percussion, piano) play Pat Doyle's melancholy music.

The mood takes its cue from the bitterly misanthropic Feste of Anton Lesser, a faintly gypsy-like hobo with a carpet bag, whose smouldering anger and contempt reach a natural climax with his furious baiting of the imprisoned Malvolio. This intriguing reading is saddled with a final setting of "The rain it raineth every day" that is vocally ungrateful and plainly a strain to sing; otherwise there is immense promise here.

Promise too in Caroline Langrishe's Olivia, immediately yearning for some sort of relationship when she sees the disguised Viola, genuinely upset by Malvolio's final humiliation. The Victorian setting provides her with fetching mourning—black velvet and jet—and she is patently an efficient as well as humane mistress of the household.

Inevitably attention focuses on what that superb comic technician Richard Briers will make of Malvolio. The fussy air of primly affronted fastidiousness faintly recalls the late Stafford Cripps. This dried-up functionary of the creaking voice thrusts out a Gladstonian jaw as he rumbles out his fantasies about Olivia in a tone of loathing. The opening of the hoax letter is a comic vignette: his final exit, ragged, begrimed and degraded, is taken with absolute dignity, and quite rightly left the house silent and embarrassed for him. There are signs that Mr Briers is holding himself in nobly. He may be a victim of the lack of buoyancy that causes the comic scenes to bog down. James Saxon's Toby is the most colourless and characterless I have seen, and James Simmons's Aguecheek is simply undeveloped.
The gem of the production is Frances Barber's Viola, played in what one can term the Judi Dench mould: plucky, loving, sweet-natured, warm-hearted, sturdily convincing as a boy in her three-piece grey suit. The reunion with her brother (Christopher Hollis, a little stiff) worked its magic. A thoughtful, intelligent production, then, that needs to relax and enjoy itself much more.

Michael Billington (review date 5 December 1987)


At first I thought we might be in for some shocks as Kenneth Branagh's production of Twelfth Night at the Riverside Studios reversed the order of Shakespeare's first two scenes. But it turns out to be a genial, generous actor-oriented production chiefly remarkable for its use of a Victorian Christmas setting and for Richard Briers's outstanding Malvolio, a cross between Mr Murdstone and Samuel Smiles.

The snow-flaked Christmas setting strikes me as very odd. It enables the designer, Bunny Christie, to fill the wide stage with white from Olivia's portals on the right to Orsino's tomb-decked manor on the left. It is also possible that the play was first performed as a post-Yule entertainment at Whitehall in 1601. But everything in it cries out summer. Olivia dismisses Malvolio's cross-gartered, yellow stockings as "mid-summer madness." Fabian describes Sir Andrew's challenge as "more matter for a May morning." That doesn't suggest to me a world of Christmas trees and gift-boxes.

But although Mr Branagh, in only his second Shakespeare production, comes armed with a strong visual concept, he gives his actors a lot of elbow-room. This works very well when—like Mr Briers and Anton Lesser—they are naturally inventive. It also leaves certain darker areas of the play unexplored. Nowhere in James Saxon's bland, checktrousered Christmas-card Sir Toby do I find a hint of the character's exploitative cruelty. And while Abigail McKern's Maria is a neat Victorian lady's maid, where is the doting admiration for a drunken sot and the attempt to impress him with a cruel practical joke? Mr Branagh leaves some of the relationships suspiciously vague.

The chief beneficiary of the Victorian setting is Malvolio whom Richard Briers plays superbly as a frock-coated, wildly-ambitious fanatic: a Mr Hudson who can't wait to get upstairs into his lady's chamber. With his flattened, centre-parted hair and mouth down-turned like a reversed crescent moon, he is almost unrecognisable; in the box-tree scene he skirts the usual innuendoes to stress his dream of being "Count Malvolio"; and when he bares his teeth in a distorted smile, it is like watching the unveiling of some grotesque monument from which you would hide the children's eyes.

Yet when Mr Briers crawls out of his prison cell on all fours like a wounded animal, he evokes one's pity without unbalancing the play or suggesting that Shakespeare was writing a Steward's Tragedy.

It is a star performance without being a stage-hogging one, thanks to strong casting elsewhere. Anton Lesser's shaggy-locked Feste (singing Come Away Death, incidentally, to Pat Doyle's arrangement of a Paul McCartney tune) looks as if he might be waiting for Godot rather than Olivia but has the right vindictive asperity. Frances Barber, crop-haired in grey flannel, makes Viola a clear-spoken and giggly sport: all I miss is the hint of orphaned melancholy with which Shakespeare invests the character. And Caroline Langrishe is a fine Olivia combining aristocratic beauty with clear hints that she cannot wait to get her hands on the boy- emissary as she buries her head in her lap.

They say there is a perfect Twelfth Night laid up for us in heaven. In the meantime, we have a briskly-enjoyable one on tap in Hammersmith. Mr Branagh's RTC (Renaissance Theatre Company) may not be quite ready to oust the RSC but it is right that Shakespeare should not be a Stratford monopoly and I shall long remember the sight of Mr Briers extending an outflung hand to an imagined Sir Toby like a Richard the
Opal and taffeta—materials that flicker between one tinge and another—are both mentioned in *Twelfth Night*: appropriately for, placed at a time of the year when festivity shades back into sobriety, the play itself ceaselessly ripples between the bright and the sombre. Comic emotings clench into aching emotions. Appearances fluctuate, setting up undulations between pleasure and pain. It is entirely typical of the play's atmosphere that the songs of its clown, Feste, are forlorn.

Recognising all this, Kenneth Branagh's superlative production highlights it by setting the drama in nineteenth-century dress. The play's graver side gets translated into the Victorian preoccupation with mortality. Ivy-wreathed tombstones and a funerary monument form part of the scenery. The self-indulgent luxuriating in grief mocked by *Twelfth Night* is decked out in the extravagant trappings of Victorian mourning.

Olivia—her melancholic posturings gracefully caught by Caroline Langrishe—wears a jet-black velvet dress, swathes herself in a black veil and languishes on a black chaise longue. To convey Orsino's voluptuous mopings, Christopher Ravenscroft—at first too genuinely hang-dog, but gaining in affected strickenness as the play proceeds—paces round in a sable-coloured frock-coat.

In *Twelfth Night*, the *memento mori*—"Youth's a stuff will not endure"—both whets and dampens *joie de vivre*: decay is a reminder not to delay. Knuckling aside tears at thoughts of her brother's death as she briskly sets out to survive, Frances Barber's lively, lucid Viola demonstrates this sensitively and robustly.

Balancing the Victorian inclination towards the mortuary, the production stresses its gusto for Yuletide revelry. Stark wintry branches are silhouetted against the back-ground of Bunny Christie's set, but at its forefront is a candle-bedecked Christmas tree. Lanterns glow through flurries of snow. Swirls of music—by Pat Doyle and Paul McCartney—exuberantly accompany the whooping gamesomeness of Toby Belch and his cronies. Cheerily fleshed out by James Saxon, Belch resembles a genial toper in a nineteenth century print.

James Simmons' permanently wooden-faced Aguecheek looks like a Victorian toy soldier in his Hussar's uniform with its braid and frogging. Maria, performed with dashing skill by Abigail McKern, is a perky parlour-maid. Fabian—a slight role cleverly made substantial by Shaun Prendergast—becomes a dapper, knowing butler.

At the centre of the evening's success is Richard Briers' masterly Malvolio. Black-suited, shoulders hunched in tetchy sub-servience, cheeks biliously sucked in, he at first makes the character hilariously appalling, like a disgruntled undertaker gradually succumbing to megalomania. Then his portrayal modulates into something harsher—with astute help from the production.

Sparing none of the savagery of his tormenting and incarceration, it has Belch, Maria and Feste suddenly falling silent and avoiding each other's eyes in embarrassment as they realise how far their euphoric vengeance has taken them towards cruelty. Matching this, self-contempt regularly rips disgustedly through the professional foolery of Anton Lesser's restless, farouche Feste.

To the end, the production keeps up *Twelfth Night*'s shot-silk shimmer between the cheering and the chastening. As the couples lope off enthusiastically, two casualties of the marital happiness—Antonio with his
redundant love for Sebastian, and the rejected Aguecheek—are left alone at the sides of the stage.

Throughout, placing of characters is always finely judged—as is the pacing of events: so that the play's elegant structure stands out beautifully. In this production by the Renaissance Theatre Company, Kenneth Branagh has achieved a first-rate feat: doing sensuous justice to *Twelfth Night's* velvety surface while never letting you forget the bones underneath.

**Kate Kellaway (review date 6 December 1987)**


From the programme arranged like an advent calendar and the stage upon which at first you can make out only wintry shapes because of an expanse of gauze which veils the view, it is apparent that Kenneth Branagh's *Twelfth Night* (Riverside) takes delight in mystery and discovery.

And when the world is unwrapped, the gauze lifted on Bunny Christie's set, the effect is entrancing. Illyria is a luxurious but ruined place of broken balustrades, statuettes and fugitive furniture—a grandfather clock and chaise-longue stand out incongruously in the snow. Throughout the evening, high up on a stone terrace, musicians play Pat Doyle's and Paul McCartney's sweet but melancholy music, specially commissioned for this production.

The period is imprecisely defined, Edwardian perhaps—or Illyria's equivalent. Viola and Sebastian are both got up in grey flannel suits. Kenneth Branagh has made sure that they also resemble each other in mannerisms and tone—both are fervent, humorous and emphatic. Frances Barber's charming Viola has exactly the right blend of self-consciousness and excitement at the impropriety of her disguise. Grave and animated by turns, she is also wonderfully cheeky, delivering Orsino's compliments to Olivia with her hands stuffed into her pockets. Olivia (Caroline Langrishe) and Orsino (Christopher Ravenscroft) also, in a sense, resemble each other: their characters are, here, complementary: intelligent, courtly and obsessive in love.

Although this is a festive, magical version of *Twelfth Night*, celebration is never untouched by sadness. Feste (Anton Lesser) ensures that this is so, playing a sweet and bitter fool, supplier of champagne and sad songs—a fool and a wayfarer only because it is too painful to be wise. He drowns his sorrows in the company of James Saxon's wonderful, uproarious Sir Toby, a rosy reprobate popping Alka Seltzer pills, and of James Simmons's emaciated, self-pitying Sir Andrew Aguecheek who honours the role down to the last detail (his hair really *does* look like 'flax on a distaff'). Diminutive Maria (Abigail McKern) has an extraordinarily infectious laugh, but we do not need her help in responding to Richard Briers's memorable Malvolio. Briers plays him as an elderly valet stupefied with self-importance. Hilarity is followed by pity. When he appears at the end, mud-spattered and humiliated, the message is clear:

In nature, there's no blemish but the mind
None can be called deformed but the unkind.

**Christopher Edwards (review date 12 December 1987)**


Too much has been made of the supposed bitterness of Shakespeare's Arcadia. For instance, to Auden, Shakespeare was in no mood for comedy in this play. Instinctively, I side with Hazlitt who held that *Twelfth Night* was one of the most delightful of the comedies, containing little satire and no spleen: 'Shakespeare's comic genius resembles the bee rather in its power of extracting sweets from weeds or poisons, than in leaving a sting behind it.' At any rate, the spleen should not be seen as paramount. For this, among other reasons,
Kenneth Branagh's generous-spirited, unsplenetic production at the Riverside Studios is very welcome.

Those mourning the passing of classically spoken blank verse may find only patchy comfort here, it is true. And those who prefer their Feste songs to be sung to traditional tunes may resist the contributions of Paul McCartney and Pat Doyle to the musical side of the evening. For my part, I disliked the crooning ballads but enjoyed the occasional accompanying passages. All the same, this is a skilfully wrought production—funny, moving and festive in its vaguely Edwardian Illyrian setting. Seasonal touches include generous helpings of false snow, a Christmas tree and an advent calendar programme. But it is Richard Briers's Malvolio who offers the most welcome cheer. At first sight it may have seemed just shrewd marketing by Branagh to cast a television sitcom star in the part, but Briers makes the part memorably his own, rising high above his cosy television persona.

The set, by Bunny Christie, is both skillful and serviceable. Shrouded at the back with white sheets, Illyria is an artful clutter of broken balustrades, odd pieces of furniture, bare wintry trees and, for Orsino's opening 'If music be the food of love' speech, a raised seat overlooking a graveyard. Despite its apparent bleakness, an essentially celebratory spirit lurks not far below the surface—vide Toby Belch's secret haul of liquor hidden beneath the fringed flap of one of the tombstones. Enter, in Scene HI, the round, bearded, pink-cheeked form of Sir Toby Belch himself (James Saxon). 'You must come in earlier o' nights,' says Abigail McKern's sprightly, engaging Maria, as she obligingly pops an Alka Seltzer into his glass. James Saxon is a worthy leading reveller; Sir Andrew Aguecheek (James Simmons) his natural, credulous and absurdly funny gull.

Briers's first entrance—dressed in black, hair slicked down, nose in the air—bears the true stamp of Malvolio's sickly self-love; the pinched, overweening air of self-importance makes us all willing collaborators in Maria's device to ridicule him. Immediately before the letter trick is sprung, his fantasies of preference are both ferocious and funny—Briers's eyes rolling dementedly as he fancies himself Count Malvolio, crushing Sir Toby and his followers. Briers is very amusing in these scenes, as he is painfully moving later on when he realises how thoroughly he has been duped. It is a notable performance.

Of course, there are elements of harsh discord in the play. Malvolio, locked up as a madman, is cruelly treated, but he deserves it and his punishment is, more or less, just. Nor is Sir Toby just a genial bon viveur. He cruelly exploits Sir Andrew, but here too he is punished with a cracked skull from the martial Sebastian. It is a question of focus, of what elements you allow to prevail. Branagh admits the minor notes but allows harmony to prevail.

Anton Lesser's Feste, as well as supplying much of the play's humour, channels those discordant elements. His clown is possessed of more than a merely professional cynicism. For all his wit he is also genuinely weary at the world's folly—at times he seems driven with impatience. Lesser, looking like a hippy pop star on a low-budget tour, carries the role through—crooning ballads and all—with effortless authority and pointed intensity. Finally, there is the unifying presence of Viola, played by Frances Barber with considerable (if at times slightly forced) charm, humour and spirit. For once, this Viola makes a very plausible-looking twin to Christopher Hollis's Sebastian.

**Sheridan Morley (review date 16 December 1987)**


"If music be the food of love, play on" is arguably the most famous and oft-quoted opening line in all Shakespearian comedy. It takes, therefore, a certain amount of courage to start *Twelfth Night* without it, or indeed that whole first scene. Instead, Kenneth Branagh's new production at Riverside Studios plunges us straight into scene two and Viola's shipwrecked arrival: "What country, friends, is this?" "This is Illyria, lady" but it is like no Illyria we have ever seen before. Far from any seashore, all later references to May mornings
and sunshine ignored, we would appear to be deep in some park surrounding Anton Chekhov's winter residence. There, taking the play's title quite literally, the designer Bunny Christie offers us snowflakes, half-ruined statues, immense gothic tombstones and a generally ravishing if melancholic landscape apparently only waiting for someone to come and paint it as a Victorian Christmas card.

Through the snowflakes wander Aguecheek and Toby Belch and Maria and Feste and Fabian, not figures of the usual slapstick fun but poets and dreamers and losers apparently all in search of Vanya or at any rate the next train to Moscow: at any moment you expect to hear the fall of trees in some distant cherry orchard. This may not, therefore, be a Twelfth Night to appeal to Shakespearian purists: but it is one of the most thoughtful and beautiful of recent years, characterised by a haunting new score by Paul McCartney and Pat Doyle and crowned by a Malvolio from Richard Briers which is far and away the most comically tragic since Olivier played the role at Stratford all of thirty years ago.

Mr Branagh has all kinds of other ideas about the play: Orsino eventually gets his opening scene, albeit in flash-back, and we then get a dropout hippie Feste (Anton Lesser), a Viola (Frances Barber) who is alone the pure innocent abroad in a park where all are trying to betray her, a bully-boy Fabian (Shaun Prendergast) and a Belch/Aguecheek (James Saxon and James Simmons) double-act thin, enough to hide behind the Christmas tree which masks them from Malvolio.

Everything about this production suggests that the actors are back in charge, and that what they have done under Branagh's leadership for his own Renaissance company is to restructure an all-too-familiar text locate a palm court trio high above the stage and then go to work on an immensely intriguing collection of character studies. True, the Olivia and the Orsino are a little nondescript, and there are moments towards the end when invention and courage seem to flag, but that is a small price to pay for the realisation that Malvolio goes within an act from comic fool to tragic victim, so that his final off-stage scream of revenge is worthy of Lear, or that Viola alone retains awareness of a world elsewhere, far removed from all these manic Chekhovian romantic defeatists. It is a rare and wondrous Christmas treat: hasten along, as they close it in mid-January.

H. R. Woudhuysen (review date 18-24 December 1987)


It is ten to eight in Illyria, snowing, and Christmas is well under way. There are plenty of drinks and jokes, a tree and presents, as well as songs and hangovers. The twelve days of Christmas pass; there is more snow; time untangles the lovers' knot and Malvolio swears his revenge: it is still ten to eight on the grandfather clock. So many things have happened: the usual family rows and disagreements, barely suppressed jealousies and resentments, choice specimens of bad behaviour and semi-private romantic intrigues are all remembered through a haze of drinks which satisfy various appetites; Christmas has come and gone again, but clock-time for once has stood still. Illyria is not hot and sunny, but neither is it really cold. It has that warm dampness that comes with snow—a place somewhere between laughter and tears, but which is never merely sentimental.

The country has its large houses for Orsino and Olivia, but its only visible part is an iron-gated graveyard, broad enough for the Duke to feed his melancholy love, Olivia to mourn her dead father and brother, and where her Steward can be imprisoned and tormented within a convenient tomb. Illyria is not quite Victorian England but very like our Dickens-inspired idea of it: black, formal clothes, stiff, formal behaviour covering a world of restrained erotic desire and unrestrained imaginative power: not the Dickens of Pickwick or A Christmas Carol but of Bleak House and Little Dorrit, where secrecy and tragedy will eventually give birth to revelation and joy.

The pleasure principle lies firmly behind Kenneth Branagh's production of Twelfth Night, resulting in a carefully measured reading of the play which brings out its irresistible charm, without suppressing its
undeniable awkwardnesses and strangeness. This is deliberately emphasized by reversing the order of the play's first and second scenes, making Viola's resolution to serve Olivia even more abrupt and lacking in credibility than Johnson found it to be. Branagh is well served by a young Viola (Frances Barber) and an attractive Olivia (Caroline Langrishe). Most of all, he has a first-rate Maria (Abigail McKern), who moves convincingly between her mistress and the five satellites of the household. This quintet, Belch, Ague-cheek, Malvolio, Maria and Feste, come perilously close to taking the play over, so assured and well worked are their performances. Indeed, in a sense, Twelfth Night offers less to the actors playing the four lovers (especially to the Duke and Sebastian) than it does to Olivia's house-hold. James Simmons and James Saxon as the thin man and the fat man, with Anton Lesser's sinister, long-haired Feste, under the supervision and direction of the expert Maria, are a real match even for Richard Briers's superb Malvolio. Briers creates a painfully credible Steward, in turns pathetic and hateful, both Uriah Heep and Mr Guppy, cruelly abused but, we feel, badly in need of some pain and humiliation.

It is no mean achievement to create a Twelfth Night which so successfully evokes and captures the moment and mood of the play. This is partly made possible by the production's well-judged lighting, but more is contributed by pleasing music written by Pat Doyle and Paul McCartney and played by a quartet of musicians (piano, cello, horn and timpani), who are on stage throughout the production, discreetly hidden by some bare trees. Perhaps the only disappointment of an evening otherwise completely without vulgarity, is Feste's singing in an American folk-song drone. But this is only a small failing in a production which fulfils most of what one wants and always hopes for from the play.

Kenneth Hurren (review date February 1988)


Confronted with the business of reviewing yet another production of Twelfth Night, which sometimes seems to occur about every three or four weeks. I have often thought to fill up a bit of the space by detailing the plot. Not in this journal, of course, but there are other readerships that must be constantly irked by reviewers' assumption that everyone is as familiar with Shakespeare's plots as they are. I have felt it would be helpful to these happy illiterates to distinguish, at least, between the two great transvestite comedies—Twelfth Night, whose heroine passes herself off as a boy so successfully that another woman falls in love with her, and As You Like It, whose heroine passes herself as a boy so successfully that even the man who has already fallen in love with her can't tell the difference.

The great kindness of this would ordinarily be to protect the innocent: it is a terrible thought that they should find themselves unwittingly exposed to Sir Toby Belch and his cronies when the worst they had mistakenly expected was Touchstone. But, as it happens, that would not be so terrible in the case of Kenneth Branagh's production. God knows, the low-comedy crew attached to Olivia's house-hold cannot be other than painful, and the more their 'business' is elaborated the worse they become. Here they are judiciously subdued. They go through the necessary motions of the Malvolio jest, but are otherwise handled with a discretion that precludes their actually becoming an active nuisance.

What a remarkable talent is amongst us in young Branagh. I begin to think there has not been such a boy wonder since Orson Welles. Not only is he one of the finest actors of his generation, he also writes plays (not, so far, with spectacular success, but that will may come), has formed his own Renaissance Theatre Company which has three major Shakespearian productions on its agenda in the next few months, and he directs—with, it may be said on the evidence of this Twelfth Night, considerable distinction.

This is quite the most enjoyable production of the comedy I have seen for decades, and it is achieved with, by today's lights, a merciful minimum of innovative 'interpretation' and wayward eccentricity. There are, to be sure, one or two aspects that may disconcert pedantic purists. The first two scenes, for example, are
transposed—but that, I am persuaded, is advantageous to the flow of the narrative. And all is set outdoors in winter, which is less defensible when there is reference to 'midsummer madness' while snow is perversely falling; but anyway it makes for a pretty and seasonable setting (stunningly designed by Bunny Christie, with the residences of Orsino and Olivia at opposite sides of a white winter-garden with graveyard statuary, and a quartet of Spartans on the terrace to provide the music) and allows the conspirators to bring on a portable Christmas tree to hide behind in Malvolio's letter scene.

The costumes are vaguely Victorian, which seems odd when we come to the Viola-Aguecheek sword duel, but any tetchy criticism of period anachronisms is disarmed by the otherwise incongruous presence under a leafless tree of a grandfather clock, its hands stationary while the comedy's fancies and fantasies are enacted during some wondrous breathing-space in the history of the world.

All would be lost, of course, if the performances did not match the conception. Happily, they do; and while the Malvolio of Richard Briers is as fine a realisation of that famous role you could wish to see, encompassing all the gravity and absurdity of the man's pretensions with the confident technique of a superb comic actor and catching as well the touching pathos of his humiliation, it never unbalances the play into a one-man show. The wit and style of Frances Barber's Viola, the cool passion of Caroline Langrishe's Olivia, the dark hint of sadness in Anton Lesser's vagabond Feste, the sprightliness of Abigail McKern's piquant Maria, and indeed a cast without a single damaging weakness see to that.

Jill Pearce (review date April 1988)


The newly-formed Renaissance Theatre Company was launched in style at the Riverside Studios with a sell-out run of Twelfth Night, directed by Kenneth Branagh and produced by David Parfitt, who together direct the new company. Other interesting productions to be taken on tour in 1988 are Much Ado About Nothing (director, Judi Dench), Hamlet (Derek Jacobi), and As You Like It (Geraldine McEwan—who was taking a keen interest in Twelfth Night the evening we were there).

This was a very brightly-lit seasonal Twelfth Night with a Christmas tree used to hide the conspirators from Malvolio. The very wide stage at the Riverside Studios was unobtrusively broken up into different areas, and yet the size was also exploited cleverly (designer, Bunny Christie). On the left, a white door with steps leading up to it was used to great effect as the entrance to Olivia's house, while on the right, an ironwork fence and white backcloth gave an effective final exit to Malvolio, whose vow to be revenged on the whole pack of them could be heard as he made his way out of the green garden gate and down the path. A four-piece orchestra, set on a raised dais left stage, provided accompaniment to the songs, reworked by the Renaissance Company composer and musical director, Pat Doyle, in collaboration with Paul McCartney. Centre stage was dominated by a snowy cemetery, one of whose vaults provided Malvolio's prison. A ramp led up to a throne-like chair, perched in isolation, where Orsino was first to be seen, listening to the music, while the opening scene of the play, brought forward, was Viola's arrival in Illyria.

The costume was late nineteenth-century, and for the most part the colours were subdued greys, black and white. James Simmons as Aguecheek added a touch of colour when he appeared in full regimental uniform to fight his reluctant duel, and James Saxon as Sir Toby Belch was also more colourfully attired, although his performance was somewhat subdued. Maria (Abigail McKern) was seen to be the only driving force behind the conspiracy against Malvolio and rather overdid the merriment on observing the results of her efforts. Shaun Prendergast, pitching his voice very high, was good as Fabian. One only caught a brief glimpse of Viola (Frances Barber) in her maiden's weeds before she reappeared as Cesario, tightly buttoned into a three-piece suit to conceal a somewhat buxom figure. Her appearance was a little incongruous in the romantic lyrical part of her role with the melancholy and good-looking Orsino of Christopher Ravenscroft falling for
her as heavily at the end as the beautiful and lively Olivia of Caroline Langrishe had earlier. However, it went well with Cesario's pert manner when trying to manage the recalcitrant Olivia. Christopher Hollis make a credible Sebastian and Tim Barker a sinister Antonio with a terrible birthmark. Anton Lesser played Feste as a gipsy with long tangled locks and ragged clothes, frequently swigging from a flask and always seemingly in the angry stage of drunkenness. It was an interpretation too heavy on the cynicism—the lines, *We are some of her trappings* … were uttered with venomous hatred—and it was at odds with the gentle melancholy of the songs which he sang in-differently.

The gem of the evening was Richard Briers' Malvolio. A centre parting and false teeth made it hard to recognize this well-known comic actor as he stepped out of Olivia's house and paused on top of the steps to dazzle us with his amazing smile. Everything about his performance was impeccable, his strut, timing, peevish manner, voice and measured speech and above all the dignity he maintained when he emerged dishevelled and ridiculed from his prison. He even managed to look dignified when he appeared in night-gown and Wellington boots to remonstrate with the carousing Toby Belch and company. He must rate as one of the great Malvolios.

It would certainly have been worth seeing this *Twelfth Night* for Malvolio alone, but other aspects will make it memorable, in particular, the effective wintry set.

**PRODUCTION:**

Peter Hall • Playhouse Theatre •1991

**BACKGROUND:**

Eschewing a recent trend that emphasized the ideological potential of the theatre, Hall presented *Twelfth Night* without imposing contemporary political and social concerns on the narrative. Critical opinion varied markedly as to the success of Hall's approach. Peter J. Smith argued that the production "failed to satisfy," despite having "captured both the magic and the melancholy of the script." Similarly, Eric Sams maintained that the staging was hampered by a lack of direction. Bernard Levin, by contrast, lavishly praised Hall's shaping of the drama, making particular mention of the cast's sensitivity to Shakespearean diction. Hall set the play in the Caroline period, and the stage designs presented an Illyria that Christopher Edwards described as a "glorious autumnal prospect—apple trees and falling brown leaves—which dips down to a stretch of mist-shrouded water." Among the performances, Eric Porter's Malvolio proved the subject of controversy. Irving Wardle, for example, maintained that nobody would shed any tears for Porter's "fatuously capering Malvolio," while Michael Coveney took the contrary position that "there is simply no better Malvolio in the world than Eric Porter." While this staging pleased audiences, critics such as Roy Walker voiced certain objections: "This was a *Twelfth Night* that did not altogether succeed, but a production that continually threw fresh light on a comedy about which most of us have long ceased to think freshly." The cast further included Dinsdale Landen as Sir Toby Belch, Richard Garnett as Orsino, Sara Crowe as Olivia, Maria Miles as Viola, and David Ryall as Feste.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Benedict Nightingale (review date 1 March 1991)**


Not long ago *Twelfth Night* was regarded as Shakespeare's most serene comedy. Then the scholars remembered that the great tragedies came only a few years later, and began to see darkness, danger and malice behind the play's smiles, and, inevitably, the directors followed. Toby Belch became a horrid, bulbous drone,
the practical jokes he plays on Malvolio almost demanded investigation by Amnesty International, and Illyria seemed barely sunnier than Birnam Wood or Dunsinane.

Peter Hall clearly wants to edge back the pendulum. The orange tree in Timothy O'Brien's courtyard set is shedding autumnal leaves David Ryall's clown has his lugubrious moments, but otherwise melancholy is missing. Indeed, Dinsdale Landen's Belch, with his curls, looping moustachios, red Carolean garb and genial grin, seems to be auditioning for a famous painting by Frans Hals. He is not just a laughing Cavalier but a hilariously gurgling one. There is no more meanness in him than might be expected of Santa Claus after a tiring night spent clambering down the world's chimneys.

That is not the only trend Hall challenges. His production rejects the guileful detail, the verbal nuances, the pregnant pauses so beloved of the RSC in particular. That entails some loss (Landen burbles "byarenthrpshrn" for "be yare in thy preparation") but also a new briskness and momentum. Moreover, Hall takes pains to establish points important to the plot usually neglected by super-subtle directors.

Thus Richard Garnett's Orsino clearly feels a half-conscious pull towards Maria Miles's fine, bold Viola. At one moment he actually strokes her chin and kisses her lips. That makes it easier to believe his renunciation of Sara Crowe's pert Olivia for a girl he thought a boy. Again, Martin Jarvis has been encouraged to play Ague-cheek, not as the drip of tradition, but as the "great quarreller" the text calls him.

True, that doesn't explain why he dresses in what I at first mistook for a huge wicker picnic basket but later realised was a yellow plaid blanket that had been converted into knickerbockers stretching up to his wispy off-white hair. The visual impression is of Beckett's crazed Lucky playing celebrity golf. Nevertheless, this incongruous figure has a surly truculence, a macho swagger that for once explains why he is quick to cuff or challenge those he thinks he can beat, such as the "male" Viola.

That leaves what could, should and maybe will be the evening's major performance, Eric Porter's Malvolio. Certainly, his clay-coloured, pock-marked face exudes a wonderfully wintry disdain. Certainly, he twists in plausible glee when upmarket fantasies seize him, and certainly he frisks comically enough in his yellow stockings. But if the idea is to suggest that inside the old, gristly mutton is a lamb, waiting for release, it does not yet come off. His two Malvolios have yet to cohere into one. Time may do it.

Malcolm Rutherford (review date 3 March 1991)


Sir Peter Hall's production of Twelfth Night at the Play-house Theatre is remarkably pretty to look at. The dominant colours in the set are red and green: a tree with bright red apples, the windfalls lying on the grass. Nature spills over into the costumes. Sir Toby Belch appropriately has more than a touch of red about him. There is also the black and yellow of Malvolio.

Other characters are more flaxen. This is late summer or very early autumn. The Playhouse has a very tall stage which lends itself well to this display of colour schemes. There is a shade of opera rather than drama to the production.

Otherwise, this Twelfth Night is uneven. Since Sir Toby is played by Dinsdale Landen and Sir Andrew Aguecheek by Martin Jarvis, those performances at least are very professional. Their singing and drinking scenes are outstanding. The best of the bunch, however, is Feste, the Fool, played by David Ryall. He is older than you might expect, and also wiser. This is the first time that I have seen the Fool as the central figure in the play.
The main weakness among the performances is Sara Crowe's Olivia. Ms Crowe is the actress who recently played Sybil alongside Joan Collins's Amanda in Noel Coward's *Private Lives* and was widely praised for making so much of the part. Here she is a pouting, petulant spoiled child who looks and talks like a dumb blonde. Since we know that she can act and speak perfectly well, the blame cannot fairly be placed on her. Playing the role this way can only have been imposed from the top. The result is pointlessly perverse, mildly irritating and should be corrected.

Malvolio, played by Eric Porter, has his moments. He is especially good when reflecting on his social ambitions before finding the near-fatal fake letter. Yet I wonder if I am alone in finding some aspects of Shakespeare's comedies increasingly unsympathetic. The maltreatment of Malvolio, which starts as a joke but degenerates, is offensive to our age.

The current English Shakespeare Company's production of *The Merchant of Venice* tries to get round this kind of problem by being as sympathetic as possible towards Shy-lock. I suspect that Peter Hall is trying the same approach by being kinder than usual to Malvolio in his opening scenes. There are limits, however, to how far you can play against a text that is not overflowing with the milk of human kindness.

It is also possible, judging by this production, that Hall thinks that *Twelfth Night* really would be better as an opera. I am not at all sure that he is wrong. The twins, Sebastian and Viola, could just as well step out of Mozart. The brilliant designing and lighting are done by Timothy O'Brien and Rick Fisher respectively, both of whom, like Hall, have considerable opera experience. Their work here would look very good at Glyndebourne.

**Irving Wardle (review date 3 March 1991)**


Anyone who has kept up with the Shakespearian repertory over the past 15 years will have noticed a gradual erosion of the old boundary between the "dark comedies" and their popular counterparts. *As You Like It* now plunges the pastoral refugees into worse conditions than those they left behind; *Much Ado About Nothing* celebrates the union of two dislikeable, sharp-tongued wall-flowers, while *Twelfth Night* has been all but engulfed in cruelty, pain, and the sense of mortal transience.

Peter Hall's production calls a halt to this process. Nobody will shed any tears for Eric Porter's fatuously capering Malvolio; or recoil from the sadistic brutality of Dinsdale Landen's relentlessly genial Sir Toby. The show is out to reclaim the play's lost territory. It does nothing to gratify the critical appetite for ugly secrets; but I think it will please a lot of spectators.

Hall takes his cue not from the middle-period dark comedies but from the late romances. What he emphasises most is the story of a tortuous journey towards a long-desired reunion. Viola, a creature of the sea, continues her voyage on land; and if, as a heroine, she does little to navigate her own course, it is because she is no match for the surrounding elements. When John Caird directed the play in the early 1980s he set it on a desolate promontory and underscored the action with lavishly orchestrated sea music. Hall reduces the music (by Stephen Edwards) to a string motif that recurs like a distant memory, and opts for a masque-like setting—a formal park overcast with cypresses (by Timothy O'Brien) where the Caroline velvets and satins glint darkly as in a Watteau *fête champêtre*.

The mood is melancholy without becoming oppressive, and responsive to delicate atmospheric shifts. Orsino (Richard Garnett) languishes through the opening scene to an onstage lute number which then mingles with the sea music as the castaways crawl ashore: thus the show distinguishes from the outset between
narcissistically self-induced emotion and the feelings of the heart. Melancholy evaporates like the sea-mists when Toby is trucked on, a scarlet hogshedd boozing in his half-timbered inglenook; but once Feste joins the party with "O mistress mine", his oafish listeners, too, are overcome with a shared sense of loss and regret.

Otherwise, their usual relationship is reversed. Landen plays a perpetually beaming Toby to a truculent Ague-cheek (Martin Jarvis) who is always looking for a pretext to draw his sword; which pays handsome dividends when he arrives at the duel scene. There is not much depth in the comic partnerships: Aguecheek is spared his erotic humiliations, and Maria (Diane Bull) is simply a bundle of fun with no evident marital designs on Toby. But that way darkness lies.

The spirit of the show resides in the casting of the remaining four principals so as to contrast youth with age. Maria Miles's gamely cherubic Viola and Sara Crowe's virginally strangulated Olivia are at the beginning of their emotional lives: Porter's grizzled Malvolio and David Ryall's wearily laconic Feste at the end of theirs. It takes some believing when the stately Porter erupts into a last tango for a partner who could be his granddaughter; but at least he emerges as the production's supreme victim of erotic delusion. Ryall, who controls the house with his songs and abandons his gags as a lost cause, appears to be savouring the human comedy from long distance; and then, from the Sir Topaz scenes, moves into action as the cruelllest character in the piece. Hall has preserved one small area of darkness.

**Michael Coveney (review date 3 March 1991)**


It would be charming, but dishonest of me, to be complimentary about *Twelfth Night* at the Playhouse, the theatre you can never quite find near Charing Cross. There is simply no better Malvolio in the world than Eric Porter, who repeats the silkily incensed Puritan he first launched in the RSC's very first season in 1960 and repeated, more gustily, at the ill-fated St George's in Tufnell Park some years ago.

But all the rest is not so much dire as dull. This can be the most tedious of comedies if played without sex appeal and inventive comic inflection. It is here played without sex appeal and inventive comic inflection, although it is seductively designed by Timothy O'Brien. Sara Crowe's Olivia talks in a curdled, irritating voice similar to the one she employed in her over-praised *Private Lives* role. I would hate to think that she might talk like this all the time, but I am beginning to worry since seeing her performance in the television ads for soft cheese. What country, friends, is this? This is Philadelphia, lady.

The purplish red leaves of the garden tree are picked out in the costume of David Ryall's incipiently ancient, foot-sore Feste, an admirably painstaking performance. Maria Miles is Viola, and is excellent in the first scenes, tolerably delightful in the wooing by proxy, competent in the farcical byways. But you have to love Viola, or at least get to know her, and Miss Miles is miles away. Dinsdale Landen plays Sir Toby as a laughing, snorting cavalier, and Martin Jarvis is a traditional Aguecheek.

Peter Lindford makes something positive of Sebastian, no mean feat, and David Hargreaves is an honest, nautical Antonio, living up to the 'notable pirate' tag. Rick Fisher's lighting is haphazard, but Diane Bull's Maria is anything but.

**John Peter (review date 3 March 1991)**

Sir Peter Hall's new production of *Twelfth Night* (Playhouse) is a labour of love, but I do not mean that as a compliment. Hall last directed this play in Stratford 31 years ago: the brilliant 29-year-old who had just founded the RSC and set out to rediscover, underneath Shakespeare the Romantic poet, Shakespeare the hard-headed political writer, the ruthless psychologist, the ironic joker. I saw that first *Twelfth Night* as a young student and still remember its irresistible freshness, its vigour and its hard but generous humour. Hall showed you precisely how the exquisite lyricism was constantly being undercut by irony: how people laughed through other people's tears.

He now revisits the play in a spirit of uncritical generosity. It unfolds like a Caroline idyll, bathed in soft light and melancholy music. Orsino is a lovesick cavalier whose longings have no subtext: you would never think, from Richard Garnett's statuesque performance, that all this poetic elegance is meant to cover up a heavy streak of exhibitionism and self-pity. Dinsdale Landen's Sir Toby comes on twinkling and rubicund, like Frans Hals's Laughing Cavalier, lovably tipsy: you would never think that the man was a professional sponger who was busy fleecing Aguecheek, almost playing Iago to his Roderigo.

Aguecheek is thus reduced to a comic; and perhaps because he has little to press and fight against, Martin Jarvis turns in a most uncharacteristically actorish performance. I liked Sara Crowe's spoilt, petulant Olivia at first, but she has none of the gravitas of a great lady (which would make her situation even funnier), and I did not think that her cutglass voice was always fully under control.

Eric Porter's Malvolio is quite another matter. This is an authentic Shakespearian victim, sombrely conscious of his status, unaware of mockery, analysing the famous letter like a Foreign Office mandarin studying a coded diplomatic message, the melancholy prune face cracking into a pitiful smile. The other gem of the production is Maria Miles, whose Viola is a troubled adolescent, both innocent and touchingly calculating, taking her first steps into adult-hood as if it were a minefield. During Feste's song, Orsino casually takes her hand: Miles's face is a study in pain which is only just beginning to be understood.

Yes, this play is a cruel romance, a comedy with real tears. But the production as a whole has a decorous, nostalgic air about it, as if Hall had met a long-lost friend and decided not to remember his faults. You hardly ever feel that anyone could get hurt. It leaves you emotionally safe—and, no Shakespeare play should ever do that.

**Christopher Edwards (review date 9 March 1991)**


Peter Hall has directed a charming, intelligent and enjoyable production of *Twelfth Night*. These qualities, by themselves, may not satisfy the dwindling band of diehards pursuing novelty or deeply topical reinterpretations of Shakespeare. Feste is not projected as a proto-Green, nor is Malvolio a Shi'ite Muslim. Instead, the play's delicate shifting moods and its magnificent language are, on the whole, allowed to operate upon us with a minimum of interference.

Timothy O'Brien has designed a Caroline Illyria. In Orsino's court a chandelier hangs above dark-stained floor-boards. Everyone wears Cavalier costume. Beyond the court is a glorious autumnal prospect—apple trees and falling brown leaves—which dips down to a stretch of mist-shrouded water.

After Orsino's opening, 'If music be the food of love …' (a speech, and indeed a performance, handled with rather too much self-mockery by Richard Gameti), a bedraggled Viola (Maria Miles) emerges from the mist. This young actress is delightful. Fresh, earnest and captivating (the willow-cabin speech is particularly well delivered), she succeeds in retaining her essential femininity while coming across plausibly as a boy.
Sara Crowe's Olivia is the only oddity in the production. She completely upstaged Joan Collins in last year's production of *Private Lives*, with her performance of Sybil. Everyone said how hilarious she had made Sybil sound with that squealing, scalded, brittle, baby-doll caricature voice she gave her. Oh dear. It seems that the voice belongs to Sara Crowe. Olivia is heavily Sybilised, at some cost to the poise and gravity of her feelings.

Dinsdale Landen is an excellent laughing cavalier of a Sir Toby Belch (although, along with the cakes and ale, he does swallow some of his lines). Huge-bellied, bearded and rubicund, he is content cheerfully to lead Sir Andrew Aguecheek on. Often we are shown a Sir Toby whose love of pleasure has a decidedly malicious bias—not just in the gulling of Malvolio, but in his exploitation of Sir Andrew. Dinsdale Landen does not overdo the malice: he is funny, good company and not particularly nice, except to Diane Bull's spritely Maria. He sees Sir Andrew as a rich twerp and treats him accordingly. The subtle part of Martin Jarvis's portrait of Sir Andrew is that, while retaining the twerpy, he also fleshes out the character's frustration and resentment. His final exit, head broken by Sebastian, rejected by Sir Toby, his amorous designs shot through, is both comical and touchingly dignified.

Eric Porter's Malvolio is one of the most convincing I have seen. His sense of his own importance, flawed though it makes him, has a wonderful kind of integrity about it. Eric Porter is funny enough, but dignified as well. His reading of 'Olivia's love letter is a superb study in self-delusion. I was very impressed too by David Ryall's dry, philosophic Feste. This Feste really has seen it all before, and the experience shows in his manner which manages to sound world-weary while remaining quicksilver. His taunting of Malvolio at the end is cruel enough and the moment when Feste bangs down the trap door on his imploring face is uncomfortable. Malvolio deserves some of his punishment, but he justly complains that he has been 'notoriously abused'. All the same, this prison episode is not handled in a spirit of pointed viciousness. It is this refreshing lack of insistence—of letting the text speak for itself—that helps make the production so enjoyable.

**Bernard Levin (review date 23 March 1991)**

Others abide our question; thou art free. But for many years now, thou hast been anything but free. When, and how and why, did the modern vogue for buggering Shakespeare about start? More to the point, why do we put up with it? True, we smile tolerantly when we read of the outrages to which he was subjected by 18th century actor-managers; but surely we should have progressed beyond the crudities of earlier times?

Well, we should, certainly, but let me give you a mild example of our modern equivalent of the habit (quite customary two centuries ago) of giving *King Lear* a happy ending.

Not long ago, there was in London a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, I do not name the director, for a reason he will spot if he reads on. In the trial scene, an extraneous, almost aleatoric, item was included, which Shakespeare had not written or indicated. Three actors, playing louts, were perched in the gallery of the court, and as Shylock was indicted they chanted, "Jew, Jew, Jew".

Clearly, the director was convinced that audiences had never noticed that Shylock, in the play, is reviled as a Jew; until that pioneering interpolation, they had always been under the impression that he was a rigid Presbyterian and, for good measure, chairman of the Lord's Day Observance Society. It was then that I began to take to Shakespearean performances a rabbit's foot, which I would surreptitiously finger in the dark in the hope (vain, as it turned out) that it might bring me at least as much luck as would be needed to discover which play I was seeing.

A symbol, that; but perhaps a significant one. I could not possibly count my evenings of Shakespeare in the theatre, but it must be many hundreds by now; I think I have not missed a production at either the RSC or the
National for many years, and of course I have seen many elsewhere. (I bet I am the only man you know who has seen *The Taming of the Shrew* in Danish.) And I own to a powerful conviction that the quality of Shakespeare on out stages has declined, and is still declining. I think it is worth wondering why.

I must not recall the past to belabour the present. I am just old enough to have seen Gielgud's last Hamlet and Olivier's Hotspur, and easily old enough to have seen Ashcroft's Cleopatra. On such memories I inevitably dwell; who wouldn't? But I think it is now getting very rare indeed for younger Shakespeare theatre-goers to experience a production or a performance that they will be able to treasure, and to call up at will, for the rest of their lives.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past.
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.
And with old woes new wail my dear times'
   waste …

Of course, all is not yet lost, as anyone who saw Ian McKellen as Coriolanus recently will agree, but if you did see it and now try to think of a recent half dozen of such memory-catchers, you will, I assure you, be disappointed.

What happened? Naturalism became the watchword, or rather the vogueword, perhaps encouraged by the *verismo* of directors such as Zeffirelli, Visconti and Strehler in their sensationally successful rescue of Italian opera. It soon conquered the Shakespearean stage; but in so doing it opened the gates to disaster. In no time, declamation was a crime, scansion a disreputable disease, elocution itself was unnecessary—nay, there was no need for all, or even most, of the words to be heard by the audience, provided sufficiently striking things were happening on stage.

Soon, the Royal Shakespeare Company (in one dire season all the players seemed to have been told to talk only out of the corners of their mouths), followed smartly by the National, had added to the belief that audibility was old-fashioned the notion that Shakespeare wrote some lovely lines but didn't really know his job, particularly in the matter of stress and cadence; the former, it was argued, should be used at random, and the second abolished entirely if the audience was to stay awake.

So it went on, year after year, until it seemed that never again would Shakespeare's words take precedence over lesser people's ideas. But hark! Who comes, with drum and fife, to raise the siege? If you are as parched as I am for the real thing that once reigned almost universally, go quickly to the Playhouse, hard by Charing Cross. There you will see that real Shakespeare has not vanished entirely, that there are actors and actresses who not only speak verse as though it is verse but speak it so every word—every single word, I swear—is audible, meaningful and Shakespeare's. For in that theatre, Peter Hall has directed *Twelfth Night*, and the counter-revolution has begun.

The diction throughout is not just impeccable; Hall has got out of his players a lode of truth *by the very sound of the words*. Clarity is only the start; every word is caressed and honoured, and the effect is to deepen the joy of the play and the feelings it offers. But the reason it has this effect is that Shakespeare, contrary to the belief widespread in our theatres, knew his job; he knew that if the rhythm in which he wrote was followed, the force of the words would work effortlessly. Is it not shocking that actors and directors putting on Shakespeare today repeatedly reveal that they do not understand that precious rule?

If you think I exaggerate when I commend the scrupulous clarity of these players, I offer you a tiny, infinitely delicate, proof. In Act I, scene 5, Sir Toby Belch is assiduously living up to his name, and after one tremendous eructation he matters as excuse the Une, "A plague on these pickle herring". Dinsdale Landen (a
wonderfully crisp as well as ripe performance, remembering, as few Tobys do, that he may be a roistering gentleman but he is a gentleman none the less) speaks the words just as I have printed them. But if you look at the First Folio, you will find that then of "on" is elided; the Urtext has "A plague o'these pickle herring". Thus, Hall and Lansden have given Shakespeare more than he asked for, Can fidelity to an author go further?

I must not give the impression that we are here for a talk on diction; the production, and most of the players, are pure enchantment from the very first moments, as we savour Timothy O'Brien's lovely, simple set and Rick Fisher's magical lighting. But when I said that the counter-revolution is upon us, it was not just a metaphor; Hall's production could indeed set new standards and see them, over time, adopted.

What is so wonderful at the Playhouse is not just the complete absence of the usual anachronistic absurdities and perversions of Shakespeare's words; Hall has taken an immense risk. For the production is well-nigh invisible; when Shakespeare wants a character to move, he or she moves, and everybody else keeps still. When Maria Miles, for instance, a lovely, innocent, bruisable Viola, gets to, "A blank, my lord, she never told her love", she stands still, looks at Orsino, and delivers, without affectation, fidgeting, or wrenching the words the wrong way, let alone speaking the lines while riding a bicycle round the stage. (Her performance was the more creditable for the fact that she was suffering from an appalling cold. Why wasn't she bundled off home and put to bed? I would willingly have brought her orange-juice and read to her.)

Or Aguecheek; Martin Jarvis is one of the most interesting I have ever seen, but it is hard to say why, until you sit back and realise that he simply takes each word and squeezes ripe juice out of it, thus demonstrating that if you trust Shakespeare he will never let you let you down. The same goes, even more strongly, for David Ryall, a sad and autumnal, though never cynical, Feste; I have never known an audience so turned completely to stone for the final song. As for Eric Porter, this truly great actor has seized Malvolio as firmly as Olivier did, and gives the part not just three dimensions but four.

But I said that Hall had taken a risk; where lies it? Read the reviews and you will know. The tone is generally of disappointment; the clue lies in the use by more than one critic of the word dull. But it is not Hall's work that is dull; they have been dulled by what they have seen and heard for so many years, until they cannot see authenticity and beauty if it is quiet and simple and real and pure and faithful to Shakespeare. Let them revisit to the Playhouse, where their eyes, and ears, may be opened whereupon the repentant sinners could help further the revolution. To the barricades! To the barricades!

Eric Sams (review date 29 March 1991)


Surprisingly, and disappointingly, this production lacks direction. Its aim is plain, and deserving of applause; let Shakespeare speak, without superimposed interpretation. The play itself, from its first line to its last, pleads for just such a performance. It avowedly strives to please us by presenting love and drama in terms of music, of which we can also make what we will. For this purpose, Peter Hall eschews both the broad approach of the English Shakespeare Company and the subtler individual detail of its Royal counterpart. His musical models are neither choral works nor Lieder but Mozart operas; in theory, the perfect paradigm for the exposition and resolution of sexual ambiguities and tensions. At The Playhouse, the actual onstage music is minimal, if not minimalist; but the quasi-musical effects are pervasive. Thus Maria Miles, who has an occasional twinkle of star quality, inserts a deliberate pause before each of her set speeches, as if to introduce a Viola solo. The three merry men in the caterwauling scene are arranged as an operatic trio. Above all, the dénouement works wonders by stage grouping and delivery. Against the background of real ungrudging reconciliation, as in Figaro and Cosi, the added theme of revenge strikes a painfully jarring and unresolved discord. The great era of Shakespearean tragedy is waiting round the corner, out of sight.
So, sadly, is much of this comedy. As yet, the company is hardly an entity, let alone a unity; and it achieves no more than a good concert performance, in which the artists address the audience. In consequence there is too little sense of the required interplay within the play. The characters fall in or out of love with themselves instead of each other; so no independent dramatic world is created except by individual effort, which is fitful. The steadiest highlight is Eric Porter's Malvolio, whose malevolence is not merely nominal. His study could achieve greatness, if it were more strongly supported by stage action and reaction. But his tormentors are unhelpfully lightweight. Dinsdale Landen offers too much literal Belch and not enough poetic Sir Toby; that malicious mischiefmaker is concealed in a cozy Santa Claus character and costume. No one could have guessed from Diane Bull's Mrs Mopp impersonation that Maria is a gentlewoman, still less the brains behind the counterfeit-letter plot. Martin Jarvis makes an intelligent Aguecheek, which is a genuine achievement; but that paradox proves impossible to sustain. The glum laughter and sad clowning of David Ryall's Feste, on the other hand, are convincing enough; but his dry, throwaway style of singing does little for lyricism in Illyria. Sara Crowe's amorous metamorphosis from dark mourning into bright morning is well effected, with the help of costume and lighting changes. But neither aspect of Olivia makes any special appeal to Richard Garnett's Orsino, who seems strangely serene for so desperately frustrated a lover. His philosophical reading remains unperturbed even when his page turns into a woman before his eyes. As her non-identical twin brother Sebastian, Peter Lindford makes the most of his part; so does David Hargreaves, who for some brief but compelling moments not only holds but dominates the stage as the sea-captain Antonio.

Of course there is much else to admire and relish, including many a deft directorial touch if no very strong or consistent grasp. The design and décor are unobtrusively expressive and relevant; the autumnal setting of flamecoloured foliage with a hint of frost to follow, and the alternation of smoky mists with sunny radiance, are modestly yet memorably managed. But where are the expected fire and warmth?

Peter J. Smith (review date October 1991)


In its potted history of the Playhouse Theatre, the programme boasts that 1988 was the year in which "Jeffrey Archer, politician, novelist and playwright, acquires the controlling interest in the Playhouse". For those on the Left in England, Archer's threefold description might sound slightly exaggerated, perceived, as he is, as a Tory-party fundraiser and writer of potboilers, but, be that as it may, he is now the controlling share-holder in a newly reopened theatre.

Archer's theatre houses everything one might expect. Gaggles of beautifully turned-out public-school children, besuited businessmen and furred, ostentatiously encrusted, and almost unfeasibly hugely shoulder-padded women. At the risk of sounding like Jimmy Porter, there is something about this kind of theatre that smacks unembarrassedly of privilege. "From 1991", the programme triumphs, "the Playhouse will be the home of the Peter Hall Company". Twelfth Night is then the company's first production in its new venue and, fittingly, it seemed to espouse the values and the ethos of the Playhouse itself.

Along with the iconoclastic revaluation of Shakespeare in academic circles, Shakespearean production has also altered. Companies like the English Shakespeare Company with their full-time commitment to educational backup and the even more theatrically radical Cheek by Jowl, treat these plays as vehicles for discussing political and social issues as inseparable from theatrical ones. Theatre, as it was in Shakespeare's own day is, once again, inherently ideological. This approach is anathema to Hall and consequently his Twelfth Night is a production that is about thirty years out of date.

Recently, Hall's predilection has been for the Caroline period. Like all of his late plays at the National in 1988, this new Twelfth Night was full of Van Dyke figures. Richard Garnett's Orsino looked like the fated king himself with long hair and sharp beard. The Caroline setting made stage sense in as much as Viola and
Sebastian were allowed to look strikingly similar, in long feathered hats and pantomime boots, but apart from this, one is tempted to make a connection between the self-indulgence of the Caroline court and the escapist and essentially mystical tone of the production itself. Hall's attitude to the Bard is that of the 'enlightened' Caliban to Prospero—respect and absolute trust; indeed, at times, this Twelfth Night was close to an act of blind faith. Hall's ethereal production was underscored throughout by the sounds of the waves' repeated fresh collapse (as Larkin has it) and the atmospheric music of Stephen Edwards which, reminiscent of the work of Brian Eno, comprised synthesised tonal impulses rather than melodies.

Timothy O'Brien's set was, like the costumes, full of rich colours. The cyclorama was suitably marine blue, while Illyria was composed (almost compost) of deep autumnal reds and browns. Rick Fisher's lighting was warm and comforting. Benevolence and reconciliation seemed to be watchwords. Sara Crowe's beautifully youthful Olivia languished on a floral swing as her ladies swept up around her and Garnett's gracefully refined Orsino indulged himself in his rich language while a cavalier lutenist (Robin Jeffrey) played live music in the background. Garnett's performance was the best of the evening. He caressed Cesario's cheek as he noted that all is semblative a woman's part and inclined his head to kiss 'him' in response to the page's story of his lovesick sister. The delicate homoeroticism of the relationship was touchingly conveyed and the Count's abrupt return to male bravado in response to Cesario's question, Sir, shall I to this lady? was a fitting mixture of egocentricity and pragmatism, Ay, that's the theme. The impetuosity and self-pity were galvanised into dangerous wrath in the final scene as he threatened first the countess and then his page with a wildly flourishing dagger.

Against what was for the most part a lingering mildness were set the figures of Eric Porter's Malvolio and David Ryall's Feste. The former's was a disappointingly undistinguished performance from a rightfully distinguished actor. One of the major focuses of the play was, here, transformed into a mere foil for the malevolence of Belch and Fabian. There was little in the way either of Malvolio's withering condemnation of the drunks or of a pathos which he so often attracts when incarcerated and taunted by the oxymoronic Sir Topas. The box tree scene was the most subdued I have ever seen and the audience found Maria's later hysteric about the approach of the cross-gartered and yellow-stockinged steward, a little exaggerated having not been adequately prepared for it earlier.

Feste's motley was faded and tired. He was an old grey fool, a hanger-on (as the play makes clear) from the house-hold of an earlier generation. There was a nice touch as he directed his question to an audience that, as he soon realised, was too new-fangled ever to have heard of his authorities. For what says Quinapalus? he asked us hopefully, before resigning himself to the reality that, as Olivia tells him, his fooling has grown old and people dislike it. His wailing of the songs was melancholic and his final rejection occurred as Olivia rounded on him, blaming him for the torture of Malvolio. She drew herself up and shouted at Feste, He hath been most notoriously abused. Like Falstaff, Feste was finally outcast by the court and he retreated into his doomed and pathetic final song, beating his tabor faster and faster to simulate the increasing rainfall.

Aguecheek, played by Martin Jarvis, was an interesting and original, if not entirely successful, version. This Andrew was blustering, crotchety, crossly-assertive and thoroughly dislikable. Even his usually pathetic I was adored once too, was issued here as a challenge or a "So there!" rather than as a piteous lamentation. Andrew, in daft yellow checked culottes and huge yellow hat which he snatched off and hid behind his back when Maria told them that yellow is a colour [Olivia] abhors, was closer to Belch's description of him as an ass-head, and... a thin-faced knave than usual. Dinsdale Landen's Belch with his falstaffian twinkling eye was both corpulent and competent, but, as with Porter's Malvolio, he brought nothing of great interest to the role. His drunken stagger, his stage belching (a plague o'these pickle-herring) and his phallic business with his walking stick, as he jokes about the housewife taking Andrew between her legs and spinning off his hair, were all features of the knight I had seen before, though at Sneck up, Belch wittily and irreverently lifted Malvolio's nightshirt on the end of his cane. Maria (Diane Bull) broke down during the taunting of Malvolio the madman and this gave real force to the desire of Toby to be well rid of the business.
One of the central problems of the production, for this reviewer, was the woeful undercasting of Viola (Maria Miles). There was no time, in her performance, for Viola to think. Olivia drew back her veil and asked if her face was not well done. Viola's double-edged response was instantaneous, *Excellently done* [no pause] // *God did all.* When Malvolio offered her the ring that she had apparently just left with his lady, there was not a glimmer of recognition that Olivia had engineered the gift as a sign of her burgeoning attraction to the page. *She took the ring of me, I'll none of it*, followed too fast upon Malvolio's lines. Viola's resignation to the constructive forces of time (*thou must untangle this, not I*) was again wasted—shouted straight up into the flies rather than thought through. Indeed, Miles had a tendency throughout to shout and lacked the verbal modulation and the intelligence that make Viola such an adroit personality.

Hall's *Twelfth Night* is at home in the Playhouse. It looked superb and its richly indulgent and autumnal spirit captured both the magic and the melancholy of the script. The production though somehow failed to satisfy; fundamentally, it was unchallenging—accomplished, detailed and consummate but unmoving, without verve and, at times, tired. At its most basic, the problem is this: that Hall's crafted professionalism is not all that interesting to watch and it is a problem of which the Peter Hall Company will have to take account whether it finds its new roost in Archer's well-feathered nest or elsewhere.

**PRODUCTION:**

Ian Judge RSC 1994

**BACKGROUND:**

Judge's 1994 RSC production was faulted by several critics for a lack of depth, though it charmed the majority of commentators with what Irving Wardle termed its "fresh and truthful detail." The set design featured a wintry Jacobean representation of the city of Stratford-upon-Avon itself. Judge explained: "When I look through the hedges of New Place or sit in the gardens of Hall's Croft, I understand Illyria." The director emphasized the comic and wistful nature of the play, thereby softening its melancholic elements. While praising the clever staging of this production, Jackson nevertheless deprecated its lack of "carnival or carnality," arguing that "theatregoers who prefer their comic worlds a little more romantic may find this tame, and it will be too sentimental for those who want more bite in their comedy." Among the performances, commentators generally admired Desmond Barritt's Welsh Malvolio, whom Irving Wardle characterized as "an immobile, puddingy poseur, galvanized into a garter-snapping flasher, and then into a tragic clown, howling frantically in the dark." Additionally, reviewers frequently singled out Derek Griffiths as Feste, Tony Britton as Sir Toby Belch, Clive Wood as Orsino, and Emma Fielding as Viola.

**COMMENTARY:**

Nicholas de Jongh (review date 26 May 1994)


Although *Twelfth Night* is Shakespeare's most sexually subversive and ambivalent comedy, most modern directors steer clear of its erotic potential. So it proves in Ian Judge's jovial new production, which plays the broad comedy to the hilt, with picturesque flourishes. The romantic and sexual aspects drift discreetly into the shade.

Not surprisingly then, Judge seizes upon Malvolio, impersonated with dazzling comic buoyancy by Desmond Barritt. The puffed-up Welsh puritan due for his come-uppance is the production's chief example of the self-deceiving and self-unaware.
But the prime sexual business happens elsewhere in the play. Duke Orsino and the Countess Olivia both fall in love at first or second sight with a youth, or rather with Viola, who convincingly passes herself off as male. The aristocrats' wooing ought be comic, ironic and disturbing all in one fell swoop.

But for that to happen, Viola must be played—as in Shakespeare's day—by an actor, or by a thoroughly androgynous actress. The Viola of Emma Fielding—a small girlish figure with matching hair—hardly comes across as boyish, let alone a young man.

So Orsino, to whom a long-haired Clive Wood gives the look of an unromantic lecher and the manner of a flaunting Narcissus, and Haydn Gwynne's anxiously mourning Olivia, do not communicate the play's sense of sexual danger. The notion that love is a game of wild caprice, in which the androgynous win, passes us by.

Miss Fielding, nearly everyone's most promising young thing in 1993, disappoints by suggesting so wanly a Viola awakened to secret love and grief. She reacts with studied calm—and little comedy—to the tentative touchings of duke and countess alike. And there is no feeling of heart-felt discovery, or self-discovery, when at last brought faceto-face with the brother she thought dead. Judge disastrously stages this crucial scene as a display in which they circle each other like a pair of suspicious dogs.

Yet the production is atmospherically powerful and precise. John Gunter, the sumptuous designer, conjures up a Tudor village with distant houses pictured in gloomy mid-winter, decked with evergreen trees and bare branches. And Miss Gwynne's Olivia presides over a household in which Mr Barrit's Malvolio looms as a comic enormity. Acting as foil to Tony Britton's bluff Toby Belch, Joanna McCallum's bland Maria and Bille Brown's over-pantomimic Sir Andrew (silly hat, walk and voice) this lightly-moustachioed Malvolio achieves Lady Bracknell's outrage and the ponderous self-importance of Mr Pooter. He oozes pomposity from every pore until the idea of Olivia's love catches him out.

Then he swaggers on, swathed in masses of black and yellow like a trussed wasp, as he ogles his astonished mistress with a leer-like smile, tongue flicking in and out like a toad. Confronted with the truth, he has all the pathos of a very large balloon, impaled after the party.

This *Twelfth Night* may make too little of the warning against dangerous romanticism but Barrit's Malvolio lights up the evening and makes it.

**Alastair Macaulay (review date 27 May 1994)**


Part of what makes young Emma Fielding, the RSC's new Viola in *Twelfth Night*, so captivating is that she is made up of contrasts. She is elfin, tiny, vulnerable, with vast eyes; and yet she is forthright, living intensely in the moment, with an inquiring little nose that is a vital part of her profile, and an eager stance whereby her weight rests keenly on her toes. This mix of opposites is why she was so heartcatching as Thomasina when Stoppard's *Arcadia* was new; and no less so in Jonathan Kent's *School for Wives* at the Almeida.

She is heartcatching again in *Twelfth Night*. Her voice is deep, strong, firm (though she does not always enter words cleanly enough), until in an instant some new thought renders it high, clear, light. This sudden illumination from within is what makes Olivia lose her heart, when in male disguise Viola tells her that she/he would "call upon my soul within the house … And make the babbling gossip of the air/ Cry out 'Olivia!'" And it is what halts Orsino and confuses him when Viola/Cesario tells him that the history of her father's daughter is "A blank, my lord. She never told her love …"
She is surrounded here by a fine cast, but I am in two minds about the production that frames them. Ian Judge, the director, tells the play's story surely and briskly. Sometimes he is alert to its affecting shadows: the way we see both Viola and her brother Sebastian is potent, as is the moment of their final reunion. Sometimes, however, he treats it like the merest artificial farce. The funereal cypress shadows of the text are absent. And erotic affliction, which so possesses Orsino, Viola and Olivia, is never serious.

Smiling charm abounds. The ending and the curtain calls are as sweetly neat as a chocolate box. John Gunter's Elizabethan scenery is pretty but needlessly symmetrical and boxy: a tourist view of Olde England. And though Nigel Hess has written some fair songs, the taped muzak that he has provided at regular intervals makes Twelfth Night feel like a MGM musical.

That it keeps turning back into a beautiful play, both robust and tender, is largely due to a superb cast. Desmond Barrit's Malvolio, a sour Welsh Frankie Howerd of unusual force, is a triumph of comic self-importance. Liverishly he fantasises about the day-bed "where I have left Olivia" (pause, then, with lascivious delicacy) "sleeping". Bitterly he sobs out "I thank my stars I am happy". Tony Britton makes a touchingly noble Sir Toby Belch. The way he gently plants a line like "She is a beagle" into the still air has the true Twelfth Night magic.

There are excellent moments too from other players, notably Haydn Gwynne's elegant and eloquent Olivia. But the production lets her dwindle into an ignoble silly, and it never lets Bille Brown's Andrew Aguecheek grow from his hilariously absurd beginning into a three-dimensional study of perpetually feckless adolescence. Clive Wood is a commanding Orsino, both virile and narcissistic; but I never believed that either love or music had overwhelmed his senses. As Feste, Derek Griffiths projects his songs clearly; but his voice is far from mellifluous, and his manner the least charming onstage.

I have the same mixed feelings about Ian Judge's Love's Labour's Lost, currently at the Barbican. Truly mixed. In Twelfth Night, I love the way that, in the final scene, he suddenly beclouds the farce with Malvolio's fury. Then, after Barrit has hissed "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you," the way he wipes a long strand of hair back across his bald pate returns us, ideally, to comedy in an instant.

Just as fine are the thunder and lightning at the end, and the way Maria turns Feste out of doors—where he sings to us of "the wind and the rain". If Judge can build his understanding of these glorious moments into the whole fabric of a play, then he will be a great director of Shakespeare comedy. Right now he is a very good one who is sometimes not good enough.

Paul Taylor (review date 27 May 1994)


No one can work an audience better than Desmond Barrit: he is to engaging camp what a butter mountain is to butter. Whether as Toad in Wind in the Willows or as Brazen in The Recruiting Officer, this gifted, corpulent comedian has the knack of totally winning you round to characters who would otherwise be objectionable. Is this a talent, though, you would wish to see applied to Malvolio, the killjoy steward in Twelfth Night? If the first night audience for Ian Judge's tourist-friendly production is anything to go by, the answer is an overwhelming yes. This, then, is a minority report.

Barrit is, of course, very, very funny. With a mournful Welsh lilt and feeble strands of hair forced, kicking and screaming, across his bald pate, this Malvolio perambulates his massive circumference about in a parade of dignity he cannot possibly bring off. Enjoined to smile more, he practises by pulling his mouth up in a lewd, lopsided pucker, such as might get you arrested, and then remodels it with his fingers into a grimace that merely suggests stark insanity. Barrit's Malvolio takes to the fashion hint about the yellow stockings
cross-gartered in a big way, for when he whips off his cape in front of Olivia (Haydn Gwynne) he's a sheer
vision in yellow and black—ruff, slops, the lot.

What you don't get, thought, is any real sense of the character's repression or of the danger posed by his
interfering zeal. True, many good Malvolios have shown there's a dandy waiting to burst out of the
buttoned-up wrappings, but Barrit's version of him seems congenitally stage-struck, which is ironic when you
reflect that men of Malvolio's ilk were to close down the theatres only 40-odd years after Twelfth Night's
composition.

Instead of conjuring the complex, mixed atmospheres of the play, Judge panders to rudimentary tastes. For
example, although Derek Griffiths's Feste sings well, the awful saccharine plaintiveness of the music suggests
that this Fool must have been the Johnny Mathis of the Jacobean world. It is haunting, but more like toothache
than heart-ache. Like the dinky half-timbered houses in the distance and the utterly palatable drunken
disorderliness of Tony Britton's Sir Toby Belch and Bille Brown's Sir Andrew Aguecheek, it would go down
a storm, you feel, at Chichester, where they enjoy a challenge about as much as Sir Peter Hall likes rest.

Emma Fielding has some affecting moments as the disguised Viola, although her most touching speech is
undercut by the staging. Would a page and master really find themselves both sitting on the latter's bed in
their night-clothes like a couple of girls at a stop-over party? And wouldn't Viola's emotional plight be
communicated better if you stressed rather than made light of the social constraints? Steven Elliott is allowed
to give due emphasis to Antonio's homosexual crush on Robert Bowman's Sebastian, and, near the beginning,
we even see this pair dis-gorge, clutching each other, by the storm-tossed sea. For the most part, though, this
crowd-pleaser of a production coughs up nothing surprising.

Benedict Nightingale (review date 27 May 1994)


What a delight Ian Judge's production more than compensates for the weird concoction—Orsino's court as
Dartmouth Naval College, if you please—that masqueraded as Twelfth Night at this address three years ago.
In Desmond Barrit we have the funniest Malvolio since Donald Sinden back in 1969 and in Emma Fielding as
moving a Viola as I have seen since I can't say when. With Toby Stephens's Coriolanus doing wonderfully
supercilious things with his nose, chin and voice at the Swan next door, this is proving an encouraging week
both for the RSC and for tomorrow's British theatre.

"If music be the food of love, play on, give me excess of it," cries Clive Wood's fine Orsino from his
cushions, sounding like a wine-buff who has had to subsist on tap-water for a year. There is plenty of music in
this production, and plenty of atmosphere, too. Up goes the vast tapestry that dominates this voluptuous
prince's luxurious lair, and suddenly black clouds are scudding, lightning crackling and white billows surging.
Enter Fielding's half-drowned Viola, carried by the sea-captain, and, after they have left, enter her twin
brother Sebastian, carried by Antonio.

This last is, of course, interpolated dumb-show. So is the following scene, in which Olivia is seen weeping
beside her brother's grave. But Judge's revisionist touches are almost always apt. Most of his production is
played against a row of Elizabethan houses, emphasising what the text makes clear, that Illyria is actually
Shakespeare's England. Again, extra business prepares us for much that is to come; intimate looks between
Belch and Maria, who will marry; a sensual kiss for Viola from her future husband, Orsino; a friendly pat
from Olivia for Malvolio, provoking the mad erotic fantasies that doom him.

Barrit's Malvolio trundles on, a lugubrious man-mountain with a face as colourful and alive as a slab of cold
veal that has sat too long in the fridge. He catches the frostiness, the solemnity, the vanity, and the
exhilaration that eventually bubbles out. When his Malvolio is forcing his lips into something he calls a smile—actually a highly experimental blend of a twisted dinghy and some bared piano keys—he is hilarious. So he is when he is massively pirouetting about in yellow. So he is again and again.

A caveat Barrit slightly over-elaborates some of his comic business, and, maybe as a result does not achieve the pathos he might when his tormentors have trapped him in prison. Elsewhere, too, Judge misses opportunities to show that Twelfth Night, while hardly the darkest of Shakespeare's comedies, is not the lightest either. Bille Brown plays the mincing, prancing, silly-ass Aguecheek of theatrical tradition with great panache; but there is, surely, more to the role. Again, Haydn Gwynne could find more than grace, sweetness and warmth in Olivia.

Still Tony Britton is a strong, gentlemanly Belch—"because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?" is an outraged cry from the bar of the Athenaeum at some low-church temperance preacher—and Emma Fielding makes an infinitely touching Viola. She will clearly survive all that life throws; and yet, for instance when she sits forlornly gulping as Derek Griffiths's Feste sings of death, she makes you feel it has already thrown a lot.

I don't think I have heard the famous speeches about love delivered with more freshness and candour. This is an actress sure to go far.

Irving Wardle (review date 29 May 1994)


With its cute Warwickshire street scenes (John Gunter) and lush orchestral underpinning (Nigel Hess), Ian Judge's production of Twelfth Night has all the signs of a number one tourist attraction. It also overflows with fresh and truthful detail—beginning, if you please, with a comic Orsino (Clive Wood) whose pretended grand passion collapses in ruins once he meets Viola and experiences the real thing. No wonder, given Emma Fielding's performance, which combines the high romance of a bereaved castaway with a commanding comic attack—as in her peremptory treatment of Olivia (Haydn Gwynne) before submissively modulating into the praise speech.

Where you most expect comedy there are fewer laughs than usual. Neither Bille Browne's ostrich-like Aguecheek nor Tony Britton's over-gentlemanly Toby add much to these outlines, and their drunken party consists of stiffly rehearsed routines with not a drink in sight. But any comic team would probably be eclipsed by Desmond Barrit's Welsh Malvolio: an immobile, puddingy poseur, galvanised into a garter-snapping flasher, and then into a tragic clown, howling frantically in the dark. The show ends with the sight of Feste (an exquisitely melodious Derek Griffiths) being thrown out of the house to sing his last song under the night sky. For once, Malvolio gets his revenge.

Michael Coveney (review date 29 May 1994)


On the main Stratford stage, 'Doctor Feelgood' (Motto: 'Here's some Shakespeare, it won't hurt a bit') strikes again. The director Ian Judge has become the RSC's 'warm glow' specialist, and his Elizabethan, Stratfordian Twelfth Night is a third knockout RSC comedy experience following the surreal Comedy of Errors and the Edwardian Love's Labour's Lost (now running at the Barbican).

Emma Fielding's small, impetuous Viola is magically washed up in a cinematic flood on the shores of Illyria, Warwickshire. John Gunter's beguiling design (with fine costumes by Deirdre Clancy and superb lighting by
David Hersey) places Clive Wood's Orsino in a tapestry-walled enclave with candelabra; and Olivia's palace, unambiguously, on Shakespeare's home patch, with a tantalising prospect of the medieval guild chapel, timbered façades of Scholar's Lane and, in the gulling of Malvolio, the barren, wintry flower beds of the knot garden in New Place.

Frost and snow coat the Stratford rooftops. Judge, like Kenneth Branagh in his 1987 Renaissance Theatre production, is mindful of the play's title. The cosiness might be cloying without the sulphurous Welsh Malvolio of Desmond Barrit, for the melancholic strain below stairs is missing to such an extent that when we learn that Sir Toby (Tony Britton) has married Maria (Joanna McCallum), no-one gives hoot.

Despite this vague and regrettable Chichester Festival tendency, Judge supplies several elements missing from recent RSC Twelfth Nights: a Feste, Derek Griffiths, who is a genuine singing clown; an Aguecheek, Bille Brown, who can cut a ridiculous caper; a Viola you can hear; and a Malvolio who is easily the best since Donald Sinden's.

Barrit, in a bald wig smeared with Bobby Charlton-style strands of greasy hair, grinning and cross-gartered in a pair of painfully dainty boots (later spotlit in the prison), appears before the willowy, winsome Olivia of Haydn Gwynne like a huge, flashing bumblebee.

He finds the tragic dimension in the extreme comedy of Malvolio's self-delusion. The misapprehended bedroom invitation propels him across the stage, rolling his tongue lasciviously around his slack chops. The performance is one of abject and hilarious physical decline, scrambling on his knees in a pathetic pout of sensual surrender before quivering in tepid isolation in the cell. The intention of revenge is announced with sad and doleful menace and a defiant gesture of pride as he rearranges a dangling strand across his boiled-egg pate. You laugh, and you cry.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Comparisons And Overviews

T. W. Craik (essay date 1975)


[In the following excerpt, Craik comments on Twelfth Night in performance, focusing his attention on various theatrical interpretations of setting, costume, character, and scene.]

The following selective account is concerned, first, with the vicissitudes of Shakespeare's text in the theatre; secondly, with the general history of stage performance, with special reference to setting and costume; and thirdly, with various theatrical interpretations of the play, and of particular scenes and characters.

The only recorded performance of Twelfth Night in Shakespeare's lifetime is that at the Middle Temple on 2 February 1602 witnessed by John Manningham. Performances at court by the King's Men took place on 6 April 1618 (as Twelfth Night) and on 2 February 1623 (as Malvolio). When the theatres reopened after the Restoration, Twelfth Night was in the repertory of D'Avenant's company (the Duke of York's) and was in production by 11 September 1661, when Charles II saw it and Pepys was also in the audience. Pepys saw the play again on 6 January 1663 and 20 January 1669. The performances he saw (no text survives) may have been adapted by D'Avenant. In 1703 Charles Burnaby published his Love Betray'd: or, the Agreeable [sic] Disapointment [sic]; 'Part of the Tale of this Play, I took from Shakespear', he wrote in his preface, 'and about 50 of the Lines', these including the opening words and Viola's image of patience on a monument. His play
(which was not a success) is of no importance to the history of Twelfth Night in the theatre (most of Shakespeare's design being changed beyond recognition), though it is of some interest in confirming the un-Shakespearean temper of its time, at least with regard to Shakespearean romantic comedy (Pepys had a low opinion of Twelfth Night). Shakespeare's comedy itself, after a long period of neglect, returned to the London stage in 1741, with Macklin playing Malvolio at Drury Lane, and thereafter it continued to be regularly performed until in 1820 it was again briefly supplanted by a thoroughly altered version, this time a musical production devised by Frederick Reynolds (who had in 1816 and 1819 presented similarly 'operatic' renderings of A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Comedy of Errors); it contained 'Songs, Glees, and Choruses' selected from Shakespeare's other plays and poems and set by various composers, chiefly Henry Bishop, who was responsible for the vocal and orchestral arrangements. Since that time there have been no such thoroughgoing transformations of Twelfth Night, though omissions, additions and transpositions have been frequent. The Clown's songs in II. iii and II. iv, for example, were omitted from Bell's acting edition (printed from prompt-books, 1773-5), along with their context of dialogue, but it is more usual to find them (and others) in unexpected places and sung by unexpected persons. One would nowadays hardly expect Olivia to sing, though in 1771 Mrs Abington did so; still less Sebastian, for whom Henry Bishop supplied a song in 1818 and 1819 (in the 'operatic' age of Reynolds, admittedly). As recently as 1932 Olivia joined the Clown in the final verse of his final song, and in the same production Orsino had 'Come away, death' sung to him in the opening scene (not by the Clown). Acting upon many readers' conviction that because Viola declares in I. ii that she can sing to the Duke she must have been originally intended to do so, Eduard and Otto Devrient gave 'Come away, death' to her in 1893 at Carlsruhe. This change, though I think it mis-conceived, was at least based on a theory of dramatic propriety. The merely ornamental introduction of songs, however—a relic of the 'operatic' period—reappeared as late as Daly's production of 1894, where (in an otherwise wordless scene following III. iv) Orsino's musicians serenaded Olivia with 'Who is Olivia? What is she?' adapted from the serenade to Silvia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and sung to Schubert's deservedly famous setting. It is true that Daly had here contrived a dramatic and romantic context which may well be defended on its own terms, but his opening of the play, with the two 'shipwreck' scenes II. i. and I. ii preceded by 'Come unto these yellow sands', was an incongruity wholly indefensible.

Songs—omitted, interpolated or transferred—are a relatively unimportant alteration to the text (however seriously they may affect the mood), provided that Shakespeare's dialogue and his scene-order are preserved. Alterations to these, though often made with good intentions or for compelling reasons, are capable of affecting the play more drastically. In fact, the verbal alterations have been few and unobjectionable. One can sympathize with Kemble's excision of 'Castiliano vulgo' from I. iii. 42-3 on the evident grounds of its unintelligibility; one can understand his rewriting of Viola's lines, I. ii. 55-6, as

I'll serve this duke;
Thou shalt present me as a page unto him,
Of gentle breeding, and my name Cesario:—
This trunk, the reliques of my sea-drown'd brother,
Will furnish man's apparel to my need,

since it gets rid of her embarrassing word 'eunuch', prepares the audience for her assumed name, and undertakes to explain how she came to be dressed just like her brother—though all these points may well be trivial or even superfluous. His omission of her line (v. i. 135)

More, by all mores, than e'er I shall love wife

is an interesting pointer to his judgment (he probably thought 'by all mores' an eccentric phrase and the whole line dangerous to the seriousness at which he was presumably aiming in Viola's asseveration of her love for Orsino). Finally, his interpolation later in the same scene (v. i. 385: between 'We will not part from hence' and
'Cesario, come') is specially interesting because it shows his awareness, as a man of the theatre, that Orsino and Antonio must quench their enmity during the final speeches of the play:

—Go, officers, We do discharge you of your prisoner. [Exeunt officers.]

Antonio, thou hast well deserv'd our thanks: Thy kind protection of Cesario's person, Although thou knew'st not then for whom thou fought'st, Merits our favour: Henceforth, be forgotten All cause of anger: Thou hast a noble spirit, And, as Sebastian's friend, be ever near him.—

This production of Kemble's was the first to reverse the order of the first two scenes, a regrettable change often made since, and occasionally found even today. There are at least three reasons why the order of Shakespeare's scenes has been, on various occasions, altered. One is the desire to improve on Shakespeare's dramatic art. A second is the need to get late-comers seated without their or other spectators' missing, or suffering distraction from, the first appearances of the more important characters: thus Daly's 1894 production began with il. i (Antonio and Sebastian) before I. ii (Viola) and I. i (Orsino). A third is the fact that, in the nineteenth-century theatre, relatively un-localized scenes were conventionally presented before a lowered front curtain which was afterwards raised to disclose a representational stage-set (such as Orsino's palace, even though this was required for only forty lines); it was chiefly for this reason that so many productions, from Kemble's time onwards, began with 'What country, friends, is this?—a question to be asked indeed when nothing indicated the answer.

Changes of elaborate scenery (accompanied by many and long intervals) were characteristic of the nineteenth-century theatre; the principal set of Tree's 1901 Twelfth Night was Olivia's terraced garden, copied by Hawes Craven from a picture in Country Life, while Sir Barry Jackson refers to an unspecified production ending with 'a double marriage ceremony in the Illyrian Cathedral'. The basic stage requirements of Twelfth Night are, of course, minimal: no appearances 'above', no 'discoveries' or 'concealments', no trap-door entrances or exits, are called for, and, apart from the 'box tree' where the overhearers hide (II. v) and the exterior of the 'dark room' where the supposedly mad Malvolio is confined 'within' (IV. ii), place never needs to be visually suggested, and stage furniture, if used at all, needs only to be of the most elementary kind. A fundamentalist return to Elizabethan simplicity, as he conceived it, was made by William Poel in 1895. Though coldly received by Max Beerbohm, Poel's similar production of 1903 prepared the way for Granville Barker's of 1912, in which the settings were formal and uncluttered; while the 'twisted pink barley-sugar pillars' of Orsino's palace and the 'Noah's-ark trees' of Olivia's garden might look affected to us today, these settings were well fitted to Barker's sense of dramatic rhythm. Since then, splendour of setting has never been allowed to obstruct the flow of the play. In terms of setting and costume, the theatrical treatment of Twelfth Night has been prevalingly 'Elizabethan'. Wheatley's 1774 drawing of the duel scene (III. iv) shows Fabian wearing the deep lace collar and cuffs of the Caroline period, and Sir Toby in a small ruff, a laced jerkin, and the boots to which he refers in I. iii, though Sir Andrew's dress, apart from ruffles at the wrists and rosettes on the shoes, is that of the 1770s, and Viola's, more ornate and worn under a long cape, is similar, the only Illyrian touch consisting in her turban-like hat with an ostrich plume. The nineteenth century saw a steady movement towards consistency, though Malvolio's cross-gartering was often misinterpreted as extending to his ankles, and though there was a tendency to clothe Viola in a tunic, belted at the waist, such as is shown in many photographs of actresses in the role (a concession, perhaps, to the confusion of Messaline in the play with Mitylene in Greece, but more probably to a feminine sense of what was 'becoming': one feels sorry for the male Sebastians of these productions). An interesting and very satisfactory compromise between the androgynous and the Elizabethan appears in the two 'Cesario' costumes for Granville Barker's Twelfth Night
preserved in the London Museum. Naturally, in the present century, producers have experimented with other times and place than the England of Shakespeare, though it is very rare indeed to find the play done in familiar 'modern dress': indeed, the usual motivation of experiment seems to be the creation of an unfamiliar world in order to make the 'unrealistic' main plot more acceptable (hence the use of the French eighteenth century, or the English Regency, or the late Victorian periods). However, as John Russell Brown has shown [in his Shakespeare's Plays in Performance, 1969], Twelfth Night returns again and again in its language and action to 'English countryside and domesticity', and, as he says, the stage picture can help to establish this world, 'not insistently, but with subtlety'. Despite occasional references to shipwreck on the Illyrian coast, eunuchs and mutes, 'the Count his galleys', the 'rough and unhospitable' manners of the natives to strangers, and the Italianate names of most of the characters, the greater part of the action takes place in and near Olivia's house, which is the typical great household of Shakespeare's day, with its lady, her waiting-gentlewoman, her steward, and her fool. Sir Toby Belch (her kinsman) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are no strangers in this society, as are Sir Politic and Lady Would-be in the Venice of Volpone, but are indigenous. Dogberry and Bottom similarly confirm the Elizabethan Englishness of the air they breathe, though it will rightly be replied that Messina and Athens, and Illyria, have also (whenever it suits Shakespeare's purpose) romantic atmospheres of their own, in which Antonio's idealistic loyalty to the friend he adores finds its natural element, as do Orsino's ardent despair and (near the end of the play) his fierce jealousy. Sir Toby's remark about 'the bed of Ware in England', like Trinculo's 'Were, I in England now, as once I was', is designed to keep us simultaneously and humorously aware of both worlds at once. Both are, of course, in their different ways, Elizabethan, and call for Elizabethan costume.

Nothing is known for certain of how the roles were distributed among the original performers. Even Robert Armin's taking the part of the Clown is not an established fact but merely a probability, based on the considerations that Will Kempe had left the company and that Armin may have had musical talent. It is, of course, unsafe to suppose that because he was familiar with his fellow-actors, Shakespeare had his mind's eye continually upon them in creating his characters. Though Kempe had left, Sir Toby is a Kempe part, and he and Sir Andrew recall the Kempeand-Cowley pairing of Dogberry and Verges. Sir Andrew is never explicitly said to be thin, though this may perhaps be deducible from his surname, from the 'flax on a distaff' simile (I. iii. 99), and also from the word 'anatomy' (III. ii. 61) if it is descriptive, as it had been when applied to the 'hungry lean-faced' Pinch in The Comedy of Errors (v. i. 238). He has, it is true, much in common with Slender in The Merry Wives of Windsor, but then Slender's wit is quite as slender as his body could possibly be. John Sincklo, who played the thin Beadle in 2 Henry IV (v. iv), seems unlikely to have taken so large a part as Sir Andrew's, and, in any case, Shakespeare had a fancy for 'thin man' jokes whether or not they demand a specially thin actor. It would be specially valuable to know who played Malvolio.

It is not part of my purpose to give later cast-lists (which can be found elsewhere). It is, however, interesting to find that (as one man in his time plays many parts) in the eighteenth century Richard Yates graduated from the Clown to Malvolio, and John Palmer from Sebastian to Sir Toby, while in our own century Leon Quartermaine has been first the Clown and later Sir Andrew, and Laurence Olivier has been successively Sir Toby and Malvolio, a part which John Laurie filled after beginning (like Yates) as the Clown. When Shakespeare's company acted Twelfth Night at court in 1618 and 1623, the casts would, in all probability, be different (certainly as regards the boys) and might include similar graduations from one role to another.

John Palmer's majestic figure must have suited Sir Toby far more than Sebastian, and how the lack of resemblance between him as Sebastian and the actress playing Viola was made endurable it is hard to guess. When Ben Jonson visited William Drummond of Hawthornden in 1619, he confided to him (with doubtful seriousness?) that

he had ane intention to have made a play like Plautus's Amphitrio but left it of, for that he could never find two so like others that he could persuade the spectators they were one.
Although Viola and Sebastian must not be wildly unlike (a bearded Sebastian would be the ultimate absurdity, and therefore, no doubt, we shall see so much if we live so long), it is in fact the natural difference between the actors in this and similar plays which prevents the spectators' sharing in the general confusion and makes them able to distinguish the twins as the other characters cannot. As far as I know, identical twins have never taken the roles (to be truly identical they would need to be of the same sex, which would not be impossible if a boy were to play Viola or a girl Sebastian). On the professional stage, the parts have sometimes been taken by sister and brother; by Mrs Jordan and Mr Bland in 1790, and by Mrs Henry Siddons and William Murray at Edinburgh in 1815. A more daring venture is for one actress to double the two parts. This has occurred from time to time in the past century or so: first in a German translation of the play at Dresden in 1851 (Henry Crabb Robinson, the diarist, noted that Mme Baier Bürick adopted a manliness of voice and step as Sebastian); later by Kate Terry in 1865, and Jessica Tandy in 1937, and also by the actress (whose name I have not been able to discover) in a French version by Jean Anouilh in 1961. On all these occasions the audience must have anticipated the final scene with apprehension. In the production of 1851, another person, who managed to hide his (or her?) face, came on, and in 1961 the reunion took place in silhouette behind a screen; Anouilh's solution had the limited merit that the actress was able to speak both parts. Yet however the end is contrived, the experiment is a dramatic perversity, memorably condemned by A. S. Downer in his review of Anouilh's production [in Shakespeare Quarterly XII (1962)]:

For four and a half acts the complex structure of Twelfth Night prepares the audience for the confrontation of the twins. Shakespeare rewards our patience with seventy lines of anagnorisis, a long and gratifying tribute to the comic view of life. It is a necessary scene, and Shakespeare does not cheat even when improbability might have tempted him to do so. To share in the triumph of the improbable is the true delight of Twelfth Night, but Anouilh will be tinkering.

In short, if spectators are reluctant to embrace theatrical illusion in the theatre, they had better stay away. Strong resemblance of costume, and tolerable resemblance of personal appearance, are quite enough to preserve this particular theatrical illusion in Twelfth Night.

It is perhaps best to discuss the stage interpretation of the characters before proceeding to specially important scenes, though it is evident that the two go together; the reports of the earlier productions commonly dwell on how this or that actor played his part, and it is only later that detailed accounts of the treatment of whole scenes can be found. Generally speaking, it seems that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences gave their special attention to Viola, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio. Before the present century one hears little of Orsino and Olivia, and little of the Clown (who has been called several times the centre of the play).

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew have traditionally been recognized as a pair of united broad-comedy parts (Sir Andrew never has a scene without Sir Toby, and Sir Toby only two without Sir Andrew), with Sir Andrew as Sir Toby's 'anvil', as Theobald well described him. It was also traditional that Sir Toby should be Falstaffian and Puckish, Sir Andrew tractable and idiotic. Lamb's brilliant account of James Dodd's performance of Sir Andrew stresses the genius with which he made 'slowness of apprehension' the natural product of Sir Andrew's mental metabolism ('He seemed to keep back his intellect, as some have had the power to retard their pulsation'), not a grotesque exhibition. In the role of drunken Sir Toby (according to another critic [William Dunlop, as quoted in William Winter's Shakespeare on the Stage, 1911]) 'Palmer's gigantic limbs outstretched seemed to indicate the enjoyment of that physical superiority which Nature had given him, even while debasing it to the lowest of all vices', though Lamb felt that John Palmer 'did not quite fill out' Sir Toby's 'solidity of wit' and put too much 'swaggering gentility' into the part. Early actors and reviewers alike seemed in no doubt as to the nature and relative simplicity of both characters: it was a matter of how well the agreed features were portrayed. To say this is, of course, to speak rather too generally: even Sir Andrew has his moments of pique and disillusionment, and neither he nor Sir Toby is all of a piece throughout. But in the present century we have seen a larger range of interpretation, with Sir Toby sometimes conspicuous for his
glazed and fuddled dignity, sometimes for his vivacity, sometimes even for his tenacious maintenance of his place at Olivia's (with consequent bitter hostility to Malvolio who seems to threaten it in II. iii); and 'a melancholy Sir Toby', compensating himself for his sense of failure in life, is not quite impossible (though I feel this conception goes against the grain of the play and of most of his lines). [According to John Russell Brown] 'Sir Andrew Aguecheek can be patient, sunny, feckless, gormless, animated or neurotic', or even a 'paranoid manic depressive, strongly reminiscent at times of Lucky in Waiting for Godot'; he has been equipped with a Scottish accent and bagpipes, presumably on the strength of his Christian name, but this is carrying inventiveness too far (and I doubt whether he could have mastered the pipes any more than the viol-de-gamboys, since he has not studied the arts). The more natural the touches, the better, like his 'vanity of authorship' when Sir Toby reads aloud his challenge.

Audiences have always recognized in Malvolio the centre of the play's conspicuously comic scenes, and actors have interpreted him in a variety of ways. It is of great historical importance that the first notable Malvolio, Charles Macklin in 1741, also played Shylock: the two parts (each of them the leading unromantic part in a romantic comedy) have often been in one actor's repertoire, and there is a long-standing critical tradition (more long-standing, perhaps, than well-grounded) of treating them as comparable. Malvolio, though at the centre of the play's broadest comedy, is no part for a clown. After Macklin, though David Garrick never played him, important actors like Robert Bensley and John Henderson (who also played Hamlet) did so. Everyone is familiar with Lamb's eulogy of Bensley's performance ('He looked, spake, and moved like an old Castilian'), and even though the performance may have been amended by Lamb's imagination, it must have included solid respectability as well as fantastical vanity. Whatever faith we may place in Lamb's account, it is clear that by his time the opportunities offered by the role were being explored. Samuel Phelps, in 1857, emphasized the steward's 'self-love' by regarding the world through eyes 'very nearly covered with their heavy lids'; his thoughts were turned inward. 'Walled up in his own temple of flesh, he is his own adorer': Henry Morley's phrase captures the impassiveness with which this versatile actor (whose parts included Hamlet and Christopher Sly) played the part to the very end. Morley had clearly read Lamb's essay, and his description [in The Journal of a London Playgoer from 1851 to 1866] suggests that Phelps had read it too: 'Few who have seen or may see at Sadler's Wells the Spanish-looking steward of Countess Olivia, and laughed at the rise and fall of his château en Espagne, will forget him speedily.' Henry Irving, in 1884, likewise aimed at consistency and credibility. He too played with half-shut eyes, and with beard of pointed Spanish cut, but he exploited his lean and intellectual appearance to evoke a more genuine dignity than that which Phelps had attempted. A reliable contemporary account [by Sir Edward Russell, in The Fortnightly Review (1 September, 1884)] makes it clear that Irving conceived the character humorously (in the lightness of his steward's wand there was 'something of fantastic symbolism'), though essentially as an exhibition of real personality.

Later actors seem to have generally presented Malvolio as human rather than fantastic, with the exception of Beerbohm Tree who played him in the vacuous-vain tradition, with pompous gestures and a quizzing-glass. At his first entry (followed by the attendants whom the Clown bids 'Take away the lady'—four smaller copies of himself) he fell down a flight of steps—a feature of his elaborate garden setting—without losing his composure. Tree also, according to Crosse, set the fashion for Malvolio 'to wear a night-gown in the kitchen scene, a refinement that has been adopted by most of his successors'; yet Crosse, though 'refinement' is obviously ironical, commends his whole performance [in his Fifty Years of Shakespearean Playgoing, 1941], particularly in 'Malvolio's loyalty to Olivia, and his reluctance to give her away' towards the end. Most Malvolios of this century may be very roughly classified into the old kill-joys and the young upstarts. Granville Barker had in the part Henry Ainley, pallid, middle-aged, and convincing; John Laurie, in the 'Victorian' Stratford-upon-Avon production of 1939, was 'consumed by a wintry ambition and by gout'; Ernest Thesiger was in 1944 a 'sour Grey Eminence', Michael Hordern in 1954 a tortured, El-Greco-like figure, and of Roger Mitchell (at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, 1960) it was well said [by R.L. Perkin, in Shakespeare Quarterly XI (1960)] that 'when he read the line where Malvolio is instructed to smile, you could hear the ice crack in his lips'. By contrast John Abbott, a brisk young Malvolio in Tyrone Guthrie's Old Vic production of 1937; 'might have been seconded from the Illyrian foreign office'. One of the most distinctive
younger Malvolios was Laurence Olivier's in 1955 at Stratford-upon-Avon, 'whose speech suggested his origin by an affected, lisping veneer that flaked away suddenly to reveal the barrow-boy vowels' [according to the Illustrated London News (23 April 1955)]. He was not the first to hint at a Cockney background (Maurice Evans had done so in 1939), nor the last (Ian Holm followed in 1966): Robert Speight remarks [in Shakespeare Quarterly XVII (1966)], 'The new convention insists that Malvolio comes from the "suburbs [by] the Elephant" ', but, of course, the idea has not hardened into a rigid convention, and Malvolios continue to appear in great variety.

Space forbids equally full treatment of the Violas. At the risk of over-simplifying, it may be said that Viola is a character universally attractive to audiences and to performers, and it would be a sorry day for Twelfth Night if any producer were so perverse as to take a whim to dislike her. The only problem—though it requires delicate judgment to solve—is how to balance the viveliness and the poignancy in the moods and situations created by her disguise. Beatrice is sad only for Hero's sake; there is hardly a cloud in Rosalind's sky; but Viola's opening lines strike a pathetic chord; yet on her embassy to Olivia she is confident and able to brush aside impediments; and yet again her newly disclosed and newly discovered love for Orsino hangs over the dialogue with Olivia (whom it is not quite correct to call her rival). This juxtaposition, and even combination, of moods runs right through the play. The sort of traps that exist for the unwary, or the challenges that can be created by the audacious, lie in phrases like 'Excellently done, if God did all' (I. v. 236) or

\[ \text{And make the babbling gossip of the air} \\
\text{Cry out 'Olivia!'} \]

(I. v. 273-74)

It is clear that the first of these should not be shouted crudely or delivered maliciously, and even the 'graceful impudence' of Ellen Terry (commended by Clement Scott) has its evident danger. As to the second, a Peggy Ashcroft can [according to Richard David, in Shakespeare Survey 5 (1952)] bring off the effect of 'a hastily remembered substitution' of the name Olivia for the name Orsino, but it is not, I am sure, an effect that naturally grows from the scene or the speech or from the Shakespearean attitude to women in the comedies: 'We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo.' The soliloquy in II. ii is a kind of test piece for Violas, who must choose whether to make a comic point of 'I am the man' (and, if so, how to make it) or to let the verbal irony do its own work. So, above all, is the scene with Orsino (II. iv):

\[ \text{When she said, 'I am all the daughters of my father's house', her manner and the despairing sadness of her tone almost revealed her sex to the Duke, and, as Orsino turned towards her with a look of mingled surprise and inquiry, she rapidly, confusedly, and also comically, added, 'a—-a—and all the brothers too!'—thus obtaining a laugh instead of a tear [William Winter on Ada Rehan as Viola].} \]

A laugh so bought costs the scene dear. Of course, the femininity of Viola must be stressed where it is possible to stress it (to attempt a convincing male impersonation in all the Cesario scenes is fatal to the play), but not in such inappropriate ways as this. It is always salutary to remember the boy actor, though no actress could be expected to reconstruct his performance, nor would it be desirable for her to try to do so. The great thing to remember is that Viola's part culminates in her eloquent avowal of her love for Orsino, and in her reunion with her brother, which Peggy Ashcroft made so memorably beautiful:

At the end, as Sebastian faces his sister, he cries: 'What countryman? What name? What parentage?' There is a long pause now before Viola, in almost a whisper (but one of infinite rapture and astonishment), answers: 'Of Messaline' [J.C. Trewin, in John O’London’s Weekly (8 December 1950)].
Olivia, as has been concisely pointed out by Sprague and Trewin, has, in the twentieth century, changed from 'a stately Countess' to a young and often foolish girl. Though partly connected with the riper age of leading ladies in the past, the change is more obviously attributable to a general trend in twentieth-century criticism and production which may be called antiromantic, a trend towards extracting the potentially ironical and ridiculous in Shakespeare's dramatic situations, which I regard as wholly regrettable. Young she must be, if she is to marry Sebastian, but apart from her passing levity of response to the Duke's messenger in I. v there is nothing to suggest frivolity in her character, and there are both the Captain (I. ii. 36) and Sebastian (IV. iii. 16-20) to testify to her virtue and her discretion as ruler of her household.

Meanwhile, as the same writers notice, Feste has been growing older. Granville Barker's own Feste in 1912 was Hayden Coffin, then aged fifty. Occasionally, as with Robert Eddison's Old Vic performance of 1948, there is a mystic sadness about him. More usually, however, he is merely ageing and has seen the best of his time, 'retained not for his wit but for his length of service'. He is also, nowa-days, often insecure as to his future employment, and we are sometimes allowed to think that in his epilogue-song he is out of a job. Gone (with happy exceptions, usually on the amateur stage) are the days when [according to Gordon Crosse] 'Mr John Laurie, like Frank Rodway, let us see that Feste was a human being as well as a professional funny man, and also that he thoroughly enjoys his own fooling'. In 1960 Tom Courteney's performance was criticized [by Robert Speaight, in Shakespeare Quarterly XII (1961)] because the part needed 'more weariness and weight of middle age'.

Orsino and Maria are pretty straightforward, and highly actable, roles. Orsino's nobility (I. ii. 25), despite his love-sickness, should be never in question. Nor should Maria's youth and liveliness: the ageing Maria of John Barton's 1969 production at Stratford-upon-Avon, to whom (and not to Sir Andrew) Sir Toby most incongruously addressed the phrase in his last speech in II. iii, 'Tis too late to go to bed now', should have retorted, parodying Marlowe, 'Never too late, if Toby will consent'. Her social status, as Olivia's gentlewoman, needs to be made clear; she is socially a fit match for Sir Toby.

Of the performance of particular scenes much has already been implied in considering the portrayal of the characters. Only on one or two of them a little needs to be added.

The humour of the so-called 'kitchen scene' (II. iii) has often been buried beneath gross stage business, sometimes supposedly arising from the text (as in 'Sir Toby, there you lie', 1. 107) but usually quite extraneous, involving flapping of arms, crowing, and the blowing-out of candles and throwing of tobaccopipes. Malvolio's night-gown (allegedly introduced by Tree) has already been referred to; in fact a prompt-book of 1864 for a performance at Brooklyn already specifies the night-gown, night-cap and slippers. Sprague and Trewin rightly insist that Malvolio gives offence, not suffers it, in this scene as written by Shakespeare, and remind us that the only line referring to Malvolio's dress invites him to rub his chain with crumbs, thus implying that he has appeared in full ceremonial costume to put down the revelry.

The 'duel scene' (latter part of III. iv) is traditionally, and rightly, taken as comic, but it need not therefore be farcical. It is a great test of a producer's discretion. Even Sir Andrew's terror should not be overplayed, and to demand similar fooleries from Viola (even though on a smaller scale) is pernicious. Self-control, like that of Dorothy Tutin at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1958 and 1960, is what she should show, though her lines sufficiently express her feelings of alarm.

By contrast, the 'prison scene' (IV. ii) has often, with the emphasis placed on a pathetic Malvolio, been pushed towards the painful. Despite the Folio's unambiguous direction Malvolio within, audiences have often been treated to a sight of him manacled, or 'stretched on the straw of a dungeon worthy of Fidelio'. How he and the Clown are thus to share the stage, unless it is partitioned into left and right halves, I cannot imagine. In any case, this is the Clown's scene rather than Malvolio's: he should have the whole of the stage to himself. A modern way of granting him this and also providing a part-visible and clearly-audible Malvolio is to situate
the 'dark room' under a grating (that is, beneath a trap), through which Michael Hordern's hands are shown protruding in a photograph of 1954.

The dominant interest of the play's closing minutes is Malvolio's enlightenment. J. R. Brown has an excellent paragraph on the effectiveness of Malvolio's silence during which the deception is explained to him, the emotions which he may register, and the pent-up dramatic expectation which is released with his single exit-line, 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!' Various pieces of business which have accompanied this line—Tree tore off his steward's chain, Sothern tore the forged letter—serve both to concentrate the audience's attention on a material object and to indicate Malvolio's state of mind. The speaker's intonation and general manner are also of great importance, and can range from Phelps's expression of undented pride to Olivier's utterance of the line as 'the cry of a man unmade'. Perhaps Olivier's manner, though highly effective at the moment, alienated Malvolio so completely from the rest of the characters as to undermine the Duke's assumption that he could be entreated to a peace, and hence to damage the tone of the ending. A merely angry Malvolio might—if it was made worth his while—relent. Tree's tearing off of his chain also perhaps damaged the ending, by its suggestion that Malvolio is giving up his post: no doubt Olivia's household could carry on without him and a replacement be found, but at the end of Twelfth Night one does not like to be asked to look beyond the conclusion of the action. This is a further reason why the Clown should not end his part as an outcast, especially since no one has cast him out. The final mood should surely be one of harmony. Not every reader, I am well aware, will agree with this; but, even though we may take our pleasures differently, we may unite to agree with Gordon Crosse that 'a really good performance of Twelfth Night is the perfection of pleasure that Shakespearean acting can give, at any rate in comedy.'

Ralph Berry (essay date 1981)


[In the following essay, Berry examines the evolution of Twelfth Night in production, describing a move from the festive and comic stagings of nineteenth and early twentieth-century productions to the darker interpretation of modern directors.]

Twelfth Night is the statutory comedy, as often as not, in a summer festival season. Any moderately dedicated playgoer must have seen it several times, and passed up many more chances. Like Hamlet, it tends to be absorbed into the general textures of the current theatre, and it is not usually associated with revolutionary productions. Moreover, it is not the focus of any great academic or theatrical debate. Its meaning is not in doubt: Twelfth Night is widely accepted as a supreme harmonizing of the romantic and the comic, sweet and astringent. The admirable production, then, is held to be one which holds these elements in balance. It is in the inflection which a production gives to Twelfth Night that the special interest lies. And this inflection has undoubtedly modulated in recent years. Broadly, and crudely: Twelfth Night used to be funny, and is now much less so. What has happened?

I want to describe two models of Twelfth Night productions, old and new. The seamless fabric of theatre history does not lend itself to radical departures, yet I think I can point to a date for the founding of the New Model Twelfth Night: 1969. For the old, I shall turn to the late nineteenth century, and synthesize a few productions. This is less for their antiquarian interest than for their continuing influence. The nineteenth century reveals in caricatured form contours of a Twelfth Night that were recognizable until quite recently, and are still visible in the outer provinces of theatre.
The essence of the old model was its direct appeal to laughter and romance. Of Augustin Daly's production in New York, 1894, Odell tells us [in his *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 1920]: 'Moonlight was brought into play as never before in this comedy; Viola dreamed on a bench as Orsino's minstrels warbled Shubert's *sic* "Who is Olivia (Sylvia)"?" *The New York Herald-Tribune* has this:

"The scene is Olivia's garden. The time is evening. Viola, disguised as the minstrel Cesario, having received an intimation that perhaps her brother, Sebastian, has not drowned, has spoken her joyous soliloquy upon that auspicious thought, and has sunk into a seat, in meditation. The moon is rising over the distant sea, and in the fancied freshness of the balmy rising breeze you can almost hear the ripple of the leaves. The lovelorn Orsino enters, with many musicians, and they sing a serenade, beneath the windows of Olivia's palace. The proud beauty comes forth upon her balcony, and parting her veil, looks down upon Viola… Not a word is spoken and not a word is needed. The garden is all in moonlight; the delicious music flows on; and … the curtain slowly falls. It was a perfect triumph of art, in the highest and best vein."

It is, however, through the appeal to laughter that this piece must be gauged. The old prompt-books give us a fair idea of the mechanisms of production.

Take the great drinking scene (II, iii). The main thrust of production was to play up the drinking, singing and general merriment. The standard stage direction was *Table and 3 chairs discovered. Tankards and long clay pipes on tables*. Feste, incredibly, might be the life and soul of the party. *'Clown jumps over table, and all three dance in circle.'* Some interpolated songs were usual. Sir Andrew sang 'Christmas comes but once a year/And therefore we'll be merry' after the catch, which has the double effect of defining the title more closely and alloying it with the spirit of simple revelry. This spirit dominated the scene's end. A hallowed interpolation (after 'Come, knight') was

```
Sir Andrew: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday,
   Which is the properest day to drink?
Sir Andrew:
Sir Toby: This is the properest day to drink!
Clown.
```

Note the upbeat ending, after Shakespeare has written in a downbeat cadence (matching the opening). Henry Jewett's production (Boston, 1915) went farther, with much business of people sliding around in the dark, falling candles, and the ominous direction *'MUSIC PIANO JOVIAL'.* The general commitment to revelry was unquestioned.

This comes out, naturally, in the garden scene (II, v). This scene has to be played quite straightforwardly for laughter: as one prompt has it, *'Bns of Bobbing from behind Trees all thro' this'.* But the ruthless insistence of the Neilson prompt on the laugh-quota is interesting. After Malvolio's exit from the garden the play-text reads: *'Omnes. Ha! ha! ha!'* (shades of Greyfriars). And following Maria's entrance and Sir Toby's 'Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?' *'all laugh and keep it up as long as possible'.* There is a similar instruction to Fabian after Malvolio's cross-gartered scene. It is really an anticipation of canned laughter. Fabian is the audience's stalking-horse, and he dramatizes the risibility of the play.

There is, I think, a hint of realization by the directors that the laughter-elements need to be 'protected' or played up. There is no real need for cuts aimed at shortening the piece—*Twelfth Night* is not long—so all cuts tend to reveal a shaping impulse. Sir Toby's 'I would we were well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were, for I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot' [IV. ii. 67-71] disappears from Irving's prompt. Thus, a singularly
unpleasant passage, which markedly qualifies our view of Sir Toby as a jolly dog, yields in the interests of a rounded stereotype.

Malvolio presents a central challenge to Sir Toby's view of the action, and solutions vary. Irving played his virtually uncut, taking his chances for pathos for all they were worth. (He notes 'crying' in his prompt for 'Ay, good fool' in the prison scene.) Daly cut Malvolio totally from the fifth Act; the prison scene was his last. But cuts in Malvolio's final appearance were common. Neilson cut his 'And tell me, in the modesty of honour' to 'That e'er invention played on? Tell me why!' Olivia's 'Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee' goes, together with Feste's bitter 'whirligig of time' speech: thus, some painful elements are expunged. Malvolio's 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' is in response to Fabian's 'on both sides passed'. This shows an awareness of the problem. Feste is to be 'protected' against his own words, and Malvolio is less pathetic—the fewer words he has, the less poignant his plight is.

As so often in the nineteenth century, Feste's 'whirligig of time' speech seems to have been felt rather strong, even though elsewhere a coarse communal sensibility is evident. Neilson, as we have seen, cut it. Jewett left it in, but followed Feste's 'revenges' with 'Laugh. Bus. Mai. down C. and turn up tear off chains. Mal. music for exit.' ''Malvolio music…' Still, the direction identifies the problem.

The conclusion formalizes the old view of Twelfth Night. It was customary to interpolate these lines for the Duke (after Malvolio's exit):

And now after twelve nights of tastes and pleasures,
Let me commend you to your dancing measures.

A dance followed. Thus, an invocation to revelry, and not Feste's downbeat 'When that I was and a little tiny boy', ended the play. In short, the old model took every opportunity to play up the farcical and comic elements; it softened the asperities of Malvolio's humiliation; it projected, finally, an apotheosis of romance, good-humour and social accord. But it strained somewhat at the text to achieve these effects. One senses a directorial awareness that the play is not so easy, or so reassuring, as all that.

II

The new model, to my observation, starts edging into view in the 1950s. Historically, I am content to relate it to the profound shift in sensibility which occurred in the English theatre around 1956. Of course one can find earlier evidence of productions with modernist elements, of a performance (say) that restored Sir Toby to the knighthood. Such a one was Granville-Barker's at the Savoy (1912), a production 'unimpeded by detail [which] allowed the creative artifice of its conception to do its work' [according to J. L. Styan in his The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century, 1977]. But this play gathers business relentlessly, and Sir Toby is prone to relapses: his surname, historically, weighs down his title. For all Granville-Barker's innovations, the old model was still recognizable into modern times. Hugh Hunt's production at the old Vic (1950) and John Gielgud's at Stratford (1955) with Olivier as Malvolio can be thought of as a culmination of the earlier type. They were refinements of a traditional perception of the text. After the Gielgud Twelfth Night, one can observe the scene changing. I limit my case here to a couple of critical reactions. So intelligent a critic as Laurence Kitchin writes [in Mid-Century Drama, 1960], 'Twelfth Night, even in the drinking scene, is not farce'. He would not have needed to say that a few years later. One locates social time through the démodé, and Muriel St Clare Byrne is especially dismissive of an Old Vic production that got it wrong. 'Farcical' is the word that recurs in her long review. Malvolios who cross-garter both legs together will no longer do.
That was in 1958. In the same year Peter Hall, as we should expect, got it right. His Stratford production was costumed in a Cavalier style that suggested, a shade ominously, Van Dyck. Robert Speaight took the point [in *Shakespeare Quarterly* IX (1958)]: 'Mr Hall had conceived his Illyria in some English autumn not too long before the outbreak of the Civil War. *Autumn* is, conceptually, the key word: it comprehends the gold and russet-brown of Lila de Nobili's set, and the subliminal notion of nostalgia for the golden age, the pastoral *ante-bellum* world. “That luckless apple did we taste./To make us mortal, and thee waste?” Years after, Hall's successor at the RSC, Trevor Nunn [quoted in Ralph Berry, *On Directing Shakespeare: Interviews with contemporary Directors*, 1977], had no doubt that this *Twelfth Night* was 'definitively right. He had touched a Chekhov-like centre in the play; it was unarguable.’ Yet at the time critics felt that Hall's casting took certain liberties. The focus of displeasure was Geraldine McEwan's Olivia. This actress has since become best known as a comedy-of-manners specialist—she has played very successfully in Congreve, Lonsdale, Maugham, for instance—and her *poseuse* Olivia, complete with giggles and squeaks, undercut the Romantic tradition. Olivias used to be played in the County Matron manner. For the rest, Sir Toby (Patrick Wymark) was a gentleman. (To take Sir Toby seriously is a sign of a modern production.) Malvolio (Eric Porter) was a recognizable human being. Above all, Max Adrian's intelligent and melancholy Feste dominated the play. His final envoi [according to Robert Speaight] ‘a distant and elegant pavane'.

The casting of *Twelfth Night* is open to a wide variety of options; the text is extraordinarily elastic. I don't want to discuss these options in detail, but I stress the dualism of the matter: *Belch* (with its humours, stereotypic suggestion) or *Sir Toby*. (We could remember Elgar's epigraph for his *Falstaff*, ‘a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier’.) Olivia plays well as a *grande dame* or as an aristocratic *ingénue*. More than that, some parts seem designed as functional variables, as spaces left open for the director to fill. Fabian is the leading instance. Neutral and unaligned, he can be played old or young, penny plain or tuppence coloured, English or Welsh ('I would exult, *mun*'). Maria, as we shall see, turns out to be another variable. But any discussion of individual parts is apt to miss the point. The point lies in the constellation of relationships, in the overall system of checks and balances. If you want a melancholy Feste, someone has to cheer us up; if you plan a bleak *Twelfth Night*, you need a Feste with vivacity.

And that leads us to the initial production of the contemporary era, John Barton's RSC production of 1969 (revived in 1971). Much admired and much contested, this is a directorial statement that rests solidly on the title: *Twelfth Night*. It is curious that this has been so widely interpreted as an unequivocal call to revelry. In fact, most people understand perfectly well that the last day of the Christmas festivities finds one sated. One more party, and then thank God for work. The mood is caught beautifully in II, iii, when Sir Toby wants the party to go on while everyone else wants to go to bed. So the title states a central dualism: a feast, an end to feasting. And, astonishingly, Barton illustrates the point through Maria.

Who is Maria? There's a question about her social position that is functionally puzzling. She is some kind of companion. A younger daughter of local gentry? Is she in Olivia's household to get married, or because she has failed to get married? Does she rank with the servants or the great family? Evidently, she's on the blurred edge of the class-lines, above and below Malvolio. When Cesario puts the boot in ('No, good swabber, I am to hull here a little longer') Maria has no answer to the social insult. She is usually cast as a soubrette, pert and bouncy. Barton made her an elderly spinster. (First Brenda Bruce, then Elizabeth Spriggs.) This Maria [according to Gareth Lloyd Evans in *Shakespeare Survey* 23 (1970)] 'is ageing, left on the shelf; she waits desperately for the word from him, and what she often gets is a dusty answer. The words "Tis too late to go to bed, now" are spoken to her.' Sir Toby, a well-born failure, is intelligent enough to be aware of his own parasitism. But he is Maria's last chance. So there's an elegiac quality at the heart of even the comic action.

The act of presentation of this *Twelfth Night* was genuinely original. The 1971 revival had it perfectly gauged. The audience takes its seats to find Richard Pasco's Orsino listening to his musicians. Presently an aural disturbance comes upon the music. It grows louder, and is identified as the sound of the sea crashing upon the shore. This sea is the background to the action; it enters into the imagery of Orsino's opening speech.
'Receiveth as the sea') and intermittently returns to the audience's consciousness. The sea implies a sense of the canon's unity. It intimates that Twelfth Night is the beginning of the long swell that culminates, beyond the breakers of the tragedies, in the final romances. This Twelfth Night understands, and is aware of, The Tempest. For Richard David fin Shakespeare Survey 25 (1972) 'the sound of the sea reverberating through key moments in the play' served 'to remind us of that sense of the changes and chances of life that is surely intrinsic in the mood of the play as in its basic situations'. Robert Speaight had experienced a sharper sense of 'the howling of the gale outside the gilded cage of Orsino's palace; reality at odds with romanticism … , ["Shakespeare in Britain," Shakespeare Quarterly XX (1969)]. It is a metamorphosis of that calm untroubled seascape that Daly provided for the New Yorkers of 1894.

III

John Barton's Twelfth Night is the classic of recent times, and its statement, though modulated in later productions, has not, I think, been seriously challenged since. Basically, he takes the action seriously. From that perspective endless variations remain possible. Take the relationship between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. It is, on Sir Toby's part, contemptuous and exploitative. And it ends in the unequivocal 'Will you help? An ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull?' Now, how far is the director prepared to go in acknowledging the truth of this transaction? In the old days, no problem: Sir Andrew simply looked shocked at Sir Toby saying such terrible things. In the Regent's Park production of 1972, Sir Andrew stood stock-still for a long second, head bowed, as one pondering an irrevocable decision. He then marched off like an automaton, stage left, casting no glance at Sir Toby. Sir Toby limped off stage right. The audience could have no doubt that the friendship was permanently shattered.

Illusion, clearly, is what the director now perceives in this network of relationships. The concept became an emblem in Peter Gill's RSC production of 1974. The figure of a golden Narcissus hangs over the stage, the only pictorial element in a bleak box. The programme cites, of all people, R. D. Laing:

Narcissus fell in love with his image, taking it to be another….

Jill is a distorting mirror to herself.
Jill has to distort herself to appear undistorted to herself.
To undistort herself, she finds Jack to distort her distorted image in his distorting mirror.
She hopes that his distortion of her distortion may undistort her image without her having to distort herself.

The atmosphere is vibrant with erotic undertones. Orsino's bisexuality is marked, and at least one critic had no doubt that Orsino was ready to grope the nearest, any time. A boyish Viola (Jane Lapotaire) contributes to the general sexual confusion. Maria's maturity has become an RSC orthodoxy; Sir Toby is a gentleman, and intelligent—a decision that invariably imparts a stereoscopic depth to his scenes. David Waller has since explained, in interview [quoted by Peter Thomson in Shakespeare Survey 28 (1975)], that his reading of the part is based on 'I hate a drunken rogue'. 'And it seems quite clear to me that he's referring quite consciously to himself.'

The bleaker elements were intensified in this Twelfth Night. Barton had allowed himself a Feste with a certain Celtic charm (Emrys James), but Gill's Feste, Ron Pember, [according to Peter Thomson] 'hinted always at a radical's social distaste for the antics of privilege…. He was discomforting, an outsider, almost malevolently satur-nine, defying the sentimental response to Malvolio's plight by pressing home his final accusations with
heartless accuracy in Act V. Pember sang his songs with the gritty voice of the modern unaccompanied folk-singer. There's more than a hint of Brecht in this. But there could in any case be no question of minimizing the effect of the final scene, given the major casting decision of this production: Nicol Williamson's Malvolio.

Nicol Williamson's salient characteristic is his capacity to portray pain. It is of a voltage that sets him apart from any other actor on the English stage. Not that his Malvolio was unfunny. His accent—which critics varied in finding Welsh, Scots, and veering from one to the other—placed him in the Baptist-Presbyterian tradition of the intolerant Nonconformist preacher on the make. More subtly, it placed him as an outsider (Illyria is set in the effete South of England). This Malvolio took his chances superbly in the garden scene, but his final humiliation was shattering. Michael Billington's verdict [in The Guardian (25 August 1974)] is precise: 'But what Williamson does so brilliantly is to blend high comedy and deep emotional pain … he tears Maria's epistle into minuscule fragments before departing to his own permanent, private hell, all dignity destroyed. Williamson seems to have experimented with his final line during the production. When I saw it, the line was inaudible, spoken through the hands covering the face. Robert Speaight writes of a 'fourfold repetition' [in Shakespeare Quarterly XXV (1974)]. The wound is open, and Orsino cannot heal it. The shock waves travel back through the entire action.

IV

Narcissism, eroticism and alienation, illusion ending in anguish: is this the last word of the current era on Twelfth Night? I don't think so; it appears to me rather as an over-compensation, an emphatic rejection of a stage cliché that had hardened into a lie. The modern statement on Twelfth Night has its textual justification: one has to ignore a great deal to build a production around the celebration of cakes and ale. And the play has to respond to certain tendencies of our own era. To cite a few, a taste for dark comedy has long been prevalent. The most influential (upon the stage) of recent Shakespearean writers, Jan Kott, treated Twelfth Night in a chapter [of her Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 1967] entitled 'Shakespeare's bitter Arcadia'. Moreover, the Problem Plays have, so to speak, territorially expanded. Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida are played far more often than even before, and they now look like mainstream Shakespeare, not aberrations. Then again, we ought not to ignore the oblique impact of Chekhov.

I earlier cited Trevor Nunn's identification of the 'Chekhov-like centre' of the play, and the point is worth pursuing. One often uses the word 'chekhovian' loosely, to indicate an autumnal atmosphere surrounding agreeable but rather futile people discussing, in an aimless way, what to do next. The word tends to drift away from its moorings. 'Chekhovian' means like Chekhov, and his importance on today's stage goes beyond his actual productions. Quite often one sees a Twelfth Night with II, iii, played as a homage to Chekhov: the sense of lateness and futility, the pauses, the alternation of manic gaiety and brooding, the inconsequentiality and missed connections:

Sir Toby: Does not our lives consist of the four elements?
Sir Andrew: Faith, so they say: but I think it rather consists of eating and drinking.
Sir Toby: Th'art a scholar; let us therefore eat and drink.

The scene—it occurs in Olivia's household but comes over as a tavern scene—reminds us of the tavern scene in 2 Henry IV, as the old Falstaff fondles Doll Tearsheet—'do not bid me remember mine end'—and recalls the RSC's Chekhov-oriented production of the mid-sixties. (I think it true that contemporary taste prefers the second part of Henry IV to the first; and this used not to be so.) It is not in question that Chekhov is the father of Beckett and Pinter; he is important today in a way that Ibsen is not. Not everyone will go all the way with
Christopher Booker's judgement: 'It is for our recognition of this melancholy, arid picture that I believe we have quietly elevated Chekhov into the supreme "serious" playwright of our age' ["Mirror of our Melancholy," Daily Telegraph (26 February, 1977)] We have none the less to acknowledge him as an unseen presence in the world of comedy. Through him, one catches at the implications of 'autumnal'. The subtext of autumn is winter: and one wonders if winter is not after all the right season for a setting of Twelfth Night.

Chekhov, if you like, is a surface presence. But there is an underground subsidence that affects even more our view of Twelfth Night. The practical joke has vanished. I don't mean that it has ceased to exist; but its sanctions have. Our ancestors, as the memoirs testify, took a robust pleasure in practical jokes. The fondness for them persisted through the nineteenth century. In the last generation or so, the relish for them has ebbed away. As I take it, we know too much about the sadistic undercurrent of much practical joking to be at ease with it. It is one of the social changes of our lifetime that the historian should learn to document. Its passing means that the entire network of assumptions sustaining the old Twelfth Night has collapsed. And that raises the whole question of what is called, for want of a better word, comedy. The theory of comedy is the search for a better word. Perhaps all theoreticians of comedy should take their lead from Aristotle, who passed up the opportunity of making up his lecture-notes into a book, opting for the easier field of tragedy. His reviews have probably gained from that heroic evasion. A modern production of Twelfth Night is obliged to redefine comedy, knowing always that its ultimate event is the destruction of a notably charmless bureaucrat. There it is, and it happens. Do we laugh at it?

Twelfth Night, which appears as a machine for inducing laughter, discloses itself in the end as a machine for suppressing it. One is always aware of mixed responses in the theatre, of laughter in the wrong places. It's a general hazard of playgoing, and one accepts it without comment. But once, at a repertory production under a man who knew his business, I understood it as the dramatist's design: what had seemed an imperfection of theatre experience became the truth of the play. Malvolio's entrance in Act V created a storm of laughter. The interventions of Fabian and Feste, and the dawning awareness of Olivia, became the implacable advance of a reality that stifled laughter. The laughter of others, but not of oneself, became the experience of the drama. One by one the laughs ceased, like lights going out in the house, as the edge of the great play, dark as logic, moved over the consciousness of the audience. It received in total silence the destruction of Malvolio, and the strained half-moment that followed 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' bore the meaning of the play. That silence, that end of laughter, is today's Twelfth Night.

Michael Billington (essay date 1990)


[In the following essay, Billington presents a stage history of Twelfth Night, highlighting notable productions and performances, as well as critical reaction to both.]

Twelfth Night may be Shakespeare's most perfect comedy. It is also one of the hardest to bring off in the theatre because of its sheer kaleidoscopic range of moods. It contains some of Shakespeare's most lyrical writing about love. It also contains scenes, such as the baiting of the confined Malvolio, that to a modern sensibility seem extremely cruel. It is about the impact of truth upon fantasy and about the journey of discovery undertaken by Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio. At the same time it is about the cyclical nature not only of the seasons but of human Ufe itself. It takes place in the imaginary world of Illyria. Yet it also exists in the concrete world of the Elephant (an inn in Southwark), Mistress Mall's picture, the spinsters and the knitters in the sun. To realise the play's complexities and contradictions required, suggested John Russell Brown, five years' study or a repeated return to its problems in a succession of productions. Even for the fortunate directors of the RSC, it is usually a matter of months rather than years of study, six weeks' rehearsal, and a chance to get it right (or not) on one specific occasion.
Looking back over the history of *Twelfth Night* in the British theatre (and abroad) two things are immediately apparent. One is the way different characters become, at different times, the pivot of the play. Some productions belong to Malvolio: others to Viola. But, in conversation, the quartet of RSC directors [Bill Alexander, John Barton, John Caird, and Terry Hands] suggests that Sir Toby is the motor that drives the plot and Feste the character who determines the mood. One has also seen productions where either Olivia or Sir Andrew emerges as the dominant character. It is Shakespeare's most Chekhovian play in that the attention is shared by half-a-dozen characters any one of whom may emerge as the most individually arresting. But stage history also indicates there is a constant debate about how the play should be staged. Does Illyria yield up its secrets to realism or to the imagination? Between the archaeologically exact terraced gardens of Beerbohm Tree at one end of the scale and the neo-Elizabethan simplicity of William Poël at the other there seems to be an infinite number of options. The debate still continues.

When was *Twelfth Night* first performed? In a book published in 1954, *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, Leslie Hotson plumps assertively for 6 January 1601. We know that a Court play was performed in Whitehall that night. We know that the Lord Chamberlain, Hunsdon, was ordered to provide a play that, amongst other things, had 'greate variety of Musicke and dances.' We also know that the guest of honour at the Court revels on that specific Twelfth Night was the Italian Duke Virginio Orsino. In Hotson's argument, Shakespeare's play becomes a topical comedy run up to please both the Queen and a visiting grandee; though since Shakespeare's Orsino is something of a deluded narcissist, it may be just as well that the Italian Duke spoke no English. But Professor Hotson pushes the argument much further and suggests that the arena staging adopted for the Great Chamber at Whitehall was the model for all Elizabethan theatres. He posits a production of *Twelfth Night* with the spectators on tiered benches 'all Round abowte' and 'on every side' and with a couple of tents to represent Olivia's and Orsino's houses. This is, in fact, theatre-in-the-round. But although it makes sense to suggest this is how Shakespeare's play was first presented in a hall ninety feet long, it is presumptuous to argue that this was therefore the model for all Elizabethan theatres.

Hotson's theories are speculative. But we do know, for a fact, that *Twelfth Night* was played in the Middle Temple Hall at the Inns of Court on 2 February 1602, because a barrister who was present, John Manningham, recorded the event in his diary:

> At our feast we had a play called *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will*; much like *The Comedy of Errors* or *Menæchmi* in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practice in it to make the steward believe his lady widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter as from his lady in general terms, telling him what she liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel, etc. And when he came to practise, making him believe they took him to be mad.

What is significant about Manningham's account—apart from getting a minor point in the plot wrong by making Olivia a widow—is that the play is both associated with a 'feast' or revels and that it is Malvolio who sticks most firmly in his mind. Today *Twelfth Night* is so regularly performed that it has lost any association with a specific event, but it is worth recalling that it had its origins in revelry and was presumably seen as a celebratory comedy. Manningham also does not simply seize on Malvolio but sees the other characters' pretence that he is mad as a good joke. I am not for a moment suggesting that we should attempt to recapture that ethos today but Manningham's observations may come as a salutary corrective to those actors and directors who seek to transform the play into Malvolio's Tragedy.

You could say, in fact, that the Malvolios of this world got their revenge in 1642 when Parliament issued the 'First Ordinance Against Stage Plays and Interludes' which ordered that 'public stage plays shall cease to be foreborne', that the theatres should be pulled down and that 'players shall be taken as rogues'. The savagery of those decrees is a reminder that Shakespeare, in satirising the Puritan spirit, was harpooning something that was philistine, pleasure-killing and destructive.
After the Restoration, *Twelfth Night* (in common with many of Shakespeare's plays) was interfered with by Sir William Davenant, which puts in perspective Samuel Pepys's comment in 1662: 'But a silly play and not related at all to the name of that day.' It wasn't, in fact, until the next century that Shakespeare's text began to be performed in anything like the original version. The Irish actor, Charles Macklin (whose Shylock drew from Alexander Pope the memorable couplet 'This is the Jew that Shakespeare drew') started the vogue for authenticity with a revival at Drury Lane in 1741: himself as Malvolio, Hannah Pritchard as Viola.

Macklin's success, and the growing influence of women on the theatre, firmly established *Twelfth Night*'s popularity: between 1741 and 1819 it was rarely out of the bill at either Drury Lane or Covent Garden which then enjoyed a monopoly on legitimate drama. But the most vivid account of an eighteenth-century *Twelfth Night* is provided by Charles Lamb in his graphic description, in *Some of the Old Actors*, of a 1780s revival. Robert Bensley's Malvolio, he said, came near to being the perfect Don Quixote. And Dora Jordan as Viola obviously had the precious ability to make the lines appear new-minted. 'When', wrote Lamb, 'she had declared her sister's history to be a "blank" and that she had "never told her love", there was a pause as if the story had ended—and then the "worm in the bud" came up as a new suggestion—and the heightened image of "Patience" still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say as they were watered by her tears.' That could be a description of Judi Dench almost 200 years later. The foppish comedian, James William Dodd, also brought all his skill to Ague-cheek. 'You could see', wrote Lamb, 'the first dawn of an idea stealing over his countenance, climbing up little by little, with a painful process, till it cleared up at last to the fullness of a twilight conception—its highest meridian…. A glimmer of understanding would appear in a corner of his eye, and for lack of fuel go out again. A part of his forehead would catch a little intelligence, and be a long time in communicating it to the remainder.' That's great criticism: vivid, descriptive and exact.

In the nineteenth-century, *Twelfth Night* was rarely off the London stage: Samuel Phelps staged it at Sadler's Wells in 1848, Charles Kean and Robert Keeley opened the new Princess's Theatre with it in 1850, the Royal Theatre of Saxe-Meiningen (ancestor of our modern ensembles) imported it to Drury Lane in 1881. That makes it all the odder that when Henry Irving staged the play at the Lyceum in 1884 he had apparently never seen it acted before. *Twelfth Night* was also one of Irving's most marked failures as both actor and producer. Part of the problem was his own Malvolio which, rising to the ungovernable vehemence of a Shylock in his final line, was short on comedy. Ellen Terry, playing Viola, also had the misfortune to go through the first night with her arm in a sling and had to play many of her scenes sitting down. But the real problem was that the sets, designed by Hawes Craven, smothered the play in a decorative romanticism. Orsino reclined on a velvet couch, tasselled in gold, while behind him in a dim mysterious alcove, dark with painted glass, minstrels played their seductive melodies. And, in the final scene, the spreading portico of Olivia's house was flanked with branching palms beside a blue sea while guards, pages and courtiers stood picturesquely by. It was difficult for Shakespeare's comedy to survive such overweighted, picture-book literalism.

But the late Victorian and Edwardian era seems to have oscillated between the extremes of spectacle and simplicity. The American manager and distortionist, Augustin Daly, in 1894 frantically rearranged the text in order to meet the demands of scenic realism. His version at Daly's theatre in London began with the arrival of Sebastian and Antonio, proceeded to the star-entrance of Viola (Ada Rehan) and then went on to play the first and fourth scenes of the first Act, featuring Orsino, so that the sea-coast could give way to a fantastically elaborate ducal palace. Those who complain about modern excesses of 'directors' theatre' would sometimes do well to look back in the archives and see what happened in the days of managerial domination. If Daly's approach was absurd, Herbert Beerbohm Tree's at Her Majesty's in 1901 wasn't much better. He had Malvolio followed everywhere by four miniature stewards. And, seeking verisimilitude, his designer copied Olivia's garden from a picture in *Country Life*. According to a contemporary critic: 'It extended terrace by terrace to the extreme back of the stage with real grass, real box hedges, real paths, fountains, and descending steps. I never saw anything like it for beauty and vraiesemblance. The actors were literally in an Italian garden.' The only problem is that the characters weren't, and the set 'was perforce used for many of the Shakespearean
episodes for which it was inappropriate'.

Irving, Daly, and Tree went to one extreme: William Poöl to another. In 1894 he founded the Elizabethan Stage Society 'to give practical effect to the principle that Shakespeare should be accorded the build of stage for which he designed his plays'. Shaw, seeing their Twelfth Night at Burlington Hall in 1895, admitted that the amateur cast was rank bad ('The clown made no pretence of understanding a single sentence he uttered: it sufficed for him that he was a clown'). But he welcomed the prominence the platform stage gave to the actor, applauded the use of Elizabethan music played on viol, lute, and viola de gamba, and suggested that Irving and others might come down and have a look at what they could do 'on the sort of stage which helped Burbage to become famous'. Max Beerbohm (who in a letter to Florence Kahn later wrote that 'poor William Poël's honoured name is a guarantee of badness') was less persuaded. Seeing the Elizabethan Stage Society's Twelfth Night at the Royal Court in 1903, he made the perfectly fair point that Shakespeare wrote at a time when scenic production was in its infancy and was conscious of its limitations. 'We', wrote Beerbohm, 'have developed that science and it is only when Shakespeare's plays are produced with due regard to this development that they seem to us living works of art.' Beerbohm, pace Sam Wanamaker and his projected Globe Theatre of today, was right: one cannot simply turn one's back on the present. But surely there had to be some way of presenting Shakespeare—and the opal-like comedy of Twelfth Night in particular—that was neither scenically top-heavy nor filled with an owlish solemnity and detachment.

There was; and it came, at long last, in Granville Barker's legendary production which opened at the Savoy on 15 November 1912. This, by all accounts, was Shakespeare as we understand it today. Norman Wilkinson's blackand-silver setting, evoking a half-Italianised Elizabethan court, combined beauty with intimacy: there was a formal garden with a great staircase right and left, with drop curtains and a small inner tapestry set for the carousal. The verse was spoken with lightness, speed, and dexterity. 'It goes slick but not too fast,' wrote The Times. 'It is a most agreeable sensation to feel that for once you are listening to Shakespeare as he wrote.'

But, above all, Granville Barker got rid of all the false accretions of stage tradition and sought for the essential truth of character. Lilian McCarthy's Viola was praised for not 'making fun of the equivocations due to her disguise'. Writing to Granville Barker shortly after the premiere, John Masefield said: 'Lilian often got the most exquisite effects with a sort of clear uplifting that carried us away, and I believe that the women scenes were never once allowed to drop to the dreamy and emotional; they were always high, clear and ringing, coming out of a passionate mood.' Arthur Whitby's Sir Toby was not simply an eructating sot but a gentleman with, in Robert Speaight's phrase, 'the beaming roundness of a full moon'. Henry Ainley's Malvolio was a Puritan prig who flamed up in fury on 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.' But, most significantly of all, Granville Barker broke with tradition by treating Feste (Hayden Coffin) not as the conventional hop-skip-and-jump youthful jester but as a sad, mature man through whom ran what the director himself called 'that vein of irony which is so often the mark of one of life's self-acknowledged failures'. Coffin was, in fact, a musical comedy performer who nineteen years before had starred in George Edwardes's production of A Gaiety Girl, and presumably brought with him just that touch of frayed melancholia you often find in veterans of the popular stage past their prime. It was also a mark of Granville Barker's precision that the part of Fabian was not tossed away but played as an elderly respected family retainer. Modern Shakespeare production, one feels, began with Granville Barker's Twelfth Night.

Barker also greatly admired a production of the play by a director who shared something of his own idealism, intellectual refinement, and preoccupation with text: Jacques Copeau. Copeau's French-language version opened at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier on 15 May 1914, with Copeau himself as Malvolio, Louis Jouvet as Aguecheek, Suzanne Bing as Viola, and Duncan Grant designing the costumes. Copeau's avowed aim was to bring 'true beauty and poetry' back to the French stage and in this production he seemed to have succeeded handsomely. According to Robert Speaight, the play was presented in curtains with stylised trees and simple cubes for seating. Viola was clad in white doubled with thin black strips, Augue-Cheek in sky-blue top hat, Feste in pink and blue and a red cap shaped like the claws of a lobster. Reviewing the production in The
Observer when it was revived in 1921, Granville Barker noted several flaws (far too bright costumes for Olivia and a household in mourning), but declared that the French actors spoke Shakespeare better in French than English actor spoke him in English: they had 'precision, variety, clarity and, above all, passion'. What Copeau achieved was also something that, before Barker, few English productions had ever realised was possible in Shakespeare: a quicksilver fluency. You sense that most clearly from Copeau's own description of the opening scenes:

While the Duke, followed by his gentlemen, slipped into the shadows on the left, Viola emerged from the other side in a different light, veiled in pink and holding a palm leaf in her hand. So, right from the beginning, the comedy discovered its rhythm and began to trace its winding pattern. Hardly had the grave and slightly melancholy voice finished speaking than a woman's voice—Suzanne's—clear and bell-like, transported us elsewhere without the slightest jolt. 'What country friends, is this?' 'This is Illy ria, lady.'

How many productions, even today, achieve that crucial ability to dissolve one scene meltingly into the next?

For both Granville Barker and Copeau the text had the sanctity of a musical score: something to be viewed in its entirety rather than as a collection of parts. Reading about the various productions in London and Stratford in the inter-war years, one gets the feeling that the play once again simply became an occasion for some memorable individual performances. Indeed William Bridges-Adams who ran the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon from 1919 to 1934 (in both the old and new theatres), rejected many of Barker's innovations in Shakespearean production, including the use of a brilliant white light which he described as 'germ free'. Strange liberties were also taken with the text in between-the-wars productions. At Stratford, Bridges-Adams cut the prison-scene, thereby softening the play's cruelty. At London's New Theatre in 1932 (where James Agate said of Jean Forbes-Robertson's Viola that the character's 'steel-true and blade-straight quality, her sticking to the spirit as well as the letter, of Orsino's instruction can never have been conveyed better'), the director, Robert Atkins, gave the last verse of 'The wind and the rain' to Olivia. Donald Wolfit, in his touring production first seen in 1937, suggested that Malvolio enjoyed a last-minute return to Olivia's favour.

But the lesson taught by Granville Barker—that any Shakespeare play, and Twelfth Night most particularly, requires some controlling directorial vision—took a long time to sink in. Between 1918 and 1939, it is hard to trace one single production that commanded universal respect. What one got instead was a string of notable performances. Edith Evans's Viola at the Old Vic in 1932 was admired by some, though J. C. Trewin felt that 'Her Viola sounded oddly heartless. This was the Restoration ship-wrecked upon the Illyrian coast.' Tyrone Guthrie did what he called 'a baddish, immature' production at the Old Vic in 1937 with Jessica Tandy doubling Viola and Sebastian, and Laurence Olivier playing Sir Toby, in the words of one critic, 'like a veteran Skye-terrier, ears pricked for mischief. Copeau's nephew, Michel Saint-Denis, also staged the play at the Phoenix in 1938, in what many thought was a fussy, overloaded production that prettified Illyria in the manner of a fancy-dress ball. Its chief glories were Peggy Ashcroft's Viola, full of charm, warmth, and wit, and Michael Redgrave's Ague-Cheek based, in part, on that of Louis Jouvet: not so much a fool as a man whose intelligence was, for a whim, deliberately fantasticated. The temptation of lead actors is always to go for Malvolio. Ague-Cheek, however, is the part that often yields up the most surprising comedy.

The critic W.A. Darlington once said that there is a perfect production of Twelfth Night laid up for us in heaven. What is fascinating is how hard it was, post-Barker, to come by the perfect one on earth. Time and again, one finds one aspect of the play emphasised at the expense of another: usually prankish comedy at the expense of delicate melancholy. When Twelfth Night was chosen to reopen the Old Vic on 14 November 1950, it was given a production by Hugh Hunt filled with commedia dell'arte fussiness; there was a chorus of boys in beards and girls in urchin cuts rounding off each scene with skipping dances, clapping of hands, smacking of knees, and lots of hurraying. Only Peggy Ashcroft, playing Viola again after a gap of eleven
years, gave the production real distinction. She was much praised for her rapt stillness in the scene where Orsino talks of love and Feste sings 'Come away Death.' She also showed the true Shakespearean actress's ability to focus on a particular moment and give it an un-swerving truth. When Viola (in the guise of Cesario) is confronted by Sebastian, who asks 'What countryman? What name? What parentage?', there was a long, charged, beautifully held pause before she quietly breathed 'Of Messaline'. How rarely since then has one seen an actress seize on the pure poetry of that moment.

In the immediate post-war years at Stratford, productions of the play once again seemed to miss the mark. In 1947 Walter Hudd directed a revival that transposed the first and second scenes of the play (something Kenneth Branagh did forty years later at the Riverside Studios): a pointless reversal that completely ignores the first scene's announcement of the play's major themes. In 1955 Sir John Gielgud directed a Stratford production starring Sir Laurence Olivier as Malvolio and Vivien Leigh as Viola. Gielgud himself has written: 'Somehow the production did not work, I don't know why…. It is so difficult to combine the romance of the play with the cruelty of the jokes against Malvolio, jokes which are in any case archaic and difficult. The different elements in the play are hard to balance properly.' My own chief memory of that production is of Olivier's Malvolio: a bumptious arriviste with faintly Hebraic appearance and an insecurity over pronunciation. When Olivier came to 'Cast thy humble slough' in the reading of the letter he agonised endlessly over whether it should be 'sluff' to rhyme with 'cuff' or 'slow' to rhyme with 'cow'. He also rocked back and forth on a bench in the garden with such ecstasy that at one point he fell over backwards. If one had to sum up his performance in a word it would be 'camp'; and it was redeemed only by the whiplash fury he revealed in Malvolio's exit line which introduced a note of Lear-like revenge into Illyria.

But in 1958 (two years before he officially took over as director of what soon became the Royal Shakespeare Company) Peter Hall created a production at Stratford that solved many of the play's problems. Most directors of Twelfth Night see the play as made up of a romantic half and a comic half. Hall's genius was to see that these divisions were not watertight: that the romance was invaded by high-spirited fun and the comedy by a grave melancholy. Hall's most radical decision was to cast Géraldine McEwan—in her mid-twenties and best known as a delightful West End ingenue—as Olivia. Stage tradition always had insisted that Olivia was a grave, mature woman. Ms McEwan presented her as a pouting, giggling, squealing poseuse, affecting a love for her dead brother that she didn't really feel and bored to death with acting the role of the great lady.Erotically stirred by Cesario, she threw herself on her knees in front of him (her) on 'Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide'. And when Sebastian later responded to her overtures, she entered mischievously beckoning with her forefinger to a priest. There were those at the time who resented this drastic re-evaluation of the character. John Wain wrote in The Observer that Olivia was 'played as a kittenish typist on holiday from a City office.… It isn't her (Ms McEwan's) fault that Shakespeare made Olivia a countess full of authority and aristocratic hauteur.' But is the Olivia who rushes so speedily to the altar with Sebastian ('Blame not this haste of mine') all that full of aristocratic hauteur? And isn't there something suspect about her reported determination to 'water once a day her chamber round with eye-offending brine'? But if Hall tapped a new vein of comedy in Olivia, he also (possibly less originally) unearthed a sweet melancholia in Ague-Cheek. Richard Johnson played him, in Mr. Wain's description, as 'a paranoid manic-depressive strongly reminiscent at times of Lucky in Waiting For Godot'. In his long flaxen wig, Mr. Johnson looked like a lachrymose spaniel: he was the eternal, dogged trier who wants to be a great blade and a roaring lover but who can never quite make it. I recall still Mr. Johnson's look of wan hopelessness as, having claimed to be a very dog at a catch, he was squeezed out by Sir Toby and Feste.

Hall’s ability to merge, rather than separate, the play's romantic-comic elements was also embodied in Dorothy Tutin's Viola. For a start, in her Caroline pageboy, 'And when did you last see my Father?' costume, Ms Tutin made a thoroughly convincing Cesario and cut through all the academic arguments about the oddity of the Shakespearean boy-girl heroine. But she also balanced a genuine amusement at the confusion created by her disguise ('Poor lady' was done in a mischievous drawl that got a big laugh) with a lyrical sense of passion. Her 'Ay but I know …' to Orsino was a soaring cry from the heart halted just in time and brought
down in the vocal scale to a more moderate 'Too well what love women to men may owe'.

The design by Lila de Nobili, a distinguished Italian painter who had worked with Visconti at La Scala, Milan, also suffused Hall's production in a warm romantic glow without ever becoming cumbersome or heavy. I cannot better Robert Speaight's description of it: 'Peter Hall's Caroline Twelfth Night was a rich symphony in russet, designed by Lila de Nobili. The cavaliers were gathered round Orsino in a panelled hall out of Nash's English Mansions, and just as this gave way to the cloud-capped towers of a transitory Adriatic, so these quickly dissolved into an English garden and Sir Toby Belch enjoying an obviously continental breakfast.' But the gauzy romanticism of the design was offset by touches of realism: when Viola clambered ashore in Illyria after the shipwreck she had the wet-wigged, drowned-rat look of someone extremely happy to have at last reached terra firma.

Such a production was too good to die; and in 1960 Hall revived it at Stratford as part of his opening season devoted to exploring the range of Shakespearean comedy. By then, there had been some major cast-changes, proving how much the delicate balance of this particular play depends upon the right match of ingredients. In place of Geraldine McEwan, Barbara Barnett now played Olivia: a good but immature actress who mistakenly tried to ape the cooing vanity of her predecessor without her spontaneous sense of the ridiculous. Ian Richardson capably replaced Richard Johnson as Ague-Cheek without quite achieving his exquisite hangdog mournfulness. But two of the other new arrivals greatly strengthened the production. Eric Porter's Malvolio was logical, precise, outwardly rational, and rather like a civil servant trying to master a difficult brief in his reading of the letter. He also kept the comedy within bounds, conveying the construction of the cross-garters by thrusting all his weight onto one foot; and in the famous last line he exuded a wronged dignity rather than tragic suffering. But possibly the greatest gain of all was Max Adrian's Feste. Hall followed Granville Barker in casting a mature actor for the role, and one equipped with a peculiar gift for sardonic sadness, well caught by Alan Pryce-Jones in The Observer:

It would be possible to make a case for Feste as the ancestor of the modern anti-hero—a resounding tinkler, a caretaker, a mad mother all rolled into one. Not an inflection is lost by Mr. Adrian, who not only speaks his lines with singular distinction but conveys the psychological subtlety of a character whom it is easy to dismiss as a mere clown. In fact, Feste is much the most interesting character in the comedy; he provides in his own person the interplay of light and shadow which makes it memorable.

But it is worth recalling that Twelfth Night is a play that it is hard to get exactly right first time; and even Hall's production only achieved a mellow perfection when it transferred to the Aldwych in December 1960 with a cast that combined the best of the two seasons' work. McEwan and Johnson returned, Porter and Adrian stayed, and at the centre of it all was Turin's enchanting boy-girl Viola, eyes glowing with mischief at the thought, 'Heaven forbid my outside hath not charmed her'. It is fascinating to note that even now, thirty years on, Hall is contemplating a return to this most Mozartian of comedies.

A first-rate production like Hall's is, whatever directors may say, a hard act to follow: so it proved when the RSC next turned to the play in June 1966. It was directed by Clifford Williams, who four years previously had given the company one of its most spectacular early triumphs with a production of The Comedy of Errors run up in a hurry to give Paul Scofield extra time to work on King Lear. It might have seemed the magic could work again. Once again we had a comedy about twins separated by ship-wreck and mistaken for each other. Once again we had a coolly austere set by Sally Jacobs, consisting of an elegant row of Roman arches topped by a minstrels' gallery. There was even Diana Rigg, from the cast of Williams's Comedy of Errors, to lend her beauty and intelligence to the role of Viola. But somehow, on the first night at any rate and in spite of a front-rank cast (Alan Howard, Estelle Kohler, Brewster Mason, Norman Rodway, David Warner), the ingredients failed to mix. Where Mr. Williams's Comedy of Errors worked because of its dazzling uniformity of style, his Twelfth Night didn't because the rich individuality of the characters was only half-realised.
But out of *Twelfth Night*, like Africa, there is always something new. On this occasion, it was one memorable piece of business and one original performance. The classic bit of business came when Maria said of Malvolio, 'He will come to her in yellow stockings and 'tis a colour she abhors', at which point everyone looked at Ague-Cheek dressed from head to toe in vilest yellow. And the one genuinely finished performance came from Ian Holm as Malvolio, expertly described by Ronald Bryden: 'He plays him as Olivia's sergeant-major, a small dapper disciplinarian with NCO vowels, who knows his authority resides only in his rank. Under it he combines the odd sexlessness of the military bachelor (brought from his bed by Toby's carousing, he appears in a nightcap which conceals paper curlers) with the frail petulance of a middle-aged child. For no obvious reason he's made up in the likeness of the Droeshout portrait of the Bard, but the irrelevant joke somehow fits. Holm convinces you that this is the face of self-made, middle-class Elizabethan industriousness.'

Outside the context of the RSC, *Twelfth Night* was inevitably seized on in the sixties as a high camp hymn to unisex: the most celebrated example was a New York musical, *Your Own Thing*, which predated *Hair* by three months and which used the framework of Shakespeare's play to advocate an unbuttoned sexual liberality. It played in London at the Comedy Theatre in 1969, but was over-shadowed by the much more melodious and free-spirited *Hair*. It was John Barton, however, who returned to Shakespearean basics with a legendary production that opened at Stratford in August 1969, moved to the Aldwych the following year, and was revived again at Stafford in 1971. The casting underwent a number of permutations and combinations, but the constant factors were Judi Dench's Viola, Donald Sinden's Malvolio, and Emrys James's Feste: those and John Barton's unremitting exploration of text and sub-text, his detailed exploration of character, and his well-nigh perfect achievement of the balance between comedy and tears. It was the most Chekhovian *Twelfth Night* most of us had even seen.

Barton's production was staged in the context of a season devoted primarily to Shakespeare's late plays for which the designer, Christopher Morley, devised an enveloping white box. He modified this, however, for *Twelfth Night*, as J. W. Lambert indicated in *The Sunday Times*:

> Christopher Morley has set this play in a long receding wattle tunnel decorated by four stately, flickering candlesticks but lit from the outside, sometimes a sombre twilit umber, sometimes soaring into sunburst brilliance. No bright colours are allowed in Stephanie Howard's costumes, though a pleasing muslin flutter invades Lisa Harrow's fresh young Olivia as she emerges from the comfortable certainties of mourning into the perilous playground of desire. But the essential furniture is all a silvery white, including the shrubbery.

The depth of perspective afforded by the tunnel was brilliantly used. At the beginning of the second scene, doors at the far end were thrown open and Judi Dench's Viola appeared in a swirl of smoke, moved slowly downstage and became, in J. C. Trewin's words, 'a figure entering a world of fantasy and uttering suddenly that romantic line, "What country friends is this?" "It is Illyria lady"; and Illyria is the country of a dream.' It was a strong contrast with Peter Hall's much more realistic entry for Viola, gratefully arriving on some distant Adriatic shore. But Barton also used the long perspective to great comic effect for the entrance of Donald Sinden's Malvolio. He entered down through the slatted tunnel practising behaviour to his own shadow, loftily extending his hand and giving curt orders in dumbshow. Before he had spoken a word, we realised that Malvolio was in the grip of his own fantasy.

But the real secret of Barton's production was that the characters were presented with all their contradictions intact and endowed with a wealth of detail. Judi Dench's Viola, for instance, in her wooing of Olivia on Orsino's behalf was more ironic than impassioned on 'Make me a willow cabin at your gate'. But the comedy gave way to something deeper in the short scene where Malvolio catches up with her to give her Olivia's ring: innocent astonishment was replaced by tremulous self-doubt on 'Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness Wherein the pregnant enemy does much'. And, yet again, this gave way to the anguish of un-spoken love as
she bit her lip while watching the effect of Feste's 'Come away, come away, death' on Orsino. But this was not a performance made up of momentary effects. J. W. Lambert again got it right when he wrote: 'Miss Dench manages to be sturdy, steadfast and—if the word doesn't sound absurd—spiritual at the same time; not least in her tiny scene with the Fool and his tabor, where bickering upon a bench they seem to discover in each other the same bewildered hard-pressed love of life.'

For a description of Donald Sinden's Malvolio, I commend you to the actor's own chapter in his book *Laughter in the Second Act*. It offers a vivid account of the way an actor builds up a character partly by creating an imaginary biography for him and partly by seeking visual inspiration in the outside world: in this case, it was Graham Sutherland's portrait of Somerset Maugham with its turned-down mouth, its thinning hair, and its vaguely jaundiced look. Sinden also records mild disputes with John Barton about the propriety of Malvolio's responding to Olivia's injunction, 'Run after that same peevish messenger', by himself repeating the word 'Run'. Barton disapproved and asked Sinden to leave the gag out on nights when fellow-scholars were known to be in front. But Sinden is also fascinating on how he reconciled his detailed characterisation with his ability to address the audience directly. I have never, in fact, seen a Malvolio make more of the letter-reading scene simply by acknowledging our response to his words. I recall even now Sinden on 'These be her very C's, her U's and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's, shooting a lock of mock-reproof to the gallery at its burst of unseemly laughter. Sinden managed to play the house without, in any degree, diminishing his ability to play the character.

But Barton's most intriguing innovation in this production was his upgrading of the ages of the characters. The Viola and the Olivia (Lisa Harrow) were both young. But Bill Fraser's Sir Toby was an ageing, far-gone Falstaff with a touch of melancholy defeat about him. Barrie Ingham's Sir Andrew was a hapless Scot, beadily scrambling for the smallest coin in his sporran or proffering unwanted posies to Olivia: hearing that she couldn't abide anything yellow, he quietly and sadly concealed the little bunch of prim-roses with which he had been hoping to woo her and there-after carried only pink flowers. The age of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew lent extraordinary poignancy to Feste's delivery of 'O Mistress mine': the two of them sat listening to the song in a state of rheumy-eyed retrospection while Feste watched them with tender irony. And by playing Maria (first Brenda Bruce, later Elizabeth Spriggs) as a fiftyish governess rather than a pert serving-maid, Barton deepened the sense of pathos: one recalls this Maria lurking in a door's shadow to look back anxiously at Sir Toby draining one more tankard.

Barton invested *Twelfth Night* with psychological detail without depriving it of its magic. Indeed, J.C. Trewin picked out a revealing example of the way Barton's immaculate sense of detail enriched the production. Trewin highlighted 'the passage when, as Sebastian comes down-stage with "This is the air, that is the glorious sun", we hear faintly, from underground, the baffled sobbing of Malvolio.' This gift for allowing the mood of one scene to linger into the next is not only the mark of a great director. It is also the surest way to realise *Twelfth Night* to the full and to give us the play in all its emotional complexity.

'Everyone is connected to everyone else,' Ronald Bryden wrote of Barton's production, citing as an example Olivia's troubled glance after Malvolio thrust his chain of office into her hands and stumbled away. The exact opposite was true of the next RSC revival directed by Peter Gill in 1974. The dominant image on the back wall of William Dudley's bare set was of Narcissus gazing down into his pool, and we were presented with a group of characters all intoxicated with their own reflections. The function of Viola and Sebastian, as Irving Wardle noted in *The Times*, was 'to put them through an Ovidian obstacle course from which they learn to turn away from their mirror and form real attachments'.

All very well in theory; but, in practice, it led to a somewhat cold, unfeeling production, short on comedy and lacking that dense network of relationships one found in the Barton production. It was hard, for instance, to imagine Patricia Hayes's busy-bee Maria forming any attachment to David Waller's gruff, free-loading Sir Toby. And although Frank Thornton's Sir Andrew (elaborating on a now familiar RSC joke by wearing in his
hat a yellow feather—the colour Olivia abhorred) was a rather good dejected White Knight with no will of his
own, he seemed to have no particular interest in Olivia. Even the late John Price's Orsino, lying back on
cushions fondling whichever favourite happened to be nearest, was simply a variation on the theme of
romantic narcissism. Self-love may have been the theme, but what one missed was a particularised sense of
Illyria, once excellently described by Hugh Leonard as 'a fairyland with back streets'.

As so often in a moderate *Twelfth Night*, one was left admiring one single performance: in this case, Nicol
Williamson's Malvolio. While not being in the same class as Sinden's, it was founded on a combination of
innate loneliness and emotional pain. His snarling, peremptory dismissal of Ron Pember's cockney Feste for
once justified the plot against him. In the garden-scene, he cut a sadly ridiculous figure as he distended his
mouth into grotesque shapes in an attempt to make the cryptic letters form a meaningful word. And in the
final scene he tore Maria's epistle into miniscule fragments before departing to his own permanent private
hell. Malvolio was the greatest narcissist of the lot; and the only one who finally resisted cure.

But although the production was based on a sound logical principle, it lacked lyricism and laughter. Mr. Gill
made his name as a director with his meticulously realistic productions of three plays by D. H. Lawrence. But
instead of applying the same kind of detail to Shakespeare, he stripped the action of social context and human
warmth. It was a modest production rather than an indifferent one; but it suggested again that the dreamlike
environment of Illyria needs to be realised on stage with a fierce particularity without going to the absurd
lengths of the Victorian hyper-realists.

The play came round again in 1979 in a production by Terry Hands: an Anglicised reworking of a version he
had originally created for the Comédie Franâaise. Some found it extravagantly original: others (myself
included) thought it tended to underscore things that should rise easily from the text. Thus Mr. Hands had
Geoffrey Hutchings's turnip-faced Feste (who, incidentally, was on stage throughout) repeat the line 'Youth's a
stuff will not endure' [II. iii. 52] at the end of the drinking-scene lest we had missed the point. But the
production was blessedly funny and offered a drastic re-interpretation of one particular role. Visually, Mr.
Hands's (and the designer John Napier's) chief conceit was to take the title literally. The evening began in
midwinter with snow underfoot, bare, silvery branches, frosted crates serving as both seats and as lanterns
when illuminated from within, and with a blurred, watery full moon above. Only after the interval did
daffodils begin to peer and trees to blossom. As Garry O'Connor pointed out in *The Financial Times*, 'all very
effective and decorous but it does ignore the necessity that Act Three Scenes One and Two (in which Viola
returns to the proxy wooing of Olivia and Sir Andrew is dissuaded from returning home) must follow a matter
of hours only after the previous scene.' The time-scheme of *Twelfth Night* is, in fact, a crucial matter to be
explored in discussion.

But Mr. Hands's boldest stroke was to capitalise on the youthfulness of his Olivia (Kate Nicholls) by
emphasising that she was smitten hip and thigh with love for Cesario. It is a mark of how much
Shakespearean production had changed that back in 1955 Maxine Audley, in the prettified Gielgud
production, followed stage-tradition by playing Olivia as a serene, mature beauty: Kate Nicholls was more
like an Angela Brazil head-girl discovering the giddy delights of young love. Benedict Nightingale in the *New
Statesman* approved mightily and described vividly:

She has no sooner swept on stage than she has thrown aside her mourning veil to reveal a
lavish auburn mane that at once justifies her overweening vanity and gives due warning of her
torrid temperament. Before long this pre-Raphaelite beauty is proclaiming her loves and hates
with a flamboyance that must be audible halfway across Illyria, and enthusiastically matching
voice with movement and gesture. She flirtatiously rubs up against Malvolio, flings aside the
wretched Ague-Cheek, and proceeds to astonish Cesario-Viola with the physical frankness of
her unruly emotions. 'To one of your receiving enough is shown,' she cries, and promptly
disproves her own words by leaping at her, cuddling her, and pursuing her pell-mell through
the garden. At one moment of high excitement she seems actually to be trying to rape her, and at another she blunders into and very nearly knocks flat one of the spindly, woebegone trees that cower onstage, like crones in a gymnasium. It is as if defloration were not enough: this rampaging lady will be satisfied with nothing short of deforestation.

But in addition to a rampaging, headstrong Olivia, there was a Viola from Cherie Lunghi full of wit and feeling. In her first scene, where she was shivering, barefoot and palpably shipwrecked, you actually saw her slowly forming the idea of appearing as 'an eunuch' to Orsino as if in love with the notion of him before she had seen him. And later, as they listened to Feste's 'Come away, come away, death', she wrapped him protectively in her cloak while gazing at him with enslaved intensity. John Woodvine's Malvolio was also extremely funny. For once it seemed entirely plausible that he should fall into the waiting trap since Olivia frequently nuzzled and caressed him and treated him as a useful platonic escort. Mr. Woodvine also went the whole hog by appearing not just in yellow-stockings but in a saffron body-stocking with bulging codpiece, which he periodically flashed, and in a ringleted hairdo that Harpo Marx would not have disowned. It may not have had the precise social placement of Sinden's performance, but it undeniably worked. The originality of this production, however, was that it put Olivia and Viola right at the very centre of the play, and seemed a further exploration of the idea which Shakespeare offered a couple of years earlier in *As You Like It* that 'Love is merely a madness'.

If Terry Hands's production was full of the wild exuberance of young love, John Caird's 1983 RSC revival was widely perceived to be dark, autumnal, and melancholic. Partly this was because of Robin Don's outdoor setting, apparently inspired by Giorgione's *La Tempesta* in the Academy at Venice and well described by Michael Coveney in The Financial Times: 'The play is set on a neo-classical exterior with Illyria a cliff-top retreat where the waves beat against a distant shore and a jutting, craggy knoll pushes out and away into the sky. A great gnarled tree dominates the stage. To the left, we see the neglected pillars and wrought-iron gates of Olivia's fortress. To the right, a chapel with a flickering candle by the door.' Never before had we been made so aware of the elements in a production of *Twelfth Night*. What is more, the permanent set managed to accommodate the play's various shifts of locale. Orsino's court was encamped on the craggy knoll. The below-stairs revels were out in the open as night gave way to dawn. The gulling of Malvolio was observed by his persecutors entwined in the branches of the overhanging tree. The Sir Topaz scene was played with Feste addressing his victim down a well. Obviously the alfresco setting made for a few textual oddities (such as Olivia's reported request to Malvolio to turn the nocturnal revellers 'out of doors') but the success of the production depended very much on its creation of a complete and plausible Illyrian world. Illona Sekacz's music, filling Illyria with waterwashed sounds, also brought the play closer to *The Tempest* than the inland pastoral world of *As You Like It*.

Inside this fantasy-world, however, there was a strong sense of emotional reality: something Mr. Caird may possibly have inherited from the production of *Peter Pan* that he had earlier co-directed with Trevor Nunn. Gemma Jones, for instance, made Maria a social-climbing gentle-woman, conscious of her status in Olivia's household, but also thrilled to be in the company of John Thaw's acerbic bully of a Sir Toby and raptly determined to become Lady Belch. You could even see the precise moment (her fierce bellow at Malvolio—'Go shake your ears') when she decided to burn her boats in Olivia's household and throw in her lot with the opposition. The same care was invested in the Viola-Olivia relationship. Unlike some previous Violas, Zoë Wanamaker was not tickled or amused to discover her own sexual drawing-power, but palpably troubled both by Olivia's declaration of love and by her own equivocal response to it: a contemporary female equivalent of the sexual ambiguity inherent in any Elizabethan production when two boys were thrown into close emotional contact. Without going quite as far as Mr. Hands's Olivia, Sarah Berger was also young, vehement, and quick to strike twelve, as when she intervened in Sir Toby's attack on Cesario by raining fierce blows on the back of her sottish cousin.
'Brooding' was the word Giles Gordon used to describe Mr. Caird's treatment of the play, but the comedy, where appropriate, was given due measure. The late Emrys James was always a full-blooded actor and his Malvolio was characteristically robust. One thing about the character has become increasingly clear over the years. If Malvolio is no more than an uppish steward, then the plot against him leaves behind a sour taste. If, however, he is genuinely threatening, the machinations of Maria and the rest have some motive. Emrys James realised that, making him an obstreperous, finger-wagging tyrant who genuinely deserved a moral lesson. But Mr. James (Feste in the Barton production) had also learned something from Sinden's technique of acknowledging the audience: in this case, Mr. James whipped himself into a state of erotic fervour while reading the letter, which he then proceeded to brandish at the front stalls in a state of sheer disbelief. The comedy in Mr. Caird's production was there (not least in Daniel Massey's goofy, limp-stockinged Ague-Cheek, constantly looking on at the witty folk in dazed incomprehension) but it derived from character and served as a counterpoint to the autumnal setting.

Four years later the play came round again at Stratford-upon-Avon in Bill Alexander's production: a highly enjoyable one that raised many fascinating questions. The determining feature was Kit Surrey's geographically precise set: a sun-kissed, white-walled, travel-brochure Greek island full of shadowy ginnels and exotic arches. This was an Illyria that existed as a real place on the map. But, in dispensing with such traditional features as a ring of box-trees for Olivia's garden, Mr. Alexander had to come up with new solutions to old problems: thus in the gulling of Malvolio the malevolent jokers were not placed immediately behind the uppity steward but peered at him through overhead windows. Some, such as Michael Coveney, welcomed the jettisoning of generations of hackneyed stage-business. Others, such as Stanley Wells in Shakespeare Survey 41, debated the wisdom of relocating that particular scene: 'Much of the scene's comedy', wrote Professor Wells, 'derives from the tension between Malvolio's self-absorption and the danger that they (Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian) will burst into it with their outraged reactions to his presumptions. Placing them in windows where they had little freedom of movement upset the balance of the scene, throwing too much emphasis on Malvolio's fantasies, too little on the tricksters who had stimulated them.'

But in Stratford-on-Avon, where Antony Sher played the part, Malvolio's fantasies were very much at the heart of the production. Mr. Sher and Mr. Alexander had worked together twice before, on Richard HI and (earlier in the same season) The Merchant of Venice: the result, on each occasion, had been a crucial redefinition of the central character. The intention here, quite clearly, was to push both the comedy and tragedy of Malvolio to its utmost limits: opinions varied wildly on how far the device succeeded, but it was certainly an audacious experiment.

In the early scenes, Mr. Sher was outrageously funny. He came on looking like a bug-eyed Archbishop Makarios dressed in black from his fez to his gaiters. You could see that he was totally enslaved by Olivia by the way he rushed off to rinse her tear-stained handkerchief under the village pump and by his unnerving habit of popping up from behind walls like a private eye every time she cried 'What ho'. In the cross-gartered scene he even turned the linings of his pockets and hat inside out to show that they too were yellow.

The real controversy centred on the final scenes, which Mr. Sher played as if Malvolio had been driven out of his wits: in the prison-scene he was tethered to a stake by a halter and he was last seen essaying cross-gartered high kicks as if totally deranged. Stanley Wells made the point that 'If Malvolio has a tragedy, it is not that he goes mad but that he remains irremediably sane.' But, for Charles Osborne in The Daily Telegraph, Mr. Sher remained 'the most charismatic Malvolio I have seen since Donald Sinden and Laurence Olivier'.

But the production was not sheer Sher. Harriet Walter's Viola had a gentle erotic melancholy: I also retain an image of her, at the moment of Sebastian's reappearance, standing with hands flattened against the wall, like a knifethrower's apprentice, in stunned disbelief. David Bradley's Auge-Cheek was also far and away the best since Richard Johnson's in Peter Hall's production. Mr. Bradley's mournful, spaniel eyes and long, lean body, tapering down to spindle shanks in bedraggled green stockings, induced laughter every time he came on stage.
He also combined the manic with the depressive. During the midnight revels he suddenly went wild and started jumping vehemently up and down on the spot as if treading invisible grapes. But when urged later by Roger Allam's strong, bullying Sir Toby (Hardy to his Laurel), he vaguely demurred and limped off to his cubiculo, only to crawl back seconds later to fulfil his role of eternal whipping-boy. A brilliant performance in a production that (as often happens) matured between Stratford and London, and that raised many important questions. To what extent is Illyria a state of mind or a real Mediterranean locale? And how much is the play Malvolio's tragedy or simply a turning-point in Shakespearean comedy in which, for the first time, the merry fooling is pervaded by a sense of loss?

It is a measure of the extent to which new young companies capable of performing Shakespeare are springing up that in the same year (1987) as Mr. Alexander's production opened in Stratford, two other versions of Twelfth Night were seen in London. Diversity is good—but both of the rival productions raised fundamental questions about the staging of Shakespeare and the extent to which liberties may be taken with the text.

Declan Donnellan's production for Cheek by Jowl, which arrived in London at the Donmar Warehouse after a long provincial tour, was by far the more irreverent of the two. It began with Viola's arrival in Illyria. It treated Ague-Cheek as, in Michael Ratcliffe's phrase, 'a tumescent jack-rabbit from the boondocks of Middle America', and gave the saxophone-playing Maria a Brooklyn twang. It had Orsino petting Cesario as heavily and unequivocally as Olivia did. It showed the gay Antonio at the last striking up a liaison with Feste. And, most controversially, it had the midnight revelers singing a drunken, bellowed version of 'My Way'. How one reacted was a matter of choice. For Michael Ratcliffe in The Observer, 'This was a Twelfth Night for those who have never seen the play before and those who thought they never wanted to see it again.' For Peter Kemp in The Independent: 'Self-indulgence—mocked in Twelfth Night—is pandered to in this production. The cast strain to seem cute and street-wise. But, for all their contortions in search of "sophistication", clod-hopping callowness prevails.'

Kenneth Branagh directed a much more sober and intelligent production for the Renaissance Theatre Company at the Riverside Studios. I felt there were some mistakes. The snow-flaked Victorian Christmas setting swathed the production in a misleading prettiness. Some of the darker areas of the play went unexplored: the Sir Toby was simply a bland buffoon and the Maria a neat lady's maid with little hint of admiration for a drunken sot. And, once again, the order of the first two scenes was reversed, which implied a certain tone-deafness to Shakespeare's musical statement of his themes.

But, elsewhere, Mr. Branagh showed a sensitivity to the play's shifting mood and combined a first-rate Malvolio (Richard Briers) with a sense of ensemble. The Victorian setting helped to give social precision to a Malvolio whom Mr. Briers played as a frockcoated, wildly ambitious fanatic: a combination of Mr. Murdstone and Samuel Smiles. For once his ambitions had more to do with class than sex. In the box-tree scene, Mr. Briers skirted the usual innuendoes to stress his dream of being 'Count Malvolio'; and at his next sighting of Sir Toby he extended to him an outflung hand like a Richard the Third who had been boning up on Self-Help. It was a star performance without being a stage-hogging one, and was nicely balanced by Anton Lesser's shaggy-locked Feste, Frances Barber's clear-spoken Viola, and Caroline Langrishe's Olivia, who combined aristocratic beauty with clear hints that she could not wait to get her hands on Orsino's boy-emissary.

Looking back over its stage history, what is clear is that Twelfth Night is now and always has been an extremely elusive play. It rarely fails to afford pleasure or to yield a batch of memorable performances. But, equally, it is difficult to achieve what Stanley Wells calls 'the transmuting alchemy' that unlocks its ambivalent darkness and resonant comedy…. How does one achieve a balance between the play's light and dark aspects? How much of the mood of a production is determined by the casting and, specifically, the age of the actors involved? How far can one go in treating the play as a realistic picture of a particular society? Is there any one character who determines the tone of a production? How does one embody Illyria on stage?
Obviously there is no single, right or wrong answer to these or multifarious other questions. Each production throws up its own solutions. But only by addressing the questions with skilled practitioners can one begin to get to the heart of this most haunting, beautiful, and opal-like of all Shakespeare's comedies.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Staging Issues

Harley Granville-Barker (essay date 1912)


[Granville-Barker was a noted actor, playwright, director, and critic who, in his productions of Shakespeare's plays, emphasized simplicity in staging, set design, and costume. In the following essay, originally published in 1912, he provides an account of how Twelfth Night should be staged and acted.]

Twelfth Night is classed, as to the period of its writing, with Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Henry V. But however close in date, in spirit I am very sure it is far from them. I confess to liking those other three as little as any plays he ever wrote. I find them so stodgily good, even a little (dare one say it?) vulgar, the work of a successful man who is caring most for success. I can imagine the lovers of his work losing hope in the Shakespeare of that year or two. He was thirty-five and the first impulse of his art had spent itself. He was popular. There was welcome enough, we may be sure, for as many Much Ado's and As You Like It's and jingo history pageants as he'd choose to manufacture. It was a turning point and he might have remained a popular dramatist. But from some rebirth in him that mediocre satisfaction was foregone, and, to our profit at least, came Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, and the rest. Hamlet, perhaps, was popular, though Burbage may have claimed a just share in making it so. But I doubt if the great heart of the public would beat any more constantly towards the rarer tragedies in that century and society than it will in this. To the average man or play-goer three hundred or indeed three thousand years are as a day. While we have Shakespeare's own comment even on that 'supporter to a state,' Polonius (true type of the official mind. And was he not indeed Lord Chamberlain?), that where art is concerned 'He's for a jig, or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps.'

Twelfth Night is, to me, the last play of Shakespeare's golden age. I feel happy ease in the writing, and find much happy carelessness in the putting together. It is akin to the Two Gentlemen of Verona (compare Viola and Julia), it echoes a little to the same tune as the sweeter parts of the Merchant of Venice, and its comic spirit is the spirit of the Falstaff scenes of Henry IV, that are to my taste the truest comedy he wrote.

There is much to show that the play was designed for performance upon a bare platform stage without traverses or inner rooms or the like. It has the virtues of this method, swiftness and cleanness of writing and simple directness of arrangement even where the plot is least simple. It takes full advantage of the method's convenience. The scene changes constantly from anywhere suitable to anywhere else that is equally so. The time of the play's action is any time that suits the author as he goes along. Scenery is an inconvenience. I am pretty sure that Shakespeare's performance went through without a break. Certainly its conventional arrangement into five acts for the printing of the Folio is neither by Shakespeare's nor any other sensitive hand; it is shockingly bad.…

I believe the play was written with a special cast in mind. Who was Shakespeare's clown, a sweet-voiced singer and something much more than a comic actor? He wrote Feste for him, and later the Fool in Lear. At least, I can conceive no dramatist risking the writing of such parts unless he knew he had a man to play them. And why a diminutive Maria—Penthesilea, the youngest wren of nine—unless it was only that the actor of the part was to be such a very small boy? I have cudgelled my brains to discover why Maria, as Maria, should be tiny, and finding no reason have ignored the point.
I believe too (this is a commonplace of criticism) that the plan of the play was altered in the writing of it. Shakespeare sets out upon a passionate love romance, perseveres in this until (one detects the moment, it is that jolly mid-night revel) Malvolio, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew completely capture him. Even then, perhaps, Maria's notable revenge on the affectioned ass is still to be kept within bounds. But two scenes later he begins to elaborate the new idea. The character of Fabian is added to take Feste's share of the rough practical joke and set him free for subtler wit. Then Shakespeare lets fling and works out the humorous business to his heart's content. That done, little enough space is left him if the play is to be over at the proper hour, and, it may be (if the play was being prepared for an occasion, the famous festivity in the Middle Temple Hall or another), there was little enough time to finish writing it in either. From any cause, we certainly have a scandalously ill-arranged and ill-written last scene, the despair of any stage manager. But one can discover, I believe, amid the chaos scraps of the play he first meant to write. Olivia suffers not so much by the midway change of plan, for it is about her house that the later action of the play proceeds, and she is on her author's hands. It is on Orsino, that interesting romantic, that the blow falls.

Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
Kill what I love?—a savage jealousy
That sometime savours nobly.
[V. i. 117-20]

On that fine fury of his—shamefully reduced to those few lines—I believe the last part of the play was to have hung. It is too good a theme to have been meant to be so wasted. And the revelation of Olivia's marriage to his page (as he supposes), his reconciliation with her, and the more vital discovery that his comradely love for Viola is worth more to him after all than any high-sounding passion, is now all muddled up with the final rounding off of the comic relief. The character suffers severely. Orsino remains a finely interesting figure; he might have been a magnificent one. But there, it was Shakespeare's way to come out on the other side of his romance.

The most important aspect of the play must be viewed, to view it rightly, with Elizabethan eyes. Viola was played, and was meant to be played, by a boy. See what this involves. To that original audience the strain of make-believe in the matter ended just where for us it most begins, at Viola's entrance as a page. Shakespeare's audience saw Cesario without effort as Orsino sees him; more importantly they saw him as Olivia sees him; indeed it was over Olivia they had most to make believe. One feels at once how this affects the sympathy and balance of the love scenes of the play. One sees how dramatically right is the delicate still grace of the dialogue between Orsino and Cesario, and how possible it makes the more outspoken passion of the scenes with Olivia. Give to Olivia, as we must do now, all the value of her sex, and to the supposed Cesario none of the value of his, we are naturally quite un-moved by the business. Olivia looks a fool. And it is the common practice for actresses of Viola to seize every chance of reminding the audience that they are girls dressed up, to impress on one moreover, by childish by-play as to legs and petticoats or the absence of them, that this is the play's supreme joke. Now Shakespeare has devised one most carefully placed soliloquy where we are to be forcibly reminded that Cesario is Viola; in it he has as carefully divided the comic from the serious side of the matter. That scene played, the Viola, who does not do her best, as far as the passages with Olivia are concerned, to make us believe, as Olivia believes, that she is a man, shows, to my mind, a lack of imagination and is guilty of dramatic bad manners, knocking, for the sake of a little laughter, the whole of the play's romantic plot on the head.

Let me explain briefly the interpretation I favour of four or five other points.

I do not think that Sir Toby is meant for nothing but a bestial sot. He is a gentleman by birth, or he would not be Olivia's uncle (or cousin, if that is the relationship). He has been, it would seem, a soldier. He is a drinker, and while idleness leads him to excess, the boredom of Olivia's drawing-room, where she sits solitary in her
mourning, drives him to such jolly companions as he can find: Maria and Fabian and the Fool. He is a poor relation, and has been dear to Sir Andrew some two thousand strong or so (poor Sir Andrew), but as to that he might say he was but anticipating his commission as matrimonial agent. Now, dull though Olivia's house may be, it is free quarters. He is, it seems, in some danger of losing them, but if only by good luck he could see Sir Andrew installed there as master! Not perhaps all one could wish for in an uncle; but to found an interpretation of Sir Toby only upon a study of his unfortunate surname is, I think, for the actor to give us both less and more than Shakespeare meant.

I do not believe that Sir Andrew is meant for a cretinous idiot. His accomplishments may not quite stand to Sir Toby's boast of them; alas! the three or four languages, word for word without book, seem to end at 'Dieu vous garde, Monsieur.' But Sir Andrew, as he would be if he could—the scholar to no purpose, the fine fellow to no end, in short the perfect gentleman—is still the ideal of better men than he who yet can find nothing better to do. One can meet a score of Sir Andrews, in greater or less perfection, any day after a west-end London lunch, doing, what I believe is called, a slope down Bond.

Fabian, I think, is not a young man, for he hardly treats Sir Toby as his senior, he is the cautious one of the practical jokers, and he has the courage to speak out to Olivia at the end. He treats Sir Andrew with a certain respect. He is a family retainer of some sort; from his talk he has to do with horses and dogs.

Feste, I feel, is not a young man either. There runs through all he says and does that vein of irony by which we may so often mark one of life's self-acknowledged failures. We gather that in those days, for a man of parts without character and with more wit than sense, there was a kindly refuge from the world's struggle as an allowed fool. Nowadays we no longer put them in livery.

I believe Antonio to be an exact picture of an Elizabethan seaman-adventurer, and Orsino's view of him to be just such as a Spanish grandee would have taken of Drake. 'Notable pirate' and 'salt-water thief,' he calls him.

A bawbling vessel was he captain of,
For shallow draught and bulk unprizable;
With which such scathful grapple did he make
With the most noble bottom of our fleet,
That very envy and the tongue of loss
Cried fame and honour on him.
[V.i.54-9]

And Antonio is a passionate fellow as those west countrymen were. I am always reminded of him by the story of Richard Grenville chewing a wineglass in his rage.

The keynotes of the poetry of the play are that it is passionate and it is exquisite. It is life, I believe, as Shakespeare glimpsed it with the eye of his genius in that halfItalianised court of Elizabeth. Orsino, Olivia, Antonio, Sebastian, Viola are passionate all, and conscious of the worth of their passion in terms of beauty. To have one's full laugh at the play's comedy is no longer possible, even for an audience of Elizabethan experts. Though the humour that is set in character is humour still, so much of the salt of it, its play upon the time and place, can have no savour for us. Instead we have learned editors disputing over the existence and meaning of jokes at which the simplest soul was meant to laugh unthinkingly. I would cut out nothing else, but I think I am justified in cutting those pathetic survivals.

Finally, as to the speaking of the verse and prose. The prose is mostly simple and straightforward. True, he could no more resist a fine-sounding word than, as has been said, he could resist a pun. They abound, but if we have any taste for the flavour of a language he makes us delight in them equally. There is none of that difficult involuted decoration for its own sake in which he revelled in the later plays. The verse is still regular,
still lyrical in its inspiration, and it should I think be spoken swiftly.…

I think that all Elizabethan dramatic verse must be spoken swiftly, and nothing can make me think otherwise. My fellow workers acting in The Winter's Tale were accused by some people (only by some) of gabbling. I readily take that accusation on myself, and I deny it. Gabbling implies hasty speech, but our ideal was speed, nor was the speed universal, nor, but in a dozen well-defined passages, really so great. Unexpected it was, I don't doubt; and once exceed the legal limit, as well accuse you of seventy miles an hour as twenty-one. But I call in question the evidence of mere policemen-critics. I question a little their expertness of hearing, a little too their quickness of understanding Elizabethan English not at its easiest, just a little their lack of delight in anything that is not as they thought it always would be, and I suggest that it is more difficult than they think to look and listen and remember and appraise all in the same flash of time. But be all the short-comings on one side and that side ours, it is still no proof that the thing come short of is not the right thing. That is the important point to determine, and for much criticism that has been helpful in amending what we did and making clearer what we should strive towards—I tender thanks.

The Winter's Tale, as I see its writing, is complex, vivid, abundant in the variety of its mood and pace and colour, now disordered, now at rest, the product of a mind rapid, changing, and over-full. I believe its interpretation should express all that. Twelfth Night is quite other. Daily, as we rehearse together, I learn more what it is and should be; the working together of the theatre is a fine thing. But, as a man is asked to name his stroke at billiards, I will even now commit myself to this: its serious mood is passionate, its verse is lyrical, the speaking of it needs swiftness and fine tone; not rush, but rhythm, constant and compelling. And now I wait contentedly to be told that less rhythmic speaking of Shakespeare has never been heard.

Herbert Farjeon (essay date 1937)


[In the following essay, originally published in 1937, Farjeon comments on several issues associated with the staging of Twelfth Night in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.]

In the Henry Irving edition of Shakespeare, published fifty years ago, the famous actor-manager marked in all the plays those passages which, in his opinion, might suitably be left out when the plays were performed. Many of these cuts were made on the ground of propriety. In Twelfth Night, an unusually "pure" play, sixteen offending passages, now fearlessly spoken and unblushingly heard, were square-bracketed. That, in the Victorian age, was only to be expected. Other excisions are more difficult to account for. The first really startling cut comes in the drinking scene, where the passage preceding, following, and including the singing of "O mistress mine" is recommended for omission. The second really startling cut is the passage preceding, following, and including the singing of "Come away, come away, death". Thus the leading Shakespearean manager of the 'eighties and 'nineties made his C's, his U's and his T's. Now, the melancholy god protect him!

Playgoers have only to see the present production of Twelfth Night at the Old Vic to appreciate the dramatic value of Feste's songs. "O mistress mine," concentrating into a dozen lines of divine harmony all the philosophy of Omar Khayyam, makes the moment it apostrophizes one with the eternity it is reluctant to contemplate. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, under the melting influence of music and canary, become demi-gods (if rather obfuscated demigods!) as they listen. Hearing the song, as we do, through their ears, how much lovelier it becomes than when sung out of context, though even then it is lovely enough. "Come away, come away, death," we hear again through the ears of those on the stage. Orsino is the First Listener, for Olivia becomes the "fair cruel maid" by whom he is "slain". Yet one hears this song at second remove through the ears of Viola, the Second Listener, who does not receive the air directly, for Orsino is between her and it, and all through the singing she, whose emotions are realer and stronger than Orsino's, reacts to his reactions. This
is a relationship not explicitly set down in the text but so inevitable that no actress playing the part of Viola ever misses it. As for "When that I was", here is surely the most perfect conclusion to any comedy ever devised, though the cuckoo song in Love's Labour's Lost runs it close. Even Henry Irving—a great actor but not a great Shakespearean—could not bring himself to blue-pencil this.

Augustin Daly, who was a far greater offender than Irving, did not Gut out songs. He put them in. When he produced Twelfth Night, he began with a storm on the sea-shore, for the first scene of this amazing version was that between Antonio and Sebastian. Then, similarity to The Tempest having been established, on came a band of blithe seashore, warbling "Come unto these yellow sands". A little later Viola sat up on a bench like patience on a monument while Orsino's minstrels serenaded Olivia with "Who's Olivia? What is she that all our swains commend her?" This put Mr. Daly in some perplexity when he came, later, to produce The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Beer-bohm Tree's version was better, but so elaborate was the setting of Olivia's garden, with "real grass, real fountains, paths and descending steps," that it could not be shifted and had to be used for episodes that were quite out of place in it.

Shakespeare's plays are full of mysteries, and there is one mystery in Twelfth Night which has always perplexed me and which I have never seen discussed. When Maria forged her letter, why did she write "M, O, A, I," instead of "M, A, I, O"? As Malvolio says, M begins his name, but "A should follow … there is no consonancy in the sequel." Although the letter goes on, "If this fall into thy hand, revolve", this hardly dissipates the doubt which was the last thing Maria wanted to set up in Malvolio's mind. Why, then, did Shakespeare write "M, O, A, I"? Is there some latent sequential consonancy that was understood by the audience? If so, what was it? I should be glad to hear theories. So here, Baconians and Oxfordians, is your chance.

If music be the food of luv, ply on,
Give me excess of it; that soorfayting
The appeteet my sicken and saw deec.
That strine agen, it had a deeing fahl;
Aw, it kime o'er mee air, leek the sweet soond
That braythes upon a bank of veeolets,
Stayling, and giving odour.

[Li. 1-7]

The above is a very rough transcription of the opening lines of Twelfth Night as they would have sounded, according to professors of phonetics, if you had attended a performance of the play in Shakespeare's day. So the strange symphony would have continued. You would have heard Viola declaring that her father's daughter "never tawld her luv" (north country) but "sat leek Pytience on a monument smeeling at grief." You would have heard the Clown sounding his k's in "knave" and "knight"—"Ee shall be constrined to cahl thee k-nive, kneecht." And the proceedings would have concluded with the cockney lament that "The rine it rineth every dye."

For the Old Vic to plunge back to Elizabethan pronunciation would be disastrous, but in the case of words used for rhyming purposes, as "adieu" rhyming with "you", should not the pronunciation be consistently Elizabethan throughout? And should not the same principle be applied to words used for punning purposes, since modern pronunciation sometimes makes the sense of Shakespeare's puns unintelligible? Take this passage in Twelfth Night:

Sir Andrew. I would I had bestowed that time
in the tongues, that I have in fencing, dancing
and bear-baiting. O, had I but followed the arts!
Sir Toby. Then hadst thou had an excellent head of hair.
Sir Andrew. Why, would that have mended my hair?
Sir Toby. Past question, for thou seest it will not curl by nature.

Sir Toby's explanation leaves modern audiences completely fogged. Shakespeare's pronunciation clears the matter up, for in his day "tongues" and "tongs" were pronounced alike.

Who is Fabian? What is he? Where does he spring from? Why is he introduced into the play at all? Here is a Shakespearean mystery that has been left unexplored. Is there any other character in Shakespeare with so many words to say who remains so completely characterless? Sometimes he is played young, sometimes middle-aged, sometimes bearded, sometimes clean-shaven, sometimes well-born, sometimes plebeian: a jack-of-all-types. Nearly all the lines that Fabian speaks could be spoken equally well by some other character on the stage. It is almost as though Shakespeare had dodged up an extra part at the last moment to give a player a job.

The English climate was as damp in Elizabeth's day as it is now. The groundlings must often have stood in the rain (being as enthusiastic as football crowds) during open-air performances. If 1601 was a wet summer, what an apt song for an auditorium open to the sky must have been the Clown's "With hey, ho, the wind and the rain!" Can't you see the groundlings, as they join in the chorus, drawing their old cloaks around them?

Arthur Colby Sprague (essay date 1944)


[In the following excerpt, Sprague examines the handling of stage business in various productions of Twelfth Night.]

The fact that this most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies was on the boards in the sixteen-sixties, when Pepys saw it more than once—"a silly play," he calls it, "and not related at all to the name or day"—may well be misleading. For though, in 1703, Twelfth Night furnished ideas and a certain number of lines to a negligible piece by William Burnaby called Love Betray'd, it was not acted again until 1741, this time, we may be certain, without the slightest guidance from tradition.

It has long been customary for Viola, in the second scene, to be accompanied by two sailors carrying a "trunk" or "chest." Why, by the way, it is perfectly seemly for Viola, landing, in Illyria, to have luggage, when it would be slightly ridiculous for Hamlet, setting out for England, to have any, is matter for thought. Miss Helen Hayes, I recall, upon entering pretended to shake sand from her shoe.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek's demonstration of dancing and capering is the most notable bit of business in Scene 3. In one of two Twelfth Night promptbooks prepared by George Becks (this one identified by a reference to Adelaide Neilson), when Sir Toby says "Let me see thee caper," "Sir A does so—Sir Toby taps his cane on stage—higher &c.—Sir Toby laughing & applauding"—and the friends go out "laughing & capering." A "Walkg Cane each" for the frolicsome knights is called for in Mrs. Shaw's prompt-book (c. 1850). For a more subtle touch [in Gordon Crosse, Fifty Years of Shakespearean Playgoing, 1941], one reads of Norman Forbes, the Aguecheek in Tree's production, that "his startled look when he caught sight of Maria over Sir Toby's shoulder as the knights embraced, was by itself worth the money." Equally happy was an idea of Kate Terry's in the next scene: Viola's "quick turn at the sound of [Orsino's] voice in the question 'Where's Caesario?'"
Tree as Malvolio entered in state, attended by "four smaller Malvolios, who aped the great chamberlain in dress, in manners, in deportment. He had a magnificent flight of stairs on the stage; and when he was descending it majestically, he slipped and fell with a crash sitting." Mr. Bernard Shaw [in *Herbert Beerbohm Tree, 1920*] yet finds that this was not "mere clowning.… Tree, without betraying the smallest discomfiture, raised his eye-glass and surveyed the landscape as if he had sat down on purpose." Irving had entered with upturned nose, "and eyes half shut, as if with singular and moody contemplation [Edward R. Russel, "Mr. Irving's Work," *Fortnightly Review* (September 1, 1884)]. Sent to admit Cesario, Malvolio has sometimes returned with him, to linger on the stage for whatever values might be obtained from his silent presence. Thus, Daly made Cesario's "some mollification for your giant, sweet lady" [I. x. 204] apply to him and not to the little "wren," Maria—and was taken to task by Archer for doing so. Two mid-nineteenth-century prompt notes of John Moore's may be quoted in passing. Sir Toby's entrance is "with slightly unsteady gait—Hat over eyes, and cloak awry," and, before "A plague o' these pickleherring!" "Pause slight Belch." Later, when Olivia says "I thank you for your pains," it is, "Retreating gradually to wing her eyes fixed on Viola—suddenly and eagerly advances to her and offers a purse."

Malvolio has long carried a wand; but it seems to have been Tree who first used the still familiar business of slipping Olivia's ring over the point of this wand and dropping it, churlishly enough, at Cesario's feet. In Viola's soliloquy, which follows this incident in Act II, Scene 2, Mrs. Charles Kean (Ellen Tree) is criticized by George Henry Lewes [in *The Leader* (October 5, 1850)]:

> The look with which she said "I am the man" was perfect; but that little saucy tap on her head, with the playful swagger which followed it, though they "brought down the house," appeared to us to betray a forgetfulness of Viola …

a passing into "the lower orbit of a soubrette." Julia Marlowe used regularly to check off on her fingers the several items in Viola's complicated account—"My master loves her dearly," etc.

Voices have been raised from time to time in protest against the farcical extravagances of the so-called Kitchen Scene (II, 3). Thus, Joseph Knight in 1878 was "almost certain" that the traditional business dated back "to the time of the Restoration"—though not to a still earlier period, because there were too few of the elder actors who survived the long years during which the theatres were closed. Even so, he found the behavior of the drunken knights "preposterous, unnatural, inartistic, and wholly out of keeping with the general scope of the play." Mr. G. R. Foss, in 1932, not only spoke out against the same ancient abuses, but advanced reasons for supposing that the scene does not take place in a kitchen at all. He even denies that it is a drinking scene! Rather, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew upon their return from carousing have ventured into a part of the great house where their uproar is audible. Twice they call to Maria "to bring drink, but she never does." The last point seems to me indemonstrable.

Our first glimpse of the scene is pleasant enough. Dunlap saw *Twelfth Night* at Drury Lane about 1785.

> The picture presented, when the two knights are discovered with their pipes and potations, as exhibited by Dodd and Palmer, is ineffaceable.… [Dodd's] thin legs in scarlet stockings, his knees raised nearly to his chin, by placing his feet on the front cross-piece of the chair (the degraded drunkards being seated with a table, tankards, pipes, and candles, between them), a candle in one hand and pipe in the other, endeavouring in vain to bring the two together; while, in representing the swaggering Sir Toby, Palmer's gigantic limbs outstretched seemed to indicate the enjoyment of that physical superiority which nature had given him [*History of the American Theatre, 1833*].

A generation later, the drunkenness of Liston's Sir Andrew made "his eyes dim and his feet tremble, without making his idiotism more senseless … his attempt to light his pipe was amusingly unsuccessful" [as quoted in
the *European Magazine* (December, 1820)]. Mrs. Shaw's promptbook calls for a "Long Pipe" each, for Sir Toby and his companion—and they were still smoking when Mr. Crosse saw them in Daly's production, and in Benson's wielded churchwardens.

Shortly after Malvolio's entrance, comes this scrap of dialogue:

*Clown, [sings]* His eyes do show his days are almost done.

*Mal.* Isn't even so?

*To.* But I will never die.

*Clown.* Sir Toby, there you lie.

[In his *Notes and Various Readings*, 1779] Capell, who thinks often in terms of the stage, calls the last speech "a waggish remark in tune upon a great stumble of sir Toby's which brings him almost upon his nose." Bell's edition (1774) has Sir Toby fall down singing. Of course, Sir Andrew goes to his assistance, and of course, in time, he too falls down. Then, according to Beck's promptnotes ("1864"), "Maria & Clown assist them, put them back to back—&c &c—ad lib." "Mal gets L—Sir A X L tries to light his pipe at Mals candle—comic bus—blow it out"; and, as the intruder turns to go, "Clown crows, flaps his arms as though they were wings . . .". Moore has Sir Toby cross to Malvolio: "fills his fingers in his face—and Xes behind back to R.H. kissing his hand to Maria as he passes. Clown Xes in the same manner and round again to his place. Sir A. Xes, but is too drunk or stupid to say anything." Malvolio exists, "shaking his head & hand threateningly," and Sir Toby "throws his pipe" after him.

It would be tedious to dwell on such inanities. A general warning must, however, be offered. It is Malvolio who gives offense here; Malvolio who provokes vengeance. I well remember Maude Adams's angry walking up and down as the plan is taking shape in Maria's mind. "Go shake your ears!" she had flung after him, as he went. If, on the contrary, an excess of physical abuse is meted out to the Steward, in this scene, he may, himself, become the injured party with much loss of meaning to what follows.

Near the end of the scene, Beck's "1864" promptbook has:

Sir Andrew keeps repeating "Cut" as if it was the best joke in the world, laughing at it holding his sides—both Exeunt laughing loudly, or Sir Toby takes candle (also Sir A) from Table Comic bus—Toby mugs & holds candle to Sir A's face—he blows it out—then Toby tries to light it & fails—then make a desperate thrust—fails & both go up stairs—Sir Toby on hand & knees—when at top—rolls down.

Of a performance by the Benson Company at the Lyceum, *The Athenæum* (March 31, 1900) writes stuffily: "When Sir Andrew thrusts his long churchwarden tobacco-pipe through his belt as a sword, and when he and Sir Toby, after wild farcical business with their candles, stretch themselves out at full length … the effect is to us as depressing as it is inspiring to the uneducated portion of the public."

In the scene between Orsino and Viola (II, 4), Ada Rehan, upon receiving the chain which she is to give the Countess, "raised it to her lips and reverently kissed it." Julia Marlowe writes interestingly about another passage, the lines beginning "She never told her love." At one time, she had "endeavored to aid Shakespeare" and bring out the speaker's "shyness by coyly fingering Viola's little red cap. The result was that there was a great deal of red cap and not nearly enough of the maiden's perturbation." When, on the contrary, she had last played the part (this was written in 1901), she had "made an effort to keep everything still"—even to the ends of her fingers.
Experience has taught me that … we cannot go far wrong if we let the lines have the center of the stage and allow them to show the poet's meaning. We cannot aid him by a multitude of gestures or by creating of intricate "business." ["The Essentials of Stage Success," *Theatre* (December 1901)].

On Malvolio's approach, in the Letter Scene, Moore's promptbook has: "Sir A. goes to pick up the letter. Toby pulls him to bush, C." Sometimes, Sir Toby and Fabian have hidden themselves behind a tree, with Sir Andrew actually climbing the tree and putting his head out through the branches—a refinement of which Becks notes, "This is better after duel." The Steward reads—and greatness is thrust upon him. "How he went smiling to himself," Lamb writes of Bensley [in his *Dramatic Essays*, 1891], "with what ineffable carelessness would he twirl his gold chain; what a dream it was!" Or there was Charles Fisher, at Burton's Theatre in 1853: "When it comes home to him at last that he indeed is the favored of Olivia… he was inimitable. Already [in fancy] he is clothed in yellow-stockings and cross-gartered; and he smiles, as he struts, [writes William L. Keese in his *William E. Burton*, 1885].

In the third act there is little to detain us until we come to the Duel Scene. Henry Austin Clapp, writing of a performance by Daly's Company at the Hollis Street Theatre, Boston [in the *Boston Advertiser* (April 18, 1893)], protests vigorously against the impertinent and monstrously absurd introduction of Sir Andrew silently to threaten Viola with his sword in her chief scene with Olivia, as if Olivia's faintly ironical phrase, "Be not afraid, good youth," needed any explanation when followed without pause by "I will not have you."

There could be no better example, indeed, of "business out of keeping with the plain meaning of what Shakespeare wrote." When, in Scene 4, Malvolio enters, no longer "sad and civil" but "in very strange manner," we hear again of Lamb's Mr. Bensley:

All his peculiarities of deportment … aided his exhibition of the steward—the sliding zig-zag advance and retreat of his figure fixed the attention to his stockings and his garters. His constrained smile, his hollow laugh, his lordly assumption, and his ineffable contempt of all that opposed him in the way to greatness were irresistibly diverting.

Fancy such a Malvolio exposed to the familiarity of Belch's "How dost thou, chuck?" accompanied as it sometimes was by a slap on the back!

In the eighteenth-century theatre, two armed grenadiers were posted one on each side of the proscenium, where they remained throughout the performance mute and un-regarded. On October 28, 1763, one of these sentries, at Drury Lane, behaved most strangely, falling down "in a kind of fit" during the encounter between Viola and Sir Andrew. Explanations were promptly offered: as that his collapse was due to fear; that it resulted from excessive laughter, which seems somewhat more probable; that it had been arranged beforehand since "it was proper for Sir Andrew to place himself in that part of the stage the soldier occupied." Sir Andrew in later times has taken refuge in strange places. Mr. Liston, at Covent Garden in 1820, "violated the whole illusion of his duel-scene with Viola, by climbing up a part of the proscenium." Mr. Mason, in Edinburgh five years later, climbed up a rope-ladder—"but even that he makes in perfect keeping with the character." In Moore's promptbook, at line 342, the duellists advance towards centre—swords extended—but neither looking at his adversary, in centre the swords meet this frightens them, and they turn away ["causing Sir Toby and Fabian to bump together" inserted] & again are brought back by Sir Toby & Fabian—Advance as before Viola hits Sir Andrew on the leg—he holloas runs away and begin to climb tree L up stage.
By this time, however, if not before, he was more likely to postpone his climbing until Sir Toby crosses swords with Antonio. Then, when the brawl is over, Sir Toby calls him and he answers from among the branches—"Here I am.

As for Viola, enough perhaps that Madame Modjeska realized that her antagonist was not in the least dangerous, had a good opportunity to hit him, and refrained from doing so, out of "womanly generosity"; whereas Julia Arthur beat her Sir Andrew first "with her sword, and then with her hands across his bent back."

One last glimpse of the knight comes from The Examiner June 5, 1808, and is probably by Leigh Hunt:

The fixed and trembling posture of Mr. Mathews … his hard breathing which tried to recover itself now and then by a heavy sigh, and his occasional side bend of the head accompanied with a munch of the lips, like a person who has just swallowed a crust that had stuck in his throat, presented a perfect picture of feeble despair.

At the beginning of the Dark Room Scene (IV, 2), "Malvolio," according to Beck's notes, "gives a deep groan & passes his head by the window straw beruffled." The miserable man has "chains on wrists," too.

[According to William Archer in "Twelfth Night at the Lyceum," Macmillan's Magazine (August 1889)] Irving exhibited him in "a nerveless state of prostrate dejection … stretched on the straw of a dungeon worthy of Fidelio."

For relief, there is an account of Sir Andrew's final exit. John Bull, September 8, 1839, is grateful to Buckstone, at the Haymarket,

for cheating us into hearty laughter by his whimsicalities in Sir Andrew … his parting look at Olivia, in the last scene, as if to ascertain whether there might not be a chance left for him, was characteristic, and in excellent keeping with his author.

Dyce, in 1853, could "well remember that, when Twelfth Night was revived at Edinburgh many years ago, Terry, who then acted Malvolio … had 'straw about him,' on his release from durance." Beck's "Neilson" Promptbook calls for "straws in his hair—one over hanging face—which annoys him for a time—finally pulls it out—Eyes red—terribly in earnest." His exit is a great moment. Phelps's restraint was striking. His Malvolio had gone through the play with half-closed eyes, as if there were "nothing in the world without that is worth noticing." Now "he opens his eyes on learning how he has been tricked," but

they close again in happy self-content, and he is retiring in state without deigning a word to his tormentors, when, as the fool had twitted him by nothing how "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," he remembers that the whirligig is still in motion. Therefore, marching back with as much increase of speed as is consistent with magnificence, he threatens all—including now Olivia in his contempt—"I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" [Henry Morley, Journal of a London Playgoer, 1891]

Tree tore off his steward's chain—the chain Maria had referred to with derision, early in the play, the chain, too, which he had found himself fingering instinctively in the Letter Scene: "I frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my—some rich jewel." Sothern preferred to tear the forged letter into bits, which he threw on the stage as he went. And "there was something of great dignity in the manner of that exit." [Richard Dickens, Forty Years of Shakespeare on the English Stage: August, 1867 to August, 1907].

Ngaio Marsh (essay date 1955)

In the following essay, Marsh discusses his 1951 staging of Twelfth Night in the Antipodes, focusing on the elements of characterization and visual presentation as they relate to the tone of the play.

Each decade creates its own fashions in Shakespeare and only actors of distinction can survive them. The Shakespearian costumes of Macready's stage now 'date' almost as markedly as the crinoline itself. Is it not probable, moreover, that if we could look through the wrong end of our opera glasses at the Lyceum of the 1880's, the mannerisms of the lesser players would make us titter while Ellen Terry or Irving would still command our applause? In the portrait of Garrick as Lear the authentic look of madness in his eyes effaces the oddness of his wig and costume. One is able to believe that his performance, if we could see and hear it, would transcend the mannerisms of his period.

Fashions in acting and presentation are as extreme as those that control the garments worn by the actors. The points of view held by producers, critics, actors and designers are forever changing; there is a feverish anxiety in our theatres to keep up with, or better still, anticipate the mode. It is in the presentation of Shakespeare's comedies that this kind of stylistic snobbism is seen at its extremity and it is about an attempt to escape from fashion that I propose to write, with specific reference to the comedy of Twelfth Night.

The modern producer of Shakespeare's comedies believes himself to be up against a number of difficulties. Much of the word-bandying is, he says, disastrously unfunny while many of the allusions are obscure and some so coarse that it is just as well that they are also incomprehensible. He must cut great swathes out of his script and for the rest depend on comic 'business' funny enough in its own right to amuse the audience while the words may look after themselves. If he is honest he dreads the obligatory laughter of the Bardolators as much as he fears the silence of unamused Philistia. These are reasonable fears, and, in my opinion, he does well to entertain them.

There are, however, contemporary producers who in their search for a new treatment of an old comedy forget to examine the play as a whole and fall into the stylistic error of seizing upon a single fashionable aspect of a subtle and delicate work and forcing it up to a point of emphasis that quite destroys the balance of production.

In 1951 it fell to my lot to produce Twelfth Night with a company of British actors on tour in the Antipodes. As soon as I was made aware of my fate I began to look back at the many productions I had seen of this comedy. Some had been by distinguished producers with famous companies, others by repertory theatres and touring companies like my own. Of them all, the best, it seemed to me in retrospect, had been the simplest: the least pleasing, the most pretentious; and the most pretentious, those in which producers, actors and designers had apparently exchanged glances of dismay and asked each other what they could do to put a bit of 'go' into the old show. They had done much. There had been star Malvolios and star Violas. There had been remorseless emphasis on a single character or sometimes on a single scene. The words had been trapped in the net of a fantasticated style, lost in a welter of comic goings-on, coarsened by cleverness or stifled by being forced out of their native air. I had seen Andrew wither into a palsied eld, Malvolio as a red-nosed comic and Feste, God save the mark, as bitter as coloquintida or the Fool in Lear. I had seen productions with choreo-graphic trimmings and with constructivist backgrounds. I had, however, missed the production on ice skates.

It seemed to me that my best, indeed my only chance, was to put aside everything that I had seen, forget if possible the current fashions in Twelfth Night and start humbly with the play itself. It is, after all, a very good play. If I venture now to retrace this production of Twelfth Night it is with the hope that in doing so it may be possible to examine some of the problems of its presentation. Because it is also a very difficult play.

As I read it again I saw that in his story Shakespeare shows us the several aspects of love. He begins with Orsino's romantic absorption with the idea of loving the inaccessible Olivia and repeats this theme, burlesqued, in Malvolio's assumption that Olivia loves him. This in turn modulates into Olivia's completely
unreal 'crush' on Viola. Through these three aspects of fancied passion he weaves three aspects of true devotion: Viola's for Orsino, Antonio's for Sebastian and, a delicate echo, the Fool's almost inarticulate adoration of Olivia. These variations on a dual theme are linked by the sum-dazzled flowering of Sebastian's love for Olivia, while skipping discreetly through the pattern is the buffo romance of Toby and Maria. Andrew's foolish acceptance of the role of suitor to Olivia is the final detail in an exquisitely balanced design. It is a pattern made by setting fancy against truth, dream against reality. Of course one did not hope, when one discussed the play with the actors, that an audience, in the ripeness of time, would go away muttering: "We have seen a comedy of eight variations on two aspects of love." One merely hoped that the production would be an honest one because the actors had referred their job back to their author.

As I prepared the script it seemed to me that if, following Stanislavsky's rule, one were to say in a single word what Twelfth Night was about, that single word would be Illyria. It chimes through the text nostalgically as if Shakespeare would make us desirous of a place we had visited only in dreams.

Viola. What country, friends, is this?
Captain. This is Illyria, lady.
Viola. And what should I do in Illyria?
   My brother, he is in Elysium….
[I. ii. 1-4]

Andrew is "as tall a man as any's in Illyria". Maria is "as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria". And so it goes on. The rehearsal period was journey in search of Illyria; the performance, we dared to hope, would be our arrival there.

And what happens in Illyria? By day the sun shines with a golden richness on boscage, on palaces and on well-tended gardens. At night a full moon presides over revels that for all their robust foolery are tempered with wistfulness. The inhabitants move with a certain precision. Toby, Andrew, Maria and Fabian step across their landscape to an antic measure, now lively, now reflective but always compact and articulate. Orsino, the Renaissance man in love with love, moons in the grand manner over the young countess Olivia, whose principal attraction rests on her refusal to have anything to do with him. She, for her part, mopes with adolescent excessiveness over the death of her brother. And moving between these two strongholds of romantic nonsense are the Shakespearian girl-boy, gallant and wise, and Feste, the errant Fool. The whole most lovely play is set down in words that are so exact an expression of its aesthetic tone that one wonders how one dare meddle with them.

However, meddle we must and one of our first concerns would be the visual presentation of Illyria in terms of a touring company. How must it look and what must its inhabitants wear? After consultation with our young Australian designer, it was decided to use a Watteau-esque décor. The dresses of Watteau belong to no precise historical period: they are civilized, rich and fantastic and they have an air of freshness. We had three little pavilions of striped poles and airily draped banners. There were flights of steps, dark green backgrounds, platforms and a cyclorama. A traverse turned the half-stage into the interior of Orsino's palace. A jointed screen in two sections mounted on wheels and painted with a formalized seaport design was pulled across for the front scenes. These changes, effected by two nimble pages in view of the audience, took a matter of seconds to complete. For the letter-reading scene, there was a formalized boxthrivehed and a group of flamboyant statuary with which Toby, Andrew and Fabian associated themselves to good comic effect. A giant be-ribboned birdcage, prominent throughout the garden scenes, afterwards became Malvolio's mobile prison, being clapped over his head, leaving his legs free. The colour throughout in paint, fabrics and lighting modulated from grey and blue-pink to full Watteau-esque gold and turquoise.

As I read the play again, I caught—and who could miss them?—its overtones of regret. It has a character that is, I believe, unique in English comedy, a particular tinge of sadness that is the complementary colour of
aesthetic pleasure. One listens to it with the half-sigh that accompanies an experience of perfect beauty. This is an element that has much to do with music and nothing at all to do either with sentiment or with tragedy and it is the quintessence of *Twelfth Night*. The warp of regret is interlaced with a vigorous weft of foolery. The producer's job is to retain them both in their just proportion. It is because *Twelfth Night* is so gay that it is also so delicately sad.

I planned a swiftly running production with only one interval. This would come after the letter-reading scene and the coda of laughter that follows it. Toby would pick Maria up in a pother of giggles and petticoats and carry her off. Andrew and Fabian would follow arm in arm and the curtain come down. My aim at this stage of production was to catch the measure of the whole. That measure would be sustained by the occasional use of music. For this we chose Purcell's *Golden Sonata*, which seemed to me to be perfect Illyria.

It was now, when the script was plotted, the music chosen, the design in preparation and the first rehearsal called, that I was most forcibly reminded of the influence of theatrical fashion upon actors. I had in my company a number of young actors and actresses who had worked under distinguished direction and one senior actor of great talent, experience and discernment. It was among the youngest players that the fashionable attitude to *Twelfth Night* was most tenderly embraced. At least two of them were consumed with the desire to play up the regretful overtones for all and more than they are worth. "Infinite sadness" was a phrase much bandied about during the earlier rehearsals, minor overtones were remorselessly insisted upon, the horrid ghost of /Pagliacci/ seemed to lurk behind the boxtree hedge. I had seen all this sort of thing done and very cleverly done and had felt it to be an error in taste and discernment. The Fool in *Twelfth Night* is not the Fool in *Lear*, Malvolio's downfall was not conceived as a tragic downfall. He would not, therefore, be allowed to gloop himself into a sort of cross-gartered Richard II. No: he would be as acid as a lime and as lean as a preying mantis. He would have such an air of creaking dryness that when his transformation came about it would be as if he were galvanized into egregious gallantry. There must be no nonsense about making him sympathetic. Shakespeare disliked the fellow and so must the audience.

With Olivia I was able to air what had long been a fervent belief. There is another fashion in our theatres (stemming from who knows what forgotten managerial charms) that would make a mature woman of Olivia. For far too long, more than mature leading ladies have confronted us with the not very delectable prospect of solid worth extended in corsetted melancholy upon some comfortless chaiselongue, distressingly besotted on a girl-boy and finally marrying the latter's twin brother. Could anything be less Illyrian? I defy the fashionmongers to find in the text one single hint that the spoilt young countess is in fact anything but very young. There is not a ponderable note in Olivia: the bloom of adolescence adorns every word she speaks. Viola's impatience is with a girl of her own age who is making a little silly-billy of herself. Our Olivia was as pretty and young as a rosebud, her mourning was as nonsensical as Orsino's love-lorn dumps. Having shut herself up in a charming prison she fancied herself head-over-heels in love with the first personable boy to walk into it and was exasperated beyond measure when he failed to respond. None of my cast had ever thought of Olivia being played in this key. The concept of the stricken dowager dies hard.

There are, however, no fashions in Violas. She has, as far as I know, withstood the most determined onslaughts of the modish 'fun' merchants and has neither holla-ed Olivia's name through a megaphone to the reverberant hills nor yet disguised her fair and outward character in a track-suit. Our Viola fulfilled the first requirements of a heroine in a Shakespeare comedy by being an accomplished actress, very young, intelligent and a darling. She moved through the play with charm, wit and good breeding. By the command of a certain quality in her voice she was able to alight on her lyrical passages and in so doing bring about that sudden stillness in a theatre that tells an actress she is safely home.

And Feste? It was with Feste that fashion threatened most insistently to put up her unlovely visage, for it is through him more than any other of the Illyrians that Shakespeare shows us the reverse side of the coin of comedy. I had of late seen Festes who, by plugging at the minor theme in their part, had administered a series
of excruciating nudges in the ribs of their audiences. "Goodness!" in Morley's phrase, they seemed to exclaim, "Goodness, how sad! Look!" But Feste is not Lear's fool. He must play against his own ruefulness and if he does this his ruefulness will speak for itself. It shows most markedly in the songs. "Youth", Feste sings, "is a stuff will not endure." "What's to come", he sings, "is still unsure." Beauty, he says, is a flower, and elsewhere the Duke reflects that "women are as roses, whose fair flower Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour". Viola agrees:

And so they are: alas, that they are so;
To die, even when they to perfection grow!

[H.iv.40-41]

Olivia swears by the roses of the spring. The shroud of white in the Fool's song of death is strewn with yew and "not a flower, not a flower sweet" on his coffin shall be strewn. This flower image is scattered through Twelfth Night like the daisies on a Botticelli lawn and it is Feste who most often expresses it. He wanders about the play mingling with its several themes. He is by turns listless and brilliant. He has an artist's resentment for Malvolio's criticism of his professional status and can be waspish. He is all things to all men and yet very much himself and very much alone. His devotion to Olivia drifts across the text with no more insistence than a breath on a looking-glass. He can be ruined by an actor who sees in him a chance to make a big thing of a light part. He sets the tone of the play.

I felt that there should be some visual expression of his function and looked for it in the flower image. On Olivia's first entrance, Feste, who has played truant from her household, sets about fooling himself back into her good graces. Our Feste mutely asked her for the rose she carried. It was refused and given to Fabian, that oddly occurring character whose sudden appearance is thought to have some reference to the departure of Kemp from Shakespeare's company and the arrival of Armin to take his place. Fabian seems to have been brought in arbitrarily to replace the Fool in the letter-reading scene and perhaps to suggest a rival to him in Olivia's favour. It was to sustain this suggestion that Fabian escorted Olivia on this first entry. Later, on his own line: "So beauty's a flower" [I. v. 52], Feste snatched the rose from Fabian and wore it on his motley for the rest of the play. At the end he was left alone to sing his wry song of the wind and the rain. At its close he laid down his lute on the stage and broke the rose between his fingers. The petals fell with a faint tinkle of sound across the strings. Feste tiptoed into the shadows and the final curtain came down on the lute and rose-petals, vignetted in a pool of light. This use of a visual symbol in the rose was the only piece of extraneous production imposed on the play and even this could be referred back to the text. There was comic 'business' enough, certainly, in the buffo scenes, but it was kept in style and played strictly to the general tempo of the production. The result, surprising to actors and audience alike, was the discovery that the comic scenes in Twelfth Night are funny.

It remains only to say that with the intelligent and patient co-operation of the actors this treatment of Twelfth Night became articulate. It was successful in performance. This, I am sure, was because we came freshly to the text and, seeking its true savour, bent all our thought and energy to serving it.

"If that this simple syllogism will serve, so: if it will not, what remedy?" None, I am sure, in any approach to the play that imposes an extrinsic fashion upon it. Whatever the style for Twelfth Night, it must be in grain. Only so will it endure the wind and weather of production.

John Russell Brown (essay date 1966)

[In the following essay, originally published in 1966, Brown investigates differing approaches to set design and character portrayal in Twelfth Night]

After the first dozen Twelfth Night's there are still surprises, new guises for the old masterpiece. Directors colour it golden, russet, silver or white; blue for dreams, and sometimes pink; or they allow red and even purple to dominate. They can make it sound noisy as a carnival, or eager, or melodious, or quarrelsome like children; it can also be strained and nervous. In 1958, Peter Hall at Stratford-upon-Avon hung the stage with gauzes and contrived what The Times called a 'Watteauesque light'. And critics report that a year previously, at Stratford, Ontario, Tyrone Guthrie contrasted Feste and Malvolio in 'psychological terms', allowing the final song of the 'wind and rain' to be 'as plaintive and wonderful as a Jewish lament.' Two years before that, at the English Stratford, Sir John Gielgud brought 'a faint chill to the air' of his production; the comics were on their best behaviour in defence to a pervasive 'charm'; The Observer said that the polite word for this would be 'formal', and the exact word 'mechanical'; it seemed as if, during rehearsals of the last scene, Sir John had stopped the actors and commanded, 'Be beautiful; be beautiful'.

This play might have been designed for an age when each director must make his name and register his mark. Yet there is one difficulty: in most productions some part of the play resists the director's control. In Sir John's elegant Twelfth Night, Malvolio yielded Sir Laurence Olivier a role in which to exploit his impudent and plebeian comedy, and in his last line—'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you'—an opportunity for the cry of a man un-made. The gray and urban setting of the Old Vic's production in 1950 was enlivened by an untrained ballet of sailors and riffraff, but Peggy Ashcroft's clear, white voice was an unechoed reminder of other directions the comedy can be given. More commonly, without such trained stars to cross the director's intentions, robust comics usurp more attention than their part in the last Act is allowed to satisfy, or an intelligent Sebastian will deny his own words, a too gentle Orsino devalue Viola's ardour. There is need for vigilance: Margaret Webster, who sees Twelfth Night as 'filled with impermanence, fragile, imponderable'; has found that:

> The director will have to balance and combine his ingredients in carefully graded proportions, compensating for weaknesses, keeping a moderating hand on excessive strength. This play, above all, he must treat with a light touch and a flexible mind, keeping the final goal clearly in sight [Shakespeare Today (1957)].

What happened, one wonders, before there were directors to give directions?

For if we refer back, from the theatre to the text of the play, we shall observe a similar lack of simplicity and uniformity. Malvolio can be a 'turkey cock', a common 'geek and gull' who is told to 'shake his ears'; or a fantastic who asks what 'an alphabetical position portends' and speaks repeatedly 'out of his welkin'. Yet Olivier's petty, ambitious vulgarian is also true to the text when he addresses his mistress with 'Sweet lady, ho, ho!' and with tags from popular ballads. Even Michael Hordern's tortured Malvolio at the Old Vic in 1954, 'dried up, emaciated, elongated … (as) an El Greco'—his hands, reaching out of the pit in the scene where Feste visits him as Sir Topas, the curate, suggested to one critic 'the damned in the Inferno'—is authorised by Feste's disguise, by his own first words of 'the pangs of death' and 'infirmity', his account of how 'imagination' jades him, and his physical and psychological isolation at the end. And yet again, Olivia's high regard for Malvolio—she 'would not lose him for half her dowry'—justifies Eric Porter's performance at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1960, as a solid, efficient steward waking with practical good sense to worlds unrealised.

Actors seeking to express their originality will find that 'new' interpretations rise unbidden from a straightforward study of the text, Sir Toby is usually a domesticated Falstaff, but at the Old Vic in 1958 with tumultuous 'gulps and shouts', he was seen as a plain 'boor'; and for this there is plenty of support in his name, Belch, and in his talk of 'boarding and assailing', making water and cutting 'mutton'. And the same year, at
Stratford-upon-Avon, Patrick Wymark made him young and spry with a sense of style; for this, 'she's a beagle, true-bred' was most appropriate language, and his easy confidence in 'consanguinity' with Olivia and expertise in swordplay were natural accomplishments. One might imagine too, a melancholy Sir Toby, tried in true service and knowing from experience that 'care's an enemy to life': his tricks upon Sir Andrew would then be a compensation for his own retirement, his wooing—off-stage and presumably brief—of Maria, a just and difficult tribute to her service for him; lethargy comes with drunkenness and he 'hates a drunken rogue'; he needs company, even that of a fool, an ass, and a servant.

Olivia is another role which can be seen to be of different ages—either mature years or extreme youth; and she can be melancholy or gay. Maxine Audley at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1955 presented a gracious lady, truly grieving for the death of her brother and strong enough to recognise an absolute passion for a boy; this Olivia had the 'smooth, discreet and stable bearing', the majesty, to which Sebastian and Orsino testify. And three years later, at the same theatre, Géraldine McEwen presented her as kittenish and cute, saved from triviality by fine timing of movement and verse-speaking, the dignity of 'style'. And yet another Olivia may be suggested by the text: a very young girl, at first afraid of meeting the world and therefore living in a fantasy capable of decreeing seven-years of mourning; then a girl solemnly repeating old saws with a new understanding of their truth;

Even so quickly may one catch the plague…. I do I know not what, and fear to find Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind…. What is decreed must be … how apt the poor are to be proud … youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrowed,

and forgetting her 'discreet' bearing in breathless eagerness:

_How does he love me?… Why, what would you? … not too fast: soft, soft! … Well, let it be,… That's a degree to love…. Yet come again…. I have sent after him: he says he'll come…. What do you say?… Most wonderful!

Feste, the fool, can be melancholy, or bitter, or professional, or amorous (and sometimes impressively silent), or self-contained and philosophical, or bawdy and impotent. Sir Andrew Aguecheek can be patient, sunny, feckless, gormless, animated or neurotic. (In 1958 Richard Johnson gave an assured performance of this knight as a 'paranoid manic-depressive, strongly reminiscent at times of Lucky in Waiting for Godot'.) Orsino can be mature or very young; poetic; or weak; or strong but deceived; or regal and distant. The text can suggest a Viola who is pert, sentimental, lyrical, practical, courageous or helpless. Shakespeare's words can support all these interpretations, and others; there are few plays which give comparable scope for enterprise and originality. The characters, the situations and the speeches are protean.

This is evident in a director's ability to alter the trend of his production, even in the very last moments, to achieve what Miss Webster has called his 'balance', to arrive at his chosen 'final goal'. If sentiment needs reinforcing, Viola (as Cesario) can be given a down-stage position and a preparatory pause as the arrangements for her duel with Sir Andrew grow to a comic climax, and thus her 'I do assure you, 'tis against my will' can be, not the usual laugh-line, but a reminder of her other full-hearted struggles of will and passion; this momentary seriousness, the more impressive for its incongruous setting, was managed with great grace by Dorothy Tutin at Stratford, in Peter Hall's productions of 1958 and 1960. Still later in the play, there is another opportunity for the strong re-emphasis of Viola's depth of feeling: Peggy Ashcroft mastered this in 1950, and J. C. Trewin has well described its effect in performance:

At the end, as Sebastian faces his sister, he cries: 'What countryman? What name? What parentage?' There is a long pause now before Viola, in almost a whisper (but one of infinite rapture and astonishment) answers: 'Of Messaline'. Practically for the first time in my experience a Viola has forced me to believe in her past…. [John O'London's Weekly (8
More simply and without affecting any established characterisation, the balance of a production can be altered by the Priest's lines in the last scene, with their special idiom and assured syntax and timing:

A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirm'd by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strength'ned by interchangement of your rings
And all the ceremony of this compact
Seal'd in my function, by my testimony;
Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my
grave,
I have travell'd but two hours.

[V. i. 156-63]

If these lines are spoken in a weighty and measured way, they can restore a sense of awe, an awareness of general and timeless implications, to a dénouement which has become too headlong and hilarious for the director's taste. Or, at the last moment, Orsino can give 'guts' to an over-pretty production: the sight of Antonio permits an evocation of the 'smoke of war' and 'scathful grapple', and can legitimately bring a harsh quality to his voice which has hitherto been tuned to softer themes. When he invites Olivia to live 'the marble-breasted tyrant still' and turns to Cesario with:

But this your minion, whom I know you love,
And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly,
Him will I tear out of that cruel eye
Where he sits crowned in his master's spite.
Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in
mischief:
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love
To spite a raven's heart within a dove

[V. i. 125-31]

the director can call for physical as well as verbal violence towards Viola. The lines imply that Orsino cares more for his seeming boy than for the lady of his dreams and fancy, and thus they may be acted fully and strongly; the release of passion in a desire to kill Cesario shows the true object of that passion, and its power. (This reading of the subtext is authorised by Shakespeare, as by Freud and Stanislavski, for Orsino has just acknowledged that a 'savage' jealousy 'kills what it loves', not what it thinks it loves.) If the production is, at this stage of the play, too solemn rather than too sentimental or hilarious, there are opportunities in plenty for lightening the whole last Act: Olivia's 'Where goes Cesario?', after Orsino's outburst, can easily be spoken to invite laughter; and so can her 'Most wonderful' as Viola and Sebastian confront each other. Nearly all Sebastian's lines can be tipped the same way, as 'I do perceive it hath offended you'… 'Fear'st thou that, Antonio'… and (about the mole on the brow of Viola's father) 'And so had mine.' Antonio's 'An apple, cleft in two is not more twin' can be directed so that it implies laughter rather than rapt amazement, and Orsino's final 'Cesario, come' can be a jest at the whole contrivance of the last Act, or even at Viola's expense, rather than recognition of his own long, half-hidden affection for his bride-to-be.

The opportunities for swinging a production round into line with a chosen mood—to make it 'what they will', to reverse roles as in a 'Twelfth Night' revel—have encouraged directors to tackle Twelfth Night and to experiment widely in the search for original interpretations. But a second practical consequence of the freedom of interpretation is of greater importance: this play challenges us to provide a longer and deeper study
than is normally given to a text in the theatre. We may be assured that the diverse ways of playing the
characters and controlling the mood are not finally irreconcilable. The experience of seeing many independent
productions and reading about many more does not create a multitude of separate memories; each new
revelation reflects on earlier ones and, in the mind, a single view of the play is continually growing in
complexity and range, and in understanding. We may believe that a single production might, one day,
represent to the full our single, developing awareness. Our knowledge of *Twelfth Night* and of human
behaviour may assure us that an Olivia is both mature and immature, according to which side of her
personality is in view; a Sir Toby energetic *and* melancholic, vulgar *and* well-schooled; and a Viola lyrical
*and* practical, *and* helpless. The world of the play is gay, quiet, strained, solemn, dignified, elegant, easy,
complicated, precarious, hearty, homely; the conclusion close to laughter, song, awe *and* simplicity. And this
is an understanding which begs not to be hid, but to be realised on the stage.

Of course, in the theatre it is tempting to simplify too early, in order to be effective and make a 'strong'
impression. But with such a play as *Twelfth Night* we are drawn by another possibility, a more demanding
course: five years' study, a repeated return to its problems in a succession of productions under different
conditions and for different audiences, might make possible a production which would be original, not by
one-sidedness, but by answering more fully than before to Shakespeare's text and combining the excitement of
many interpretations. The time necessary to make this attempt would be an expensive investment; and it
would be a risky one—for the speculator may not be capable of living up to the developing demands of his
enterprise. Yet the business is a practical possibility, and must be considered. An exclusive pursuit of
immediate effectiveness and originality leads to immature and in-secure achievements, in theatres as in other
fields of activity; a play like *Twelfth Night* offers, therefore, an opportunity and a challenge which it would be
salutary merely to envisage, regenerative to attempt. Shakespeare's stage-cunning, human understanding and
poetic imagination, which are all implicit in the text would be fine assets.

The necessary conditions for such an achievement would be a concern for, and skill in, all the arts of the
theatre—this is required for any sort of theatrical success—but, more peculiarly, a constant return to the
details of Shakespeare's text. Here the popular misconception that close textual study is a dull and pedestrian
activity, restricting originality and encouraging an exclusively verbal kind of drama—may inhibit the right
kind of work, and must be denounced: a prolonged and careful study of Shakespeare's text, in association with
other theatre skills, can awaken and enrich a production in all elements of a play's life. If we trust
Shakespeare's imagination, we know that *Twelfth Night* was conceived as a whole with each apparently
discordant element reconciled to its opposite: and our only clue to that original resolution is the printed words.
Every opportunity for visual realisation or elaboration, for movement and variation of grouping, for temporal
control, for subtlety of elocution or stage-business, for creation of character and mood, emotion and
expression, that the text can suggest should be searched out, tested, practically evaluated and, finally, given its
due place in the responsible and mature production which each successive, partial and conflicting production
of such a play as *Twelfth Night* invites us to consider, and to hope that one day we may help to stage or
witness.

The combination, or growing together, of elements from new interpretations of roles is, perhaps, the best
charted part of a difficult task; it calls for a developing sympathy and understanding, and a grasp of the
progressive and formal presentation of character, but it does not require, at the beginning of rehearsals a single
limiting choice; moreover the actors are always in obvious contact with Shakespeare's words. Perhaps the
problems of a textually responsible production will be most perplexing in choosing the stage setting,
especially if the play is to be performed on a picture-frame stage with the full range of modern equipment.

*Twelfth Night* has received many visual interpretations: the elegant, controlled and overtly dramatic, as a
Tiepolo fresco, is a common one; or domestic with dark shadows, like the Jacobean interiors in Joseph Nash's
*Mansions of England in the Olden Times*; or Italianate, free and colourful in the fashion of the *commedia
dell'arte*. Or the stage may be spacious and clean, like one modern notion of what an Elizabethan platform
stage was like, or pillared, tiered and substantial, like another. Some designers have introduced the satins and laces of Restoration England, and others the boaters and billows of the theatre of Charley's Aunt. The main difficulty is that all these, and others, are in some degree appropriate, usually in different parts of the play; and yet it would be distracting to a modern audience to move from one to another during a single performance, even if this were technically possible. If a mature production of Twelfth Night is to be considered, this problem will have to be solved in a single way—the more urgently because the proscenium arches and lighting devices of modern theatres have made the visual embodiment of a play, in setting, costumes and effects, a dominating—often the dominating—element of a production.

A resource to the text in the search for a comprehensive style and single stage setting does not involve the director in an antiquarian production which tries to reproduce original stage conditions; those are, in any case, irrecoverable, in their full complexity which involves specially trained actors and historically accurate audiences, as well as theatres which no longer exist. The study of the text can be of help in utilising the modern technical devices of a picture-frame stage, and in answering the expectations of any particular audience. The verbal imagery can, for example, give valuable help towards deciding which setting is most appropriate; it can tell the director the kind of visual images which were associated with the action and characters in the author's mind and which he may usefully transmit to the audience in visual stage terms.

Illyria, the world of Twelfth Night, is obviously a land of love, music, leisure, servants, a Duke and a Countess; it must have dwellings, a garden, a seacoast and a 'dark house' or temporary prison. Its institutions include a church and a chantry, a captain and officers of the law, an inn; and there must be doors or gates. Thus far the choice of a setting is not circumscribed; it might be English, Italian, French, Russian (before the revolution), or, with some adaptation, American or Utopian; medieval, renaissance or modern. But incidental details of speech and action at once limit the setting to something resembling, or representing, English countryside and domesticity. In the first scene there are mentioned a bank of violets, a hunt, sweet beds of flowers, and these are followed by wind and weather, a squash and a peascod, a willow, the hills, a beagle, roses, a yew, a cypress and box tree, and more flowers; familiar living creatures are a hart, a sheep-biter, a horse, a trout, a turkey-cock and a wood-cock, a raven, lamb and dove, and hounds; daylight, champaign (or open fields), harvest, ripeness, and oxen and wain-ropes easily come to mind; the songs of nightingales, daws and owls have been heard. The characters of the play do not talk of an elegant or fanciful scene, although the violets and beds of flowers might be interpreted in that way; their wain-ropes, sheep-biter and daws belong to a countryside that knows labour and inconvenience, as well as delights. Speaking of horrors and danger, they are neither sophisticated nor learned; they refer to tempests, the sea, fields, mountains, barbarous caves, and hunger. The domestic note is almost as persistent as that of the countryside: early in Act I, canary-wine, beef, a housewife and a buttery-bar are mentioned; even the Duke, Orsino, speaks of knitters in the sun; there is talk of pilchards and herrings (fresh and pickled) and of vinegar and pepper. If a director is to attempt a responsible production of the play, he should give substance to these references in his setting—not in an illustrative way which provides objects for the actors to point at, but in a manner which echoes, extends and, where appropriate, contrasts with the dialogue and stage business. This is the mental and emotional world of the dramatis personae as revealed by their language, and the stage picture can help to establish this, not insistently, but with subtlety.

It is the world of the play's action too, and its visual recreation will, therefore, aid the director towards an appropriate rhythm and acting style: an Italianate setting, which is often chosen, suggests the wrong tempo—the wrong temperature, even—and insists on distracting contrasts between dialogue and visual effect. An English summer takes three months to establish itself, through April, May and June, and so does the action of this play—as Orsino states explicitly in the last scene. It would be convenient, therefore, to show this passage of time in modifications to the setting during the course of the play: the first Acts green and youthful, the last coloured with roses in bloom and strong lights; the same setting but at different times of the year. In the first scene Orsino would be seeking the earliest violets; later 'beauty's a flower', 'women are as roses', 'youth's a stuff will not endure' would sound properly precarious in view of the visual reminder of the
changing seasons; a 'lenten answer' would seem more restrictive and 'let summer bear it out' a fuller and more inevitable judgement. Orsino might stand in white, as the young lover in Nicholas Hillyarde's miniature (dated about 1590), over against frail, twining roses: this association represented for the painter his motto—'Dat poenas lau-data fides', or 'My praisèd faith procures my pain'—and it might serve in much the same way today. 'Midsummer madness' and 'matter for a May morning', which are spoken of in Act III, would be in key with the setting, and the talk of harvest, the grave and the immutable yew-tree would sound in significant contrast.

The course of single days might also be suggested in the lighting of the stage picture. Talk of hunting in the first scene establishes the time as early morning. In the third, Maria's remonstrance to Sir Toby about returning late 'a' nights' belongs to the first meeting of a new day, and then coming 'early' by one's 'lethargy' implies preprandial drinking. In II. iii, the chaffing about 'being up late', Malvolio's chiding about 'respect of… time', and 'its too late to go to bed now' all suggest midnight; so one 'day' is completed in due order. (Again Feste's song in this last mentioned scene, about 'present mirth' and what's to come and 'youth's a stuff will not endure', will be more poignant if it seems indeed to have been sung just before the 'night-owl', nature's reminder of death, is roused.) The following scene, II. iv, is clearly a new day with its first lines of 'good morrow' and 'we heard last night'; and the truth that' … women are as roses, whose fair flower Being once display'd doth fall that very hour's is more fully expressed if spoken in the transitory light of dawn. The next scene, II. v, beginning with 'Come thy ways…' and with news that Malvolio has been 'i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour', is still early morning. Act III, Scene i, which follows with Feste speaking of the sun shining everywhere, may be at noon, and later, when Malvolio supposes Olivia invites him to bed, his outrageous presumption would be more apparent if it were obviously not that 'time of day'. At the end of IV. ii, Feste visits Malvolio in prison and sings:

I'll be with you again,
In a trice,
Like the old Vice,
Your need to sustain;
Who, with dagger of lath,
In his rage and his wrath,
Cries, ah, ha! to the devil….

[IV. ii. 122-28]

—here stage lighting could simulate a sudden, passing storm, such as interrupts an easy summer's afternoon in England; it might culminate in thunder. This would be an elaboration impossible to stage in an Elizabethan theatre, but it would be appropriate in a play which is continually concerned with the summer countryside of England, with 'beauty that can endure wind and weather', and which ends with a song of the rain that 'raineth every day'. Sir Toby and Maria could take shelter from the storm, while the fool is left to bear it out and 'pursue the sport'. The sun would shine fully again for Sebastian's 'This is the air; that is the glorious sun; This pearl she gave me …', and for the high afternoon of the ending of the comedy. Towards the close shadows might lengthen and, as the marriages are postponed till 'golden time convents,' the sky might become golden with a sunset's promise of another fair day. Then as the other characters leave, to enter perhaps a lighted house, Feste might be left in the grey-green light of early evening to sing alone of time and youth, and of the beginning of the world and the conclusion of a play.

(There is in fact a double time scheme in Twelfth Night: three months for the development and fulfilment of the action, and two consecutive days for the sequence of scenes. The representation of both schemes in the setting and in the lighting may help an audience to accept this double sense of time which suits, on the one hand, the rapid fairy-tale transitions and the 'changeable' characterisations, and, on the other hand, the play's suggestion of the season's alterations and the endurance and maturing of affections.)
Such lighting effects require an outdoor setting for almost all the play. And this may be convenient for the action: Olivia's house might be shown to one side, with a terrace and garden before it, a main entrance and a way to the back door; and there might be a dovecote, small pavilion or gazebo on the other side of the stage to do duty as Malvolio's prison. There would be some inconvenience in staging the carousing scene between Feste, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in a garden, but there is plenty of reference to outdoor affairs in its dialogue and the two knights could fall asleep around their table at the close of the scene and be discovered there next morning to be awakened by Fabian. The scenes at Orsino's court could also be in the open air, and could be set by bringing in tall cypress hedges to mask Olivia's house and garden, and to reveal part of the sky-cloth or cyclorama at the end of a long walk or vista in some spacious park. It would be appropriately affected for Orsino to seek the shade of such a walk in the early morning; there could be a stone seat on one side, and on the other a sculpture of Venus, or some such deity. For the brief scene outside Olivia's gate (II. ii) and for the Sebastian scenes, 'somewhere in Illyria' (II. i and III. iii), a 'wall' could be let down from the flies, with a gate in its centre: this would locate the action outside Olivia's estate and, if her house and the taller trees were visible over the top of the wall and through the gate, the audience would relish the physical proximity of Sebastian to his journey's end.

There remains one, apparently unrelated, scene (I. ii) which begins 'What country, friends, is this? This might also be played 'outside Olivia's garden', but Viola's mysterious entry into the play from the sea asks for a different visual presentation. It would be possible to play it in front of gauzes let down to hide the transition from Orsino's park of I. i, to Olivia's garden of I. iii; these might be lightly painted and lit to suggest a seashore, touched, perhaps with fluorescent material low down, as if catching the surf of a strange sea. If Orsino had been contemplating a statue of Venus in the previous scene that figure might be caught by a higher light as the gauzes came down, and then, in a moment of darkness, Viola might take its place to rise from the sea as the stage is relit. If this were effected tactfully, this scene could easily take its place in the chiaroscuro: its sea-effects might be echoed later as Feste is also isolated in the 'storm' of his 'vice' song; and echoed differently at the end of the play, as he is isolated in the evening. Moreover the myth-like transition and transference would be in keeping with the 'romantic' attraction of the lovers and the solution of their stories—the dream, or fantasy element, of the play.

The colours of setting and costumes could be those of an early English summer: clear, light blues, greens, yellows and pinks, and plenty of white. The buildings could be the honey-coloured stone of the English Cotswolds, with marble ornaments for Orsino's park. Olivia would, of course, wear black while in mourning, and Malvolio always—the only character to take no colour from the sun.

Such is one solution of the visual problems of Twelfth Night, and one which tries to answer the demands of the text in terms of the realism of the picture-frame stage—which is perhaps the furthest removed from Elizabehathan practice. Other stages and other visual styles would call for different solutions. This way of staging the play is worth consideration chiefly as an example: for if any production is to be undertaken with a belief in the unity and imaginative quality of Shakespeare's text, its choice of setting must answer the same demands and others like them, as more are revealed through further study of the text and further experiments in eccentric productions.

The quest for a responsible direction for Twelfth Night will not lead to a series of stereotyped productions: changing stage-conditions, actors and audiences will prevent that. Nor will we rest content with our achievements, for the 'idea' of the play, which grows in our minds as we meet it frequently in many guises, is most likely to remain several steps beyond our most truthful production. The desire for an authentic direction will not be satisfied easily, but those who try to respond to it will grow more aware of the wealth of Shakespeare's imagination and perhaps more expert in their attempts to give his masterpiece its theatrical life.

John Russell Brown (essay date 1976)
Twelfth Night is a paradoxical play. It is brilliant, compact, and riddling and, at the same time, delightful, easy, and enjoyable. It is full of fanciful and impossible events; yet it reflects domestic and personal life with exact realism. It has much theatrical, sexual, and verbal humor, much poetry and fine sentiment, and a little rhetoric; yet it is haunted by a continuous sense of pain and loss. Its mood is youthful; yet the play is aware of death, old age, and the changes that time brings. It is full of fervor, and also of weariness and disbelief. While reading Twelfth Night, one is reminded of Dr. Johnson's opinion that Shakespeare's tragedy "seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct," and yet this congenial comedy is occasionally close in phrasing and idea to other plays written about the same time—Hamlet, Julius Caesar, and Troilus and Cressida—in which Shakespeare wrestled with political and moral issues of obvious difficulty.

As soon as one tries to cast the play for performance, the paradoxes come into focus. Sir Toby is a knight and yet he says he married a chambermaid for a joke. He is often drunk but swears that he "hates" a drunkard. Malvolio is a steward and yet he rehearses his behavior for more than half-an-hour before the day's work begins. Not only does he think himself the most attractive man in the world but also acts as if this were true. Olivia is a young heiress who has lost father, mother, and brother and who shuts herself up in her own house for seven years to avoid all men, and then she falls in love with someone else's servant. Orsino is a man of great responsibility who has fought a sea battle, and then he finds he wants to murder a boy. Viola, who is disguised as a boy for most of the play, is sometimes like "patience on a monument, smiling at grief" and, at other times, "saucy" or "rude," "fearful" or "mad"; in the last scene, she is "jocund, apt," and willing to die. The demands on the actors are large and various. Henry Irving, who cast himself as Malvolio and Ellen Terry as Viola in his production of the play, confessed afterwards that he ought never to have attempted it without having "three great comedians" in his company as well [quoted in Ellen Terry, The Story of My Life, 1908].

If the comedy is to be staged in a modern theater, with scenery and lights, the stage designer will find two main aspects to his task. The scene to be created is "Illyria," which is actually on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, but more important than geographic and historical accuracy will be the need to give to the land that Orsino governs the twin realities of a wild seacoast and of the English countryside. There are allusions to dangerous seas, "barren mountains," and political danger on the one hand and, on the other, to "sweet beds of flowers," squash, peascod, willow, beagle, roses, violets, yews, and a box tree. Characters talk of daylight, open fields, harvest, ripeness, oxen, and wain-ropes, and of the songs of nightingales, daws, and owls. Olivia's house obviously has a kitchen, for there is talk of canary wine, beef, pilchards, herrings (fresh and pickled), vinegar, and pepper. There are both prisons and gardens as well as a house and a palace. Devils, fiends, and hell occupy men's minds as do a "holy man," heaven and a "good life," and "devotion."

The very title of the comedy emphasizes a double nature. Twelfth Night, or the feast of the Epiphany on January 6, was observed in England and throughout Europe as the last day of Christmas festivities. It was customary to choose, by chance or by election, a "king" or "Lord of Misrule." Thus a servant might act for one day as master of the household and preside at a feast in the great hall. There would be drinking, toasts, games, mock trials, divination, dancing, and processions. It was a brief occasion for license, feasting, and disguises. Often there were ceremonies, in this dead time of the year, that looked forward to harvest, seeking to avert disease or ensure plentiful crops. In the play named after this festival, there is not much dancing and only one scene of corporate singing—and even that is interrupted as it grows toward its boisterous conclusion. But the Twelfth Night revelry is represented by various disguises and the reversal of roles between master and servant: Malvolio, the servant, dreams of being "Count Malvolio" and begins his performance; Olivia does "she knows not what," loving servant rather than master, and then finds that rejection has meant acceptance;
Orsino loves one who has served him, and whom he will serve now; Antonio takes pleasure in his dangerous service to Sebastian, the man he has saved from the sea, and Sebastian lightheartedly becomes Antonio's "purse-bearer." There are reversals of luck, changes from sunlight to dark prison, and from death to life, and numerous mistakes of identity and intention. The Lord of Misrule is, perhaps, Feste, the fool whose very name is a form of "Fête" or "Feast." He seems to be a "merry fellow" who cares for nothing, but he sits in judgment on each of the other characters and through zany and complicated jesting tells them the "truth" of their own Uves. He himself does "care for something," but what it is remains a secret, not to be revealed even in his last riddling, childlike, and cynical song with which he concludes the whole festival-play after the others have walked offstage together to wait until "golden time convents." Feste remains to sing of the rain that "raineth every day," and some, at least, of his subjects are determined to make a "solemn combination" of their "dear souls."

The last scene of the play is complicated in its stage business, with many comings and goings and careful postponements of the full comical conclusion. The disguises are dropped and misunderstandings resolved only when it is abundantly clear that the twelfth-night festival of folly has led each character to a manifestation of "What they will." Through madness, folly, confusion, revels, and play, the "truth," as Shakespeare calls it, has become progressively apparent. Sebastian provides the clue to this basic movement in the play when he promises Olivia that "having sworn truth" he "ever will be true." Orsino's last words make the same point (speaking to Viola as if to Cesario, his servant):

But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.
[V. i. 387-88]

The servant is to be the mistress, and she will rule the "fancy," the strange, demanding, "fantastic" source of what each character "wills."

The "will" is that part of the human comedy in which discordant forces, images, and appearances find their single truth. When Twelfth Night is performed, each member of the cast has to create an impression that his strangest words and actions are based on a strong, imaginative response to his fellow characters and the action of the play. For all the simple, domestic occurrences of the play, its conventional encounters between lovers, masters, and servants, and its madness and folly, each character is based on an individual, imaginative life—on "what they will," or wish, or desire, on what must happen if their inner "truth" is to be realized. (The word "will," for Shakespeare, encompassed all these meanings.) In one sense Twelfth Night is a comedy of unmasking; it is a winter celebration of new life, a release of what is usually confined. Each character has moments of "folly," "madness," "frenzy," "anger," "uncivil rule," or "wonder," which are the outward "shapes" of fancy and the "will," but by the end of the play the audience has been given opportunities to recognize the sustaining power of each individual, imaginative life, the still center of each being.

Viola, disguised as Cesario, gives a warning to Olivia that may be taken as a motto for the whole play, and a warning to reader, actor, director, and critic:

—I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.
—That you do think you are not what you are.
—if I think so, I think the same of you.
—Then think you right: I am not what I am.
—I would you were as I would have you be.
—Would it be better, madam, than I am?
I wish it might, for now I am your fool.
[III.i. 138-44]
There are numerous episodes in the comedy that can be enjoyed with ease and immediate pleasure—evocations of beauty and assertions of desire, teasing and lovemaking, comic mistakes, practical jokes, absurd behavior, dramatic changes of fortune, displays of temperament, cunning, and enjoyment—but the comedy is also a riddle in that characters and statements are "not what they are." Shakespeare has created moments when the picture seems to go out of focus, and then the audience is invited to look more deeply and narrowly, or sometimes more widely.

In the theater, this play has had great and varied success.... In earliest records, Malvolio seems to have dominated the play, but actresses such as Julia Marlowe, Ellen Terry, Peggy Ashcroft, Katharine Hepburn, and Dorothy Tutin have shown that Viola can usurp that position. When Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are strongly cast and allowed to elaborate their performances, the romantic wooing and the gulling of the steward can take second and third places to the mellow clowning and character acting. In this century, Alec Guinness and Michael Redgrave (as Sir Andrew), and Robert Livesey and Leon Quartermaine (as Sir Toby) have given performances that are comparable with those described by Charles Lamb at the beginning of the eighteenth century as the height of an English comic tradition. Feste, the outsider, the singer, and the fool, can also dominate the play, especially when a director is determined, as Tyrone Guthrie was, to emphasize the melancholy strand running throughout the play.

It is the actors' play rather than a director's, for each character in turn is given sensitively written moments when he or she must control the whole theater by sheer acting. Most of the characters have been given silences, simple yet climactic words, physical actions, or delayed reactions that are left open to individual realization: so the actors can put their own stamp on their parts and give performances grounded in their own personalities, their actual, entire "presence," or being. Even the last scene, which brings almost all the characters onstage together, does not lead to a climactic group effect, like the dances and songs at the end of Love's Labor's Lost, As You Like It, or Much Ado, or like the group jesting at the end of The Merchant of Venice. It is a sequence of precise, individual confrontations, as "will" meets "will" and makes clear its own "truth."

The time in which the action unfolds is said to be three months, but the various events portrayed could fit into two successive days, each shown at morning, noon, and afternoon, and the first day passing into midnight. Time should pass lightly in this play, but with a consciousness of all the varying qualities of each day. The plot complications and resolutions should be accomplished with ease and variety, yet should yield an awareness of the immutable and secretive resources of individual imaginations.

The earliest evidence for the existence of this play is the record of a performance in the Great Hall of the Middle Temple in London on February 2, 1602. This hall still survives, although damaged in an air raid during the Second World War. Against the ornately carved oak paneling of this dining and assembly room for lawyers and law students, Shakespeare's Illyrian comedy was brought to life as a special and private entertainment. Although it was new to John Manningham who recorded this performance, a few topical references and literary borrowings argue that it had been written a year or more earlier. Probably it had already been seen at the Globe Theatre and at court in the season of 1600-01. Certainly it was revived at court in 1618, and again in 1623 under the title of Malvolio.

For the source of the main romantic story, Shakespeare almost certainly read Barnabe Riche's story of Apolonius and Silla in his Farewell to the Military Profession (1581). But he may well have read further, and earlier, versions of the same tale and some of the plays using the same basic material. Shipwreck and the subsequent confusion of twins were common elements in romance and in Plautine comedy, and Shakespeare had used them before in The Comedy of Errors. The device of a girl disguised as a page serving the man she loves is also common, and in The Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare had already explored some of its dramatic possibilities. The Italian comedy Gl'Ingannati (The Deceived), performed at Siena in 1531, has numerous features in common with Twelfth Night, and in its Induction has a Fabio, a Malevolti, and a
reference to "la notte di Beffano" or Epiphany.

For the scenes involving Malvolio, no one source has been identified, and here Shakespeare has probably relied more directly on his own general reading, his memory of theatrical gulling episodes, and his own observation of life in the households of Elizabethan gentlemen. Sir Toby Belch represents many younger sons of his own time, born into noble families but lacking an inheritance and so starting life as soldiers; when too old for their profession—and that might be in their early thirties—such men could only fall back on living with relations and idling time away. So the young Olivia has to tolerate her uncle and his casual acquaintance, Sir Andrew, whom he introduces to her house. This young knight has a small patrimony but little or no knowledge of how to make use of it; he represents scores of young men who left their homes to make some kind of fortune only to be tricked out of their money by less congenial means than Sir Toby's confidence tricks. Malvolio is an ambitious man, relying on his own "good parts" and sense of duty; as such, he is invaluable to his mistress but is isolated from the gentry and from the "lesser" servants. Several actual identifications have been suggested for Malvolio; the most elaborately worked out is that in favor of Sir William Knollys, a less lowly steward who was Comptroller of the Queen's household. Maria, the gentlewoman who acts as Olivia's personal maid, and Fabian, the servant of some education who carries a grudge against Malvolio for interfering with a bearbaiting amusement, are also familiar figures of an English country-gentleman's establishment and help to account for the wide range of domestic and countryside references in this play.

Feste, too, as a licensed fool, has a place in the same social setting, but here Shakespeare is also obviously indebted to theatrical tradition and the actual expertise of clowns in the actors' company for which he wrote. He must also have drawn on his own earlier writing for such actors, especially in As You Like It and the Launcelot scenes of The Merchant of Venice (in particular, III. v). Feste's dallying with words allows Shakespeare to relate the events of his main plots and the aspirations of each of his characters to a wide range of ordinary human activity, to piety, scholarship, lovemaking, war, avarice, hard work, old age and disappointment, and much more besides. By giving him songs and asking that the fool have a "mellifluous voice," Shakespeare has also introduced moments when immediate dramatic concerns are held back, and the audience is invited to attend to the music and simple words and themes.

To most critics, Twelfth Night seems to be the crown of Shakespeare's early work in comedy. Certainly it draws on many characters, themes, and situations that he had used before, from his first comedy onward, and which subsequently reappear only in very different contexts and appearances. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, perhaps written in the same year, the setting is wholly domestic and the characters for the most part are older and more dispassionate. All's Well, Measure for Measure, and Troilus and Cressida, which follow within a few years, add a more judicial or "problem" frame for romance, explore more deeply the confrontation of death and deception, and, in the last named, bring lovers to the field of battle and show the breakdown of faith. Thereafter followed the tragedies, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, and Timon of Athens. Only in the last four or five years of his writing life, some nine or ten years after Twelfth Night, did Shakespeare return to comedy, but then in a very different mode to that of this paradoxical, brilliant, riddling, and delightful masterpiece.

Ralph Berry (essay date 1981)


[In the following essay, Berry examines the means by which Shakespeare manipulates audience perceptions of the characters in Twelfth Night.]
Let the claret which Shakespeare drank, as we know, on expense account symbolize the general experience of *Twelfth Night*. The taste of this play has the same tension between sweetness and dryness, which translates easily into the indulgent reveries of the opening and the realities of rain, ageing, and work, in Feste's final song. To analyse this tension is surely the business of criticism. The experience of *Twelfth Night* blends our sense of the title metaphor with the growing magnitude of the joke that goes too far, and with it our grasp of the relation between the gulling and romantic actions. It is a matter of changing expectations, of a modified sense of the initial *données* of the play. *Twelfth Night* is played out, as it were, on a meta-physical revolving stage, which slowly rotates through half a revolution: the profiles that were presented to us at the beginning are not those of the end. The heads remain the same, the presented view is much altered. In the end the audience is asked to revise its judgement, not simply of people, but of a convention, 'festive' comedy itself. And that is bound to be disturbing.

Let us sketch in the initial experience of an audience not closely acquainted with the text. *Twelfth Night* is advertised and known as a comedy; the audience expects to be amused and entertained. At once it encounters a romantic and lovesick Duke. In the second scene an attractive young lady emerges from a shipwreck, who determines to enter the Duke's service. We can see the future there clearly enough. In scene 3 we meet the comics, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek: why, this is the best fooling, when all is done. The form is now clear. A romantic main action, with some comic relief from a bibulous knight, two varieties of fool, and an intolerable bureaucrat who is obviously to be done down. We have it. The play can run on metalled lines into the future.

And for some time yet, there is no need to rethink this position. The revels of act 2, scene 3 will secure the sympathy of the audience, and the great confrontation between Sir Toby and Malvolio does at the time seem like the life-force challenging the powers of repression and sterility: 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' As presented, there is no chance of an audience denying this affirmation. (Or critic, one might add. There is an all but universal convention for commentators to stand up and be counted as in favour of cakes and ale.) And if *Twelfth Night* stopped at act 2, scene 3, there would be no need to modify C. L. Barber's view of the matter [in his *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study in Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*, 1959], 'The festive spirit shows up the kill-joy vanity of Malvolio's decorum. The steward shows his limits when he calls misrule "this uncivil rule" … Sir Toby uses mis-rule to show up a careerist.' But that verdict is slowly phased out by the play itself. Not at first: the garden scene is pure delight. Here we yield absolutely to the pleasure of the gulling. One has to stress the point, for in the later stages the ultimate theatrical effect of guilt requires that we should have participated fully in the garden scene. There is a certain moral responsibility, even culpability, which the audience assumes in *Twelfth Night*: I don't think the play can be understood without it.

The scene in which Malvolio makes a fool of himself before Olivia (act 3, scene 4) begins to insinuate unease into the audience's consciousness. It is a scene we have been prepared for, and kept waiting for, and it is an unholy delight; yet the thought is emerging that Malvolio has committed an irreversible *bâtise*. The activities of Sir Toby, Fabian, and Maria begin to look like open sadism, and we may make the subliminal connection between Malvolio and bear-baiting, mentioned earlier [I. iii. 93, II. v. 8]. Sir Toby's 'Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound' contributes to the unease, and so does its continuation:

> My niece is already in the belief that he's mad. We may carry it thus, for our pleasure and his penance, till our very pastime, tir'd out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him; at which time we will bring the device to the bar and crown thee for a finder of madmen.

[III. iv. 136-41]

The inexorable line of development holds into the cell scene of act 4, scene 2, and however this is played, the audience is now conscious that the affair is much less funny than it was. The joke has been taken too far, and
we know it. Let us hold on to that formulation, and cast back to the beginning of the play. The entire construct prepares us for our realization in the later stages. (One cannot point to a precise moment in act 3, or even 4, when the audience becomes aware of its own queasiness; but it must surely happen.) The hints start, of course, with the title. Twelfth Night is a festival that has already been going on too long. Twelve days and nights of overeating and overdrinking, little or nothing done in the way of useful work: the Elizabethans were not so different from ourselves. By 6 January they were ready enough for one more party, and then back to work. The experience of satiety is confirmed in Orsino's opening words. They stem from a condition, 'If music be the food of love, play on …' that itself indicates an un-certainty about the festive mood. The terms that follow are excess, surfeiting, appetite may sicken and so die. Enough, no more,' Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

This last is the motto-statement, and it should stand not only before the play as a whole but before act 2, scene 3. This scene, more than any other, evokes the experience of Twelfth Night. That is because it is a revel, which goes on too long, and because Sir Toby actually hints at a seasonal festivity in his song 'O' the twelfth day of December' [II. iii. 84]. The opening and closing sections of the scene are worth pausing over. Sir Andrew would clearly be happy to go to bed, but Sir Toby insists on keeping the party going. He is the moving spirit in what is not simply a revel, but rather a revived and maintained revel—against the pressures of those who feel that enough is enough. The scene moves up from the lyric nostalgia of 'O Mistress mine' to the bar-room catch, 'Hold thy peace', and so to the intense climax of the confrontation: it then is stepped down to the lesser excitements of the projected plot, and finally reverts to the mood of the piano opening. Bottom is hit, apparently, with Sir Andrew's Chekhovian 'I was adored once too.' A moment's silence, a grunt, then 'Let's to bed, knight.' The scene has ended now, and with it the party? No. Sir Toby, needing more money from Sir Andrew, presses him to send for it; then he changes his mind about going to bed. 'Come, come, I'll go burn some sack,' tis too late to go to bed now. Come, knight, come, knight.' And those four monosyllables, which seem to symbolize the energy needed to lug a sack of potatoes from a room, close the scene. Who is there who has not shared and understood this episode? Whatever one's temperament, there is a time to move off and to bed. Someone else prefers to stay and keep things going, though the fire has died out of the occasion. It is a fault of taste, this failure to judge the natural life of a party, and someone always commits it.

I put it, then, that Sir Toby's interpretation of the Twelfth Night spirit prepares us for, as it is analogous to, his pursuit of the gulling action. Both impulses spring from the same mind. And this leads us to a concept which we have, I think, to contemplate in this play: the likeableness of the dramatis personae.

Likeableness, for obvious reasons, is not a critical concept. It looks like an invitation to the untrammelled subjectivities of all readers and playgoers—an abdication of critical decorum. All the same, we need the term here. That is because Shakespeare, as I view it, sets up a design in which we are to begin by liking certain characters and disliking others, and to end with reversing these judgements.

It is all focused on Sir Toby and Malvolio, though other characters can affect matters marginally. First, let us place Sir Toby, without preconception. I think C. L. Barber's 'gentlemanly liberty incarnate' hopelessly over-romanticized, just as I would think 'parasite' a misleading importation of modern values concerning employment. It is better to take Sir Toby as a dramatized case-history, with the implied caption 'This is the sort of person certain social conditions yield.' Sir Toby is a knight; he has no substance, no land or money; he lives with and upon his wealthy kinswoman. The order of relationship was familiar and sanctioned. Having no employment, he is endemically short of things to do, and his activities emerge as drinking, the pursuit of practical jokes, spectator sports, conversation. What else could be expected? Sir Toby is gripped by that ennui which is the condition of the unemployed, at all social levels. More, to base any dramatic system of festive values on Sir Toby is self-evidently absurd, for 'holiday' is a meaningless concept save to those who work. Sir Toby does not work, and therefore usurps the values of 'play'.
His revealed characteristics become steadily less appealing. His drunkenness is nicely poised: in act 2, scene 3 it can appear as a tribute to the good life, but in act 1, scene 5 his brief appearance is all but incoherent. (Perhaps the most telling comment on his state is Olivia's 'By mine honour, half drunk' (1. 116). What was the finished product like?) Stage drunkenness is always an ambivalent affair, for the sufficient reason that it is in real life. A drunk is funny, an alcoholic is not. The human mind contains diverse views of the matter, and its responses are generally mixed. So in Twelfth Night. On the whole, our experience of Sir Toby is in this respect probably analogous to our reception of anyone who, like the immortal Captain Grimes, 'puts in some very plucky work with the elbow': we warm to him more in the earlier than the later stages of the acquaintance.

Sir Toby's other characteristics are similarly disenchanting. His relationship with Sir Andrew emerges as contemptuous and exploitative. The comic glow protects his name for a while, certainly. Ask anyone who said 'Thou hadst need send for more money', and he will probably answer 'Iago', and he will be wrong. It is in the gulling actions that Sir Toby appears at his least appealing. There are two main points here. He pursues the Malvolio affair with a relentlessness that is disturbing: 'I would we were well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently deliver'd, I would he were, for I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot' [IV. ii. 67-71]. Not remorse, but fear of the consequences for himself, inhibits 'gentlemanly liberty incarnate' here. No wonder this unattractive little speech is so often cut in performance. The other matter is the gulling of Sir Andrew and the arranged duel between him and Cesario. Here I stress the force of pattern, so often Shakespeare's way of imparting personality and being. One joke is inconclusive; two suggest a mind obsessively addicted to making sport out of others. It comes back to the ennui of the unemployed, and therefore to the social attitudes that condition Sir Toby's cast of mind.

'Art any more than a steward?' Everyone quotes the great tribute to cakes and ale; fewer recall, or perhaps in the audience even register, the words that immediately precede it. The greater quotation drives out the lesser. It is typical of this play's strategy that the reservation is set into the record, before being overtaken by the main tenor of the play's surface statement. Yet the question summarizes much of this play's concerns and tensions. All Shakespeare's plays exhibit some social tensions, if only within the same class. Twelfth Night, more than any other comedy of this period, reveals a discreet awareness of these tensions. Three of its personages marry upwards (Sebastian, Viola, Maria), and two seek to (Sir Andrew, Malvolio). This movement upwards is caricatured in Malvolio, but the others demonstrate it too. There is a general blurring of social frontiers in Olivia's household, and this contributes to the friction and resentments of the play. Malvolio is the administrator, formally in charge, and he has to deal with people who are or feel themselves to be socially superior to him. It recalls the resentments that Drake identified years before: 'I must have the gentleman to haul and draw with the mariner, and the mariners with the gentleman.' These resentments, dramatized most forcefully in the encounters of Malvolio and Sir Toby, are in fact most subtly expressed through Maria.

Maria need not be seen and played as the bouncy, vital soubrette of stage history. Her pattern is one of social resentment, a willingness to stir up trouble for others (while usually exiting rapidly from the scene of the crime), and a remorseless drive towards her postcurtain apotheosis: Lady Belch. (Her route there is charted via the subtextually unimpeachable 'do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed', and whatever the director wants to make of 'Come by and by to my chamber'). With Maria, conversations tend to turn into threats to others. Sir Toby is in trouble; Feste may be fired; Cesario should be shown the door; Malvolio will come; Malvolio is mad. Maria's 'perfectly selfless tact' [in the words of C. L. Barber] is invisible to me. As with Sir Toby, we must reach out for a type from the characteristics of the individual. Maria endures the classic ambivalences of the lady-in-waiting, above the servants but not ranking with the great. Who is Maria? 'My niece's chambermaid' is Sir Toby's description, in her presence. It is not what we should term an introduction: Sir Toby is speaking to Sir Andrew, presumably just out of earshot of Maria. The editorial glosses are unanimous in their assurance that 'My niece's chamber-maid' means 'lady-in-waiting' or 'lady's maid'. But the OED does not confirm this certitude. The fact is that chambermaid did also, at this time, mean (as we should expect), 'female servant', roughly the usage of today. Interestingly, the OED marks the 'lady's
maid' sense of chambermaid as obsolete: the latest reference cited is Swift's, in 1719. In other words, the editors limit the word to a sense destined to become historically moribund (perhaps, already so), while rejecting a perfectly healthy sense that has survived to our present day. I don't, of course, doubt that the editorial gloss substantially identifies the position Maria holds in Olivia's household. (Olivia herself refers to Maria as 'my gentlewoman', [I. v. 162].) I suggest that the 'servant' sense is present, and in Maria's mind; which is why Sir Toby does not speak the word to Maria's face. Chambermaid indicates a historic trap, out of which the most socially agile clambered—upwards. Why they should wish to is touched in during act 1, scene 5. Maria receives a deadly thrust from Cesario: her nautically-phrased intervention is met with 'No, good swabber, I am to hull here a little longer' (11. 203-04), after which no more is heard from Maria. Swabber is one who swabs down decks—and is therefore pure metaphor—but contains the lingering hint that Maria was engaged in a similar activity, as chambermaid. The social insult is all part of what the play identifies as the fluid and shifting lines of social demarcation.

In the collisions of aspiration and resentment Malvolio stands, or seems to stand, for an absurd and affected species of folly. That is the unmistakable verdict that we are required to arrive at in the first half of Twelfth Night. Yet the play's strategy is to pivot the dramatis personae around on their revolving stage, and the second half is insistent that we reconsider Malvolio. Notoriously, this poses problems for the actor. It is fairly easy to play the Malvolio of the first few scenes; it is fairly easy to play the Malvolio of the later scenes; it is difficult to knit the two halves into a whole, which is one reason why Malvolio is a star part. There are difficulties for the audience, and for the critic, too, since all are engaged in revising a settled position. As we look back on the early scenes, a few obvious points can be ticked off. Malvolio is a charmless and humourless bureaucrat, but honest and able, and Olivia thinks well of him. ('I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry', [III. iv. 62-3].) It cannot be easy to get Sir Toby to behave—Olivia cannot—and the functional opposition between them slips easily into antagonism. Then, the drinking scene (act 2, scene 3) is presented entirely from the view of the partygoers. We, the audience, are at the party, and we want it to go on. Yet everyone has had the experience of being woken up in the small hours by a crowd of late revellers, and of feeling precisely the rage that Malvolio puts words to (acting on behalf of Olivia, and Malvolio would never lie on a matter like that). That rage is the greater if one needs to get up to work—unlike the revellers, who can sleep it off. In the theatre there is only one case, that of the partygoers. In real life there is a quite different case, and our backward glance recognizes it. Malvolio, then, is not the simple anti-life stereotype that he is cast for in act 2, scene 3. But the on-stage case for Malvolio does not emerge until act 4, scene 2.

The cell scene is crucial. On the one side, we begin to detach ourselves from the sustained animosity of Feste, and from the self-interested sadism of Sir Toby. On the other, we recognize a 'different' human being emerging from the darkness. It is a rebirth, almost. I do not wish to support some of the excesses of stage history. Henry Irving, for instance, used to play the scene all out for pathos, with much weeping and an appeal to the 'poor man' response. What happens to Malvolio has nothing to do with pathos. It is a matter of human identity emerging, and it is all in the words. Take, as a simple comparison, Malvolio's opening lines, 'Yes, and shall do, till the pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool … I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal' [I. v. 75-84]. It is impossible to speak these lines without giving in some form the impression of an affected dolt. And now take:

    I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abus'd. I am no more mad than you are; make the trial of it in any constant question … I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion. [IV. ii. 45-56]

Unless one strains intolerably against the directions of the words, it is impossible to speak them in the manner and accent of a fool. They express a being of sense, and human worth. The words must be respected, and thus the speaker. Above all, the words express an identity, individual and social.
And what is this identity? It is that of a gentleman. The first phase of the cell scene, the dialogue with Sir Topas, shows Malvolio at bottom. This is the dark night of the soul, the communion with madness and (apparently) clerical imbecility. The second phase, with Feste speaking in his own voice, records Malvolio’s struggle out of the pit and towards the light. The themes are communication, relationship, ways and means. Phase two starts with the calls of ‘Fool!’ (which Feste affects not to hear) and, after ‘Who calls, ha?’, modulates into ‘Good fool’. What follows is decisive:

Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle, and pen, ink, and paper. As I am a gentleman, I will live to be thankful to thee for’t. (11. 80-3)

The identity which Malvolio discovers for himself in the cell, and which he imparts to us, is the backing for his promise: ‘As I am a gentleman.’ Not, be it noted, ‘steward’. The identity of functional authority is rejected in favour of a term whose core of meaning lies outside, as well as within, social rank. The OED does not commit itself to a categorization of Malvolio’s word here—neither does Schmidt or Onions—but I judge sense 3 to be the nearest: ‘A man in whom gentle birth is accompanied by appropriate qualities of behaviour; hence, in general, a man of chivalrous instincts and fine feelings.’ Gentleman, of all social terms, casts the widest net. The word contains the ideas of birth, education, wealth, behaviour, and values; yet it allows no single aspect to dominate, nor can any element insist on its presence. Gentleman, that uniquely English invention, is at bottom the principle of ‘tolerance’ within the social structure, the moving part that takes the strain of fixed relationships. It is also, in dramatic terms, a variable, and it permits a case to be re-opened and the standing of Malvolio to be reconsidered, very late. The term accounts for Malvolio’s changed address to the Fool. Malvolio does not offer him a crude bribe, but a form of words that combines the hint of material reward with the understatements of courtesy. ‘I will live to be thankful to thee for’t… It shall advantage thee more than ever the bearing of letter did.… Fool, I’ll requite it to the highest degree’ [IV. ii. 82-3, 111-12, 118]. Under all is the implied admission of fellowship with the Fool. Not ‘fellow’, that socially ambivalent word Malvolio mistook from Olivia, but fellowship, is Malvolio’s discovery. The man who would be ‘Count Malvolio’, fantasy’s alternative to ‘Steward’, now founds himself on the truth of ‘gentleman’.

Shakespeare admits the claim, for Malvolio at the end speaks the language of a gentleman. Before his final irruption occurs the intermezzo of the letter. This episode throws some light on the dramatic origins of Fabian. Commentators have often wondered as to the point of this nondescript character, who appears, as few characters in Shakespeare do, to have been less created than manufactured. Of the functional reasons for his existence, the most important that I can detect is his reading of Malvolio’s letter. We need Fabian for the same reason that we need a newscaster for news: we require a fairly neutral and objective tone for the delivery of potentially explosive information. By universal assent, a too emotional, personal delivery distracts one’s reception of the message. Feste’s hatred of Malvolio bars a neutral reading, and he obviously mimics Malvolio’s voice; hence Olivia orders Fabian to read the letter. His colourless delivery is exactly the right medium, and the message comes through with undisturbed clarity. Malvolio’s deep sense of injury is expressed with both passion and control, and the Duke’s comment ratifies its inner decorum: ‘This savours not much of distraction.’ (This line is a perfectly-formed cell in the structure of the final scene: the aesthete’s word, ’savour’, confronts a reality outside the world of aesthetic contemplation.) Malvolio’s is a well-filed message, and by dramatic convention it is, like almost all letters, expressed in prose.

Hence the way is paved for Malvolio’s entry, and his climactic statement of injury. The tone and quality of that last speech are obvious to all. What matters formally is that the speech is in verse. For the first time in the play, Malvolio speaks in the language of the rank to which he had aspired. It is his ultimate irony, that in the moment of humiliation and disgrace he speaks in the tongue of social elevation and human dignity.

That final speech, leading to the appalling ‘I’ll be reveng’d on the whole pack of you’, is the climax of everything that happens in Twelfth Night. The experience must be confronted, and neither denied nor indulged. ‘Malvolio: a Tragedy’ is a sentimentalization of this play. But equally, one is struck by the large
number of critics who, on this issue, seem bent on repressing instincts which, outside the theatre of *Twelfth Night*, they would surely admit. I cite a few instances, though my point could easily be illustrated at far greater length. To Joseph Summers [in "The Masks of *Twelfth Night*," *University of Kansas Review* 22 (1955)], 'Malvolio is, of course, justly punished.' [In "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*," *Shakespeare Studies* 1 (1965)] Barbara K. Lewalski concurs in the natural justice of the affair: 'Since he so richly deserves his exposure, and so actively cooperates in bringing it upon himself, there seems little warrant for the critical tears sometimes shed over his harsh treatment and none at all for a semitragic rendering of his plight in the "dark house".' For C. L. Barber, Malvolio is 'a kind of foreign body to be expelled by laughter, in Shakespeare's last free-and-easy festive comedy'. Most certainly he is to be expelled, if *Twelfth Night* is a 'free-and-easy festive comedy'; but supposing the intruder belongs in the play, what then?

How can one explain this critical imperviousness to the ending? One comes to view the critics here as a representative sampling of the human mind. They *want*, as we all do, a comedy; they do not want a disturbance to the agreeable mood created in *Twelfth Night*; it is easiest to find a response based on 'Serve Malvolio right: he asked for it: anyway, Olivia and Orsino will do their best to smooth things over.' They seek a formula that helps to suppress the disquiet one inevitably feels. In this they faithfully embody certain tendencies within the mind, and thus—as Shakespeare well knew—of his audience.

Even so, it is a failure of criticism. Hardin Craig catches the essence of the position I have illustrated, commenting [in his edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1951)] that the reading of Malvolio's last line 'is by many modern actors so passionate and revengeful as to spoil the effect of the comedy; this cannot have been Shakespeare's intention'. Precisely: but it is only necessary to extend the thought an inch further, and ask: was it not Shakespeare's intention to 'spoil the effect of the comedy', and was not that the goal to which the entire dramatic enterprise was directed? Why not? Where is it laid down that a dramatist may not build into his design a threat to its own mood?

In the final stages, that threat all but destroys the mood of *Twelfth Night*. The minor action bids to overwhelm the major. The Illyrian world of fulfilled romance, genial comics, and harmless pranks metamorphoses into an image of the real world, with its grainy texture, social frictions, and real pain inflicted upon real people. Malvolio must bear the burden of the real world, as he did its festive release. The disposable person of part one has become the victim of part two, and thus the agent for showing up the festive spirit itself. The Duke's last nine lines exactly measure the play's attempt to pull together the vestiges of the mood of comedy. But this time the party, barring a last song from Feste, is really over. It is balm of a sort, and the audience needs it, for it has to recover from a climax in which it participated, to the origins of which it was privy. It is necessary for the mind's defences to re-group. They have, after all, to deal with shock.

*I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you.* 'The theatrical dimension of the line is all-important, and we need the historical imagination to grasp it. At pack, the subliminal metaphor discloses itself. It is a bear-baiting. The audience becomes spectators, Malvolio the bear. The theatrical voltage of the shock is immensely increased if we accept that bear-baiting actually occurred within the same auditorium. It is, however, unnecessary for me to argue here that theatres were 'multi-use auditoria'. The essential point is that the original audience would have witnessed enough bear-baitings, whether in the specific theatre of *Twelfth Night* (Globe), in other theatres such as the Hope, or elsewhere. The connections between theatre, bear-baiting, and festivity were well established. And the awareness of those connections would have governed the audience's experience of Malvolio. So would the delivery of the line. We see a Malvolio who must address his stage tormentors, roughly at right angles to the sight lines of the audience. He is addressing Orsino and company, not us. Imagine a Malvolio in the centre of the platform stage, addressing others downstage: he is surrounded on three (or all) sides by tiers of spectators, who are still perhaps jeering at him, and turns on his heel through at least 180 degrees to take in 'the whole pack of you'. That way the house, not merely the stage company, is identified with the 'pack'. It is theatre as blood sport, theatre that celebrates its own dark origins. That, too, is 'festive' comedy. What the audience makes of its emotions is its own affair. I surmise that the ultimate effect
of *Twelfth Night* is to make the audience ashamed of itself.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 26): Further Reading**

**REVIEWS AND RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTS**


Mixed review of Margaret Webster's 1940 revival of *Twelfth Night* at the St. James Theater in New York, in which the critic asserts that the text of the production lacks a "poetic touch." The reviewer also suggests that both Helen Hayes as Viola and Maurice Evans as Malvolio are miscast.


Commends Peter Gill's emphasis on self-love and sexual ambiguity in his 1975 revival of *Twelfth Night* at the Aldwych Theatre in London. The critic notes, however, that in this interpretation the comic characters are presented less successfully than are the romantic characters.


Applauds the performances of Henry Irving as Malvolio, who "reads with consummate intelligence," and Ellen Terry as Viola, who "bore herself right manfully as a boy," in the 1884 production of *Twelfth Night*. The review was first published in *The New York Herald*.


Generally negative critique of John Barton's 1969 RSC staging of *Twelfth Night* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.


Faults Hugh Hunt in his 1950 revival of *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic Theatre for altering Feste's position from that of a clown to that of "an ageing entertainer in faded motley who … is losing his grip and knows it." The critic ventures that, because the attention afforded Feste's character has not been given to the development of other characters—notably Malvolio, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby—the production is flawed.


Argues that the 1940 production of *Twelfth Night* at the St. James Theater in New York was flawed because of such defects as obscure Elizabethan jokes and arduous plotting. Gibbs does, however, laud the portrayals of Viola and Malvolio by both Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans and commends the direction of Margaret Webster.


Favorable review of John Gielgud's 1955 staging of *Twelfth Night* at Stratford-on-Avon, with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the starring roles.

Extols the "excellent, well-spoken, freshly characterized performances" of Kenneth Branagh's 1987 *Twelfth Night* cast at the Riverside Studios in London. James especially praises Richard Briers's puritanistic and comical portrayal of Malvolio.


Brief assessment of the 1974 revival of *Twelfth Night* by David William at the American Shakespeare Theater. Kalem finds the production tedious and one in which "the prankishness and the poetry are divorced instead of being mated."


Laudatory assessment of John Barton's 1970 RSC presentation of *Twelfth Night* at London's Aldwych Theatre; Kingston declares the staging a "fine and moving production."


Examining the setting, costuming, technical aspects, and music in John Caird's 1983 presentation of *Twelfth Night* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Maguin concludes that the stage is "cluttered" and finds it "difficult to judge the actors… since all they are supposed to do is fit in with the set and survive between special effects."


Highly favorable review of Augustin Daly's 1893 revival of *Twelfth Night* at Daly's Theatre. The critic praises the production's whimsical, dreamlike quality, and commends in particular the performance of Ada Rehan, whose portrayal of Viola marked "one of the finest and richest examples of her art."


Commends the 1991 revival of *Twelfth Night* at London's Playhouse Theatre, finding that director Peter Hall challenges the scholarly trend to focus on the "darkness, danger and malice behind the play's smiles."


Brief mention of a revival of *Twelfth Night* by William D'Avenant at the Duke's playhouse, which Pepys found to be "acted well, though … a silly play."


Presents a brief overview of the principal actors in William D'Avenant's 1661 revival of *Twelfth Night* at the Duke's playhouse and speculates that the production may have been an altered version of the original text.


Asserts that Henry Irving's 1884 staging of *Twelfth Night* was "one of the least successful of [his] Shakespearean productions." Terry states that the play, which was booed by its opening night audience, fared
better in America, though she still felt it was miscast and "dull."


Calling the work "a lively but uneven production," the critic offers a mixed review of Michael Benthall's 1958 version of Twelfth Night at the Old Vic Theatre.


Praising a "brilliantly resourceful" and comical performance of Olivia by Dorothy Tutin, the critic offers a generally positive assessment of Peter Hall's 1958 staging of Twelfth Night at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.


Considers Peter Hall's 1960 revival of Twelfth Night at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre a success, though the critic finds fault with Barbara Barnett's portrayal of Olivia.


Brief and generally negative appraisal of Terry Hands's 1979 presentation of Twelfth Night with the RSC.


Applauds Sir Cedric Hardwicke's portrayal of Sir Toby Belch in Alec Guinness's 1948 production at the New Theatre, declaring that he has "seen no performance in Shakespearean comedy much better than this."

COMPARISONS AND OVERVIEWS


Summarizes the stage history of Twelfth Night, chronicling the productions from an early 17th century performance noted by John Manningham in his Diary, to a revival at the Birmingham Repertory Theater during the 1910s.


Assesses the 1958 stagings of Twelfth Night at both the Old Vic (Michael Benthall) and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (Peter Hall), finding the productions unconventional and lacking the "inner cohesion which is essential to full artistic satisfaction."


Provides excerpts from reviews of selected American productions of Twelfth Night, beginning with Margaret Webster's 1940 presentation at the St. James Theater and continuing through Michael Benthall's 1958 revival with the Old Vic company at the Broadway Theater. Swander also analyzes the text of the play in relation to staging issues, concluding "that there is no substitute for a genuine understanding of the meaning—and thus of
the unity and theatrical potential—of the playwright's words."

STAGING ISSUES


Postulates that Johan de Witt, whose sketch of a scene enacted at the Swan Theatre might correspond with Act III, scene iv of *Twelfth Night*, may have viewed an early version of Shakespeare's play in 1598.


Brief discussion of possible dates for the first production of *Twelfth Night*, focusing in particular on a 1601 reference to the play in John Manningham's *Diary*.

Waters Bennett, Josephine. "Topicality and the Date of the Court Production of *Twelfth Night*" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 71, No. 4 (Autumn 1972): 473-79.

Argues that the first court production of *Twelfth Night* may have occurred during the Christmas festivities of 1601-02.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Introduction**

*Twelfth Night*

Written before the "problem comedies" such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night* marks for many critics the most well-crafted of Shakespeare's "happy comedies," one rich in symbolism and complex in its exploration of love, its blurring of appearance and reality, its troubling of gender, and its portrayal of human psychology.

As in most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies from the 1590's, love motivates many of the characters' actions and attitudes. Some commentators, such as Peter G. Phialas (1966) and Charles Tyler Prouty (1966), have claimed that the characters interact in order to depict a Renaissance ideal of courtly love. Richard Henze (1975) has expanded this line of thought, arguing that Shakespeare resolves the play's contradictions through the interaction of characters, particularly through love-relationships. Similarly, Dennis R. Preston (1970) has asserted that the minor characters bind the seemingly disparate elements of the play, forming a unified whole. Other critics, including Terence Eagleton (1967), have contended that love in the play fuses language and reality, and thus questions the fixity of nature.

While some scholars have argued that love is the primary subject of *Twelfth Night* and have debated whether it has a unifying or dissembling effect on the dichotomy between appearance and reality, other commentators have identified this very dichotomy as the play's central theme. For example, Karen Greif (1981) has focused on Shakespeare's questioning of the nature of truth through the characters' "play," claiming that "*Twelfth Night* poses questions about 'the purpose of playing' and about whether illusion is perhaps too deeply embedded in human experience to be ever completely separated from reality." Other critics, including D. J. Palmer (1967), have contextualized Shakespeare within a tradition that conflates art and nature, and Walter N. King (1968), drawing on the history of philosophy, has considered Shakespeare to be consciously commenting on a Parmenidean approach to metaphysics. The resulting portrayal of nature has led commentators such as Karin S. Coddon (1993) to consider *Twelfth Night* as questioning the stability of social status by troubling a
supposedly natural hierarchy in Elizabethan society.

In addition to Shakespeare's problematizing the fixity of nature, many feminist literary theorists have claimed that disorder in *Twelfth Night* also affects definitions of sex and gender, focusing primarily on the Viola/Cesario character. Scholars have extensively debated whether Shakespeare consciously or unconsciously uses Viola's role-playing to demonstrate the plasticity of socially constructed gender roles as well as whether the character calls supposedly fixed sexual differences into question. Stevie Davies (1993) and Nancy Hayles (1979), for example, have contended that Viola's role-playing questions the idea of a naturally determined gender. Others, such as Lorna Hutson (1996), have argued that Shakespeare affirms not only the plasticity of gender, but the rhetorical construction of sex as well.

Modern commentators have also studied the tenets of psychoanalysis to explore both the actions of the characters and the motivations of the author. Freudian and Jungian taxonomies have been used to dissect characters' actions (such as Viola's putting on the guise of a man) and their personification of psychological attributes. For example, Helene Moglen (1973) has contended that *Twelfth Night* portrays a psychological picture "strikingly similar to major aspects of Freud's own theory of psycho-sexual development." Critics such as Leonard F. Manheim (1964) have even applied psychoanalytic theory to Shakespeare himself, finding in *Twelfth Night* an expression of his unconscious attempt to enact an Oedipal fantasy.

Critical approaches to *Twelfth Night* have varied considerably, from strict examinations of the text alone to psychoanalytic evaluations of its author, from historical inquiries into Elizabethan love to feminist interpretations of sex and gender. Regardless, *Twelfth Night* continues to attract contemporary criticism, as commentators find in the play the height of Shakespeare's comedic art.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Overviews**

Peter G. Phialas (essay date 1966)


In the following essay, Phialas examines the elements of *Twelfth Night* that Shakespeare adapted from his earlier comedies, and he discerns in the play an ideal of love that emerges through the juxtaposition of Viola's selfless love and the self-indulgent love of Orsino and Olivia.

**I**

*Twelfth Night* has been called a masterpiece not of invention but recapitulation, a summing-up of the admirable features of the "joyous" comedies. It is certainly that and much more. Its connections with earlier Shakespearean comedies are many and they have to do with large elements of the plot, although of course we should bear in mind that some of these elements are present also in the sources of the play. In any case, it is clear that the confusion of twins goes back to *The Comedy of Errors*. The theme of a disguised lady serving the man she loves in his courtship of another woman, though present in the sources of *Twelfth Night*, had been employed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. And here it may be worth mentioning that the disguised Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* calls herself Sebastian. Sebastian's devoted Antonio in *Twelfth Night* recalls Bassanio's equally devoted friend of the same name in *The Merchant of Venice*. With *Much Ado About Nothing*, as with other comedies, *Twelfth Night* has in common the motif of the disdaining lover, a motif it develops rather in the way of *As You Like It*, where Phoebe in some ways anticipates Olivia's fruitless love for a disguised lady. Another connection with *As You Like It* is an analogy in the roles of Viola and Silvius, both of whom undertake to advance rival love affairs of those they love themselves. Furthermore, and far more
significant, is the fact that Feste, though of course a fresh, independent character, is a creation in the new manner of Touch-stone, and he is intended to supply something like the latter's point of view and commentary.¹ These and other features of earlier comedies Twelfth Night employs in fresh combinations, in an action that, in spite of these borrowings, produces the impression of complete novelty. But although the story is fresh and although Shakespeare invents episodes and characters, the total effect of the play, its chief thematic concern, repeats the large meaning we have discovered in the earlier plays and particularly in the other two joyous comedies. If we accept as the play's chief theme the education in the ways of love of the disdainful as well as the romantic lover then it is clear that in this it repeats the central ideas of As You Like It and Much Ado About Nothing. And if in addition we accept Rosalind as the representative of the ideally balanced temperament and exemplar of the proper attitude toward love, then we shall conclude that Shakespeare intends something very like that in his conception of Viola. This is not to say that the two heroines have the same temperament but rather that through them, in somewhat different ways, the dramatist defines the proper point of view towards life's processes. Through their intelligent, level-headed, and generous approach to the challenges of this "working-day world," they demonstrate the sure way to maximum happiness for themselves and those around them. Of this more presently.

In chronology Twelfth Night appears to have followed the other two joyous comedies, and its date can be fixed with fair accuracy. To begin with, the limits of that date are 1598, the year of Meres' Palladis Tamia, which fails to mention the play, and the first allusion to it on February 2, 1601/2 (Candlemas), in John Manningham's Diary, where he records that at "our feast wee had a play called "Twelve Night or What you Will."² But before this performance of February, 1601/2, the play must have been acted in a private or public theatre or both. The title strongly suggests that it was first acted on Twelfth Night, and this would defeat Dover Wilson's view that it was originally drafted for the performance at the Inns of Court on February 2, 1601/2, to which Manningham alludes in his diary.³ Two contemporary facts, though seeming to raise difficulties, ultimately contribute to a precise dating of the play. Shakespeare's company acted a play at court on Twelfth Night, January 6, 1600/1, and on that same day the Queen entertained Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano, who was visiting her court. And what is even more tantalizing is his report in a letter to his Duchess that the Queen's entertainment had included una commedia mescolata, con musiche e balli, "a mingled comedy with bits of music and dances."⁴ Unfortunately Don Virginio gives no further details but promises his Duchess to tell her more by word of mouth. From this and other contributory records Leslie Hotson has concluded that Twelfth Night was the play in question, that Shakespeare's Orsino is a graceful compliment to the visiting Duke, that Olivia is intended to suggest the Queen, and that Malvolio is indeed, as other critics had supposed, an audacious though by no means impudent satiric portrait of Sir William Knollys, the Queen's controller.⁵ Some connection between the name of Shakespeare's Orsino and the Queen's royal visitor there must be, but it is scarcely possible that Shakespeare wrote the play especially for the Duke's entertainment. One reason is that he would have had scant time—just eleven days—to compose the comedy since firm news of the Duke's journey and of the probable date of his arrival reached Whitehall on Christmas Day, 1600.⁵ It was thus on Christmas Day or shortly thereafter that the Queen gave detailed directions to her Lord Chamberlain which he was to follow in planning the grand entertainment. Among these directions occur the following: "To Confer with my Lord Admirall and the Master of the Revells for taking order generally with the players to make choyse of [?the] play that shalbe best furnished with rich appareil, have greate variety and change of Musick and daunces, and of a Subject that may be most pleasing to her Majestic."⁷ The probability is strong that "to make choyse" here means select a play in existence, not commission a new one, a play with music and dance and a theme pleasing to the Queen. The care and minuteness of detail in the royal directions suggest that the Queen was unwilling to allow chance and improvisation to detract from the splendor of the royal celebration, and it seems logical to conclude that she wished to present to her visitor a play known to possess the qualities she specified. Furthermore, it is not certain that Shakespeare's Orsino and Olivia would have been sufficiently flattering to Don Virginio and his imperial hostess. In all probability the play was written later in the year 1601, when the name Orsino could be employed with greater propriety and the character could be presented with greater freedom than would have been possible in 1600. Other evidence points to a date after 1600. The new map alluded to in III, ii, 66, is that in Hakluyt's Voyages which was
printed in 1600. In addition, 1600 is the date of Robert Jones's *First Booke of Songs and Ayres* from which Shakespeare borrowed the song "Farewell, dear heart," which is sung alternately by Feste and Sir Toby Belch. What all this does is to narrow this does of the probable play by placing it in or after 1600 and before Manningham's allusion on February 2, 1601/2. Since, as we have seen, 1600 will not do, the only Twelfth Night available was that of 1601, and this means that the play, the last of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, must have been acted for the first time a few weeks before Manningham's reference to it on February 2, 1601/2.

II

For the love story of the four chief characters in the play Shakespeare may have turned to a variety of sources, dramatic and non-dramatic. The chief of these seems to have been the story of Apolonius and Siila in Barnaby Riche's *Farewell to Militane Profession*, first printed in 1581. Here Shakespeare found the story of twins of different sexes, which would admit a romantic treatment of the sort of confusion of identity which in a different context had formed the central theme of *The Comedy of Errors*. In addition he found a ship-wreck on a strange coast which forces the heroine to take the sex and name of her brother. Thus disguised, Silla (Viola) seeks employment with Apolonius (Orosino), the man she loves, who sends her to court Juliana (Olivia) for him. The latter, rejecting Apolionius' suit, falls in love with the disguised Siila, who is later replaced by her long-absent twin brother, Silvio (Sebastian). Silvio's acceptance of Juliana's invitation, Juliana's revelation of her betrothal, her criticism of the page's refusal to acknowledge it, and the Duke's anger with his page—these matters are so close to the corresponding episodes in *Twelfth Night* that Shakespeare must have known Riche's version of the tale.

The alleged topicality of the conflict between Sir Toby and Malvolio has been the subject of much speculation. In addition to Leslie Hotson's theory alluded to above, it has been observed that another contemporary quarrel may have given Shakespeare the impetus and even details for the attack upon Malvolio. The quarrel was that between Sir Posthumus Hoby and two or three gentlemen, including Sir Richard Cholmley and William Eure, who, after a day's hunting in the country, invited themselves to spend the night in Hoby's house and proceeded to disturb that household with their boisterous drinking. The matter was brought to trial and seems to have been the talk of London during the years 1600-02. Still another source for the Malvolio episodes has been found in Sidney's *Arcadia*, in the broad comedy dealing with Dametas and his family. A more likely influence upon the episodes with Malvolio and his tormentors may have been the severe onslaught upon humour characters in Jonsonian comedy. Such influence may have been particularly strong in Shakespeare's conception of Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. The latter may be seen in part as a composite of Matthew and Stephen, Jonson's city and country gulls in his *Every Man in His Humour*.

III

The materials available to Shakespeare were, then, extensive; and it is possible that he was indebted to a good many of them. But what is of great interest is that the two chief actions in the play, the mistaking of twins and the service by a disguised lady of the man she loves in his courtship of another woman, had each been dramatized in different plays by Shakespeare at the very outset of his career. In *Twelfth Night*, where he combines these two actions, he seems to complete the circle. But the way the two themes are combined and the conception of the characters, especially the heroines, clearly give proof of the distance Shakespeare had measured since the composition of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. And thus the structure of *Twelfth Night*, the way its episodes are conceived and related, the recreation of characters found in the sources, the invention of new episodes and characters, the function of music and song, and in general the mutual qualification of the play's several parts—these matters derive in great part from earlier comedies written in the long interval of nearly ten years. Whether Shakespeare was indebted to a contemporary quarrel or Sidney's *Arcadia* for a few details in the Malvolio episodes it is impossible to say. What is clear is that those episodes owe their presence to Shakespeare's concern with different attitudes toward love. And it is
equally clear that those episodes are presented in close relationship to the chief events in the comedy. Malvolio is not simply the butt of the inebriated Sir Toby and Andrew Aguecheek. He is conceived in terms which bear close relevance to the love theme of the play. Malvolio is first and last one of Olivia's suitors, and his chief contribution to the play is in representing a particular attitude toward love as well as toward himself and his world. In this he recalls Jaques of As You Like It, and it is his peculiar response to love and his rigid objection to all indulgence which exclude him for a time from the happy and harmonious conclusion of the play. Malvolio's opposition to indulgence, in itself an important theme of the play, is the immediate cause of his undoing, but that undoing has to do with him as Olivia's suitor, one who represents a particular conception of love. Malvolio has clearly evolved out of Shakespeare's preoccupation, in his romantic comedies, with different and often conflicting conceptions of man's ideal relationship to woman.

Malvolio's love for Olivia, or what he takes to be love, is limited or rather vitiated by his extreme and humorless self-love. But there is another side in Shakespeare's conception of the pompous steward. The complete absence of humor and self-awareness in him is coupled with in this a fierce all liberality indictment and pleasure. In this he stands for an extreme view which, by juxtaposition with its opposite, is intended to point to an ideal attitude. But the theme of indulgence is not a gratuitous adjunct to the main concern of Twelfth Night. It is instead a theme dramatized in analogical relationship to the theme of love. Thus Malvolio, involved in both themes, must be seen as a central character, and the dramatist's conception of him is clearly dictated by thematic considerations. He evolves in great part out of Shakespeare's choice to dramatize the analogy between romantic love and self-indulgence.

Other features in the action of Twelfth Night which derive from earlier plays may be cited. The scene in which Orsino declares his love for Olivia in the hearing of the disguised Viola repeats in the main the action of a similar episode in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. There is of course an important difference, namely the fact that, unlike Proteus, Orsino is not violating any love vows made earlier to the disguised woman who loves him. And this difference is dictated by the dramatist's choice to stress different motifs in the two scenes. In the scene in The Two Gentlemen of Verona the emphasis is upon Proteus' violation of his vows and the effect of his action upon the disguised Julia. In Twelfth Night the stress is upon the Duke's manner of expressing his infatuation with Olivia, his hyperbolic romanticism, as well as upon its painful effect on the disguised Viola. Here there is no immediate question of fickleness on the part of Orsino in the sense of the episode in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Orsino's outpouring of what he considers his great passion for Olivia is of course undermined by his rhetoric, but it is also thrown into comic relief in retrospect later on in the play by his all too sudden transference of that passion from Olivia to Viola.

Among the many links connecting the comedy with Much Ado About Nothing is the ruse employed in the intrigues aimed at the pair of reluctant lovers in the earlier play and at Malvolio in Twelfth Night. The ironic effect of the conversations which are intended to be overheard by Benedick and Beatrice is here repeated through the letter which Maria drops in Malvolio's path. Maria's letter is but a variation of Don Pedro's plan to bring Beatrice and Benedick together. There are of course the obvious differences in the circumstances of the ruse and its ultimate effects upon its "victims." But there are also certain striking correspondences of detail. Before he overhears talk of Beatrice's love for him, Benedick, it will be recalled, is shown in a long soliloquy attacking Claudio's recent transformation from soldier to lover. But at the conclusion of that passage Benedick asks if he, himself, could be changed by love in the same manner. The question and Benedick's uncertain answer reveal that he is vulnerable, indeed ready to receive the impact of Don Pedro's plan. In like manner Malvolio is shown in the act of revealing his own readiness to be duped by Maria's letter and its "revelations." He is presented in soliloquy imagining himself worthy of Olivia's love. Indeed he imagines himself married to her and in the act of making ready to deal rather severely with Sir Toby. And at that very moment his eye falls upon the letter. The episode is furthermore given a refinement which likewise recalls and surpasses something similar in the earlier play. Benedick is convinced that what he over-hears is not counterfeited: the very thought that someone is trying to gull somebody is instantly rejected. And this is brought about by having that suspicion utterly demolished by the grave witness of the elderly Leonato. The words onstage merge into
Benedick's own thoughts so imperceptibly that he would have thought "this a gull but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it." And later he concludes that "This can be no trick." In *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare in like manner provided a device by which Malvolio is tricked into the conviction that Maria's letter is genuine. What Malvolio reads in the letter are of course his own thoughts and most devout wishes, but there is more. When we consider the letter's style, particularly in the last long passage—"Let thy tongue tang arguments of state; put thyself into the trick of singularity"—we can see clearly that this is neither Olivia's style nor Maria's but Malvolio's own. It is a brilliant stroke. Both the thoughts and words in the letter are so expressive of Malvolio's being that they produce instant conviction.19

**IV**

Shakespeare's dependence on earlier comedies for certain elements of *Twelfth Night* ranged beyond his use in fresh combinations of certain episodes. As we have already noted, he repeats certain characters, though of course he recreates them in a fashion to fit the structural and thematic necessities of the story he is dramatizing. This is true in the creation or recreation of minor as well as major characters. Though lacking the brilliant virtuosity of Rosalind and her superior comic awareness, Viola is nevertheless meant to represent the same balance of sentiment with common sense, the same steady and level view of the world around her. In this she repeats Rosalind's function in the earlier play, a function made indispensable by the dramatist's chief concern in these plays. But of course the dramatic terms of her existence require individual features in Viola which are quite different from Rosalind's. Rosalind could not be repeated. Certainly in Viola's position Rosalind would never allow Orsino to maintain even a semblance of an initiative. But her general attitude towards love is repeated in Viola, though more profoundly, albeit more obliquely expressed in the latter. Rosalind's direct attempts to "cure" both Orlando and Phoebe, the one of his bookish Petrarchism and the other of disdain, are repeated by Viola in the later play. But a glance at her scenes with Orsino and Olivia will show how tentative Viola's approach is. She seldom opposes Orsino's whims, and when she differs with him, her comments are gentle and indirect. When she confronts Olivia in their initial meeting, her comment on the latter's disinterest in love is gentler than Rosalind's similar criticism of Phoebe. But Viola's words to Olivia carry greater significance, a maturer vision as befits her own temperament and also the character and position of Olivia. To Viola's inquiry if she is "the lady of the house," Olivia replies: "If I do not usurp myself, I am." Viola's comment on this expresses one of Shakespeare's favorite themes: "Most certain, if you are she, you do usurp yourself; for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve." The import of such a speech would have been beyond Phoebe, and perhaps it is beyond Olivia as well. But what is far more significant is that the speech could not have come from Rosalind, for the words proceed from the sort of stillness and reflection we would not associate with her temperament. The attitude expressed in the passage, though repeating Rosalind's general point of view concerning the rejection of love, is enriched by evidence of serious thought. It is an attitude presupposing Rosalind's and transcending it. Although rationality and incisive intellect combine to produce that most attractive quality in Rosalind which we identified with the comic spirit, it is also true that she is not innocent of emotion and the romantic attitude towards love and her lover. But with all this, it must be admitted that Rosalind is master of her emotions; she is in complete control of these as she is of her destiny. Though exiled and forced to disguise herself for safety, she is never in any danger. Rosalind is never in pain, and this is one of the chief points in which she differs from Viola. While Rosalind has "convers'd with a magician" and can do "strange things"—she promises to unite all the lovers on the morrow—Viola is bewildered by her dilemma.20

O time! thou must untangle this, not I.
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie!

(II, ii, 41-42)

It may be said of Rosalind that she controls not only her emotions and her destiny but also the action of the whole play. The same cannot be said of Viola, whose role is somewhat passive by comparison.
This general difference in the conception of Rosalind and Viola is to be found also in other characters. Feste, for instance, though he repeats in part Touchstone's function, achieves his ends by more oblique means. Like Touchstone, his chief role is to comment upon and thereby deflate the sentimental pretensions of such characters as Orsino and Olivia. But his comment upon Orsino's love-melancholy and Olivia's capriciously excessive mourning is both more oblique in manner and more serious in tone than Touchstone's had been in the earlier play. In both cases Feste addresses his reducing commentary in part through songs of time's passing and lovers' deaths and thereby implies at once a subtler attitude towards the aberrations of Orsino and Olivia as well as a measure of sympathy. These features of Feste's character and function suggest greater reflection, perhaps we should say greater maturity, than is revealed in Touchstone.

This reflectiveness implied in the character of Viola and Feste accords with—and indeed generates—a sense of melancholy characteristic of the general mood of the play. In spite of much revelry in its action, Twelfth Night impresses one with a certain air of gravity which is quite different from the high spirits of As You Like It. The world of Twelfth Night appears a little more complex and thus more puzzling than that of the earlier comedies. And this complexity anticipates the greater seriousness not only of the tragedies which are soon to follow but also of the problem plays and the romances.

V

Another significant relationship between Twelfth Night and As You Like It has to do with an aspect of their structure, for here again Shakespeare presents the theme of love in analogical relationship with a secondary theme, the theme of indulgence. In an earlier section the point was made that Malvolio's role has to do with both love and the theme of indulgence which is presented in a special relationship to it. Malvolio is both a lover, one of Olivia's suitors, and also the exponent of opposition to all pleasure. His interest in Olivia, which he calls love, is vitiated by his self-love, and in this he is the antithesis of Viola, whose generous and self-sacrificing love of Orsino may be said to represent the opposite extreme. In his attitude toward indulgence, Malvolio is contrasted with Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, whose overindulgence clearly throws into relief the steward's austerity. But although Malvolio rejects the kind of indulgence practiced by the other two, he overindulges in self-love, so surfeiting that in Olivia's words he becomes "sick of self-love." What is to be noted here is that Shakespeare presents extravagant attitudes toward the themes of love and indulgence, extremes which by juxtaposition tend toward mutual qualification. Malvolio is but one of the characters whose attitudes form the main action of the comedy. But he is central to that action in his double role of being both a lover, or would-be lover, and an exponent of a particular attitude toward indulgence.

The theme of indulgence, as we have said, is here presented in such a way that attitudes toward it are made to reflect upon analogous attitudes toward love. The relationship of the two themes can be seen as it affects other characters besides Malvolio. Orsino and Olivia are both gluttons in their way, both gorging themselves upon boundless sentiment: he upon extravagant passion (as he calls it) for Olivia, she upon equally excessive mourning for a dead brother. In effect he is overfond of love-melancholy, she of grief. Both, then, overindulge in certain emotions, and that extravagance, and especially the rhetoric of its expression, form yet another instance of comic reduction. And thus it may be said that Orsino, Olivia, Malvolio, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew are presented in postures of overindulgence of one sort or another. Furthermore, that part of the plot which deals with Malvolio and his enemies dramatizes indulgence itself, that is, what in the main action is a metaphor here becomes a theme. And the comic reduction of excess in this part of the play, the comic comment upon extreme attitudes toward indulgence, reinforces the comic reduction of extreme attitudes toward love. And as we have seen, this last is accomplished in part by the metaphoric function of the term indulgence in the main action of the comedy. From the point of view of structure, this circumstance represents the highest point to which Shakespeare could raise the analogical relationship of the two themes.
The theme of indulgence, then, occupies an important position in the play, but we should remember that it is secondary to the theme of love, that it is employed in support of it. Because *Twelfth Night* is associated with revelry, it is quite possible to overstate this element of the plot. Thus one critic has proposed that "*Twelfth Night* is a philosophical defence of a moderate indulgence in pleasure, in opposition on the one hand to an extreme hostility to pleasure and on the other hand to an extreme self-indulgence." A related view finds that the play "develops an ethic of indulgence based on the notion that the personality of any individual is a function not of the static proportions of the humors within him, but of the dynamic appetites that may more purposefully, as well as more pragmatically, be said to govern his behavior." This is relevant and just so long as we do not raise the theme of indulgence to a position above that assigned to it by the dramatist. In a second and equally provocative essay on *Twelfth Night*, Professor Hollander sees the play as "representing the killing off of excessive appetite through indulgence of it, leading to the rebirth of the unencumbered self." Though an exciting notion of comic catharsis, such a view lays undue stress on what we have called the play's chief metaphor at the expense of its central idea.

In addition to the primary metaphor of indulgence, and most significantly associated with it, is the subsidiary concept of musical order and due proportion. Even as order and proportion are indispensable to harmony, whether musical, celestial, or political, so they are to the well-being and inner unity of the individual. Here music, which fills *Twelfth Night*, achieves the status of motif in the thought of the play. "The general concern of *Twelfth Night*," says Professor Hollander, "is musica humana, the Boethian application of abstract order and proportion to human behavior." This is unquestionably so, and what is said here of *Twelfth Night* applies with equal force to Shakespearean drama generally. But again it should be noted that the play is concerned with a particular application, an application to a particular aspect of human behavior. That *Twelfth Night* dramatizes the concept of proportion and moderation, there can be no question. We may go so far as to say that the play's chief theme has to do with proportion and moderation. But it is proportion and moderation neither in terms of general behavior nor of revelry, eating, and drinking, though these provide both metaphoric and thematic support. The play is primarily concerned with proportion and moderation in matters concerning romantic love, the general subject of all Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

VI

The chief idea of *Twelfth Night* has been variously identified. Some have argued that the leading note of the play is fun; others have held that the play's "lesson is ... 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.'" Unrequited love is another choice. Still another is social security. According to this view *Twelfth Night* is not a story of love "but of the very realistic struggles and intrigues over the betrothal of a rich countess, whose selection of a mate determines the future of all the major and most of the minor characters." Much closer to the mark than any of these is the view that *Twelfth Night* "exhibits in its action one of the fundamental motifs of comedy: the education of a man or woman." What needs to be added here is that the motif exhibited in the action of the play has to do with the education of characters in matters of love. As in the comedies we have so far considered, so here the main action presents in juxtaposition attitudes toward love, with the result that such attitudes by mutual qualification point to the best attitude possible in the world created by the play, a world ultimately not different from our own.

The initial episode introduces the two contrasting attitudes toward love which we have found at the center of Shakespeare's other romantic comedies. Orsino in his opening lines reveals and exposes to the censure of the comic spirit his immoderately sentimental conception of what he thinks is his passion for Olivia. His fancy is, in his own words, "high fantastical," and the pain it causes him is insupportable. For that reason he calls for music as a way to relieve his passion.

If music be the food of love, play on!
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
Notwithstanding its "capacity," love may be so surfeited with music, he hopes, that its force will abate for a short while. It is all in excess, all expressed in one comic hyperbole after another.

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
That instant was I turn'd into a hart;

(11. 19-21)

With the entrance of Valentine at line 23 and his report to the Duke, Shakespeare matches Orsino's hyperboles with Olivia's own extreme sentimentality in rejecting his suit in order to abandon herself to excessive grief over her brother's death. The extravagance of Olivia's mourning, like Orsino's passion, is given a comic note by the language in which it is expressed. Furthermore, Valentine's description tends to qualify the genuineness of the vow by the elaborate insistence on its austerity:

The element itself, till seven years' heat,
Shall not behold her face at ample view;
But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine;

(11. 26-30)

The two attitudes toward love are here bound together more significantly than in earlier comedies. Orsino is the romantic lover who vaunts his alleged passion in hyperboles. And Olivia is the reluctant lover who rejects the Duke's addresses to her. But she is very different from such disdainful lovers as Phoebe of As You Like It, the king and his lords in Love's Labour's Lost, and Benedick and Beatrice. Like all these, Olivia rejects thoughts of love, but she does so in favor of something else, a passionate surrender to what seems to be her love of grief. In this, though she rejects Orsino, she acts very much like him. Both exhibit excessive sentimentality which shows as folly, though the object of that folly is different in the two characters. Their attitudes toward love and grief are extreme and they are best expressed by the thematic metaphor of indulgence, the very image the Duke employs in the opening lines of the play. Orsino and Olivia overindulge their passions or what they consider their passions. And so in the initial episode Shakespeare briefly but pointedly defines the comic errors of these two, errors to be recognized before the conclusion of the play. But he does much more in these early lines. He binds Orsino's and Olivia's contrasting attitudes towards love by means of an identical attitude towards their respective passions, love and grief. And furthermore he relates all this to the idea of indulgence, the theme of the secondary action.

The opening scene, then, presents Orsino and Olivia in contrasting attitudes towards love but in identical attitudes towards themselves. In the second scene the two are contrasted with Viola, both in their attitudes towards themselves and towards love. From the first lines she speaks Viola reveals the absence in her of sentimentality and self-pity.

Viola. What country, friends, is this?
Captain. This is Illyria, lady.
Viola. And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother he is in Elysium.
Perchance he is not drown'd. What think you.
sailors?

(I, ii, 1-5)
The captain encourages her to hope, for he saw her brother, "most provident in peril," "bind himself to "a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea." Whereupon she turns to the present moment and demands to know who governs Illyria.

Captain. A noble duke, in nature as in name.
Viola. What is his name?
Captain. Orsino.
Viola. Orsino! I have heard my father name him.
He was a bachelor then.

(11. 25-29)

Viola is as eager to know the Duke as she is unwilling to give herself over to excessive grief over her brother's feared death. Her feelings and the words expressing them are level and direct, avoiding the extremes we have noted in the alleged passions of Orsino and Olivia. In this she clearly presents a contrast to these two, and her role in the rest of the play will be to aid them in amending their ways. On the one hand, Viola essays to persuade Olivia that falling in love—with Orsino or another—is her unavoidable responsibility (else she usurps herself); on the other, she tells the Duke that he is not the only one who suffers from unrequited love. From the above we should conclude that Viola is intended to represent the norm, an attitude we might call ideal. And we may add that her words and acts are so aimed as to bring about comic recognition by Orsino and Olivia. In due course he learns that he was never in love with Olivia but someone else; and the latter soon discovers that far from being able to remain heart-whole she falls in love at first sight with Orsino's page, who she later finds is a lady in disguise. To such recognition and self-knowledge these two are led by the agency of Viola, by what she says and does, by what she is.

VII

But Viola is not the only character whose words and actions are employed to those ends. Feste, who as his name suggests occupies a significant position in the development of the theme of indulgence in the sub-plot, carries an equal responsibility in the conduct of the main action as well. In the subplot his chief purpose is to oppose Malvolio's austerity with the notion of revelry, though perhaps not in the extreme form practiced by Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. When Sir Toby tells Malvolio that there shall be "cakes and ale" in spite of the steward's "virtuousness," Feste adds: "Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' th' mouth too." In addition, Feste helps bring about Malvolio's comic retribution. He defines both the steward's austerity and his presumption that Olivia could love him as a kind of madness and thus proves him a fool. In so doing Feste in his own way essays to lead Malvolio toward a recognition of his folly. This is especially clear in the scene wherein Feste, both in his own person and as Sir Topas, engages the steward in conversation while the latter is locked in the dark room.

Feste's allusion to Malvolio's folly in his notions about Olivia is made obliquely in the song he sings to him:

Clown. "Hey, Robin, jolly Robin,
Tell me how thy lady does."
Malvolio. Fool!
Clown. "My lady is unkind, perdy."
Malvolio. Fool!
Clown. "Alas, why is she so?"
Malvolio. Fool, I say!
Clown. "She loves another"—Who calls, ha?
(IV. ii. 78-85)
The steward's persistent calling of "Fool!" points ironically to the very term most properly applying to himself in the scene. And this is followed by an even clearer allusion to his folly in the following exchange with Feste a few lines later.

\[\text{Clown. Alas, sir, how fell you besides your five wits?}\]

\[\text{Malvolio. Fool, there was never man so notoriously abus'd. I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art.}\]

\[\text{Clown. But as well? Then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool.}\]

\[(11. 92-97)\]

Precisely the same purpose as shown here is to be seen in Feste's role in the main plot, that is, in the words he addresses to Orsino and Olivia. Again his most pregnant comments on the self-deception of those two are made through songs, that is, in the same oblique manner he employs in part in his treatment of Malvolio, for Orsino and Olivia in what they say and do enact extreme attitudes identical with those exhibited by the steward. Professor Dover Wilson is partly right in suggesting that Malvolio "reflects in a kind of distorting mirror the emotional situation of the main plot. For Malvolio is a dreamer, after his kind; like Orsino he aspires for the hand of Olivia; and like both Orsino and Olivia he mistakes dreams for realities."\(^32\) It is certainly true that there is something of the dreamer in a steward who is so self-endeared that he supposes himself the object of Olivia's love. Malvolio does not merely aspire for the hand of Olivia; he believes that she has chosen him for her husband. But it can scarcely be said that Orsino and Olivia are dreamers unless by the term we mean persons who by their extravagant posturings reveal utter failure to understand themselves and their relationships with others. Such posturing is perhaps more vulnerable to the comic spirit than dreaming can ever be. What is accurate in Professor Wilson's comment is the notion that Malvolio's comic shortcomings in the subplot are a reflex of Orsino's and Olivia's shortcomings in the main action. Hence Feste's analogous comment, in matter and form, upon the aberrations of those two.

When first confronted with Olivia, Feste proceeds to "catechise" her, to demonstrate in playful fashion that she, instead of himself, is the fool. Her calling him a fool is, he instructs her, "Misprision in the highest degree!" In contrast, he adds, his mistress has been acting foolishly in the excessive show of grief, especially since she believes her brother's soul in heaven: "'The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven.' (I, v, 76-77) This initial comment upon Olivia's folly is followed shortly by another, this one in the form of the clown's first song. Although "O Mistress Mine" is ostensibly sung for the delectation of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, it really concerns Olivia, though of course she is not present while it is sung. But the content, from the first line, "O mistress mine, where are you roaming," to the concluding invitation to love since "Youth's a stuff will not endure," has exclusive application to her, gently reprimanding her careless wasting, in Viola's phrase usurping, her own youth and beauty. The lines are in a sense addressed to Olivia, pointing gently to her folly in refusing love in favor of immoderate sorrow. Furthermore, the song anticipates her eventual capitulation and hints at the strange conjunction into which she will be thrown. For it announces that her "true love's coming / That can sing both high and low." Olivia will fall in love with Cesario-Sebastian, but in the end all will be well.\(^33\)

Likewise the song Feste addresses to the Duke in the following scene serves the purpose of gently mocking his exaggerated sense of his own grief in love, a grief that could find release only in death. Because it expresses his love-melancholy as well as the self-pity occasioned by it Orsino prefers that song over all others. And he calls upon Cesario to heed its lines, little knowing that his page is the one who truly suffers genuine love-grief. In the lines following the song, Feste leaves no doubt as to its comic intention. For he adds to its mockery of the Duke's love melancholy his own direct comment. "Now, the melancholy god protect thee, and
the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal." And he adds the further mocking note that he would have "men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere." The gentle mockery of the Duke's inconstancy is resumed a few lines later when Orsino in conversation with Viola draws a distinction between the strength of his own passion for Olivia and a woman's love.

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.

(II, iv, 96-99)

His insistence on his own steadfast passion in contrast to a woman's incapacity for such love not only anticipates ironically his swift transference of that passion from Olivia to Viola at the conclusion of the play but also points with equal irony to the latter's constancy and devotion throughout. And this difference between Orsino's extravagant protestations and her own reticence is further stressed by Viola in her allusion to her father's fictional daughter who, because of unrequited love,

sat, like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

(ll. 117-18)

To which she adds:

Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more; but
indeed
Our shows are more than will, for still we
prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.

(11. 118-21)

Both in the image of Patience smiling at grief and in the presence of rhyme in the second passage Shakespeare introduces a faint tinge of self-consciousness, perhaps even of self-pity, just sufficient to enrich Viola's attitude toward her dilemma.

VIII

The comic process of *Twelfth Night*, then, presents episodes which are intended to expose and reduce extravagant attitudes on the part of Orsino and Olivia as well as Malvolio. And the function of this comic reduction is carried out in the main by Viola and Feste. But there is a further action dealing with Sebastian, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Fabian. Just as Maria initiates the intrigue against Malvolio, so Sir Toby puts into practice a second intrigue aimed at Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the disguised Viola. But Aguecheek is the main target. Sir Toby's purpose in forcing a duel upon those two is the sheer comedy of exposing Sir Andrew's pretensions to bravery. For some moments there is also the additional effect of Viola's discomfiture, perhaps intended as a comment upon the liability of her disguise. Structurally, the most significant effect of the intrigue is the challenge of the newly arrived Sebastian by Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. And the severe beating they receive at his hands is a kind of censure upon their overindulgence and boisterousness. But far more important, their challenge of Sebastian brings him into the action of the love-triangle so that his reunion with Viola resolves the lovers’ dilemma.
As noted above, the action of *Twelfth Night* presents episodes which expose and reduce attitudes toward love and the related theme of indulgence. That reduction is brought about by direct statement, by the juxtaposition of opposed attitudes, by song. And out of such action there emerges a simple conception of the way to happiness, namely through individual as well as communal integration. That level and sensible way is the way we reach through experience, leading to both self-understanding and a clear awareness of one's role as a social being. And this simple wisdom is precisely the meaning of the song Feste sings at the conclusion of the play.

Most critics have expressed doubts concerning the Among authenticity and dramatic appropriateness of the song. Among the very few who have defended it was A. C. Bradley, who thought it most appropriate to the singer, and even conceded that Shakespeare may have written the concluding stanza. Richmond Noble also defends the song as Shakespearean, a song of wise nonsense, fitting commentary on the events of the play. And he alludes to the following lines by John Weiss which he considers the most sensible interpretation of Feste's concluding song: "Then he sings a song which conveys to us his feeling of the world's impartiality: all things proceed according to law; nobody is humored; people must abide the consequences of their actions, 'for the rain it raineth every day.' A 'little tiny boy' may have his toy; but a man must guard against knavery and thieving: marriage itself cannot be sweetened by swaggering; whoso drinks with 'toss-pots' will get a 'drunken head:' it is a very old world, and began so long ago that no change in its habits can be looked for." This is indeed the general meaning of the song, a crystallization of that simple wisdom to which the comic spirit is always pointing. Such wisdom is a fitting epilogue not only to this particular play but to the series of comedies it brings to a conclusion. Whether in childhood, adulthood, or old age, we find that certain things are constant; they have not changed and we cannot change them. Such changes are really what Orsino and Olivia and others like them would bring about, but in the end they are made to shed their aberrations. The sovereignty of nature asserts itself in Olivia's precipitous falling in love, even as it does in the case of Benedick and Beatrice and the rest. Nor are other pretensions less vulnerable as Malvolio and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew discover. "A great while ago the world began" and its laws, which are but the laws of nature, cannot change to accommodate some strange caprice or posturing. The individual, in these plays the lover, whether romantic or disdainful, must become a part of society, must be integrated into it. But the lover must first achieve an individual fulfillment, an inner integration. How fitting, then, that in the closing song of this last of his romantic comedies Shakespeare should express through the wise fool's seeming nonsense, and in the simplest terms, the comic vision he had been dramatizing during the last decade of the century.

In form *Twelfth Night* represents the ultimate plane to which Shakespeare could raise the structure of his romantic comedy. For here Shakespeare at last achieved a completely independent and fully unified romantic plot, a plot from which he eliminated the kind of external obstacle to love's fruition represented by Don John's machinations in *Much Ado* and by the conflict of the two pairs of brothers in *As You Like It*. Instead, *Twelfth Night* unites the romantic concerns of the two earlier plays, that is, the two aspects of the internal conflict which for a time delays love's fulfillment. It combines the disdain of love, which forms the most absorbing theme of *Much Ado*, with the education of a romantic lover, which is at the center of *As You Like It*. Orlando and Silvius are here replaced by Orsino, while Benedick and Beatrice are replaced by Olivia. And, as was shown above, the two attitudes toward love are related metaphorically by the idea of indulgence which forms the theme of the secondary action. It is, then, in this perfect combination of the two master-themes that *Twelfth Night* may be said to represent the final and near-pure form of Shakespearean romantic comedy. But the play marks also another milestone in Shakespeare's dramatic career. It is the last of his romantic comedies. Having perfected a comic form through which he could reflect his responses to one aspect of human destiny, Shakespeare immediately turned away from romantic comedy and its theme of romantic love and proceeded to give dramatic expression to other responses by means of other modes.

This turn to other dramatic modes is anticipated perhaps in a special quality of *Twelfth Night*. Although it sums up and recapitulates the earlier comedies, the play differs from them in one particular. Its atmosphere, in spite of the play's revelry, is characterized by a reflectiveness which at moments tends towards gravity. This quality of the play is in great part associated with the temperament of Viola and Feste who, though deriving
from earlier creations, prefigure later and greater studies to be placed in the graver air of the tragedies and the romances. Viola's character, though owing a good deal to earlier conceptions, really points to the heroines of the romances, particularly Hermione and Imogen. And Feste, though not unlike Touchstone in his function, is by temperament quite different. His individuality is to be seen especially in a certain quality of apartness which gives him a special perspective and also contributes to a measure of pathos in his relationships with others. In this and in the irony which plays about his name and circumstances Feste anticipates Lear's fool. If Feste's concluding song is by Shakespeare, it may well be that the dramatist thought of him and Lear's fool together, since the latter sings a stanza of the same song in *King Lear*. Indeed it appears that what is needed to draw from Feste the kind of devotion we see in the fool of the later play is a worthy object of such devotion, a great and greatly suffering nature such as Lear's.

In these matters *Twelfth Night* may be said to reflect, albeit distantly, Shakespeare's growing concern with those other aspects of human motive and destiny which were soon to fill the world of the later plays. But *Twelfth Night* is a romantic comedy, bringing to a brilliant conclusion Shakespeare's search for a comic structure which could treat most divertingly and significantly man's relationship to woman. Like its predecessors, and especially the other two "joyous" comedies, it projects a vision of the lovers' ideal, the best possible way to achieve inner as well as outer fulfillment, a unity within and a harmony with the world in which we live. That vision expresses man's longing for a state of being which transcends human limitation, the limitation against which it is here dramatized. And it is precisely in responding to and gratifying that longing by presenting the ideal as achievable that romantic comedy is so deeply satisfying.

**Notes**

1 There are other similarities with earlier plays. Viola's disguise recalls that of Portia and Nerissa, of Jessica and Rosalind. Sir Toby and Aguecheek recall Falstaff and Slender, and the trick played on Malvolio looks back to the trick played on Benedick and Beatrice.


9 Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London, 1961), II, 270-71. For minor details Shakespeare may be indebted to *Gl'Ingannati*, first performed in 1537, which is the ultimate source of all versions, including *Gl'Inganni* (1562) by Nicolò Secchi and Curzio Gonzaga's *Gl'Inganni* (1592). In the Induction to the play there is a Fabio and also a Malevolti, as well as a reference to *la notte di Beffano*, which some believe may have suggested the title of Shakespeare's play. Although *Gl'Ingannati* is closer to Shakespeare's play, it is nevertheless true that Curzio Gonzaga's *Gl'Inganni* gives Cesare (Cesario) as the name of the disguised heroine. In connection with the names of the chief characters it should be noted also that in Emanuel Forde's *Famous History of Parismus* (1598) there is a Viola who is shipwrecked while following her lover in the disguise of a page. See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, II, 363-71. It
has also been proposed that another play by Nicolò Secchi, *L'Interesse,* (c. 1547), may have suggested the duel between Sir Andrew and Viola. See Helen A. Kaufman, "Nicolò Secchi as a Source of *Twelfth Night,*" *SQ* V (1954), 271-80.


11 See Fitzroy Pyle, "*Twelfth Night, King Lear,* and *Arcadia,*" *MLR,* XLIII (1948), 449-55.

12 See Oscar J. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Satire* (New York, 1943), p. 83. See also


14 On the other hand it is perhaps going too far to say that Shakespeare "invented the story of Malvolio, and used it with rare skill as the foundation of the play." Milton Crane, "*Twelfth Night* and Shakespearean Comedy," *SQ* VI (1955), 7. Nor is it quite accurate to call Malvolio "the most comical and most ridiculous character in the play." Sen Gupta, *Shakespearian Comedy* (Oxford, 1950), p. 168. In Shakespearean romantic comedy the most comical characters are misguided or disdainful lovers, or the self-dramatizing lover whose language is fraught with hyperbole and his passion with sentimentality, the lover who believes himself a realist yet who all along responds to love in the romantic manner. The most comical characters in such comedy are the king and his lords in *Love's Labour's Lost,* Benedick and Beatrice, Orlando and Rosalind, Orsino and Olivia.

15 It is interesting to note that his cross-gartered yellow stockings may be intended to show him as a lover and more particularly as a jealous one. See M. Channing Linthicum, "Malvolio's Cross-gartered Yellow Stockings," *MP,* XXV (1927), 87-93; also M. P. Tilley, "Malvolio's Yellow Stockings and Cross Garters," *SAB,* XII (1937), 54-55. Yellow is also the color of the narcissus, that is, a symbol of self-love. See Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night,* p. 98.

16 In his rigidity, his lack of self-awareness, and his obsessive concern with certain proprieties, malvolio approaches the Jonsonian humour character.

17 His *raison d'être* is thus much more significant than might appear on the surface. His role in the play is not, for instance, "so that Shakespeare's lovers may preserve their status free from the nothing-if-not-critical comic scrutiny which would otherwise expose their romantic pretensions to the withering winds of laughter," Melvin Seiden, "Malvolio Reconsidered," *University of Kansas City Review,* XXVII (1961), 106-7. Incidentally, the lovers do not escape comic scrutiny in the play.


19 Something like this takes place during the initial meeting of Touchstone and Jaques, reported by the latter, in which Touchstone tells him precisely what he wants to hear and in the terms he himself would have used.


25 This over-stress on the play's metaphor can be seen in Professor Hollander's suggestion that Orsino's name reflects and defines his nature: "Orsino—the bear, the ravenous and clumsy devourer." *Ibid.*, p. 224.

26 Hollander, "Musica Mundana and Twelfth Night," p. 75.

27 Furnivall, quoted in Furness, *Variorum*, p. 385.


29 J. W. Draper, *The Twelfth Night of Shakespeare's Audience* (Palo Alto, 1950), p. 249. This and other views of Professor Draper have been answered by N. A. Brittin in "The Twelfth Night of Shakespeare and Professor Draper," *SQ*, VII (1956), 211-16.


31 It has been suggested that Feste and Viola "represent the golden mean of temperance, in whom reason and emotion are at poise." Tilley, "The Organic Unity of Twelfth Night," p. 558.


33 Whether written by Shakespeare or borrowed, the song illustrates his ability to endow complex function to music and song, both thematic and structural. For in addition to its obvious thematic meaning the song leads to more riotous singing which in turn brings the protesting Malvolio to the stage. And out of this emerges the conspiracy against him. In spite of this, some critics have failed to see the dramatic relevance of the song and its perfect blending with its context. See for instance L. B. Lathrop, "Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Songs," *MLN*, XXIII (1908), 3; John H. Long, *Shakespeare's Use of Music: A Study of Music and its Performance in the Original Production of Seven Comedies* (Gainesville, Florida, 1955), I, 169. The authenticity of "O Mistress Mine" has been the subject of a long debate, dealing mainly with the relationship of the song in Shakespeare's play to a tune (without words) by the same title in Thomas Morley's *First Booke of Consort Lessons* (1599). Was the song, words and tune, an old one or did Shakespeare compose his own words, and if so did he employ Morley's tune? Did Shakespeare and Morley collaborate? Is there any connection between Shakespeare's song and Morley's tune? See E. Brennecke, Jr., "Shakespeare's Collaboration with Morley," *PMLA*, LIV (1939), 139-49; Sydney Beck, "The Case of 'O Mistress Mine,'" *Renaissance News*, VI (1953), 19-23. Edward H. Fellowes saw no connection between Morley's tune and Shakespeare's song and believed that the dramatist probably rewrote an old song. See Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Use of Song* (London, 1923), p. 82.

34 Capell thought it was either a popular song of the day or it was composed by William Kempe, who, he believed, had played the part of Feste. Furness, *Variorum*, pp. 313-14. H. B. Lathrop considered the song extraneous and not by Shakespeare. "Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Songs," p. 2. L. B. Wright insisted that the song "has no relation to the play." "Extraneous Song in Elizabethan Drama After the Advent of Shakespeare," *SP*, XXIV (1927), 263. John R. Moore thought it might have been an interpolation. "The Songs of the Public Theaters in the Time of Shakespeare," *JEGP*, XXVIII (1929), 182. And John Dover Wilson is convinced that the song was written by Robert Armin. New Cambridge Shakespeare, p. 170. Finally John H. Long follows L. B. Wright and H. B. Lathrop, saying that "there does not seem to be any reason to doubt their conclusions." *Shakespeare's Use of Music*, I, 180.
In the following essay, Preston discusses the important functions of the minor characters in Twelfth Night: complementing prominent characters, maintaining the play's pace, and providing a complex of motivations for the action.

It is pretty well agreed upon that no matter what the central plot of Twelfth Night may be the total effect is musical, or, to make that flat analogy more descriptive, the characters of Twelfth Night, as disparate in function as the different instruments of an orchestra are, play in concert: Sir Toby's bass notes crash in on the lyric qualities established in the first two scenes of the play, only to be answered by Viola and Orsino, the soloists of those scenes, who "play" a duet in scene four. So the arrangement goes; never reaching symphonic heights until the denouement, but developing and introducing aspects of plot and character in short concerti which build to the final total chorus of voices. There are soloists in each scene in the sense that instruments of an orchestra are featured in concerto, but there are few truly soli passages.

The major characters—Orsino, Viola, Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste, Olivia, Malvolio, and Sebastian—could not, by their interweaving of parts, maintain the pace which prevents any character from becoming a Hamlet or Macbeth. If the major figures attempted to accomplish this liveliness without assistance, the dramatic action would be thoroughly confused. The dramatic purpose is served, in keeping with the total musical effect of the play, and the confusion of the Italian novella avoided by the careful use of minor characters.

Unlike Shakespeare's other Italian romance comedies, where the minor characters make up a second or third plot which injects the play with native humor, Twelfth Night already has an Elizabethan plot involving major characters. The importance of the minor figures, then, does not rest in a single section of the play, nor do those characters act together as an example of a class or type. Twelfth Night demands, rather, a number of minor figures, coming from all of society and occurring throughout the play. Some of them fulfill such obvious functions as bringing a letter, performing a service, or announcing an arrival. Others, however, build contrasts, stand in for major players, further the action, or contribute a distinct character. None, even of the members of the first mentioned group, is left without sensible dramatic motivation.

I believe that a careful survey of the minor players of Twelfth Night can display how three common errors in the performance, reading, and criticism of lesser figures in Shakespearian drama may be avoided. The easiest way to deal with minor figures is to indicate their social standing. For many this method seems to be the final word in character analysis; however, a list of social "do's" and "don'ts" coupled with a social rank supplies only a necessary and handy framework for further investigation. The character has yet the dramatic justification of his presence and his lines. More important, especially as a minor figure, he must be related to the structure, themes, action, and major characters of the play.

The other two faults are especially dramatic ones, though the first often asserts itself in reading as well. Minor characters are likely to be skipped over. In reading, their lines seem often to be mere transitional devices, hardly the words of real people. In performance, their presentation is often so flat that they conflict
It is not necessary to prepare a set of director's notes to sketch in such a background of character. Characterization is not a question here, though, at times, it is necessary to indicate a particular rendering of a line, especially if the line is capable of diverse and conflicting deliveries. What can be made, however, is an indication of the role, in the broadest sense of that word, each figure is to play in the drama.

It is perhaps most difficult to deal with the really small members of the cast, for they usually take care of an immediate structural necessity and then disappear or remain silent. Whatever part of the action is moved by their message or appearance only reacts to a purely mechanical convenience, for what they have to say or do is more a total dependence on the demands of the action or a major character than a willful extension of their own reality.

This distinction between minor figures whose character is completely revealed by the immediate dramatic purpose and those whose character is further revealed in the outcome of some action or in their extended relation to other characters may be seen between the two officers who arrest Antonio in Act III.

The First Officer, evidently the superior, is not, as it might seem at first, only an identifier of Antonio and a bystander to the process of arrest:

1st Off. This is the man. Do thy office.
2nd Off. Antonio, I arrest thee at the suit of Count Orsino.
Ant. You do mistake me, sir.
1st Off. No, sir, no jot. I know your favor well,
Though now you have no sea cap on your head.
Take him away. He knows I know him well.
(III. iv. 359-365)\(^1\)

Although, as he later explains to Orsino, the First Officer has fought against Antonio, this functionary now, perhaps due to times of peace or his advancing age, is a municipal officer in Illyria: "What's that to us? The time goes by—away!" And though it is the Second Officer's official duty to perform the actual arrest, the First, probably more familiar with military swiftness of procedure, is the one who finally demands Antonio's cooperation: "The man grows mad. Away with him! Come, come, sir."

Here, and later, when the First Officer tells Orsino of Antonio's crime against Illyria, the dramatic action depends upon and demands a specific individual with knowledge of specific details and events.

The Second Officer, no more than a type, meets only the dramatic necessity of number in handling the rough Antinio.\(^2\) His concern is purely official: "Antonio, I arrest thee at the suit of Count Orsino." Without the First Officer this policeman might prove a poor adversary to the daring seaman. The officers are not, however, guards of Dogberry quality. In spite of Orsino's love-sickness, he has kept an efficient state.
Other characters who suffer the minute demands of dramatic or linguistic necessity are Curio, the Priest, and the Messenger. Curio, however, requires more than the Second Officer, even though the Duke's servant seems to serve the dramatic action less than the policeman does. Indeed, his presence seems purely linguistic; he is a "straight man" to Orsino's pun on "hart". But even though Curio's line seems only to fill this need in the dialogue and supply a transition between Orsino's two speeches, it must be given some dramatic quality or motivation. The Second Officer had a job to do and an obvious motivation. Curio is in a less revealing position; his line, nevertheless, must partake of the same real qualities that the Second Officer's does.

Two possibilities are apparent; perhaps both are there. Aside from providing Orsino with a character to feed him his cue, Shakespeare probably intended Curio's "Will you go hunt, my Lord?" to contrast humorously with Orsino's rhapsodic speech. However, this stylistic purpose cannot be extended to the character. If the pun on "hart" is first Curio's, then he must be allowed an unlikely license with his Duke's serious thoughts. Only a jester (witness Feste's "catechizing" of Olivia) could dare make fun of such emotions in the nobility, and there is nothing in Curio's name, lines, or behavior to indicate that he is the court fool. If he filled such a position, he certainly missed a professional opportunity to make a disparaging remark about Feste, whom he fetches to sing for the Duke.

It is most likely that Curio is a serving man to the Count, older than Valentine, perhaps a follower of Orsino's father. Since Curio is aware that Orsino is more in love with love than he is with Olivia, he suggests the traditional Elizabethan cure for love-melancholia—hunting.³

In spite of the fact that more can be said of Curio than of the Second Officer, the Count's man is really no more than a verbal functionary, and his character, even when infused with dramatic motivation, is no more than a broadly defined type.

Of Valentine, Curio's social counterpart, more can be said. His report to Orsino, though consisting of information he got from Olivia's handmaid, is not framed in language he heard from Maria:

So please my lord, I might not be admitted,
But from her handmaid do return this answer:
The element itself, till seven years' heat,
Shall not behold her face at ample view;
But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine—all this to season
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance.

(I. i. 24-32)

In name and in speech Valentine seems well-suited to the task Orsino has set for him. Unlike Curio, whose character is formulated best by a reference to Elizabethan medical theory, Valentine is best understood in reference to the larger context of the play. He is called upon, as many minor Shakespearian figures are, to explain the first turn of the action: the love Orsino has described in the first lines of the play must go unrequited. Curio, on the other hand, speaks his lines before any plot has developed; his sole obligation is to Orsino's character. Valentine too contributes to the Count's character, but the contribution is by comparison rather than contrast. The love messenger continues the mood of Orsino's first two speeches. Like the Count's love, Olivia's rejection of it, as Valentine chooses to phrase it, is lengthy and descriptive. Furthermore, Valentine's speech, unlike Curio's brief cue, is one of the four poetic units which make up the first scene.
Curio's later lines, delivered when he is sent to summon Feste, tell nothing further about his character. Draper would say, however, that Valentine's gossipy remarks to Viola at the beginning of scene four are significant:

Val. If the Duke continue these favors toward
you, Cesario, you are like to be much
advanced. He hath known you but three
days, and already you are no stranger.

Vio. You either fear his humor or my
negligence that you call in question the
continuance of his love. Is he inconstant,
sir, in his favors?
Val. No, believe me.
(I. iv. 1-8)

Thus Viola takes over Valentine's thankless post. The older servingman is luckily not jealous, and kindly tells "Cesario" that she is like to be "much advanc'd," that Orsino is by nature constant in his favors; and with these felicitations, he seems to drop out of the play as if his task as unsuccessful intermediary had quite exhausted him. His magnanimity to Viola, without apparent motive, makes him seem a bit too good for this wicked world, for very few of us rejoice to be supplanted by others more successful.  

The problem here is that the lines quoted above and by Draper occur at the very beginning of scene four, and nothing has passed to indicate that Viola or anyone else has been chosen to supplant Valentine. By line thirteen the audience knows that Orsino has spoken to Viola of his love for Olivia: "I have unclasped / To thee the book even of my secret soul." But the Count's first speech of the scene was, "Stand you awhile aloof." His words to Viola are private, and when, in line fifteen, he instructs Viola to go to Olivia, there is no reason to assume that this commission had been arranged earlier. The line Draper uses to substantiate the contrast between Viola and Valentine does not occur until half the scene is played out: "She will attend it better in thy youth / Than in a nuncio's of more grave aspect."

Rather than being magnanimous, as Draper would have it, Valentine is only indulging in court talk with Viola. She misunderstands his remark, and, uncertain of her new position, questions Valentine about the constancy of the Count's affections. Viola probably observes in Valentine, as she did in the Captain who brought her to Illyria, a "fair behavior" and thus permits herself to ask the serving man a frank question about his master. Aside from this confidence that Valentine must have inspired in Viola, there is little in this repartee to define his character further.

The minor figures of Olivia's household, except for Fabian, are even less significant than the Duke's serving men. The servant who tells Olivia in Act III that "the young gentleman of the Count Orsino's is returned" is simply a stand-in for Malvolio who is parading on stage with his yellow stockings and ambition. He, as steward, would ordinarily bring such news, as he did at Viola's first arrival. If he were otherwise involved, Maria would serve in that capacity, as she does twice earlier. In this scene, since Malvolio and Maria are both on stage, another servant must be inserted for the announcement.

The Priest who marries Olivia and Sebastian has a little treatise on marriage to deliver when he is asked about Cesario. Perhaps H. B. Charlton is right when he asserts that the main problem in Elizabethan comedy is the fusion of comedy and romance. Shakespeare has on stage an Italian delight: A woman disguised as a man is accused of courting her master's lady; the master is about to inflict a harsh punishment on the mistaken deceiver; she, all the while, loves the misguided master; the lady reveals that a marriage has already taken place; a formidable sea-pirate, whose case has been set aside, is, by association, kept on stage as a reminder of
the real husband. Yet into this excellent comedy of romance Shakespeare chooses to insert a fatuous Priest whose lines could not have been taken seriously:

A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirmed by mutual joindure of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthened by the interchangement of your rings.
And all the ceremony of this compact
Sealed in my function, by my testimony.
Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave
I have traveled but two hours.

(V. i. 159-166)

If the outline of the marriage ceremony does not make the Priest a marked man for a laugh, his notion of reckoning time will.

It is surely a mistake, though, to suggest that the Priest is comic relief for the potentially dangerous situation on stage, for romantic comedy thrives on such situations. The comic irony of differing levels of awareness, misunderstandings, and mistaken identities is the real basis of the romantic comedies. The Priest is an Elizabethan fault. Even in Twelfth Night, Shakespeare's greatest achievement in romance comedy, the dramatist did not pass by the chance to introduce one more genre figure. Instead of relying completely on the comic realization of the romantic plot, Shakespeare chose to add to an already complete situation. This is probably one of the few instances in Shakespeare where obtrusive lines should be delivered as unobtrusively as possible.

Two of the more important minor figures of the play have similar functions. The first duty of the two seamen, Antonio and the Captain who serves Viola, is to show by their attitudes and actions what attractive and likeable young people Viola and Sebastian are.

Viola's friend is agreeable at every turn. He gives Viola hope for Sebastian's safety, describes the situation in Illyria, and agrees to help Viola in her plan to serve the Count. Beyond this agreeableness, however, the Captain's character is something of a puzzle. It is difficult to draw the broad social boundaries necessary for a beginning. While Valentine's speeches show that he is on a plane of sophistication near the Duke's, the Captain's halting, overly-parenthetical speeches contrast sharply with Viola's flowing lines. However, his lines are set in poetic form, and, even though he admits that "what the great ones do the less will prattle of", he is well-informed about the situation in the Illyrian court. It is unlikely that he would knowingly classify himself a prattler. In spite of his halting lines, the Captain, instead of indulging in hearty sea-talk, alludes to court affairs and classical learning.

That he is not an ordinary seaman can be seen further in his gentle pun of Viola's "perchance", his attractive manner, and his ability to introduce Viola into the Illyrian court. Though M. St. Clare Byrne shows that accessibility to the great was unrealistically easy in Shakespeare's plays,⁶ it is difficult to believe that Viola's friend is merely a mechant seaman. Perhaps he, like the First Officer, is a former defender of Illyria and has gained the respect and admiration of the Count through service in war. His readiness to take a "fearfull oath", familiarity with the ways of the sea, and courtly manner all indicate that he might have spent earlier years in the Count's military.

The second seafarer, Antonio, is the most completely developed minor character, though the honor of most useful must be reserved for Fabian. Although Antonio introduces Sebastian and helps reveal his likeable
qualities in the same way the Captain does for Viola in Act I, the rough pirate does not disappear from the action. Perhaps there is some question about his identity, but it need not be so involved as Draper would have it. By narrowly interpreting "breach of the waves", from whence Antonio saved Sebastian, to mean "shore", Draper assumes that Antonio has a house by the sea-side, was not a pirate or a seaman (since the boarding party onto the Tiger would probably have been led by a soldier), and entrusts too much friendship and money to Sebastian to be the "Notable Pyrate" he is called in Shakespeare's text.7

"Breach of the waves" is just as likely a reference to the break between the crests of the waves on the open sea. It is as well unlikely that Antonio, had he been a soldier serving a rival state, would choose not to reimburse Orsino had the government so demanded. He is most likely the commander of a privateer, where, as leader of a group of men necessarily fighters and sailors, he would have led the party that boarded the Tiger. The First Officer indicates that Antonio is a man of the sea: "I know your favor well, / Though now you wear no sea cap on your head." Orsino later explicitly states what Antonio's profession is: "A bawbling vessel he was captain of."

In Antonio's original motivation Shakespeare probably commits one error to gain several advantages. Sebastian directs his course to Orsino's court purely by chance. If a strong friendship had developed between the two men and Antonio sincerely wished to accompany Sebastian, the young man could surely have been persuaded to wander to less dangerous ground. That possibility is, of course, not open to the play, so Shakespeare must formulate Sebastian's hasty farewell and Antonio's decision to follow within the framework of strong friendship, hoping that that theme will dominate and Sebastian's illogical direction will pass unnoticed. Shakespeare uses this weakly motivated passage, however, to strengthen the two most important aspects of Antonio's character—daring and devotion:

I have many enemies in Orsino's Court,
Else would I very shortly see thee there.
But, come what may, I do adore thee so
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.

(II. i. 45-49)

Further corroboration for the likelihood of Antonio's seamanship and devotion comes from the highly suggestive parallel with Viola's Captain of Act I. Both are fatherly, though neither attempts to persuade his young charge to a different course of action. But, unlike the Captain's, Antonio's language is full of references to the sea: He has come far to find Sebastian, but his love "might have drawn one to a longer voyage"; Illyria, like the sea, may prove "rough and unhospitable to a stranger"; Antonio is in danger in Illyria because he has done service "in a sea fight, 'gainst the Count his galleys"; Sebastian, when pulled "from the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth", was, like a ship in peril, "a wreck past hope". Thus in language alone Antonio does more than help define Sebastian's character.

This paradoxically gruff and doting seaman adds a distinct character to the already overflowing lists of Twelfth Night. He views the action from a completely different point of view, providing two excellent scenes of comic irony with Viola. In some sense he knows much less about the immediate situation than do the regular inhabitants of Illyria. On the other hand, his presence in the play is an added note of realistic awareness. At least his confusion involves Sebastian, a real person. All of Illyria, however, has been undermined by the Count's new favorite, "Cesario".8 Antonio brings with him, as well, a note of honesty which imperils his life. All have lied in one way or another; even Viola's Captain is a partner to her disguise, but Antonio is unwilling to assume a mask in a world of pretenders.9

His presence on stage, especially in the last act, substitutes for the absent Sebastian and indicates the probable outcome of the confusion. At the same time his rough character announces the disorder of the final scene.10 In other words, Antonio usurps the world of Twelfth Night as he has usurped the Count's peace. Although his
faith in Sebastian has been shattered, his truthfulness and courage make him a suitable symbol for the strength of the time which will undo the knot Viola has found too difficult to untie.

The man of all work in *Twelfth Night* is Fabian. Although his very presence in the play is questioned, since Maria tells Sir Toby and Sir Andrew to "let the fool make a third", Fabian becomes essential, performing services Feste could not. Fabian is probably the second son of a country gentleman, and, having no place in the inheritance, he seeks his fortune in service. His language is particularly rich in allusions to the country, though occasionally his wit sparkles with a new-learned reference to travel, money, or theater.

Only Hugh Hunt has called Fabian's identity into question. He suggests that the clever servant may be a second fool, younger than Feste and much more circumspect. Hunt says that the actor who played Feste may have enjoyed too many liberties behind Malvolio's back during the letter scene, forcing the actor who did Malvolio to request a less ebullient background for his scene. Indeed, that segment of Feste's character which, especially in song, might be called melancholy would be given added significance if the old fool were about to be replaced by a youthful counterpart.

Like Curio, however, there is nothing in Fabian's name or manner or speech to indicate that he is a professional jester. Sir Toby would not address a fool as "Signior Fabian"; Feste would not call a professional inferior "Master Fabian". It is much safer to assume that Fabian is a well-born servant of the type rendered completely useless in the overstuffed Elizabethan house-hold. His affinity for good times has attracted him to Sir Toby, and the roaring knight no doubt looks on Fabian as a particular favorite. Although Fabian shows he is quick to pun by picking up many cues from Malvolio in the letter scene, he only once indulges in the counter-logical type of argument Feste is so fond of. He "proves" to Sir Andrew that Olivia's favors to Cesario in the orchard were directed subtly at the tall knight. Even this, however seems more like Sir Toby's proof that to be up late is to go to bed early than Feste's involved syllogisms.

Fabian enters the action of the play just in time to relieve the major players of their burden of contrapuntal effect. Only four scenes after the last major player has contributed his introduction to the speed of the play, Fabian appears. As if expecting disappointment or consternation at the absence of Feste, Shakespeare supplies an immediate motivation for Fabian's part in the device against Malvolio: "You know he brought me out o'favor with my lady about a bear-baiting here."

In the scene which follows Fabian restrains Sir Toby and Sir Andrew from giving away the plot and shows himself to be the quickest wit of the three. His role becomes increasingly important, however, when he is seen not only as an accomplice in the plot against Malvolio, but also as a confidante of Sir Toby's in the constant gulling of Sir Andrew. In the fourth scene of Act III Fabian supplies the necessary addition which prevents a simple two-part banter between Belch and Aguecheek. He moves the foolish knight as surely as Sir Toby does, and, since soliloquy is at a minimum in *Twelfth Night*, he allows Sir Toby to tell of his friendship for Sir Andrew: "I have been dear to him, lad, some two thousand strong or so."

In that scene Fabian is in and out, silent and witty as the action demands. He plays a minor role in the encounter with Malvolio but becomes a witty commentator when Sir Toby reads Aguecheek's challenge. In the duel he plays an even more important role, performing the service of "arrangement", a privilege Feste could not have aspired to. Except for the final moments of the play, Fabian is most essential in this scene. He frightens Viola with reports of Sir Andrew's skill and ferocity, warns Sir Toby of the approaching officers, and becomes silent as other minor figures help distribute the action.

Fabian disappears when Feste enters into the trick against Malvolio. Perhaps the Fool was afraid earlier to be outrightly involved in the plot but now enters into the fun when his anonymity as a tormentor seems likely. This almost obvious substitution seems to further validate the necessity for a character of Fabian's social standing in such sequences as the duel. This is hardly necessary, however, if only Feste is to be considered as
a major counterpart to Fabian, for Fabian relieves the necessity for constant reappearance and cross play of the entire range of major figures who infest Olivia's household.

When Fabian returns he is in hot pursuit of Feste, who is carrying Malvolio's letter. In Act V Fabian must become a real part of the background. The stage directions indicate that he is before Olivia's house while Feste jokes with the Count, Antonio is heard, Cesario is accused, the Priest verifies the marriage, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew enter from their disastrous duel. All the while he must remain, like Antonio, an unobtrusive observer. He has wisely avoided the conflict with Sebastian, but he and Feste lead the wounded revellers off. Fabian returns with Feste (after Sebastian has entered and ended the chief masquerade of the play) in time to be present for the unfolding of Malvolio's plight. He reads the letter which Feste refuses to read except, allowing Vox, as a "madman's epistle", and goes off to fetch the imprisoned steward. It is indeed Fabian who knows more about the Malvolio plot than any other person on stage at the end of the drama. Although Feste is happy to disclose himself as Sir Topas, Fabian must tell his mistress the history of Malvolio's downfall. He takes away from any serious tone Malvolio might inject with his "revenge" by explaining that the foolery "may rather pluck on laughter than revenge." Though Orsino is to repeat his taking of Viola ("But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress and his fancy's Queen"), Fabian discloses the last important turn of action in the play: "Maria writ / The letter at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her."

Each of Twelfth Night's minor figures has been carefully employed for rather specific reasons, but the major effects of this conglomeration of individuals are speed and economy. The major characters have not been left alone to indulge in tiring repartee, but the play has never been crowded with unnecessary groups of hangerson. The play has never been invaded meaninglessly as Romeo and Juliet is by the musicians, nor has it been left bare at any time.

Especially noticeable is the fact that the minor characters at the first of the play—the Captain, Curio, and Valentine—perform specific chores and, since the introduction of the major characters is performing the contrapuntal function, disappear or remain unheard. The speed in the first part of the play is almost entirely dependent on the introduction of the long list of major figures which is finally complete at the beginning of Act II. After that, except for the very specific jobs done by the Priest and the Messenger, two more important minor players—Antonio and Fabian—serve as reappearing aids in the pace of the drama. Their significantly different points of view and degrees of awareness produce involvements in the irony, structure, and information of the play.

Even though Antonio and Fabian play more significant parts both as characters and contributors to the action, all the minor figures perform essential services, all the speaking parts can be dramatically justified. Although at times some minor characters fall below the expected Shakespearian mark of characterization or consistency, all contribute vitally to the contrapuntal weaving of people, events, and ideas that is the basis of Twelfth Night.

Notes


3 Draper, p. 165.

4 Draper, p. 165.

Critical interpretations of *Twelfth Night* are notable for the variety of contradictory meanings that their makers attach to the play. The play has been called, among other things, a vindication of romance, a depreciation of romance, a realistic comment on economic security and practical marriage, an account of saturnalian festivity, a "subtle portrayal of the psychology of love," a play about "unrequital in love" because of self-deception, an account of love's wealth, a dramatic account of Epiphany and the gift of Divine Love, a moral comedy about the surfeiting of the appetite so that it "may sicken and so die" and allow "the rebirth of the unencumbered self." Various critics have variously described the chief character in the play to be Malvolio, Viola, Olivia, or even Feste. The complexity of the play is such that each of these opinions is supported by considerable textual evidence. The play is about the vindication of romance and the depreciation of romance, but the romance that is vindicated is that of Viola and Sebastian reunited and chosen by love and not that of Orsino and his selfish, conventional, melancholic seclusion in a bower of flowers. The play does deal with both practicality and prudence—Viola tells us her very practical reasons for joining the duke's household, for example; but the play also shows saturnalian festivity in full sway under Sir Toby Belch, master of the holiday. The play shows Viola's epiphany of love and Toby's surfeit of the appetite—Viola's love fulfilled and Malvolio's love unrequited.

I should like to propose a solution to this puzzle of interpretations: that *Twelfth Night* is a play about opposites and that each of the interpretations above tends to treat just one of a pair of opposites in the play. The primary opposition in the play is the one implicit in the title, *Twelfth Night; or, What You Will*: epiphany and the divine gift of love or earthly appetite, desire, and choice. But as the play's action proceeds, oppositions become much more complicated and subtle than the single one in the title as they grow to include oppositions between characters, between actions, between images, and finally between the present mirth of the play and the continual indiscriminate rain of Feste's concluding song.
The most obvious opposition in the play is that between giving and taking: whether it is better to give or to receive is a question that the play continually poses and answers ambiguously. Viola gives freely, Sebastian takes unhesitantly. Maria gives, Toby takes. Ornino gives, Feste takes. Critics have described very well the giving side of the play, but not very fully at all its opposite—the constant taking of the play. The generosity is obvious: Viola gives freely of her money and herself; she even offers to give her life finally if Ornino will take it. Antonio, until he is captured, gives his money and himself for Sebastian; then he asks for his money back and regrets his generosity. Ornino gives money somewhat generously to the fool, himself very insistently to Olivia; Olivia matches Ornino by taking care to preserve Malvolio even while she forces herself upon Viola. Maria gives sport that delights Toby and deludes Malvolio. Sebastian gives himself to Olivia; Ornino finally gives himself to Viola. Gifts in the play are multiple even though giving is not always generous.

But taking is just as important in the play, and most evident in Feste's constant begging for tips and bribes, although Feste only begs so long as someone is bountiful toward him; he is never very insistent, but is often even hesitant in his pleas: as he says, "I would not have you to think that my desire of having is the sin of covetousness." Just as free from greed—and no beggar at all—is Sebastian in his acceptance of Olivia. Olivia and Ornino, on the other hand, lack full freedom from covetousness, although they covet persons rather than money. Less hesitant and more covetous still are Toby in his attempts to get Andrew's money and horse, Andrew in his attempt to get Olivia, and Malvolio in his conceited assurance that Olivia loves him and that he will soon have power over Toby.

Feste describes in the play a norm for getting what he wills without taking what others would not have him take. He differs from Sebastian in that he does not repay what he gets with a like gift; he differs from the other takers in his lack of covetousness, even though his profession is to beg. He is the generous taker.

The other norm, that of generous giving, is defined by Viola as she gives herself and her services to Ornino, money to the fool, and half her purse to Antonio. The others in the play, with the exception of Sebastian, violate one or both of the norms established by Feste and Viola. Ornino gives himself to Olivia, but he also tries to claim her as Antonio did his ship. Olivia seems to be generous: "What shall you ask of me that I'll deny, / That honour, sav'd, may upon asking give?" Yet she tries to buy Viola-Cesario with a show of wealth. Antonio is extravagant in his generosity toward Sebastian, but he is also a "salt water pirate" and very concerned about his own safety in spite of his hazard of himself. Malvolio's offer of himself is gross conceit; Andrew's is gross foolishness. Maria gives Toby sport but seeks to end Malvolio's freedom. Only Viola consistently gives freely and graciously with no expectation of profit or power; only Feste consistently takes freely and graciously without disturbing another's bounty and without giving himself in return.

The range in the action of the play is suggested by the characterization of Viola and Feste. Viola becomes the embodiment of gracious, nearly divine Twelfth Night giving, Feste of festive Twelfth Night taking. Yet, though they seem to contradict each other, Viola and Feste are more alike than they are unlike, for they share the essential qualities of graciousness, civility, and free disposition; they are both careful not to intrude on someone else's free disposition.

Free disposition in the play involves two things: that one be generous with one's money and one's self where the money and self are freely desired—and that one graciously accept what one is freely offered if to accept the gift does not intrude on the free disposition of giver or recipient. To be simply generous is not enough, for generosity can become terribly selfish if it is imposed on one who does not desire it. Simply to take is likewise not enough, for graciousness requires that one take only what one is freely offered. Viola and Feste demonstrate the right kind of generosity and the right kind of graciousness; Malvolio, on the other hand, neither generous nor gracious, opposes both Feste and Viola. As the characters become more like Viola and Feste and less like Malvolio, they acquire generosity, graciousness, and true civility.
The freedom that Orsino and Olivia finally acquire, freedom to give where the gift is desired, is the true festivity that Feste himself tends to symbolize in the play. Here the distinction is between Feste's true festivity and the belching, oversatisfied, what-shall-wedo-else sport of Toby. There will be cakes and ale to be sure, but cakes and ale are not all that life is. Feste's sport inspires generosity without intruding on free disposition; he begs only as long as one is freely generous, then he allows bounty to sleep a while. Toby on the other hand has no concern whatever for others' freedom. His sport is terribly ungenerous, endangering even Viola—free disposition itself—as well as Andrew and Malvolio. His sport is too indiscriminate, too little inclined to take into account person, time, and circumstances. He, like Falstaff, has too little to do with the time of the day.

A proper attitude toward festivity, the play implies, is one that recommends Feste and his freedom even while it rejects the excess of Toby Belch. But one's choice is not always that simple. Maria, for example, has to choose between Malvolio and Toby: in that case Maria, the embodiment of wit, properly prefers Toby's freedom to Malvolio's self-love; but she recognizes, at the same time, that Toby is out of order. So does the fool he too prefers Toby's attitude to Malvolio's, but he sees Toby for the drunk that he is.

The names of the characters indicate their symbolic qualities. Viola is both musical and free in volition; her counterimage, Malvolio is the embodiment of ill will who intrudes on free disposition. Feste is festive; his counterimage, Belch, is surfeited. Toby Belch, until his marriage to Maria, threatens to replace Twelfth Night's generous festivity with un-civil sport. For what you will to be fully satisfactory, it must be Viola's what you will and not Malvolio's. For the festivity of Twelfth Night to be fully satisfactory, it must be Feste's graciousness, not Toby's rambunctiousness.

The movement of the play is from ill will to true festivity, generosity, and the harmonic feast of marriage and friendship. Sebastian's arrival signifies the approaching success of the characters in arriving at that point, for Sebastian is a compound of Feste and Viola, one who freely gives and just as freely takes. He furnishes the single embodiment of the Twelfth Night spirit that Viola and Feste together define, and the final opposition of the play is the thorough opposition between Sebastian and Malvolio rather than the superficial one between Feste and Viola. Twelfth Night becomes what you will; desire and generosity operate in accord.

The play begins with Orsino's attempt to force himself upon Olivia. Orsino wants an excess of music, as Toby wants an excess of cakes and ale, "that, surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die." Such appetite hardly surfeits itself into correction, however; instead it threatens music, one of Viola's significances:

    for I can sing
    And speak to him in many sorts of music
    That will allow me very worth his service.

Like all false lovers Orsino considers himself like all true lovers, but in his demands on Olivia, his desire for solitude, his selfish submersion in melancholy, he is neither truly loving nor truly generous. While he "prizes not quantity of dirty lands," he demands the immediate surrender of Olivia, "that miracle and queen of gems," and thus shows himself to be more like witless Andrew and ill-willed Malvolio than like Viola.

Viola warns Orsino that Olivia may not wish to accept his gift:

    Duke. I cannot be so answer'd.
    Vio. Sooth, but you must.

Viola sees the threat to free disposition; the duke merely feels his appetite "all as hungry as the sea":

    Make no compare
    Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

The woman is Viola and we do make compare.

The sea which Orsino is "as hungry as" is the sea of love that can either support or devour, but the ships upon it are responsible for its quality; they can support one another or they can prey upon one another. Orsino describes that sea:

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute.

This metaphor of ships sailing on an ocean of love becomes the most important image in the play. The sea begins as the great devouring element that almost drowns Viola and Sebastian when their ship is destroyed in a storm. But their voyage on a sometimes supporting, sometimes devouring sea does not end when they drift ashore from the literal sea, for, safely ashore they begin a dangerous voyage toward a journey's "end in lovers meeting" on a sea of love where they continually encounter pirates and rocks. With the lovers finally together, the salt waves have proved themselves kind, to Viola at least, and the collision that gets the ships together is a fortunate wreck.

Not all ships fall, as the duke complains, into "abatement and low price" The waves threaten worthy vessel and pirate ship alike, but the worthy ships get through on the strength of generosity and graciousness while the pirates either sink or surrender. The sea does devour, but it devours those who trust rotten timbers of self-conceit and greed, who seek profit from the other ships and not at the journey's end. The prime example, of course, is Malvolio, who, in spite of his high self-estimation, loses, even in a minute, his value on the sea. Orsino, in his warlike assault on Olivia, is likewise at first too much the pirate. He sends Viola to board and claim a prize: "Be clamorous, and leap all civil bonds, / Rather than make unprofited return." To demand profit is both uncivil and ungenerous, like the prospects of Malvolio instead of the generosity of Viola. Orsino promises Viola a share in the profits if she succeeds:

Prosper well in this,
And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord,
To call his fortunes thine.

Orsino's promise is fulfilled in a fashion that he does not expect, and not because of any desire for profit on Viola's part.

In spite of Orsino's commission to her, Viola hoists her sail and accosts Olivia with "no overture of war, no taxation of homage; I hold the olive in my hand; my words are as full of peace as matter." Viola woos gently for Orsino, pities Olivia when she loves Cesario instead of Orsino, and finally leaves the whole problem up to time, the larger ocean that includes the sea of love and its coasts.

The difference between the generosity of Viola and Sebastian and that of Orsino is a difference in relationship to the sea of love. Orsino is himself as hungry as the sea, ready to devour Olivia. Viola and Sebastian, on the other hand, are provident and generous and able to survive misfortune on the sea. Viola has been saved by hanging "on our driving boat"; her brother, Sebastian, "most provident in peril" by binding himself (courage and hope both teaching him the practice) "to a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea." When Sebastian lands upon Illyria, and embarks on its sea of love, he proves himself just as provident in peril by binding himself to
Olivia, another strong mast on the sea. Viola, on the other hand, hangs onto her driving boat, Orsino, until the wind calms on the sea and the preservation of Sebastian proves "salt waves fresh in love."

Olivia is not the pirate that Orsino is, but her generosity is hardly Viola's. She refuses to listen to Viola's suit for Orsino:

But would you undertake another suit,  
I had rather hear you to solicit that  
Than music from the spheres.

Viola hopes that "grace and good disposition attend your ladyship!" Such good disposition should be freer than Olivia's is at the moment. That very loss of freedom involves, as it does with Malvolio and Orsino, delusion:

Oli. I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.  
Vio. That you do think you are not what you are.  
Oli. If I think so, I think the same of you.  
Vio. Then think you right: I am not what I am.

In her delusion Olivia is, as she admits, as mad as Malvolio, "if sad and merry madness equal be." As madness is delusion on a sea of love that leads one to become uncivil or ungenerous, Olivia's madness is like Malvolio's; for both she and Malvolio attempt to board and claim a prize. Toby's merry madness, as it leaps the confines of holiday freedom and threatens Viola, becomes likewise piratical. Malvolio's "very midsummer madness" is contagious as long as the ships encourage the sea to devour rather than support the vessels that sail on it.

Love given unsought is good, as Olivia says, but only if it does not compromise the loved one's free disposition. Olivia is neither truly generous nor truly gracious when she forces herself upon Viola-Cesario and even attempts to purchase love: "How shall I feast him? What bestow of him? / For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd." Olivia wishes that Viola "were as I would have you be." That is the problem. What Olivia wills compromises Viola's capability to give freely of herself; the opposition is an improper one between Twelfth Night and what you will, between what is given and what is desired.

Orsino and Olivia are alike; Viola is the opposite. She asks only Olivia's "true love for my master," although she would like to be his bride herself. She refuses even to accept a trip from Olivia: "I am no fee'd post, lady; keep your purse; / My master, not myself, lacks recom pense." Generosity to Viola requires, as it does for Antonio in The Merchant of Venice, the hazard of everything. With Orsino and Olivia, on the other hand, generosity is an uncivil attempt to seize power and profit on the sea of love. They are potentially generous; they indicate that by their treatment of the fool and Malvolio: Olivia would not have Malvolio "miscarry for the half of my dowry"; but until they both learn as Viola tells Olivia that "what is yours to be-stow is not yours to reserve," and learn to beslow it without hope of power or profit where it is freely desired, they will both breathe "thriftless sighs."

While Viola opposes false generosity with true generosity, Feste opposes false festivity with true festivity. Feste takes graciously when Orsino pays him "for thy pains":

Clown. No pains, sir, I take pleasure in singing, sir.
Duke. I'll pay thy pleasure then.

Clown. Truly, sir, and pleasure will be paid,
one time or another.

As Viola tells him, he begs well. Of all the beggars in the play only Feste is capable of inspiring generosity without compromising his free disposition. Orsino and Olivia in contrast are both uncivil in their begging, while Sir Andrew has no manners or civility whatever. Only Feste, both wise and civil enough to play the fool, is able to "observe their mood on whom he jests, / The quality of persons, and the time"; and to practice foolery "full of labor as a wise man's art."

Toby's festivity and piracy lack such labor and wisdom. Where Feste does "care for something," Toby cares for nothing but his own enjoyment and profit, the food for his insatiable appetite. Like witless Andrew, Toby delights in "masques and revels sometimes altogether," because life "consists of eating and drinking":

And. Shall we set about some revels?
Toby. What shall we do else?

Toby's sport is sport, to be sure, holiday madness that gives plenty of matter for a May morning; but his sport is too much lacking in civility—as Maria points out: he has "no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night." Cakes and ale are not enough. Civility, good manners, generosity are as important to the proper sport of life as eating and drinking. That Malvolio points out, although he is too much like Ophelia's preacher who "recks not his own rede": "Mistress Mary, if you priz'd my lady's favor at anything more than contempt, you would not give means for this uncivil rule." Toby's rule is uncivil and ungenerous toward Olivia and Viola; yet he lacks the ill will of Malvolio. Thus Maria, siding with Toby, chooses the lesser of two evils, even though she clearly recognizes Toby's fault.

Toby, however, does not operate alone; his cronies are careless Fabian and witless Andrew. The three together oppose Malvolio; even their excessive festivity may lessen the power of ill will; but their unconfined festivity becomes dangerous when Toby maneuvers his "dear minikin" Andrew into a duel that threatens free disposition and order. To oppose Malvolio, as Maria points out, is necessary; but to dismiss all restraint is not satisfactory. Toby, Fabian, and Andrew lack the moderation, grace, and wit that Feste has. The union between Maria and Toby and the confession of Fabian at the end of the play indicate the movement of Toby and Fabian toward Viola and Feste. Andrew we can do little more with than we can Malvolio: absolute ill will and absolute witlessness are both impossible to reform.

Toby's appetite is excessive and threatens anarchy; Malvolio's is distempered and threatens tyranny. Olivia indicates her potential for clear sight by describing accurately the fault of Malvolio when he calls Feste "a barren rascal": "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for birdbolts that you deem cannon bullets." Malvolio, of all the ships that sail on the sea of love, is most nearly a self-contained pirate: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes." Although he gives credit to Jove, Malvolio knows that he himself deserves full credit for his own success.

Maria, with her "sport royal," makes Malvolio, the "time pleaser," a "common recreation" by playing on his self-conceit that "all that look on him love him." The gulling of Malvolio is comically acceptable because he is ill will itself being downed by the holiday that he would prevent, even though the profit from the gulling is less satisfactory than Viola's final recompense from Orsino. But for the holiday to go further and become anarchy is not comically acceptable. When Toby begins to endanger Viola and Sebastian, he becomes too uncivil. Olivia's criticism is harsh but proper: "Ungracious wretch, / Fit for the mountains and the barbarous caves, / Where manners ne'er were preach'd!" Toby joins Malvolio in disgrace, to be redeemed only by the generous gift of himself to Maria. Malvolio, incapable to the end of such free disposition, remains
unredeemed.

Feste, dressed as Sir Topas the curate, goes to Malvolio in his prison of darkness that symbolizes Malvolio himself and tries to arouse the spirit of holiday generosity in him. He points out to Malvolio that the mind can be its own place if it is free and generous: "I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog." The darkness of the room, like the rain that falls every day, may be penetrated by light and warmth if one generously wills to do so. Feste's insistence that the room is light and bright indicates Feste's ability to will it so; Malvolio's failure to consider it light signifies his ill will.

With ill will comes captivity; with free disposition comes security. In The Comedy of Errors true security, as Luciana says, lies in social bonds; by being bound one becomes truly free, by losing one's self in the ocean one attains the fullest and noblest individuality. The same kind of security is recommended in Twelfth Night: the hazard of self and free acceptance of restrictions. Sebastian finally embodies that combination of Feste and Viola that makes collision on the sea a happy wreck. Safely ashore from the literal sea, Sebastian embarks on a "determinate voyage" of "mere extravagancy." Although Sebastian does not wish to endanger Antonio ("It were a bad recompense for your love"), he does accept with grace Antonio's bounteously offered purse:

I can no other answer make but thanks,  
And thanks; and ever oft good turns  
Are shuffled off with such uncurrent pay.

Sebastian most perfectly of all the characters in the play combines generosity, wit, and civility. He hazards himself, accepts support that he is freely offered, and recognizes, better than Viola, the possibility of delusion: "There's something in't / That is deceivable." He lacks Malvolio's self-conceited ability to think that his own worth is sufficient cause for everyone to love him, but he nevertheless accepts love that is offered:

Oli. Nay, come I prithee. Would thou'dst be  
rul'd by me!  
Seb. Madam, I will.

He will be ruled; he voluntarily disposes himself to follow Olivia. Thus he is not a puppet, as Viola would have been had Olivia had her way, and as Andrew is to Toby. He retains his freedom to bestow himself where he will, chooses to bestow himself where he is desired, and thus forms, with Olivia, who is finally giving herself where she is desired, a free and mutually generous pair.

Antonio, like his namesake in The Merchant of Venice, demonstrates the hazard of self; he follows Sebastian even though great danger is present: "I do adore thee so / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go," "Willing love" and care, "as might have drawn one to a longer voyage," draw him after Sebastian. But Antonio's generosity, unlike Sebastian's, is modified by the fact that Antonio has been a pirate and may be again; he pirated a ship from Orsino:

It might have since been answer'd in repaying  
What we took from them, which for traffic's sake  
Most of our city did. Only myself stood out,  
For which if I be lapsed in this place  
I shall pay dear.

Antonio's generosity, like Olivia's and Orsino's, is not absolute; thus when he is captured he begins to doubt that he should have been generous: "What will you do, now my necessity / Makes me to ask you for my purse?" Since he saved Sebastian from "the rude sea's enrag'd and foamy mouth," he expects Sebastian to
reap his generosity freely. When Sebastian seems ungracious and ungrateful, Antonio begins to fear for his own safety. The point is that safety on the sea from the rain that "raineth every day" requires human generosity, human civility. If people prey upon each other, the sea will accept the wrecks; if they support each other, even the accidents that do happen may be fortunate like the "happy wrack" that occurs in *Twelfth Night*.

Sebastian establishes the proper combination of the qualities of Feste and Viola to allow movement toward that happy wrack; the last-act accomplishes that combination in other characters. The act begins with Feste carrying Malvolio's letter to Olivia. Fabian asks to see it. Without violating generosity, in fact by encouraging generosity, Feste avoids showing the letter:

_Fab._ Now as thou lov'st me, let me see his letter.

_Clown._ Good Master Fabian, grant me another request.

_Fab._ Anything.

_Clown._ Do not desire to see this letter.

_Fab._ This is to give a dog, and in recompense desire my dog again.

But that very return of the dog allows a double generosity without intruding on Feste's free disposition and desire. This interchange effectively emphasizes Feste's ability to inspire generosity in others without giving up his own freedom. Then Feste offers some wise foolishness which the duke rewards:

_Duke._ Thou shalt not be the worse for me, there's gold.

_Clown._ But that it would be double-dealing, sir, I would you could make it another.

The duke gives Feste a second coin. Feste suggests that "the third pays for all":

_Duke._ You can fool no more money out of me at this throw. If you will let your lady know I am here to speak with her, and bring her along with you, it may awake my bounty further.

_Clown._ Marry, sir, lullaby to your bounty till I come again!

… But as you say, sir, let your bounty take a nap, I will awake it anon.

While the duke's bounty is asleep, the sea threatens to devour order and generosity as "blind waves and surges" wash the boats.

Antonio, brought in captive, accuses Viola once again of ingratitude. Then Olivia rejects Orsino's suit before he can speak, and the Duke accuses her of incivility:

_You uncivil lady, To whose ingrate and inauspicious altars My soul the faithfull'st off rings hath breath'd out That e'er devotion tender'd!_
Orsino even threatens to kill Olivia: "a savage jealousy / That sometime savors nobly," and then Viola: "I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love, / To spite a raven's heart within a dove." Viola goes "most jocund, apt, and willingly, / To do you rest." Olivia feels herself beguiled and calls for the priest to confirm her marriage. Toby and Andrew come with broken heads. Finally Sebastian brings the proper combination of giving and taking, freedom and wit, to end the confusion. The duke, finally reawakened to generosity, asks a "share in this most happy wrack" and gives himself where he is desired, thus finally allowing free disposition.

Malvolio is sent for. Olivia offers to bear the cost of a celebration, "here at my house and at my proper cost." Orsino generously and civilly agrees; then he gives Viola his hand and himself—the true generosity. All are generous but Malvolio; even he is given a chance. Fabian freely confesses his and Toby's "device against Malvolio here, / Upon some stubborn and uncourteous parts / We had conceiv'd against him." The confession reaffirms the norm: Fabian is willing to forgive Malvolio; only Malvolio is obdurate in incivility: "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!" Toby, appetite, can be tempered: he has, "in recompense" to Maria, married her; ill will can only be avoided.

The play ends, as Feste foretold, with the ships in harbor and lovers well-met: "Journeys end in lovers meeting, / Every wise man's son doth know"; but it ends too with the awareness that the rain will fall again, as Feste also foretold: "Present mirth hath present laughter" and "Youth's a stuff will not endure." For finally there is Feste's song about the continual rain. We have seen the sunshine, now we see the rain; the final opposition seems to be one between Feste's conclusion and the play that we have just seen; but that opposition is not so abrupt, for the rain has been near throughout the play, in the death of Olivia's brother, in the near loss of Viola and Sebastian, in Feste's songs about life's melancholy, and most importantly in the ill will of Malvolio that appropriately is recognized but not reformed. The difference between this play and the comedies that precede it is finally the difference of Feste's song. The song is a description of the flow of time, of the dark strand in the weave, the dying fall, the deceit of disguise, the loss of the rose of beauty, the rain that raineth every day.

While the play does remain essentially a happy account of Jack getting Jill, the implication is no longer so clear that the man shall get his mare again and all shall be well. Fortunate shipwrecks may occur, but drownings also occur, and the sun that brightly illuminates all Twelfth Night except Malvolio's dark room may be shining through a break in the clouds of storm. It has rained before; it will rain again; one cannot trust in the sunshine, but one can perhaps trust in generosity, grace, and free disposition, in the mind's ability to be its own place, to turn a dark, rainy, devouring ocean into a sunlit kind sea teeming with life.

Twelfth Night lacks much of the substantial security of the earlier comedies; Sir Topas replaces Aemilia; a devouring ocean replaces Arden; the rain partly obscures the feast. Order is possible, to be sure; the comic norm remains; but that order requires more than a walk in the fields or the arrival of Theseus in the woods. The ring that Bassanio must take great care to keep safe has now been replaced by larger relationships. The consequences of fault are not yet tragic; one does not lose Desdemona or Cordelia; one does not even lose the sixteen years, youth, and innocence that Leontes loses. But one does see the rain closing in and the waves rising.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Appearance Vs. Reality

Terence Eagleton (essay date 1967)

At the opening of *Twelfth Night*, Orsino describes his love for Olivia in terms which directly recall some of the paradoxes of language and illusion in other Shakespearian plays:

> O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou!  
> That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
> Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,  
> Of what validity and pitch soe'er,  
> But falls into abatement and low price  
> Even in a minute.

(1, 1)

Orsino's love has the destructively creative quality of the language of Richard II and the *Macbeth* witches, and the illusions of Puck: it absorbs and transforms reality into its own image, levelling its values to its own standard and thus rendering all experience arbitrary and interchangeable. The free-ranging, ocean-like quality of excessive love is the ground of its own negation: its capacity to receive all experience is equally its inability to discriminate between the intrinsic values of particular items. Excessive love, like disembodied or elaborate language, is a self-generating subjectivity detached from physical reality and therefore illusory; like the illusions of Oberon and Richard II it dominates reality, shaping it to its own form and granting it validity only within these terms, negating the experiences from which it draws positive substance. Unrequited, melancholic love intensifies this process: it is self-consuming, as Orsino is pursued and consumed by his own desires. When love, like language and created illusion, ceases to be closely structured by the physical situations which render it intelligible, its relation to these situations becomes paradoxically both parasitic and imperialist: it feeds off a real condition which it simultaneously creates, and can then be seen as an embodied contradiction, a self-cancelling encounter of negative and positive life.

The complex relations of language and reality is a common theme in *Twelfth Night*. Language in the play, as in Gaunt's use of metaphor in *Richard II*, can shape reality creatively, disclosing through linguistic connection a previously obscure truth:

> Viola And what should I do in Illyria?  
> My brother he is in Elysium.  
> Perchance he is not drown'd—what think you, sailors?  
> Captain It is perchance that you yourself were saved.  
> Viola O my poor brother! and so perchance may he be.

(1,2)

The Captain catches up Viola's use of 'perchance' and gives it a slightly different emphasis, which Viola then takes up with a sense of new insight, using the word a second time with both her own original emphasis and the Captain's new meaning in mind.

This creative-exploratory use of language can be contrasted with the verbal fencing of Sir Toby Belch and his companions. In these exchanges language constantly overrides reality, ceaselessly spawning new meanings which grow, not from the substance of an argument, but from previous verbal resonances themselves unrooted in reality. Language detaches itself from reality and takes flight as a self-creating force, controlling rather than articulating the course of a conversation until reality comes to exist almost wholly at a verbal level, only
tenuously connected to actual experience:

Sir Andrew Fair lady, do you think you have fools in hand?
Maria Sir, I have not you by th' hand.
Sir Andrew Marry, but you shall have; and here's my hand.
Maria Now, sir, thought is free. I pray you, bring your hand to the butt'ry bar and let it drink.
Sir Andrew Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?
Maria It's dry, sir.
Sir Andrew Why, I think so; I am not such an ass but I can keep my hand dry. But what's your jest?
Maria A dry jest, sir.
Sir Andrew Are you full of them?
Maria Ay, sir, I have them at my fingers' ends; marry, now I let go of your hand, I am barren.

(1,3)

The progress of this exchange is shaped wholly by verbal resonances, each giving rise to another. The puns and allusions collide, counter-cross and interact rapidly, and one significant element in the word-play is the quick, confusing switches from physical fact to metaphor. Maria converts Aguecheek's metaphor of 'hand' into fact, then unifies fact and metaphor in the image of the hand drinking at the buttery-bar; Aguecheek latches onto the metaphor and is then further confused by Maria's ambivalent use of 'dry' to apply both to her own language and Aguecheek's hand; when Augecheek settles on the first meaning at Maria's instigation, Maria reverts to applying the term to physical fact—his hand—but in a metaphorical way. Maria's language absorbs and appropriates reality for its own purpose, without ever submitting to the contours of fact itself: her speech is an area of free, fluid existence ('thought is free') beyond the rigidities of stable definition, an area within which elements of experience can be endlessly interchanged, combined and devalued to create fresh absurdities and arbitrary connections.¹

Metaphor, then, can operate creatively or destructively: by breaking down the limits of settled definition it can extend one reality into illuminating connection with another; it can also break down defined reality into a purely negative freedom, disclosing insights and relations held at a sheerly verbal level beyond the boundaries of actuality and therefore incapable of interacting with known reality to reveal fresh truth. The breakdown of creative connection at the level of normal discourse is a corollary of this mode of communication:

Sir Toby He's as tall a man as any's in Illyria.
Maria What's that to th' purpose?
Sir Toby Why, he has three thousand ducats a year.

(1,3)

Verbal dexterity is effective only at the level of its own self-generated illusion: brute reality can expose it for what it is, as an elaborate nothing, a substanceless patter:
Sir Toby
Approach, Sir Andrew. Not to be
abed after midnight is to be up betimes; and
'dilucido surgere' thou know'st—
Sir Andrew
Nay, by my troth, I know not; but
I know to be up late is to be up late.
Sir Toby
A false conclusion! I hate it as an
unfill'd can …

(2,2)

For Belch, reality consists in proving contradiction and illusion, and Aguecheek's simple-minded assertion of
the self-evident offends his sensibility. Yet Aguecheek's mode of discourse is paradoxically similar to Belch's:
to affirm that things are what they are, to resist elaboration, is a tautology equivalent in its own realm to the
contradictions which Sir Toby discerns. A tautology is as self-contained and self-created as Belch's own
language: reality itself shares the quality of illusion.

The issue of language and reality emerges directly in Viola's conversation with the Clown in Act 3 Scene 1. The Clown acknowledges himself as a 'corrupter of words':

To see this age! A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side
may be turn'd outward! … I can yield you (no reason) without words, and words are grown so
false I am loath to prove reason with them.

Reason—reality—can be expressed only in language and yet is falsified by language; without language there
can be no reason yet with language there can be none either—to speak or keep silent is equally illusory. The Clown is aware that language and experience are so intertwined that to manipulate words is to distort reality:

Viola … they that dally nicely with words
may quickly make them wanton.
Clown I would, therefore, my sister had had
no name, sir.
Viola Why, man?
Clown Why, sir, her name's a word; and to
dally with that word might make my sister
wanton.

Yet the power of language to shape reality to itself, a power which involves the absorption of reality into
speech, highlights paradoxically the distance of language from reality:

… in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it
would make you invisible.

(3, 1)

Language draws real substance into itself and becomes a self-contained, substitute reality confronting a
nothing—the vacuum left by the reality it has assimilated. Because it confronts nothing, and nothing cannot
be changed, it is impotent to affect it: the Clown's rejection of Viola as nothing cannot in fact make her
invisible.

Before the Clown leaves Viola he manages to extract from her two coins, and the connection of money and
language is significant. The Clown's response to Viola's first coin is to ask for another:
Clown Would not a pair of these have bred, sir?
Viola Yes, being kept together and put to use.
Clown I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus.

The Clown personifies the coins, endowing them with real, generative life, reducing himself simultaneously to a neutral go-between, a mediating element. The relation of money (symbol) to human life (reality) is inverted, as it is in Richard II: the coins, like language, 'breed' by their own independent life, becoming the controlling masters of a human reality which exists as a parasite upon them. Human life is objectivised and inanimate life subjectivised in a single movement, as language, inanimate symbol, sucks life from real human existence and reduces it to a corpse, an inanimate nothing. In both cases, money and language control, and yet cannot control, reality: they dominate and determine it as a superior power, yet since their mode of domination is to absorb reality into themselves, they are merely regulating themselves.  

The duping of Malvolio is a similar instance of the controlling power of language. Malvolio is driven to false and illusory action which he believes real by a language-created illusion—the letter written by Toby and his friends—which has all the force of reality. Malvolio's laborious tracing out of letters, words and meanings is an image of a man falling under the false power of language, viewing language as a completely adequate motivation to action. His behaviour before Viola is purely linguistic and therefore illusory, with no ground in fact: the letter determines and controls his physical existence, as in the text of the letter itself Viola is presented as saying that 'M.O.A.I. doth sway my life', shown as under the power of inanimate strokes of the pen. As a result of the illusion, Malvolio the servant overreaches his role to become a self-created master, as language itself, the servant of human life, becomes its tyrant. The letter which Belch later presses Aguecheek to write, challenging Antonio to a duel, reveals a similar confusion of language and reality:  

Taunt him with the license of ink; if thou thou'st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss; and as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper, although the sheet were big enough for the bed of Ware in England, set 'em down; go about it. Let there be gall enough in thy ink, though thou write with a goose-pen, no matter. About it.

(3,2)  

The interchange here of symbol and reality is parallel to the similar interchange in Maria's puns. The physical yet symbolic act of writing becomes itself a substitute for physical activity, so that metaphor constantly blurs into fact: the greater the physical size of the paper the greater the insults will be, the gall is almost literally in the pen despite the physical fact that the pen may be a goose-pen.  

The illusory, interchangeable quality of language in the play, its capacity to absorb and regulate the substance of human reality, has a direct parallel in the action of the drama itself: in the illusions, switchings and mistakes involved in the adoption of human roles. Throughout the play, roles adopted as conscious illusions backfire and begin to control reality itself, to a point where the frontier of reality and illusion is dangerously obscured. Olivia and Orsino are both 'actors', self-consciously fostering roles of lover and beloved which are objectively false but seen by the actors themselves as real; the roles, like language, actually regulate their owners' physical behaviour, providing them, as in a play, with strictly delimited 'texts', given functions and attitudes, from which their personal action must never deviate. Each character's role depends on the role of the other, in an act of collaborative illusion: Orsino's identity as a rejected lover feeds off Olivia's identity as the cold beloved, and vice versa, in a reciprocal movement of negative and positive creation. Viola is then drawn within this illusion, through her adoption of an illusion of disguise to further her real aim of serving Orsino; she is made to act the part of one actor (Orsino) to another actor (Olivia) in a way which conflicts with her
own genuine identity (her love of Orsino). Viola, like the Clown with his coins, is reduced from real human existence to the status of a neutral mediator between two illusions: in the scene where she presents Orsino's claims to Olivia she operates merely as an embodied verbal message, a metaphor connecting two separate realities. Her role in this scene is to live at a sheerly linguistic level, eliminating her own authentic desires; she is an actor who must confine herself to a given text, with no reality beyond this:

\[
\begin{align*}
Olivia & \text{ Whence came you, sir?} \\
Viola & \text{I can say little more than I have} \\
& \text{studied, and that question's out of my part.}
\end{align*}
\]

(1,5)

When Viola asks to see Olivia's face she is told that she is 'now out of (her) text'; the face which is then shown is equally a defined and static illusion, a 'picture' which can be itemised in mechanical detail, as Viola's set speeches are a similar categorisation of elements.

The consequence of Viola's entering the reciprocal illusion of Orsino and Olivia is the creation in Olivia of a reality—her love for Viola—which breaks beyond the illusion and yet is similarly illusory—she does not know that Viola is a woman. Both Viola and Olivia define themselves and each other in roles which contradict their personal reality, weaving a network of illusion which neither dare break: their conversation is false for each, yet each considers it real for the other. Viola's enforced role as mediator for Orsino is a kind of self-cancellation: she is placed in a 'double-bind' situation where to secure Orsino's love is to further his love for Olivia and therefore destroy his love for herself. Either way she will come to nothing: her original, conscious adoption of the illusion of disguise to win Orsino's love is turned against itself, controlling rather than nourishing her real aims. Viola's own substance of identity is at odds with her role as linguistic mediator in precisely the way that language, in the play, falsifies human reality. Olivia is placed in a similarly impossible position: in rejecting Viola at the level of linguistic mediator she must harm herself by rejecting her also as the 'man' she loves. Since Viola has fully assimilated this personal reality into her assumed role when she confronts Olivia, the language and substance cannot be separated out.

The story of Malvolio brings together similar themes and images into a significant pattern. Malvolio, like Macbeth, overreaches a defined social role at the instigation of inauthentic language and becomes himself inauthentic, illusory: his bid for a higher freedom is a self-enslavement, leading to physical imprisonment in a suffocatingly narrow dungeon which is at once materially cramping and, because pitch dark, a kind of nothingness, an absence of all material experience. By confining himself so strictly to the false role which Sir Toby creates for him, in order finally to overreach and negate it (he obeys 'every point of the letter', as Viola talks precisely within her text), he plunges himself into a prison which is a cynically apt image of his real condition: a space so narrow and enclosed that it is at once positively limiting and, in its darkness, a negation which allows his imagination free and impotent range beyond it. The prison, that is, is simply a grotesque intensification of Malvolio's previous existence, disclosing its deepest reality: his positive and pedantic self-confinement to a narrow social role—brought out in the solid, laborious quality of his language—and the self-negating, overreaching ambition which paradoxically accompanied it, are pressed in prison into caricatures of themselves, and the essential relation of these positive and negative aspects exposed within a single condition. Malvolio falls both below and above the level of true identity: he restricts himself inhumanly to a rigid social role, and simultaneously allows his imagination free and ludicrous range beyond it.

The scene where Sir Toby and the Clown visit Malvolio in his prison brings the confusions of illusion and reality to their highest peak. The Clown disguises himself as a curate, and in doing so exposes four levels of illusion: he is a Clown (and thus, as we shall see later, a kind of illusion) disguised in the illusion of a curate, a role itself often illusory ('I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown'), visiting Malvolio in a prison whose darkness—itself a nothingness—renders the disguise superfluous, doubly unreal. This particular interaction of illusion and reality discloses the nature of the whole situation: Belch and his companions trap
Malvolio in a created illusion aimed to reveal the reality of his character (a reality itself defined by illusory ambition), and then treat the illusion as real, bringing rational criteria to bear on it to torment Malvolio into a further sense of unreality. The Clown refuses to treat Malvolio's answers to his questions as 'real', attributing them to a devil inside the illusory facade of Malvolio's personality, treating Malvolio's physical reality as a disguise for a diabolic (and therefore illusory) reality behind it. Because Sir Toby and the Clown have themselves set, and can control, the terms of the illusory game in which Malvolio is trapped, they can turn any of his answers against him as proofs of his madness, offering a question or remark which he grasps as real and then withdrawing it as illusory:

*Clown* What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?
*Malvolio* That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.
*Clown* What think'st thou of his opinion?
*Malvolio* I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.
*Clown* Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness: thou shalt hold th' opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits.

(4,2)

Malvolio cannot win: whatever answers he advances will be absorbed, neutralised and turned against themselves by the rules of the illusion. It is his word against the Clown's, and because the Clown controls the conventions of the game Malvolio will always lose:

*Malvolio* I am not mad, Sir Topas. I say to you this house is dark.
*Clown* Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance; in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.
*Malvolio* I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell …

Within the framework of an illusion which has carefully excluded real fact, truth is a matter of who can destroy the other linguistically. The Clown frames his questions to create 'double-bind' situations for Malvolio, blocking off certain aspects of reality and loading his language to produce the replies he wants:

But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit?

The possibility that Malvolio is neither mad nor counterfeiting but sane and ill-treated is carefully excluded from the question; whatever Malvolio replies can then be used to his detriment. When Malvolio attempts to prove his sanity by comparison with the Clown's—'I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art'—the Clown, by exploiting the ambiguity of 'fool', as both a social title and a character-description, denies his own sanity and therefore Malvolio's: 'Then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool'.

Illusion, then, both defines a man falsely and negates as false any criterion beyond itself to which appeal can be made: it is a kind of language which, by collapsing and controlling reality within itself, can adjust it endlessly for its own purposes. Illusion and language create a structure whose roles operate to control, not
only the experience within the structure, but any possible experience outside it. By setting up the language and
the illusion in a particular way, all experience is controllable and any assault on the structure can be deflected,
as Malvolio's answers are deflected and distorted. Language, money, illusion, are only parts of reality, but
parts which can encompass and regulate the whole.

Just as, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania, herself an illusion, is trapped by Oberon into the further
illusion of loving Bottom, so in this play Andrew Aguecheek, who helps Belch to ensnare Malvolio, becomes
himself the victim of a Belch-created illusion, when he is induced to duel with Viola. Belch's manipulation of
the duel is a striking instance of illusion creating reality: by mediating illusory information about each other to
Viola and Aguecheek, Belch creates a situation in which each of the duellers thinks himself unwilling and the
other willing to fight. The supposed mediator is in fact the creator and controller of the event: by deluding
each character about the other, Belch can make something from nothing, fashioning a positive—a fight—from
two negatives. By falsely defining each character to the other, Belch induces each to fight under the sway of
this false image; by pretending to take his own created illusion as a real drama in which he is a minor
participant, he produces a positive quarrel which is also a negation, one without cause or substance. In Viola's
case, the illusion of the duel is simply a further illusion into which her original illusion of disguise has led her:
it interlocks with the illusion brought about by the confusion of her with her brother Sebastian. In
Aguecheek's case, the duel serves to expose the disparity evident throughout the play between his language
and action, his real condition and his illusions about it:

… besides that he's a fool, he's a great quarreller; and but that he hath the gift of a coward to
allay the gusts he hath in quarrelling, 'tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have
the gift of a grave.

(1,3)

Aguecheek's language and action are mutually cancelling: he is a contradictory embodiment of language and
action, and the point of the duel is to bring him to recognition of this reality. Sir Toby persuades him first that
language is an adequate substitute for reality:

… so soon as ever thou seest him, draw; and as thou draw'st, swear horrible; for it comes to
pass off that a terrible oath, with a swaggering accent sharply twang'd off, gives manhood
more approbation than ever proof itself would have earn'd him.

(3,4)

By creating this illusion, he can draw Aguecheek into the further falsity of the duel, a real action which
reveals his negativity.

The positions of Belch and the Clown in this general confusion of reality and illusion, false role and language,
are especially significant. Belch refuses all limit, all definition:

*Maria* … you must confine yourself within
the modest limits of order.
*Sir Toby* Confine! I'll confine myself no finer
than I am.

(1,3)

His rejection of definition is a refusal of external limit, of imposed convention; in a play where false versions
of identity are being continually offered, he escapes relatively unscathed, defining others rather than suffering
definition. Yet his rejection of restraint is not made in terms of an absolute freedom to become all, to
appropriate all roles and experiences; it is made simply in terms of a freedom to be himself, to live within his own limits, confining himself to precisely what he is. His presentation in terms of physical sensuality, of the body, underlines this fact: like Falstaff, his overriding of social order springs from an achieved stasis, a bodily fullness which breaks order not by reaching beyond it but by ignoring it in favour of a stolid self-containment, by falling below rather than above it.

The Clown is in some senses the opposite of Belch, in some ways a parallel figure: they are positively related as polarities. The Clown, like Puck, is roleless, a negative, disembodied presence within and yet beyond the conventions of human community, all-licensed and thus a limitless nothing, a merely linguistic mode of existence, fast-talking but inactive. He is beyond community-rules because he questions all codes, all definitions, dissolving them into the paradox and contradiction of his free, fluid speech; yet he is also within the community because this negativity is sanctioned by the social role of Clown. Like Puck, his role is to be roleless; his positive and defined function in society is to criticise all function, all positivity. Olivia's rebuke to Malvolio, whom the Clown's wit offends, suggests the degree to which the fooling is sanctioned:

There is no slander in an allow'd fool, though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove.

(1,5)

The emphasis here is on 'allow'd' and 'known': once it is recognised that the fool's formal function is to rail—that he draws positive identity from this negativity—he can be tolerated: his social role both lends him defined reality and, by containing his wit, neutralises it to the level of play, of illusion. The Clown is himself aware of this process, as his ambivalent use of the word 'fool' signifies. As we have seen already in his taunting of Malvolio, the Clown creates paradox by using the word in two senses, as professional occupation and character-judgement:

Olivia Take the fool away.
Clown Do you not hear, fellows? Take away
the lady … The lady bade take away the
fool; therefore, I say again, take her away.                                            (1,5)

The Clown goes on to justify 'fool' as a judgement on Olivia, thus validating his reversal of her command. He dissolves the defined status of 'fool'—the social meaning—into the reality of human foolishness, thus showing the social status to be illusory—he, the Fool, has wisely revealed foolishness in what seemed reality—and therefore ironically exposing his own (illusory) role as more real than reality itself.

The truth implicit in his word-play is that to be a Clown is to be simultaneously real and illusory, positive and negative. The Clown is a 'corrupter of words' and as such the supreme focus of society's unreality, reflecting it back to them: he is thus both more real than others, disclosing what is ultimately true of them, and less real, since his own foolery is the function of an arbitrary social role before it is a genuine personal characteristic. He exists in so far as he is 'allow'd', as Fool, by society, given a social function which, because the negation of all function, is self-cancelling and illusory. Yet he is more real than others because consciously a fool, adopting this negative role with grim and positive realism:

Those wits that think they have (wit) do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man.

(1,5)

Viola recognises this truth also:
This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit …
This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art;
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

(3,1)

The Clown is therefore more real than Orsino and Olivia, who are fools without knowing it; he is a good actor who, like Viola herself, consciously adopts an illusory role and remains undeceived by his own acting. The Fool is thus wiser than the fool: the more of a fool he is, the better Fool he makes and thus the less foolish he becomes, the more he fulfils a particular, settled definition without overreaching it into absurdity. The greater his clowning, and thus his illusion, the more real a man he becomes. The Clown, unlike Macbeth and Malvolio, can combine a complete social definition with complete freedom: total linguistic liberty is the constitutive element of his sanctioned role. He fuses the self-containment of Olivia and Orsino with the self-squandering liberty of Sir Toby Belch, achieving that synthesis which is implicit in the ideal (rather than, in this play, the reality) of the steward, who preserves and dispenses in careful balance. The Clown's sanity—his reality—springs from the fact that he fulfils a settled role consistently, and it is the lack of such consistency in the play as a whole which suggests that illusion and insanity are general conditions. Consistent role-playing allows conjunction and communication, a reciprocal confirmation of identity and thus of sanity; inconsistent role-playing creates insanity, unreality, as the general confusion of identities at the end of the play suggests. In this situation, the Clown's ironic self-awareness, his insight into the confusion, is a negative mode of sanity.

In the whole action of the play, then, illusion, role and language connect into a single pattern. The switching and interchange of human roles is a kind of living pun and metaphor, a blurring of the symbols through which reality is expressed in a way which casts radical doubt on the consistency of that reality. Hamlet's advice to the Players, to suit the action to the word and the word to the action, cannot be sustained: language overwhelms and manipulates action, draining reality until it finds itself in danger of collapsing into nothing under the weight of its own excess. If language is in this sense articulate unreality, social role shares the same quality: they, too, define reality falsely, detaching themselves from the real purposes they were fashioned to sustain into a self-contained realm of illusion where they set up relations between themselves in isolation from real experience, thwarting and obscuring it. The final irony, as in A Midsummer Night's Dream, is that this whole process occurs within a play which is itself, as the subtitle suggests, a kind of illusion, a momentary sport; when Fabian remarks that he would condemn Malvolio's behaviour as 'an improbable fiction' if he were to see it on stage, the play pauses to reflect on its own illusory nature, becoming for a moment less real than the characters it presents. When Viola confronts Olivia with Orsino's love, the effect, once the illusion of the whole play is held in mind, is one of an overlapping series of un-realities: Viola, an actor playing an actor playing an actor, presents the case of one actor playing an actor to another actor playing an actor. The relations of illusion and reality touch a peak of complexity which is equalled only later, in some of the mature tragedies.

Notes

1 c.f. Falstaff in Henry IV Part II: 'A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity.' (1, 22).

2 c.f. the Clown's own connection between language and money when he remarks that words have been disgraced by bonds. C.f. also the quarrel between Antonio and Sebastian in Act 3 Scene 4, which is created and controlled by money: the purse which Antonio gave to Sebastian as a symbol of trust and friendship.
becomes humanly divisive, as (from Antonio's mistaken viewpoint) the 'purse-bearer', the servant, becomes
the master, overstepping his role.

3 This interchange of animate and inanimate occurs in several minor images in the play. Physical objects are
themselves symbolic—they have meaning, like signs, only in terms of what they do—but can be endowed
with a constant human existence: Belch wishes that his boots should 'hang themselves in their own straps' (1, 3), Malvolio,
at the moment he is endowing the symbolic shapes of written language with life, begs leave of
the wax of the letter for breaking it.

4 c.f. also the exchange between Fabian and the Clown, Act 5 Scene 1:

   Fabian Now, as thouo lov'st me, let me see
      his letter.
   Clown Good Master Fabian, grant me another
      request.
   Fabian Anything.
   Clown Do not desire to see this letter.
   Fabian This is to give a dog, and in
      recompense desire my dog again.

The Clown frames his remark so that Fabian cancels out his own request: Fabian's generosity is turned against
itself, by the Clown's verbal dexterity.

5 c.f. the Clown, Act 5 Scene 1: 'Marry, sir, (my friends) praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell
me plainly I am an ass; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am
abused; so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why then, (I
am) the worse for my friends and the better for my foes.' Negative criticism induces by negation positive
self-awareness.

Walter N. King (essay date 1968)

SOURCE: "Shakespeare and Parmenides: Metaphysics of Twelfth Night," in Studies in English Literature,

[In the following excerpt, King focuses on the character of Feste, comparing his ambiguous comments to
those made by the sixth-century Greek philosopher Parmenides regarding "what is " and "what is not. "]

Recurrent themes are by now such a recognized feature of Shakespearian drama that we are perhaps in danger
of underrating them. And when one begins to reconsider Shakespeare's use of the most recurrent theme of
them all, the contrast between the ideal and the real (between what the mind comprehends discursively or
intuitively and what it apprehends by means of the senses), this caveat seems especially apropos. For everyone
knows that Shakespeare manipulates this theme in play after play throughout his career, and it all begins to
seem tediously old hat. One recollects the casket scene in The Merchant of Venice, the mirror scene in
Richard II, and Falstaff's homily on honor in / Henry IV. One thinks of Hamlet's bitter awareness of the
discrepancy between what ought to be and what is (or appears to be), and of Lear's anguished realization that
the ethics of quality (what ought to be) must not be confused with any plausible ethics of quantity (what
appears to be or may be in a material sense). And one recalls the obvious differences between appearance and
reality in the comedies, differences that ultimately take on the resonance of symbols: the mistaken identities in
The Comedy of Errors, the costume and sex disguise of Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and the
misunderstandings that crop up in Much Ado About Nothing because at crucial moments different characters
fail to see or hear distinctly.
Now a metaphysical view of things is at least implicit in all these scenes and situations, a metaphysic that is easier to get at, if not easy to define in any definitive way, in the tragedies. Lear, for instance, asks Edgar at a focal point in the play, "What is the cause of thunder?" (III.iv.160)—a question that remains unanswered, but implies a metaphysical force, or being, or what you will, that is responsible for both the physical and the moral universe. And Hamlet can return to the traditional Christian view that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" and that "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.10, 230-231). Even Coriolanus perceives at last that "nature" cannot be denied or made other than it is and that no man is "author of himself (V.iii.25, 36).

But in which of the comedies are the metaphysical aspects of Shakespeare's near obsession with the antithesis between appearance and reality explored with any acuity? Perhaps in As You Like It, where the kaleidoscopic shifts from one possible center of values to another and the modification of values as episode comments upon preceding episode suggest a possible relativistic view of human experience. Or perhaps in Much Ado, where in the church scene the difference between what seems to be and what is receives a steady analytical treatment. But more profoundly in Twelfth Night with its riddling sub-title, What You Will, and its holiday atmosphere that prompts commonsensical discrimination between the worlds of moral order and misrule, between the excess traditionally permissible to the Christmas season and the relaxed return to decorum with the arrival of Epiphany. In no other comedy of Shakespeare is delusion, self-induced or attributable to blameless misapprehension, so central, and in no other comedy is attention so consistently directed toward the ambiguities that play between "what is" and "what is not."

Yet even if this be so, what character in Twelfth Night is reflective enough to grapple with the contradictions inherent in the relationship of "seeming" to "being?" Viola will not do. Though intelligent enough to be attracted to the professional raillery of Feste, she is too much a part of the illusion that characterizes Illyria and too dependent upon the "whirligig of time" and its revenges to probe very far beneath the surface. There is only Feste, the one figure in all the comedies with a true gift for Socratic irony, and Socratic enough to know that he knows nothing: "Those wits that think they have thee [i.e., wit] do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man" (I.v.36-38). And it is Feste who reappears as the Fool in Lear and sings another stanza to the nostalgic song, that elusive blend of sense and nonsense, with which Twelfth Night dissolves into conclusion.

But is there really a Shakespearian metaphysic for comedy, and can Feste actually be its spokesman? And doesn't the mere suggestion that there might be one trigger the warning that whatever Shakespeare's comedies are about, they are not dramatizations of philosophical systems? Are they not, as representative critics insist, just exuberant expressions of the here and now, of the saturnalian claims of life, of love and its fulfillment? Shakespeare is, of course, extolling all these things; hence the difficulty of interpreting the comedies by means of any one critical standard. But it may be that by seeking some broad conceptual base we can discover a critical stance that permits us to do justice to at least the major comedies as a group—to their joyous acceptance of life and love, their social satire, their low comedy characters who are always more than mere clowns, their poignant songs that are always more than mere embellishments to the action, and their breathless cascades of wit that are surely something more than mere witticisms. What fashions these disparate elements into obvious comic wholes if it is not some philosophic vision pervasive through them all, something which Shakespeare was gradually coming to understand during the 1590's? And if there is such a vision—skeptics will assert at once that there is not—might it not be discoverable in Twelfth Night, the one comedy in which everyone agrees that Shakespeare recombines into a subtler, almost perfect whole everything (plot devices, character types, themes) to be found in more diluted combinations in the earlier comedies?

By its very nature the search I am undertaking in this essay will lead far into the critical area called by John Russell Brown that of the "implicit judgment." For what I am suggesting is that through Feste Shakespeare is concerning himself in a teasing, yet finally serious way with the ontological postulates affirmed by Parmenides in his insistence upon the irreconcilable difference between "what is" and "what is not," and is
implying a somewhat whimsical, but nevertheless penetrating criticism of it. Whether Shakespeare had any knowledge of the fragments of Parmenides's poem, Nature, I shall defer till the end of this essay, meanwhile citing and commenting upon the curious parallels between several of Feste's most cryptic statements and their counterparts in Parmenides.

I approach this possibility primarily in the spirit of play, on the assumption that without damaging the judgment we can, like equilibrists, balance these parallels against each other for a while and speculate about whether by means of them a rounded interpretation of Twelfth Night might not be possible. And if by this means light can be shed upon odd corners of the play usually bypassed by critics, it may then be profitable to turn to the historical issue—could Shakespeare have known anything about Parmenides, and if so, what?—and debate it tranquilly. And then could we not conclude, if only tentatively, that there is a metaphysical basis for Shakespearian comedy—even if Shakespeare had no knowledge of Parmenides whatsoever?

II

Of all Feste's ambiguous comments, three seem to me to be tinged with something I tend to call Parmenidean:

1. The most elusive (usually dismissed as nonsense by editors if they annotate it at all) occurs immediately prior to Feste's masquerade as Sir Topas, the curate: "for, as the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink, very wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc, 'That that is is'; so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is 'that' but that, and 'is' but is?"

   (IV.ii.14-19)

   ♦ Almost as puzzling is the second, which occurs when Feste confuses Sebastian for Cesario and exclaims: "No, I do not know you; nor I am not sent to you by my lady, to bid you come speak with her; nor your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither. Nothing that is so is so"

   (IV.i.5-9)

   ♦ The third occurs somewhat earlier, when to Viola's joshing comment that he is "a merry fellow and car'st for nothing," Feste replies: "Not so, sir; I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible" (III.i.30-35). And a few lines later Feste declares: "I am indeed not her [Olivia's] fool, but her corrupter of words"

   (III.i.40-41)

When we place these passages, especially the first two, against one of the key passages from the first part of the body of Parmenides's poem, often called the Way of Truth, we find an odd correspondence:

Come now and I will tell thee—listen and lay my word to heart—the only ways of inquiry that are to be thought of: one, that [That which is] is, and it is impossible for it not to be, is the Way of Persuasion, for Persuasion attends on Truth.

Another, that It is not, and must needs not be—this I tell thee is a path that is utterly undiscernible: for thou couldst not know that which is not—for that is impossible—nor utter it.

For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.
What can be spoken of and thought must be: for it is possible for it to be, but it is not possible for "nothing" to be. These things I bid thee ponder; for this is the first Way of inquiry from which I hold thee back.\(^7\)

The verbal parallels should be obvious between Feste's "that that is is" and Parmenides's "[That which is] is" in the first verse-paragraph; though perhaps I should state flatly that Feste's second comment, "Nothing that is so is so" I see as parallel to Parmenides's assertions in the second and fourth verse-paragraphs that not-being, or nothing, cannot be known. These assertions are also relevant to Feste's insistence in the third comment that he does care for "something"—"something" (left undefined) being balanced against "nothing" and "invisible."

But it is one thing to point out corresponding passages and another to interpret them; and since Parmenides's poem is not always immediately comprehensible to lay readers, it may not be amiss to quote at some length from F. M. Cornford's interpretation:

This first way of untruth directly contradicts the Way of Truth. The starting-point of the true Way is: That which is is, and cannot not-be. The starting-point of this false way is: That which is, is not, and must not-be, or It is possible for 'nothing' to be. Here is a flat contradiction; one or other of the starting-points must be completely dismissed before we can advance a step in any direction. The goddess accordingly condemns the false Way as 'utterly undiscernible': a Way starting from nonentity lies in total darkness and cannot be followed to any conclusions whatsoever....

No advance can be made from the premise that all that exists was once in a state of non-existence, or that nonentity can exist.... Thought cannot pursue such a Way at all; there is no being for thought to think of or for language to describe significantly. This impassible Way may be called, for distinction, the Way of Notbeing. It is dismissed, once for all, in the above fragments.\(^8\)

In short, Parmenides is drawing an absolute distinction between an intelligible world ("that which is, is") comprehensible to the mind and therefore called the Way of Truth, and its opposite ("that which is, is not"), totally incomprehensible to the mind and therefore logically absurd.

"But," Parmenides continues,

secondly (I hold thee back) from the Way whereon mortals who know nothing wander, two-headed; for perplexity guides the wandering thought in their breasts, and they are borne along, both deaf and blind, bemused, as undiscerning hordes, who have determined to believe that it is and it is not, the same and not the same, and for whom there is a way of all things that turns back upon itself.

For never shall this be proved; that things that are not are; but do thou hold back thy thought from this Way of inquiry, nor let custom that comes of much experience force thee to cast along this Way an aimless eye and a droning ear and tongue, but judge by reasoning the much-debated proof I utter.\(^9\)

Cornford's explanation:

I have called this second way of untruth the 'Way of Seeming' ... because 'opinions' or 'beliefs' is too narrow a rendering. 'What seems to mortals' ... includes (a) what seems real or appears to the senses; (b) what seems true, what all men, misled by the senses, believe and the dogmas taught by philosophers and poets on the same basis; and (c) what has seemed right to
men,… the decision they have 'laid down' to recognize appearances and the beliefs founded on mem in the conventional institution of language.…

Parmenides means that all men—common men and philosophers alike—are agreed to believe in the reality of the world our senses seem to show us. The premise they start from is neither the recognition of the One Being only (from which follows the Way of Truth and nothing more) nor the recognition of an original state of sheer nothingness (which would lead to the impassable Way of Not-being). What mortals do in fact accept as real and ultimate is a world of diversity, in which things 'both are and are not,' passing from non-existence to existence and back again in becoming and perishing, and from being this ('the same') to being something else ('not the same') in change.10

Whatever these passages from Parmenides and Cornford may lead to, it should at least be clear that Feste's ambiguous statements, cited earlier, ought not to be brushed aside as mere nonsense. Here we have, tucked into contexts tricked out as the usual pattern of the professional stage fool, statements that apparently do more than echo Parmenides (as we shall see shortly). And they are just the sort of metaphysical statements suitable to a play whose plot depends upon the confusions generated by self-deception, physical and psychological disguise, and mistaken identity—confusions that gradually become worse confounded until the shrewder characters begin to make sharp distinctions between "what is" and "what appears to be." But the critical problem itself is initially one of tone. Is Shakespeare mocking philosophical hair-splitting, or is he getting down to substantial metaphysical assumptions by adopting an oblique approach calculated not to disrupt the genial comic mood that pervades every scene? Or to put the question another way, is Feste in the most literal sense only a "corrupter of words," a clever professional entertainer acquainted only by hearsay with the philosophical slogans and catchwords of the age?

Persuasive answers to these questions depend upon the meanings implicit in Feste's statements and the degree to which they illuminate major themes. First: "'That that is is'; so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is 'that' but that, and 'is' but is?" On the simplest level Feste is suggesting here the difference between what is indubitably real and what only appears to be so. Though dressed as Sir Topas, he is not really Sir Topas, either to Maria, Sir Toby, or himself, since all three know his real identity. Nevertheless he is "really" Sir Topas to Malvolio as long as he can play the role imaginatively enough for Malvolio to accept him as such. And this Malvolio does, partly because he cannot see Feste, partly because he is too confused, owing to the imputation of madness, to penetrate Feste's vocal disguise, and partly because, owing to delusions about himself (his own reality), he is incapable of recognizing reality of any sort. But the problem is more complex than this. There is the provocative possibility, as Feste hints, that so long as one plays a role to perfection, one is the role one plays: the mask one assumes can become oneself. But in this case "that" (one's former self) is no longer "that," but has become "this" (one's present self), so that "is" may not necessarily always be "is." Contrary to Parmenides's conviction, "the same" may not be easily distinguishable even on purely logical grounds from "not the same." And so appearance seems to possess some measure of reality.

But as Feste knows very well, he is not Master Parson. He is himself, a concrete entity that unquestionably is and about whom he can think clearly so long as he avoids self-delusion and is on guard against possible false appraisals of what is real. Such mistakes are common enough unless one evaluates sensory data according to rigorous logical standards. For though the effort to determine what "that that is" actually "is" may lead to bewilderment, nevertheless "that that is." In sum, Shakespeare through Feste is suggesting obliquely both the strength of Parmenides's metaphysics, the need for absolute definition of the real; and its weakness, Parmenides's failure to credit the world of sensible objects with any reality whatsoever.

In addition, Feste is implicitly exposing the ambiguity of basing a metaphysic upon the meaning of the verb "to be." Unhappily, "to be" has three general meanings that breed confusion of thought by their tendency to elide into each other. (1) Identification—i.e., Feste can be named and thus is knowable in Parmenides's terms.
The existential—i.e., Feste "is," or has being, and so is again available to cognition. And (3) the copulative—i.e., Feste is equivalent to himself, yet paradoxically can assert, "so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson." But as the ensuing scene with Malvolio demonstrates, all three definitions point to involvement in the world of sensible, as well as of intelligible data, so that appearance cannot always be readily differentiated from reality (as Plato revealed to the disadvantage of Parmenides's system).11

The ambiguity implicit in "to be" is even more glaring in Feste's mistaken identification of Sebastian for Cesario: "No, I do not know you; nor I am not sent to you by my lady, to bid you come speak with her; nor your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither. Nothing that is so is so." Here Feste's position is reversed from what it is in the preceding instance. Not in control of all the facts, he is obliged like Malvolio to rely upon sensory impressions for the determination of what is real. Yet he has two advantages over Malvolio. He need not doubt his own sanity, nor is he suffering from self-delusion. It is noticeable that he depends, if only negatively, upon the meaning of "to be" as identification ("nor your name is not Master Cesario") and as the existential ("nor this is not my nose neither"). Sight is misleading him, but touch and his full awareness of his own body are not. He can therefore conclude, both logically and illogically (as well as ironically), that "nothing that is so is so." He can argue correctly by analogy that if his nose is still his nose, Cesario must still be Cesario (and can thus be named), not somebody else—and yet incorrectly, since Sebastian is not Cesario.

Furthermore, Feste's "nothing that is so is so" is curiously reminiscent of Parmenides's (1) "It is not, and must needs not be" (explicated by Cornford as "That which is, is not, and must not-be"), and (2) Parmenides's "it is and it is not, the same and not the same." Feste, then, in his confusion, yet in his certainty that he is right, is unwittingly undermining, we might say, the very keystone of Parmenides's metaphysic. By relying upon sensory evidence and past experience, the only raw materials for cognition he now possesses, Feste is pursuing the Way of Seeming; and to the degree that this Way supports his sound conclusion that his nose is his nose, the weakness of Parmenides's proposition that the Way of Seeming is a totally false way is strongly implied. But to the degree that sensory evidence and past experience lead Feste, however naturally, to a false conclusion, Parmenides's dogmatic dismissal of the Way of Seeming and his equally dogmatic insistence upon the Way of Truth as the only true way are affirmed.12 "That that is is." Sebastian is plainly something, not nothing; yet just as plainly neither sensory evidence alone nor sound logic will ever lead to defining or naming correctly what and who he is. The unreliability of sensory data is further emphasized in the immediate and similar misapprehension of Sebastian's identity by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian, so that Sebastian begins to question the sanity of everyone in Illyria: "Are all the people mad?" (V.i.29)—a copulative use of "to be."

On the other hand, the conclusion is implied that nothing can come from nothing, a solidly Parmenidean doctrine. Thus it can be assumed that when Feste informs Viola he does "care for something," in reply to her good-natured assertion that he is a "merry fellow and car'st for nothing," he means what he says. What that something is can be conjectured after the remainder of his reply has been interpreted: "but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible." Kittredge's gloss seems only a good try: "to care for something is the same as not to care for nothing; then perhaps the fact that I do not care for you makes you equivalent to nothing; and, in that case, I wish you might be actually nothing, and so—invisible."13 In the light of Parmenides's views upon nothing, a considerably more acute interpretation is possible.

To quote again from Cornford's analysis of the second passage from Parmenides: "No advance can be made from the premise that all that exists was once in a state of non-existence, or that nonentity can exist.... Thought cannot pursue such a Way at all; there is no being for thought to think of or for language to describe significantly."14 Feste's rejoinder to Viola (phrased conditionally, be it noted) seems, then, to imply the Parmenidean doctrine of the non-existence of nothing and the consequent existence of something. To care for nothing would be tantamount to believing that nothing "is," and this would be a palpable absurdity. In such a
case, Viola would indeed be invisible, just as is nothing. It would be impossible to think or say anything about Viola that would make logical sense. Feste would then be, what he knows he is not, a "corrupter of words."

But to care for something is to possess values, to be engaged in ethical measurements—to care for what is true. And this means to care for what is real, since, though in an ontological sense reality can be limited only to "what is," in an ethical sense it can be extended to cover "what ought to be" or "what is best," as Plato very well understood. When Feste insists that he does care for something, he means in all likelihood that he cares for reality in both these senses. What that something is, is the sum total of "what is" and "what ought to be" disclosed in the comic vision of life that is the play, and this vision is implied in Feste's ironic criticism of the false values of the various deluded characters. But this is to move from metaphysics to ethics, which Parmenides was scrupulous not to do, but which Shakespeare as a comic dramatist could not have avoided doing, had he been minded to.

III

Earlier I posed questions to which specific answers may now be offered. Let me repeat the questions here. "Is Shakespeare mocking philosophical hair-splitting, or is he getting down to substantial metaphysical assumptions by adopting an oblique approach calculated not to disrupt the genial comic mood that pervades every scene? Or to put the question another way, is Feste in the most literal sense only a 'corrupter of words,' a clever professional entertainer acquainted only by hearsay with the philosophical slogans and catch-words of the age?"

That Feste is not corrupting words, contrary to his own assertion, is evident throughout. Indeed, he implies broadly that the inhabitants of Illyria are the real corrupters of words. Early in the play he warns his auditors (and so us): "I wear not motley in my brain" (I.v.63); and midway in the play he points out the danger of mistaking words for things. (1) "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn'd outward!" (III.i.13-15) (2) "But indeed words are very rascals since bonds disgrac'd them" (III.i.24-25). And (3) "Words are grown so false that I am loath to prove reason with them" (III.i.29-30). Are we not, then, committed to the working assumption that Feste's words are rich with implications, especially when he speaks most cryptically? For to be cryptic is not necessarily to be verbally corrupt.

It seems equally implausible to believe, after absorbing the range of implications in Feste's three "Parmenidean" statements, that Shakespeare's intention was to mock philosophical hair-splitting. Leaving aside the fact that this kind of mockery supplies only a limited comic mileage, one can remind one-self that all great comedy has for its raison d'être the exposure of the difference between "what is" and "what appears to be," both being balanced, however gingerly, against "what ought to be." That this touchy contrast and balance are fundamental to all Shakespearian comedy no one would deny. Is it, then, unreasonable to assume that in the substratum of his maturest comedy, the one immediately preceding the great tragedies, Shakespeare was speculating upon the nature of reality and dramatizing how difficult it is to be certain of any type of reality? Furthermore, the parallels with Parmenides are too pronounced (still leaving aside the historical problem) to be ignored. One is at least driven to wonder where Shakespeare came upon the most telling phrase of Eleatic philosophy, "that that is is," and why he placed it in Feste's dialogue just at the point in the play where appearance and reality are being thoroughly confused by all the characters, and even by Feste. One cannot assume that Shakespeare, by this time an accomplished dramatist, would have thrust in this puzzling statement only for obscurantist reasons or only because it was part of the verbal rag-tag of the 1590's, as of course it may have been. Lastly, the metaphysical issues I have been sketching in permeate the entire play.

It has never been commented upon, to my knowledge, that Twelfth Night is very liberally sprinkled with questions. Numbering slightly over 300, their greatest incidence is in those scenes in which misunderstandings grounded in self-delusion or mistaken identity are most prevalent. A fair number of questions simply promote plot movement or comic gags, but an impressively high total have to do with
identification and motive—with what is materially and non-materi ally real. In fact, the characteristic questions turn upon the verbs "to be" and "to will" (i.e., to want, desire, or intend), as in Olivia's pointed questioning of Viola: "What are you? What would you?" (I.v.228-229).

Shakespeare's iteration of this kind of questioning reaches into every cranny of the play and every question devolves upon the proposition, "that that is is," or upon modifications of it. Hence, though cataloguing is a weariness to the critical soul, I shall give typical examples in this and the following paragraph, which readers are at liberty to skip or skim. In I.ii, Viola asks about Orsino and Olivia: "What is his name?" (26) and "What's she?" (35). In I.iii, Sir Toby asks about the detractors of Sir Andrew: "Who are they?" (37). In I.v, Olivia asks about Cesario, before Viola's entrance: "What kind o' man is he?" (159); "What manner of man?" (161); "Of what personage and years is he?" (164); and to Viola: "Are you a comedian?" (194); and "What is your parentage?" (296)—all of them questions dealing with identification. In this same scene Viola begs Olivia to remove her veil, a typical Shakespearian symbol of appearance masking reality. In II.iii, Malvolio asks Feste, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby: "My masters, are you mad? or what are you? Have you not wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? … Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?" (93-99). To which Sir Toby replies: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (122-125), and later with respect to Malvolio he asks Maria: "What, for being a Puritan?" (155). And in II.v, Malvolio's soliloquy upon the identity of the intended recipient of the forged letter, supposedly written by Olivia, is entirely consonant with the implied self-questioning: "Am I he?"

In III.i, Viola asks Feste: "Art thou a churchman?" (4); "Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?" (36); and Olivia bluntly asks Viola: "What is your name?" (107). And when Olivia hints: "I would you were as I would have you be!" Viola asks in return: "Would it be better, madam, than I am?" (154-155). In III.iv, Olivia asks Malvolio a series of questions about his ludicrous behavior, among them: "Why, how dost thou, man? What is the matter with thee?" (26-27); "Why dost thou smile so, and kiss thy hand so oft?" (35-36); to which Maria adds: "Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness before my lady?" (40-41). Somewhat later Viola inquires about Sir Andrew: "What is he?" (256) and "What manner of man is he?" (288-289). Later yet Antonio is asked by Sir Toby: "Why, what are you?" (346). In IV.i, Sebastian wonders: "Are all the people mad?" (29) and shortly demands of Sir Toby: "What wouldst thou now?" (44). In IV.ii, all the questions Feste asks Malvolio concern the "is" and "is not" of his madness and culminate in: "But tell me true, are you not mad indeed? or do you but counterfeit?" (121-123). And in Act V the crucial questions follow the same pattern until mistakes have been rectified, true identities and motives have been confessed, and the need for such questions has disappeared.

The relevance of these questions to Feste's "that that is is" and "nothing that is so is so" hardly requires comment. Throughout the play one character after another attempts to ascertain the reality of other characters: their identity, their intentions, their beingness—so that disguise and mistaken identity are not mechanical plot devices, as in the early comedies, but are symbolic figurations of the metaphysical problems of "seeming" and "being." The difference between inner and outer, already symbolized in the caskets in The Merchant of Venice, is developed in Twelfth Night to apply fully to the "knot intrinsicate" of human personality and the difficulty of defining or describing it accurately, all of which is revealed in the various forms of self-deception of Orsino, Olivia, Malvolio, and Sir Andrew, and of the bafflement consequent upon the mask of appearance worn by many of the characters.

Viola's estimate of the Captain's character is an apt summary of the metaphysical and ethical situation: "And though that nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee / I will believe thou hast a mind that suits / With this thy fair and outward character" (I.ii.48-51). Indeed, the image of the beauteous wall incorporates both Parmenides's Way of Truth and Way of Seeming and makes concrete the ease with which "what appears" may be mistaken for "what is." Orsino and Olivia, handsome without, are sentimental within. Equally absurd discrepancies between "seeming" and "being" are burlesqued in the degraded gentility of Sir
Andrew and the social climbing of Malvolio. And in time the image of the wall is applied to Viola herself, when upbraided by Antonio in words that echo her own judgment of the Captain (III.iv.400-404).  

This image works its way through the play submerged in turns of phrase, often paradoxical, that bear down hard upon Feste's "that that is is." In I.v, Viola tells Olivia: "I am not that I play" (196-197); and "I see you what you are" (269). In II.ii, Viola's "as I am man" and "as I am woman" (37 and 39) further the ambiguity, along with Orsino's egotistical observation in II.iv: "For such as I am all true lovers are" (17). In II.v, Malvolio is ironically hidden in the forged letter "to insure thyself to what thou are like to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh" (160-162); and in III.i, Feste remarks to Viola: "Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin" (63-64). In the same scene Viola informs Olivia: "That you do think you are not what you are" (151) and "I am not what I am" (153). In III.iv, Sir Andrew addresses Viola in his insane letter of challenge: "Youth, whatsoever thou art, thou art but a scurvy fellow" (161-162); and in V.i, Olivia begs Viola, mistaking her for Sebastian: "Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art / As great as that thou fear'st" (152-153).

This long sequence of interrogative, declarative, and imperative statements hinging on "to be" and "to will" heads up in Orsino's amazed reaction to the sight of Viola and Sebastian in Act V: "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons! / A natural perspective, that is and is not!" (223-224). Here the Way of Truth ("that that is is") and the Way of Seeming or Not-Being merge in as subtle a criticism of Parmenides's metaphysics as Plato's more elaborate study of it in the Parmenides and the Sophist. "[That which is] is, and it is impossible for it not to be" appears less contradictory to "It is not, and must needs not be" (and to Parmenides's contempt for the "undiscerning hordes, who have determined to believe that it is and it is not, the same and not the same") than Parmenides had supposed. Whether Orsino's ironic echoing of Parmenides be deliberate or not, it is surely significant in any summing up of Shakespeare's own thinking. For it now appears that "what is" and "what is not" are not by necessity mutually exclusive, however illogical this conclusion seemed to Parmenides.

But seemingly illogical conclusions need not be frightening so long as one faces squarely the possibility of deception and of lack of pertinent information, as Sebastian does in his soliloquy in III.iv. Here for the first time a character employs human reason as an instrument for probing beneath appearances. By carefully testing the reality of his situation through controlled analysis of the information provided by his senses of sight and touch, he concludes that his dream-like relationship with Olivia is not delusion. "For though my soul disputes well with my sense / That this may be some error, but no madness," he is still "ready to distrust mine eyes / And wrangle with my reason" on the supposition that either he or Olivia might be mad (III.iv.9-16). Percept is mingling here with concept, which is to say that either without the other has pronounced limitations.

Thus Shakespeare's conclusion appears to be that to reach trustworthy conclusions about "seeming" and "being," neither logic alone (Parmenides's Way of Truth) nor thoughtless faith in the senses (Parmenides's Way of Seeming) are entirely reliable. They can be either singly or mutually misleading. In a play as steeped in deception and self-deception as Twelfth Night such a conclusion is, of course, rich in implications, especially when extended into value judgments. For just as "seeming" and "being" need to be distinguished between in matters of identification and of existential and copulative relationships, so too must they be distinguished between when one is evaluating love and the legitimate and illegitimate claims of pleasure and of moral principle (the overt themes of the play).

But this is not to say that reliance upon logical thought and sensory perception should not be employed to the full, nor that, to weigh the scales again in Parmenides's favor, "that that is, is not." Viola turns out to be Viola, not Cesario: "that that is is." And so we can conclude with Feste, in the final song that touches upon every theme of the play, that "what you will" and "what is" mutually limit each other, owing to the nature of things and to human fallibility, though "what you will" and "what is" are both capable of a fair degree of descriptive
But did Shakespeare have any knowledge of Parmenides (a problem inevitably linked with his possible knowledge of Platonism)? And if not, or if we cannot be sure, does this fact militate against the metaphysical interpretation of *Twelfth Night* offered in this essay?

That Shakespeare had any direct acquaintance with Parmenides seems improbable. But that in the sixteenth century it would have been impossible to learn anything about Parmenides is simply not so. One must bear in mind that the fragments of Parmenides's poem survived for the most part in two sources; (1) the poem is quoted in full by Sextus Empiricus in his *Against the Logicians* and to this quotation he added a commentary; and (2) the major fragments from the body of the poem were preserved by Simplicius in his commentary on the *Physics* and the *de Caelo* of Aristotle. That Both Sextus and Simplicius were available to those who cared is certain (Sextus, in particular, in the Latin translation of Henri Estienne, Paris, 1562), though it is not easy or always possible to plot out with any certainty the spread of pre-Socratic philosophy during the Renaissance. We do know, for instance, that soon after his return from Italy, Thomas Linacre translated the commentary of Simplicius on the *Physics*, but did not publish it; and we do know that some of the fragments of Parmenides were published in his *Poesis Philosophica* by Henri Estienne (Geneva, 1573) along with some doxography from Plato, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Clement, and Proclus. But no one could have learned much from this collection, nor is there much likelihood that Shakespeare ever saw it. It is also true that prior to 1573 J. C. Scaliger had gathered together the verse of Parmenides and Empedocles, but his manuscript was not published. In point of fact, no complete or even semi-complete edition of the fragments appeared until late in the eighteenth century.

A possible Shakespearian source for information about Parmenides might have been Giordano Bruno, whose English sojourn extended from 1582 to 1585, and whose London circle included John Florio, Sir Philip Sidney (who alludes to Parmenides, as well as to Thales, Empedocles, Pythagoras, and Phocylides in the fourth paragraph of "The Defense of Poesy"), and Sir Fulke Greville. Two of Bruno's Italian works are dedicated to Sidney, and Greville appears as host in Bruno's *Ash Wednesday Supper*. Bruno apparently also knew Sir Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, later first Earl of Dorset, and perhaps Gabriel Harvey, who certainly knew about Bruno. It has even been suggested by Benedetto Croce that Berowne in *Love's Labor's Lost* is a portrait of Bruno himself. That Bruno greatly admired the pre-Socratic philosophers there can be no doubt. Writes Dorothea Waley Singer: "Among many passages we may recall from the *De Immenso* Bruno's magnificent lines proclaiming that the potentiality of all parts is in the whole and in each ("All things are in all"). This is the real basis of his view of the Identity of Opposites, and he fortifies himself with the support of such names as Anaxagoras, Anaximenes and 'the divine Parmenides,' as well as of Plato's *Timaeus* and the neoplatonists." But be this as it may, such allusions to the works of Bruno in Shakespeare's plays as have been alleged are far from convincing, nor can one accept without considerable skepticism the parallels, suggested by Frances A. Yates, between Italians living in London in the 1590's and some of the characters in *Love's Labor's Lost*. On the whole, it seems fairly improbable that Shakespeare could have learned much about Parmenides via Bruno.

Of all the possible sources the most plausible appears to be the brief account of Parmenides in Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Latin translations of which were well-thumbed during the Renaissance. Here Shakespeare could have learned that Parmenides divided his philosophy into two parts dealing the one with truth, the other with opinion. Hence he somewhere says: Thou must needs learn all things, as well the unshakeable heart of well-rounded truth as the opinions of mortals in which there is no sure trust.... He made reason the standard and pronounced sensations to be inexact. At all events his words are: And
let not long-practiced wont force thee to treat this path, to be governed by an aimless eye, and echoing ear and a tongue, but do thou with understanding bring the much-contested issue to decision.30

Here we have a good thumb-nail sketch of the conventional Renaissance view of Parmenides's metaphysics and his method, but even if Shakespeare had read it and had noted any of the other unelightening references to Parmenides scattered through the Lives, he would not have found Feste's "that that is is."

Were it certain that Shakespeare's acquaintance with Plato came directly from the dialogues, it might be conjectured that his source for Feste's phrase was either the Parmenides or the Sophist, in the Latin translation of Ficino, widely read in the Renaissance, wherein Parmenides's postulates are rigorously examined; or in the Theaetetus, the Symposium, or the Euthydemus, wherein Parmenides is either alluded to by name or certain of his doctrines, such as the non-existence of nothing, are briefly mentioned. But no investigator of Shakespeare's learning has ever claimed that his knowledge of Plato was either scholarly or extensive. On the other hand, so authoritative a student of Greek philosophy as John Burnet has argued that in Lorenzo's rhapsodic lines upon the music of the spheres in The Merchant of Venice (V.i.59-65) "Shakespeare has given us the finest interpretation in any language of one of the central doctrines of Greek philosophy"—that the soul, imprisoned in the body, cannot hear the harmonies produced by the motion of celestial bodies—as stated in the Timaeus.31 Burnet contends that Shakespeare's classical attainments were more considerable than are supposed and that he "was able to disentangle the essential meaning of the Pythagorean doctrines preserved in that dialogue [the Timaeus'], though these were only known to him through a very distorted tradition."32 This tradition Burnet traces with great care in order to support his belief that by the fifteenth century the principal ideas of the Timaeus were everybody's property, and that Shakespeare's knowledge of Plato came to him through a long line of sources whose fountainhead was the early medieval School of Chartres.33 "It is certain, at any rate, that there was a vast mass of floating traditional lore, of Pythagorean and Platonic origin, in the England of Shakespeare's youth, and that he was just the man to be influenced by it."34

My own impression is that the best, and probably the only, case to be made for Shakespeare's possible knowledge of Parmenides is the kind Burnet makes for his knowledge of Plato and Pythagoras. (One should not forget that Feste "tests Malvolio's madness by quizzing him about Pythagoras's theory of metempsychosis"—IV.i.55-65) When such scrupulous scholars as J. S. Smart, J. A. K. Thomson and T. W. Baldwin hesitate to claim much for Shakespeare's Latinity and classical learning,35 it would be pointless to argue that Shakespeare possessed scholarly knowledge of Parmenides, especially when such knowledge was not widespread in his own age. All one can do is measure the degree of his knowledge against a representative text, as Burnet did with respect to the Timaeus. If such measurement leads to a more intensive reading of Twelfth Night, or to considerable portions of it, then one can suspect rather strongly that somewhere behind the play stands, mirabile dictu, the figure of Parmenides.

Certainly the postulate (and conclusion too, since Parmenides's thought is finally circular), "that that is is," is not original with Shakespeare. Just as certainly, so far as can now be known, it was original with Parmenides. And just as certainly the phrase is not meaningless jargon. Therefore it has meaning when Feste speaks it. Where Shakespeare found it I frankly do not know, nor do I know how we can find out for certain now. On the other hand, dangerous though it may be, we should not be afraid to assume that Shakespeare, like many other Renaissance writers with well stocked minds, had a broader knowledge about many things than scrupulous scholarly researchers can pin down precisely. The possibility is strong that "that that is is" had for some time been current as part of the stock phraseology of the age and was used commonly in certain contexts by the formally educated Elizabethan. I can imagine, then, that Shakespeare might have picked it up by ear and perhaps might never have associated it with any philosopher known to him. But that he would not have wondered what the phrase means, would not have worried it over in his own mind, would not have been attracted to it because of its succinctness and its cryptic quality I cannot imagine. Whatever kind of mind Shakespeare had, we can be certain that it was an inquisitive one, one given to intense speculative habits.36
Consequently I cannot believe that he put this curious phrase into Feste's mouth fortuitously just when deception of every sort is most rampant in the play and when plot complications are maximal. By the time Shakespeare was writing *Twelfth Night* he was not composing plays by reliance only upon inspiration, and this play is one of Shakespeare's most intricately planned achievements. "That that is is" fits too snugly into the total pattern of the play to be only a lucky hit.

Indeed, once its full meaning is understood and applied back to puzzling passages in the play, everything in it begins to respond resonantly—so that one becomes convinced that the play has a metaphysical substratum. This resonance does not destroy, but rather harmonizes with and enhances the play's Twelfth Night gaiety and its curiously reserved, almost sad, yet always sympathetic feeling for the nature and quality of love, of moral order, and of human *joie de vivre*. These things have their own reality and their own appearances, neither precisely like those defined by Parmenides, nor yet precisely unlike them. Love both is and appears to be; so like-wise with moral order and joy in being alive. Failure to perceive this ambiguity, which is fundamental to man's experience, leads to the folly of Orsino and Olivia, of Malvolio, and of the revelers who comprise Sir Toby's social intimates. For folly may be defined as failure to perceive the true nature of people, events, values, things, or as incapacity to separate words from things.

And so it can be argued that something like a Parmenidean metaphysics, with its Platonic qualifications, is singularly appropriate as a foundation for a metaphysic of Shakespearian comedy. The rigid simplicity of "that that is is" obliges us, as it apparently obliged Shakespeare, to speculate rigorously about what is permanent in a world of constant flux. This, too, is one of the obligations of the writer of comedy, plus the sensitivity not to draw too rigid distinctions. (I am not implying, of course, that Shakespeare had not speculated on the relationship of appearance to reality until he wrote *Twelfth Night*. His thinking on this issue began very early in his career and came to a rapid, but immature head in *The Rape of Lucrece*.) It is noteworthy that in *Twelfth Night* rigid distinctions are not drawn, yet neither are they blurred out. Rather, they are faced up to, and a process is covertly suggested whereby human beings, limited by nature, may intelligently face up to them; hence the iteration of characteristic questions and paradoxical answers that embrace both the sensible and the intelligible worlds.

Moreover, through understanding clearly the meaning of "that that is is," we can better understand Shakespeare's enormous advance in *Twelfth Night* as a craftsman: his movement away from the implausible use in the early comedies of conventional theatrical disguises, mistaken identities and the like into a more plausible use of them in the mature comedies (where misuse of the senses, especially of sight and hearing, become crucial), and finally into the fully symbolic use of disguise and mistaken identity in Edgar, for instance, in *King Lear*. And it is Lear far more even than Hamlet who struggles toward the rockbottom meaning of "that that is is" and learns through experiences of horrifying actuality the fallacy of Parmenides's doctrinaire belief that "nothing can come from nothing."

It ought not, then, to be considered heavy-handed or straw-clutching to seek out a metaphysic for *Twelfth Night* by way of Parmenides, even if, as may be the case, Shakespeare had no knowledge of Parmenides whatsoever. By juxtaposing this merriest, yet saddest of all Shakespeare's comedies against the rigors of Parmenidean thought, we can at least make use of a basic tool for thinking clearly about "seeming" and "being," a tool Shakespeare made use of, whether he understood its place in the history of ideas or not. It was a tool that Plato himself was happy to employ, though in time he forged a better one by developing Socratic dialectic. So also did Shakespeare. For the dialectic of speech and action typical of *Twelfth Night* prepared the way for the dialectic of thought and action Shakespeare developed as far as he could in the great tragedies that were on the horizon.

**Notes**

1 Citations from any of Shakespeare's plays refer to the Kittredge *Complete Works* (Boston, 1936).


6 *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (London, 1957), chap. I.

7 Citations from Parmenides are from the translation by Francis MacDonald Cornford of those fragments upon which he comments in *Plato and Parmenides* (New York, 1939)—in this instance, pp. 30-31.

8 Cornford's commentary, pp. 31-32.

9 Cornford's translation, p. 32.

10 Cornford's commentary, pp. 32-33.

11 The complexities inherent in such a differentiation are explored in the *Theaetetus* and in the two dialogues in which Plato submits the philosophy of Parmenides to rigorous dialectic, the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*.

12 See Plato's criticisms of Parmenides's metaphysics in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*.


14 Cornford's commentary, p. 31.

15 See especially Feste's subtle criticism of Orsino (II.iv.75-81). I cannot accept L. G. Salingar's interpretation of Feste as a skeptical moralist who finds a sanctuary in fantasies of pure nonsense: "what he sees at the bottom of the well is 'nothing.'" ("The Design of *Twelfth Night," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, IX [Spring, 1958], 136.) Salingar's analysis of all the overt themes of the play is, however, acute and persuasive.

16 I am assuming, of course, that metaphysics and ethics cannot be rigidly separated. What is real in an ethical sense is real only to the degree that behind it is an ontological reality of some sort.

17 Altogether there are 314 questions: 92 in Act I; 67 in II; 76 in III; 26 in IV; and 51 in V. The greatest incidence occurs in I.iii.—32; I.v.—46; II.iii.—29; II.v.—21; III.i.—13; III.iv.—53; IV.ii.—15; and V.i.—51; i.e. in the eight crucial scenes out of the total eighteen.

18 See Summers, *passim*.

19 Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.
   In nature there's no blemish but the mind;
   None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind.
   Virtue is beauty; but the beauteous evil
   Are empty trunks, o'erflourish'd by the devil."

20 On the epistemological level *Twelfth Night* is not provocative. There is considerable iteration of forms of "to know," but questions and answers dealing with how one knows are too few to admit of a theory of
knowledge.

21 Plato argues somewhat similarly in the *Sophist*. See A. E. Taylor, *Plato, the Man and His Work*, 6th ed. (London, 1949), p. 389: "When we say that something 'is not so-and-so,' by the not-being here asserted we do not mean the 'opposite' … of what is but only something different from what is. 'A is not X' does not mean that A is nothing at all, but only that it is something other than anything which is X…. We may say, then, that 'not-being' is as real and has as definite a character as being. This is our answer to Parmenides. We have not merely succeeded in doing what he forbade, asserting significantly that 'what is not, is': we have actually discovered what it is. It is 'the different.' … It is childishly easy to see that any thing is different from other things and so may be said to be 'what is not'; the true difficulty is to determine the precise limits of the identity and difference to be found among things….


26 Francis Riaux, p. 2.


28 Singer, pp. 84-85.


30 See the Loeb ed., trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950), 11, 431. Sextus Empiricus in his commentary on Parmenides says much the same thing. See footnote 22.


32 A *Book of Homage to Shakespeare*. It is generally believed, however, that Shakespeare's specific knowledge of Pythagoras came from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV.

33 Burnet, pp. 59-60. See also an even more comprehensive survey than that in "Shakespeare and Greek Philosophy."

34 Burnet, "Shakespeare and Greek Philosophy," p. 60.

35 See J. S. Smart, *Shakespeare, Truth and Tradition* (London, 1928); J. A. K. Thomson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (London, 1952); and T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Less Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana, 1944). All these scholars agree that Shakespeare read no Greek; that his reading knowledge of Latin was sufficient to allow him to read Ovid in the original, though he appears to have read Golding's translation
of the *Metamorphoses* through preference; and that his classical knowledge, though extensive in many ways, could not be called scholarly by Renaissance standards.

35 Inasmuch as the approach to source studies employed in this essay will undoubtedly produce anguished reactions in some quarters, it may not be amiss to quote a somewhat similar defense, written by J. B. Leishman in support of his conviction that Shakespeare must have had a fair knowledge of Horace: "Was Shakespeare familiar with Horace's Odes? I can see no way of proving that he was, but on the other hand, it seems to me almost incredible that he should not have been. Almost all other great poets have learnt from their predecessors, either by way of a progressively un-imitative imitation, or simply through an ever-renewed awareness of the infinite possibilities of expression and of what great poetry could and ought to be; but it seems to be generally assumed that, except for a few translations, Shakespeare, when he read at all, read chiefly almanacks, Fat Stock Prices, and whatever may have been the Elizabethan equivalent of a financial weekly. What I find so incredible about this is the lack of curiosity it presupposes.... No doubt the fact that he could write like Aeschylus without ever, perhaps, having even heard the name of Aeschylus, makes it not impossible to suppose that he could write like Horace without ever having read him. On the other hand, we cannot assume that Shakespeare had not read him simply because we cannot produce from his poems and plays such immediately recognisable imitations of variations of Horatian phrases and passages as we can produce from Petrarch or Ronsard or Ben Jonson." ([*Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets*](https://www.loc.gov/item/61010074/), p. 36.)

**Helene Moglen (essay date 1973)**


*In this essay, Moglen postulates a set of Freudian psychological theses that underlie Shakespeare's portrayal of disguised characters in Twelfth Night."

Mistaken identity and sex disguise are familiar, rather hackneyed devices used with some regularity in romantic comedy. Critics of *Twelfth Night* have taken these conventions for granted and have been content simply to describe their use in the articulation of plot and character. Surprisingly little allowance has been made for the possibility that Shakespeare might have defined quite differently, at different points in his career, the varying functions of devices as rich in implication as these. Because critics of the play have largely ignored the psychological premises of romance, they have not understood that Shakespeare, in the comic romances of this period, reinterpreted conventional techniques and incorporated them into an apparent theory of the development of personal and therefore sexual identity. It will be the purpose of this essay to indicate the ways in which these psychological premises are fundamental to the treatment of theme and character in *Twelfth Night,* basic to the relation of plot to subplot, and strikingly similar to major aspects of Freud's own theory of psycho-sexual development.

Illyria is a world of the dreaming mind: landscaped by wishes and fears, peopled by fragments of the self. Illyria is a world of symbols in which the face must be traced in the mask and the appearance is more real than reality. Here the dreaming heroes and heroines (Orsino, Sebastian, Olivia, Viola) explore the secrets of their own identities. The object of their quest is love: to recapture the unconscious unity of childhood in the integration of the self with another.

But Illyria is also a real world: comic and absurd. Here self-indulgence replaces self-involvement and hypocrisy is the primary disguise. The comic heroes (Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Malvolio) move between freedom and rigidity. Their need to free themselves from restraint confronts their obligation to assume responsibility. In one world, the individual's self-definition is given a psychological reference. In the other, the process takes place within a social context.
In *Twelfth Night* the conditions of the romantic journey have been satisfied before the play begins. All authority figures have miraculously disappeared, external barriers are down, the self is thrust back upon itself. As they undertake their quests, Orsino, Olivia and Viola seem to emerge from states of childish narcissism in which they are themselves objects of their own love: a beginning stage (as Freud was later to define it) of all normal sexual development.

Thus, Orsino egotistically withdraws from society, neglecting the responsibilities of the dukedome ("For I myself am best / when least in company") and giving himself instead to the sensation of sensation. It is not a woman he loves, but love itself—in the form of Olivia. It is the "food of love" he enjoys; his own capacity for love which he celebrates. His feeling is not part of a relationship. It is stimulated by appearance. Its source is visual.

O' when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence.
(II, i, 20-21)

As with many courtly lovers before him, Orsino is delighted by his own reflection—discovered in his mistress's eyes.

Olivia is a perfect object for Orsino's egotism. With her as his beloved, he can enjoy the experience of love without having to confront its reality. He can appreciate Olivia's capacity for sisterly affection while anticipating the passion which will eventually accompany her aroused sexuality:

O' she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love when the rich golden shaft
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her…
(II, i, 34-38)

And he is safe in the knowledge that for seven years nothing will disturb the sweetness of that anticipation. Olivia protects herself by carefully preserving and savoring the subtly spiced sensations of the grief which is the condition of her celibacy:

But like a cloistress she will veiled walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine: all this to season
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance.
(II, i, 29-33)

Both Orsino and Olivia are locked within the prisons of their self-love. They progress from narcissism only insofar as they *define* their self-involvement as love for another. But their behavior belies the truth of their definitions and it remains for Viola to become the agency of their freedom, helping them progress through adolescent conflict to mature resolution.

Initially, Viola's own situation seems to parallel theirs, but her divergences prove more crucial than the similarities. With Orsino and Olivia, she is cut off from the familiar forms of her old life, but while the causes of change are, in their cases, largely specious and self-imposed, they are, for her, radical and decisive. She has undergone a long and dangerous sea-journey (a familiar metaphor for the romantic quest for self) and, at the
end, she finds herself bereft—as is Olivia—of a brother. Almost drowned, on the shore of a strange country, she has been, in a sense, reborn; prepared for a new life which is, from another perspective, a new level of development.

Viola's spontaneous response to the information that Orsino rules the land to which she has come, implies that she, like Olivia and the Duke himself, is interested in the possibilities of courtship.

Orsino! I have heard my father name him.
He was a bachelor then.
(I, ii, 28-29)

But her interest is not conscious. Viola, unlike the heroines upon whom she was modeled, has no particular interest in the Duke. Her susceptibility to love is general: a stage in her development. And, quite typically, her curiosity is accompanied by fear and ambivalence. If she is attracted, she is also repelled by an environment that threatens her uncertain sexuality. The security of Olivia's household, the immediate sense of kinship, is tempting:

O' that I served that lady,
And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow.
What my estate is.
(I, ii, 41-44)

But she must and is prepared to play—as Olivia and Orsino are not—an active role. With a more sophisticated understanding of the dangers of disguise, the delusory quality of appearance (Nature with a beauteous wall / Doth form close in pollution...) (I, iii, 48-9) she initiates the next stage of her development, deciding to become "the form of my intent," offering to serve the duke in the guise of a young man. The chosen disguise suggests that Viola's intent is to become that androgynous person who, in the Eden of childhood she was, and longs again to be. She is a boy-girl hovering precariously, if self-consciously, between the sexless child and the adult female. Her disguise is the adolescent confusion of identity made visible. It is a confusion of identity equally, if less consciously, shared by Olivia and Orsino.

Seen from this perspective, the loss of the brother represents for Viola and Olivia a denial of the primitive, infantile unity of the personality; a schism that necessarily accompanies self-awareness. Orsino's isolation implies a similar fragmentation. For all, the primary narcissism of childhood yields to the sexual ambiguity of adolescence which must be confronted before it can be resolved. The assumption of a male identity is essential to Viola's definition of herself as woman. It suggests the objectification of conflict, allows her to act out her ambivalence, and enables her ultimately to assume a role more appropriate to the demands of nature and society. Similarly, as they interact with the ambiguous sexuality of Viola-Cesario, Olivia and the Duke confront themselves in homoerotic relationships which allow them to achieve the security which is essential if they are to accept mature, heterosexual love. Freud remarked:

It is well known that even in the normal person it takes a certain time before a decision in regard to the sex of the love-object is finally achieved. Homosexual enthusiasms, tinged with sensuality are common enough in both sexes during the first years after puberty.

It is with this period of uncertainty and change that Shakespeare concerns himself. What Jan Kott calls, in another context, "the metamorphosis of sex," becomes the focus of the play. Sexual roles are explored and defined, conflicts are resolved and Viola is the medium and the measure.
To Orsino, Viola offers the terms of a rather simple compromise. The security afforded by Cesario's masculine appearance allows the Duke to reveal himself to the receptive—albeit disguised—femininity of Viola:

Thou know'st no less but all. Cesario, I have unclasped to thee the book even of my secret soul.

(I, iv, 12-14)

From Cesario, the Duke (whose "mind is a very opal") learns the lesson of a constancy that creates meaning for the romantic songs that feed his fantasies. He has congratulated himself on the strength of his passion, "as hungry as the sea," and dotes on stories of lovers slain by the heartlessness of fair maidens. By his own admission:

… however we do praise ourselves,
our fancies are more giddy and unfirm
more longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.

(II, iv, 33-36)

He is quick to deny the affection he has professed for his young page, when he suspects Cesario's involvement with Olivia:

Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in mischief.
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

(V, i, 132-4)

Cesario remains steadfast, however, and offers himself lovingly and in fact to the cruelty of his sentimental wrath:

And I, most jocund, apt and willingly,
To do you rest a thousand deaths would die.

(V, i, 112-3)

By affording him this transitional relationship, Viola forces Orsino to search out the truth of the disguise and provides him with a corrective to illusion.

In relating to Olivia, Viola must play a complex role. By avoiding contact with Orsino and removing herself from the temptation of a heterosexual love relationship, Olivia has revealed her fear of herself. An orphan, like Viola, she will not jeopardize her newly won authority nor will she endanger the integrity of an identity already threatened by the symbolic loss of her brother. The efficient head of a complicated household, Olivia does not want to surrender her masculine dominance: "She'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit (I, iii, 106-7)." She is willing to speak with Cesario because he is unthreatening: his audacious wit as well as his commanding nobility which make her put aside her veil. Her ambivalence is betrayed. Her vulnerability is exposed. In admitting that "Ourselves we do not owe (I, v, 311)," she acknowledges herself to be part of a developmental process which she cannot control. It is the odd logic of this process which defines her actions, attracting her to Viola, attaching her to Cesario and leading her to accept quite readily the eventual substitution of Sebastian.
Viola, too, recognizes that she is not mistress of her situation:

O Time, thou must entangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

(II, ii, 40-1)

And she becomes aware of the dangers of the disguise which she has assumed:

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.

(II, ii, 27-8)

Still, to embrace illusion is to give oneself to a necessary madness. As Cesario, Viola is able to establish the meaning of her sexual identity. Although she enjoys her easy domination of Olivia, she prefers to subordinate herself to the Duke. In the process of convincing Olivia that it is appropriate for her to give freely of her love ("What is yours to bestow is not yours to preserve (I, v, 186-7).") she explores in herself a capacity for feeling which is profound. The security afforded by her disguise makes the exploration possible. She is an eloquent petitioner:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hallo your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia." O you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.

(I, v, 269-277)

Her disguise makes her eloquence a mockery of romantic sentiment, but it also invests that mockery with the genuine feeling which is her love for the Duke.

Viola demonstrates the truth of the clown's assertion that: "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward (III, i, 11-13)." Her language is as ambiguous as her disguise, and reveals as it hides. The game she plays enables her to test reality while only partially accepting it. Her ultimate readiness to confront herself is asserted by her confrontation with Sebastian. Aware of the nature of her femininity, she can encounter the masculine possibility: her brother externalized and experienced now as "the other." He is the form of her awareness and, on the level of plot, he makes it possible for that awareness to be activated. The mystery of their twinship solved, her separateness asserted, she is able to put on her "woman's weeds" and assume the role of wife.

Sebastian is, in every respect, an appropriate "double" for Viola. His experience parallels hers and his development is the same as Olivia's and Orsino's. Like Viola, Sebastian has endured an arduous sea-journey which deprives him of his twin and brings him to a new land. The images used to describe his experiences are symbolic of resurrection (he binds himself to a mast and rides upon it like Arion upon the Dolphin's back) and suggest that he has progressed from one level of development to another. In the crisis of identity, friend supplants sister (" …for some hour before you took me from the breach of the sea was my sister drown's (II, i, 22-24).") The fact that his relationship with Antonio is tinged by the same homoeroticism that distinguishes Olivia's attraction to Viola and Orsino's affection for Cesario, is suggested by the language that Antonio uses when he speaks of the depth and intensity of his attachment:
If you will not murder me for my love,
let me be your servant.

(II, i, 36-37)

I have many enemies in Orsino's court,
Else would I very shortly see thee there.
But come what may, I do adore thee so
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.

(II, i, 46-49)

When we are first introduced to Sebastian as he takes leave of Antonio, he seems slightly feminized.

My bosom is full of kindness and
I am yet so near the manners
Of my mother that, upon the least
Occasion more, mine eyes will tell
Tales of me.

(II, i, 39-42)

But he hovers on the edge of manhood, anxious to separate himself from the domination of his older friend ("Therefore I shall crave of you your leave, that I may bear my evils alone (II, i, 5-6.").) It is appropriate that he should now divest himself of his disguise, telling Antonio his name and describing to him his background. Having endured the loss of his sister, inviting a separation from Antonio, Sebastian seems in growing control of himself. He demonstrates his physical prowess when challenged by Sir Toby and Andrew and, more importantly, he welcomes with mature ease, the reality of the dream:

What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
Or I am mad, or else this is a dream,
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!

(IV, i, 59-62)

When he explains to Olivia: "You are betrothed both to a maid and man (V, i, 263)," he reveals the truth of the illusion.

Through Sebastian the resolution of the romance is made possible. In their readiness for marriage all of the characters affirm their own sexual identities. In choosing a mate each of the characters confronts that part of the self which is subordinate but, nevertheless, essential to total definition. Courtship involves an awareness and externalization of conflict. Marriage is the promise of a higher unity. Explaining the need of the personality to move beyond its early narcissism, Freud wrote:

… we are so impelled when the cathexis of the ego with libido exceeds a certain degree. A strong egoism is a protection against disease but in the last resort we must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill, and must fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we cannot love.9

It is the illusion, the experimental assumption of roles, which allows the development here from the disease of self-involvement and fragmentation to the healthful state of love and self-definition.

II
In the sub-plot of *Twelfth Night* the same themes are explored, but the exploration is given a social focus. The romantic characters and situations have their comic counterparts. Self-revelation replaces self-recognition. Self-indulgence replaces narcissism and the absence of self-knowledge is expressed in hypocrisy. The conflict is one of social rather than sexual definition and the antithetical possibilities which must be resolved are personal freedom and expression on one hand, social formalism and responsibility on the other.

Sir Toby, the "Lord of Misrule" who "burlesques majesty by promoting license,"\(^\text{10}\) occupies a key position, similar to Viola's. Viola, in her androgynous disguise, encourages Olivia and the Duke to project freely the selves submerged in the roles they play. Sir Toby, whose drunken revelry is another form of disguised freedom, manipulates Sir Andrew and Malvolio so that each betrays his true nature, hypocritically masked. Antisocial qualities are identified and purged. In Sir Andrew, the vanity of the courtly lover is revealed: recognition of his cowardice is a corrective to the absurdity of idealized romance. Ignorant of himself and the woman chosen to be his mistress, he is Orsino perceived through the lens of social comedy. Only ridiculous, he is not punished, for he does, after all, search for love remembering, with some nostalgia, that he "was adored once too."

Malvolio, alone of the Illyrians, does not share this capacity for affection. His narcissism is not an early stage of a complex developmental process, but seems rather to be endemic. He is "sick of self-love" and "tastes with a distempered appetite (I, v, 90-91)." He is a man who "practises behavior to his own shadow (II, v, 16)." A precursor of the commercial revolution, as C. L. Barber suggests,\(^\text{11}\) Malvolio translates all values into material terms. Love, for him, is power. To marry Olivia is to become Count Malvolio. It is to exercise control over the household, to claim the right to berate Sir Toby. In his pride he rejects the established order of society and believes that accepted hierarchies can be overturned. Most important of all, perhaps, Malvolio rejects the wisdom of the fool and refuses to accept the function of disguise:

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ protest I take these wise men} \\
\text{that crows so at these set kind} \\
of \text{fools no better than the fools' zanies.} \\
\text{(I, v, 87-9)}
\end{align*}
\]

Paradoxically, it is because of his inflexibility that he alone is sealed into a disguise. Maria's plan offers him only the concrete, external form of his own self-deception. He belongs to the world of comic realism and aspires to the world of psychological romance. He is unable to use the freedom of either as part of his process of self-definition. He rejects the dream along with the cakes and ale. His journey into the self can be nothing more than what it, in fact, becomes: imprisonment in the pitch blackness of delusion.

Malvolio is representative of that egotism which is, in its extreme form, anti-social and self-destructive. His final threat of revenge makes this clear. Because he cannot progress to a state of knowledge which implies integration through the recognition of inner and outer order, he must himself be purged. His dismissal is the symbolic condition of the consolidation of the society and the integration of the individual which is represented by marriage.

It is in the atmosphere of freedom created by Sir Toby that Malvolio's unmasking is created by Maria. Only she is able to mediate between the two worlds of Illyria, while being part of their reality.\(^\text{12}\) Moving between Olivia and Sir Toby, she maintains the structures of the household (a microcosmic version of Illyria) imposing order, meting out justice. Her wit, like Viola's, implies the flexibility requisite to personal maturity and social stability. In the parodic letter she writes to Malvolio and in her chiding of Sir Toby, she suggests the limitations of romantic idealism and comic freedom.

At first Sir Toby rejects those restrictions which her reason would impose upon him:
but he recognizes the value of a wit that can conceive as the form of disguise the revelation of truth. Responding joyously to her ingenuity ("I could marry this wench for this device (II, v, 83)") he comes to respect the constructive intelligence which makes it possible. In this way Maria functions for him as Viola functions for Orsino and Olivia. And when Sir Toby does, in fact, decide to marry Maria, his decision implies his recognition of the limited and transitional value of disguise. Somewhat ruefully he puts aside his freedom ("I hate a drunken rogue (V, i, 200)") and accepts responsibility.

Feste's song places the action of the play in its final perspective. The inevitable movement from childhood to maturity is noted. The psychological and social resolutions once affected, are qualified. The play is, after all, only another kind of disguise which presents reality in a bearable form. The truth itself encompasses more than the image by which it is suggested. The ambivalent quest for self, the conflict between personal integrity and social definition: these are seldom resolved as happily as in Illyria. Freedoms claimed are easily lost, recognitions made are obscured and "the rain it raineth every day."

Notes


4 William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Or What You Will, ed. Charles T. Prouty, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1958, I, iv, 36-37. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

5 L. G. Salinger, in "The Design of Twelfth Night, points out that in all four of the plays which served as probable or possible sources for Twelfth Night, the heroine knew previously the master whom she serves as page and, wanting to win his love, pursued him to his own country.


7 Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, New York, Anchor, 1961, p. 314. Kott suggests that the play deals with the ambiguity and impossibility of clear sexual definition and choice. His argument is stimulating and insightful, but seems to overlook the developmental aspect of the plot as well as the resolution of central conflicts. Shakespeare seems to express his point in Sebastian's words to Olivia:
So comes it, lady, you have been mistook;  
But nature to her bias drew in that.  
V, i, 266-7

8 It is interesting to note, as L. G. Salinger points out in "The Design of Twelfth Night," that the Italian authors who provided Shakespeare with his sources for the play, gave Viola both a domineering father and a foster mother, like Juliet's nurse. The effect of Shakespeare's change is not simply to make "the whole situation more romantically improbable, more melancholy at some points, more fantastic at others," as Salinger suggests, but to emphasize the psycho-sexual, developmental aspect of his characterization.


11 Barber, p. 256.

12 Feste also mediates between the comic and romantic sensibilities, but he remains, in the tradition of the jester, an outsider.

Karen Greif (essay date 1981)


[In this essay, Greif claims that Twelfth Night views "playing" as a means both to conceal and to reveal truth.]

'The purpose of playing,' says Hamlet, is 'to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.'1 Hamlet himself employs 'playing', in various guises, as a means of penetrating false appearances to uncover hidden truths, but he also discovers how slippery illusions can be when their effects become entangled in the human world. Like Hamlet, but in a comic vein, Twelfth Night poses questions about 'the purpose of playing' and about whether illusion is perhaps too deeply embedded in human experience to be ever completely separated from reality.

Virtually every character in Twelfth Night is either an agent or a victim of illusion, and often a player will assume both these roles: as Viola is an impostor but also a prisoner of her own disguise, or as Sir Toby loses control of the deception he has contrived when he mistakes Sebastian for his twin. Illyria is a world populated by pretenders, which has led one critic to describe the action as 'a dance of maskers ... for the assumption of the play is that no one is without a mask in the serio-comic business of the pursuit of happiness'.2 In the course of the story, many of these masks are stripped away or willingly set aside; but illusion itself plays a pivotal yet somewhat ambiguous role in this process. While Viola's masquerade serves to redeem Orsino and Olivia from their romantic fantasies and ends in happiness with the final love-matches, the more negative aspects of deception are exposed in the trick played against Malvolio, which leads only to humiliation and deeper isolation.

Role-playing, deceptions, disguises, and comic manipulations provide the fabric of the entire action. So pervasive is the intermingling of illusion and reality in the play that it becomes impossible at times for the characters to distinguish between the two. This is not simply a case of illusion becoming a simulated version of reality. 'I am not that I play', Viola warns her fellow player (1.5.184); but, as the subtitle suggests, in Twelfth Night one discovers that 'what you will' may transform the ordinary shape of reality.
The fluidity of the relationship between 'being' and 'playing' is indirectly illuminated at the beginning of act 3, in the play's single face-to-face encounter between Viola and Feste, who share the distinction of being the only pretenders in Illyria who do not wear their motley in their brains. They match wits in a contest of wordplay, which moves the Fool to sermonize: 'To see this age! A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn'd outward!' (3.1.11-13). According to Feste, words have become like kidskin gloves, pliable outside coverings readily yielding to manipulation by a good wit. Viola's response echoes this sense; those who know how to play with words 'may quickly make them wanton' (1. 15). Men may expect words to operate as constant symbols of meaning, faithfully reflecting the concrete outlines of reality; but, in fact, words prove to be flighty, untrustworthy mediators between human beings and experience:

Clown. But indeed, words are very rascals
since bonds disgrac'd them.

Viola. Thy reason, man?

Clown. Troth, sir, I can yield you none
without words, and words are grown so
false, I am loath to prove reason with them.

(11. 20-5)

Rather than serving as a medium for straightforward communication, words have become bent to the purposes of dissembling. Feste declares himself a 'corrupter of words' (1. 36), and throughout the play he demonstrates how chameleon-like words can become in the mouth of an expert dissembler like himself. Yet Feste is also recognized by his audience and many of his fellow players as a kind of truth-teller; under the guise of fooling and ingenious word-play, he reminds those around him of truths they have blocked out of their illusion-bound existences. The Fool's dialogue with Viola suggests that 'since bonds disgrac'd them', words have fallen under suspicion within the world of *Twelfth Night*, at least among those who admit their own dissembling. But for those who possess wit and imagination, the protean nature of words also affords an exhilarating form of release. Dexterity with language becomes a means of circumventing a world that is always shifting its outlines by exploiting that fluidity to the speaker's own advantage.

The same ambiguity that is characteristic of words pervades almost every aspect of human experience in *Twelfth Night*. Illyria is a world of deceptive surfaces, where appearances constantly fluctuate between what is real and what is illusory. Out of the sea, there comes into this unstable society a catalyst in the form of the disguised Viola, who becomes the agent required to free Orsino and Olivia from the bondage of their self-delusions. Equilibrium is finally attained, however, only after the presence of Viola and her separated twin has generated as much error and disturbance as Illyria could possibly contain.

Moreover, this resolution is achieved not by a straight-forward injection of realism into this bemused dreamworld, but by further subterfuge. 'Conceal me what I am', Viola entreats the Sea Captain after the shipwreck (1.2.53), setting in motion the twin themes of identity and disguise that motivate so much of the action in *Twelfth Night*. Identity, it is important to bear in mind, includes both the identity that represents the essence of one's being, the 'what I am' that separates one individual from another, and also the identity that makes identical twins alike; and the comedy is concerned with the loss and the recovery of identity in both these senses.

Viola's plan to dissemble her true identity proves to be ironically in keeping with the milieu she has entered. But the fact that Viola, left stranded and unprotected by the wreck, assumes her guise as Cesario in response to a real predicament sets her apart from most of the pretenders already dwelling in Illyria. Surfeiting on fancy, they endlessly fabricate grounds for deceiving others or themselves. Orsino and Olivia are foolish, in part, because it is apparent that the roles of unrequited lover and grief-stricken lady they have chosen for themselves spring more from romantic conceits than from deep feeling or necessity. The games-playing mania of Sir Toby Belch and his cohorts carries to comic extremes the Illyrian penchant for playing make-believe.
Just as words, in Sir Toby's hands, are rendered plastic by his Falstaffian talent for making their meaning suit his own convenience, so he manufactures circumstances to fit his will.

The kind of egotism that stamps Sir Toby's perpetual manipulation of words and appearances, or Orsino and Olivia's wilful insistence on their own way, is far removed from Viola's humility as a role-player. Although she shares Feste's zest for wordplay and improvisation, Viola never deludes herself into believing she has absolute control over either her own part or the actions of her fellow players. Musing over the complications of the love triangle into which her masculine disguise has thrust her, Viola wryly concedes 'O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie' (2.2.40-1). Viola's outlook is unaffectedly realistic without the need to reject imaginative possibilities. Her own miraculous escape encourages her to hope her brother has also survived the wreck, but throughout most of the play she must continue to act without any certainty he is still alive. She accepts the facts of her dilemma without self-pity and begins at once to improvise a new, more flexible role for herself in a difficult situation; but she also learns that the freedom playing permits her is only a circumscribed liberty. For as long as the role of Cesario conceals her real identity, Viola is free to move at will through Illyria, but not to reveal her true nature or her love for Orsino.

The first meeting between Cesario and Olivia creates one of the most demanding tests of Viola's ability to improvise. She meets the challenge with ingenuity, but Viola also insists, with deliberate theatricality, on the disparity between her true self and the role that she dissembles:

**Viola.** I can say little more than I have studied, and that question's out of my part.
Good gentle one, give me modest assurance
if you be the lady of the house, that I may proceed in my speech.

**Olivia.** Are you a comedian?

**Viola.** No, my profound heart; and yet (by the very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play.

(1.5.178-84)

In her exchanges with Olivia, Viola is able to treat the part she plays with comic detachment; but the some-what rueful tone underlying her awareness of the ironies of her relation to Olivia turns to genuine heart-ache when this separation between her true identity and her assumed one comes into conflict with her growing love for Orsino.

Unable to reveal her love openly, Viola conjures for Orsino the imaginary history of a sister who

lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

(2.4.107-9)

As long as Orsino clings to his fancied passion for Olivia and she herself holds on to her disguise, Viola can vent her true feelings only by more dissembling, so she masks her secret love for the Duke with the sad tale of this lovelorn sister. Yet her fiction also serves to present her master with a portrait of genuine love against which to measure his own obsession for Olivia. 'Was this not love indeed?' she challenges him:

We men may say more, swear more, but indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we
prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.
(11. 116-18)

Her story is a touching one, and for once Orsino's blustering is stilled. He is moved to wonder 'But died thy sister of her love, my boy?'; but she offers only the cryptic answer 'I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too—and yet I know not' (11. 119-21). Viola's veiled avowal of her love is perhaps the most delicate blend of imagination and truth in the play, and this fabrication will finally yield its reward when Cesario is free to disclose 'That I am Viola' (5.1.253).

Role-playing, whether it be a deliberate choice like Viola's disguise or the foolish self-delusions that Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio all practise upon themselves, leads to a general confusion of identity within Illyria. In the second encounter between Olivia and Cesario, this tension between being and playing is given special resonance:

Olivia. I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.
Viola. That you do think you are not what you are.
Olivia. If I think so, I think the same of you.
Viola. Then think you right: I am not what I am.
Olivia. I would you were as I would have you be.
Viola. Would it be better, madam, than I am? I wish it might, for now I am your fool.
(3.1.138-44)

Like a tonic chord in a musical passage. Viola's riddles always come back to the idea of 'what you are' and 'what I am', the enduring truth of one's real identity. But this note of resolution is never a stable one. Viola warns Olivia that she has deluded herself into acting out fantasies with no basis in reality, first in her vow of celibacy to preserve her grief and then in her pursuit of the unattainable Cesario. In turn, she herself admits that 'I am not what I am.' Olivia, meanwhile, is obsessed with 'what thou think'st of me' and what 'I would have you be'. She is less interested in the truth about Cesario or her own nature than in making what is conform to what she would like it to be. On the one hand, the facts of nature ensure that she will be frustrated in her wooing, and yet her beloved will indeed be transformed into what she would have him be when the counterfeit Cesario is replaced by the real Sebastian.

The compression of so many levels of meaning within this passage suggests how complicated and paradoxical the relationship is in Twelfth Night between what actually is and what playing with reality can create. Viola's exchange with Olivia follows directly upon her encounter with Feste, and the second dialogue translates into terms of identity and role-playing the same attitudes towards words appearing in the first. The Fool claims that 'since bonds disgrac'd them', words have no static nature—that no unchanging identification between the-thing-itself and the word symbolizing it is ever possible—and the condition of being, the identity belonging to 'what I am', is in a comparable state of flux throughout most of the action.

The separation between being and playing, like the disjunction between words and concrete reality, may lead to a sense of disorientation closely akin to madness. This is the condition that the release of imagination creates in Malvolio. When he exchanges the reality of what he is for the make-believe part he dreams of becoming, he begins to act like a madman. Viola's charade as Cesario produces a welter of mistaken identities
that so disorient her fellow players no one is quite certain of his or her sanity. Yet another variation of the
madness which springs from unleashing the effects of imagination upon reality is seen in the escapades of Sir
Toby Belch.

His reign of misrule is fuelled by his refusal to allow reality to interfere with his desires, and this unruliness
drives his associates to wonder repeatedly if he is mad.

Yet, just as Feste finds means of communicating truth by playing with words, so does the unstable
relationship between being and playing allow at least a few of the players in Illyria to discover a more flexible
sense of identity that can accommodate both enduring truths and changing appearances. The same loosening
of the bonds governing identity that can lead to bewildering confusion may also open up a fresh sense of
freedom in shaping one's own nature. What you will may indeed transform what you are.

The point at which all these attitudes converge is in the recognition scene of the final act. At the moment
when Viola and Sebastian finally come face to face upon the stage, the climactic note of this motif is sounded
in Orsino's exclamation of wonder:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two
persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not!
(5.1.216-17)

For the onlookers, who are still ignorant both of Viola's true identity and of the existence of her twin, the
mirror image created by the twins' confrontation seems explicable only as an optical illusion of nature. Yet the
illusion proves to be real; this 'natural perspective' is the stable reality underlying
the mirage of shifting appearances caused by mistaken identity.

This dramatic revelation of the identity that has been obscured by illusory appearances, but is now made
visible in the mirror image of the twins, is deliberately prolonged as Viola and Sebastian exchange their
tokens of recognition. Anne Barton has drawn attention to the fact that the recognition scene provides

a happy ending of an extraordinarily schematized and 'playlike' kind. Viola has already had
virtual proof, in Act III, that her brother has survived the wreck. They have been separated for
only three months. Yet the two of them put each other through a formal, intensely
conventional question and answer test that comes straight out of Greek New Comedy.³

The recognition of identity is at first an experience involving only the reunited twins; but, as the facts of their
kinship are brought forth, the circle of awareness expands to include Orsino and Olivia. They appreciate for
the first time their shared folly in desiring the unobtainable and both discover true love in unexpected forms
by sharing in the recognition of the twins' identities. As Orsino vows,

If this be so, as yet the glass seems true,
I shall have share in this most happy wrack.
(5.1.265-6)

The reflections of identity that have been present throughout the play are now openly acknowledged and
sealed by the bonds of marriage and kinship. The similarities between Viola and Olivia, for example—the lost
brother, the unrequited love, the veiled identity—which are echoed in the names that are virtually ana-grams,
are now confirmed by the ties of sisterhood when each wins the husband she desires.
Paradoxically, what allows this dramatic moment of epiphany to occur at all is the same loss and mistaking of identities that caused the original confusion. It is the separation of the twins and Viola's subsequent decision to 'Conceal me what I am' which gives emotional intensity to the moment when identity is recognized and regained. This final scene, moreover, makes it clear that the regaining of lost personal identity—the individuality that distinguishes Viola from Sebastian—is closely tied to the recognition of the likeness that makes the twins identical. The recognition scene, with its ritual-like ceremony of identification, suggests that men and women must recognize how much they are identical, how much alike in virtues and follies and in experiences and desires, before they can affirm the personal identities that make them unique. These twin senses of identity converge in the final act, dramatically embodied in the reunited twins who share 'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons'.

But at what point do the reflections stop? Beyond the onlookers upon the stage who behold this ceremony of recognition is the larger audience of the illusion that is Twelfth Night. The play itself is 'a natural perspective, that is and is not': a mirror held up to nature intended to reflect the contours of reality and simultaneously a work of imagination that incarnates the world of being in a world of playing. What the audience encounters in the mirror of the play is its own reflected identity in the characters who play out their experiences upon the stage. In sharing the experience of Twelfth Night, we come to recognize the ties of identity that link our own world of being to the imagined world of the play; and, on a more personal level, we identify our private follies and desires in our fictional counterparts upon the stage. In acknowledging this kinship of resemblance, we too gain a fresh awareness of the nature of 'what I am', the true self concealed beneath the surface level of appearances. Moreover, having witnessed how deeply life is ingrained with illusion within Illyria, we may awake from the dreamworld of the play to wonder if 'what we are' in the world outside the playhouse is perhaps less static and immutable than we once believed. At this point, imagination and truth may begin to merge in our own world: 'Prove true, imagination, O, prove true' (3.4.375).

If art possesses this creative power, however, there remains the problem of dealing with the more troubling issues raised by the gulling of Malvolio. The plot contrived to convince the steward of Olivia's passion for him is enacted with deliberately theatrical overtones, and the conspirators employ deception to feed and then expose Malvolio's folly in much the same way that a playwright manipulates illusion and reality upon the stage. Yet Malvolio's enforced immersion in the world of make-believe in no way reforms him. Nor does it enable him to gain a more positive understanding of either his own identity or the ties that bind him to his fellow men. Malvolio remains isolated and egotistical to the end. What is more, the mockers who have seen their own follies reflected in Malvolio's comic performance are no more altered by the experience than he is.

The plot against Malvolio is originally planned along the traditional lines of Jonsonian 'humour' comedy: the victim's folly is to be exposed and purged by comic ridicule to rid him of his humour. Maria explains the scheme in such terms to her fellow satirists:

… it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work…. I know my physic will work with him.

(2.3.151-3;172-3)

But there is also a strong dose of personal spite in their mockery. The pranksters are really more eager to be entertained by Malvolio's delusions of grandeur than they are to reform him. Maria guarantees her audience that 'If I do not gull him into an ayword, and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed' (11. 134-7). It is certainly in this spirit that the revellers take the jest. 'If I lose a scruple of this sport', Fabian pledges as the game begins, 'let me be boil'd to death with melancholy' (2.5.2-3).

Maria plants the conspirators in the garden box-tree like spectators at a play, bidding them: 'Observe him, for the love of mocker y; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him' (11. 18-20). Malvolio, who
'has been yonder i’ the sun practising behavior to his own shadow this half hour' (11. 16-18), is a natural play-actor; and he immediately takes the bait of this improvised comedy. The megalomania suppressed beneath his Puritan façade is comically set free by the discovery of Maria's forged letter, and he is soon persuaded to parade his folly publicly by donning the famous yellow stockings.

Maria's letter cleverly exploits Malvolio's conceit, but he himself manufactures his obsession. With only the flimsiest of clues to lead him on, Malvolio systematically construes every detail of the letter to fuel his newly liberated dreams of greatness, never pausing to consider how ludicrous the message really is:

> Why, this is evident to any formal capacity, there is no obstruction in this. And the end—what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! …
> M.O.A.I. This simulation is not as the former; and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name.

(11. 116-20; 139-41)

The deception deftly juggles appearances to prompt Malvolio to his own undoing, but there is always the danger inherent in such games of make-believe that the dupe will no longer be able to cope with reality once his self-fabricated fantasies are stripped away from him. 'Why, thou hast put him in such a dream', Sir Toby laughingly tells Maria, 'that when the image of it leaves him he must run mad' (11. 193-4). But no such qualms disturb these puppet-masters. When Fabian echoes this warning, Maria replies 'The house will be the quieter' (3.4.134).

Although it is the letter that persuades Malvolio to play out his fantasies in public, his audience has already been treated to a display of his fondness for make-believe. While the conspirators impatiently wait for him to stumble on the letter, Malvolio muses on his dream of becoming the rich and powerful 'Count Malvolio'. As he paints the imaginary scene of Sir Toby's future humiliation and expulsion, the eavesdroppers find themselves unexpectedly drawn into the performance they are watching. Sir Toby, in particular, becomes so enraged at this 'overweening rogue' (1. 29) that Fabian must repeatedly warn him to control his outbursts: 'Nay, patience, or we break the sinews of our plot!' (11. 75-6). Malvolio's audience prove to be as uncertain as their gull about the boundaries separating fiction from fact, as will be made comically evident in the miscalculations and confusions that result from the duel contrived between Sir Andrew and Cesario. Taken unawares by Malvolio's tableau of future triumph, the three spies inadvertently become participants in the comedy they are observing.

Malvolio's private playlet of revenge and his discovery of the letter are staged in a deliberately theatrical manner, played before the unruly audience of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian. His play-acting exposes Malvolio's folly to comic perfection; but it also, in its own topsy-turvy fashion, holds the mirror up to nature for both the spectators in the box-tree and the audience beyond the stage. It is a glass more like a funhouse mirror than the symmetry of a 'natural perspective', but in Malvolio's absurd performance the pranksters are presented with a comically distorted image of their own follies and delusions. Malvolio's folly is made more ludicrous by the charade that openly exposes the overweening ambition and conceit normally held within respectable bounds by the sanctimonious steward, but the difference between the performer and his audience is simply one of degree.

If Malvolio is treated by these practical jokers as a puppet on a string, a 'trout that must be caught with tickling' (2.5.22), Sir Andrew is no less Sir Toby's own 'dear manikin' (3.2.53). His auditors deride Malvolio's pretensions to his mistress's love; but Sir Andrew's wooing of Olivia is equally preposterous, and his hopes are based entirely on Sir Toby's counterfeit assurances. Sir Toby may ridicule Malvolio's determined efforts to 'crush' the letter's message to accommodate his own desires, but the assertion of imagination over concrete reality is no less a characteristic trait of Sir Toby himself, who has earlier insisted that 'Not to be a-bed after
midnight is to be up betimes' (2.3.1-2). The only difference in their dealings with words is that Malvolio uses logic as a crowbar to twist and hammer meanings into a more gratifying form, while Sir Toby chooses to suspend logic altogether. The steward's obsessive instinct for order is simply the inverted image of Sir Toby's own mania for disorder. Even their plot to put an end to Malvolio's authority is dramatized for the spectators in a parody version supplied by Malvolio's own dream of revenge.

The spectators are in their own ways as much drowned in excesses of folly and imagination as their gull. But as they mock the woodcock nearing the gin, the on-lookers fail to realize that the 'play' itself is an imaginary snare for the woodcocks in its audience. Sir Andrew's reaction to Malvolio's fictive dialogue with a humbled Sir Toby exemplifies the fatuity of his fellow auditors:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Malvolio.} & \quad \text{'Besides, you waste the treasure of} \\
& \quad \text{your time with a foolish knight'}— \\
\text{Andrew.} & \quad \text{That's me, I warrant you.} \\
\text{Malvolio.} & \quad \text{'One Sir Andrew'}— \\
\text{Andrew.} & \quad \text{I knew 'twas I, for many do call me} \\
& \quad \text{fool.}
\end{align*}
\]

(2.5.77-81)

Sir Andrew makes the correct identification but remains oblivious to the intended reprimand. In the same fashion, all the members of Malvolio's audience observe their reflected images in the mirror of the comedy without recognition, thus comically fulfilling Jonathan Swift's famous dictum that 'Satyr is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their own.'

By the time Malvolio encounters Olivia again after reading her supposed declaration of love, his perceptions have become completely mastered by his delusions. To those around him who are unaware of the deception, Malvolio appears quite mad. 'Why, this is very midsummer madness', (3.4.56) cries Olivia in response to the incoherent ramblings of this smiling, cross-gartered apparition. From his own perspective, however, he is unquestionably sane, and it is the rest of the world that is behaving strangely. Unlike Viola or Feste, Malvolio has no talent for improvisation. His rejection of a rigidly defined identity, although it gives him a temporary release from social bonds, affords Malvolio no room for flexibility.

Faced with the fluidity of the world of playing in which he suddenly finds himself, Malvolio insists on trying to marshal shifting appearances back into regimented formation:

\[
\text{Why, every thing adheres together, that no dram of a scruple, no scruple of a scruple, no} \\
\text{obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance—What can be said?}
\]

(3.4.78-81)

But Malvolio's efforts to control the flux are like trying to sculpt water into solid shapes; the material itself refuses static form. His obstinate insistence that the words and actions of those around him should conform to his will makes him appear mad to his fellow players, while they seem equally insane to him.

The quandary over who is mad and who is sane becomes even more entangled in the dialogue between the incarcerated steward and the Fool, disguised as Sir Topas. Malvolio is entirely just in his charge that 'never was man thus wrong'd.... they have laid me here in hideous darkness' (4.2.28-30). From his perspective, the darkness is tangible and his madness the fantasy of those around him. Yet it is also true, as 'Sir Topas' insists, that the darkness is symbolic of the shroud of ignorance and vanity through which Malvolio views the world:
Malvolio. I am not mad, Sir Topas, I say to you this house is dark.

Clown. Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

Malvolio. I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abus'd. I am no more mad than you are.

(4.2.40-8)

His 'confessor's' riddles seem designed to force Malvolio to a new understanding of his identity as a fallible and often foolish human being. But 'Sir Topas' is himself a fake—a self-avowed corrupter of words whose disguised purpose is not to heal Malvolio's imagined lunacy, but to drive him deeper into madness. Feste juggles words with ease because he understands that they are 'very rascals since bonds disgrac'd them', but Malvolio stubbornly insists on making rascal words behave with as much decorum as he believes they should. Throughout this scene, Malvolio returns to his claim 'I am not mad' with the same tonic emphasis as Viola reverts to 'what I am' in her dialogue with Olivia (act 3, scene 1). But being incapable of Viola's playful attitude, Malvolio rejects any imaginative interpretation of his dilemma.

His rigidity toward both language and experience leaves him incapable of comprehending any truth beyond the concrete limits of reality. 'I tell thee I am as well in my wits as any man in Illyria' (4.2.106-7), Malvolio insists with absolute justice; but how far from madness are the other inhabitants of Illyria? In a very ironic sense, Malvolio gets what he deserves when he is imprisoned in his cell. Having persisted in imposing his arbitrary order upon capricious words and appearances, he is himself confined in a guardhouse for his own caprices.

Whatever his deserts, there is nonetheless considerable justice to Malvolio's charge that he has been much abused by the deceivers who have made him 'the most notorious geek and gull / That e'er invention play'd on' (5.1.343-4). Ironically, Malvolio's absurdly inflated ego and his isolation are only hardened by his satiric treatment. Even in making his defence, Malvolio stubbornly maintains yet another delusion, that Olivia is personally responsible for his torment. Humiliated beyond endurance, Malvolio stalks off the stage with a final ringing assertion of his vanity and alienation: 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (1. 378). Malvolio stands as an isolated figure in a festive world from beginning to end because never once does he honestly perceive his own nature, the true identity of 'what I am', or the corresponding ties of identity that bind him to his fellow players.

The pranksters, in spite of their fondness for 'fellowship', do not fare much better. They have already demonstrated a failure to detect their own follies in Malvolio's pretensions, and it is therefore appropriate that the beguilers as well as their gull should be missing from the witnesses at the recognition scene and the subsequent revelations. Sir Toby, in particular, suffers for his failures of identification. After having challenged Sebastian to a fight in the mistaken belief he was the timorous Cesario, Sir Toby rages onto the stage with a bloody head, angrily spurning the comfort of his friend Sir Andrew: 'Will you help?—an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-fac'd knave, a gull!' (5.1.206-7).

Whereas the mistaken identities and role-playing in the romantic plot centering on Viola ultimately lead, in the recognition scene, to a renewal of identity and the human bonds of kinship and marriage, Malvolio's immersion in a world of make-believe yields no such beneficial rewards. The ironic counterpart to the recognition scene with its unravelling of identities is Malvolio's dungeon scene. There, Malvolio is literally enclosed in darkness in a cell cutting him off from all direct human contact, and he is bedevilled by tricksters.
who would like to drive him into deeper confusion. Nor does his audience there or in the garden scene gain
any greater insight into their own characters. This failure of imagination, set against Viola's own miraculous
success, reflects ironically on the supposedly therapeutic value of 'playing' and the dubious morality of the
wouldbe satirists as much as it does on Malvolio's own recalcitrance. Malvolio's final words and his incensed
departure add a discordant note to the gracefully orchestrated harmonies of the final act.

Malvolio's response to his comic purgatory stirs un-resolved questions about the value of playing with reality.
Whereas Viola's part in the comedy reveals how the release that playing allows can lead to a renewed sense of
identity and human bonds, Malvolio's role exposes the other side of the coin, the realm in which release of
imagination leads only to greater isolation and imperception. Fabian's jest about Malvolio's absurd
play-acting, 'If this were play'd upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction' (3.4.127-8),
like the theatrical overtones of Viola's improvisations and the playlike quality of the recognition scene,
deliberately opens up the vistas of the play by reminding us that we are witnesses of a play, 'a natural
perspective, that is and is not'. But amusing as Malvolio's surrender to playing is, it raises the most disturbing
questions in the play. Can men, in fact, ever perfectly distinguish what is real from what is imagined or
intentionally spurious? Can they ever come to know the truth about themselves, the identity appearances have
concealed from them?

Twelfth Night itself offers no pat solutions. In a comic world devoted to playing and yet mirroring the actual
world of being, in which identities are both mistaken and revealed, in which deception can both conceal truths
and expose them, and in which bonds have disgraced the words on which men are dependent for
communication, no permanent resolution of these ambiguities is ever possible. Shakespeare himself shrugs off
the task of providing any final illumination with delightful finesse. As the play draws to a close with Feste's
epilogue song and the world of playing begins to dissolve back into the world of being, the Fool concludes:

    A great while ago the world begun,
    With hey ho, the wind and the rain,
    But that's all one, our play is done,
    And we'll strive to please you every day.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Relation To
Elizabethan Culture

Charles Tyler Prouty (lecture date 1966)


[In the following essay first delivered at the 1966 Shakespeare Seminar, Prouty positions Twelfth Night with
regard to Shakespeare's source materials, focusing specifically on his interpretation of Renaissance notions of
courtly love.]

In some thirty years of teaching it has been my experience that of all the plays in the Shakespeare canon the
comedies are the most difficult to teach. The Joyous Comedies in particular require so much explanation that
we are in danger of losing the play in establishing what I regard as the essential details. The reason is very
simply that these are sophisticated plays based on a complex of social and literary conventions that were well
known to the Renaissance world in general and the Elizabethan world in particular but are almost unknown to
our world. In Twelfth Night we are dealing almost exclusively with the conventions of love and the behaviour
of lovers—conventions which are completely alien to our world. The important thing, however, is
Shakespeare's reaction to these conventions, which controls the nature of his play and makes it, therefore,
peculiarly his own. In the social world of the Renaissance the traditions of the Middle Ages which we call Courtly Love flourished, and these conventions were incredibly sophisticated; they are not certainly, to be seen in the context of the banal sexuality of our times.

For example, in the 1570s a novella by George Whet-stone entitled 'Rinaldo and Guetta' tells us a lovely story. An aged man by the name of Frizaldo is in love with the fair Giletta, but Giletta is not in love with him. Rather she is in love with Rinaldo, a hand-some but poor young man who is, of course, in love with her. On a specific occasion Frizaldo has entered Giletta's chamber while Rinaldo is outside underneath the balcony singing a love song. Frizaldo, recognizing the voice, pretends ignorance as far as Giletta is concerned, and so he addresses her with the term of 'Mistress'. Giletta, in order to conceal her knowledge of the singer outside, is forced to use the appropriate reply: she addresses Frizaldo as 'Servant'. These words, 'Servant' and 'Mistress', are conventional words and do not necessarily imply a sexual relationship; but the implication is enough for the wretched Rinaldo, who flees the scene and jumps into the river, ostensibly to die. But, perhaps because of the temperature of the water or for some other reason, he has second thoughts, swims to the farthest shore, returns in the nick of time to rescue the fair Giletta, and all ends happily! The conventions in this kind of story are typical, and, for example, we see in the second scene of Twelfth Night, where the ship captain tells Viola, 'What great ones do, the less will prattle of,' that the types of behaviour reflected here were not exclusively the property of the great; while the great had established the game, the game itself was known through all strata of society. However by the 1590s the game had become the subject of witty scoffing. For example, in Greene's Menaphon, first published in 1589, we find these lines from 'Doron's Eclogue ioynd with Carmela's'. Doron addresses Carmela:

Carmela deare, evert as the golden ball
That Venus got, such are thy goodly eyes,
When cherries iuice is iumbled therewithal!,
Thy breath is like the steeme of apple pies.

Thy lippes resemble Two Cowcumbers faire,
Thy teeth like to the tuskes of fattest swine,
Thy speach is like the thunder in the aire:
Would God thy toes, thy lips and all were mine.

Here we can see how the conventional epithets of 'ruby lips' and 'pearl-like teeth' have been reduced to rustic figures, and thus how the whole game is deliberately undercut and becomes the subject of laughter. The same kind of thing occurs in As You Like It when Rosalind tells Orlando, 'Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them but not for love.' This, of course, is a great blow to the over-serious Orlando because he really does believe that he would die from love, even though he fails to keep his appointments with Rosalind in spite of all his oaths. And Rosalind has played with the conventions still further with her references to Troilus's having his brains dashed out with a Grecian club and Leander's being drowned by catching a cramp on a hot summer's night. The whole set of conventions was understood by the Elizabethans (and as a matter of fact it was still understood in prewar England as we can see in such a play as Noel Coward's Private Lives or in the popular press. Such periodicals as the Tatler were filled with pictures of the 'great ones' at balls, at hunts, at race meetings and all that sort of thing, and these were largely seized upon by the middle and lower classes as subjects for conversation and objects of admiration.)

The conventions are clearly indicated in the source materials of Twelfth Night so we must know about these materials and must try to ascertain Shakespeare's comprehension of them, what he read and also what he knew about the intellectual milieu in which these conventions operated and out of which the written materials came.

The first mention of Twelfth Night, in John Manningham's Diary, is in the entry for 2 February 1602. At the Middle Temple the Candlemas Feast was celebrated by a performance which Manningham describes as 'a
play called Twelve Night or What You Will, much like the Commedy of Errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni.'

The latter play to which Manningham refers is an Italian play of 1562 written by one Nicolo Secchi. More important for our purposes, however, is the earliest known play dealing with the theme of separated twins; this, *Gli'Ingannati*, first printed in 1537, was presented by the Academy of the Intronnati of Siena—Intronnati, of course, means 'Thunderstruck'. In its printed form it was preceded by another play, a comedy entitled the *Comedia del Sacrificio*, which was also a presentation of the Thunderstruck Ones. Here the members all appear as rebels against the tyranny of love. In the centre of the stage is a large urn with a fire burning inside and each member of the Academy in turn makes his way forward to cast into the urn some token of his erstwhile beloved so that it is consumed by the flames and thus symbolizes his rejection of love. He, of course, speaks appropriate lines to indicate what he is doing and why he is doing it.

Now this Academy is not something unusual. It was one of many that spread all over Italy during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, and these derived from the fifteenth-century Platonic Academy in Florence which was a very serious Academy (for example, Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Symposium* was only one of the works that came out of it). The serious purpose was, however, very soon lost and the jesting spirit took over. Practically every city in Italy had an Academy by the sixteenth century, and the custom of such academies spread to even France and Germany. The aim had now become one of producing courtiers in imitation of *Il Cortegiano*, polished and refined gentlemen. The names of the societies and of the individual members became wittily allegorical or symbolic. Wit was prized above all, everything was a subject for jesting.

It is just such an academy as this that we find in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* or in the festivities at Gray's Inn, entitled *Gesta Grayorum*. Now let us turn to the play of the 'Thunderstruck Ones'. It's a typical Italian comedy of plot, the Commedia Erudita. There is no attention paid to character or morality; the play is amoral. Most important there is no tone except the tone of jesting and a complete lack of seriousness. This is the most important aspect that we have to consider in *Twelfth Night*—the whole aspect of tone.

Specifically the immediate English source is a short story by Barnaby Riche, 'Apollonius and Scilla', contained in a collection which Riche wrote and entitled *Riche His Farewell to the Militarle profession*, printed in 1581. Riche's point of view is quite different from that of the Italians and, of course, from that of Shakespeare. He has gathered together these stories, according to his own word, for 'the onely delight of the courteous Gentlewomen bothe of England and Ireland'. Riche is, in short, a bourgeois moralist who, as a very moral gentleman, takes a very dim view of the whole game of Love. In his own preface to the volume he speaks of the poisoned cup of error, love being madness, wickedness, etc., etc. But we do not need to labour that point, it will appear later.

Exactly as Riche began his story with comments on love in general so did Shakespeare, but with what a difference: 'If music be the food of love, play on, Give me excess of it … ' (It's interesting that Kemble transposed this scene, made it the second scene, and made Viola's appearance, which we find in scene two of modern editions, the first—Sir Tyrone Guthrie did the same thing in his production at this Stratford.) This is, of course, a gross misunderstanding of the play because one needs this first scene to set the tone of the whole play. The problem is, of course, how we are to read this soliloquy of Orsino's. It can be read as 'big' lyric poetry, with high soaring gestures, and so on, or perhaps, more wisely, it can be read with a certain degree of archness which will give the audience an idea of a slight undercutting. As a matter of fact, the whole show is given away by the Duke's final lines, 'So full of shapes is fancy / That it alone is high fantastical,' which are immediately followed by Curio's inquiry, 'Will you go hunt, my lord?'

**DUKE:** What, Curio?

**CURIO:** The hart.
DUKE: Why, so I do, the noblest that I have.
O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence.
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

The reference was obvious to anybody in Shakespeare's audience because even the middle classes would have read Ovid in school. They would have known that the learned Duke was referring to the myth of Actaeon who gazed upon Diana bathing and was punished by being pursued by his own hounds after a vengeful Diana metamorphosed him into a stag.

The same kind of learned reference is found in the ensuing dialogue when Valentine reports about Olivia's reaction to the Duke's suit. The key here is, of course, in the language and the way it is used. Valentine knows the proper words: 'And water once a day her chamber round with high offending brine.' But the Duke does even better:

O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love when the rich golden shaft
Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and filled,
Her sweet perfections, with one self king,
A way before me to sweet beds of flow'rs;
Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bow'rs.

In other words, Orsino has read all the right books. The 'rich golden shaft' is, of course, Cupid's arrow. He has two sets of arrows, gold and lead; the gold inspires love, the lead inspires dislike, or to use the Elizabethan word, disdain. Furthermore, it is not just a golden arrow, it is a rich, golden shaft. And Orsino continues to demonstrate his knowledge as well as his imaginative powers. The seats of her affections are thoroughly described, 'liver, brain, and heart'—the 'sovereign thrones'.

Now according to various theories of love, the seat of the affections could be any one of these three parts of the body—usually the heart, though of course the liver and brain figured too. But Orsino has to get them all in just to prove how learned he really is. Here then is a key to the whole play. The use of language, the words, the conceits, the figures, the references, but most important the way in which these are used and the tone in which they are spoken, is exemplified for us quite clearly, I think, by what I have said about Curio's entry, the Ovid reference, Cupid's arrows and the seats of the affections.

We find the same tone in Viola's first appearance in the second scene:

VIOLA: What country, friends, is this?
CAPTAIN: This is Illyria, lady.
VIOLA: And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother he is in Elysium.

Having consigned her brother to the other world, Viola at once imagines that he is not dead. 'Perchance he is not drowned. What think you, sailors?' One notes the three 'perchances' in three successive lines: 'perchance
he is not drowned; the captain replies that it is 'perchance' she was saved; Viola replies, 'O my poor brother, and so perchance may he be.' This is no accident; this is another perfectly clear clue to an Elizabethan audience, as it should be to us, that games are going on. The game continues with the Captain, who refers to her brother whom he had seen clinging to a mast

Where like Arion on the dolphin's back,
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
So long as I could see.

The Captain is learned, he knows his classical mythology too. The story of Arion and the dolphin was well known. This matter of tone is further evidenced by the way in which coincidence now takes over. It just so happens that the Captain was born near where they have been cast up on the seacoast and he knows all about Orsino. So, too, does Viola. 'Orsino! I have heard my father name him. He was a bachelor then.' (One notices Viola's first reference, 'He was a bachelor then.' Her 'fell and cruel' intent is quite clear!)

Following the Captain's reference to Olivia and his description of her, Viola momentarily forgets about the bachelor. Now she is going to serve this lady who has retired from the world and whose sad condition suits with Viola's. However, she immediately changes her mind again and decides to serve Orsino, of course in disguise. She is going to be a eunuch to account for her voice, and the Captain is to introduce her and to secure her a position in Orsino's service. As far as this matter of tone is concerned, the exit line is interesting. Viola says, 'I thank thee. Lead me on.' Well, what a way to end the scene!

Let us follow this whole matter of tone in the main plot. Viola next appears in Act I, Scene iv, where she is going under the assumed masculine name of Cesario. She is very high in the Duke's favour, so high in fact that she is to go a-wooing for him: 'I'll do my best to woo your lady.' But suddenly we are struck over the head by her concluding lines, with their nice use of couplet, in an aside, 'Yet a barful strife! Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife.'

In all the typical Elizabethan romances this is the way they fall in love. It is a coup de foudre—all of a sudden they are in love. This is the first we have heard of Viola's love. We might have anticipated it, but the way in which it is delivered to us gives us the tone of the play and the tone with which we are expected to approach the love portions of the play.

But it most certainly should be noted that, although we are dealing with a convention, the language of Viola here, and of other characters in similar situations, is not stylized, not a language of conventions. Here we have a plain style, with a simple, bare, statement of fact. Elsewhere when Viola is dealing with other conventions she can use an imaginative language, a poetic language, but here in her declaration of love, she does not.

The next time we meet Viola is toward the end of the first act. Here she has come a-wooing for Orsino, but the scene has begun with our introduction to the lady Olivia whose first line, to us, is 'Take the fool away' (referring, of course, to the Clown, Feste). In the ensuing dialogue with Feste and Malvolio there is no evidence whatsoever of Olivia's great sorrow of which we have heard so much but which she never displays. Feste does ask her why she mourns, but she makes merely a brief and undeveloped factual response to this. Olivia ticks off Malvolio, she greets the drunken Sir Toby rather easily and her big moment comes, as I have said, when Viola comes a-wooing for Orsino.

This encounter between Viola (Cesario) and Olivia is what I choose to call the 'Big Game' scene, because in this scene both Viola and Olivia know that each is playing a game and each one of them knows that the other knows that respective roles are being performed. Just to make sure that we do not miss the point Viola begins by referring to herself as an actor: 'I would be loath to cast away my speech; for, besides that it is excellently well penned, I have taken great pains to con it.' In other words, she has a set speech which she has ostensibly
written herself and which she has learned by heart. The same figure of an actor is carried on in the ensuing
dialogue when Olivia inquires, 'Are you a comedian?' 'No', says Viola, 'no, my profound heart; and yet (by the
very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play.' A few lines later she again refers to her speech, 'Alas, I
took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical.' An actual definition of her role is found when she says, 'I am a
messenger.' She subsequently uses, of course, the language of heraldry, as does Olivia. And here the dialogue
gives a clear indication of the nature and intention of the scene, when Olivia says, 'Sure you have some
hideous matter to deliver, when the courtesy of it is so fearful. Speak your office' (the office of herald). One
notes the adjectives 'hideous' and 'fearful'; such matters, of course, are not for everyone's ears, and so Viola
makes it quite clear that she will only speak to Olivia: 'It alone concerns your ear. I bring no overture of war,
no taxation of homage. I hold the olive in my hand. My words are as full of peace as matter.' These are the
phrases, the conventional phrases, of a herald.

Olivia opens the next gambit by inquiring, 'Now, sir, what is your text?', to which Viola replies, 'Most sweet
lady—'. Olivia: 'A most comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it. Where lies your text?' Now the use
of this word 'text' is a definite reminder of the language of love, which is part of the amalgamation of the
Petrarchan tradition with that of Courtly Love in which the lover becomes an almost religious figure and the
lady, of course, a saint. (Near the beginning of his career in The Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare uses
this religious conceit in connection with love in the dialogue in the very first scene between Valentine and
Proteus.) The conceits continue. In answer to the inquiry, 'Where lies your text?' Viola replies, 'In Orsino's
bosom.' Olivia asks, 'In his bosom? In what chapter of his bosom?' To which Viola replies, 'To answer by the
method, in the first of his heart.' Thus the figure of the 'text' of her message has been related to Orsino's heart.
Olivia is playing along and uses the word 'chapter', referring, of course, to 'text'; one is curious as to just what
Viola means by the 'method'. Certainly she doesn't mean 'method' in the modern sense of 'mumble and
scratch'; she means 'method' in following the conventions. This is the way you play the Game; this is what you
ought to say.

Viola's next move is to ask to see Olivia's face, and Viola can be a little bit arch or, to some people's tastes,
almost cruel. When she comments on the vision of Olivia's beauty, 'Excellently done, if God did all,' Olivia
insists, 'Tis in grain sir; 'twill endure wind and weather.' Says Viola,

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
Lady, you are the cruellest she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave,
And leave the world no copy.

(We are at once reminded of similar ideas in Shakespeare's Sonnets where the friend is urged to marry so that
his beauty may be passed on through his children to subsequent generations and thus not be lost to the world.)
Well, this is rather old stuff by about 1600, the probable date of Twelfth Night. Olivia is not going to have
much more of this, and solves the problem of preserving her beauty by saying,

O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted. I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be
inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent
red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you
sent hither to praise me?

Beauty has thus been reduced to an inventory such as one might find appended to an inquisition post mortem
or in a testamentary paper such as a will. The conceit that Olivia is here employing punctures, of course, any
idealization of love. It completely destroys the traditional description of a beautiful woman derived from
Ariosto's description of Alcina, one that begins at the forehead and proceeds down to the eyebrows, the eyes,
the nose, the lips, the teeth, the throat and so on.
Olivia thinks rather well of Orsino:

Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
In voices well divulged, free, learned, and valiant,
And in dimension and the shape of nature
A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.
He might have took his answer long ago.

At this point Viola remembers her speech and launches into it when Olivia inquires, 'Why, what would you?'

Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloe your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.

This lyric strain is soon ended by Olivia whose only comment is, 'You might do much. What is your parentage?'

VIOLA: Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.
I am a gentleman. OLIVIA: Get you to your lord.
I cannot love him. Let him send no more.

Viola does her best to preserve the traditional love strain:

Love makes his heart of flint that you shall love;
And let your fervor, like my master's, be
Placed in contempt. Farewell, fair cruelty.

And with only a few more words than Viola has used to inform us of her love for Orsino, Olivia tells us that she has fallen in love with Viola in her guise of Cesario:

Not too fast; soft, soft,
Unless the master were the man. How now?
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes.

And, at the conclusion, 'Well, let it be.' This is all we hear. She has fallen love; there is nothing much to be done about it. Well, let it be.
The ring episode concludes this part of our study. Olivia has sent Malvolio in pursuit of Viola-Cesario, telling him that the ring had been left with her by Cesario, presumably as a gift from Orsino. Of course, no such ring has appeared. This is simply a device of Olivia's, and Viola quite understands what's going on when she encounters Malvolio. Here again the language is very important. Viola says:

She loves me sure; the cunning of her passion  
Invites me in this churlish messenger.  
None of my lord's ring? Why he sent her none.  
I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,  
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.  
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness

Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.  
How easy is it for the proper false  
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!  
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,  
For such as we are made of, such we be.

There can be no question that in the terms 'pregnant enemy' and 'proper false' we have a reference to Satan, but what is such a serious reference doing in such a context? Well, very simply in my view it emphasizes the whole artificiality of the episode that we have witnessed—the game that Olivia and Viola have been playing with one another. And this artificiality is, of course, emphasized by the couplet with which Viola ends the scene:

O Time, thou must untangle this, not I;  
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

Again the couplet rhyme, again the bald statement of fact—nothing much can be done about it, time just has to work it out somehow or other. This final couplet, like Viola's couplet announcing her love for Orsino, is in the best tradition of the romances, exactly the sort of thing that we find in Two Gentlemen of Verona over and over again. The point is that we are laughing at, or are amused by, the whole business. The ultimate absurdity in this play is found in the denouement. The Duke learning of Olivia's love, is ready to kill Cesario. He breaks forth:

O thou dissembling cub, what wilt thou be  
When time hath sowed a grizzle on thy case?  
Or will not else thy craft so quickly grow  
That thine own trip shall be thine overthrow?  
Farewell, and take her; but direct thy feet  
Where thou and I, henceforth, may never meet.

About a hundred lines later, after Sebastian has appeared and the mystery of the identity has cleared up, the Duke is very anxious to marry Viola:

Give me thy hand,  
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.

Here again a declaration of love is couched in very, very simple language, lacking ornamentation or imagery of any sort: 'Let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.' This is no 'big' confession of love, no 'big lyric love stuff
whatsoever. In fact, the nearest we come to any traditional language is found when the Duke says,

Here is my hand; you shall from this time be
Your master's mistress.

We may now, I think, briefly summarize the main plot. We have been operating in a world of artificiality. The whole question of reality has been raised by Viola. The business of falling in love is completely artificial. The switch of the Duke is completely artificial. The characters themselves are not, in the accepted sense of the word, rounded, three-dimensional characters. They are, in essence, flat, but this does not mean that Shakespeare has lacked dramatic skill—far from it. He is using these characters for his own purposes. He is playing games with us, and, by playing games, he convinces us of the reality of the characters. Of course we like Viola. She is a very sweet girl, but there is no depth to the character, no dimension to it beyond the purely theatrical. In other words, we are dealing here with theatrical truth as opposed to the truth of the printed page. The illusion in the theatre will hold us, will captivate us, and, in the theatre, no more is needed for this artificial love. It's exactly the sort of thing that Noel Coward does to perfection. In other words, I am suggesting that we treat the play as a play and examine it on the basis of its theatrical premises. Here these premises are the artificial world of lovers as exemplified over and over again in the world of Queen Elizabeth's court where such games were played, such lines spoken, such attitudes taken; and everything turns out all right, of course.

As we turn to the subplot we find ourselves in a very real world indeed. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are drunk every night. Toby is, of course, urging Sir Andrew on, ostensibly to woo Olivia, but mainly because Sir Andrew has three thousand ducats a year. The hypocrisy of Toby's attitude toward Sir Andrew and his possible wooing of Olivia is found in his description of Sir Andrew: 'He's as tall a man as any's in Illyria'—'tall' suggesting a 'fine, upstanding noble fellow'. Furthermore, according to Toby, Sir Andrew has other gifts: 'He plays o' th' viol-de-gamboys, and speaks three or four languages word for word without book, and hath all the good gifts of nature.' But immediately Sir Andrew appears his stupidity is apparent in his misunderstanding of Toby's simple injunction, 'Accost', which he takes to be Maria's name. As far as being a musician or having other talents, as far as languages go, Sir Andrew denies them specifically in his own words. For example, he says, 'Methinks sometimes I have no more with than a Christian or an ordinary man has. But I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit.' A few lines later he demonstrates his complete ignorance of foreign languages when Toby inquires, 'Pourquoi, my dear knight?' 'What is pourquoi?' asks Andrew, 'Do, or not do? I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O, had I but followed the arts!' Sir Toby's original description of Andrew in terms of the courtier, the gentleman, is completely invalidated by Andrew himself. He is rather the exact opposite of the ideal courtier, the ideal courtly gentleman. When describing his abilities in dancing, in response to Toby's inquiry, 'What is thy excellence in a galliard, knight?' 'Faith, I can cut a caper,' says Sir Andrew; and he goes on, 'And I think I have the back-trick simply as strong as any man in Illyria.' Toby hits back very, very hard: 'Wherefore are these things hid?' These things are, of course, not assets; they are not recommendations for Sir Andrew as a potential suitor for the fair Olivia—far from it.

If Sir Andrew is a caricature, so too is Malvolio. But Malvolio has the further distinction of being rather unpleasant. We see this unpleasantness quite clearly in the later scene when Sir Toby and the others are having a good time drinking and singing and eating:

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?
Here Malvolio's attitude is well described in Toby's line, 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?'

Malvolio is the enemy of joy, of cakes and ale, of pleasure in life. This has tempted some to press, I think, just a bit too hard on Malvolio as a portrait of a Puritan. No, no! Olivia is much more accurate when, earlier in the play, she has told Malvolio, 'You are sick of self-love.'

And it is this very state of mind, this being sick of self-love, that motivates the action of the subplot. Here we note that in contrast with the main plot we do have specific motivation. Things happen now for a reason. The letter is planted in order to gull and trick Malvolio. The characters involved are in a sense lowlife and quite realistic. Thus we have the artificial world of Orsino and Olivia and Viola, in contrast with the world in the servants' hall. In both plots we see foolish love, but in the artificial world everything works out all right. We need a bit of machinery to get Antonio out of trouble. And, obviously, there has got to be some machinery to get Malvolio out of gaol. But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that there is no machinery of this nature in the main plot; there we have simply the *deus ex machina* appearance of Sebastian to resolve the question of identity and all is well.

We must not leave the play without some mention of the note of sadness which has received so much comment. Reviewing a recent performance at Stratford-upon-Avon, Harold Hobson of the *Sunday Times* described *Twelfth Night* as Shakespeare's most melancholy play and also as his most wittily written.

The melancholy is found exclusively in Feste's songs, in the first:

```
O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear! your true-love's coming,
   That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
   Journeys end in lovers meeting,
   Every wise man's son doth know;
```

and the conclusion of the second verse,

```
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
   Youth's a stuff will not endure.
```

To suit the Duke's melancholy of love Feste produces another famous song:

```
Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
```

And, of course, perhaps the most famous song is that which concludes the play when Feste sings:

```
When that I was and a little tiny boy,
   With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
   For the rain it raineth every day.
```

I think we should, perhaps, temper our attitude towards this note of sadness with reference to the title of the play, *Twelfth Night or What You Will*. Twelfth Night, the Feast of the Epiphany, marked the end of the Christmas festivities and, as a general rule, there was no more playing of plays at Court until the Sunday
before the beginning of Lent or on Shrove Tuesday itself. Thus very simply Twelfth Night marks the end of
the festivities of the Christmas season. In that sense it is not too difficult to understand that final stanza of the
last song.

A great while ago the world begun,
   With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
But that's all one, our play is done,
   And we'll strive to please you every day.

The fun and the games are over and we will have one last fling, a sort of carnival time before Lent—but that is
still some weeks away. In other words, I don't think we need to be any more seriously concerned about it than
I have indicated. The title—The End of the Christmas Revelry. Yes, yes. It's all over—the fun and games are
ended. And so Adieu.

Notes

1 3.2.20-4. Quotations from Shakespeare are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al.
   (Boston, 1974).


3 "'As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night": Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending', in Shakespearian Comedy, ed.

4 It is relevant to recall that the festival of Twelfth Night, in addition to its popular associations with the
   holiday release of Misrule festivities, was also a religious celebration of the Feast of Epiphany.

5 Discussing the use of identical twins in The Comedy of Errors, Northrop Frye argues: ' … I feel that one
   reason for the use of two sets of twins in this play is that identical twins are not really identical (the same
   person) but merely similar, and when they meet they are delivered, in comic fashion, from the fear of the loss
   of identity, the primitive horror of the döppelganger which is an element in nearly all forms of insanity,
   something of which they feel as long as they are being mistaken for each other.' (A Natural Perspective (New
   York, 1965), p. 78)


Karin S. Coddon (essay date 1993)


[In this essay, Coddon claims that the closing of Twelfth Night emphasizes disorder over natural order,
   seeming "less than a wholesale endorsement of the privileges of rank and hierarchy."]

In Twelfth Night demarcations between male and female, master and servant, libertine and moralist come into
festive—and not so festive—collision. Typical readings of the play have focused on its misrule and
topsy-turvy as serving ultimately to reaffirm the dominant, aristocratic values against which the ostensible
"puritan," Malvolio, stands as a scorn-worthy scapegoat. 1 By this reasoning, the play may be seen as a
comedy in which insubordination, cross-dressing, and unruly "license" are, in the final analysis, contained in
the rites of unmasking and marriage. The play's notably troubled closure—Malvolio's vow of revenge, the
Captain's imprisonment, and Feste's strangely inappropriate closing dirge—has been given its due only insofar
as it contributes to the comedy's "dark outline." But the problem of closure also aligns *Twelfth Night* with *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, plays in which the apparent "restoration of order" is countered by the excesses of precedent disorder that have been repressed, perhaps, but not entirely effaced. If in *Twelfth Night* the aristocratic order is ostensibly reasserted in the pairings of Orsino/Viola and Oliva/Sebastian, the refusal of the play's closing to recuperate two of its most disorderly subjects—Malvolio and Feste—suggests rather less than a wholesale endorsement of the privileges of rank and hierarchy. For by mockingly disclosing the mutability and contingency of social rank, *Twelfth Night* demystifies one of Elizabethan authority's central political fictions. In the process, the play tests the precarious limits of theatrical "license," as festivity itself exceeds the containment of mere "fantasy inversion" to take on a markedly historical, even contestatory dimension.

Elizabethan and Jacobean culture is commonly characterized by an overwhelming obsession with "good order and obedience." Copious propaganda exhorted a minutely classified, divinely ordained social hierarchy:

```
Every degree of people in their vocation, calling, and office hath appointed to them, their duty and order. Some are in hyghe degree, some in lowe, some kynes and prynces, some inferiors and subjectes, priestes, and layemenne, Maysters and Servauntes, Fathers and children, husbands and wives, riche and poore, and everyone hath nede of other: so that in all thynges is to be lauded and praysed the goodly order of god, wythoute the whiche, no house, no citie, no commonwealth can continue and indure or laste.
```

Yet Keith Wrightson has suggested that the promulgators of this rigidly organic paradigm "knew very well that it was an ideal, an aspiration," a response to increased opportunities for social mobility rather than a reflection of universal belief or practice. As Wrightson has demonstrated, while the foremost status of the titular nobility remained a constant, there was notable slippage throughout the entire social hierarchy between supposedly rigid "degrees of people":

```
gentle status itself could be achieved as well as inherited; by obtaining a university degree, by appointment to governmental or military office, or by any man who "can live without manuell labour, and thereto is able and will beare the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman."
```

The Elizabethan propensity for classifying and even legislating (e.g., via sumptuary laws) a fixed and self-evident social hierarchy was belied by actual social practice; under James the First, rampant title-mongering would further erode the primacy of blood and birth as sole determinants of social rank. Jacobean indiscretions aside, the official propaganda chiefly served the interests of the uppermost social echelon, not the least of which was a crown intent on absolutism but without a standing militia to enforce it. For the primacy of blood, after all, lay at the core of the divine-right ideology so dear to both Elizabeth and James.

The theater, of course, already occupied the most equivocal of situations toward the aristocratic and nonaristocratic, even antiaristocratic factions. As Michael Bristol has remarked, "The social position of the players and of their work was based on two contradictory presuppositions—that they were engaged in a business or industry, and that they were engaged in 'service' to their aristocratic patrons." Government licensing and courtly patronage do not necessarily imply the theater's ideological alignment with the court, especially given the apparent, remarkable social heterogeneity of Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. Comedy in particular tended to foster heterogeneity, as Robert Weimann has noted:

```
In matters of social custom and dramatic taste there was as yet no clear division between the rural plebs and the London middle classes. This meant that there was little difference between the middle class and the plebian reception of the Morris dance, the jig, clowning, and the like. The middle strata of these craftsmen and the more wealthy dealers and retailers enjoyed
```

545
these entertainments just as did the lower strata, the laborer, carriers, servants.  

Similarly, the very nature of theatrical representation defied "official" positions on rank and degree, as common players personated princes, male actors "boyed" females. If Malvolio, like such antitheatrical polemicists as Phillip Stubbes, disapproves of festive misrule in principle, the government's regulation of the theater testifies to its own anxieties about the drama's potential to produce (and reproduce) fictions contesting Tudor and Stuart official ideologies. The theater, like the "allicens'd fool," was to an extent authorized to enact a degree of insubordination, apparently on the thought that it would thus function as a sort of safety valve for discontent that might otherwise seek less indirect forms of expression. But as Natalie Zemon Davis has argued, festive misrule need not be conceived as either wholly contestatory or wholly conservative:

It is an exaggeration to view the carnival and Misrule as merely a "safety valve," as merely a primitive, prepolitical form of recreation… the structure of the carnival form can evolve so that it can act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to that existing order.

My suggestion, then, is that Twelfth Night pointedly reinforces neither aristocratic nor anticourt values; rather, by exploding the kinds of social classifications propounded by contemporary theorists into a multiplicity of slippery, contingent positions, the play subversively confounds holiday and history, festive "license" and contestation. Officially controlled by the government and increasingly subjected to virulent antitheatrical attacks, the theater was positioned as much in a site of limited resistance as of limited allegiance. The opening—and closing—resistance of Feste the clown to narrative recuperation suggests not only the possibility of theatrical evasion of order, but also a material if limited autonomy from the institutional structures seemingly acknowledged in the reversions of the young nobles and the overreaching Malvolio to their proper places and degrees.

Lawrence Stone's argument for a "crisis of the aristocracy" as a major precipitant of the 1642 revolution has been roundly criticized by a number of social historians. It has been suggested, for example, that radical social change in seventeenth-century England was due more to the emergence of landed and professional "middle classes" than to a decline in the aristocracy's prestige. Yet without asserting a direct causality between aristocratic excesses and the development of a revolutionary movement, it seems clear that the nobility's profligate expenditures and conspicuous consumption served to weaken the aristocracy both economically and in terms of popular perception. The latter is evidenced in mocking gallows derision throughout Jacobean tragedy; Shakespeare's Lear and Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy offer bitter critiques of courtly extravagances. Even so worldly a blade as John Harington remarked upon the libertinism of the Jacobean court, where

those, whom I never coud get to taste good liquor, now follow the fashion and wallow in beastly delights. The Ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication…. I do often say (but not aloud) that the Danes have again conquered the Britains, for I see no man, or woman either, that can now command himself or herself.

But the court of James Stuart hardly introduced excess into the early modern English aristocracy. Twelfth Night, with its elaborate imagery of appetite and satiety, seems to draw upon contemporary notions, by no means hyperbolic, about the consumption habits of an aristocratic household. In fact, the supposed "morality of indulgence" John Hollander attributes to aristocratic excess and satiety in the play becomes a bit incongruous in light of Stone's catalogues of noble gluttony. According to Stone, even conservatice, prudent Lord Burghley indulged in the extravagant gormandizing of aristocratic "festive" entertainments:

The £363 [Burghley] spent on a feast to the French Commissioners in 1581 might perhaps be explained on grounds of public policy. But what are we to make of the £629 spent in three days' junketing at the marriage of his daughter a year later? At this vast party there were
consumed, among other things, about 1,000 gallons of wine, 6 veals, 26 deer, 14 sheep, 16 lambs, 4 kids, 6 hares, 36 swans, 2 storks, 41 turkeys, over 370 poultry, 49 curlews, 135 mallards, 354 teals, 1,049 plovers, 124 knotts, 280 stints, 109 pheasants, 277 partridges, 615 cocks, 485 snipe, 840 larks, 21 gulls, 71 rabbits, 21 pigeons, and 2 sturgeons.\(^{17}\)

If music be the food of love, play on, indeed; Orsino's elaborate tropes of appetite and satiety might well have prompted a subversive laughter, given the mind-boggling extravagances of the Elizabethan aristocrat's table. On the other hand, certain factions were less likely to find such gluttony a laughing matter in the inflation and famine-plagued 1590s. For the commoner and particularly the poor, the 1590s were years of economic hardship and deprivation. Four consecutive failed harvests between 1594 and 1597 contributed to rampant food shortages;\(^{18}\) authorities greatly feared the possibility of large-scale social disorder, and in fact, a number of food riots occurred in both the countryside and London.\(^{19}\) As Buchanan Sharp has shown, the privileged were frequently the focus of the rioters' deepest resentments: "The reported poor of Somerset who in 1596 seized a load of cheese were reported to be animated by a hatred of all gentlemen because they believed 'that the rich men had gotten all into their hands, and will starve the poor.'"\(^{20}\) Civil discontent over food shortages bore the threat of an attack on the entire social order, as the Privy Council itself recognized.\(^{21}\) Indeed, in the aftermath of the abortive Oxfordshire Rising of 1596, Attorney-General Coke insisted that "[t]he real purpose of Bartholomew Stere [one of the Oxfordshire conspirators] was 'to kill the gentlemen of that country and to take the spoile of them, affirming that the commons, long sithens in Spaine did rise and kill all the gentlemen in Spain and sithens that time have lyved merrily there.'"\(^{22}\) Thus historicized, Twelfth Night's mockery of noble excesses may be seen as homologous to the rather less playful sentiments of another Oxfordshire conspirator, James Bradshaw, who asked "Whether there were not certaine good fellowes in Witney that wold ryse & knock down the gentlemen & riche men that take in the comons, and made corre so deare?"\(^{23}\)

It is worth noting, however, that the play's lone vocal critic of profligacy, Malvolio, is held up to even greater derision than the extravagant nobles. As Elliot Krieger has noted, Malvolio "actually threatens the social order much less than he seems to.... [H]e has the greatest respect for all the accoutrements of aristocratic rank."\(^{24}\) Malvolio, "sick of self-love,"\(^{25}\) covets the very privilege he seems to criticize, as is borne out by his desire to transcend his social rank by marrying Olivia. Far from a radical social critic, Malvolio is more reminiscent of the antitheatricalists\(^{26}\) who lambasted playgoers for their own variety of moral gluttony. Phillip Stubbes claimed that playgoers "are alwaies eating, & neuer satisfied; euer seeing, & neuer contented; continualie hearing, & neuer wearied; they are greedie of wickednes."\(^{27}\) That Malvolio's threat of revenge troubles the play's comic ending suggests less an endorsement of the legitimacy of his grievances than an ironic acknowledgment of the strident persistence of antitheatricalism.

Orsino's opening trope, then—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{If music be the food of love, play on,} \\
\text{Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,} \\
\text{The appetite may sicken, and so die} \\
\text{(I.i.1-3)}
\end{align*}
\]

—lends to his lyric self-indulgence a material marker of social privilege and its excesses. It serves to yoke together the amorous appetites of the relatively decorous Orsino and the more grotesque, "carnivalesque" appetites of Sir Toby Belch.\(^{28}\) For Sir Toby is, of course, the play's most comical—and most pointed—travesty of aristocratic self-indulgence. His revels are informed by the popular tradition of "seasonal misrule," a tradition already suspect for its violations of class and gender boundaries.\(^{29}\) Sir Toby cavorts not only with his fellow titled tosspot Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but also with his social inferiors—Feste, Fabian, and Maria, the last of whom he marries.\(^{30}\) The deflation of Malvolio's ambition to wed into the aristocracy is countered by the marriage of Olivia's uncle to her serving-woman. The play's fantasy transgressions typical of festive misrule—Olivia's infatuation with a disguised woman, "Cesario's" with Orsino—are ostensibly...
contained as gender stability is restored. Like Malvolio’s vow of revenge, however, Sir Toby’s offstage marriage to Maria is a reminder of the instability of rank and order that persists outside the world of the play. Far from being merely a temporary and cathartic release from social order, festivity intervenes to alter that order. Sir Toby’s marriage to Maria makes explicit the identification of festivity with social fluidity, despite the play’s apparent recuperation of transvestism and homoerotic desire.

But Sir Toby’s marriage is not the play’s sole—or most significant—offstage social transgression. Feste’s first appearance in I.v. aligns the clown with insubordination, with the equivocal boundaries between licensed and unlicensed foolery.

MARIA. Nay, either tell me where thou hast been, or I will open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter, in way of thy excuse: my lady will hang thee for thy absence.
CLOWN. Let her hang me: he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours.
(I.v.1-5)

As has been frequently noted, Feste’s entrance is marked by an emphatic lacuna; his introduction is colored not only by the unauthorized absence from Olivia’s household, but also by his defiant resistance (“Let her hang me”) to Maria’s interrogations about his whereabouts, even under the threat of hanging or unemployment. The clown’s unlicensed insubordination lies less in the nature of his absence than in his refusal to represent a “subjectivity” to his interrogator. This is not to claim that Feste’s uncooperation is akin to Hamlet’s “I have that within which passes show” (I.ii.85), but rather, that theatricality constitutes a site of evasion from subjectification, i.e., the strategies of surveillance and interrogation that comprise, as Michel Foucault has written, “a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement … a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship.” An actor does not speak a "self”—he impersonates; his social identity is not metaphysical but infinitely manipulable, as was recognized, however disapprovingly, by the theater’s critics. For

unlike the consecrated minister of God’s word or the political orator, an actor is a man whose public utterance does not represent what he feels or thinks, although it is said with full conviction and the sound of authority. An actor is not just someone whose speech is "dissembling": the deeper problem is that he is most valued for his ability to dissemble convincingly.

That virtually the first thing we learn about Feste is that he has been somewhere offstage, outside of representation and vigilance, suggests not a Derridean aporia so much as the theater’s potential to exceed its carefully, officially delimited boundaries, to collapse the distinction between “festivity” and history. As Bristol notes of Feste, “[the clown] traverses the boundary between a represented world and the here-and-now world he shares with the audience.” Earlier clowns like Richard Tarlton commonly interacted directly with the audience as well as with other characters in the play; though Feste embodies the sophistication and intellectualism of the later Elizabethan jester, he is as much of the world outside the play as of the fictive world within.

Despite its comic word-play, Feste’s exchange with Maria has somewhat grave undertones. The threat of hanging seems hyperbolic, though as Maria notes, "to be turned away" would be "as good as a hanging" (I.v. 18); a fool without a post would be "voiceless," indeed. The refusal of interrogation risks a coerced expulsion from discourse entirely. The Elizabethan theater, like Feste testing the limits of licensed foolery, was subject to an authority that could—and occasionally, did—impose silence. But also like Feste, the theater deftly
confounds the boundaries between festive misrule and unruly license. Not the least of the Elizabethan clown's functions is to mediate between audience and play; with Feste, the mediation takes on, however playfully, a dimension of conspiracy.

Upon Olivia's appearance, the clown launches into what is ostensibly the licensed insubordination allowed his function by his patroness and superior. Feste's witty impertinence reestablishes his "allow'd," public role as jester. Though he effectively proves her a fool, Olivia concedes, "There is no slander in an allow'd fool" (I.V.94). Yet because Feste's cheeky demonstration of his mistress's foolishness has been preceded by his unlicensed absence, Olivia's authority here seems superfluous, even specious, as though Feste is but humoring her by playing the prescribed role of servant. Typically mistrustful of festive insubordination and frivolity, Malvolio, rather than Olivia, takes offense at the fool's impudence. But Olivia's rejoinder—"O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite" (lines 90-91)—tacitly accuses the steward of the very ills he claims to disdain. For Malvolio's "self-love" is pointedly not the absence of appetite but merely a "distempered" one. That Olivia's reprimand of Malvolio is shortly followed by the reappearance of Sir Toby "in the third degree of drink" (line 136) marks a less festive variety of inversion: Malvolio is not so much the antithesis of Sir Toby as he is the reversed mirror-image.

Feste, then, is far more than merely the "spirit of festivity"; he is also an ironic commentator upon the discrepancies between aristocratic myth and the material circumstances that contradict it. The clown's consistent gulling of his social superiors has been frequently noted,\(^\text{36}\) but it is a mistake to view Feste as simply a protocapitalist "service professional."\(^\text{37}\) The emphasis on payment serves to remind the spectator that this is not the mythic, feudal world of loyal, ideal service, "The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed!"\(^\text{38}\) but rather one in which festivity itself is purchased at the same outlandishly inflated rate that swells Orsino's plaints of love or Olivia's grandiloquent self-denial. The contrast between the bawdy knights' boisterous entreaties for a song and the melancholy "O Mistress Mine" with which the clown responds points up the distance between mythic \textit{carpe diem} romance and the almost indiscriminate, self-indulgent appetites that govern not only Sir Toby and Sir Andrew but Orsino and Malvolio as well. Hollander's suggestion that the song is a reflection upon the various lovers' romantic foibles\(^\text{39}\) does not take into account either the inappropriate audience or the closing allusion to an uncertain future outside of the festive present: "Youth's a stuff will not endure" (II.iii.53). \textit{Twelfth Night}'s nominal situation in a particular, finite time not only evokes traditional, popular festivity organized around the church calendar;\(^\text{40}\) it also foregrounds the play's precarious temporality. The Epiphany functions as a temporal trope much as the Forest of Arden, in As \textit{You Like It}, functions as a spatial one: the time of carefree, aristocratic festivity is gone, and between nostalgia for an idealized past and uncertainty about the historical time beyond holiday is the tenuous and hence ironic celebration of the present.

As Feste willingly joins Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for a merry round, he playfully reminds the latter that his own cooperation in the song entails a transgression of rank: "'Hold thy peace, then, knave,' knight? I shall be constrained in it to call thee knave, knight" (II.iii.66-67); Feste subtly remarks upon the knights' complicity in the deconstruction of social order. Akin to government licensing of the theater, the nobles' authorization of "benign" festive subversion enables the terms by which institutional authority may be mocked and questioned. The ostensibly vast social distinction between gentleman and common player is elided. Just as Feste has previously "proven" Olivia a fool, his observation that Sir Toby is "in admirable fooling" (line 81) places his social superior in the role of servant, jester, \textit{player}—the very kind of class "mingle-mangle" so mistrusted by the antitheatricalists.\(^\text{41}\) Interestingly, it is Malvolio who scolds the revelers for their violation of good order:

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?
Malvolio objects to the revelry explicitly on grounds of its disorderliness of "place, persons, [and] time"; once more, the critic of aristocratic "uncivil rule" is the play's most vehement proponent of a stable, orderly social structure. But Sir Toby, thus chided for transgression of his degree, picks up the gauntlet with a peculiarly bitter rejoinder to Malvolio: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (lines 113-15). The question, of course, is rhetorical, though like Malvolio's threat of revenge, in retrospect rather eerily prophetic.

There is some suggestion, once again, that the festive interval—as interval—itself is already anachronistic, that the revels have, if not ended, become embedded in historical rather than holiday matters. Orsino, in II.iv once more caught in the throes of a language of amorous appetite, requests "that old and antic song" (line 3) performed the night before. Curio's response to this is, interestingly, the first and only time Olivia's clown is named, and, additionally, given a history: he is "a fool that the Lady Olivia's father took much delight in" (lines 11-12). The introduction of Feste's name in this context seems appropriate; for the festivity with which Orsino identifies him is indeed a thing of the past, when festive rites were bound up in a popular, material marking of time:

Mark it, Cesario, it [the song] is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chant it: it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love,
Like the old age.
(lines 43-48)

Given Orsino's own penchant for florid, hyperbolic love talk, his paean to the "silly" song is noteworthy. And yet the song, when it does come, seems less a rustic lay than a pensive Elizabethan lyric telling of a lady's disdain and a "dying," unrequited lover's lonely fate. Like "O Mistress Mine," "Come Away, Death" is touched by Petrarchan conventions of female resistance and frustrated male desire. The song's melancholy, along with its identification with an idealized past, contrasts strikingly with the language of self-indulgent appetite and desire that characterizes its context. The sad song is unsuited to its setting, but not solely because of the play's comic aims. It is a performance whose signification has been rendered specious by the play's own ironization of desire; the song, like the one preceding, is merely the "food of love" for the nobleman's appetite. Indeed, Orsino follows with two more elaborate speeches of quantification and appetite to "Cesario," in blatant contradiction of his prior homage to the simplicity of the old love song. The disembodied metaphoric trappings of petrarchan love become in Twelfth Night parodically reconstituted as crassly material, even gluttonous.

Similarly, Feste's refusal, to Viola, of the "licensed" title of fool, and his claim that he is, rather, Olivia's "corrupter of words" (III.i.36-37), acknowledge the degeneration of language, the discrepancy between the anachronistic idiom of lyric love and the actual amorous discourses marked by consumption and excess. As Terry Eagleton has observed, "What has discredited language in Feste's view is commerce, the breaking of bonds.... Bonds—written commercial contracts—have rendered signs valueless, since too often they are not backed up by the physical actions they promise." Feste is Olivia's "corrupter of words," but after the fact: language is no more innocent than love. Feste's corruption of language, however, is of a different and more equivocal variety than Orsino's or Malvolio's, for he consistently takes the words of his noble superiors—much as he does their money—and destabilizes them, exposing the semiotic and political slipperiness of ostensibly stable categories and values. Thus he responds to Viola's characterization of him as
"a merry fellow, [who] car'st for nothing" (III.i.26-27) with what may seem like an inexplicably surly rejoinder: "Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you" (lines 27-28). Like Orsino before her, Viola attempts to constitute Feste as merely the embodiment of the mirthful court jester, the abstract spirit of song and festivity. But the clown, as in his initial exchange with Maria, at once resists the fixity of his prescribed role and pointedly refuses to invest "corrupt" words with any kind of truth value. What that "something" may be for which he cares is less significant than the refusal of explication.

When Feste accepts Viola's money, he also accepts his function as servant, but not without a saucy allusion to her complicity in the crassest variety of commerce: "I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus" (III.i.51). Pandarus, of course, evokes the activity for which Orsino has engaged "Cesario"; like Feste, Viola is playing the role of servant, and her actual social superiority is undercut by the clown's suggestion of a kind of material equivalence between them. Viola apparently recognizes her error in labeling Feste merely a merry madcap, and characterizes him as, like herself, one playing a part:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,  
And to do that well, craves a kind of wit:  
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
The quality of persons, and the time,  
And like the haggard, check at every feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practice  
As full of labour as a wise man's art.  
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;  
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

(lines 60-68)

This speech is commonly taken as the playwright's homage to the art of theater, or even as a tribute to Robert Armin.43 But while it is an oversimplification to read Feste's function as strictly metadramatic, Viola's words indeed testify to the "labour" and intellection of playing, as if to counter antitheatricalist accusations of wantonness and idleness. Indeed, one of Armin's own Quips upon Questions articulates a similar theme:

True it is, he playes the Foole indeed;  
But in the Play he playes it as he must:  
Yet when the play is ended, then his speed  
Is better than the pleasure of thy trust.  
For he shall have what thou that time has spent,  
Playing the foole, thy folly to consent.

He playes the Wise man then, and not the Foole,  
That wisely for his lyving so can do;  
So doth the Carpenter with his sharpe tool,  
Cut his owne finger oft, yet lives by't to.  
He is a foole to cut his limbe say I  
But not so with his toole to live thereby.44

The notion of fooling as professional, intellectual labor at once responds to and significantly revises such suspicions as those of Stephen Gosson regarding the actor's equivocal identity: "There is more in [Players] than we perceive."45 The comic actor is thus transformed from diabolically Protean hypocrite to expertly
skilled craftsman, a keen observer of social practices shrewd enough to play fool "for his lyving."

In fact, Feste corrupts words chiefly to expose the corruption of others by them, and for them. To this extent, the clown embodies the instructive model of comedy extolled by Thomas Heywood in *An Apologie for Actors* (1612):

And what is then the subject of this harmlesse mirth? either in the shape of a clowne to shew others their slovenly and unhandsome behaviour, that they may reforme that simplicity in themselves which others make their sport, lest they happen to become the like subject of generali scorne to an auditory; else it intreates of love, deriding foolish inamorates, who spend their ages, their spirits, nay themselves, in the servile and ridiculous imployments of their mistresses.46

In IV.i, wherein "Sir Topas" interrogates Malvolio, Feste both exemplifies and parodies the didactic dimension of foolery. Again, the scene owes a debt to the festive tradition of "misrule," in which, as Stuart Clark has noted, typically "clerical parodies of divine service substituted the profane for the sacred, and low for high office."47 But Feste is doing more than mocking Malvolio with his travesty of a Puritan curate. With his emphatic, ludicrous "testing" of Malvolio's sanity, Feste parodies the discourse of interrogation he has himself consistently eluded. The clown uses the guise of authority to mock authority, a strategy manifest not only in "Sir Topas's" worrying of the "madman," but also in Feste's assumption of the voices of both the curate and the servant: "Maintain no words with him, good fellow!—Who, I, sir? not I, sir! God buy you, good Sir Topas!—Marry, amen!—I will, sir, I will" (lines 102-105). As Maria has pointed out, the clown's costume is superfluous (lines 64-65); language itself enables dissemblance. In theater, subjectivity is no more than a habit that aptly is put on. Feste's trick question to Malvolio—"But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit?" (lines 117-18)—mockingly discloses the equivocal nature of playing itself. Neither madness nor sanity has any ontological status in the realm of theatricality, for the "counterfeit" is at once as true—and as false—as the thing itself. Stable distinctions between licensed and unlicensed foolery then, are radically problematic, Heywood's "harmlesse mirth" perhaps not as socially benign as the term suggests.

Not surprisingly, the play's final act, with its various unmaskings and revelations, yet falls short of the thorough restoration of order that the plot and genre seem to dictate. V.i begins with an almost uncanny echo of I.v, as Fabian beseeches the clown to show him Malvolio's letter, only to be enigmatically refused (lines 1-6). Feste's resistance to Fabian's entreaty is narratively inexplicable, since the latter has been in on the trick all along and the former at least attempts to read the letter publicly. Feste's refusal appears motivated simply by a characteristic deflection of interrogation for its own sake. But it is also in the last act that Feste is silenced, as Olivia objects to his "mad" reading of Malvolio's letter, despite his protests, and orders Fabian to deliver the missive instead. It is a significant moment, not the least because Olivia, the clown's employer, here disdains his foolery on grounds that its theatricality is an apparent obstacle to discerning the truth. This momentary suppression of theatricality serves to refigure—temporarily, at any rate—the intractable lines of social hierarchy heretofore overturned by playing. Malvolio, upon appearing, issues a proclamation whose very tenor is one of "unseemly" entitlement: "Madam, you have done me wrong. Notorious wrong" (lines 327-28). But the ensuing explanation merely reiterates the steward's subordinate position, as Olivia remarks, "Alas, poor fool, how they have baffled thee!" (line 368). Malvolio, the overreacher, is now reduced to the lowly status of one whose function he has previously scorned, as Feste promptly reminds him, concluding "thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (lines 375-76). But just as Feste has taken his cue to speak from Olivia's epithet "poor fool," so does Malvolio take his from the clown's gloating last words. "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you(!)" Malvolio warns (line 378), the "whole pack" evidently including not only the pranksters (the two chiefest of whom—Sir Toby and Maria—are not present) but the nobles as well. The so-called "festive comedy" concludes rather ominously; if indeed "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," it is difficult to dismiss Malvolio's parting threat as merely one sour note troubling an otherwise stable social hierarchy.
Significantly, the clown's closing song seems to take its uncertain, melancholy tone not from the promised (though deferred) wedding and "golden time" of Orsino's last speech, but from the bitter note of Malvolio's final words. Far from heralding a "golden time," a term that itself evokes the pastoral myths of idyllic, benevolent relations between masters and servants, the haunting song marks the end of holiday time and takes the play back into history, into materiality. Not just the wind and rain, but their inexorability against the festive vices of lust and drunkenness, the harshness of "man's estate" wherein gates are shut against foolery, call attention to the illusory nature of comic resolution and to the uncertain world to which actor and spectator alike must return. The final line, "And we'll strive to please you every day" (line 407), is a reminder that playing itself, while trafficking in illusion, is historically embedded, materially reproducible in time and space, and thus vulnerable as well to "wind and rain," to the threats that escape narrative closure. But like Malvolio's threat, Feste too is outside the narrative here, his song not mediated by the now-vanished illusory world of Illyria. It is a moment that keenly demonstrates Weimann's assertion that "the comic actor … does not merely play to the audience; to If Malvolio's a certain degree still plays with the audience." If Malvolio's evasion of closure deflates the ideal of a "golden time," Feste's signifies a resonant deconstruction of the boundaries between festivity and history. He stands as an emblem of the theater's capacity to intervene in lived experience. This gesture of self-licensed foolery figures the theater's testimonial to a limited institutional autonomy, even while the melancholy song discloses the material terms of those limitations.

Notes


3 For a consideration of the problematics of disorder and closure in Hamlet, see my essay "Suche Strange Desygn's: Madness, Subjectivity, and Treason in Hamlet and Elizabethan Culture," Renaissance Drama n.s. 20 (1989): 51-76.


6 Wrightson, p. 20.


16 See note 1.

17 Stone, p. 256.


20 Sharp, p. 36.

21 Walter, pp. 96-99.

22 Sharp, p. 39.

23 Quoted in Walter, p. 99.


26 I am deliberately avoiding the term "puritan" in reference to Malvolio, not only because I do not believe he is explicitly a satirical Puritan in the sense, e.g., of Jonson's *Zeal-of-the-Land Busy*, but also because, as Palliser observes, "'Puritan' has proven almost impossible to define, both at the time and since, and some historians are now tempted to abandon the term altogether" (p. 347; see also ).

27 Quoted in Weimann, p. 171.

28 Cf. Terry Eagleton: "Like Falstaff [Sir Toby] ... is a rampant hedonist, complacently anchored in his body, falling at once 'beyond' the symbolic order of society in his verbal anarchy, and 'below' it in his carnivalesque refusal to submit his body to social control" (*William Shakespeare* [London: Basil Blackwell, 1986], p. 32).

Ralph Berry remarks that Maria's exact social status is somewhat unclear, though he observes that other characters frequently address her as a menial servant (*Shakespeare and Social Class* [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988], pp. 70-71).

I still think that C.L. Barber says it best: "the fool in *Twelfth Night* has been over the garden wall into some such world as the Vienna of *Measure for Measure*. He never tells where he has been, gives no details. But he has an air of knowing more of life than anyone else—too much, in fact" (p. 259).


Bristol, p. 113.

Bristol, p. 140.

See Weimann, p. 213.


The term may be found in Berry, p. 74.


Hollander, p. 237.


See Weimann, pp. 23-25; Marcus, p. 27.

Eagleton, p. 28.

The suggestion that the speech may refer specifically to Armin may be found in the Arden Edition of *Twelfth Night*, p. 27, nn. 61-69.


Clark, p. 101.


Weimann, p. 257.

I would like to thank Don Wayne and Louis Montrose for their generous suggestions.
Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Sexual Ambiguity

Leonard F. Manheim (essay date 1964)


[In the following essay, Manheim gives a psychoanalytic treatment of Twelfth Night, contending that the play is "an oedipal comedy written from the viewpoint of the father. "]

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
    That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

_A Midsummer Night's Dream V.i.18-20_

*Will* will fulfill the treasure of thy love …

_Sonnet 136_

I offer an interpretation of _Twelfth Night_ based on accepted Shakespearean scholarship plus the data of psychoanalysis. I shall extrapolate beyond the words assigned to the characters in the play and shall consider these characters as "persons" known to me (and, in all truth, there are few persons whom I meet in the ordinary intercourse of life whom I know as well as I know these characters), and capable of having a former and a future existence of their own, all, of course, wholly within the bounds of the play's basic structure and development. In the same way, and using the same data, I shall attempt to read _out of_ (not into) the text evidence of the author's own fears, hopes, and wishes, none of which will at any time contradict or attenuate any accepted biographical facts and documented material. I know that in accepting Freud, Jones, and their school, and rejecting that of Stool and Sisson, I run the risk of critical condemnation, including the risk of being belabored with the cudgel of Professor Sisson's animadversions on "The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare."¹

I know this so well that I have run to meet it by basing my title on Sisson's. But the reading is different. By "mythical" I mean not that which is mendacious, factitious, untrue, consciously conceived by an irresponsible critic; but rather that which is the product of a non-conscious, "mythopoeic" drive to explain phenomena which are not rationally understood, or which are so understood but are not, on the psychodynamic level, acceptable to the conscious mind.² I substitute "joys" for "sorrows," and I mean by "joy" just what Shakespeare meant by the word in his treatise on the ways of the mind which is embodied in the colloquy between Theseus and Hippolyta in the fifth act of _A Midsummer Night's Dream_. As is apparent, I agree with Freud that "Story-tellers are valuable allies, [whose] testimony is to be rated high, for they usually know many things between heaven and earth that our academic wisdom does not even dream of."³ But I am concerned not only with the intuitions of Shakespeare the creative artist, but with the wish-fulfilling fantasies of Shakespeare the man, and I imply this by adopting, with a possible change of emphasis, his subtitle for _Twelfth Night_, indicating that by the fantasy of this piece of joyous entertainment he is flying in the teeth of certain painful but unalterable facts, giving himself through this fantasy grounds for (irrational) joy. In other words, "What You Will" implies the phenomenon of "the omnipotence of thought"; it means not (or not only) "whatever you prefer" but "that which you will into being," "that which you attempt to bring about as a wish-fulfillment."⁴ I contend that in _Twelfth Night_ Shakespeare was freely expressing a number of such wish-fulfillments, some of them conscious, some of them possibly preconscious (that is, not within the area of awareness but capable of being understood directly when they are brought into that area), but most of them completely unconscious; that these wish-fulfillments had indeed grown out of the private and personal experience of the author but were also projected into the personal and private experience of the "persons" introduced as characters in the
The more conventional Shakespearean critic, apprehensive—not without cause—of the excesses committed by some psychoanalytic investigators (I hesitate to call them "critics"), will ask, "How much do we really know of Shakespeare's private and personal experience?" and "What does that private and personal experience have to do with his works of art?" To the first question I respond that I shall imply nothing concerning Shakespeare's private life which is not in complete harmony with evidence which is acceptable to the most traditional critic; viz., the Shakespearean documents gathered and published by J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, D. H. Lambert, E. K. Chambers, and B Roland Lewis. Nor do I intend to imply a one-to-one relationship between documented events and works produced; that, for instance, a shocking event will necessarily be reflected in an attitude or tone in the next succeeding play. I do imply, however, that once an event of importance has been established in point of time, it must be considered as having some influence on some work which follows it, closely or at farther remove. And this makes plain my reply to the second question, for I firmly believe that Shakespeare was a man as well as an artist, and that no man can do, say, or write anything (even—or, rather, particularly—a work of art) that does not reflect his own experience directly or indirectly. The real difficulty is not in finding evidence in a work of art that points clearly to the influence of private experience; on the contrary, the difficulty lies in the fact that created material has its roots in many, seemingly unrelated, elements of personal experience, much of it, I must repeat, unconscious; in other words, much of that material is, as the psycho-analyst puts it, "overdetermined," requiring investigation into many, often inconsistent and seemingly irreconcilable, sources.

The preliminaries thus disposed of, I proceed to my basic contention: Twelfth Night is an oedipal comedy written from the viewpoint of the father, just as Hamlet is an oedipal tragedy written from the viewpoint of the son. The comedy was written between 1598 and 1601; so was the tragedy. Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died in August of 1596, at the age of eleven, and was survived by his twin sister Judith. In Twelfth Night the twin son and daughter are separated by the primal power of the sea, each considering the other dead. The living daughter takes upon herself the sex and appearance of the dead twin son and is so successful in passing for him that the sea-captain Antonio, who has enacted the role of father-substitute to the son, can say when he sees the two of them together,

How have you made division of yourself?
An apple, left in two, is not more twin
Than these two creatures. Which is
Sebastian?"

It need not be pointed out (and it could hardly have been unknown to the Elizabethans) that whatever might have been the confusion between male twins in The Comedy of Errors, brother-and-sister twins are fraternal, not identical; they do not resemble each other more than ordinary brothers and sisters do.

Here, then, is the first and fundamental wish-fulfillment of the play. The dead son can be replaced by the living daughter, who gives up her own sex in order to obtain access, by appearing as a man, or at least "an eunuch," to the bachelor who must be considerably older than she is, for she has "heard [her] father name him" (I.ii.28), and that father "died that day when Viola from her birth / Had number'd thirteen years" (V.i.251-252). The Duke, when informed by Cesario that "he" has been attracted to a woman of about the Duke's age, exclaims,

Too old, by heaven; let still the woman take
An elder than herself …

(II.iv.30-31)
and stresses the persistent fantasy that women, on losing their virginity, are thereby rendered less attractive to their lovers, a doctrine to which Viola will, of course, not wholly assent:

_Duke:_ Then let thy love be younger than thynself,
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour.
_Viola:_ And so they are: alas, that they are so;
To die, even when they to perfection grow!

(II.iv.37-42)

The Duke's attitude toward Viola's masculinity seems to me to be rather ambivalent, and Cesario clearly runs the risk of being accused of a homosexual attachment to the bachelor Orsino. Even in the opening scenes, Valentine comments, "If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced: he hath known you but three days and already you are no stranger" (I.iv.1-4). And the Duke himself displaces and condenses his emotional attachments by insisting that Cesario-Viola is the best possible bearer of the tale of his love for Olivia:

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man: Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill of sound;
And all is semblative a woman's part.

… Prosper well in this,
And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord,
To call his fortunes thine.

(I.v.29-34,37-39)

Orsino reveals even more when he loses his temper, for he reproaches both Cesario and Olivia when he refers to the former as "this your minion, whom I know you love, / And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly" (V.i.128-129), an obvious projection, for if Cesario is anyone's "minion" it will have to be Orsino's who tenders him dearly rather than Olivia's. And this ambivalence of Orsino is embedded in the speech in which Italianate sadism for once rears its ugly head in the fantasy-land of Illyria:

Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
Kill what I love?—a savage jealousy
That sometimes savours nobly….

Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in mischief:
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

(V.i.120-123,133-134)

For a moment it seems that the pattern of Fletcher's Philaster and Bellario is about to be enacted, when Olivia sets matters right by calling in the euphuistic priest to testify to the marriage. But I wonder how many readers and viewers of the play have not suspected, as I did years ago, that Orsino was aware of Viola's secret on
some level of marginal consciousness.

But no such logical inference is necessary, for there is no logic in the wish-fulfilling Unconscious, and Viola can be both the lost twin-brother and the surviving twin-sister, who will provide the mourning dramatist with the male heir he so greatly desires and at the same time be the solacing daughter who will unwaveringly prefer the father-figure in spite of all the enticements of normal heterosexual adjustment. In the blithe irrationality of the Unconscious, Viola comes back to life once as her own twin brother, the sea-devoured Hamnet-Sebastian, and then Sebastian (the beautiful martyr, the "hanging god," let it be remembered, of medieval and Renaissance art) also returns to life to wed with most precipitate haste the other virginal figure who is, as we shall note more fully in a moment, another projection of the beloved daughter, leaving the first daughter-image, the inviolate Viola, free to devote herself wholly to her beloved father-Duke. And all this happens in Illyria, a fantasy-land like the later Bohemia which had a seacoast for the same reason that Illyria does; i.e., in order that the sea may both engulf and give up its dead. The word-play "Illyria-Elysium" is made at the very outset of the play (I.i.3-4). In this country of the fulfilled wishes of fantasy it is possible for a sister not only to take the place of her dead brother and thus restore him to life, but also to be, in one guise, a loving daughter to her mourning father, while her alter ego is recompensed for the loss of one brother by finding another who is permitted to be her sexual mate.

Note how the legitimized incest-fantasies become more and more apparent as we examine the ambivalent intricacies imposed by the plot. Manningham was able to gloss over the implications of an underlying incest-theme by forgetting (or never realizing) the occasion of Olivia's mourning and referring to her as the "lady widowe," even though Viola's seacaptain says at the very outset that she is

A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count
That died some twelvemonth since; then
leaving her
To the protection of his son, her brother,
Who shortly also died; for whose dear love,
They say, she hath abjured the company
And sight of man.

(I.i.36-41)

to which Viola quite naturally responds,

O that I served that lady,
And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is!

(I.i.41-4)

But Viola is not to be allowed to join her lot with that of her sister in misfortune; instead she goes to serve a living lord and master who "knows her not." And the father-daughter incest theme is betrayed in lines which through their insistent poetic beauty, have obscured their revealing ambiguity.

Viola: My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.
Duke: And what's her history?
Viola: A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

Duke: But died thy sister of her love, my boy?
Viola: I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too: and yet I know not.

(II.iv.110-118,122-124)

A moment ago I spoke of Olivia as Viola's alter ego. The point might be made without more painstaking demonstration, but there is a pattern in the play which blurts out the secret that even he who runs may read. Let us look for a moment at a piece of deliberate mystification concocted by Maria for the humbling of Malvolio and the delectation of Toby and his companions. In the forged letter which Malvolio believes to have been written by Olivia, there are two sets of verses, the second of which is to convey to the hapless steward, who hardly needs the additional assurance, that it is he and he alone who is the object of his mistress' love:

I may command where I adore;
But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore:
M, O, I, A, doth sway my life.

(II.v.115-118)

Neither Malvolio nor the audience needs much prompting that the code points to him. "M,—Malvolio," he says; "M,—why that begins my name" (II.v.137-138). But he is concerned because "A should follow, but O does" (II.v.142-143). Apart from his reading, we may want to make one of our own, for the letters contribute to a pervasive anagram. The vowels are to be found in the name of every character in the romantic (incest-ridden) plot. All three are to be found in "Viola" and "Olivia" as well as in "Malvolio." Two are to be found in the lesser figures, "Orsino" and "Maria." In the gullied steward whose name furnishes the first clue to the anagram, the "mal-" element points clearly to the "evil" in the presumption of the Puritanical steward who should be the protector of the virginity of his lady-mistress, but instead raises his eyes in unholy desire for her. This is emphasized by the "will" element in "-volio" (voglio), substituted in place of the original letters in the "Malevolti" of the source-material. All three vowels are to be found in his name, the "o" being used twice, to establish a masculine ending to a rearrangement of both "Viola" and "Olivia." And these two are obvious anagrams for each other, with the latter name carrying a second "i." And, as I have suggested above, she is indeed a second "I" to Viola. As double, therefore, she rejects the substitute father whom her counterpart adores, thus rejecting but also achieving the implied incest. She loses one brother but is recompensed for the loss by her marriage to Sebastian, just as the first "I" loses a brother and finds a father.

The incest-taboo is also avoided by what we might term a "purloined letter" technique; the relationships, real and substitute, are made so obvious, so oft-repeated, that they are accepted as innocent, since nothing forbidden could be so patently presented. This is, of course, a pattern not uncommon in Shakespeare, as in other Elizabethan dramatists. Viola and Sebastian, the fatherless twins, each have their respective father-protectors, the sea-captains who rescue them from the sea of death and watch over them even after bringing them to rebirth in the land of Illyria-Elysium. Viola's unnamed captain is the sole custodian of her secret, as well as of her "maiden weeds" (V.i.262), but his possible protection for the daughter who turns out to need none is frustrated by the evil "father" Malvolio, who keeps him "in durance" (V.i.281-284).
Sebastian's faithful father-protector, fares worse, for he is in mortal danger in Illyria (in which he resembles
father Aegeon in *The Comedy of Errors*) but braves all dangers for the son who proves to be (or at least seems
to be) ungrateful and unfilial. He is saved only by the intervention of the father-paramount, the Duke.

To the fathers who serve, or are served by the twins (the reversal is a dynamic equivalence in the pattern of
the Unconscious, in which there is no such word as "not"), there must be added the congeries of fathers who
cluster about the second "I." With her real father and brother gone, she avows her intention of remaining
unseen—veiled—for seven years, the appropriate period of biblical servitude. She casts aside that veil,
however, both literally and symbolically, when brother Cesario makes his appearance and saucily commands
her to do so. In the meantime, and until her deliverance by Cesario-Sebastian, she is surrounded by a
grotesque set of "protectors," only one of whom, Sir Toby, has designs on her fortune which do not also
include threats to her virginity. But they cannot prevail, for if Viola-Cesario has not the swordsman's skill to
defend her against the witless Sir Andrew, Sebastian is waiting to act as substitute in the nick of time, and to
give Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb (or to make it plain that that is what each of the two false knights really is)
and break Sir Andrew's head as well, thus rescuing the virgin "I" from all her unworthy "protectors."

Before concluding, let me repeat my words of warning. I am not describing or attempting to describe the
conscious, intentional devices of an artist, appealing to the conscious awareness of the reader or spectator.
Any such appeal would arouse anxiety rather than pleasure in both; whereas such anxiety is avoided when
"deep calleth unto deep." The analytic critic, like the analytic therapist, avoids this anxiety by a process which
I cannot undertake to explain here. In any case, it has become apparent in the years since psychoanalytic
criticism first began to function (as criticism, I repeat, not as clinical analysis) that analysis does not "reduce"
the work of art nor militate against its full enjoyment; rather, the contrary is true: we perceive in depth what
we had formerly missed superficially. In our play we see the disarming nature of the approach through
comedy summed up in the song of Feste as epilogue:

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain:
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> For the rain it raineth every day.

A profound but unacceptable psychodynamic drive is presented as "a foolish thing," "a toy"; indeed, nothing
more than a Twelfth-Night frolic. It could have been masked in the form of tragedy; perhaps the self-same
drive would reappear some years later in *King Lear*. But now, at the end of *Twelfth Night; or, What You Will*
we rest content, for

> A great while ago the world begun,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain:
> But that's all one, our play is done,
> And we'll strive to please you every day.

**Notes**

XX; London: Humphrey Milford). Actually, Professor Sisson's fire is not directed against the psychoanalytic
critic. The immediate cause of his irritation was Nazi propaganda in the guise of criticism, "… by dint of
which there arises, as from a trap-door at Bayreuth, a dour heroic figure of pure Nordic ancestry, the enemy of
all Southern decadences, faithful to his Leader, the prophet of the new Germany of today" (pp. 3-4). These
excesses Professor Sisson ascribes not to the influence of psychoanalysis (under the circumstances, he could
hardly do so) but to the example of Coleridge, carried over into the nineteenth-century German criticism of
the brothers Schlegel and their followers, and back into *their* British successors in the later nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries.

Not that there is a lack of evidence of Professor Sisson's animosity toward psychoanalytic criticism per se. See, for example, his introduction to Hamlet in his edition of the Complete Works (New York: Harper & Bros., [1953]):

There has been altogether too much throwing about of brains concerning the character of Hamlet himself, both analytic and psycho-analytic. We would do better to consider Hamlet according to his own words, and against the contemporary background of the writings of Thomas More or of John Donne on the problems of his state of mind.

(p. 997)

The psychoanalytic critic—need it be said?—does consider the character "according to his own words," and he does not deny the influence of Shakespeare's contemporary background; he does, however, insist on his right and duty to consider the author first as a man, then as a Western man, and then as an Elizabethan man.

2 When we consider how much more prevalent the latter meaning of "mythical" has become, it is at least remarkable that the critic who used the word in "mythical sorrows" should not have chosen some expression which is unequivocally indicative of "non-existent" or "grossly exaggerated."

3 Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradiva" (1893-1895), Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press, (1953)), IX, 8. See also and

4 "The omnipotence of thoughts, or, more accurately speaking, of wishes, has since been recognized as an essential element in the mental life of primitive people." This is Freud's additional (1923) note to "A Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909) in Collected Papers (London: Hogarth Press), IV (1953), 370n. The play on "will" is, of course, closely allied to Shakespeare's wordplay on his own name, as, for example, in the "Will" sonnets (135, 136, 143).

5 Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare (London: Longmans, Green, 1898).

6 Cartae Shakespeareanae: Shakespeare Documents (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904).


8 The Shakespeare Documents (Stanford University Press, 1940-41), 2 vols.


10 Much of the biographical information concerning births, marriages, and deaths is taken by the authorities named in notes 5-8 from entries in the parish Register of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon. This gives 2 February 1585 as the date of the christening of Hamnet and Judith, son and
daughter of William Shakespeare, and 11 August 1596 as the date of Hamnet's funeral.

11TN, V.i.229-231. I use the Temple edition (see note 9), and I see no need to reproduce old spelling and punctuation. Act, scene, and line numbers are hereafter indicated in the text.,

12 It may be argued that the identical appearance of the twins is inherent in Shakespeare's sources. Whether this is so or not is not decisive in the matter of psychodynamic interpretation, for what Shakespeare invented and what Shakespeare adopted by selection from his source material are both indicative of at least some personal predilection on his part for a particular dramatic device. Still, it may be appropriate to glance at the scholarly data concerning the sources. Manningham's diary entry for 2 February 1601 (-2) describes the play as "Much like the Comedy of Errors, or Menechmi in Plautus; but most like and near to that in Italian called Inganni" (Gollancz, p. v). "The source for the main plot," writes Sisson (Complete Works, p. 356), "is apparently Riche his Farewell to Militane Profession (1581) in which he tells the tale of Apolonus and Sila, Apolonius being Orsino and Sila Viola…. The story came to Riche from Bandello's Italian novella, and to him from an Italian play Gli Ingannati (The deceived ones) dating from 1531…. " The identity of the Italian source is not particularly clarified by the fact that "there are at least two Italian plays called Gli'Inganni (The Cheats), to which Manningham may have referred in his entry as containing incidents resembling those of Twelfth Night; one of these plays, by Nicolo Secchi, was printed in 1562; another by Curzio Ganzalo, was first published [in Italian?] in 1592. In the latter play the sister, who dresses as a man and is mistaken for her brother, gives herself the name of Cesare…. A third play, however, entitled Gli'Ingannati (Venice 1537), … bears a much stronger resemblance to Twelfth Night; in its poetical induction, // Sacrificio, occurs the name 'Malevoli,' which is at least suggestive of the name 'Malvolio'" (Gollancz, pp. vi-vii). To dispose of matters of source and origin, it seems generally agreed that Malvolio (except for the suggestion of the name), Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Fabian, Feste, Maria, and (at least as far as her name is concerned) Olivia are all wholly Shakespeare's.

13 I for my part, have forsworn all temptation to speculative biographical inferences, but I cannot refrain from marshalling a few of the well-attested facts, leaving the inferences to the reader.

Both of Shakespeare's daughters were unmarried at the time Twelfth Night was probably written, Susanna being no more than eighteen years old and Judith no more than sixteen (if we take the terminus ad quern, 1601, as the date of the play; it seems more probable that they were both several years younger). Susanna married on 5 June 1607, at the age of twenty-one, and the marriage seems to have been considered a good one; at all events, William Shakespeare named John and Susanna Hall the residuary legatees in his Will, in addition to indicating other marked signs of confidence in them. Judith did not marry until 10 February 1616, being then thirty-one years of age.

Judith's marriage was followed soon after (25 March 1616) by the execution of Shakespeare's Will, and about a month after that by Shakespeare's death. A few words of comment on some of the less familiar provisions of the Will. (I think I may make them on the strength of the text of the Will alone, for I claim some familiarity with the Anglo-American law of wills, since I was admitted to the New York Bar in 1925.) I have already commented on the special favor shown to John and Susanna Hall. In the Will Judith receives £100 "in discharge of her marriage porcion" (the words quoted were added to the original draft of the Will), plus £50 in return for her surrender of her rights as heir-at-law of certain real property left to Susanna; plus another £150, which is attributable to her only if she survives the testator's death by three years, and which is then to be held in trust with the income alone payable to her "soe long as she shalbe married and covert baron" (a familiar device to prevent a husband's getting his hands on his wife's property), with a gift over to her children, "if she have anie, and if not, to her executors or assignes, she lyving the saied term after my deceas."

It is plain that the elder daughter was preferred to the younger, even though the latter had remained unmarried and faithful to the father for so many years. The very close order in which her marriage, her father's Will, and
his death followed one another seems to me most interesting,—but I have sworn to let the reader do the speculating, and I say no more.

Lorna Hutson (essay date 1996)


[In the excerpt that follows, Hutson contends that in Twelfth Night Shakespeare questions natural sexual differences, blurs sex and gender, and explores sex through rhetorical deception.]

Elder Loveless. Mistres, your wil leads my speeches from the purpose. But as a man—
Lady. A Simile servant? This room was built for honest meaners, that deliver themselves hastily and plainely, and are gone. Is this a time or place for Exordiums, and Similes, and metaphors?!

"Shakespearean comedy," writes Stephen Greenblatt, "constantly appeals to the body and to sexuality as the heart of its theatrical magic." Without wishing to disparage the enterprise of writing histories of the body, or indeed to underestimate what such histories have accomplished in terms of enhancing our understanding of early modern culture, I would like in the following pages to challenge the operation of a certain kind of "body history" within recent Shakespeare criticism. I do not so much want to disagree with Greenblatt's statement as it stands, as to argue that our understanding of how Shakespeare's comedy intervened, both in its own time and subsequently, to modify attitudes to sexuality and to gender has been more obscured than enlightened by the obsession with the "body" as Greenblatt here understands it, and with the kind of body history to which he and others have prompted us to turn.

1. Circulating Arguments: The "Single Sex" Body

I shall focus my argument on Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, a play which, for all the curiously metaphoric, even disembodied nature of the language in which it articulates the desires of its protagonists, has nevertheless become the touchstone of this "body" criticism within Shakespeare studies. Yet it is worth remarking that the current critical interest in Twelfth Night as a play about the indeterminacy of gender and the arbitrary nature of sexual desire actually began with the contemplation not of the materiality of the body, but with that of the signifier. In much earlier twentieth-century criticism, Shakespeare's comedies have been appreciated as temporary aberrations from an established sexual and social order for the purposes of a thoroughly conservative "self-discovery" and return to the status quo. Saussurian linguistics, alerting critics to the way in which meaning in language is always the effect of a play of differences, enabled them to challenge such interpretations on their own terms by arguing that the conservative denouement was inadequate to contain and fix the meanings released by the play of differences. This was especially the case in comedies such as As You Like It and Twelfth Night, in which the fiction of a woman's successful masquerade of masculinity is complicated by the understanding of its having been originally composed for performance by a boy. Suddenly, instead of being about the discovery of one's "true" identity, or a "natural" social and sexual order, it seemed that what the comedies were about was the ease with which systems of sexual difference could be dismantled, and the notion of gendered identity itself called into question. This was important when it happened—the mid-1980s—because at the same time feminist critics were beginning to draw attention to the misogynistic implications of the transvestite theater, thereby throwing into confusion that venerable tradition of critical delight in the sprightliness of Shakespeare's girls-dressed-as-boys. How could we go on liking Rosalind and Viola in the knowledge that what they really represented was the denial to women of access to
the histrionic exchanges in which they excelled and we took pleasure?5 Just in time poststructuralist criticism saved us from the agony of this dilemma by recuperating the double transvestitism of the comedies as a calling into question of the "fully unified, gendered subject," thereby producing, instead of a patriarchal Shakespeare, a Shakespeare, who, in the words of Catherine Belsey, offered "a radical challenge to patriarchal values by disrupting sexual difference itself."6

Subsequently, the notion that what the comedies were about was really the indeterminacy of gender was given a new and historically authenticating twist by investigations into the history of biological definitions of gender which seemed to prove that, in the minds of Shakespeare's contemporaries, gender itself was a kind of comic plot, the happy denouement of which could only be masculinity. A special issue of Representations on "Sexuality and the social body in the nineteenth century" contained an article by Thomas Laqueur which, though primarily concerned with the politics of nineteenth-century reproductive biology, was nevertheless to have a considerable impact on Renaissance literary studies as a result of what its findings implied about the biological construction of gender in the early modern period. Laqueur drew our attention to a momentous, but overlooked event in the history of sexuality. Sometime in the late eighteenth century, the old belief that women needed to experience orgasm in order to conceive was abandoned. Women were henceforward to be thought of as properly passionless, because passive, participants in the act of sexual reproduction. What this implied was nothing less than a change in the existing physiology of sexual difference: the ancient Galenic model, according to which the hidden reproductive organs of women were merely a colder, imperfectly developed, and introverted type of the penis and testicles, requiring to be chafed into producing their seed, was replaced by the modern notion of the incommensurability of male and female reproductive organs. Laqueur's crucial point, however, was that the need to replace the old Galenic "metaphysics of hierarchy" between the sexes with an "anatomy and physiology of incommensurability" actually anticipated any real scientific understanding of women's reproductive makeup, and must therefore have been motivated not by scientific discovery, but by the need to find a new rationale for the exclusion of women from Enlightenment claims for the equality of men.7

I am ignorant of the effect of Laqueur's argument on nineteenth-century criticism, but the impact on Renaissance studies has been considerable. Writing in 1986 Laqueur cites, in a footnote, a paper on Shakespeare's Twelfth Night by Stephen Greenblatt, which was first published in 1985 in a collection called Reconstructing Individualism8 and subsequently included in Greenblatt's 1988 Shakespearean Negotiations as the essay, "Fiction and Frustration." Both authors evince exactly the same ancient and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical texts—first and foremost, Galen on the exact parity between male and female reproductive organs ("think of the 'uterus turned outward and projecting': Would not the testes [ovaries] then necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the neck [the cervix], hitherto concealed … be made into the male member?"9) and then Galen's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers, Ambroise Paré, Jacques Duval, Thomas Vicary, Helkiah Croke, and Jane Sharp.10 They also both cite Montaigne, who twice refers to a story also told by Ambroise Paré about the sex-change of Marie-Germaine, a contemporary inhabitant of Vitry-le-François, who had the misfortune or good fortune to realize her manhood by jumping too energetically over a stream, thus prompting the eruption of the appropriate genitals".

Where Laqueur expounded the Galenic model of woman as introverted man in order to expose the politics of nineteenth-century reproductive biology and its denial of female orgasm, Stephen Greenblatt's identical quotations employ the model's stress on the defective "heat" of female reproductive organs, and the "friction" required to activate them, as an allegory for the "theatrical representation of individuality in Shakespeare." "Erotic chafing" writes Greenblatt, "is the central means by which characters in plays like The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night realize their identities and form loving unions."11 One might be forgiven for balking at the definition of The Taming of the Shrew as a fiction of "identity," or at the naturalization of its highly pragmatic argument of husbandry as a form of "erotic chafing"; Greenblatt, however, refrains from pursuing his argument in relation to this or indeed any of Shakespeare's comedies other than Twelfth Night. He puts the question of the relation of identity
to erotic chafing—of fiction to friction—more persuasively by asking, "how does a play come to possess sexual energy?" The answer is supplied by a reading of Twelfth Night, the crux of which is a short speech made by the male twin, Sebastian, after Olivia has realized that his double, with whom she was in love, is a woman and his sister. "So comes it, lady," says Sebastian, "you have been mistook,"

But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceive'd:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.

According to Greenblatt, the "nature" to which Sebastian refers is, precisely, the Galenic discourse of the one-gender body. Sebastian's reference to himself as "both a maid and man" consequentially invokes the inherent instability of gender as construed by this model, which in turn enables a good, radical-sounding assault on more comfortable readings which essentialize sexual difference. Thus, Greenblatt quotes C. L. Barber's argument that, "the most fundamental distinction that the play brings home to us … is the difference between men and women" in order to reinforce, by contrast, the persuasiveness of his view that the fundamental physiological distinction between men and women is precisely what the play can't "bring home," historically speaking. At the end of Twelfth Night, as he points out, "Viola is still Cesario—For so you shall be,' says Orsino, 'while you are a man' (5.1.386)—and Olivia, strong-willed as ever, is betrothed to one who is, by his own account, both 'a maid and a man.'" Notice just how closely this conclusion resembles the poststructuralist reading which found Twelfth Night calling into question, "the possibility of a fully unified, gendered subject." And, as with the poststructuralist argument, a crucial legacy of this reading is its obscuring of the need to account, in feminist terms, for the historical fact of the absence of women's bodies from the Renaissance stage. In the light of the Galenic theory of reproduction, concludes Greenblatt, it is easy to see that transvestitism actually "represents a structural identity between men and women—an identity revealed in the dramatic disclosure of the penis concealed behind the labia." And the dramatic fiction—an outrage to belief which is nevertheless endowed with generative because persuasive power—becomes analogous to the friction or chafing required, according to this Galenic model, both to warm women into conception, and to stimulate their reticent reproductive organs into realizing their latent virility.

Two years after Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" was published, Laqueur's thesis on the political and cultural investments of reproductive biology was published in book form as, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud. The chapter on the pervasiveness of the Galenic model in Renaissance thought and culture carries an epigraph from Twelfth Night:

Sebastian [To Olivia]
So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.

And he goes on to introduce the substance of his chapter thus:

Somehow if Olivia—played by a boy, of course—is not to marry the maid with whom she has fallen in love, but the girl's twin brother Sebastian; if Orsino's intimacy with "Cesario" is to go beyond male bonding to marriage with Viola, "masculine usurped attire" must be thrown off and woman linked to man. Nature must "to her bias" be drawn, that is, deflected from the straight path. "Something off center, then, is implanted in nature," as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, which "deflects men and women from their ostensible desires and toward the pairings for which they are destined." But if mat "something" is not the opposition of two sexes that
naturally attract one another—as it came to be construed in the eighteenth century—then what is it?\textsuperscript{18}

The answer, of course, is the one-gender body according to Galen, with all its micro- and macrocosmic correspondences. The reading of a single Shakespeare play—or rather, the reading of five lines from a single Shakespeare play—seems to be doing a lot of work in supporting a circular argument about the relevance of body history to the question of how the magic of theater relates to the early modern conception of the body.

In the last five years, Laqueur's and Greenblatt's arguments and examples—Galen, Ambroise Paré, Jacques Duval, Helkiah Crooke, Jane Sharp, and (especially, perhaps) Montaigne—have been repeatedly invoked and quoted to support arguments about the pervasiveness of sixteenth-century fears that women might turn into men and men into women. Stephen Orgel thus accounts for the practice of having boys play women on the English stage by means of a complex argument whereby pathological fears about the chastity of women are weighed against equally pathological "fantas[ies] of a reversal from the natural transition from woman to man," which "are clearly related to anatomical theories of the essential homology of male and female." "Many cases," he writes, "were recorded of women becoming men through the pressure of some great activity."\textsuperscript{19} The endnote to this large claim refers not to women, but to alligators, but as the previous note referred the reader to Laqueur's \textit{Representations} article and to Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction," we can be reasonably sure that the "many cases" in question are in fact the single case of Marie-Germaine, cited by both Paré and Montaigne.

It is true that both Montaigne and Paré liken the case of Marie-Germaine to other examples; these, however, being drawn from such authors as Pliny and Ovid, scarcely seem to constitute "many cases being recorded" in the times of the authors concerned.\textsuperscript{20} Judith Brown's well-researched \textit{Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy} exaggerates less, but still enlarges the evidence: "in a few cases women did not just imitate men, but actually became men," she writes, citing Greenblatt.\textsuperscript{21} More recently, Valerie Traub's \textit{Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama}—which contains an interesting and persuasive account of Twelfth Night—claims, citing both Greenblatt and Laqueur, that fear of turning into a woman "may have been a common masculine fantasy" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{22} Traub's critical project involves enlarging Orgel's contention that the homoerotics of the Renaissance stage enabled "fantasies of freedom" for women as well as men\textsuperscript{23} by deconstructing the hierarchy of hetero- over homo-erotic readings of the plays, and revealing, as she puts it, "the polymorphous potential of desire itself, which Shakespeare so assiduously evokes and controls." Though such potential might not seem to have much to do with women in an exclusively male theater, Traub argues that boys were available to women as objects of fantasy, and in rejecting what she characterizes as the "feminist" interpretation of the boy player's significance (that is, the boy-player as instrument of the patriarchal control of female chastity) reveals her indebtedness to Greenblatt in preferring to argue that the boy-player represented, "an embodiment of the metadramatic theme of identity itself: always a charade, a masquerade, other." Laqueur provides further support for Traub's rejection of the idea that an all-male theater in itself argues either indifference to women's intelligent participation, or fear of the effects of such participation upon the reputation of women and their families. On Laqueur's evidence Traub proposes that

\begin{quote}
in spite of patriarchal control of female sexuality through the ideology of chastity and the laws regarding marriage, there seems to have been a high cultural investment in female erotic pleasure—not because women's pleasure was intrinsically desirable, but because it was thought necessary for conception to occur.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Once again, as in Greenblatt and in Orgel, the focus on a medical discourse about the body enables a way of speaking of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatic discourse, and of the position that it offered women in the audience, as exhaustively signified by its analogue, erotic arousal.

What bothers me most about these arguments is that while they seem to be historicizing and de-essentializing our ideas about the relationship of gender to sexuality, the "fantasies" and "anxieties" that they identify in
early modern dramatic texts take no account at all of the way in which, in sixteenth-century society, a woman's sexual behavior was perceived to affect the honor and therefore the credit and economic power of her kinsmen. Nor do they consider the way in which such traditional conceptions of sexual honor, credit, and wealth were themselves being rapidly transformed by the technology of persuasion—or "credit"—that such dramatic texts as Shakespeare's represented. None of these critics appear to entertain the possibility that the capacity to plot, write, and be able to make use of the erudition and wit of a comedy such as Twelfth Night might in itself be more central to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceptions of what it meant to "be a man" than any theory derived from Galen. Moreover, for all the emphasis on plurality, the "polymorphous potential" and the "unmooring of desire" released by the comedies, there still seems to be a commitment to the twentieth-century "lit-crit" notion that what the comedies are really all about is individual identity. Traub explores how characters negotiate their individual desires in the plays as if they were real people and not even partly figures in a persuasive discourse or agents of a plot, while Greenblatt celebrates "the emergence of identity through the experience of erotic heat" as "this Shakespearean discovery, perfected over a six- or seven- year period from Taming to Twelfth Night." It seems that where literary criticism, as it was once conceived, celebrated the saturnalian energies of Shakespeare's comedies for returning us to a "natural" social and sexual order, these theorists of desire want to find a historically specific concept of "nature"—the Galenic one-sex body—that mimics what is actually their essentialized notion of culture as something which is always preoccupied with the theatrical destabilization of "identities"—identity is "always a masquerade, a charade, other." But what if the errors, confusions, and masquerades of comedy were not, in their own time, thought of as dramas of identity? And what if the way in which the plays construct sexual difference in relation to the audience crucially concerned not the sexual object-choice of men or women in the audience, but whether or not they were able to make use of the play as a discourse, an argument, to enhance their own agency? When James Shirley wrote the preface to an edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's comedies, published in 1647, he called it the collection of the Authentick Witt that hath made Blackfriers an Academy, where the three howers spectacle while Beaumont and Fletcher were presented, were usually of more advantage to the hopeful young Heire, then a costly, dangerous, forraine Travell … And it cannot be denied but that the young spirits of the Time, whose Birth and Quality made them impatient of the sorrower ways of education, have from the attentive hearing of these pieces, got ground in point of wit and carriage of the most severely employed students … How many passable discoursing dining witts stand yet in good credit upon the bare stock of two or three of these single scenes!

I'd like to suggest that Shirley's final metaphor of young men as prodigals, living on the "credit" of an ability to recommend themselves to strangers, a "stock" of wit which they have learned from plays, might tell us something about the way in which Shakespeare's plays, for all that they invoke the magic of the reproductive body, nevertheless construct sexual difference by appealing to the male (because formally educated) mind.

2. "Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd": Twelfth Night and Gl'Ingannati

My counter-argument depends on the claim that the kind of comic plot from which Shakespeare never wavered—the five-act plot derived from Terence and Plautus—was perceived in his own time to be concerned, not with the emergence of identity, but with men's discursive ability to improvise social credit, or credibility. For all its popular appeal, Shakespeare's drama had a rigorous intellectual basis in the deliberative or hypothetical structure of Terentian comedy as it was rhetorically analyzed in every grammar school. The rhetorical analysis of Terentian comedy, far from being a rigid intellectual straightjacket (as I was implicitly taught at school, where I learned that Shakespeare transcended his contemporaries by ignoring the classical unities) enabled the achievement of a drama that carried emotional conviction as an unfolding narrative of events—"a kind of history," as Shakespeare himself called it—by investing the representation of those events with the impression of an intelligible combination of causality and fortuitousness. Not only were Terentian
plots themselves examples of how one might dispose an argument probably; they also offered images of male protagonists who were themselves able, in moments of crisis, to improvise a temporary source of credit (perhaps a disguise, or a fiction of being related to someone rich) that could defer disaster until the terms of the crisis had altered to bring in a fortunate conclusion. The commentaries of the fourth-century grammarian, Donatus, together with those of Melanchthon and other sixteenth-century humanists, were appended to every edition of Terence, with the effect that no schoolboy could escape noticing how the plays demonstrated that uncertain or conjectural arguments were more productive in social exchanges—because more productive of emotional credibility—than the traditional means of assuring of good faith by oaths or other tokens.31

The Terentian plot characteristically concerned an illicit sexual union between a well born young man and a prostitute, which in turn betrayed a promise made between his father and neighbor that the son should unite their houses by marrying the neighbor's daughter. Characteristically, too, the plot managed to lend emotional credibility to the highly improbable argument that the prostitute in question was, in fact, the long lost daughter of the neighbor, thereby reconciling in her person the laws of desire and those of social exchange. Donatus's commentary on Terence was discovered in 1433, and its impact on the composition of European drama evident by the early sixteenth century.

Formal effects upon sixteenth-century vernacular drama, however, were complicated by the ideological impacts of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, both of which revolutionized attitudes to sex, marriage, and the conjugal household in Europe. For example: Terentian comedy articulates a sense in which the space of prostitution is prophylactic; a household of male, citizen relatives is not dishonored by the entry of the heroine whose desirability was initially associated with her marginal status and sexual accessibility to the young hero. The plays therefore represent a society in which official tolerance of prostitution first sanctions the initial violation of chastity and ensures that, once attached to a citizen household, the woman will be protected by the very institution that once made her vulnerable. The Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, however, brought with them an end to ideologically sanctioned prostitution, so that, as Lyndal Roper writes of Augsburg, "any sexual relationship outside marriage, and any occasion on which the sexes mingled … might lead to sin."32 The marginal status once overtly allocated to prostitutes became a covertly allocated category of suspicion embracing all women.

Nevertheless, there were differences in the way in which Catholic and Protestant Europe acknowledged this and reacted to the sexual mores of the Terentian plot. While the writers of Italian commedia erudita cynically substituted citizens' wives and daughters for the prostitutes of Roman comedy, northern humanists tempered their enthusiasm for New Comedy as a model of Latinity and eloquence with a distaste for its evident authorization of illicit financial and sexual transactions, that is, clandestine marriages and rhetorical and sartorial impostures of credit. Thus, while Ariosto was claiming to outdo Terence and Plautus with his brilliant /Suppositi in which conjectural arguments ("supposes") are manipulated by the dramatist and the heroes to facilitate and subsequently legitimize the defloration of a citizen's daughter, German and Dutch humanists were redeeming the Terentian plot of sexual and financial deception by adapting it to the New Testament parable of the talents and that of the prodigal son.33 The waste of money and dissipation of male sexual energy, became, in these reforming "Christian Terence" plays, analogous to the danger posed to civil society by the abuse of conjectural argument in what we might call the "technology of credit" represented by the Terentian plot.34

I use the word "technology" here to stress the material impact of the pedagogic dissemination of Terentian rhetoric. A pre-capitalist society necessarily guarantees its economic exchanges—exchanges of honor and wealth—by such instruments as oaths, which bind the faith of the contracting parties. The Terentian plot dramatizes a situation in which oaths and gestures of good faith bring about such an impasse as can only be resolved by exploiting the "error" or uncertainty about motive and intention which obtains between the participants in any social transaction. At a formal level, this very exploitation of error or uncertainty was the basis of the Terentian achievement of dramatic verisimilitude. Reformation dramatists were, therefore,
concerned to appropriate the power of the Terentian formula to grant verisimilitude to dramatic fantasy, or to bestow credibility upon outrageous hypotheses, without endorsing the suggestion that this rhetorical "technology of credit" be exploited to facilitate deceptive sexual and financial exchanges in real life.

Much has been made, in recent discussions of "desire" on the English Renaissance stage, of the anti-theater writers' objections to the eroticized body of the boy player. These discussions evidently misunderstand the relationship of anti-theater writing to sixteenth-century neo-Terentian drama, with disastrously simplifying effects. Thus, for example, the title of one polemic against the stage, Stephen Gosson's *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* does not go unnoticed, but its relevance is missed; Laura Levine calls Gosson's conception of his attack as a five-act play "confused," while Jean Howard simply notes that Gosson "uses the five-act structure of classical drama to wage war on theatre." The point is that the five act Terentian argument represented, for educated sixteenth-century men, a technology of credit or of probability which, in its dramatic form, was perceived to be implicated in an ethos of betrayal, sexual and otherwise. Gosson's title indicates a need to appropriate dramatic probability for the cause of reform, as it moves from mocking native English drama's ignorance of verisimilitude to condemning the probable arguments of Italian *commedia erudita* for their thematic endorsement of sexual and financial deception:

> When the soule of your playes is … Italian baudery, or the wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught? … the discipline we gette by these playes is like to the justice that a certaine Schoolmaster taught in *Persia*, which taught his schollers to lye, and not to lye, to deceive, and not to deceive, with a distinction how they might do it to their friends, & how to their enemies; to their friends, for exercise; to their foes, in earnest. Wherein many of his pupils became so skillful by practise, by custome so bolde, that their dearest friends payde more for their learning than their enemies. I would wish the Players to beware of this kinde of schooling … whilst they teach youthfull gentlemen how to love, and not to love … As the mischiefs that followed that discipline of *Persia* enforced them to make a lawe, that young men should ever after, as householders use to instruct their families: so I trust, that when the Londoners are sufficiently beaten with the hunte of suche lessons that are learned at Plaies, if not for conscience sake, yet for shunning the mischief that may privately breake into every mans house, this methode of teaching will become so hateful, that even worldly pollicy … shall be driven to banish it.36

[my italics]

Gosson, of course, had himself been a dramatist; English playwrights were not ideologically immune to the effects of the Reformation, and were themselves torn between admiration for the rhetorical proficiency of Italian *commedia erudita*, and unease at its explicit promotion of an ethos of imposture and deception.

George Gascoigne thus produced an exuberant translation of Ariosto's irrepressible *I Suppositi* but followed it with the composition of an exceptionally harsh prodigal son play in which he argued that he would hence-forth be guilty of "no Terence phrase," since "Reformed speech doth now become us best."37 George Whetstone's two five-act plays concerning the exposition and punishment of illicit sex and the abuse of financial credit in a city like London were prefaced by an acknowledgment of the need for English dramatists to heed the Terentian rhetoric of probability, for the English playwright "grounds his work on impossibilities." The problem, argued Whetstone, was that the available Continental models of a probable drama—*commedia erudita* and "Christian Terence"—were no use to the English dramatist: "at this daye, the Italian is so lascivious in his comedies that the worst hearers are greeved at his actions," while "the German is too holye: for he presentes on every common Stage, what Preachers should pronounce in Pulpets."38 As Shakespeare paid both Gascoigne and Whetstone the compliment of rewriting the plays in question, we may reasonably infer that he was aware of the difficulty of dissociating the productivity of the Terentian technology of probability from its implicit endorsement of violations of chastity and betrayals of household honor.39
Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, for all its currency as a drama of the body and sexual desire, is in fact so remarkably chaste that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's friend, Anna Jameson, writing a political and feminist criticism of Shakespeare in 1832 could exclaim, "how exquisitely is the character of Viola fitted to her part, carrying through her ordeal with all inward grace and modesty!" Jameson was not being naive or repressed about the sexual content of the play: a glance at the Italian or Roman models of any comedy by Shakespeare will reveal how consistently he chastened their arguments, displacing deep into his depiction of female "character" the signs of an inclination towards sexual betrayal that in his originals were explicit sexual acts. The lawyer John Manningham, seeing a performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple in February 1601, noted that it was "much like the commedy of errors or Menachmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni." Although there is a play called "Inganni," Manningham was almost certainly thinking of *Gl'Ingannati* or "The Deceived," a play by the Accademia degli Intronati di Siena, written as an apology to the ladies for a sketch performed the previous evening, which was Twelfth Night, 1531. *Gl'Ingannati* seems to have enjoyed a reputation for formal excellence only second, or perhaps not even that, to Ariosto. If Machiavelli (who himself translated Terence's *Andria*, the play central to Donatus's analysis) could urge the Tuscan to forget their prejudice against Ferarese Ariosto, for his "gentil composizione," the French Charles Estienne, dedicating his translation of *Gl'Ingannati* to the Dauphin in 1549, argued that this Sienese play surpassed even Ariosto, giving the reader the impression "que si Terence mesmes l'eust composé en Italien, à peine mieux l'eust il sceu diter, inventer ou deduyer." [That if Terence himself had composed it in Italian, he would hardly have known better how to express, invent or handle it.] English readers were probably aware of the play's high literary reputation; the scholarly publisher, Girolamo Ruscelli, included a collection of Italian comedies "buone degne di legersi, & d'imitarsi," [well worthy of being read and imitated] to which he appended a critical apparatus "de' modi osservati in esse da gli antichi, così Greci come Latini" [in the manner observed in the case of ancient authors, both Greek and Latin] so as to make them into a book of "eloquentia."

Behind the central plot device of both Ariosto's / *Suppositi* and *Gl'ingannati* (and remotely, therefore, behind Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*) lay the notorious play by Terence called *Eunuchus*, which concerns a young man's gaining access, on the pretext of being a eunuch, to the house in which a virgin is being kept, whom he proceeds to rape. Renaissance versions of the plot, of course, have to deal with what we might call the "homosocial" aspect of the crime—that is, the outrage to fathers and kinsmen—since the virgin is no longer found in a house of courtesans. Thus, Polinesta's father in / *Suppositi* lifts the genre into pathos with his sorrow at the loss of his daughter's honor in his own house. And in *Gl'Ingannati*, though there is less pathos, the scandal of the daughter's seduction is perhaps even greater, due to the bizarre means by which she is left alone with a man in her bedroom (her father assumed the man was a woman dressed up; maybe it is a reminiscence of this scandalous plot that has Viola asking to be presented "as an eunch" to Orsino's court at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*).

*Gl'Ingannati* begins with a contract between two old men, Virginio and Gherardo, whereby Gherardo is to marry Virginio's daughter, Lelia; "Ne pensar ch'io mi sia permutare di quel ch'io t'ho promesso" [Don't think I'll go back on what I've promised] says Virginio; a merchant's credit depends on keeping his word. But his daughter, Lelia—Shakespeare's Viola—has slipped away from her convent and, disguised as a page, has entered the service of Flaminio, with whom she is in love, but who is himself besotted with another, namely Gherardo's daughter, Isabella, the equivalent of Shakespeare's Olivia. Isabella receives letters and "embassies" [imbasciati] from Flaminio by means of his cute page, Fabio (Lelia in disguise) with whom she, of course, falls in love.

It is worth pointing out how much more explicit than *Twelfth Night* this play is about the fact that sexual desire is not gender specific. Indeed, it becomes very clear that what counts, in distinguishing those who may desire and ask, and those who must be passive, is not gender but social status. Thus, when Lelia's nurse,
Clemenzia, finds out that, as Flammineo's page, she has been sleeping in the antechamber of his bedroom, she assumes he will ask her to sleep with him.\textsuperscript{49} And later, when Isabella's maid, Pasquella, asks Lelia, disguised as Fabio, why on earth "he" doesn't want to sleep with her mistress, Lelia-as-Fabio replies: "a me bisogna servire il padrone, intendi, Pasquella?" [I have to serve the master, you know what I mean, Pasquella?] and Pasquella does understand: "O io so ben che a tu padron non faresti dispiacere a venirci, non dormi forse con lui?" [Oh, I know very well that you don't displease your master by coming here; but you don't, by any chance, sleep with him?]. When Lelia replies, "Dio il volesse ch'io fosse tanto in gratia sua" [I wish I were so much in his favor] Pasquella is puzzled; "Oh non dormiresti piu volentieri con Isabella?" [Wouldn't you rather sleep with Isabella?], she asks. And she makes it clear, in an ensuing speech on the ephemerality of Fabio's good looks, that (as a fellow dependent herself) she regards the arrangement of sleeping with Isabella not so much as more "natural" than simply as more stable, practical, and fortunate in the long term for Fabio.\textsuperscript{50}

In good Terentian fashion, the denouement of the play proves that the contract between the old men is not broken, though both are fortunately deceived; their houses are united not by the impotent old Gherardo's marrying Lelia, but by the passionately consummated union of Isabella with Lelia's long-lost twin brother, Fabrizio, who, like Shakespeare's Sebastian, doesn't question his good fortune in happening accidentally upon a rich woman who ardently desires him. But where Shakespeare's Olivia finds out who her lover really is by means of the words he speaks (which, as we've seen, have been recently been read as proof of the inherent instability of gender in sixteenth-century thinking about the body), Isabella and the audience of Gl'Ingannati discover who her lover is in a speech which is more explicitly designed to "appeal to the body." Pasquella, Isabella's maid, emerges from the room in which the two old men have locked Isabella and someone who they think is the truant Lelia, in boy's clothes:

\textit{Pasquella:}

those two old sheep insisted that young man was a woman, and shut him in the room with Isabella, my mistress, and gave me the key. I wanted to go in and see what they were doing, and, finding them embracing and kissing together, I had to satisfy myself as to whether the other\textsuperscript{51} was male or female. The mistress had him stretched out on her bed, and was asking me to help her, while she held him by the hands. He allowed himself to be overcome, and I undid him in front, and in one pull, I felt something hit my hand; I couldn't tell whether it was a pestle, or a carrot, or indeed something else, but whatever it was, it hadn't suffered from hailstones. When I saw how it was, girls, I fled, and locked the exit! And I know that as far as I'm concerned, I won't go back in alone, and if one of you doesn't believe me, and wants to satisfy herself, I'll lend her the key.\textsuperscript{52}

Pasquella then tries to persuade the distraught Gherardo that it isn't true—his daughter isn't really embracing a man: "vedeste voi ogni cosa, e miraste che gli è femina" [Did you see everything? Well, then you can see she's a woman]. But Gherardo is not to be appeased: "svergognato a me," he says, "I am dishonoured."\textsuperscript{53} Gherardo has been deceived, despite his own sharp awareness of the nebulous quality of sexual honor and its susceptibility to gossip.

Precisely because they involve citizens' wives and daughters rather than courtesans, Renaissance imitations of Terentian comedy exhibit a strong awareness of the resemblance of the Terentian technology of probability—the uncertain, or conjectural argument—to the everyday gossip that destroys female sexual honor. Ariosto makes this a theme in \textit{I Suppositi}, where the nurse comes out of her house, onto the stage, anxious to avoid the spread of rumor within the walls, and proceeds to announce to the theatre at large that her charge has (probably) been sleeping with a household servant. But here in \textit{Gl'Ingannati} the joke turns on the way that Gherardo's cautious calculations on the risks of mere probability, uncertainty, and conjecture—calculations as to whether an association with the transvestite (and hence probably promiscuous) Lelia would call Isabella's own sexual innocence into question—are overthrown, by the substitution of
Fabrizio for Lelia in Isabella's bedroom, which ensures an unequivocally penetrative defloration. "L'ho veduto con questi occhi," says Gherado, "egli s'era spogliato in giubbone, et non hebbe tempo a corprisì … Io dico che gli e maschio, e bastarebbe a far due maschi" [I saw it with these eyes … he was undressed to his shirt and didn't have time to cover himself … I tell you he was a man, and had enough for two men].

The rhetorical deceptions by means of which the play's argument attains its probability—"la gaçon de disposer & pursuyure leur sens & argumens en icelles, pour donner recreation aux auditeurs" that Charles Estienne so admired—thus come to be associated with this act of penetrative sex. To the ladies in the audience, the prologue comments,

As far I understand it, they've called this comedy "The Deceived" not because they were ever deceived by you, oh no, … but they've called it so because there aren't many characters in the plot (favola) who don't, in the end, find themselves deceived. But there is among these deceptions one particular sort which makes me wish (for the malice I bear you) that you might be often deceived, if I were the deceiver … the plot is a new one … and is extracted from no other source than their busy pumpkin heads, from whence also came the fortunes you were allotted on Twelfth Night.

In this context, it looks as if the most significant single departure from the Italian variants on the plot of The Eunuch in Twelfth Night is its dissociation of the effectiveness of the original imposture of credit—the original pretense of androgyny or emasculation which effectively gains access to both to the person and to the heart of the wealthy Olivia—from the identification of its triumph as explicitly sexual (Fabrizio proving his virility with Isabella), rather than chastely marital (Sebastian contracted to Olivia). To a chance member of the audience of Twelfth Night in the Middle Temple in 1601 who saw the resemblance of Shakespeare's play to Gl'Inganni or Gl'Ingannati, meaning respectively "the deceits" and "the deceived," Sebastian's speech at the end might well recall these plays' themes and titles:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv 'd:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.
(V.i.257-61)

"Deceiv'd" surely here recalls its Italian translation, "ingannata," and no less surely, there is an ethical distinction being made here between being "mistook" and being "deceiv'd" that turns on the question of whether or not Sebastian is a "maid." His affirmation before the audience that he is both "a maid and man" is less a signal of his inherent androgyny than an assurance that Olivia, not having experienced the same "inganno" as Isabella, remains chaste, honorable, and a prize worthy his, Sebastian's, having.

To the argument implied here—namely, that the explicit eroticism of Gl'Ingannati makes interpretations of Twelfth Night that focus exclusively on the body and sexuality look a little contrived—it could be objected that I am being literal-minded about the theatrical representation of desire. It could be argued (and I would agree) that the very reticence and fantasticality of the amorous language of Twelfth Night ensures the "circulation" of desire or of sexual energy more effectively than the gleeful voyeurism of Gl'Ingannati. If this is so, however, it must also be acknowledged that the same linguistic reticence and latency of meaning which allows us, in the 1990s, to read Twelfth Night as a celebration of the polymorphous potential of desire, equally enabled Anna Jameson in 1832 to find in Viola a paradigm of the sexual self-control that qualified women for access to education and political life. For, within Laqueur's argument, Jameson belongs to that category of nineteenth-century women who based their claims for the recognition of women's political capacity on arguments proving their inherent moral strength. If the rest of Laqueur's argument for the importance of the
eighteenth-century transition from the endorsement to the denial of female orgasm has substance, then it must follow that Shakespeare's own texts belong among the discourses that have, historically, helped to construct the moral characteristics felt to be appropriate to a biology of incommensurability—sexual difference—between the male and female. And this in turn would imply that, in their own time, Shakespeare's comedies were not just—in Stephen Greenblatt's words—fictions which "participated in a larger field of sexual discourses" but were fictions of the Reformation—that is, they were actively transformative of existing sexual discourses, tending to substitute the intimation of female sexual intention for the representation of the act which would implicate both sexes equally.58

It is, in fact, possible to trace through Shakespeare's plays a consistency of strategy (though not, of course, of effect) in his chastening of the roles and language of women. Whereas in his Italian and Roman sources, the significance of the "woman's part" to the resolution of the dilemma depends upon her having had sex, in Shakespeare this significance is translated into an implicit, or uncertain argument involving her dis-position to have sex, or her "sexuality." To modern readers this can give the impression of a more complex "interiority" or "character" because its doubtfulness requires our interpretation. In the fraught context of the emergent commercial theatre of sixteenth-century England, however, Shakespeare's chastening of Italian and Roman dramatic models was motivated by the need to prove that the productively deceptive arguments of a Terentian-style theatre need not, as its enemies suggested, necessarily advocate the breakdown of trust and honor by endorsing every kind of sexual and financial deception in contemporary society.59

To attempt a reading of Twelfth Night that would seriously try to take account of the play's place in the history of sex and gender would require some elaboration of how, in common with other Shakespeare plays, this comedy makes a theme of being implicated in a humanistic literary culture which, through its privileging of skill in persuasive argument, was in the process of transforming relations of economic and social dependency. Current discussions of the subversive erotics of the Renaissance stage trivialize the economic and social issues at stake in Twelfth Night and similar plays by reducing the whole of the humanist literary culture of which the theatre was a product to the most banal version of Greenblatt's "self-fashioning"—a mere "increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process."60 "Self-fashioning" thereby becomes synonymous with a quite unspecific notion of "theatricality," which in turn is easily assimilated to the concept of "performativity" articulated by Judith Butler in relation to the category of gender.61 The sixteenth-century investment in masculine education, which crucially enabled the very instances of "self-fashioning" or of "theatricality" so beloved of current criticism—an education which privileged the dialectical and analysis and imitation of classical texts—is simply left out of the discussion. What we have as a result is a criticism of Shakespeare, Jonson and others that is incapable of accounting for the rhetorical and affective excess distinguishing this drama of the English Renaissance from its Continental antecedents; an excess which, in the case of Twelfth Night, permits interpretations as widely divergent as those of Greenblatt, Barber, and Jameson, and which therefore (because of its contribution to the historical "instability" of the play's "identity") surely begs to be interpreted as a thematic aspect of the play's concern with disguise, deception, and "theatricality."

For an example of how even good contemporary criticism effaces the rhetorical content of the play I want to turn to Valerie Traub's argument that the meaning of Viola/Cesario resides principally in the "dual erotic investment" that the play establishes in order to "elicit the similarly polymorphous desires of the audience, whose spectator pleasure would be at least partly derived from a transgressive glimpse of multiple erotic possibilities." In order to "substantiate the play's investment in erotic duality," she continues,

one can compare the language used in Viola/Cesario's two avowals of love: the first as Orsino's wooer of Olivia, and the second as s/he attempts to communicate love to Orsino. In both avowals, Viola/Cesario theatricalizes desire, using a similar language of conditionals toward both erotic objects …"If I did love you with my master's flame, / With such a suffr'ing, such a deadly life, / In your denial I would find no sense; / I would not understand
I would not for a moment deny the existence of the "dual erotic investment" which Traub does well to point out. However, another brief glance at *Gl'Ingannati* will show that Shakespeare's text is more remarkable for resisting than exploiting the considerable dramatic potential of any such investment.

Reading *Gl'Ingannati*, Shakespeare would have come across a model for a scene between Olivia and Viola/Cesario. The scene in question requires the audience to share the voyeuristic position of Flamineo's servants who stumble across Isabella and Lelia/Fabio during an intimate exchange of words and caresses. The audience, however, knows that "Fabio" is, for the purposes of the play, a woman (though the part was probably played by a boy). For the servants, then, the scene arouses sexual feeling and a sense of scandal at the betrayal of Flamineo by the "boy" whom he loved and trusted so much; the audience, however, freed from any sense of the latter, is invited to enjoy the transgression of the scene as if it were a kind of affluence; in Traub's words, it becomes "a transgressive glimpse of multiple erotic possibilities."

Isa. Do you know what I'd like?
Lel. What would you like?
Isa. I'd like you to come closer.
Sca. Get closer, you bumpkin.
Isa. Listen, do you want to go?
Sca. Kiss her, for Christ's sake.
Cri. She's afraid of being seen.
Isa. Come into the doorway a little.
Sca. The thing is done.
Cri. Alas, alas, I'm dry and thirsty—do it to me!
Sca. Didn't I tell you he'd kiss her?

Without denying the possibility of performing the equivalent scene between Olivia and Viola/Cesario in such a way as to maximize its erotic possibilities, I would want to argue that the rhetorical excess which distinguishes Shakespeare's text from the Italian model insists on a far higher level of engagement from the audience as auditors. This, in turn, reorients the dramatic meaning of the scene from pleasure in the spectacle of erotic possibility towards complicity in the act of *interpretation* by means of which a reader or auditor lends credibility to the figures, tropes, and fictions in the discourse of another.

Such audience complicity in the bestowal of credibility through interpretation replicates what the scene offers by way of a narrative of "desire." Olivia's desire for Viola/Cesario must become intelligible (unless we ignore the text altogether) through Viola/Cesario's progression away from formal literary models of courtship towards the affective intimacy of a more familiar mode of address, exemplified in the deservedly famous speech which begins, "Make me a willow cabin at your gate" (1.5.273). At this point we have already witnessed Olivia's unenchanted exposure of the economics of the Petrarchan argument, her parody of its facile and opportunistic movement from the praise of natural beauty to the imperatives of husbandry and reproduction: "O sir, I will not be so hard-hearted, I will give out divers schedules of my beauty" (1.5.247-48). Cesario's subsequent readiness to improvise a first-person fiction of abandonment in love represents an ability to extemporize, to seize "the gifts of moment" and so illustrate the crowning glory of classical rhetorical education.

The speech's most obvious analogue in the schoolboy literature which prepared men for such improvisations is that of the impassioned epistolary rhetoric of the women of Ovid's *Heroides*, whose vivid evocations of their writing, and of the cries that echo through the wild and lonely places to which they are abandoned,
resemble (in their simultaneous acknowledgment of hopelessness and its contradiction by the emotions aroused in the reader) the curious emotional power tapped by Cesario's entry into a hypothetical desolation of ineffectual texts that nevertheless defy the premise of their ineffectuality. Like Dido writing "without hope to move you," or Oenone, telling Paris how she made Ida resound with howls ("uluati") at his desertion, Viola/Cesario imagines filling the vacant times and spaces of rejection with "cants of contemned love" and "halloos" of Olivia's name, suddenly evoking a geography of loneliness in a play otherwise suggestive of houses, estates, and urbanity. The implied femininity of Cesario's hypothetically assumed persona here, however, merely complicates the already problematic dramatic hypothesis of a female "Viola" inasmuch as the prominence of Ovid's *Heroides* within the education syllabus for boys implied, as Warren Boutcher has noted,

>a relationship between the path to knowledge and … the mastery of the heroical genus *familiare*, with its base in epistolary stories which involve—both in the telling and in the action—intimate access to and power over feminine sensibility.

The "femininity" of the genre, then, is inseparable from its implication in a plot of seduction not unlike that of Petrarchism, except that in this version "femininity" itself—understood as a peculiar susceptibility to artificially induced compassion—is the emotional catalyst of masculine rhetorical success.

Olivia's desire for Viola/Cesario becomes apparent as a response to this speech and is inseparable, in its articulation, from the material expression of belief ("credit") that would exempt the unknown stranger from providing the heraldic display (the "blazon") that would put "his" gentility beyond doubt:

"What is my parentage?"
"Above my fortunes, yet my state is well,
I am a gentleman." I'll be sworn thou art;
Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit
Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast:
soft! soft!
Unless the master were the man …
(1.5.293-98)

Olivia's desire motivates her affirmation of Cesario's somewhat evasive protestation of gentility on the grounds of "his" exceptional beauty, eloquence, and presence of mind. What this implies, then, is that the capacity to arouse desire resides less in the androgynous beauty of the body, than in the body conceived as the medium of *elocutio* ("tongue … face … limbs … actions … spirit"); that is, the apt delivery of the mind's invention. Viola/ Cesario embodies the capacity of timely and well expressed speech to compel for a mere fiction *credit*, that is the kind of materially consequential belief (in this case, belief in matrimonial eligibility) that is rarely afforded to the "real thing."

The transgressive "glimpse" being offered to a seventeenth-century audience here, I would suggest, is less that of lesbian desire than that of the opportunity for social advancement and erotic gratification afforded by education for any servant of ability entrusted with missions of such intimate familiarity. That the entertainment of such a possibility is necessarily transgressive (though here held at bay from full recognition by the "femininity" of Viola) is evident from the care taken in the Malvolio plot to exploit the audience's revulsion at the very same idea. As a steward, Malvolio shares with Viola/Cesario the distinction of being a household servant whose "civility" of manner is qualification for a position of exceptional trust in the intimate affairs of the household. Olivia's musing, "unless the master were the man," touches the center of the play's concern with the question of social advancement by means of skills and attractions "blazoned" in the execution of service rather than properly inhering in nobility. How can such social advancement be imagined
except as an individualistic pursuit of gain, a betrayal of trust, sexual honor, economic dependency, and love?

Leo Salingar and Emrys Jones have shown how comedies of the late 1590s and early 1600s are concerned with establishing the credentials of a notion of "gentility" that operates independently of the feudal structures of lineage and affinity. "The king might create a duke, but not even he could create a gentleman," writes Jones, echoing a sentiment expressed in plays of this period. Gentility thus conceived is less the effect of lineage than of a certain affluence—freedom from manual labor—combined with the type of liberal education that might contribute a civil demeanor in social exchange. The arguments of such comedies therefore require that the discursively and morally cumbersome aspects of the humanist education bequeathed by Erasmus and the grammar schools be adapted to requirements of a style and habitus such as Viola/Cesario exhibits: a non-pedantic conversational facility appropriate to the modest enterprises of urban social encounter.

Salingar sees the conflicts played out through this re-definition of humanistic "wit" in terms of an attempt to distinguish between money values and "the values of a leisure class" whose social and financial ambitions are subliminally expressed as the civilized pleasures of courtship. Jones notes in the early 1600s the "crystallisation of a new theatrical formula":

The plays in question are comedies, usually set in some fictitious vaguely foreign court, often with a double-plot of which one part may be romantic and the other more frankly comic. The comic action sometimes takes the form of a persecution, a "baiting" extended through several episodes.

About the same time as the Chamberlain's men performed Twelfth Night, the children of the Chapel staged one of the plays to which Jones here refers, The Gentleman Usher. In the predicament of its eponymous anti-hero, Bassiolo, the play comments interestingly on Twelfth Night, condensing different aspects of the situations in which Viola/Cesario and Malvolio find themselves. Bassiolo is, like Malvolio, the most trusted servant in the household of Count Lasso, but, like Viola/ Cesario, his being familiarly confided in and befriended by a nobleman for whom he undertakes to woo Margaret, Count Lasso's daughter, immediately puts him in a position of both actual and potential betrayal of trust: Vincentio accuses him of behaving, "as if the master were the man" in an erotic sense, but he has already done so in the sense that in his contract of friendship with Vincentio, he is wooing for himself.

Chapman's is, however, a far more conservative play than Shakespeare's. Whereas Viola/Cesario's inspired improvisation on the model of the Ovidian heroic epistle actually gains the sympathetic ear and the heart of Olivia, Bassiolo's verbose and cumbersome attempt at amorous epistles merely earns him the noble lovers' contempt, serving to prove that the adaptation of a liberal education to civilized wooing can only be managed by one whose gentleness of birth is beyond dispute. The play is nevertheless concerned to argue the necessity of complementing the hunting and riding skills traditionally definitive of nobility with "wits and paper learning" of a non-pedantic kind; the Duke's ennobling of his illiterate minion, Medice, proves disastrous, arguing against the social advancement of servants who are unable to acquit themselves plausibly in noble society. At the same time, however, the play finds, in Bassiolo's dilemma between fidelity to his master, and the opportunity offered by Vincentio's pretended confidence in his rhetorical ability, that any servant so accomplished and entrusted is liable to deceive.

The fantastic unlikelihood of the plot of Twelfth Night and its apparent preoccupation with issues of gender have distracted critical attention from the play's affinity with such contemporary comedies of civility and social advancement. Yet it might well be argued that the very fantasticality of the fiction of gender in Twelfth Night constitutes the play's strategy of engagement with contemporary debates on the legitimacy of the individualistic exploitation of service in order, in Viola's own words, to "make occasion mellow."
Twelfth Night endorses the notion of rhetorical opportunism, or individual enterprise insofar as it expresses the mastery of fortune and of the occasions of civil life as the metaphorical equivalent of heroic enterprise on the high seas. Thus, for example, the rivalry between Viola and Aguecheek for the favor of Olivia is recurrently expressed in a nautical idiom. Viola is spoken of as having "trade" (3.1.76) and "commerce" (3.4.175) with Olivia, "she is the list of my voyage" says Viola (3.1.77). The hapless Aguecheek, for lack of Viola's witty invention and attractive presence, is berated for having "sailed into the north of my lady's opinion, where you will hang, like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard, unless you redeem it by some laudable attempt, either of valor or policy" (3.3.24-28). Fabian's reference here—to a 1598 translation of Gerrit de Veer's report of the ordeal of Dutch explorers trapped for ten months in Nova Zembla, where they "never saw, nor heard of any man"—comically imagines Aguecheek's conversational failure both as a failure to prove his masculinity and as meriting exile altogether from the new medium of masculine self-assertion—the profitable commerce of sociability.

The sociability thus defined as heroically masculine, however, must be purposeful as well as facile; Orsino, as Feste says, is insufficiently discriminating in the object of his discourse: "I would have men of such constancy put to sea that their business might be everywhere and there intent nowhere, for that's it always makes a good voyage of nothing" (2.4.75-78). The pervasiveness of such oceanic metaphors, as well as references to maps and narratives of discovery (Malvolio's smiling face is likened to the 1599 map which displayed the new world "as revealed by actual voyages of discovery") invests the Renaissance synonymity of "tempest" and "fortune" with specifically economic resonances. From the analogy developed between drinking and the hazards of navigation (Feste tells Olivia that a drunken man is like a drowned man—1.5.132) there emerges a chiastic narrative of rhetorical oikonomia, in which the eloquent and beautiful twins exchange near-drowning for domestic security, while the drunken and inept or irresponsible Toby and Aguecheek—initially comfortable with cakes and ale in Olivia's buttery—are finally banished, like the "knaves and fools" they prove to be, to the "wind and the rain" of Feste's song, beyond Olivia's gates.

Oikonomia is rhetorical because linguistic ability is identified with the ability to manage wealth. Maria declares of the wealthy Aguecheek that he is incompetent with his resources, he will "have but a year to all those ducats. He's a very fool, and a prodigal" (1.3.22); this failure in husbandry is then discovered at intervals during the play as Aguecheek's recurrent inability to invent plausible arguments or "reasons" for his words or actions. Aguecheek's companions are always teasing him for the reasons he cannot give; "Pourquoi? " asks Toby when Aguecheek declares his intention to leave at once, but the question bewilders the knight (1.3.89). In a later exchange Fabian joins Toby in demanding evidence of plausibility: "You must needs yield your reason, Sir Andrew" (3.2.2). The letter which Toby urges him to make "eloquent and full of invention" (3.2.41-43) turns out to be as barren as his speech: "Wonder not … why I do call thee [a scurvy fellow] for I will show thee no reason for't" (3.4.152-53).

When Anna Jameson praised Viola for the moral sensibility she displayed both in the propriety of her fidelity to Orsino, and in "her generous feeling for her rival Olivia," she appropriated for nineteenth-century feminism a seventeenth-century play's concern with calling into question the assumption that eloquent servants, accomplished in the provision of reasons, and entrusted with the intimate affairs of the household, are necessarily opportunists, people who deceive. The narrative rationale of the scene I have already remarked upon in Gl'Ingannati, in which Flammineo's servants spy upon Isabella and Lelia's kiss, is to enrage Flammineo against the deceitfulness of his favorite, Fabio; a hilarious scene ensues in which the probability of the kiss is itself called into doubt by the incompetence of the servants in relaying to Flammineo their evidence of Fabio's perfidy. The point here, however, is that Lelia/Fabio has kissed Isabella; one deceit leads to another, and Lelia finds herself explaining her refusal of further favors to Isabella on the grounds that "too much love" for Isabella has already led her to deceive ("ingannare") her lord. Earlier, however, Lelia/Fabio showed a singular lack of regard for Flammineo's suit, attempting by means of Pasquella to ensure that Isabella would never respond to his affections; Viola, as Jameson notes, is remarkable for resisting the temptation to do this. In Chapman's Gentleman Usher, Bassiolo, also in the position of a go-between or an
ambassador between lovers, is tempted not only into exploitation of his position of trust, but into presumptions of equality and friendship with the nobleman who employs him, which the play then ridicules with all the fervor of profound social anxiety.

It becomes clear that the twinning of Sebastian and Viola, and the femininity of the latter, occurs in Shakespeare's play not simply (as in other derivatives of Terence's *Eunuch*) for the sake of resolving an erotic impasse by offering a means of gaining access to the cloistered woman, but for the sake of foregrounding an outrageously improbable hypothesis about the possibility of combining fidelity in service with rhetorical *oikonomia*—that is, the heroic exploitation of rhetorical opportunity, which typically achieves both economic security and erotic gratification. Terence Cave has noted that the final revelation of "Viola's" identity remains merely hypothetical, contingent on an accumulation of probabilities beyond the scope of the play: "Do not embrace me till each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump / That I am Viola." It could be said that the femininity of Viola is the grounds upon which the fiction of the servant Cesario can prove the success of eloquence in the narrative of social advancement that Sebastian fulfills, while at the same time ensuring this narrative remains quite untainted by what would otherwise be its precondition—the betrayal of the master by his "man." Viola/Cesario, then, represents more than the "dual erotic investment" that exhausts the meaning of Lelia/Fabio, for s/he is the means by which a seventeenth-century audience could be seduced into entertaining unawares the possibility of a positive version of Malvolio, a servant able to exploit the civility that earns the trust and favor of noblewomen to the extent of achieving the "love" that promises contractual equality. When Fabian imagines himself condemning the crossgartered Malvolio as an "improbable fiction" on the stage, he draws attention to the self-consciousness that marks the play's violation of the Terentian rhetoric of probability, which remains so near the textual surface of *Gl'Ingannati*. Any audience hearing Fabian, however, must feel that the primary violation of probability lies not in the outrageousness of Malvolio's behavior, but in the very existence of the person called Viola, who represents, as Terence Cave has written, "a particularly fruitful violation of the laws of rational discourse no less than sexual decorum," and whose name performs a number of associative tricks, as it "echoes the erotic flowers and music of the opening scene, insidiously rearranges the letters of Olivia's name, and comes close to naming violation itself."

The play's erotic investment in Viola/Cesario is less, I would argue, than its investment in the violation of probability constituted by the twinship of Viola and Sebastian, which first casts the desire and emotion aroused by Cesario into extremity, and then resolves that extremity as a miraculous disproof of the betrayal of trust that would, in the ordinary circumstances of daily life, be its explanation. Thus, for example, where the sodomitic behavior of Fabrizio's traveling companion, the pedant in *Gl'Ingannati*, merely fuels the sexual comedy of that play, the love Antonio feels for Sebastian, while equally open to homoerotic interpretation, is not sidelined by mockery, but rendered able to share on equal terms in a dramatic climax which turns less on the nuptials that unite the two houses than on the proof that not one of the lovers of a beautiful "boy"—neither his wife, nor his master, nor his friend in need—is "therein, by my life, deceiv'd." The "hints of corruption and aggression," which, as Cave notes, recur in the play, accumulate around the common sense perception that the youthful beauty of a stranger is *probably* as deceitful as it is irresistibly attractive.

Certainly Orsino, having charged his lovely ambassador with the ethically problematic obligation to make "discourse" of his "dear faith" and "act" his woes, reads the apparent consequence—Cesario's contract to Olivia—as presaging the youth's career in similar deceptions: "thou dissembling cub! What wilt thou be / When time hath sown a grizzle on thy case?" (5.1.162-63). The pathos of Olivia's case is more marked, as she interprets Viola/Cesario's love for Orsino as the "fear" rightfully aroused by the consciousness of having betrayed his master. In attempting to prevent Viola/Cesario's protestation of innocence, she exposes the instability of her own grounds for belief in the youth's continued fidelity to her. "Oh, do not swear!" she begs, "Hold little faith, though thou hast too much fear" (5.1.169-170). Most moving of all, however, is Antonio's apology for being obliged by love into an extremity that makes demands of the one he loves. "What will you do, now my necessity / Makes me to ask you for my purse?" he gently enquires (3.4.342-43), only to be
moved by Viola/ Cesario's non-recognition, into an outburst against the deceptiveness of the "promise" that was the boy's manner and looks (3.4.369-79).

A contemporary reader, perusing a popular anthology of the period known as *The Parodyse of daynty deuises*, found one poem entitled thus: "Who mindes to bring his ship to happy shore / Must care to know the lawes of wisdomes lore." By this poem he wrote, "rules of wary life," bracketing off for particular annotation a verse referring to trust in friendship. Do not bestow credit on boys, the verse advised, for, "Ful soone the boy thy frendship will despyse / And him for loue thou shalt ungrateful find." As Erica Sheen has pointed out, the protracted denouement of *Cymbeline* features a "boy" called Imogen who refuses to plead for the life of her savior and friend, Lucentio. His moralizing comment, "briefly die their joys / that place them on the truth of girls and boys" does nothing to assuage the audience's impatient desire to resolve his mistake, proving the "truth" that probability and versified common sense would deny. Just so here, in *Twelfth Night*, Antonio's sententious conclusions on beauty and deceit merely fuel the audience's desire to relieve him of the pain of believing he has loved a "most ingrateful boy" (5.1.75). In view of this, Greenblatt's observation that, at the end of the play, "Viola is still Cesario," seems not so much to argue for any specific beliefs about instability of gender, as to be a part of that complex affective structure by means of which a boy proves, most improbably, to be "true" to all the kinds of lovers he might have—right up until the end of the play.

What, then, of the play's place in a history of sex and gender? The least that should be said is that any attempt to de-essentialize and historicize gender by appealing to a Galenic theory of men and women differentiated only by degrees of body heat is of strictly limited value in the analysis of a complicated tradition of comic writing in which what distinguishes men is their privileged access to allusive and intertextual levels of meaning—in other words, their access to active participation in the historical and discursive process of defining the social roles and characteristics of either sex. But something rather more positive may be said about *Twelfth Night* in particular. For here once again Shakespeare has chastened the argument of a neoTerentian play in such a way as to maximize the interpretative possibilities, and consequently the historical tenacity, of the English dramatic text.

That the meaning of the Viola/Olivia courtship for a seventeenth-century audience resided at least partly in its capacity to seduce them into condoning the social (rather than sexual) transgression elsewhere reviled by the play's mockery of Malvolio is suggested by the history of critical reaction to Shakespeare's conception of Viola. The probability of Lelia's dressing up as Fabio is established in *Gl'Ingannati* in an exchange with her nurse during which she admits that since being kept prisoner by soldiers, she has become sexually suspect irrespective of her conduct: ever since the sack of Rome, she says, "ne credevo poter vivere sí honestamente, che bastasse a far che la gente non havesse che dire" [I didn't see how I could live honestly enough to stop them gossiping]. In 1753 Charlotte Lennox, writing a criticism of Shakespeare, objected to the want of any similar argument of probability in relation to Viola's decision to dress as a man:

A very natural scheme, this for a beautiful and virtuous young Lady, to throw off all the modesty and Reservedness of her Sex, mix among men, herself disguised as one; and prest by no Necessity; influenced by no Passion, expose herself to all the dangerous consequences of so unworthy and shameful a Situation.

The Italian source, she notes, "is much more careful to preserve Probability" than "the Poet Shakespeare." However, by 1832 the very want of any "probable" argument for Viola's behavior (since any such would reflect upon Viola's modesty) enabled Anna Jameson to celebrate her femininity as the source of the peculiar integrity which characterizes her relations to both master and mistress. The very improbability of Viola, then, serves to break down the identification of rhetorical virtuosity (the capacity to make things probable) with the sexual conquest of women that marks the plot of the Italian play. The literal intertwining of the names of Malvolio, Olivia, and Viola has often been pointed out, but it many not be entirely fanciful to recall that the
identification of "inganni" (deceptions, probable arguments) with the sexual deception that makes Isabella unchaste is signaled in the prologue of Gl'Ingannati with following innuendo:

But there is among these deceptions one particular sort which makes me wish, for the malice I bear you, that you might be often deceived, if I were the deceiver.89

Here "il mal ch'io vi voglio" is a kind of flirtatious joke on the euphemism for fancying someone, "ti voglio bene." In entertaining ambitious fantasies which suddenly and indecorously make the audience aware that these are also sexual fantasies about Olivia (2.5.47-48), Shakespeare's Malvolio bears the trace of the erotic "mal ... voglio" by which Fabrizio's economic success is identified as a sexual conquest and extended through innuendo to characterize the terms upon which a female audience may be imagined capable of enjoying the argument of the play.

What was positive for seventeenth-century women about the way in which Twelfth Night addressed them, then, was due less to the "high cultural investment in female erotic pleasure … because it was thought necessary for conception to occur" than to its opposite:90 the extent to which, by refusing to subject Olivia to the "mal ... voglio" of an explicitly sexual encounter with Sebastian on the model of Isabella's with Fabrizio, Shakespeare manages to portray a heroine whose prudence, good judgment, and ability to govern others remain uncompromised even by her contract with the beautiful youth. For in marrying Sebastian, Olivia has arguably yielded to no whim, but carried out the strategic plan first made known to us by Sir Toby Belch: "she'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit" (1.3.106-108). Olivia never wavers from this purpose, and in providing the precedent that it elsewhere pretends to deny—marriage between a noble-woman and one beneath her—the play endorses the real-life example of the highly intelligent Katherine Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, who, after having been married at fourteen to her forty-nine-year-old noble guardian, later decided to marry none other then her gentleman usher, who was "an accomplished gentleman, well versed in the study of the languages … bold in discourse, quick in repartee." There were, as Katherine Brandon's biographer commented, "many reasons why the clever and serviceable gentleman usher who conducted her business … should seem to the Duchess a more desirable husband than an ambitious noble."91 Shakespeare's play, around 1602, contributed to the undoing of the social and sexual stereotyping that would make of that last statement nothing but a dirty joke.

Notes


3 I should acknowledge here my gratitude to Gayle Kern Paster, who, on reading a version of this paper, pointed out that my concern here is more with textual criticism's historicizing of erotic desire rather than with body history per se.

4 For example, see C. L. Barber's still very interesting Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959).


Greenblatt 80; Laqueur 4-5.

Greenblatt 74-75, 79, 85, 181; Laqueur 12-16.

Greenblatt 81; Laqueur 13.

Greenblatt, 88.

Greenblatt, 87.


Greenblatt, 72.

Greenblatt, 82.


Laqueur, 115.


The examples Montaigne cites are those of Iphis, from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX, 793ff, and of Lucius Constitus, from Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* VII, iv. See Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), 110. In his chapter of "histoires memorables de certains femmes qui sont degeneres en hommes," Ambroise Paré, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1971), includes the same example from Pliny, the story of Marie Germaine, and the example of Maria Pateca, told by João Rodrigues in *Amati Lusitani Medici Physici Praestantissimi, Curationum medicinalium centuriae quatuor* (Froben: Basel, 1567), 168. Needless to say, Rodrigues also cites Pliny, confirming a certain sense of circularity and repetition in the gathering of such instances. One might want to argue for a belief in the frequency of the phenomenon from Montaigne's comment, "Ce n'est pas tant de merveille que cette sort d'accident se rencontre frequent" [It isn't surprising that this sort of accident occurs frequently]. However, as Montaigne attributes the "accident" in question to the power of the imagination, which elsewhere in the same essay becomes responsible for un-founded beliefs in the magic that causes impotence, it is not clear how sceptically he means this. In any case, Montaigne's version of Marie-Germaine's accident does not
conform to Paré's analysis, since Montaigne attributes to the power of the imagination the capacity to satisfy itself a sexual longing by producing the desired genitals of the (opposite?) sex—"si l'imagination peut en telles choses, elle est si continuellement et si vigoureusement attaché à ce sujet, que, pour n'avoir si souvent à rechoir en même pensée et àperé de désir, elle a meilleur compte d'incorporer une fois pour toutes cette virile partie aux filles." This would seem to argue that girls did not already possess "cette virile partie." See Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. R. Barrai (Paris: du Seuil, 1967), 54. An excellent article by Patricia Parker, which came to my notice after I had written this article, criticizes both the functioning of medical discourse and the teleology of masculinity as a "reassuringly stable ground" in the arguments of Laqueur and Greenblatt and points to the preoccupation of Montaigne's essay with the anxiety that masculinity itself requires supplementation, to repair the "defect in sex" which is impotence. See Patricia Parker, "Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germaine," Critical Inquiry 19 (Winter, 1993), 335-64.


22 Traub, 51. This seems unlikely, since Paré explicitly says that the mutation can only go one way: "nous ne trouvons jamais en histoire veritable que d'homme aucun soit devenu femme, pource que Nature tend toujours à ce qui est le plus parfaict, et non au contraire faire ce qui est parfaict devienne imparfaict" [we never find in any true history that any man whatsoever became a woman, because Nature always tends towards that which is the most perfect, and does not on the contrary make what is perfect become imperfect].

23 Orgel, 10.

24 Traub, 103, 117, 141.

25 Thus, Traub, in her concern to refute or modify Orgel's argument that the transvestite theatre was at least in part motivated by a recognition of the value represented by female chastity, misleadingly represents the arguments as being about "the fantasized dangers posed by women" (121), which obscures beyond recovery the notion that women's chastity was valuable because it affected male honor and, therefore, economic power. The latter argument has been well made in relation to "desire" in the ancient world by John Winkler, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece (London: Routledge, 1990), 74-75.

26 Greenblatt, 88.

27 The idea that women in the audience fell in love with the players seems to have been common enough; see Beaumont and Fletcher 1.1.46-48, of a waiting maid: "She lov'd all the Players in the last Queenes time once over: she was strook when they acted lovers, and forsook some when they plaid murtherers." Women's susceptibility to the fiction, then, seems to have been laughed at, whereas the ridicule of men turns on the degree of aptitude or otherwise with which they make use of the wit they have heard at plays.


33 "E vi confessa in questo l'Autore avere e Plauto e Terenzio seguitato, … non solo ne li costumi, ma ne li argomenti ancora de le fabule vuole essere de li antiche … imitatore" [And the Author confesses that in this he has followed Plautus and Terence … because he wants to be an imitator of the ancients not just in their customs, but in their arguments and plots]: *Tutte le Opere di Ludovico Ariosto*, ed. Cesare Segre (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 197.


39 Gascoigne's *Supposes* as *The Taming of the Shrew* and Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* as *Measure for Measure*.


Delle Comedie Elette Novamente raccolte insieme, con le correttioni, & annotationi di Girolamo Ruscelli (Venetia, 1554), 164. Unfortunately, there are few annotations after Bibiena and Machiavelli, and there is nothing interesting on Gl'Ingannati.

See Terence, The Eunuch, Terence, 2 vols., trans. J. Sergeant (London: Heinemann, 1912). Arisoto explicitly derives his seduction plot from The Eunuch (Opere, IV. 197), but mitigates its scandalous effect by crossing it with Plautus' highminded Captivi. Shakespeare in The Taming of the Shrew makes several references to The Eunuch, which assimilate it to the humanist debate about the ethics of teaching schoolboys the classics, and to the anti-theatre argument that theatre works like pornography, to arouse men to commit sexual crimes. For the centrality of The Eunuch to sixteenth-century debates about art and pornography, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Titian, Ovid and Erotic Illustration," Myths, Emblems, Clues, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (London: Hutchinson, 1986), 77-95.

1.3.56; "Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him"; compare Terence, "Chaerea. o fortunatem istum eunuchum qui quidem inhanc detur domum! ... Parmeno. pro illo te deducam" [Chaerea. o what a lucky eunuch to be made a present for that house! ... Parmeno. I could take you instead], The Eunuch, in Terence, II. 270-71.

Sacrificio, Gl'ingannati, Comedia degli Intronati celebrato nei Giuochi d'un Carnovale di Siena (Venetia: Altobello Salicero, 1569) 1.1, fol. 18v. There is a translation of this play by Geoffrey Bullough in Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1958), 2:286-339, but it omits or censors a fair amount.


"Clem. Dimmi un poco, & dove dormi tu? / Lelia. In una sua anticamera sola. / Clem. Se una notte tentato dalla maladetta tentazione ti chiamasse che tu dormisse con lui, come andrebbe? / Lelia. Io non voglio pensare al male prima che venga" 1.3, fol. 26r.

"Clem. Dimmi un poco, & dove dormi tu? / Lelia. In una sua anticamera sola. / Clem. Se una notte tentato dalla maladetta tentazione ti chiamasse che tu dormisse con lui, come andrebbe? / Lelia. Io non voglio pensare al male prima che venga" 1.3, fol. 26r.

This isn't quite accurate as a rendering of "s'era maschio o femina," but any other way would announce the gender of Isabella's partner too soon by assigning a pronoun.

Gl'Ingannati, 4.4, fol. 58v. This is one of the passages that Bullough omits in his translation.

Gl'Ingannati, 4.8, fol. 62v.

Gl'Ingannati, 4.8, fol. 62v.

Estienne, Les Abusez, sig. A3r.

See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 194-205 and Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (Virago, 1983), 28. Laqueur and Taylor both refer to the use made by feminists like Jameson of texts such as John Millar’s *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (Basel, 1793), which suggested that position of women in any society might be taken as a measurement of its civility and well being. Millar's influence is certainly traceable in Anna Jameson's *Sketches in Canada, or Rambles among the Red Men* (London: Longman, 1852), and is compatible with the project of *The Characteristics of Women* as outlined in the introductory dialogue, 20-31.

Greenblatt, *Fiction and Friction*, 75.

For an account of how this happens in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, see ”Why do Shakespeare's women have 'characters'?” *The Usurer's Daughter*, 178-213.

Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing*, 11; see also Both Levine and Howard reduce the meaning of "theatricality" to the subversions, sexual and social, effected by the assumption of disguise, as if clothes themselves made the theatrical fiction credible and powerful.


Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 131.

None of the authorities on sixteenth-century Italian drama that I consulted [Mario Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento* (Venice, 1975); Nino Borsellino, *Rozzie Intronati* (Rome, 1974); Aulo Greco, *L'istituzione del teatro comico nel rinascimento* (Naples, 1976); Marvin Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1960); Louise Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989)] could inform me on this question of staging. However, Pamela Benson very kindly consulted the current expert on Italian theatrical production, Richard Andrews, whose reply suggested that although plays in convents had all female casts, courtesans were famous for improvising scenes in their salons, and there is some evidence that women did play at court and in some touring companies, they were unlikely to have taken parts in a play put on by a learned academy, such as the Intronati di Siena. I would like to thank Pamela Benson and Richard Andrews for this information.

Gl’Ingannati, 2: 6, fol. 37v.


See Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (London: Heineman, 1977), 62-63, 82-83. *Twelfth Night* is implicitly urban, by virtue of the stress placed throughout on "civility"; Olivia, for example, berates Toby as an "ungracious wretch, / Fit for the mountains and barbarous caves, / Where manners were ne'er preach'd" before begging Sebastian to forgive the "uncivil" injury he has sustained at the hands of her kinsman. *Twelfth Night* IV.i.46-52.


Jones, "The First West End Comedy" 233. See also


Charlotte Lennox complains of the improbability of Shakespeare's plots in *Shakespeare Illustrated ... by the author of the Female Quixote* (London: 1753), 244. That Lennox's response was still commonplace in the nineteenth criticism is suggested by Jameson's comment, "The situation and character of Viola have been censured for their want of consistency and probability," *Shakespeare's Heroines* 130.

Gerrit de Veer, *The True and Perfect Description of Three Voyages by the Ships of Holland and Zeland* [1609] (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1770), sig. A2r. The account was entered on the Stationers' Register in 1598; see *Twelfth Night* xxxii.


Chapman, in *The Gentleman Usher*, also assumes a relationship between rhetorical skill, household management, and the favour of noblewomen: "You are not knowne to speak well? You haue wonne direction of the Earl and all his house, / The fauour of his daughter, and all Dames / That euer I sawe, come within your sight," Vincentio flatters the steward (3.2.167-70).


*Gl'Ingannati*, 2: 8, fol. 40v.

*Gl'Ingannati*, 2: 8, fol. 38r.


Cave, 280.

*Gl'Ingannati*, fol. 53v, Stragualcia, the pedant's servant, rails, "che voi sete ... un sodomito, un tristo, posso dire" [I could say you were a sodomite, a miserable specimen].


*Cymbeline*, ed. J. M. Nosworthy (London: Methuen, 1969) 5.5.106-108. I would like to thank Erica Sheen for pointing out the similarity of this affective moment to that in *Twelfth Night*.

*Gl'Ingannati*, Hi., fol. 23v.

Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated ... by the author of the Female Quixote* (London: 1753), 244.
88 See above, note 72; Jameson observes that "The situation and character of Viola have been censured for their want … of probability," *Shakespeare's Heroines*, 130.

89*Gl'Ingannati*, "Prologo," fol. 15v.

90 Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 141.


**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 34): Further Reading**


Argues that, during the course of the play, *Twelfth Night* transforms the audience's perception of the performance, portraying "theatre as blood sport, theatre that celebrates its own dark origins."


Explores the syntax and diction in three extracts from *Twelfth Night* and how they contribute to characterization.


Considers *Twelfth Night* to be one of the richest of Shakespeare's comedies in terms of its characterization, moving beyond farce to a consideration of unique and complex identities and motivations.


Contends that the figure of Viola/Cesario defies natural sexual categories by affirming the plasticity of gender.


Asserts that *Twelfth Night* contains disturbing elements that prefigure the bleak worlds of such plays as *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*, because in *Twelfth Night* "Shakespeare was beginning to outgrow the pure mirth of the comic vision."


Interprets Malvolio's imprisonment according to the religious teachings of Martin Luther.


Reviews Samuel Johnson's interpretation of Viola.

Explores the plot elements and characterizations (especially of Malvolio and Lear) shared by Twelfth Night and King Lear, and what distinguishes them as comedy and tragedy, respectively.


Argues that the source of the comedy in Twelfth Night is "self-deception as it manifests itself in love."  


Considers Malvolio to be essential to the "merriment" of Twelfth Night, especially in his expression of repressed sexual desires.


Provides an overview of Twelfth Night, comparing it to the comedies that preceded it.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 46): Introduction**

**Twelfth Night**  

For nearly two hundred years, commentators have generally agreed that Twelfth Night represents the culmination of Elizabethan romantic comedy. By reshaping circumstances, dramatic conventions, and character types he had employed in earlier comedies, Shakespeare created a paragon of this genre—and then turned to other dramatic forms. Many twentieth-century scholars have noted that the play contains elements of the problem comedies and the romances that followed Twelfth Night. Over the past three decades, feminist, new historicist, Marxist, and materialist critics have emphasized these elements, raising questions about the play's depiction of love and gender relations, the treatment of Malvolio, and Feste's role in the punishment of Olivia's steward as well as in the work as a whole.

Over the past twenty years, many critics have looked closely at Shakespeare's portrayal of the principal characters in Twelfth Night. Offering what he has described as an "anti-romantic" interpretation of the play, Richard A. Levin (1979) has assessed Viola as a cunning young woman who intentionally charms and misleads Olivia as part of her overall strategy. In Levin's estimation, Viola is determined from the outset to marry Orsino, and her deceptions reflect the prevailing values of the play. René Girard (1990) has focused on Olivia and Orsino, viewing both of them as obsessed by self-love and desperately in need of a sense of superiority in their relations with the opposite sex. This kind of narcissism, he has argued, places a priority on desire rather than pleasure. Also evaluating the meaning of sexuality in Twelfth Night, John Astington (1994) has remarked that Malvolio is depicted as unsuited for marriage because of his spiritual impotence. The public mockery of Malvolio's lust for Olivia, the critic has maintained, exposes the steward's inadequate understanding of the true responsibilities of heterosexual love. Feste's role in the gulling of Malvolio has intrigued several recent commentators. Joan Hartwig (1973) has regarded it as mean-spirited, severe, and abusive. Feste's concept of justice, she has contended, is the legal equivalent of revenge, and the absence of forgiveness in the conclusion of the subplot leaves readers and audiences uneasy. Hartwig also has noted, however, that the clown offers other characters, including Malvolio, different perspectives from which to view themselves, and that he is particularly concerned with calling attention to human folly. Robert Wilcher (1982)
has compared Feste with other Shakespearean clowns, particularly the type known as "the domestic fool." Wilcher stresses Feste's vulnerability—his precarious situation in Olivia's household and his shortcomings as a professional jester—and has argued that the fool's verbal agility is inadequate to fill the role assigned to him. Karen Greif (1988) has termed Feste as enigmatic and inscrutable, but also as a character who serves as "a unifying presence." Reviewing twentieth-century theatrical renditions of Twelfth Night's fool, she has demonstrated that since Harley Granville-Barker's innovative staging of the play in 1912, Feste has become the personification of its melancholy undertone: a poignant mediator between the illusions of romantic comedy and the realities of human existence. Greif also has pointed out the connection between modern critical appreciation of the play's darker elements—stage productions that emphasize its bittersweet tonalities, and late twentieth-century philosophical concerns with issues of identity and alienation. In contrast to Wilcher, Bente A. Videbæk (1996) has recently rated Feste's linguistic abilities highly, noting in particular the different verbal manipulations the fool employs with aristocrats on one hand and with menials on the other. From this critic's point of view, Feste's paramount quality is his aloofness from the intrigues of the dramatic action. But Videbæk also has maintained that Feste's role as mediator between the audience and the on-stage characters, his talent for adjusting his clowning to different situations, and his capacity to show up Olivia's and Orsino's sentimental notions of love are vital to our understanding of Twelfth Night.

Aside from analyses of the play's principal characters, late twentieth-century criticism of Shakespeare's last romantic comedy is dominated by consideration of gender issues. Cristina Malcolmson (1991) has explored the relationship between gender and status in Twelfth Night and has argued that although the play questions the traditional social order, in which men are regarded as inherently superior to women, it also betrays a deep anxiety about independent and upwardly mobile females. In Malcolmson's judgment, Shakespeare resolves this tension and preserves harmonious social relations by portraying Viola as gracious, deferential, and motivated by love for Orsino—not by any interest in improving her rank in society. Douglas E. Green (1991) has also evaluated questions of love and gender in Twelfth Night, and, like Malcolmson, discerns there a repressed fear of strong-willed women. He further has claimed that while on the surface the play suggests that men and women are equally capable of being faithful or erratic in their love, the subtext endorses the value of homosexual rather than heterosexual love. Irene G. Dash (1997) has similarly examined the question of independent, headstrong women in Twelfth Night. In contrast to Malcolmson and Green, however, Dash has asserted that Shakespeare treats the subject with "humor and insight." From her perspective, though Olivia and Viola initially challenge traditional notions of female dependency, eventually their erotic desires lead them to yield their independence and then gracefully conform to the social and sexual norms of a patriarchal world. Clearly there is no general consensus among contemporary critics regarding Shakespeare's depiction in Twelfth Night of human love and gender relations, and it appears likely that these topics will continue to draw the attention of scholars and commentators well into the next century.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 46): Overviews

Elizabeth Story Donno (essay date 1985)


[In the excerpt below, Donno traces the progress of the play's dramatic action and discusses the principal characters. Although she acknowledges some discrepancies and inconsistencies in the story, she applauds Shakespeare's treatment of the complicated plot.]

After the theatres reopened in 1660, Pepys saw Twelfth Night on three occasions—in 1661, 1663 and 1668. Despite such familiarity, he seems to have missed the evocative and allusive quality of Shakespeare's alternative title, noting in his diary after the 1663 performance that this 'silly' play did not relate 'at all' to the
name or to the day. Even for Shakespeare's contemporary audience its most memorable element was the character of the proud, self-loving steward Malvolio—witness a performance presented at court by Shakespeare's company in 1623 (again on Candlemas Day) under the title Malvolio. Leonard Digges, who had contributed commendatory verses to the First Folio, observed in a later and longer tribute:

loè in a trice
The Cockpit Galleries, Boxes, all are full
To hear Malvoglio that cross-garter'd gull.

(Shakespeare's Poems, 1640)

Some time in 1632 (or later) King Charles inscribed 'Malvolio' against the printed title in his copy of the Second Folio. One may conclude that, so far as contemporary (and later) stage popularity was concerned, the whirligig of time did bring in the revenge on the 'whole pack' of the other characters that the discomfited steward promises as he exits in the final act.

But it is Sir Toby Belch, the Countess Olivia's perennially tipsy kinsman, who has the most lines to speak and who, despite his earlier 'fruitless pranks', contrives the means both to complicate the plot and to resolve it. From the outset the convivial Sir Toby is hard put to understand the countess's vow to abjure both the sight and the company of men in order to mourn her brother's death for seven long summers. This desire to cloister herself for so extended a period reveals, as John Russell Brown observes, that Olivia must be very young indeed; so, too, if one judges from their emotional predispositions and actions, all the characters must be, except perhaps for Feste—the Lady Olivia's father having taken much delight in him—and, possibly, the sprightly Sir Toby, though modern productions do not always take such evidence into account.

Shakespeare, in fact, is fairly specific in indicating the ages of the two pairs of lovers. The twins were thirteen when their father died (5.1.228-9, 232); the disguised Viola is described by Malvolio as 'not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy' (1.5.130) and an 'apple cleft in two' is not more like than the pair of them (5.1.207-8). Though obviously beardless, Sebastian is a skilful swordsman (even if Viola is not). Orsino is described as of 'fresh and stainless youth' though he has a beard (1.5.214, 3.1.38-9); since he believes that a husband should be older than his wife (2.4.27-8), he may be assumed to be a little older than both Olivia and Viola. Whether or not he is as young as the four lovers, Sir Toby, like Touchstone in As You Like It (5.4.55-6), pressing in among the 'country copulatives', anticipates the dénouement by taking the 'little villain' Maria as his wife, an action presaged in the jesting remarks of Feste at 1.5.22-4 and of Sir Toby himself at 2.5.150, and performed, it would seem, as early as 4.2, as line 57 suggests. Convinced, on any count, that 'care's an enemy to life', he has brought in a suitor for Olivia, even if it is the fatuous Sir Andrew Aguecheek. As incorrigible a 'gull-catcher' as Maria, Sir Toby also uses him as his own 'dear manikin' from whom he can extract a steady supply of money.

Sentiment, which motivates Olivia's desire to become a weeping recluse (though Feste soon prompts her to laugh again, and she is without a veil when Cesario arrives at her gate), is also characteristic of the moody Orsino, the duke or perhaps simply a count of Illyria—Shakespeare seems to have wavered in his conception. Having loved the image of Olivia for a month before the play opens, he continues to protest his love for three more months even before he has a chance to speak to her directly. Like Romeo infatuated with fair Rosaline, he is obsessed with the idea of being in love. His inconstancy of mood is emphasised in the first seven lines of the play when, calling for an excess of music in order that his appetite for it may sicken, he at once demands that the musicians repeat one particular strain because of its 'dying fall', but before he has spoken three more lines his appetite has already sickenèd, and he orders them to desist altogether. At the end of this opening speech he foreshadows the hasty replacement of the initial object of his affection that will occur in Act 5 by acknowledging here the capricious quality of love: whatever is held of greatest worth may 'fall into abatement and low price'. Yet as a result of the homage and solicitude of his young page, who bravely masks her own
emotions in order to woo Olivia on his behalf, he comes by the end of the last act to recognise the value of the devotion she has tendered to him.

With Olivia and her o'erhasty marriage to Sebastian, the case is different. Shakespeare explains it with a metaphorical reference to bowling; in her case, 'nature in her bias drew in that'. Although it may be Olivia's own tendency to sentiment that prompts her to become so quickly enamoured of the disguised Cesario, her counter-wooing has the function of predisposing her to love Sebastian in accord with nature's bias. The rationale behind this quite absurd situation is, Porter Williams notes, much like that of the lover in Donne's 'The Good-morrow':

If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

Still, Olivia remains sufficiently cool-headed to take the wondering but infinitely pliable Sebastian-supposed-Cesario to a nearby chantry to plight their troth before a holy man.

Contrasting with the sentimental Orsino and Olivia is Viola, the charming but quite practical flotsam of the sea who quickly sets about improving her situation. Informed that she cannot serve Olivia, she at once determines to disguise herself as a page and serve the noble Orsino, known to her father and, fortuitously it seems, still a bachelor. Within three days she has endeared herself to him, so much so that he has unclasped to her the book even of his 'secret soul'. In the exchanges with Olivia and the 'lighter members' of her household, she conducts herself with great verbal skill, exhibiting a remarkable range of emotional responses, at times saucy, florid or outspoken, but in some situations she remains quite surprisingly taciturn. Though Antonio, having rescued her from the farcical duel with Sir Andrew, addresses her as Sebastian, she says nothing to interfere with his arrest as a pirate or to question him about the fate of her brother. She simply allows herself to hope that he is indeed alive. Her actions throughout can be said to be predicated on her view that time will untangle all things (2.2.37-8), this in accord with the commonplace doctrine (topos) that truth is the daughter of time (veritas filia temporis). Even in the final scene, when Orsino asks to take her hand and to see her in her woman's weeds, she says nothing more than that the captain who has them has been imprisoned at Malvolio's suit. When some forty lines later he again gives her his hand and declares that from this time on she is to be her 'master's mistress', she utters not a word. Nor does she say anything more for the remainder of the action. Yet underlying her variable responses and her taciturnity is an emotional constancy, well evoked in the lines beginning 'My father had a daughter loved a man' and culminating in the moving self-portrait of the figure of Patience smiling at grief (2.4.110-11).

The clown Feste, mediating between the courtly milieu and Sir Toby's, is an irresistible figure. This results in large part from the fact that, actively engaged in both worlds, he distances himself from each by means of his witty and facetious comments. It is now accepted that Shakespeare's projection of the role of professional wit who wears the dress of the fool but does not wear motley in the brain, was the result of Robert Armin's entry into the Chamberlain's Company (probably in 1599). Early apprenticed to a goldsmith, Armin was also for some years a writer of ephemeral pamphlets and entertainments; these include an account of six 'natural' fools and a play exploiting the art of impersonation, in which he was adept. Two of the pamphlets he signed 'Clununcio del Curtanio Snuffe' and 'Clununcio del Mondo Snuffe', that is, Snuff, Clown of the Curtain Theatre and Snuff, Clown of the Globe. He was included in the list of actors in Jonson's The Alchemist in 1610, so at that date he was still a member of the King's Men, the title given to the Lord Chamberlain's Company on the accession of James I. He died five years later. The following lines, addressed to 'Honest, gamesom Robin Armine', attest to his skill and echo Viola's comment on Feste: 'This fellow is wise enough to play the fool' (3.1.50):
So play thy part, be honest still with mirth,
Then, when th'art in the tiring-house of earth;
Thou being his servant whom all kings do serve,
Mayest for thy part well-played like praise deserve:
For in that tiring-house when either be,
Y'are one man's men and equal in degree;
So thou in sport the happiest men dost school
To do as thou dost—wisely play the fool.

(John Davies, *Scourge of Folly* (1611))

Four years Shakespeare's junior, Armin would have been thirty or so when *Twelfth Night* was written, and the slightly wry speeches Feste is given seem intended to reflect a maturity of outlook that holds no illusions about the durable nature either of emotional situations or of practical circumstances. Hence his incorrigible begging and hence his stress both in words and in song on the transitory: youth is a stuff—a material thing—that will not endure; beauty is but a flower; present love is justified by present laughter since 'what's to come is still [i.e. always] unsure'. His wit is both corrective and apt. He uses his good fooling to remedy Olivia's displeasure at his truancy from her household and to persuade her of the folly of mourning a brother's soul which, after all, she *knows* is in heaven, and he pointedly remarks that Orsino's tailor should make him a doublet of changeable taffeta to accord with his changeable mind.

All in all, Feste seems to present through his nonsense a no-nonsense point of view. Accosting Cesario—though, ironically, it is in fact Sebastian—he speaks to him in his own highly ironic fashion:

No, I do not know you, nor I am not sent to you by my lady to bid you come speak with her; nor your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither. Nothing that is so is so.

(4.1.4-7)

In the next scene, as he impersonates Sir Topas the curate come to visit Malvolio the lunatic, he observes of his disguise:

'That that is, is', so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is 'that' but 'that' and 'is' but 'is'?

Yet Cesario has declared to Olivia, in all truth, 'I am not what I am'; Sir Toby has said to Sir Andrew, with some truth, that 'not to be abed after midnight is to be up betimes'; even the dénouement of the play seems to go contrary to Feste's claim. When the twins are seen together, they seem so like that it is as if there were but one face, one voice and one manner of dress—that is, the *same* face, voice and dress but still two flesh-and-blood persons. To the others, struck with wonder at the sight, the identical appearance of the twins is declared to be, in the words of Orsino, 'A natural perspective, that is and is not!' Yet in so far as theatrical illusion has been achieved, the dénouement gives substance to Feste's claim, 'That that is, is', at least in Illyria.

The dissembling of one's true nature (conscious with Viola and Feste, unconscious with Orsino and Olivia) is highlighted in the figure of the steward Malvolio. The chief officer in Olivia's household—and one that she would not have miscarried for half of her dowry—he takes to his duties with seriousness and some pomposity. That these responsibilities would have included the preserving of discipline is shown by the rules for his household which a young nobleman, Anthony Browne, the second Viscount Montague, set down in 1595, at the age of twenty-one. The steward should 'in civil sort' reprehend and correct 'negligent and disordered persons', reforming them by his 'grave admonitions and vigilant eye', among these the 'riotous, the contentious, and quarrelous persons of any degree' as well as 'the frequenters of tabling, carding, and dicing in
corners and at untimely hours and seasons'.

But when Malvolio breaks in on the carousing Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste, called to do so, it seems, by the countess herself as Maria has forewarned, he cannot be said to chide them 'in civil sort'. Rather he accuses the two knights of gabbling like tinkers, squeaking out—this of the mellifluous-voiced Feste—cobbler's catches as if they were in an ale-house. Such a rebuke by a social inferior is enough to set off Sir Toby and he rounds on him, 'Art any more than a steward?'; he then follows this up with one of the most quoted lines in the play, incorporating in it what Hazlitt termed an 'unanswerable answer':

Does thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?

Maria is also angered by his charge that she is at fault in providing the means for this 'uncivil rule', and she sums up for the others Malvolio's unpleasant qualities: he is a 'kind' of a puritan, that is, censorious, but one who is inconstantly so. He is, moreover, a time-server, an affected ass who imitates the behaviour of his betters, and is 'so crammed', she says, 'with his own excellencies' that he conceives of himself as worthy of the love of all. On these grounds she contrives the device of forging a love letter from the countess enjoining him to assume ridiculous behaviour and garb in order to secure her favour, a device which feeds his aspiration to become 'Count Malvolio'. Although Feste is not in the group which observes Malvolio's absurd response to the letter, he justifies his share in the 'interlude' on the grounds of Malvolio's having disparaged his ability as a jester, while Fabian justifies his on the grounds that Malvolio has brought him out of favour with his lady about a bear-baiting. The last of his officious actions, noted this time by Viola, is to have the kindly captain who has rescued her imprisoned on some unspecified charge. There is then in Malvolio's 'stubborn and uncourtly parts' sufficient motivation to justify Maria's trick. Intended 'to pluck on laughter', it begins to get out of hand with the confining of Malvolio in a dark room as a madman; at one moment, even Sir Toby wishes they were well rid of their knavery.

Yet Malvolio's lubricious self-projection, cunningly revealed in a day-dream-like soliloquy, is splendidly comic. He imagines himself as three months married to Olivia, now wearing a velvet gown and sitting in a chair of state, having just come from a day-bed where he has left her sleeping; he imagines how he will have 'seven' of his servants summon Sir Toby to his presence and how, after quenching his 'familiar smile' and saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece', he will direct him to amend his ways. This fantasy on Malvolio's part is put into perspective when he appears before Olivia wearing yellow stockings and cross-garters, his face crimped into myriad lines by his incessant smiling. Even more startling to her than his dress is the 'ridiculous boldness' of his talk. Tipped off as she is by Maria's charge that he is 'for sure' tainted in his wits, she accepts his strange words as evidence that something is wrong and solicitously asks, 'Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?' Taking this in seriousness, since it accords with his secret desires, he responds, 'To bed? Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee.' The audacity of his response is further highlighted by Shakespeare's establishing the time-scheme by means of adroit references. At the end of the preceding scene (2.5), when Maria alerts the conspirators to hide in (or behind) a box-tree to spy on Malvolio, it is probably early morning since she comments that he has been 'yonder i'the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour'. In the exchange between Viola and the fool that opens this scene, Feste comments that foolery like the sun shines everywhere, which suggests that it is now midday. Thus Malvolio's avidity to go to bed at noon (as the Fool in Lear puts it) strikes an even more lubricious note. From Shakespeare's time until the mid eighteenth century, the 'sportful malice' prompting the treatment of Malvolio seemed a just matter of comedy, but for Romantic and Victorian interpreters, as well as for some in the twentieth century, the ill-used steward came to seem a victim not of sport but of social discrimination.

If Shakespeare's characterisation of Malvolio has stimulated a mixed reaction, so, too, has the structure of the play, some critics finding in it signs of hasty composition, though not so many as to distract a viewing audience. One discrepancy is the rank of Orsino, who is consistently called 'duke' in stage directions and
speech headings and during two scenes of the first act but is otherwise called 'count'. In his careful analysis of the text, Robert K. Turner suggests that Shakespeare's conception of the character of Orsino changed during composition and that he decided to make him less of a figure of authority (such as Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and more of a lover (like Count Claudio in *Much Ado about Nothing*).\(^{12}\)

There are other inconsistencies and loose ends. On Viola's first entrance, when she resolves to serve Orsino, she gives as a qualification her ability to sing and to speak to him in many sorts of music, but when a song is required in the second act, it is Feste who performs. This has led some, including Dover Wilson, to postulate revision, a more radical explanation than is required in view of the favours Orsino has extended to Cesario, which have elevated him above the status of a mere performer: within three days' time (1.4.1-3) he is no longer a stranger to Orsino who has, within that short span, divulged to him his inmost sentiments (1.4.12-13).

Again one notes that it is Fabian who makes a 'third' in the espial of Malvolio's antics, rather than Feste as Maria had specified; yet at the end of Act 5, Feste is able to quote from the letter as if he, too, had been one of the eavesdroppers on Malvolio. In fact, what Maria first declares she intends for him—'some obscure epistles of love, wherein by the colour of his beard, the shape of his leg, the manner of his gait, the expression of his eye, forehead, and complexion, he shall find himself most feelingly personated' (2.3.131-4)—does not concur with the letter that Malvolio reads aloud two scenes later—except, that is, for its amatory suggestiveness. One small inconsistency is in the two accounts of Antonio's sea fight with Orsino's galleys: for his part, Antonio denies (3.3.30) that it was of a 'bloody nature' whereas Orsino (5.1.45) speaks of the 'scathful grapple' directed against the finest of their ships, though the speech is also intended to acknowledge Antonio's valour even as a pirate. Finally, the appearance of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby with bleeding heads must be the result of a second encounter with Sebastian-supposed-Cesario (see Commentary and stage direction at 5.1.160), but this is not provided for in the text.

In spite of these inconsistencies and loose ends, there is much subtlety in Shakespeare's handling of his complex plot which is particularly evident when an attitude or an action or situation relating to one character is duplicated by another. This creates a 'twinning' effect that reinforces the central situation brought about by a pair of identical twins.\(^{13}\) It is as if—to adapt Ulysses' words in *Troilus and Cressida*—many touches of nature make the whole world kin.

Despite the difference in the situation of the two heroines there is a similarity: both have lost their fathers and both, it would appear, have recently lost their brothers, but whereas Olivia would extravagantly mourn (even as Orsino would extravagantly love), Viola, trusting to her own escape as a promise of Sebastian's, reacts practically. Yet in the matter of falling in love the two heroines act alike, in that Viola freely extends her affection to Orsino without invitation on his part, even as Olivia extends hers to Cesario without any invitation except that suggested by her role as surrogate wooer. This makes for a slight touch of irony at the end of the first wooing scene, for when Cesario says 'Love make his heart of flint that you shall love', Viola does not know that she herself will turn out to be the inadvertent object of Olivia's love. The wish is also ironically cancelled with Sebastian's arrival in Illyria and the stunning alacrity with which he assents to a betrothal.

The two heroines are alike in their personal orientation. Viola's conviction that time will 'untangle' all things (*veritas filia temporis*; or, as the English proverb has it, 'time brings the truth to light' (Tilley T324)) is comparable to Olivia's (and Malvolio's) belief in 'fate' which is commented on below. The two are also alike in possessing the virtue of constancy, Viola in her devotion to Orsino, Olivia in her refusal to accept his suit. To Orsino's query in Act 5, 'Still so cruel?', she responds, 'Still so constant'. The emotional impact the twins make is, quite expectedly, alike; Olivia terms it an 'enchantment', Antonio a 'witchcraft'; the harsh denunciation he levels at Cesario-supposed-Sebastian for his seeming ingratitude is paralleled by that which Orsino levels at Cesario for the seeming betrayal of his trust.
Perhaps the most ingenious duplication is that between Olivia and Malvolio. She herself acknowledges their similarity of deportment: he is 'sad and civil', a kind of behaviour that she feels suits well with her own fortunes in love. When Maria informs her that he is surely tainted in his wits since he does nothing but smile, she confesses:

I am as mad as he
If sad and merry madness equal be.

And later she alludes to her own 'extracting frenzy', which has made her forget about his. Moreover, such sad and merry madness typifies the deportment of the other characters, whether it be the moody Orsino or the mad-brained Sir Toby; this is finely pinpointed in 4.1 when, out of the blue, Sir Andrew attacks Sebastian, who wonders incredulously: Are all the people mad? Again, in 4.3, Sebastian 'wrangles' with his reason, speculating in soliloquy whether it is he himself or Olivia who is mad. From the confines of the dark room Malvolio's words thus have special point when he asserts to Feste: 'I tell thee, I am as well in my wits as any man in Illyria.'

Malvolio also emphasises the similarity of his deportment to Olivia's when he writes assuring her that he has the benefit of his senses as well as she. But his assurance is Gomically belated; by the time Olivia hears the letter, read madly at first by Feste impersonating the 'mad' Malvolio and then straightforwardly by Fabian, she (like Orsino) has met with a happy corrective, first to her predisposition to grief and then to her infatuation with Cesario. In view of the psychological misrule prevailing in Illyria, it is not surprising that the word 'mad', together with its cognates (madness, madmen, madly), is used more frequently in this play than in any other in the canon, with The Comedy of Errors, and its double set of twins, a close rival.

Another point of likeness between Olivia and Malvolio is their willingness to justify their own desires by readily ascribing them to a power outside themselves called either 'fate' or 'fortune'. In the soliloquies following on Cesario's first visit, Olivia ponders how quickly she has caught the plague, questions her actions, and concludes:

Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be; and be this so.

(1.5.265-6)

In writing to Malvolio, Maria simulates not only Olivia's hand but also this point of view when she specifies, 'Thy fates open their hands.' To Malvolio, willingly deluded by the letter's confirmation of his own desires, 'it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful', a point he reiterates with supreme confidence after Olivia believes him to be mad:

What can be said? Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked!!

(3.4.71-3)

Even before Maria drops the letter, Malvolio prefaces his rationalising hope that Olivia might indeed love him, by saying 'Tis but fortune; all is fortune.' When Olivia pleads with Cesario-supposed-Sebastian to admit their betrothal, she echoes this point of view, urging him 'Fear not, Cesario, take thy fortunes up.'

This is, of course, what all the central characters do. If somewhat bewildered by the fortuitous opportunity to marry Olivia after the earlier 'malignancy' of his fate, Sebastian at once accepts 'this accident and flood of fortune', an acceptance that twins with Viola's attitude when, resolved to serve Orsino, she awaits whatever
may be the outcome: 'What else may hap, to time I will commit.' The untangling of circumstances by the passage of time and the reliance on fortune and fate create, for characters 'of fresh and stainless youth', the sense of wonder that is proper to the ending of romantic comedy. For the lovers, the result, as it was earlier for Maria and Sir Toby, is to be marriage when 'golden time convents'. For Antonio and Sir Andrew, what's to come is still unsure. For Malvolio, the whirligig of time having also brought in its revenges, there is the hint that he may be entreated to a peace. For Feste, there is still the pleasure he takes in singing.

And, fittingly, in place of an epilogue, he is given a final song. This, while promising that the actors for their part will strive each day to please their audience, also provides a somewhat cryptic ending to the dramatic action. Commentators have ranged widely in their response to it. Eighteenth-century editors, followed by Dover Wilson and others in this century, reacted strongly to its seeming lack of relevance to the play or to the character of Feste; more recent commentators extract a bawdy and sexual import, while still others find a strain of melancholy that harkens back to the potential within the play for violence and unhappiness—the arrest of Antonio, the (short-lived) anger of Orsino towards Olivia and Viola, perhaps even Sir Toby's harsh dismissal of the 'thin-faced knave' Sir Andrew. But since this potential is never actualised, Feste's song is perhaps more properly viewed as a means of breaking away from the Illyrian world of illusions with a return to the real world where it may—or it may not—rain every day. The song's cryptic nature, with its catch-phrase 'that's all one', may be particularly appropriate for the ending of a play with the subtitle 'What You Will'.

Notes


2 See p. 16 below and n. 4, and Textual Analysis, p. 153.

3 As in other of Shakespeare's plays, there is a double-time scheme: the action requires three months for its fulfilment, but two consecutive days serve for the sequence of scenes. See Brown, 'Directions for Twelfth Night', where he correlates the references to time with the action.

4 See Commentary (1.1.4) for Joseph H. Summers's suggestion of some comic stage business here.


6 Viola's taciturnity in the later part of Act 5 can, of course, be accounted for by the exigencies of the plot. Like his heroine earlier on, Shakespeare has a great many knots to untie. Having given her this moving speech when it applied so aptly to her emotional situation, he can assume (with the audience) that with its happy resolution, words are unnecessary.


8 'Booke of orders and rules', quoted by Muriel St Clare Byrne, 'The social background', in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Granville-Barker and Harrison, pp. 204-5.

9 For a reference in *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers, 1554-1640*, ed. Edward Arber. 5 vols., 1875-94 to a ballad entitled 'goo to bed swete harte', see Commentary at 3.4.28.
See Brown, 'Directions for Twelfth Night'.

11 For an account of the theatrical history of the part of Malvolio see pp. 28-33 below.

12 'The text of Twelfth Night', pp. 128-38. Turner explains the consistency of stage directions and speech headings as a scribal normalising of foul papers. See Textual Analysis, pp. 152-4 below.

13 See L. G. Salingar's detailed and perceptive account of this aspect of the play or what he calls 'points of contact' among the characters, 'The design of Twelfth Night', pp. 117-39.

14 The frequency of references to Jove in a play not having a classical setting is often accounted for by the Act of Abuses (against profanity), but as Turner has pointed out ('Text of Twelfth Night', p. 136) 'God' appears about twice as often as the supposed substitute; this scarcely supports the notion of expurgation. See also Commentary at 2.5.142.

15 See Hotson, pp. 167-72, for example, and John Hollander, 'Twelfth Night and the morality of indulgence', Sewanee Review 67 (1959), 220-38.

J. A. Bryant, Jr. (essay date 1986)


[In the following essay, Bryant asserts that Twelfth Night is an iconoclastic work that challenges the reassuring conventions of romantic comedy.]

Ever since the time of the Romantics, high praise for Twelfth Night has been one of the commonplaces of Shakespeare criticism. In our own time Leo Salingar has called it the "crowning achievement in one branch of his art"; and J. Dover Wilson, implicitly replying to Samuel Johnson, who complained that the latter half of the play "exhibits no just picture of life," has gone even farther: "That gem of his comic art, that condensation of life and (for those who know how to taste it rightly) elixir of life," were Wilson's superlatives; then he added, "He could never better this—and he never attempted to. He broke the mold—and passed on." Other commentators have been more specific. Kenneth Muir, by way of introducing his comments on Twelfth Night, cites Barrett Wendell's characterization of the play as a masterpiece of recapitulation and goes on to note that it combines, among other things, the device of mistaken identity that has proved so successful in The Comedy of Errors (making the look-alike pair brother and sister, however, as in numerous Italian comedies); the use of the disguised heroine as emissary, "from the man she loves to the woman he loves," from The Two Gentlemen of Verona; the theme of friendship from The Merchant of Venice; the singing fool (a combination of Amiens and Touchstone); a Falstaffian character in Sir Toby; and a half-witted suitor from The Merry Wives of Windsor. T. W. Baldwin has demonstrated that all this variety fits harmoniously into a frame that may well have been derived from Terence's Andria; and both Salingar and C. L. Barber have attributed at least part of its unity of tone to a pervasive spirit of saturnalia, Barber adding that the play goes well beyond this in its "exhibition of the use and abuse of social liberty." More recently Carolyn G. Heilbrun has touched briefly but persuasively upon the play as a celebration of androgyny; and Walter N. King, in his introduction to a collection of essays on the play, has provided an able discussion of the subtly changing perspectives that threaten to bring most of its characters to complete bewilderment and frustration but, in the manner of similar perspectives in a metaphysical poem, ultimately find resolution.

What many of these critics have been praising in Twelfth Night is the convention of romantic comedy—or rather the romantic version of Italianate comedy—which for Shakespeare's generation served, as it has for most generations since, to reassure audiences about civilized society's ability to renew itself. Joseph Summers,
himself an admirer of *Twelfth Night*, finds the resolution of the play and hence its presumably implicit reassurances less than convincing. *Twelfth Night* is the climax of Shakespeare's early achievement, he writes, but at the same time it comes close to proclaiming the limitations of that achievement: "More obvious miracles are needed," he concludes, "for comedy to exist in a world in which evil also exists, not merely incipiently but with power."\(^9\) Summers's reservation here also has to do with the convention of romantic comedy, which he understandably considers inadequate to represent real life. The details of his diagnosis are questionable, but not the insight that has prompted it: in Shakespearean comedy neither the dramatic convention nor the plot—nor even the special occasion if there is one—is ever more than incidentally determinative. Such things point not to the play but to the expectations that we in our habitual inattention to the complex way in which the world really works bring to the play and to other fictions, and in many cases to life itself.

The patterns of comedy that Shakespeare inherited, like patterns in other traditional forms of art, symbolized communal responses that his world still considered natural and valid—in particular, those responses involving the preservation of stability and order in a society which like its constituents was necessarily forever perishing. For the most part, we today are comfortable with those same responses and expect comic art to confirm their adequacy; thus Shakespeare's comedies still give most of us at least part of what we have always expected from comedy generally. Art, however, is not always the compliant handmaiden of society. It is her nature, especially when endowed with the vitality of someone like Shakespeare, to deny as well as to confirm, to generate new responses to perennially recurring situations, and sometimes in the process to break as many icons as it preserves. As we have seen, even in such early and relatively conventional plays as *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare gave indications of the iconoclastic character that comic dramatic art was to assume under his hand. In *Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Merchant of Venice* he raised questions about human suffering, cruelty, and mortality that writers in fulfilling comedy's responsibility to entertain had traditionally elected to ignore. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, he challenged the propriety of comedy's traditional ending. In *As You Like It* he dared to suggest that the mold itself of comedy might ultimately be irrelevant. In short, hints about the limitations of conventional comedy had been lurking at the fringes of Shakespeare's vision all along, and the situation in *Twelfth Night* was calculated to make audiences uneasy almost from the outset.

To begin with, as Summers notes, there are no parents or their equivalent in *Twelfth Night*, and the young people are therefore free to make their own way. "According to the strictly romantic formula," Summers writes, "the happy ending should be already achieved at the beginning of the play."\(^10\) Just the reverse is true, of course; and the reasons for that, though conspicuous, have apparently not been obvious to the play's admirers. First, Shakespeare at the beginning has provided no visible means of balancing the equation of lover and beloved that he has set before us. Olivia occupies the role of marriageable female in *Twelfth Night*, but she has no suitor that is both acceptable and available to her—no Fenton, no Orlando, no Ferdinand—until the beginning of Act IV, when Sebastian, who she thinks is the Cesario she knows, glides ready and able into her view. She could have Duke Orsino, but she will not. She would have Viola-Cesario, but cannot—for reasons that Viola, Antonio the sea captain, and we alone know. Thus for three acts the Duke pursues Olivia, Olivia pursues Viola, and Viola yearns for the Duke—a merry-go-round chase, a three-way stalemate, that has no prospect of resolution in matches until a fourth person arrives to turn Olivia out of the circle and make it possible for the other two to confront one another as pursuer and pursued.

Second, the absence of parents is not an unmixed blessing for any of the lovers in *Twelfth Night*, but it is an especially unfortunate circumstance for Olivia. In the normal course of a comic action, those filling the role of *senex* have subtle positive functions to perform as well as the more spectacular negative ones; and Olivia's parents and elder brother, all dead as the play begins, would have been expected at least to foster the idea of a good marriage for the girl and more than likely in the end to have come round to her way of thinking about an appropriate candidate. By convention they would have been faulty in their initial judgments about her best interests, but as sponsors distinguished by good will and protective instincts they would have been entitled to
seats of honor at the prenuptial feast. As it is, Shakespeare's Olivia stands defenseless in a world that with the death of her brother has suddenly turned threatening. Orsino, whom she does not and apparently cannot love, relentlessly presses his suit, undoubtedly in part because he finds the love-game amusing but also in part because by marriage he would annex Olivia's estate. He has rivals in the latter objective. Commoner Malvolio, taking advantage of a social revolution that has recently made it possible for "the Lady of the Strachy" to marry her yeoman of the wardrobe (II.v.39-40), seeks to rise in the world from steward's quarters to his lady's chamber; and Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's sottish uncle and her next of kin, has presumed to stand in loco parentis and promote a suitor of his own. We see no other suitors, but these are quite enough to show the dangerous situation of a landed and wealthy young female in Shakespeare's world, where authority over land and wealth was expected to be vested ultimately in a suitable male. Hence Olivia assumes a mask of grief, not necessarily out of self-love or whimsy (as has been commonly assumed by critics and producers of the play) and perhaps not even out of genuine grief, but out of an urgent need to protect her own interests. Despite her declared intention to mourn for an improbable seven years, the convention of mourning can serve at best as a temporary stay; but that convention is the only protection she has. Into this strained situation Viola enters to become unwittingly a fourth suitor for Olivia's hand—in Olivia's eyes the only suitor, and in the eyes of others, including eventually even Orsino, an impudent interloper to be dealt with contemptuously and with appropriate violence.

One might argue, especially in this last quarter of the twentieth century, that Olivia's need to be rescued by a strong male is to her discredit—that her position is only as parlous as she herself chooses to let it be. So it is; and so can it be considered in the world that Shakespeare creates in his plays, for repeatedly these invite approval for the threatened female who seizes the male role in a male-dominated society and triumphs over the disadvantages that society has imposed on her own sex. The fact remains, however, that Shakespeare lived in and depicted a society in which the woman who does not escape by extraordinary means must settle for being either an ornament or a slave. Moreover, even those who resort to extraordinary means may escape only temporarily—witness Julia, Portia, and Rosalind, all of whom presumably put off their masculine garments and return to live ever after in the subservient role that society has assigned to them. Angry Kate's ironic note, for all we know, was not detected until fairly recently. And Beatrice's concluding remark to Benedick is as follows: "I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption" (V.iv.94-97). To this, editors since the eighteenth century would have us believe, Benedick replies with a mouth-stopping kiss. Shakespeare, however, apparently gave the quieting to an embarrassed Leonato, who told his irreverent niece, "Peace, I will stop your mouth," and perhaps applied a gesture of a different sort.

In Illyria, consensus about the natural dependency of women seems to be fairly solid. Malvolio is convinced that his mistress is secretly yearning for an appropriate man to take charge, and so when Maria applies the bait to his vanity, he is apt to believe he is that very man. Duke Orsino, denied admittance by the conventions of mourning, continues to make advances through his messengers and tells the last of these, Viola disguised as Cesario, that the problem with Olivia is her woman's inability to comprehend the depth and seriousness of the passion that men may feel:

Alas, their love [i.e., women's] may be called appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt,
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

[II.iv.97-103]
Even Sir Andrew Aguecheek assumes that Olivia is ready for appropriate male advances and recoils in something between indignation and disgust when he spies her making what he believes to be overtures to the Duke's messenger: "No, faith, I'll not stay a jot longer. . . . Marry, I saw your niece do more favors to the Count's servingman than ever she bestow'd upon me. I saw't i' th' orchard" (III.ii.1-7). Sir Toby moves quickly to disabuse him, but Toby is clearly of like mind about women. He resents Olivia's declared state of mourning as a feminine frivolity that interferes with his more serious plans. "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus?" he fumes to Maria (I.iii.1-2); and in the exchange that follows he details Sir Andrew's qualifications as a lover and thereby further reveals his obtuseness where Olivia's predilections are concerned. Fortunately for her, Sir Toby's implementation of his plans is as inefficient as his judgments about women are erroneous. The proposed duel between Sir Andrew and Cesario backfires upon the head, literally, of its perpetrator, though one should recognize here that but for the lucky presence of Sebastian on the scene to take the challenge intended for Cesario, that duel and the action of the play might have ended quite differently. Unseen by all these watchful males, however, is a clever Olivia driven to extraordinary means of her own, who will abandon proprieties and confound definitions by pursuing forthrightly and then marrying on the spot a young man of no station whatever.

In more ways than one Viola is a counterpart to Olivia. She too is parentless; she has also lost a brother, or thinks she has; and she has put on a pretense for essentially the same reason as Olivia—to protect herself against such predators as may be at large in the presumably civilized world of Illyria. The device Viola has chosen, however, has placed her in an awkward situation. No sooner has she put on male attire and enlisted in the Duke's service than she falls in love with her master, who requires her to advance his cause with a lady manifestly amenable to being wooed by someone—though not by the Duke, either directly or indirectly.

This improbable situation is the source for several aspects of the play that have charmed modern audiences—most of these being touches of pathos rather than of comedy. Viola's best speeches are cases in point. For example, she tells Olivia at their first meeting that if she were Duke Orsino she would

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!"

[I.v.268-74]

Her language here speaks of a more intense experience than brief infatuation would warrant. Some critics have postulated a justification for it in Marsilian-Platonist terms, but one is probably nearer the spirit of the play to see it as something quaintly amusing, the mysterious attraction of a scarcely grown moth for an unresponsive star. Nevertheless, Viola's argument here has the power of a nascent but very real love for the Duke; and the same bittersweet passion of young love informs the account she gives to him of the depth of women's affection as demonstrated by the unspoken adoration of her "father's daughter":

. . . she never told her love
But let concealment like a worm in th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.
Because she is apt to feel such stirrings as no longer trouble the Duke, which indeed the Duke for all his declarations about masculine love can no longer even recall, Viola moves in company with Euphrasia-Bellario of Beaumont and Fletcher's Philaster (1608-10), the determined Helena of All's Well That Ends Well, and the Imogen of Cymbeline. Like these, Viola is genuinely and, to speak literally, hopelessly in love; but the special irony of the situation that develops in Act I is that Olivia is no less genuinely in love and in her misapplied affection exhibits to Viola precisely the kind of intense feeling that Viola chides her for not rendering to the Duke.

If we were not dealing with characters whom Shakespeare has endowed with flesh and blood, we might say that Viola is the love-in-idleness in this second play that Shakespeare wrote about "midsummer madness" (III.iv.56). Before her coming, there was no genuine love in Illyria. Her arrival there set all in motion, activating Olivia's suitors to an intensity that had previously seemed unwarranted and, more important, pushing the hitherto diffident Olivia out from behind her façade of grief to discover possibilities in the world that she had not dreamed of. Her newly found love, though it has some of the aspects of the ultimately divine fixation that Marsilio Ficino, Castiglione, and countless sonneteers have written about, is no more Neoplatonic than Viola's equally sudden love for the Duke. One might better say that the love manifested by these two women has an agapeic quality in that it prompts one of them, denied of her station and even of her sex, to offer services and devotion to a duke who barely notices her as anything more than a servant, and prompts the other, a lady of acknowledged station, to spurn suitors at all appropriate levels—duke, knight, and competent steward—to throw herself shamelessly upon a page boy.

Where Olivia is concerned, however, it is important to note that Shakespeare in presenting her initial awakening to the universal call of the flesh depicts it as an unconscious appreciation of that androgynous ideal which is normally conceived in youth and subsequently suppressed in adulthood, here beautifully portrayed by Viola as woman-man and reinforced subliminally for the Elizabethan audience by the boy-actors who were portraying both female characters on the stage. Regardless of how one tries to explain this love, there is much in it that remains inexplicable; and Shakespeare's portrayal continues to succeed with readers and audiences undoubtedly in part because most people subconsciously want something like it to be true and are delighted when Shakespeare's art can bring their wishes to a semblance of reality. Unfortunately, our latter-day conventions, translated into expectations, encourage us to discredit the genuine and innocent warmth present here and in similar situations in other Shakespearean plays and thus prevent our acknowledgment of emotional tremors which even now we hasten to dismiss as inchoate feelings, childish preludes to adult emotions that are presumably more stable and lasting, and in any case more respectable.

Nevertheless, regardless of how seriously one takes the suggestions of agapeic or androgynous attachments in Twelfth Night, one should never lose sight of the heterosexual grounding that is essential to the comic resolution achieved in the play. All the lovers here ultimately demand for satisfaction the physical possession of a member of the opposite sex. Olivia could not have been happy with Viola indefinitely, for all the beauty of Viola's face and form; and Orsino, attuned to practical considerations, finds it possible to disregard Viola's charms until he recognizes that they are as feminine in fact as they appear to be. Moreover, sexual attraction is all that really matters. Rank apparently has nothing to do with love and loving in Twelfth Night. In spite of the outrage Toby expresses at the thought of a steward's aspiring to take the hand of his niece, he does not hesitate to marry Maria, Olivia's diminutive gentlewoman ("the youngest wren of nine"), whom he mockingly dubs Penthesilea and repeatedly calls "wench." Olivia herself has no compunction about marrying someone she takes to be a serving-man; and even after the unveiling in Act V neither she nor the Duke gains any substantial knowledge about the pedigree of the twins they are linking permanently to their fortunes. One looks in vain here for some hint of what is clearly set forth in Barnaby Riche's Apolonus and Silla: that the two were actually children of another illustrious duke, Pontus of Cyprus, and worthy to mate with nobility anywhere. In short, practical and even spiritual motives for love ultimately give way in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night to
elemental sex, and thus the ancient order of society as understood by commentators—political, ecclesiastical, and otherwise—painfully maintained over the centuries and presumably divinely ordained, is here challenged by the basic animal impulses that are the reason, often unacknowledged, why society is essentially not an institution at all but a process.

This reduction of comedy in *Twelfth Night* to the ground of its being intensifies an ironic dimension in the gulling of Malvolio that is often overlooked in modern readings and productions, which persist in ignoring the complex effects of the play. To begin with, Malvolio is not a mere appendage to the plot; nor is he the insensitive killjoy and social climber that Sir Toby sees or the “time pleaser” Maria would have him be. As one critic has observed, Malvolio’s part is structurally at the center of the plot and his gulling is symbolic of the challenge to order that persists throughout the play. There is truth in both observations. The setting of Shakespeare’s comedies, regardless of designation, is invariably English; and as Shakespeare and his contemporaries knew, the ranks of the English gentry included more than a few families that had achieved their status relatively recently. Lady Olivia’s all but defunct family has the marks of being one of these; at the very least, Sir Toby, the one surviving elider member of the family, still has the class-consciousness of the newly arrived and the tavern manners of a serving-man. Malvolio, by contrast, has the marks of a belated aspirant, quite as class-conscious as Toby but awkwardly so, and as zealously committed as any newly arrived neophyte to the preservation of order, precedence, and propriety. Charles Lamb’s view of him is not currently popular, but it is closer to the truth and infinitely preferable to the farcical Malvolio that simpers and prances on some stages. Consider this passage from Lamb’s essay:

> His quality is at the best unlovely, but neither buffoon nor contemptible. His bearing is lofty, a little above his station, but probably not much above his deserts. . . . We must not confound him with the eternal old, low steward of comedy. He is master of the household to a great Princess, a dignity probably conferred upon him for other respects than age or length of service. . . . His rebuke to the knight, and his sottish revelers, is sensible and spirited; and when we take into consideration the unprotected condition of his mistress, and the strict regard with which her state of real or dissembled mourning would draw the eyes of the world upon her house affairs, Malvolio might feel the honor of the family in some sort in his keeping; as it appears not that Olivia had any more brothers, or kinsmen, to look to it—for Sir Toby had dropped all such nice respects at the buttery hatch.

This is a Malvolio who makes the tactical error of forthrightly confronting one who is technically his superior for indulging in a form of gaiety that has in it no real love of life (Maria calls it “caterwauling”) and certainly no consideration for others, and thus finds himself both rebuked by that superior and caught in a mill devised by a fellow servant (again Maria) who also aspires to a higher station no less than he, though with far less warrant. Malvolio is right to regard all of his tormentors with contempt. Maria’s ingenuity probably makes her the best of the lot. Sir Toby is a bore as well as a boor. Fabian is an insensitive servingman, whom Malvolio has properly rebuked for staging a bear-baiting on the estate (II.v.7-11), Feste is at best (except for the actual gulling scene) a second-rate clown, and Sir Andrew is a fool. Fabian observes at the end that their mischief has been such as “may rather pluck on laughter than revenge; / If that the injuries be justly weigh’d / That have on both sides pass’d”; but Fabian the bear-baiter is hardly one to give a reliable opinion. Malvolio may be deficient in humor, and he is certainly naive; but he has injured no one, and he has every cause to be angry. Moreover, the gulling that destroys him destroys the last conscious defender of the graceful world to which he would aspire.

Mark Van Doren, who also considered Malvolio central to *Twelfth Night*, concluded his essay on the play with the following sentence: "The drama is between his [Malvolio’s] mind and the music of old manners." This is true, but perhaps not quite in the way Van Doren intended. For Van Doren the important thing about the play was its courtly decor, lyrics that could be set to appealing music, carefree roistering belowstairs, expressions of romantic love followed by appropriate matings. Considered solely in the light of these things,
Twelfth Night appears to be a triumph of sophistication and wit and a reaffirmation of the values of conventional Italianate comedy. Actually it is nothing of the sort.

As has already been noted, Twelfth Night presents a world in which the opportunity for undertaking a comic action and pursuing it to the conventional conclusion has collapsed. Control of the social unit that occupies the center of our attention, Lady Olivia's estate, has passed for the moment to that lady's keeping; and because she is young, female, and unprotected, the wolves are circling. Wit characteristic of the old order is still present: for all her pretense of grief, Olivia has a large measure of it, and Viola brings in still more; but in the empty corridors where these two meet, its sparkle has more poignancy than brilliance. Music is still present, at least on the periphery of the main action, but music in Twelfth Night no longer symbolizes the harmony and order that comedy would achieve or restore. Of the two memorable lyrics in the play, the one that celebrates young love in its immediacy, "O mistress mine," is caterwauled by the aging Sir Toby and company. The other is a lament for a dead love that cannot be revived: "Come away, come away, Death." A number of older critics—F. G. Fleay, Richmond Noble, and J. Dover Wilson—suggested that this sophisticated piece of melancholy replaced the "old and antique song" that the text calls for (II.iv.3) when Robert Armin, a clown with a trained voice, performed the singing function originally intended for a singing boy who would play the part of Viola posing as a eunuch (I.ii.62). S. L. Bethell, after summarizing the whole argument, pointed out sensibly that it is sufficient the song be "romantically suggestive of antiquity," as indeed it is.18 Orsino in asking for the song notes that it differs sharply from the "light airs and recollected terms / Of these brisk and giddy-paced times" (II.iv.5-6) and thus makes the point of the play: that the old times are beyond recall; the old order is dead. He speaks with more truth than he knows or would like to believe. No amount of music can bring back the world in which courtship of the kind he would pursue can exist. Maria knows this. Olivia shows by her actions that she knows it too. Viola, but for her infatuation with Orsino and her loyalty to him, would know it sooner than she does. Malvolio, who has been outside the magic circle all his life, does not know it and thus is apt to be tricked by a spurious invitation to join in the (to him) unfamiliar dance. Still inexperienced in spite of his years, he has no way of recognizing that the show of courtly manners he is urged to assume can only be an inadvertent parody and a reaffirmation of his incompetence to participate in a game that people are no longer playing. His incorrigible loneliness is merely accentuated by the folly that a heartless anarchy has thrust upon him.

A production of Twelfth Night at Stratford-upon-Avon some years ago solved the problem of Malvolio by playing him for laughs and reducing him to little more than a stick figure with the diminished humanity of a Keystone Cop from the early cinema. The gulling thus became a harmless trick perpetrated on one who had neither dignity nor the capacity to feel. What was left in that production, however, was hardly the graceful apotheosis of Italianate comedy for which Shakespeare "broke the mold—and passed on." Even Shakespeare's language, which was largely uncut, was insufficient to prevent the general charges by London critics of prosiness and farce; the balance had been disrupted, and the illusion dispelled. The glitter was tinsel.19 One production, of course, proves nothing about a Shakespeare play; but Twelfth Night may best be regarded as an elaborate trompe l'oeil. Superficially it resembles Italianate comedy, but actually it is the apotheosis of a development that Shakespeare had been anticipating ever since he portrayed the French ladies at the court of Navarre. It is already a part of the era in which a Helena and a Mariana would resort to bed tricks to snare reluctant males, an Imogen put off her sex to go after a husband who had rejected her, a Hermione retire for sixteen years, freeze a kingdom, and take her man at the end by a trick, and an innocent and uninstructed Miranda out-woo and out-argue a prince who most likely would have preferred a casual seduction. Dr. Johnson was understandably disturbed by the ending of Twelfth Night, but he was wrong to say that it exhibits no just picture of life. Like most of his contemporaries, he was guided by expectations that are essentially inapplicable to this play except by way of ironic contrast. For him it exhibited no picture of life that he could comfortably accept, but one suspects he saw well enough what was there.

Notes


3 J. Dover Wilson, Shakespeare's Happy Comedies (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press), p. 181.


10 Ibid., p. 24.

11 Some critics see in Sir Toby's advocacy of Sir Andrew Aguecheek merely a device to bilk the fool of his money; see Van Doren, Shakespeare (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1953), p. 139. This does not quite account, however, for Sir Toby's eagerness to press for a duel with Cesario-Viola once he has detected a hint of real rivalry in that quarter.

12 According to The Riverside Shakespeare ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 364, the attribution of the speech to Benedick and the stage direction about kissing originated with Styan Thirlby and Lewis Theobald, respectively.


17 Van Doren, Shakespeare, p. 143.

This was a summer production of 1966. Sir Andrew Aguecheek was given unusual prominence, with David Warner in the role.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 46): Feste

Joan Hartwig (essay date 1973)


[In the essay that follows, Hartwig contends that Feste helps illuminate the discrepancy between human will and Providence in Twelfth Night and proposes that Feste's enigmatic final song emphasizes the ambiguities of human experience—which is neither as grim as the clown's pessimistic verses nor as blissful as romantic comedy.]

Shakespeare's plays frequently counterpose the powers of human and of suprahuman will, and the antithesis usually generates a definition of natures, both human and suprahuman. These definitions vary, however, according to the play. For instance, Hamlet's "providence" does not seem the same as the darker, equivocating power that encourages Macbeth to pit his will against a larger order; and these controls differ from Diana and Apollo in the later plays, Pericles and The Winter's Tale. Furthermore, Hamlet's submission and Macbeth's submission to non-human controls (if indeed they do submit their individual wills) cannot be understood as the same action or even to imply the same kind of human vision.

Many of the conflicts of Twelfth Night seem to be concerned with the contest between human will and suprahuman control; yet, the latter manifests itself in various ways and is called different names by the characters themselves. As each contest between the human will and another designer works itself out, the involved characters recognize that their will is fulfilled, but not according to their planning. The individual's will is finally secondary to a design that benevolently, but unpredictably, accords with what he truly desires. For example, when Olivia, at the end of Act I, implores Fate to accord with her will in allowing her love for Cesario to flourish, she has no idea that her will must be circumvented for her own happiness. Yet the substitution of Sebastian for Cesario in her love fulfills her wishes more appropriately than her own design could have done. Inversely, when Duke Orsino says in the opening scene that he expects to replace Olivia's brother in her "debt of love," he doesn't realize that literally he will become her "brother" (Li.34-40). As the closing moments of the play bring Olivia and the Duke together on the stage for the only time, she says to him, "think me as well a sister as a wife" (V.i.307); and the Duke responds in kind: "Madam, I am most apt t' embrace your offer," and a bit later, "Meantime, sweet sister, / We will not part from hence" (V.i.310, 373-74). The Duke had not understood the literal force of his prediction, but his early statement of his hope plants a subtle suggestion for the audience. When the play's action accords with Duke Orsino's "will," the discrepancy between intention and fulfillment is a delightful irony which points again to the fact that "what you will" may be realized, but under conditions which the human will cannot manipulate. Orsino's desire to love and be loved, on the other hand, is fulfilled by his fancy's true queen, Viola, more appropriately than his design for Olivia would have allowed.

The one character whose true desires are not fulfilled in the play is Malvolio. His hope to gain Olivia in marriage results in public humiliation at the hands of Feste, who takes obvious satisfaction in being able to throw Malvolio's former haughty words back at him under their new context of Malvolio's demonstrated foolishness:

Why, 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them.' I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one. 'By the Lord, fool,
I am not mad!' But do you remember, 'Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? An you smile not, he's gagged'? And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.

(V.i.360-66)

Feste's assertion that the "whirligig of time" has brought this revenge upon Malvolio neglects the fact that Maria has been the instigator and Feste the enforcer of the plot to harass Malvolio. Time's design, insofar as Malvolio is concerned, depends upon Maria's and Feste's will, which differs significantly from a central point that the main plot makes—that human will is not the controller of events. The characters in the main plot learn from the play's confusing action that human designs are frequently inadequate for securing "what you will," and that a design outside their control brings fulfillment in unexpected ways. Feste's fallacy, of course, makes the results of the subplot seem to be the same as the results of the main plot, but Time's revenges on Malvolio are primarily human revenges, and this particular measure for measure is thoroughly within human control. Feste's justice allows no mitigation for missing the mark in human action; and the incipient cruelty that his precise justice manifests is felt, apparently, by other characters in the play.

When Olivia and her company hear Malvolio's case, she responds with compassion: "Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee! . . . He hath been most notoriously abused" (V.i.359, 368). Duke Orsino, upon hearing Malvolio's letter of explanation, comments, "This savors not much of distraction" (V.i.304). And even Sir Toby has become uneasy about the harsh treatment of Malvolio in the imprisonment scene: "I would we were well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were; for I am now so far in offense with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot" (IV.ii.66-70). Actually, to place the responses into this sequence reverses the play's order; and we should consider the fact that Shakespeare builds toward a compassionate comment, with Olivia's statement climaxing an unwillingness to condone the actions of Feste and Maria in gulling Malvolio—at least in its last phase. Feste's exact form of justice without mercy has always characterized revenge, and even the word "revenge" is stressed by several of the characters in the subplot. When Maria voices her apparently spontaneous plot to gull Malvolio, she says:

The devil a Puritan that he is . . . the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.

(II.iii. 134-40)

Maria's successful implementation of her "revenge" elicits Sir Toby's total admiration. At the end of II.v, he exclaims, "I could marry this wench for this device" (168), and when Maria appears soon thereafter, he asks, "Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?" (174). The battlefield image of the victor and the victim is mock-heroic, of course; but in the final scene Fabian testifies to its literal fruition: "Maria writ / The letter, at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her" (V.i.352-54). Sir Toby's submission to Maria's will is a comic parallel for two actions: the pairing off of lovers, and the submission of the individual's will to a design other than his own. Yet the inclusion of a parodic version of marriage-harmony in the subplot does not fully ease the discomfort of the subplot's conclusion. Fabian tries to smooth it away when he suggests that the "sportful malice" of gulling Malvolio "may rather pluck on laughter than revenge" (V.i.355-58). Neither Feste nor Malvolio seems to be convinced, however. Feste's "whirligig of time brings in his revenges," and Malvolio quits the stage with, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (V.i.366-67). The forgiveness that should conclude the comic pattern is "notoriously" missing from the subplot and cannot be absorbed successfully by the Duke's line, "Pursue him and entreat him to a peace." Malvolio seems unlikely to return. The major differences between the subplot and the main plot is clearest at this dramatic moment: revenge is a human action that destroys; love, graced by the sanction of a higher providence, creates a "golden time."

607
Feste's "whirligig" seems to be a parody of Fortune's wheel in its inevitable turning, particularly with its suggestions of giddy swiftness and change. It provides a perfect image for the wild but symmetrical comic conclusion of the play's action. Feste's speech which includes it gives the appearance of completion to a mad cycle of events over which no human had much control. Only in Malvolio's case was human control of events evident. In her forged letter, Maria caters to Malvolio's "will" and, by encouraging him to accept his own interpretation of circumstances as his desire dictates, she leads him not only into foolishness, but also into a defense of his sanity. The discrepancy between Malvolio's assumption that fortune is leading him on his way and the fact that Maria is in charge of his fate manifests itself clearly in the juxtaposition of her directions to the revelers (as she leaves the stage) with Malvolio's lines as he enters:

MARIA Get ye all three into the box tree. . . . Observe him, for the love of mockery; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in the name of jesting. [The others hide.] Lie thou there [throws down a letter]; for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling. Exit.

Enter Malvolio.

MALVOLIO 'Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she [Olivia] did affect me. (II.v.13-22)

The gulling of Malvolio which follows is hilariously funny, partly because Malvolio brings it all on himself. Even before he finds the letter, his assumptions of rank and his plans for putting Sir Toby in his place elicit volatile responses from the box tree. And after he finds the forged letter, Malvolio's self-aggrandizing interpretations of the often cryptic statements evoke howls of glee mixed with the already disdainful laughter. The comedy of this scene is simple in its objective exploitation of Malvolio's self-love, and Malvolio becomes an appropriately comic butt. The audience's hilarity is probably more controlled than Sir Toby's and the box tree audience's excessive laughter; still, we are united in laughing at Malvolio's foolishness. And when Malvolio appears in his yellow stockings and cross-garters, the visual comedy encourages a total release in the fun of the game—Malvolio is gulled and we need not feel the least bit guilty, because he is marvelously unaware of his own foolishness. Oblivious to any reality but his own, Malvolio thinks he is irresistibly appealing with his repugnant dress and his continuous smiles—so contrary to his usual solemnity—and Olivia concludes that he has gone mad. "Why, this is very midsummer madness," she says, and, then, as she is leaving to receive Cesario, she commends Malvolio to Maria's care.

Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. Where's my cousin Toby? Let some of my people have a special care of him. I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry. (III.iv.55-58)

Malvolio misconstrues Olivia's generous concern as amorous passion and he thanks Jove for contriving circumstances so appropriately:

I have limed her; but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful. . . . Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked. (III.iv.68-77)

Malvolio's scrupulous praise of a higher designer than himself is a parodic echo of Olivia's earlier submission to Fate after she has begun to love Cesario: "What is decreed must be—and be this so!" (I.v.297). The
impulses underlying Malvolio's speech (and to some extent, Olivia's speech as well) exert opposite pulls: Malvolio wants to attribute control of circumstances to Jove at the same time he wants divine identity. He attempts to simulate foreknowledge through predictive assertion: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes." As long as events are in the hands of a non-human control, man cannot destroy or divert the predetermined order. But Malvolio cannot foresee the vindictive wit of Maria (often pronounced "Moriah"), nor can Olivia foresee the necessary substitution of Sebastian for Viola-Cesario. Each must learn that he, like the characters he wishes to control, is subject to an unpredictable will not his own. Precisely at this moment—when the character is forced to see a discrepancy between what he "wills" and what "is"—the possibility that he is mad confronts him.

Feste seems to adopt the disguise of Sir Topas to convince Malvolio that he is mad, and the imprisonment scene evokes a different response than the letter that exploits Malvolio by encouraging him to wear yellow stockings and cross-garters. In the earlier phase of the gulling, Malvolio is a comic butt after the fashion of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, unaware of his foolishness; however, imprisoned, Malvolio is a helpless victim, fully aware that he is being abused. With Olivia, his extraordinary costume and perpetual smiles make him a visible clown, and, as a result, he even seems good-humored. But with Maria and Feste in the imprisonment scene, he is not visible; we only hear him and his protestations of abuse. These different visual presentations produce a notable difference in comic effect because visual comedy often changes a serious tone in the dialogue.

In the imprisonment scene, Sir Topas keeps insisting that things are not as Malvolio perceives them; but Malvolio refuses to admit a discrepancy between what he perceives and reality. Accordingly, Malvolio insists that he is not mad.

_Malvolio within._

MALVOLIO Who calls there?

CLOWN Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic. . . .

MALVOLIO Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness.

CLOWN Fie, thou dishonest Satan. I call thee by the most modest terms, for I am one of those gentle ones that will use the devil himself with courtesy. Say'st thou that house is dark?

MALVOLIO As hell, Sir Topas.

CLOWN Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony; and yet complaines thou of obstruction?

MALVOLIO I am not mad, Sir Topas. I say to you this house is dark.

CLOWN Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

MALVOLIO I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are.

(IV.ii.20-48)
In the darkness of his prison, Malvolio literally is unable to see, and Feste makes the most of the symbolic implications of Malvolio's blindness. The audience perceives with Feste that the house is not dark (that hypothetical Globe audience would have been able to see the literal daylight in the playhouse), yet the audience also knows that Malvolio is being "abused" because he cannot see the light. The audience is therefore led to a double awareness of values in this scene: we are able to absorb the emblematic significance of Malvolio's separation from good-humored sanity and to know at the same time that Malvolio is not mad in the literal way that Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby insist. Although the literal action engenders the emblematic awareness, the literal action does not necessarily support the emblematic meaning. This pull in two opposite directions occurs simultaneously and places the audience in a slightly uncomfortable position. We prefer to move in one direction or in the other. Yet it seems that here Shakespeare asks us to forgo the either-or alternatives and to hold contradictory impressions together. Malvolio cannot be dismissed as a simple comic butt when his trial in the dark has such severe implications.10

The ambiguities of his situation are clear to everyone except Malvolio, but he rigidly maintains his single point of view. Because he refuses to allow more than his own narrowed focus, he is emblematically an appropriate butt for the harsh comic action that blots out his power to see as well as to act. He must ultimately depend upon the fool to bring him "ink, paper, and light" so that he may extricate himself from his prison, a situation which would have seemed to Malvolio earlier in the play "mad" indeed. Feste thus does force Malvolio to act against his will in submitting to the fool, but Malvolio fails to change his attitudes.11 Malvolio remains a literalist—Feste's visual disguise is for the audience so that we can see as well as hear the ambiguities of his performance, a point that Maria brings into focus when she says "Thou mightest have done this without thy beard and gown. He sees thee not" (IV.ii.63-64).

In the very next scene, Sebastian presents a contrast which delineates even more clearly the narrowness of Malvolio's response to an uncontrollable situation. Sebastian, too, confronts the possibility that he is mad: his situation in Illyria is anything but under his control.

This is the air; that is the glorious sun;  
This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't;  
And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus, 
Yet 'tis not madness. . . .  
For though my soul disputes well with my sense 
That this may be some error, but no madness,  
Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune  
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,  
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes  
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me  
To any other trust but that I am mad,  
Or else the lady's mad. 

(IV.iii.1-16: my italics)

Sebastian's pile of contrasting conjunctions ("though," "yet," "but") underlines his hesitance to form a final judgment, unlike Malvolio, whose point of view never changes despite the onslaught of unmanageable circumstances. The contradictions of his sensory perceptions lead Sebastian to a state of "wonder" in which he is able to suspend reason and delay judgment, and this signifies a flexibility of perception which Malvolio cannot attain. Malvolio is not stirred by the discrepancies of experience to consider that appearances may not be reality; but Sebastian can appreciate the undefinable workings of a power beyond the evident. Sebastian's ability to sense the "wonder" in a world where cause and effect have been severed gives him a stature that Malvolio cannot achieve.12 Yet the difference between them is due to the source of their manipulation as well as to their response. Sebastian is manipulated by Fate or by Fortune; Malvolio, by Maria and Feste. Human
manipulators parody suprahuman control and because they do, Maria and Feste define both levels of action.

Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby are all in a set and predictable world of sporting gullery, and the rules for their games are known. Feste's "whirligig" associates Time with a toy (perhaps even with an instrument of torture) and limits Time to human terms of punishment. On the other hand, the Time that Viola addresses does untie her problematic knot of disguise. Feste's attribution of revenge to this "whirligig of Time" points up the difference between the two controls. The whirligig becomes a parodic substitute for the larger providence that other characters talk about under other titles: Time, Jove, Fate, Fortune, or Chance. Significantly, Malvolio's humiliation is the only humanly designed action that fulfills itself as planned. The subplot performs its parody in many other ways, but in Feste's summary "whirligig" it displays the double vision that Shakespearean parody typically provides. The foibles of the romantics in Illyria are seen in their reduced terms through Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew, but the limitations of the parodic characters also heighten by contrast the expansive and expanding world of the play. Love, not revenge, is celebrated.

But even Feste's whirligig takes another spin and does not stop at revenge: in the play's final song the playwright extends an embrace to his audience. Feste's song creates an ambiguity of perspective which fuses the actual world with an ideal one: "the rain it raineth every day" is hardly the world described by the play. Romantic Illyria seems to have little to do with such realistic intrusions. Yet, the recognition of continuous rain is in itself an excess—it does not rain every day in the actual world, at least not in the same place. Thus, the pessimistic excess of the song balances the optimistic excesses of the romance world of Illyria; neither excess accurately reflects the actual world. Despite the apparent progress the song describes of a man's growing from infancy to maturity and to old age, it remains something of an enigma. The ambiguities of the first four stanzas build to a contrast of direct statements in the final stanza.

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

The first line of this stanza seems to imply that the world has its own, independent design; and it also suggests that man's actions must take their place and find meaning within this larger and older pattern. The specific meaning of that larger design, however, remains concealed within the previous ambiguities of Feste's song. His philosophic pretensions to explain that design are comically vague and he knows it. He tosses them aside to speak directly to the audience: "But that's all one, our play is done." This is the same phrase Feste uses with Malvolio in his summary speech in Act V: "I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one." In both cases, Feste avoids an explanation.

Turning to the audience and shattering the dramatic illusion is typical in epilogues, but Feste's inclusion of the audience into his consciousness of the play as a metaphor for actual experience has a special significance here. Throughout Twelfth Night, Feste has engaged various characters in dialogues of self-determination. In one game of wit, he points out that Olivia is a fool "to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (I.v.65-66). By his irrefutable logic, he wins Olivia's favor and her tacit agreement that her mourning has been overdone. The Duke also is subject to Feste's evaluation in two scenes. Following his performance, upon the Duke's request, of a sad song of unrequited love, Feste leaves a paradoxical benediction:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing.

(Il. iv. 72-77)
And later, when the Duke is approaching Olivia's house, Feste encounters him with one of his typically unique and audaciously applied truisms:

DUKE I know thee well. How dost thou, my good fellow?

CLOWN Truly, sir, the better for my foes, and the worse for my friends.

DUKE Just the contrary: the better for thy friends.

CLOWN No, sir, the worse.

DUKE How can that be?

CLOWN Marry, sir, they praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused; so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why then, the worse for my friends, and the better for my foes.

(V.i.9-20)

The Duke has in fact lacked some knowledge of himself, and Feste's pointed remark makes it clear that he is using his role as fool to point up the true foolishness of others. In the prison scene with Malvolio, Feste provides a confusing game of switching identities from the Clown to Sir Topas. In each situation, Feste provides the other person with a different perspective for seeing himself. Thus, it is more than merely appropriate that at the end of the play Feste engages the audience in its own definition of self. By asking them to look at their participation in the dramatic illusion, Feste is requesting them to recognize their own desire for humanly willed happiness.\(^{17}\)

The playwright, like the comic providence in the play, has understood "what we will" and has led us to a pleasurable fulfillment of our desires, but in ways which we could not have foreseen or controlled. The substitution of the final line, "And we'll strive to please you every day," for the refrain, "For the rain it raineth every day," is a crucial change. Like the incremental repetition in the folk ballad, this pessimistic refrain has built a dynamic tension which is released in the recognition that the play is an actual experience in the lives of the audience, even though it is enacted in an imagined world. The players, and the playwright who arranges them, are engaged in an ongoing effort to please the audience. The providential design remains incomplete within the play's action and only promises a "golden time"; similarly, the playwright promises further delightful experiences for his audience. The subplot's action, on the other hand, is limited within the framework of revenge: the revenge of the subplot characters elicits Malvolio's cry for revenge.

Malvolio is the only one who refuses to see himself in a subservient position to a larger design. And possibly because that design is too small, we cannot feel that his abuse and final exclusion from the happy community of lovers and friends allows the golden time to be fulfilled within the play. Feste's manipulation of Malvolio resembles the playwright's manipulation of his audience's will, but in such a reduced way that we cannot avoid seeing the difference between merely human revenge and the larger benevolence that controls the play's design.

Notes

1 Viola's Captain calls this power "chance" (I. ii. 6, 8); Viola submits herself to "Time" (I. ii. 60; II. ii. 39); Olivia and Sebastian refer to "Fate" (I. v. 296; II. i. 4); Malvolio speaks of Jove's control (II. v. 158, 164; III. iv. 68-77); and the forged letter names "the stars," "the Fates," and "Fortune" (II. v. 131-146). Citations of the

2 S. Nagarajan, "'What You Will': A Suggestion," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 10 (1959), 61-67, employs Thomistic categories to discuss the function of human will in the play.

3 Notice the similarity between Feste's description of events and Iago's prediction as he encourages Roderigo to join him in his revenge against Othello: "There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered" (I. iii. 366). Iago implies that he is merely an agent bringing about time's inevitable retributions.

4 Fabian's participation in the gulling of Malvolio has a vengeful motive, because, as he says to Sir Toby, Malvolio has at some previous time "brought me out o' favor with my lady about a bear-baiting here" (II. v. 4-7).

5 The *OED* cites Feste's line as an example under "circling course, revolution (of time or events)," but other uses of the term cited there are also important in the force of the word in *Twelfth Night*: "whirligig" is the name of various toys which are whirled, twirled, or spun around; the term was also used to signify "an instrument of punishment"; and the word suggests fickleness, inconstancy, giddiness, or flightiness.

6 Maria indicates her "foreknowledge" of Malvolio's certain response (II. iii. 137-40), and Malvolio's comments fulfill her prediction (II. v. 110-12, 150-52).

7 Olivia has drawn a similar conclusion about herself in the opening lines of this scene: "I am as mad as he, / If sad and merry madness equal be" (III. iv. 13-14). Because Olivia concurs with Maria in classifying Malvolio's peculiar behavior as "madness," she inadvertently begets the subplotters plan for imprisoning Malvolio. We have Rosalind's word for it in *As You Like It* that the typical treatment for lunatics in the sixteenth century was imprisonment:

> Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.

   (III. ii. 376-80).


> Out, hyperbolical fiend! How vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?

   (IV.ii.25-26)

Obsessive interest in sexual lust seems to have been a commonplace shorthand to indicate madness for Renaissance dramatists: for examples, see Ophelia's mad songs in *Hamlet* (IV.v); Edgar's speech to King Lear as poor Tom o' Bedlam (III.iv.); and the masque of madmen in *The Duchess of Malfi* (IV.ii.). Feste is also following Vice's typical role of teasing and tormenting the Devil when he berates Malvolio, who (Feste asserts) is possessed by the fiend—a point that Feste's song at the end of IV.ii reiterates.
9 The two productions of *Twelfth Night* that I have seen both chose to emphasize visual comedy. One was the Royal Shakespeare Company’s performance at Stratford-Upon-Avon in August 1971. During the scene, Malvolio kept popping his head up through a left-front trap door, and Feste responded with a swift stomp of his foot, closing the trap according to his whim. In this case, Malvolio was not allowed to see Feste, but the audience was allowed to see Malvolio. A performance in the fall of 1971, by Florida's Asolo Theater, had Feste roll onstage a wheeled cage with a small barred window on the upper left, covered by a flap. A sign reading "Beware the Lunatic" covered most of the visible side of the cage and evoked a large laugh from the audience. Throughout the scene, Feste was able to lift or lower the flap covering the bars, so that Malvolio was exposed to the audience and to Feste according to Feste's whim. In both of these instances, the visual comedy was heightened at the expense of the text and its suggested visual effects: Malvolio neither sees anyone nor is seen by anyone in the darkness of his prison. An illustration of this scene from Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709 shows Malvolio separated from the others by a center stage partition, which would allow the audience to witness both situations simultaneously. This is closer to stage directions in the text, but, of course, would not have been probable for Shakespeare's staging of the scene. See "Plate 9 (c)," W. Moelwyn Merchant, *Shakespeare and the Artist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), between pp. 48, 49.

10 The problem of whether to sympathize with or to reject and ridicule Malvolio is an old one. Charles Lamb probably opened this Pandora's box when he praised Malvolio as what Lamb thought he should have been—"brave, honourable, accomplished": from "On Some of the Old Actors," *The London Magazine*, 1822, reprinted in *Shakespeare's Twelfth Night*, ed. Leonard F. Dean and James A. S. McPeek (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965), p. 150. Many arguments have been advanced against Malvolio's "humanity" as realized in the play. Two of the more interesting are by S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London: Kings and Staples, 1944), pp. 77-78, and Barbara K. Lewalski, "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*" *Shakespeare Studies*, 1 (1965), 168-81.

11 Julian Markels, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy," p. 84, and Barbara Lewalski, "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*," discuss the regenerative potentials of madness. Both discussions are pertinent to the emblematic values presented in this scene.


14 Joseph H. Summers makes a similar point, "The Masks of *Twelfth Night*," *The University of Kansas City Review*, 22 (1955), 31. In contrast, the song becomes an appropriate description of the play's world in *King Lear* (III. ii. 64-77).

15 I disagree with John A. Hart's opinion that Feste's song "is not hard to fathom": "Foolery Shines Everywhere: The Fool's Function in the Romantic Comedies," *Starre of Poets, Carnegie Series in English*, 10 (Pittsburg: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1966), p. 47. Hart's own reading of the song's "general meaning" differs in several major points from other readings. One of the most generally held readings is by John Weiss, *Wit, Humour, and Shakespeare* (Boston, 1876), p. 204. It is impossible to list every variant, but worth noting by contrast is Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of *Twelfth Night*,* pp. 168-71, who centers his discussion of the song on the sexual innuendoes that proceed from reading "thing" as male genitalia.

16 Leslie Hotson, *ibid.*, p. 171, n. 2, points out that this line "recalls the Elizabethan euphemism for coition, 'To dance The Beginning of the World!'" Without discounting that allusion, I suggest that a much more general pattern of action is implied.
Robert Wilcher (essay date 1982)


[In the following excerpt, Wilcher asserts that, in contrast to the more conventional clowns of Shakespeare's earlier comedies, Feste is a more fully human character.]

I

Since Francis Douce's pioneering study of the 'clowns and fools' of the Elizabethan stage, a good deal of scholarly scrutiny and critical interpretation has been directed towards Shakespeare's use of his inheritance from popular drama in general and from traditions of fooling in particular.¹ But compared with the detailed studies that have been devoted to the serious dramatic functions that Shakespeare developed for the solo-turn exemplified by Launce's monologues in The Two Gentlemen of Verona and the porter scene in Macbeth,² that other familiar routine of popular comedy—the double-act—has been somewhat neglected. William Willeford traces the origins of the 'knockabout fool pair' to the interplay between the Devil and the Vice in the Tudor moralities;³ and Austin Gray identifies the comic personalities of the actors Will Kemp and Dick Cowley behind the long line of Shakespearian double-acts, from Launce and Speed to the grave-diggers in Hamlet, offering this account of the relationship between the stooge and the lead comedian:

This old fellow is a mere shadow to his wiser gossip. It is his business to ask simple-minded questions or to listen in simple-minded wonder to the dogmatic wisdom of his friend. In short, his main duty is to be the cause that wit and comicality express themselves through the mouth of his friend.⁴

The fullest account of the nature and function of the double-act is by J. A. B. Somerset who, in the course of tracing the history and significance of the comic turn in Renaissance English drama, spends some time on 'the "vaudeville" interchange in which the master acts the role of straight-man to the fooling of his servant or jester, while realizing that he is doing so'.⁵ It is the purpose of the present paper to examine the use of comic duologues in As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and Hamlet, in order to indicate the variety of Shakespeare's artistic response to Dogberry's observation that 'an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind' (Much Ado About Nothing, 3.5.35-6).⁶

Some preliminary attention must be given, however, to the early comedies, because they establish in simple form the materials which Shakespeare was to manipulate later in more complex ways and also offer glimpses of those insights into human behaviour which he perceived in the very nature of the double-act. Three variations can be distinguished, involving both the status of the participants and the kind of humorous exchange that takes place between them. First there is the Kemp-Cowley type of set-piece described by Gray, in which the lead clown and the stooge share the same low social class. The comedy resides in the ability of the dominant partner to outwit his slower companion, either by confusing him or by trapping him into an absurd situation by verbal trickery. A crude example occurs in The Taming of the Shrew, in the scene where Grumio thwarts his fellow-servant's eager desire for news of their master's marriage for some thirty lines and then clinches his comic superiority in a more material way:

Grumio. First know my horse is tired; my master and mistress fall'n out.

Curtis. How?
Grumio. Out of their saddles into the dirt; and thereby hangs a tale.

Curtis. Let's ha't, good Grumio.

Grumio. Lend thine ear.

Curtis. Here.

Grumio. There. [Striking him.

Curtis. This 'tis to feel a tale, not to hear a tale.

Grumio. And therefore 'tis called a sensible tale; and this cuff was but to knock at your ear and beseech list'ning.

(4.1.46-58)

Launcelot Gobbo's determination to 'try confusions' with his sand-blind father in *The Merchant of Venice* (2.2.28 ff.) is in a similar vein. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the servants Launce and Speed are more equally matched intellectually, but in each of their encounters Launce is given the upper hand in the verbal sparring and Speed is relegated to the stooge's role:

Speed. How now, Signior Launce! What news with your mastership?

Launce. With my master's ship? Why, it is at sea.

Speed. Well, your old vice still: mistake the word. What news, then, in your paper?

Launce. The black'st news that ever thou heard'st.

Speed. Why, man? how black?

Launce. Why, as black as ink.

(3.1.276-83)

This exchange opens into the long sequence in which Speed 'feeds' Launce by reading items from a paper detailing the qualities of Launce's mistress, thus allowing the lead clown all the witty punch-lines.

In each of these cases, the double-act interrupts the progress of the plot and is clearly designed to display the talents of the company's clowns in an interlude of low comedy. At the other end of the social scale are the duologues between characters from the main plot. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* opens with a witty scene of parting between Valentine and Proteus, which will serve to exhibit the distinctive features of this second kind of exchange:

Proteus. Upon some book of love I'll pray for thee.

Valentine. That's on some shallow story of deep love: How young Leander cross'd the Hellespont.

Proteus. That's a deep story of a deeper love; For he was more than over shoes in love.
Valentine. 'Tis true; for you are over boots in love, And yet you never swum the Hellespont.

Proteus. Over the boots! Nay, give me not the boots.

Valentine. No, I will not, for it boots thee not.

(1.1.20-8)

Here, in contrast to the previous examples, there is no dominant partner. Each holds his own in a mutual display of verbal cleverness. The puns proliferate in the game of keeping the ball of wit in the air. It is more common for this kind of game to be played while other characters are present, and then it takes on the air of a contest, with the spectators frequently commenting on the expertise of the players. Love's Labour's Lost furnishes an example:

Katharine. She might 'a been a grandam ere she died. And so may you; for a light heart lives long.

Rosaline. What's your dark meaning, mouse, of this light word?

Katharine. A light condition in a beauty dark.

Rosaline. We need more light to find your meaning out.

Katharine. You'll mar the light by taking it in snuff; Therefore I'll darkly end the argument.

Rosaline. Look what you do, you do it still i' th' dark.

Katharine. So do not you; for you are a light wench.

Rosaline. Indeed, I weigh not you; and therefore light.

Katharine. You weigh me not? O, that's you care not for me.

Rosaline. Great reason; for 'past cure is still past care'.

Princess. Well bandied both; a set of wit well play'd.

(5.2.17-29)

The Princess's image indicates the holiday nature of this kind of repartee, having no other purpose than to exercise the participants and entertain their companions. In a scene from The Two Gentlemen of Verona, however, the sport is given an edge of seriousness when Valentine is challenged by Thurio, his rival for the hand of Silvia:

Silvia. Servant, you are sad.

Valentine. Indeed, madam, I seem so.

Thurio. Seem you that you are not?

A needling interchange ensues, until Valentine catches Thurio on the raw by proving him a fool:
Silvia. What, angry, Sir Thurio! Do you change colour?

Valentine. Give him leave, madam; he is a kind of chameleon.

Thurio. That hath more mind to feed on your blood than live in your air.

Valentine. You have said, sir.

Thurio. Ay, sir, and done too, for this time.

Valentine. I know it well, sir; you always end ere you begin.

Silvia. A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off.

(2.4.8-31)

Silvia's two interventions suggest that Thurio, by taking up Valentine's initial 'I seem so' in a malicious sense and then becoming heated as the exchange develops to his disadvantage, is breaking the rules of this kind of social badinage. When personalities and the rivalries of real life become engaged in the verbal contest, the delicate mechanisms of social decorum are endangered. Silvia's concluding attempt to bring the uncomfortable situation back within the bounds of the courtly game is appropriately expressed in an image of warfare rather than sport. Already, thus early in his career, Shakespeare demonstrates how the witty duologue may be exploited dramatically to expose psychological and social tensions among characters.

The third type of comic duologue is that discussed by Somerset, in which a character of high status consents to play straight-man to a socially inferior comedian. In the early comedies, the comic actor had been accommodated in the fictional world of the play as a servant. This figure, as Robert Weimann has demonstrated in his analysis of Launce's contribution to The Two Gentlemen of Verona, moves between the real-life situation of a clown confronting a theatre audience and the dramatic situation of a character relating to other characters:

The real performance of the actor and the imaginative role of the servant interact, and they achieve a new and very subtle kind of unity. Within this unity, the character's relations to the playworld begin to dominate, but the comic ease and flexibility of these relations are still enriched by some traditional connexion between the clowning actor and the laughing spectator.7

It is in monologues and asides, and with his dull companion in the low-comedy double-act, that the clown asserts his function as entertainer of the audience and maintains his semi-independence of the playworld. When he becomes involved in the third kind of duologue, he withdraws into the fiction and exerts his wit to entertain not us, directly, but his employer. The difference between the master-servant conversation and the low-comedy turn is indicated by Antipholus of Syracuse's description of his relationship with Dromio in The Comedy of Errors:

A trusty villain, sir, that very oft,
When I am dull with care and melancholy,
Lightens my humour with his merry jests.

(1.2.19-21)
Launcelot and Grumio play at fooling their social equals and intellectual inferiors, Old Gobbo and Curtis, for the delight of the audience; Dromio and his successors Touchstone and Feste are allowed to amuse their social superiors within the world of the drama.

On two occasions in *The Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus agrees to indulge Dromio, feeding him in act 2, scene 2 with such lines as 'Your reason? ', 'Let's hear it', 'For what reason?', 'Name them'; and in act 3, scene 2 playing up to his conceit of the amorous kitchen-wench as 'a globe' by asking him to locate different countries on her anatomy. These two extended duologues are as much formal double-acts interrupting the plot as the Grumio-Curtis sequence, but the style of comedy is quite different, as we enjoy the inventiveness of Dromio's replies rather than the lower humour of one fool outwitting another. When Launcelot engages his superiors in witty conversation, another feature of this mode of comedy comes to light. He harps upon Jessica's Jewishness and her conversion to Christianity, asserting that she will be damned for her father's sins and complaining that 'this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs' (*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.5.20). These jokes are typical of the later professional fools' habit of telling home-truths and handling taboo subjects. Jessica is in no way offended or disconcerted, and seems to enjoy the chance to treat these disturbing personal matters in a mood of playfulness. As Olivia says, when Feste makes light of her brother's death: 'There is no slander in an allow'd fool' (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5.88). . . .

III

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare uses the technique of the double-act to conduct his most penetrating psychological study of the domestic fool. The character and personal predicament of the early comic servants had never been the focus of dramatic attention. Launce's parting from his family and affection for his dog, and Launcelot's hard life in Shylock's household, had been used simply as the basis for comic turns. Touchstone's behaviour in the Forest of Arden had provided insights into social manners, but had not involved us in the clown's predicament as a unique individual. He was introduced, we remember, with a philosophical discussion about wit and folly, and it was his functioning as a jester not his character as a man that Shakespeare was interested in. The duologue routine which brings Feste before us for the first time immediately establishes the difference of approach in *Twelfth Night*:

*Maria.* Nay, either tell me where thou hast been, or I will not open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter in way of thy excuse; my lady will hang thee for thy absence.

*Clown.* Let her hang me. He that is well hang'd in this world needs to fear no colours.

*Maria.* Make that good.

*Clown.* He shall see none to fear.

*Maria.* A good lenten answer. I can tell thee where that saying was born, of 'I fear no colours'.

*Clown.* Where, good Mistress Mary?

*Maria.* In the wars; and that may you be bold to say in your foolery.

*Clown.* Well, God give them wisdom that have it; and those that are fools, let them use their talents.

*Maria.* Yet you will be hang'd for being so long absent; or to be turn'd away—is not that as good as a hanging to you?
Clown. Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage; and for turning away, let summer bear it out.

Maria. You are resolute, then?

Clown. Not so, neither; but I am resolv'd on two points.

Maria. That if one break, the other will hold; or if both break, your gaskins fall.

Clown. Apt, in good faith, very apt!

(1.5.1-24)

Feste is a hired man, dependent on his fooling for his living. Whatever licence he may have to speak, he is not free to be absent without his employer's permission, and the threat of being 'turn'd away' hangs over his position in the social microcosm of Olivia's household. The progress of the duologue illustrates just how precarious that position is. He begins with a rather feeble pun on 'colours' and 'collars', and when Maria 'feeds' him with the line, 'Make that good', he collapses into the even feebler conclusion: 'He shall see none to fear.' Maria registers the poorness of this 'lenten answer', and then takes over as dominant partner in the comic routine, with Feste dropping into the role of straight-man: 'Where, good Mistress Mary?' His reply, with its comment 'those that are fools, let them use their talents', is a resigned admission that his 'talents' in the field of fooling are small. A few lines later, after offering a threadbare proverb in response to Maria's repeated warning about hanging, he launches into another joke with an intended pun on 'points'. But Maria is too quick for him, and instead of playing straight-man steals his punch-line. 'Apt', says Feste, crestfallen, 'in good faith, very apt!' the kind of remark that one expects to hear from the impressed audience of the clown, not from the clown himself.

Feste's aside, as Olivia and Malvolio approach, is different in kind from the asides of clowns like Speed or Thersites, which register a critical attitude towards the antics of the other characters. It is more of an overheard thought (a silent prayer for help) than a wink at the audience, and it reveals Feste's critical awareness of his own shortcomings rather than the folly of others:

Wit, an't be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man.

(1.5.29-32)

His uneasiness is quite justified, since Olivia is evidently displeased with him and tired of his predictable brand of humour:

Olivia. Take the fool away.

Clown. Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady.

Olivia. Go to, y'are a dry fool. I'll no more of you. Besides, you grow dishonest.

(11. 35-8)

He desperately produces a lengthy syllogistic proof that Olivia is a fool, to be met not with applause, but with a blocking speech: 'Sir, I bade them take away you.' The mock dignity of his assertion that 'I wear not motley in my brain' only half conceals his resentment at the role in which he has been cast by Fortune rather than by
Nature, and he appeals for one more chance to demonstrate that he can perform adequately: 'Good madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.'

Olivia relents, and agrees to play her part in the comic duologue with her dubious 'Can you do it?' and the feed line: 'Make your proof.' This opens the way for a comic catechism, which wins Olivia over: 'What think you of this fool, Malvolio? Doth he not mend?' The ensuing dialogue, in which Malvolio castigates 'these set kind of fools' and gets uncomfortably near the truth about Feste's limitations—'unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged'—adds further detail to Shakespeare's study of this particular clown's predicament. He is caught up in the below-stairs rivalries of a great household, and it is easy to understand why he tries to avoid anything that would aggravate Olivia's displeasure—keeping in the background when Sir Toby and Maria hatch the plot against Malvolio, and only allowing himself to be drawn in somewhat diffidently at a late stage in the proceedings, when Sir Toby is looking for a way to be 'well rid of this knavery'.

He seems to be more valued by Orsino for his ability to sing than for his skill in fooling, and it is noticeable that he plays second fiddle to Sir Toby in the great merry-making scene, and that praise for his wit comes from the foolish Sir Andrew, who enjoys such jokes as 'I did impetico thy gratility' and 'I shall never begin if I hold my peace.' In the Sir Topas episode, Feste exhibits a skill in mimicry, not in verbal brilliance. His wit is at its most inventive when he is begging money from Orsino and Viola. Warde characterizes Feste's performances as a jester accurately as lacking in both the 'spontaneous humor' and the 'sententious wisdom' we expect from a fool. His wit, he continues, 'is at times labored, frequently forced, and seldom free from obvious effort. It is professional foolery, rather than intuitive fun.' And Bradley gets closer to the heart of his mystery in recognizing that the lot of such a man, who is 'more than Shakespeare's other fools, superior in mind to his superiors in rank', must be 'more or less hard, if not of necessity degrading'.

Apart from his opening exchanges with Maria and Olivia and the Sir Topas episode, Feste's lengthiest involvement in duologue is with Viola. In substance, this scene is as much a comic interlude as the letter-reading turn between Speed and Launce: it contributes nothing to the plot. It does, however, substantiate Warde's and Bradley's insights into Feste's character and raise issues that are of thematic importance in the play:

Viola. Save thee, friend, and thy music! Dost thou live by thy tabor?

Clown. No, sir, I live by the church.

Viola. Art thou a churchman?

Clown. No such matter, sir: I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church.

Viola. So thou mayst say the king lies by a beggar, if a beggar dwell near him; or the church stands by thy tabor, if thy tabor stand by the church.

Clown. You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn'd outward!

Viola. Nay, that's certain; they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.

(3.1.1-14)

Formally, this is a duologue that belongs to the Launce-Speed type, since both participants are supposedly of the servant class. Viola makes a good-natured approach, calling him 'friend', but Feste, with a mixture of resentment and insolence, underlines his own inferior position in the servant hierarchy by addressing the
up-and-coming favourite, 'Cesario', in all but one of his thirteen replies with the mock-subservient 'sir'. In these opening moments of the encounter, the familiar double-act relationships fail to be established. Viola does not take up either of the conventional roles: that of stooge or that of straight-man. She attempts to engage the clown in a conversation between social and intellectual equals. C. L. Barber has pointed out that Feste's exasperation at the abuse of language in the interests of wit comes unexpectedly from the fool's mouth—in The Merchant of Venice, 'it was the gentlefolk who commented "How every fool can play upon the word!"'.

Two further points need to be made: firstly, Feste is not, as far as he knows, addressing more than a fellow-employee of the gentlefolk, for although 'Cesario's' parentage is 'above my fortunes' (1.5.262), 'he' is a dependant in Orsino's household; and secondly, it is in line with what we have seen of Feste's character that he should be contemptuous of the very art on which he must rely for his living. After all, it was he, not 'Cesario', who began the riddling conversation by turning the phrase 'live by' inside out. One might dig deeper, and suggest that his dallying with Viola's words is triggered by his bitterness at being forced by necessity to 'live by' his profession as jester-minstrel.

As the duologue continues, subtle adjustments are made in the relationship between the two participants:

_Clown._ I would, therefore, my sister had had no name, sir.

_Viola._ Why, man?

_Clown._ Why, sir, her name's a word; and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed words are very rascals since bonds disgrac'd them.

_Viola._ Thy reason, man?

_Clown._ Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words, and words are grown so false I am loath to prove reason with them.

(3.1.15-23)

Viola's control of both the sexual and the social aspects of her disguise as a male servant wavers in the face of Feste's refusal to respond straightforwardly to her greeting. This is delicately registered in the shift from 'friend' to the would-be hearty 'man' in her mode of address to the clown and in her assumption of the socially superior role as 'feed'—more appropriate to her real status—with the questions 'Why, man?' and 'Thy reason, man?'

The crisis of the scene occurs in the next few speeches, as Viola unwittingly nettles Feste and brings his submerged hostility into the open:

_Viola._ I warrant thou art a merry fellow and car'st for nothing.

_Clown._ Not so, sir; I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible.

_Viola._ Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?

_Clown._ No indeed, sir; the Lady Olivia has no folly; she will keep no fool, sir, till she be married; and fools are as like husbands as pilchers are to herrings—the husband's the bigger. I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter of words.

(11. 24-34)
Viola compounds the error of her patronizing tone in 'I warrant thou art a merry fellow' by using the title which Feste resents because of its implications. We remember that he even bridled when Olivia hinted that his jester's garb extended from his office to his nature: 'I wear not motley in my brain.' Viola tries to change this prickly subject, but Feste will not be placated and she breaks off the conversation in a way that places her firmly above him in the social hierarchy:

**Viola.** I saw thee late at the Count Orsino's.

**Clown.** Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun—it shines everywhere. I would be sorry, sir, but the fool should be as oft with your master as with my mistress: I think I saw your wisdom there.

**Viola.** Nay, an thou pass upon me, I'll no more with thee. Hold, there's expenses for thee. *[giving a coin.]*

(11. 35-41)

Having refused Viola's initial overtures of friendly equality, and resented her assumption of superiority, Feste now tries to turn her into his butt by calling her Orsino's fool. Viola's tip leads him into his routine of begging, but does not stem his insolence. In the very act of wheedling more money out of his antagonist, he is artfully implying that though 'Cesario' may not be a fool, he is nonetheless a hired man, and what is more, a pander:

**Clown.** I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus.

**Viola.** I understand you, sir; 'tis well begg'd. *[giving another coin.]*

**Clown.** The matter, I hope, is not great, sir, begging but a beggar: Cressida was a beggar. My lady is within, sir. I will conster to them whence you come.

(11. 49-54)

When he is gone, Viola gives her famous assessment of Feste and his art:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time;
And, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art.

(11. 57-63)

As Joseph H. Summers points out, most of the characters in the play are wearing masks, and 'Feste is the one professional among a crowd of amateurs.'\(^\text{14}\) Unlike everyone else but Viola, however, Feste *knows* he is wearing a mask—that of fool—and must 'labour' to maintain it. This is why it is difficult to accept Roger Ellis's view that Feste 'covers his tracks so completely that we never see what he stands for, but only the folly and affectation which he ridicules in all around him', and that we never do find out what he does wear in his brain.\(^\text{15}\) Feste may be 'wise enough to play the fool'—with an effort—but he resents the fact that Fortune has made it necessary for him to practise an art which he knows is not natural to him; and in the scenes with Maria and Olivia in act 1 and with Viola in act 3, the routines of the comic duologue are deliberately manipulated by
Shakespeare to wwover his tracks, rather than to cover them. Touchstone was unconsciously trapped in his role; Feste is trapped in his, but with a full and painful awareness. It is typical of him that on the rare occasion when his wit rather than his singing is praised by Orsino—'Why, this is excellent'—Feste replies ruefully, 'By my troth, sir, no; though it please you to be one of my friends', and proceeds to beg for money.

Notes


3 Willeford, The Fool and his Sceptre, p. 123.

4 Austin K. Gray, 'Robert Armine, The Foole', PMLA, 42 (1927), 673-85, p. 673. See Busby (pp. 70-1) and Ludwig Borinski ('Shakespeare's Comic Prose', Shakespeare Survey 8 (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 57-68, p. 63) for brief accounts of some of the clown's duologue techniques.


6 All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from Peter Alexander's text of the Complete Works (1951).


10 Feste wants to prove his own skill at fooling by inventing ingenious proof that his mistress is a fool—one of the traditional ploys of the jester.

11 Frederick Warde, The Fools of Shakespeare (1915), p. 78.


Karen Greif (essay date 1988)

[In the essay below, Greif traces the evolution of Feste in twentieth-century productions of Twelfth Night. She contends that Feste has become an alienated figure, who is profoundly aware of human frailty and the transience of human existence.]

All the characters in Twelfth Night are masqueraders—all imposters, self-deceivers, and counterfeiters, and all beguiled, to some degree, by the game of charades whirling around them. Only Feste the jester keeps his mask from slipping. He alone remains inscrutable, a quality that has made his character particularly fascinating to our century. We are intrigued by ambiguities, obsessed with ironies, and bewitched by paradoxes. So it is natural that the modern theatre has drawn attention to Feste, and in him we have discovered our own key to Twelfth Night. Just as the Romantics found near-tragic pathos in Malvolio's misadventures, or as the Victorians transformed Viola into a model of womanly devotion, we have searched for our own answers in the play's mirror; and the image cast back has been that of a wryly smiling, somewhat weary jester, one of life's privileged spies into the mystery of things.

I

That Feste has not always commanded respect in the theatre is clear from even a quick look at the play's stage history. To past audiences Feste was not compellingly enigmatic. He was simply baffling and all too often tiresome. His addiction to wordplay and witty jests, his oblique mockery, his delight in improvisation, his angling after coins, and his nebulous social rank all seemed alien to playgoers or actors who had lost touch with the Renaissance tradition of the "artificial" fool. Many of his jokes had become obscure and his ironic stance was hard to fathom. From the Restoration on, the standard practice was to play the hijinks in the comic plot for laughs while underlining the sentimental aspects of the romantic tangle, and Feste was odd man out in either simplified context. As a result, his part was invariably edited—sometimes emasculated—in performance. Not until this century has the fool moved from the periphery of the drama into its very heart.

A look at Bell's Shakespeare (London, 1773), an acting edition based on promptbooks used at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, reveals how dispensable Feste was once thought to be. Both of his love songs ("O mistress mine" and "Come away, death") were cut, along with the accompanying dialogue. The change in the revels scene (II.iii) kept the fun high-spirited and sped up the confrontation with the killjoy steward, but it also erased the rueful counterpoint the song provides by reminding us of time's passing. Similarly, the second abridgement (II.iv) showcased Viola's selfless devotion at the cost of the fool's dept parody of Orsino's love-melanchooly. Other cuts also weakened Feste's part. His banter with Cesario in III.i was sharply trimmed, as was his mock inquisition of Malvolio (IV.ii). These alterations were eventually codified by John Philip Kemble, who published an acting edition of Twelfth Night in 1810 that became (whether in its own stead or in Oxberry's virtually identical text) the standard theatrical version during the nineteenth century. Kemble adopted the cuts in Bell's edition and incorporated new ones of his own, including a few more slices from Feste's lines. Equally important, he re-aligned the scene order so that each act comprised a defined block of action, usually with strong opening and closing scenes that centered attention on Viola or Malvolio, the two leads. Such formal clarity was in line with Kemble's neoclassical standards, but it also broke the original dramatic structure. And in a theatre whether a linear plot was favored over a contrapuntal pattern, Feste's role in linking the story lines was easily ignored.

Of course, there were some managers who substituted their own versions for Kemble's, or who varied his formula, but they showed even less interest in the fool. For instance, one curious anomaly in Twelfth Night's stage history was the "operatic" version concocted by Frederick Reynolds for Covent Garden in 1820. Reynolds specialized in lavishly staged musical adaptations of Shakespeare, which he devised by ransacking the canon for graftable lyrics. Yet oddly enough, in revamping Twelfth Night, he cut all the original music.
except for the familiar epilogue song. As one might guess, the fool played a very minor role in this mutilated songfest. Some years later, in 1884, Henry Irving presented a more orthodox version at the Lyceum Theatre. Still remembered for Irving's pseudo-tragic Malvolio and for Ellen Terry's sparkling Viola, this star-oriented production gave scant attention to the supporting cast. Dully played by a faltering comedian, Feste won small response from Lyceum patrons.

The growth of the star-system—like Kemble's disentangling of the plot strands—inevitably sapped Feste's role. Once the spotlight was aimed at the heroine and the gull, the other major characters automatically became "second-string" parts. Just as Olivia turned into a stately contralto because she was so often played by aging ingenues, or Orsino was relegated to the rising—or falling—matinee idol in the company, Feste usually went to whichever actor could muster a decent singing voice and take the obligatory pratfalls. In Augustin Daly's opulent and immensely successful revival, presented in New York in 1893 and the following year in London, Ada Rehan dominated the stage as Viola. The fool—stripped of over half his lines—dwindled away to an inconsequential zany, trotted out to sing a few tunes and crack an occasional jest, but serving mostly as a sidekick to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. The hapless steward also suffered from Daly's scissors-and-paste approach to the text; but the two worst incisions (the abridgement—later the omission—of the prison scene and Malvolio's disappearance from the last act) also seriously diminished Feste, who normally plays a crucial part in these episodes.\footnote{4} However, this troubled few playgoers, to judge from the reviews.

Most of the later revivals presented under the actor-manager regimes did little to enhance Feste's prestige. Yet in one of history's small perversities, an early hint of the changes in store came from a most unlikely theatrical quarter. At the turn of the century, just after Queen Victoria's death in 1901, Herbert Beerbohm Tree produced a sumptuous staging of \textit{Twelfth Night} at His Majesty's Theatre. In most respects, this was the usual Tree spectacular. There were extravagant sets, most conspicuously an awe-inspiring garden that seemed to stretch for acres, lavish costumes, and ebullient clowning by Tree as a vainglorious Malvolio. But Tree had decided to mount a joyously festive comedy, and he took as his motto Feste's line: "Foolery, sir, doth walk about the orb—like the sun, it shines everywhere." Tree's staging reserved center stage for the steward—here played as a fantastic grandee—but it also shed new light upon the fool. Set down in an Illyria dedicated to laughter, Feste became the "presiding genius" of the place, impishly serving as the "connecting link of stories otherwise disparate" who alerted everyone that the play's "swooning amorism no less than its roistering fun is 'high fantastical'" (\textit{The Times}, 6 February 1901). In keeping with the show's sunny spirits, the jester's wit was more whimsical than sharp, and Courtice Pounds acted him as a genial humorist playing his pranks with cheeky nonchalance. "This Feste," Max Beerbohm wrote, "was as constant and as indispensable as punctuation"; and Tree himself called him "the all-pervading spirit of Twelfth Night."\footnote{5} But while Tree took advantage of the fool's unifying presence to improve the coherence of the heavily cut acting version employed, Feste himself, in a production so relentlessly keyed to merry laughter, remained an uncomplicated figure, a waggish Lord of Misrule overseeing the holiday fun.

It was not until Harley Granville-Barker staged his brilliant \textit{Twelfth Night} at the Savoy Theatre in 1912 that Feste was anointed as the spokesman for the comedy's bittersweet undertones. Barker's viewpoint, expressed in his preface to the acting edition, was that the fool should not be played as a blithe spirit, flitting gaily through Illyria:

\begin{quote}
Feste, I feel, is not a young man. . . . There runs through all he says and does that vein of irony by which we may so often mark one of life's self-acknowledged failures. We gather that in those days, for a man of parts without character and with more wit than sense, there was a kindly refuge from the world's struggles as an allowed fool.\footnote{6}
\end{quote}

This portrait hints at several traits subsequent directors and actors would fasten on: the fool's ironic, faintly cynical detachment from his companions; his poignant, almost melancholy awareness of time's passage; and his use of wit as a shield against despair.
Sometimes these qualities have been magnified to the point of distortion, but in Barker's production Feste carried his mantle of irony lightly. He shared with his cohorts a delight in fellowship tempered by a keener sense that "present mirth" may vanish by tomorrow. As a member of Olivia's household he could enjoy his pleasures—and, like Sir Toby and Maria, he had a vested interest in protecting that refuge from Malvolio's stringent reforms. But he also showed a rueful awareness that for some listeners his fooling had indeed grown old. Because his part was not whittled down, as traditionally it had been, the full complexities of his nature were preserved. And by casting C. Hayden Coffin, a veteran of musical comedies, as Feste, and restoring all of the songs (set to authentic Elizabethan airs), Barker ensured that the musical interludes would not be slighted. He was careful not to distract attention from Feste during the songs, keeping the listeners onstage absorbed and still while Coffin sang the lyrics with quiet simplicity.

In the closing moments, Feste's role as mediator between the worlds of illusion and everyday reality was subtly evoked when the lovers passed through an arched gateway into the secluded garden, while the fool sang the epilogue verses from the forestage. As the gates closed upon the lovers and their fantasy world, the curtain slowly descended, leaving Feste alone on the apron. Then he, too, vanished through the curtains on the last notes: "But that's all one, our play is done, / And we'll strive to please you every day." That fare-well, critic John Palmer wrote, brought the enchantment to a graceful close: "We had wandered in Elia's fairyland, but the time had come for magic to be locked away. The spell, at last, was broken; and, thereafter, with hey ho, the wind and the rain, we must tumble forth into the crowd."

Significantly, the Savoy Twelfth Night was the first revival to include virtually the full text (only about twenty lines were cut), with the scenes kept in their original sequence. Combined with continuous staging that allowed only minimal breaks in the action and balanced ensemble playing from the cast, this reform enabled Barker to capitalize on the intricacy of Twelfth Night's design. The rediscovery in the theatre of Shakespeare's interlacing dramatic structure, which the best contemporary directors have preserved, gave a healthy boost to the fool's long-devalued role. As the one character who encounters all the other major players, in a series of meetings spread over the action, Feste helps to weave together the assorted plot strands. Moreover, in his aspect as observer-cum-sooth-sayer, Feste gives voice to many of the play's thematic motifs. By restoring the comedy's original form, Barker gave Feste both a greater stake in the action and a more rounded, fully human personality.

II

Although he had demonstrated how much an expertly realized Feste could contribute to Twelfth Night in performance, Barker's cue was not at once picked up by subsequent producers. Most of the Twelfth Nights staged in the next few decades were lightweight affairs—sometimes drawing carefree laughter with élan and sometimes merely going through the motions, but seldom breaking free of the conventional expectation that it be played as a happy golden comedy. The fools in these productions were usually of the cavorting variety—sprightly, gay, always ready with a joke or a song—and little mention was made of such standardized clowns in most reviews.

There were, nonetheless, a few productions that pointed the way toward the present emphasis. Tyrone Guthrie was one director who experimented with a more serious approach. He directed Twelfth Night in 1933, for his first season in charge of the Old Vic, with Morland Graham cast as the fool. This was a fast-paced, rollicking version that reflected Guthrie's concern to liberate the comedy from its stodgier traditions. In place of scenic backdrops, he substituted an architectural setting intended to approximate the openness and depth of the Elizabethan stage. Caroline costumes broke with the rule of sixteenth-century dress. A flippant and skittish Olivia, acted with a disconcerting Russian accent by Lydia Lopokova, replaced the standard regal matron. And a deliberately discordant note was injected by making Feste a white-haired old man. He was still full of fun, but the suggestion that "clowns grow old like other people"10 silently mocked the laughs. There was only muted appreciation from the critics for such innovations; but in his next outing with Twelfth Night for the Old
Vic, in 1937, Guthrie once more gave Feste a touch of melancholy. This time playgoers were more receptive to his approach. *The Evening Standard* (24 November 1937) described the performance as a mellow blend of wit and beauty shadowed by "devouring time," calling particular attention to the nocturnal party when

> it is as though the revellers are drinking not for conviviality but to stiffen their hearts against the shadow of death. . . . And the clown, glancing at one and then the other, sings his song of sad mortality while the darkness deepens behind them. This is brilliantly done by Mr. Marius Goring, whose clown appears like a spirit from another world, commenting with bitter humour on the follies of mankind.

Some years later Alec Guinness, who had played Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Guthrie's 1937 production, staged his own revival of *Twelfth Night* for the Old Vic (1948). Having transposed Viola's shipwrecked arrival to the opening scene, Guinness began and ended the performance in thundery darkness. The intervening scenes presented, in J. C. Trewin's words, "a gentle summer-world with an odd tinge of pensive autumn in its sunlight"—and Feste, played by Robert Eddison, served as the chief reminder of that nip in the air. Skeptical critics dismissed him as a refugee from Lear's heath or as a gaunt memento mori: "white-haired, hollow-eyed, obviously tubercular . . . [his] doomed voice and haunted countenance dominate the Illyrian scene." Other viewers, however, were moved by the portrayal, which made Feste a more intriguing character than the stereotypical "fidget in cap-and-bells." For example, Audrey Williamson, in a sympathetic, although not totally approving, account of Eddison's performance, remembered him as a sad-gay figure of haunted melancholy: a Pagliacci clown, mournful and elongated, with whitened hair and lines of age on his face, moving among the sad cypresses like a man, not with a load of mischief, but of sorrow.

Perhaps it was the experience of the war and the frustrations of its peace that brought this melancholy conception into practice. The same impulses that nurtured such dramatists as Beckett, Osborne, and Pinter may also have fostered the modern tendency to shift *Twelfth Night*'s colors from midsummer brightness to autumnal shadings. Certainly, by the end of the 1950s, the bitter-sweet interpretation of the comedy had fully matured.

In 1957 Tyrone Guthrie re-staged *Twelfth Night* for the Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario. Twenty years since his last Old Vic revival had only confirmed Guthrie's impression of darkness within the farcical intrigue: the hints that merriment may spill into madness, that love may turn sour, and earthly pleasures fade. In his program notes, Guthrie argued that, although the story belongs to the vernal season of blossoming exuberance, it should not be taken as a "sentimental Springtime Rhapsody." Rather, he believed that

> as always in the work of great masters, the laughter is not far from tears, behind the sunshine there is a hint of storm. The lyric poetry, some of it the loveliest ever written, . . . carries echoes and overtones of winter and death; we are never allowed to forget that soon, too soon, the garland is withered and the burgeoning tree will wave gaunt arms in the tempest engulfing King Lear.

Despite this impassioned rhetoric, the laughter was not forgotten—indeed, the promptbook in the Festival archives shows that the comic business was both acrobatic and inventive—but the fragility of "present mirth" was keenly felt. Walter Kerr, who deeply admired the performance, reported that "from the outset of the evening an undercurrent of ingrained sadness, of rueful longing for a time when gaiety came easier, serves as a contrast and counterpoint to the abandoned horseplay."

At the heart of this interpretation was Bruno Gerussi's Feste—a played-out entertainer whose songs had "all fallen into a minor key." He was an elderly grizzled fellow, clad in rough homespun, no longer sure of his
bearings but ready to improvise his way through the confusion. A Toronto critic remarked that the director's lens had pulled into focus the usually elusive jester:

Dr. Guthrie has probed this strange misfit and found a figure of strange sadness, an aging professional clown, his place in Olivia's household held on sufferance, his jokes as shabby as his clothes, at odds with the world and finding expression only in song.\textsuperscript{18}

In all three of Guthrie's \textit{Twelfth Night} productions, an aging and saddened Feste was the spokesman for the darker truths that underpin the dreams and revelry. Yet what had seemed to most a daring experiment in the '30s had, by 1957, become an "authentic" reading. Not only had his vision mellowed with time and experience, but Guthrie's audience was now more willing to embrace it.

The following season in England brought two new productions, one at the Old Vic directed by Michael Benthall and the other staged at Stratford's Memorial Theatre by Peter Hall. A twilight mood, often brightened with sportive comedy, permeated the Old Vic \textit{Twelfth Night}, set in a ruined garden dominated by a trellised pavilion and colored in hues of russet and gold. Derek Godfrey, as Feste, was handy at playing the local games; but he also conveyed that this was a fool with a history. He suggested to Harold Hobson a man too often "bruised by the world" and now in retreat; when Orsino tried to pay him for his song, he gravely refused the proffered coins—"No pains, I take pleasure in singing"—as if tired of having a price tagged to his art.\textsuperscript{19} By hinting at the sensibility usually camouflaged by Feste's drollery, the actor could expand the dimensions of the jester's personality. Mary Clarke, in her overview of the Old Vic season, not only placed Feste at the center of the play as the "character who holds all parts together," but she also observed, in accord with the widening consensus that his foolery hides an injured soul:

There is indeed an aching sadness at the very heart of his character, something much more pathetically, vulnerably human than can be suggested by the conventional white face of a clown. The secret of Derek Godfrey's success was that he allowed the humanity to shine through.\textsuperscript{20}

Such efforts to find a subtext to Feste's lines are common in modern productions, especially those that give him a pivotal role. Robert Eddison, for example, had implied a motive for Feste's revenge against Malvolio by suggesting that the fool concealed an unrequited love for Olivia that made him jealous of her attentive steward. And in the 1954 Old Vic production, the director Hugh Hunt had supplied his Feste (Leo McKern), a middle-aged jester dressed in faded motely, with a younger rival by turning Fabian into an up-and-coming fool.\textsuperscript{21} It is as if, by constructing a human face for the creature behind the jester's mask, the actor hopes to let us penetrate Feste's cryptic nature. If pushed too far, such Hamlet-like efforts to "glean what afflicts him" only undercut Feste's credibility as Illyria's resident truth-teller by making his motives transparently personal. But when handled subtly these glimpses into his secret mind can secure our trust that he speaks out of the lessons of heartfelt experience as much as from shrewd observation.

An effort to show a Feste who nurses a bitter knowledge of life without cracking the enigma was brilliantly—if sometimes unevenly—realized in the second of the 1958 productions, Peter Hall's staging for the Royal Shakespeare Company (revived in 1960). In a short essay on the play, written for the Folio Society edition, Hall characterized \textit{Twelfth Night} as "complex, ambiguous, and heartbreakingly funny." He saw it as a "transitional play" bridging the gulf between the earlier romantic comedies and the disquieting complexities of the problem plays and the tragedies: "There is something of bitterness in its comedy. But the comedy is rich, because there is darkness and disturbance."\textsuperscript{22} To dramatize this vision, Hall made Feste his presenter. This "allowed" fool, a self-proclaimed "corruptor of words," possessed a unique knowledge of life's inequities and its transience that tinged with irony the other characters' dreams of perpetual happiness—just as the Cavalier setting, evocative of Caroline extravagance and Puritan denial, hinted that history, in due course, would bring in its revenges.
As directed by Hall—and as played by Cyril Luckham and later Max Adrian—Feste was unusually astringent. This was a "dry fool" rather than a melancholy weeper, a man who knew too much and who shared his secrets only in oblique jests and songs. Hall described him as

bitter, insecure, singing the old half-forgotten songs to the Duke . . . his jokes now tarnished and not very successful. He is the creation of a professional entertainer, and we may perhaps relate him to John Osborne's Archie Rice, or to that fearful misanthropy which overtakes most comics when they begin to despise their audiences. He is suffered by all, and liked by few. He is the most perceptive and formidable character in the play.23

Hall detected behind the jokes and the impostures an idealist embittered by experience, a loner made sharply conscious of human folly by the sting of his own failures: "Feste is the critical centre of the play, the Thersites, the Jacques without eloquence, the malcontent, the man who sees all and says little, the cynic. It takes an idealist to be such a cynic."24

The performance began with a theatrical metaphor for Feste's role as go-between: not only in the sense that he makes the rounds of all the unwitting fools residing in Illyria, but also in that he serves as mediator between the real-life audience and the illusions of the stage. When the audience entered the theatre, the stage was screened by a gauze drop-curtain showing the image of a fool wearing an ass-eared cap and holding his bauble. A silvery nimbus shimmered around this central figure, about which could be seen the faces of the other characters, faintly touched by his radiance. Then a spotlight illuminated the image until, as music sounded, the stage lights came up—making the gauze transparent—to reveal Orsino luxuriating in his melancholy in the company of his retainers.

Gauzes were used throughout the performance, along with lighting effects, to give Illyria the atmosphere of "a country of dream that, at the last, melts again into dream."25 Through this mirage world, richly colored in earth tints reminiscent of Rembrandt and Van Dyck, the characters played out their fantasies, wryly observed by Feste, who alone seemed to know that "Youth's a stuff will not endure."

This was a world in which comedy and romance were inextricably mixed, where the clowns had their moments of dignity and the Countess was "a coquetish poseuse who seemed to have escaped from a columbarium for slightly cracked doves."26 But it was also one in which the mirth, however zestful, was always on the brink of dissipating, and the lyricism, however lovely, of falling into decadence. The other players, rapt in their dreams of living "happily ever after," might ignore the hints of mortality in store, but Feste was there to remind the audience with a bemused shake of his head at Sir Toby's and Sir Andrew's idiocies, a caustic poke at Orsino's fickleness, or a flash of triumph at Malvolio's humiliation. His first scene (I.v) intimated that the snubbed jester was all too sensible of "infirmity that decays the wise," as when he turned away at Malvolio's taunt that his skills were failing, and again when word of the young messenger drew Olivia's attention away from him. Later on, finding himself accosted by the new favorite of both lord and lady (III.i), Feste treated Cesario with studied indifference. Distance from his "fellows"—whether real or feigned—was also implicit in the ending given the midnight party (II.iii) to close the First Act. Once Maria began to hatch the plot against the peevish steward, the fool apparently slumbered until, as the pranksters crept out, he raised his head and gazed thoughtfully after them. A more acid humor sometimes entered into his reactions. For example, Orsino's failure to applaud his song added bite to the warning that "pleasure will be paid, one time or another" (II.vi); and his mock inquisition of Malvolio (IV.ii) was deliberately harsh, capped by the fool dancing on the trapdoor above the "madman."27 Such antics also exposed the human frail-ties of this disillusioned seer. Isolated from the rest of the characters by his bitterness no less than his prescience, Feste drifted through Illyria, a companion to all, but an intimate to none.

At the same time, other aspects of the production—its visual beauty and rich coloring, its inventive humor, and its lyrical moments—gave romantic love and all the other temptations of the flesh a compelling charm.
The audience was left with the thought that to be the possessor of tragic wisdom, especially within the milieu of romantic comedy, might be a terrible burden. This reminder was poignantly enacted in the play's conclusion, eloquently described here by Roy Walker:

. . . the play ended as it began, with music, all the romantic and comic characters, except Malvolio, dancing together in a golden distance behind a gauze curtain in love's now triumphant harmony, with Feste . . . seated on the fore-stage in the gathering dusk, sadly remembering how the world began. Now it was their light that just touched his figure, forlorn at the thought that there was no more for him to do in this world. Even a god who plays the wise fool may be left lonely at the dance of human love.

With this ending the opening sequence was now reversed. The audience, having been drawn through Feste's agency into the illusory world of Twelfth Night, were at last thrust back out of the golden dreamworld into the reality of "the wind and the rain," still accompanied by their guide, the sadly privileged fool.

III

These three productions—the Guthrie, the Benthall, and the Hall—consolidated Feste's position both as the messenger for Twelfth Night's darker tonalities and as a keystone to its dramatic structure. In particular, Guthrie's and Hall's versions have had profound effects on subsequent interpreters, sometimes to the point where the plaintive undertones these two directors tried to sound have usurped the melody. Surveying the Twelfth Nights staged since 1960, on both sides of the Atlantic, one uncovers a host of eccentric, heartsick, grouchy, and decaying Festes. The novelty has by now become the convention, even a worn cliché.

At Ontario, Guthrie's precedent has been adopted in several variations by his successors. Eric Christmas, under David Williams's direction in 1966, was made the eldest member of an otherwise youthful and perky cast, appearing to a visiting critic from The New York Times (10 June) "as an oldster . . . who putters about like a damp rustic wit in an Illyrian country-store." He was "as careworn and philosophic a clown," said The Toronto Globe and Mail (9 June), "as the fashion warrants, which is considerable in these gloomy times." A more austere impression of a man at odds with the world, and dissatisfied with fooling, was given, in David Jones's 1975 revival, by "Tom Kneebone's harsh and metallic clown, burnished by wit, but unhappy. This was a tough professional Feste, his eyes quizzical and disenchanted, his distaste for his fellow men beginning with himself." By 1980 Feste had mellowed considerably. Robin Phillips's elegant Georgian Twelfth Night had no need of a cranky malcontent to dispel its already low-keyed mirth. Instead, William Hutt portrayed "a warm-hearted retainer who . . . shuffles about in comfortable slippers" (Southern News, 10 June 1980), a wise old fool domesticated to a well-fed and affluent household and in no hurry to venture out into the wind and the rain. Ready to share a companionable chat with Olivia, to indulge Orsino's affectations, or to give a rueful shrug for Malvolio, this Feste injected a compassionate tolerance into the vicissitudes of Illyrian fortunes. There was no mockery of the sentiment in his songs. Rather he moved his listeners with heartfelt pleasure. At the end, the others passed out of view while Feste sang his sad, sweet tune, until he alone was left on stage.

Much of the edge was lost in this characterization—indeed, some critics found the production as a whole overly genteel—but in compensation Feste gained a heart for sorrows other than his own.

Meanwhile, the traditional happy-go-lucky fool has proved remarkably hardy in America, where he still often surfaces in regional productions of the comedy. But the modern diagnosis that he suffers from ennui, complicated by mid-life syndrome, has attracted some notable converts. Morris Carnovsky, a tragedian of solid credentials, played "a grey and seedy Feste" (New York Herald Tribune, 9 June 1960) at Stratford, Connecticut in 1960. "Tradition having given us a lineage of youthful, prancing, gay fools," Claire McGlinchee commented, "it was difficult to adjust to Morris Carnovsky's interpretation of Feste as a kind of lamenting Deor" even though he acted it with characteristic skill. A less gracious critic dismissed this gloomy fool as "a broken-down, seamed and moss-hung jester, a creaking wit . . . on his last legs" (The
Morning Telegraph, 10 June). One severe disadvantage to the actor attempting this pensive mode for Feste was that he was plopped down in a gimmicky production set à la H.M.S. Pinafore in a Regency seaside resort.

Such incongruity has its drawbacks, as does the alternative extreme of muting the contrast between saturnalia and sobriety. When Ellis Rabb staged the play at Lincoln Center in 1972, Feste (George Pentecost) was again a sad-faced clown "happier commiserating with himself in song than he is in his profession of fooling" (The Saturday Review, 25 March 1972); but this time he resided in an Illyria geared to the sadder aspects of the comedy. Set on a vast stage swathed in midnight-blue, with exotic "Arabian Nights" props and costumes, the performance afforded enough visual beauty to lull many critics. Walter Kerr, however, who had so admired Tyrone Guthrie's fusion of "sad and merry madness," complained that Rabb and his actors had overplayed the heartache (New York Times, 12 March):

Feste has always been a faintly weary clown, uncertain that his muse will sustain him through another bout of wordplay, and Feste's mood, as much as anyone's, lurks behind the prankish deceptions of the evening. But that is an undertone, one that can be beautifully exploited so long as it has a grinning surface to mock. Mr. Rabb has made it the whole tone, almost as though the company were singing a requiem for a comedy recently dead.

Kerr's remarks point up a weakness in the modern penchant for brooding Festes. When the hints of mortality and temporal urgency that give resonance to Twelfth Night's celebration of life are diffused throughout, the fool's deft reminders of time's exigencies are apt to become an insistent blare. Then the comedy itself, rather than shimmering with light and shadow, will turn enervating—as it did in the 1974 American Shakespeare Theatre production. Commemorated as the "underwater" Twelfth Night for its aquarium-like setting as well as its listless style, this production culminated in an anagnorisis full of "aching pauses between beats, unnecessary exits that left the lonely principals trying to be cheery in a void, and a visible draining of energy from the actors."32 Feste was a glum hanger-on, singing dirges to his fellow mopers. And in case anyone missed the point that Malvolio was "most notoriously abused," in the prison scene the poor man was strapped down under a spotlight while his inquisitor grilled him from the shadows.

A more playful mood was struck the same year at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. There Feste (Jeff Brooks) was restored to his tenure as humorist, and his presiding role as Master of the Revels was given a clever twist:

Feste walked through the play like a stage manager. He oversaw Viola's landing in Illyria. The lighting obeyed the gestures of his hand. In short, he transcended reality and heightened the comic spirit of make-believe.33

Viola's affinity with the fool who wears no motley in his brain was signalled by allowing her to learn the same trick, while for his antagonist, Malvolio, "the lights were less obliging." Though potentially hokey, this method was an imaginative way of evincing Feste's centrality; and by allowing him to be genuinely amusing, the director (Jim Edmondson) kept the pacing nimble and the lessons diverting. Less happily, Feste's role was enhanced in Gerald Freeman's 1978 American Shakespeare Theatre Twelfth Night by subsuming Fabian's lines into the fool's part. Worse yet, in 1980 the jester's deadpan wit was trivialized by rigging him out as a chino-clad, Kool-smoking leftover from "a Bing-Crosby-as-middle-aged-frosh movie" (The Village Voice, 17 December 1980) in David Mamet's campy rendition with New York's Circle Repertory.

The vogue for world-weary Festes has spread as far afield as Paris—where Jean Anouilh cast him as "sad and obsequious, like the romanticized Pierrot," in a mannered 1961 production —and Stockholm, where Ingmar Bergman staged a headily erotic Twelfth Night (1975) watched over by a timeworn Feste. The Swedish production impressed a visiting American critic as a more robust version of Bergman's own Smiles of a Summer Night, with the choric office of Madame Armfeldt, "that wise old woman who stands outside love's
mysteries and comments on them," given to Feste and Fabian, here played as two canny old family retainers for whom "love is only a faded memory."^35

But of all the places where Twelfth Night holds the stage, the bittersweet mode has been most persistent in Britain, where Hall's example and the Guthrie/Guinness Old Vic legacy have substantially recast the older notion of Feste. This is less true of amateur players, who often remain faithful to the tradition of flippanit wits, but even so there are exceptions. One semiprofessional case was Jonathan Miller's staging for the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Company (1969). Vowing to dispense with "the capering ninnies of convention," the director promised instead "a clapped out clown with a bottle nose who knows he is scraping the bottom of the barrel to make his lady laugh."^36 The resulting gruff, acerbic fool was de-scribed, with less enthusiasm, by Sprague and Trewin (p. 131n.) as "a vinegary and unmusical hack." Perhaps the best symbol for the resilience of the weather-beaten Feste in the English theatre was Robert Eddison's reprise of his sad-gay fool for the Old Vic in 1978, thirty years after he had undertaken the role at the same house. If his nostalgia for better days, his threadbare outfit, and his forlorn visage gave Eddison something of the look of a retired flower child, this was still a memorable Feste: beautifully spoken and gallant in the face of sorrow.

But then he had some need of gallantry, since the fool, in this sometimes overblown production, was so achingly conscious of his own mortality. A typical instance came when, stricken by Olivia's gentle reproach—"Now you do see, sir, how your fooling grows old, and people dislike it?"—he buried his head sadly in her lap. For B. A. Young this was "a magical moment."^37 Yet, though truly affecting, it was also as hopelessly sentimental as any of the touching moments for Viola, or tormented histrionics for Malvolio, that the actor-managers had once devised. Unless Feste takes his own heartaches, as much as his pleasures, with a grain of salt, he is apt to turn maudlin. Just as important, his license to puncture the egocentric follies of others—like Justice Overdo's warrant or Gregers Werle's summons to the ideal—will be thrown in doubt if his own frailties are too much in view. Eddison's acting skill made Feste's troubles genuinely moving, in this case, but the voice of doom did rumble a bit naggingly. As well as demonstrating the tenacity of the sorrowful Feste in the theatre, this incarnation warned how easily he might slip into decadence.

IV

Nowhere has the serious interpretation of Twelfth Night made a deeper imprint than at Stratford's Royal Shakespeare Theatre. This is only natural in a company so responsive—in terms both of influence and reaction—to its own traditions; and Peter Hall's production was outstanding. It was also one that aged exceptionally well in memory. Despite the doubts about Hall's methods and intentions voiced in notices at the time, subsequent allusions reveal how durably this Twelfth Night stood as a measure for alternative visions. Of course, many aspects of Hall's interpretation—including his vision of Feste—were challenged, or else modified, by other RSC directors. Yet Stratford's Feste, although he has come in varying shapes and sizes, has kept with remarkable constancy both his ironic perspective on the masquerade at hand and his fund of privileged knowledge. C. L. Barber, writing at about the same time that Hall directed Twelfth Night, surmised that Feste "has been over the garden wall into some such world as the Vienna of Measure for Measure."^38 And we might say that at Stratford he has remained a traveller still, bringing back to Illyria memories from less happy realms beyond its borders.

This was true even in the 1966 production directed by Clifford Williams, which marked the sharpest break with the modern accent on the comedy's darker colors. As demonstrated through the plentiful allusions to carnival and saturnalia splashed across the playbill pages, the 1966 interpretation was a deliberate reversal of Hall's seriocomic approach. Played as a high comedy romp "firmly steeled against pathos and poetry" (The Times, 17 June 1966), Williams's Twelfth Night demoted Feste, acted by Norman Rodway, from the key spot Hall had granted him back to the supporting ranks. He remained, nevertheless, an aloof and unfunny fool "with more of dark, brittle realism than wistful charm" (The Glasgow Herald, 18 June). Curiously, even in a production as determinedly vivacious as this one, Feste sustained his air of knowing more than anyone else,
and of finding in such intuitions some cause for bitterness or sorrow. This was a trait, here only roughly sketched, that the next three productions would delineate in richer detail.

Feste was once again a major figure in John Barton's 1969 *Twelfth Night* (revived at the Aldwych in 1970 with several cast changes), one of the finest of the RSC versions. Intelligently and beautifully staged, this *Twelfth Night* was widely admired for its imagination and sensitive emotional shadings. Among its many virtues was the strength of the ensemble. The characters were fleshed-out, complex personalities, defined in good measure by the relationships—past and present, actual and desired—that joined them: "Mostly, the production simply explores the half-stated relationships and crannies of the play, loading them with feeling, . . . . Everyone is connected to everyone else, with a sympathy which never confuses sentiment with the sentimentality that is the subject of the comedy" (*The Observer*, 24 August 1969). No single character, therefore, dominated the stage; but the knowing fool did much to set the tone, one of grave lyricism and of laughter shot through with sadness.

According to Robert Speaight, Feste "was quietly in command—seeing everything and through everything, and singing with delicate accomplishment about many of the things he saw." Emrys James played him as a wryly compassionate fool, whose experience had earned him wisdom but not bitterness. A white-haired clown long in service to the family, he treated Olivia with affectionate concern and joked familiarly with her uncle. To Maria, who longed to marry the reluctant Toby, he gave quiet sympathy, and a smile to the ever-hopeful, though ever-thwarted, Sir Andrew. As a musician he was a welcome visitor to Orsino's court. Yet he remained detached, never forgetting his status as hired entertainer. Only with Viola, another independent spirit, did he find a momentary kinship when, in their brief interlude, "cross-talk gives way to music and unspoken communication, as the two characters sprawl out together ruefully surveying the human scene from some other plane" (*The Times*, 22 August 1969). Playing against the wrangling notes in this wit-contest, the actors brought out a shared understanding and respect between these two who play with words, just as they juggle roles, without losing their balance. It was even intimated that he had seen through her disguise when the fool crossed to her "as if [he] realized who [she] is" on the line "Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin." But more even than Viola, who at last joins the charmed circle of lovers insulated from loss or care, Feste was attuned to the hard realities of life, especially the sad fact that "Youth's a stuff will not endure." Awareness of time, which brings to a close all lovely things—youth, beauty, pleasure, even the play itself—was his special wisdom; and this gave the fool a crucial role in a production deeply concerned with the passing of time. From the reminders of transience and decay that sound in the lines, to the sundial upon the stage, time was felt as the untangling power that brought fulfillment to some, disillusionment to others, but irreversible change to all. Anne Barton, in the program note she wrote for the production, related the antics and revelry, sometimes bordering on madness, to the topsy-turvy holiday of Twelfth Night—but she emphasized that celebration must have an end. For a privileged few in Illyria the dream is left unbroken ("Viola and Orsino, Olivia and Sebastian remain, by the special dispensation of art, in a romance world that never falters"), but the others must face the "cold light of day." As the audience faces its own "jolt into reality," its guide is Feste:

> Left alone on the stage, Feste sings his song about the ages of man. . . . The reality of wind and rain wins out, the monotony of everyday. The passing of time is painful, may even seem unendurable, but there is nothing for it but resignation, the wise acceptance of the Fool. All holidays come to an end. All revels wind down at last. Only in the theatre can some people be left in Illyria.

These were truths the fool had known all along. One way that this was pointed in performance was to have Feste give snatches of his songs from time to time as counterpoint to the dialogue. He made his first entrance whistling "Hey, Robin, jolly Robin"—the song of fickle love he later sings as he nears the confined steward—and he repeated the same tune in other scenes. For that more poignant lament of unsatisfied desire,
"Come away, death," Feste had underlined the oblique parody of Orsino's melancholy by caricaturing a heart-sick lover—languidly circling the duke and pressing a hand to his brow—as he sang the second verse; later on, he hummed it again as Olivia pressed her favors on Cesario. Most telling, though, were the reprises of "O mistress mine." At the end of the revels scene, Maria returned and tried to lead Sir Toby off. When he resisted ("Tis too late to go to bed now") and left her, Sir Andrew kissed her hand and Feste closed the scene with a pensive strain of "Youth's a stuff will not endure." He sang the same words to point another touching moment, when outside Malvolio's cell a subdued Sir Toby slipped his ring onto Maria's finger and said, "Come by and by to my chamber." 

These last two instances of invented business exemplify the pensive tinge Barton gave to the comedy's intimations of mortality. In his detailed account of the staging in *Royal Shakespeare*, Stanley Wells described how sensitively Barton integrated humor with the pathos. Still, he conceded that in such wistful moments the director "was reducing the spectrum," employing effects that were masterly but that "deprived the play of some of its brighter colors." Many reviewers noted this rueful undertone. The critic for *The Daily Telegraph* (22 August 1969) judged that "what has interested John Barton in directing this revival is the melancholy that hangs over a play festive in spirit but concerned with people who misuse time, [who are] sadly deceived themselves and [are] deceived in each other." Others wrote of "the muted gold [light] of a winter garden" and of "the autumnal, sea-wrecked emotion which surged through" the play.

This plangent strain was not, it should be emphasized, the sole mood expressed. Barton himself stated that his object was to do justice to the play's complexity: "The text contains an enormous range of emotions and moods and most productions seem to select one—farce or bitterness or romance—and emphasize it throughout. I wanted to sound all the notes that are there" (*Plays and Players*, November 1969). Like Hall before him, Barton sought to harmonize the elements of comedy and romance, of present delight and the regretful hints that "what's to come is still unsure," but without making the swings of feeling too broad. Still, the bittersweet nuances were felt. In an interview given a few years after directing *Twelfth Night*, Barton described Shakespeare's attitude in this play as "on the whole wry, tolerant and accepting," but with a "very conscious split between the 'happy-ever-after' world of romantic comedy and his sense of what life and people are really like." His staging concentrated on the yearnings for satisfaction and security the characters all feel, but with the full knowledge that as many fantasies are shattered as are fulfilled, as many friendships damaged as upheld, as many courtships brought to nothing as to marriage. Sir Andrew carried with him a little bunch of golden primroses to give Olivia until he heard, to his dismay, that she detested anything yellow; Sir Toby spurned Sir Andrew's well-meant assistance, at the end, with "wintry" contempt; Antonio was left alone onstage, after the lovers had swept off, to make a solitary exit; and throughout the performance the distant sound of gulls and the restless sea reminded the audience of a reality circumscribing the Illyrian dreamworld. Even Sebastian's trust that Olivia's proposal was a happy stroke of fortune and not some lunacy was given an ironic cast by punctuating his reverie with the offstage cries of the confined "madman." Malvolio.

One notices, too, in looking through the reviews, how often this reflective sadness was associated with Feste. *The Times*, for example, recalled the original production as "Feste's Twelfth Night: a shifting perspective of romantic ardour and romantic folly seen through the eyes of the Fool against an ever present sense of the effects of time" (7 August 1970). "Emrys James's exquisite Feste sets the tone," stated *The Daily Telegraph* (22 August 1969): "This courtly jester . . . brings a Watteau-like dreaminess . . . to the very air we breathe in Illyria." In his lyrics and his word-games Feste reminds us of the rules that festive comedy can only temporarily suspend, but without the rancor or self-importance of a killjoy like Malvolio. And as James played him, the fool's perspective closely resembled the one Barton ascribed to his creator: realistic but "on the whole wry, tolerant and accepting." So it is not surprising that Feste seemed, to some viewers, to be at the play's heart, especially given his involvement with its deep concerns. The limits of fellowship, the problems of love, the fine line separating wisdom from folly or imagination from madness, the inconstancy of words and people, and the confounding of identity endemic to a world of quick-change artists—all these are spoken of or
acted out by Feste. In licensing the fool as his truth-teller, Barton followed Hall. But he replaced the earlier embittered veteran with a more resilient, more forbearing clown. What Stanley Wells underlined, in summing up his memories of Barton's Twelfth Night, was its "beauty of communication, of sympathy, understanding, and compassion. It had a Chekhovian quality. . . . Shot through with sadness though the production was, its ultimate effect was a happy one." 48 The Feste was very much in keeping with this generosity. Some sharpness was lost and some brightness muted, but the acceptance of frailty and mutability that infuses this last festive comedy was shown without breaking its harmonies or transforming it into a problem play.

Some dissonance, of course, is often wanted in the modern theatre. That vein of bitterness in the fool's utterances was by no means mined out yet. If Cyril Luckham and later Max Adrian, under Hall's direction, had portrayed Feste as a worn-out entertainer in the mold of Osborne's Archie Rice, then Ron Pember—in Peter Gill's 1974 Twelfth Night—carried this idea one step further with his "savage, sardonic teeth-bearing Feste rasping out his songs as if it were 'The Three Penny Opera'" (The Guardian, 23 August 1974). This "unshaven malcontent" (The Times, 23 August) brimmed with contempt for his listeners—and for himself, no less, for pandering to them. Interestingly, whereas prelapsarian Twelfth Nights had often glossed over Feste's money-grubbing, by compressing the dialogue or tossing it off lightly, this production made much of these episodes, thereby underlining both the entertainer's dependence on his audience and his disdain for their limitations. Gill encapsulated this ambivalence, for example, when Sir Toby casually tossed a coin to Feste in anticipation of some music and then Sir Andrew held up his own small offering—which Feste promptly took out of his hand. He delivered the song ("O mistress mine") directly to the audience while the two knights sat at their cups behind him. His stance and gritty voice conveyed that even if the onstage celebrants were too rapt in the present to bother with "what's to come," he knew full well their bills were coming due—and that the listeners out front should heed his meaning and not just wallow in the sentiment. Similarly, his attitude toward Orsino, even as he palmed his fee for a fine lyric or a well-turned jest, was daringly caustic—the more so because his noble auditor so clearly missed the ironic applications to his own foibles; and his encounter with Cesario in Act III stressed the abrasive undertones to their exchange. 49

Feste's isolation from his employers—and his cronies—was sociological no less than aesthetic. Peter Thomson incisively described this fallen but still testy class-warrior:

"Ron Pember spoke like a Londoner, dressed like a faded Harlequin now reduced to busking, and hinted always at a radical's distaste for the antics of privilege. He despised the effeminacy of Orsino's court, and his angry assumption that Viola considered him a beggar had all the spikiness of class pride. . . . He was a working man among the leisured classes, deeply critical of their behavior and bitterly dissatisfied with his own." 50

In an illuminating aside, Thomson reported that another member of the audience had compared this fool "with Bosola, another joker who declines to laugh at his own jokes." That to these viewers Feste resembled Webster's grimly sardonic outsider is a helpful gloss on Pember's acting. But that both critic and ordinary playgoer so casually accepted a kinsman to Bosola (however distantly related) as a lawful citizen of Illyria is an even more revealing sign of the preconceptions brought to a modern staging of Twelfth Night. Some reviewers found Pember's saturnine loner a bit eccentric—just as others thought the interpretation brashly original—but few dismissed him as a strange aberration in a festive comedy.

True, Pember's hard-boiled Feste gave a needed edge to an Illyria surfeiting on narcissism and sexual desire. His bitter dependence on patrons and their coins brought to new light all those other reminders of the economic realities that underpin holiday and romance: Orsino's "great estate" and Olivia's "quantity of dirty lands"; his counted-out "bounty" and her "inventoried charms"; Sir Toby sponging off Sir Andrew till the overextended pigeon "hadst need send for more money"; Malvolio dreaming of "some rich jewel" as he idly fondles his chain of office; Antonio's unlucky purse; Maria's "dowry" and Sir Toby's reluctant "recompense"; and all the many warnings that the piper must be paid, "one time or another."
The fool's unconvivial temperament also revealed an unexpected resemblance to another servant in the household: the steward Malvolio. In some ways, Feste was no less a "puritan" than his antagonist. He viewed the daily Illyrian carnival with the same disdainful glance Malvolio gave the impromptu late-night party. He set as high a value on his own opinions as the smug steward, even if they were formed by a keener intelligence. He was sensitive to class differences and monetary considerations. And he set himself apart from his fellows with equal insistence. Such a reading perhaps lays undue emphasis on connections that should only be hinted at. But Illyria is indeed a land where human beings are all mirrors to each other, casting back reflections—whether identical, reversed, or absurdly distorted—that most fail to recognize as images of themselves, so we should expect some correspondences between two fools. Nonetheless, linking Feste with Malvolio, like comparing him with Bosola, is an idea only modern audiences would countenance. The irony implicit in seeing Feste as an "ill-wisher" is simply more than we can resist. Today the expectation that every silver lining must have its cloud is so strong that an out-of-sorts or even downright grumpy Feste comes as no surprise to us.

Nor are we likely to be startled when Feste's role is built up, any more than erstwhile audiences were overly dismayed when he was shoved into the wings so that Malvolio or Viola or Sir Toby could reign undisturbed. A case in point was Terry Hands's direction of Twelfth Night for the RSC in 1979, with Geoffrey Hutchings as Feste. The best word for this fool was "ubiquitous." Onstage virtually every moment, Feste observed the other characters act out their fantasies—or meet their rude awakenings—from the sidelines, whenever he was not involved in the action. From the first minute of the performance, when a hooded figure (shortly revealed, minus cucullum, as the fool) piped the notes that so engrossed the lovelorn duke, to the last strummed chords of the epilogue song, Feste was at hand: sometimes watching from the margins of the stage, or closer by, behind a box-tree, sometimes eyeing his own onlookers as he sang or joked for them, and sometimes catching a word or gesture his companions were too fatuous or self-absorbed to mark—but always poised not to miss a thing worth noting. The possibilities for tongue-in-cheek dramatic irony, with this framework imposed, were naturally many. Since Feste had witnessed her arrival, Viola's disguise was occasion for wry glances rather than confusion; and his inside-track gave his encounter with Sebastian (IV.i) an almost farcical twist. As Roger Warren noted:

"Your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither" had to be made to mean the reverse of what it in fact does mean, to the extent of Feste actually removing a false nose to emphasize knowingly that "nothing is so that is so."

Feste's spying also gave him a ringside seat for Malvolio's reactions to the letter and his cross-gartered transformation—scenes from which the fool is textually excluded—so that his amused scrutiny added another circle of awareness to the side-show in motion, enveloping both the gullers and the gull.

In the later version of the staging, Feste even helped to dress the set. The scene throughout was an orchard of several trees planted in box-tubs. At the outset the landscape was wintry and bare, a bleak mirror to the men and women who ventured there, but as the sap began to rise in these repressed, barren, or somehow thwarted creatures, daffodils began to bloom in the tubs—each one planted by Feste, as the signs of warmth, release, and new growth appeared. Several marked the vows of heartfelt love soon proliferating; still more the late-night festivities and the deepening rapport between Viola and Orsino; and more yet Malvolio's headlong plunge into romance. By the time the steward reappeared, after the interval, decked out in yellow stockings, the trees had sprouted new leaves, more daffodils had flowered, and the midwinter chill had warmed into sunshine. The stagehands, of course, produced the greater miracle, but the fool's small plantings led the way into springtime.

The direction of the role was, in some ways, an extension of Hall's idea of the fool's centrality, but softened by the more generous tone set by Barton. As before, Feste was a penetrating clown who knew more of the truth than anyone else, although in this case he was inclined to smile at what he had discerned. And once again he
served as a kind of presenter, a mediator stationed midway between his fellow players and the spectators beyond the stage, but this time as a "showman" of another sort—not so much flagging entertainer as note-taking impresario. To Gareth Lloyd Evans he even seemed in charge of orchestrating the story: "He is on stage virtually all the time, not as the usual wry observer but as a kind of conductor of the action. You feel they dance to his tune, and he dispenses destiny."55

What saved this directorial imposition from heavy-handedness was, in large measure, Geoffrey Hutchings's self-effacing Feste. A small and quirky fellow, with a gnomish face that peered out of faded patchwork, his fascinated interest in the antics and revelations going on before him was seldom obtrusive, and he kept a light touch in his meetings with the other characters. Well aware of his own role-playing, he could smile at the poses that so absorbed the pretenders in his company—as when he snatched away Olivia's veil to show the girlish mirth hidden by her affected mourning or when, in the final scene, he maneuvered Orsino and Viola closer together56—but he kept his own secrets to himself. As a fool who had learned to live without illusions, he watched the human comedy spin itself out before his bemused eyes, relishing its ironies and accepting its pangs with equal humor. When at the last he sang of life's vicissitudes, a pensive tableau was formed around him: behind him, the quartet of lovers drifting slowly upstage, and off to the sides, sitting under the trees, those chastened by experience—"the wounded Aguecheek, head in hands, the isolated Antonio, and the sobered Maria and Toby, separated and facing away from each other."57

V

In his staging, Terry Hands carried to its practical limits the modern image of Feste as critic and chorus: the knowing observer who stands somewhere between the illusory fools upon the stage and their counterparts in the audience. Such an emphasis on Feste, like the ground bass of sadness that so often accompanies it, is a reflection of our time, our mind-set. Isolation, problems of identity, and broken dreams pervade modern drama. Similarly, Shakespearean performers gravitate toward the uncertainties and the hints of disturbance ingrained in even the brightest of his plays. Illyria has turned to an unstable world where the enigmatic Feste reigns as master of the revels winding down. Sometimes the fool's ubiquity or his weary wisdom can become mere tricks of habit. Yet, if done intelligently, serious treatment of Feste can still yield stimulating results.

The versions staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company exemplify the modern tradition's potential richness. These Festses, whatever their imperfections, are imaginative enough to transcend convention. His traits remain fairly constant. He is usually an aging fool, unattached but alert to what goes on. Whether cynical or compassionate, he is deeply conscious of infirmity—in himself and others—and of mutability. He is a role-player who keeps his own mask in place, and at the same time a spectator able to see through others' charades. He is a paid entertainer, something of a misfit, and a realist. Yet within the basic formula Stratford actors and directors have ingeniously given new dimensions to the role. The familiar convention is thus revitalized. Moreover, the company's ensemble skills promote strong casting and encourage the actors to test out new balances, new tensions in the relationships they create.

Conversely, some of the examples I have shown illustrate the less attractive features of the jester's modern stage identity. Too-sad Festses can turn maudlin, thereby blunting the comedy. Hack Festses make bad entertainers. Fools whose thoughts have soured or whose failings are too obvious cannot make convincing ironists, and dreary ones are worse. Gimmicky productions trivialize the fool's wisdom. Criticism-conscious productions puff him up unduly. Lastly, monotone productions that take their cue entirely from Feste's saddest utterances, or farcical versions weighed down with a malcontent clown, too often blast the comedy's delicate harmonies.

These are dangers even the finest directors must skirt with some care. A Peter Hall or Tyrone Guthrie may "do it with a better grace," but if carried too far the bittersweetness will turn to Jan Kott's desolate perception that fools like "Feste and Touchstone are not clowns any more; their jokes have ceased to be funny. . . . They live
in a bare world, bereft of myths, reduced to knowledge without illusions."  

No doubt, somewhere, *Twelfth Night* has been or will be played in such a barren lunar landscape—with an unsmiling clown in the foreground—but this is no less a distortion than the winsome, laugh-strewn versions once popular. *Twelfth Night* celebrates life and heartfelt emotion. The reminders that such things are fleeting, sometimes elusive, even riddled with absurdity, may pierce us. But the poignance is meant to endorse life's value, not deny it. Feste may stand at the garden gates, ready to usher us out of the sheltered world of romantic comedy, but he must not be exiled from its precincts. A Feste without sympathy for love and the good life, however keen his sense of their caprices, cannot open our eyes to that fuller vision of earthly life.

The whirligig of time brings in its revenges as surely in the theatre as in any other human sphere, so we should expect future transformations in Feste. But the odds are that those changes will not be too radical so long as we keep the perceptions and the biases our century has nurtured. Feste has long been seen as a professional entertainer, a shrewd wit, a loner with few, if any, attachments of affection. What has intensified is our sense that he is entrapped, or at the very least defined, by his role—a hired clown who sports his mask because it is the only sanctioned outlet for his insights. His self-containment is now a sign of alienation; his knowledge of human nature the hard-earned wisdom of a social misfit. At best he wins some freedom by hiding his "real" behind his pretended face, but this is necessarily a limited release.

Such problems of identity are a longstanding preoccupation of the modern theatre. From Pirandello's mind-games and Beckett's mock rituals through Sam Shepard's image-locked rock stars and would-be desperadoes, modern playwrights have wrestled with the actor's relationship to his role. Feste's awareness of his roleplaying and the limits it imposes is therefore very much in keeping with our cultural milieu. His pessimism is no less an expression of the times. If romantic aspirations have not been completely extinguished in our drama, they have been searchingly, often achingly, questioned. Our archetypal clowns are Samuel Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon, doing their vaudeville turns to the echoes of "all the dead voices." Feste may be more sophisticated than these poor tramps, but his fooling, too, makes us doubt the promises of happy endings, makes us remember that "the rain it raineth every day." Whether he takes the form of a disenchanted joker or a dreamer gone to seed, Feste tells us that Twelfth Night, the last night of the Christmas season, marks the end to feasting. Even when a warmhearted mood is set, granting holiday and love their pleasures, he sees beyond the passing moment. That blend of irony and compassion in John Barton's *Twelfth Night* that generated instants when "Shakespeare touches hands with Chekhov" (*The Times*, 22 August 1969) owed much to the presence of Feste, the wise observer of human folly.

Today a major *Twelfth Night* without a worthy fool would be unthinkable. This honor has a license from no less an authority than Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who over fifty years ago affirmed: "We must hold and insist on holding Feste, Master of the Revels, to be the master-mind and controller of *Twelfth Night*, its comic spirit and president."  

Viola may still win our hearts. Malvolio may grandstand all he pleases. The lovers and the merrymakers may take their turns as well. But the wily jester, inscrutable to the last, remains our chosen guide—deftly pointing our way through the comic maze and calling us back, at the end, to the waiting world outside the theatre's walls.

**Notes**


1 This article focuses on Feste's theatrical metamorphosis; but, as most readers will be aware, much of the same process has taken place in the criticism. As scholarly interpreters (like their theatrical counterparts) have stressed the play's darker, more ironic tones, they have more and more looked to Feste as its key. For anyone interested in comparing Feste's critical image with the stage version shown here, the following studies are representative: C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959); Anne


4 Twelfth Night, Or what you will. By William Shake-speare, Arranged to be played in four acts, By Augustin Daly. Printed from the Prompt Book, and as produced at Daly's Theatre, February 21st, 1883 (Privately Printed, 1893).

5 The Saturday Review, 9 February 1901; Preface to the Souvenir Program for Twelfth Night, 5 February 1901, His Majesty's Theatre, Harvard Theatre Collection.


7 Harley Granville-Barker's promptbook for Twelfth Night (1912), The University of Michigan, Shattuck, TN, No. 80; supplemented with theatrical reviews in the Harvard Theatre Collection.


9 William Poel had restored the original scene order, and earlier Samuel Phelps had come very close; but both producers had cut the text substantially. See Poel's promptbook for Twelfth Night (1897), The Victoria and Albert Museum, Shattuck, 77V, No. 43; and Phelps's promptbook (1848), The Folger Shakespeare Library, Shattuck, TN, No. 11.

10 The Manchester Guardian, 19 September 1933.

11 The Observer, 24 September 1948.

12 The New Statesman and Nation, 2 October 1948.


15 Tyrone Guthrie, Program for *Twelfth Night* (1957), Stratford Festival Archives.


17 *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 July 1957.

18 *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 3 July 1957.


See Hugh Hunt, *Old Vic Prefaces: Shakespeare and the Producer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), pp. 70-72, 76-79. Hunt ascribed a personal bitterness to Feste's last song, in which the discredited fool acknowledges that "not only has he lost his place, but his successor has probably already been found" (p. 78).


23 Folio Society edition, p. 5. Clifford Leech draws a similar analogy, but without Hall's emphasis on Feste's bitter cynicism, when he notes that Feste "has amused us, and enriched our transient Illyria, but will not let us go without claiming a common humanity with us. He is a player as well as an imaginary character: we can meet him outside the theatre when the performance is over, and the life-conditions that we know belong to him too. He has a descendant in the Archie Rice of John Osborne's *The Entertainer*, who ended the play by asking us to let him know where we were working tomorrow: he was ready to exchange roles and to come and watch us" (*Twelfth Night and Shakespearian Comedy*, p. 54).

24 Folio Society edition, pp. 5-6. Surprisingly, the only sizable cuts in the text were made in Feste's scenes (the mock indictment of wordplay in III.i [11. 11-25] and about thirty lines from the prison scene [IV.ii]). Apparently most of these lines were restored, however, in the later version (Peter Hall's promptbooks for *Twelfth Night* [1958 and 1960], The Shakespeare Centre Library).


27 Peter Hall's promptbook for *Twelfth Night* (1958), Shattuck, TN, No. 98, Shakespeare Centre Library. Hall remarks in his Introduction to the Folio Society edition that Feste "cruelly tortures the imprisoned Malvolio" (p. 5), and his speculation that the fool might have been a failed priest (p. 6) may help explain the caustic treatment of the Sir Topas scene in his staging. According to a review of the 1960 revival in *The Evening News* (18 May 1960), Feste—epitomized as an "ageing clown . . . endlessly cracking his stale jokes in a desperate attempt to win brief smiles"—took "a terrible revenge on Malvolio" in the prison scene and danced
"a savage saraband" over his enemy.


30 Phillips's promptbook for Twelfth Night (1980), Festival Archives, Stratford, Ontario; supplemented by the videotape of the production in the archives, and by theatrical reviews.


38 Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 259.


40 John Barton's promptbook for Twelfth Night (1970), Shakespeare Centre Library. The promptbook for the original production is missing; the one consulted here was used at the Aldwych revival.

41 Anne Barton, program note in Twelfth Night play-bill (1969), Shakespeare Centre Library. A fuller reading can be found in Barton's essay "As You Like It and Twelfth Night: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending" (cited in note 1, above).

42 Barton's promptbook.


45 "Directing Problem Plays: John Barton Talks to Gareth Lloyd Evans," ShS, 25 (1972), 63-71, esp. p. 63. Here Barton echoes Hall's view, shared by many modern critics, that Twelfth Night is a transitional play bridging the mature comedies and the problem plays. The repertory for the 1969 season also linked Twelfth Night with the final romances. In her program note, Anne Barton wrote that the play "crowns" the preceding run of comedies and "prefigures the final romances."
Viola, the heroine of *Twelfth Night*, is widely admired as an example of 'selfless fidelity' in love.¹ She is praised by critics with divergent interpretations of the play itself. She appeals to those who regard *Twelfth Night* as a 'festive play', in the course of which characters overcome their illusions, grow in self-knowledge, and gain a sense of community. She is regarded as the one character who is not misled about herself, and who therefore can 'teach others the true meaning of love'.² Viola appeals just as strongly to critics who puncture the

---

¹ The Glasgow Herald, 25 August; The Times, 22 August; and the promptbook.

² Barton's promptbook.

³ Wells (note 43, above), p. 61.

⁴ Peter Gill's promptbook for *Twelfth Night* (1974), Shakespeare Centre Library; augmented by critical notices and my own recollections of the production.


⁶ Appropriately, the back wall of the stage presented a picture of Narcissus gazing down at his own reflection in a pool of water. The director may have meant this to suggest the more obvious theme of self-love, but it was still an apt symbol for this pattern of "unreflecting reflectors."

⁷ Terry Hands's promptbook for *Twelfth Night* (1979), Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon; supplemented with my recollections of the performance.


⁹ Hands's promptbook.


¹¹ Hands's promptbook.


**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 46): Characterization**

**Richard A. Levin (essay date 1979)**


[In the following essay, Levin maintains that Viola has an unromantic view of love, a remarkable ability to handle crises, and a willingness to manipulate both Olivia and Orsino to achieve her goals.]

Viola, the heroine of *Twelfth Night*, is widely admired as an example of 'selfless fidelity' in love.¹ She is praised by critics with divergent interpretations of the play itself. She appeals to those who regard *Twelfth Night* as a 'festive play', in the course of which characters overcome their illusions, grow in self-knowledge, and gain a sense of community. She is regarded as the one character who is not misled about herself, and who therefore can 'teach others the true meaning of love'.² Viola appeals just as strongly to critics who puncture the
romantic surface of the play, and find excesses in Illyria that cannot be purged as a mere product of a 'holiday' atmosphere. For these critics, Viola stands above her environment. She has been called the single 'reality figure' among characters lost in a variety of illusions about themselves and others. Another writer finds it a shame that so wonderful a girl as Viola should marry 'such a spineless figure as the Duke'. Finally, Viola is also praised by critics occupying a moderate position. They qualify the generally cheerful tone of comedy by speaking of 'a silvery undertone of sadness', or 'a nostalgic, elegiac' note. With this reading, Viola becomes 'the constant and unchanging heart at the centre of several shifting and unstable attachments'. Viola, it would seem, is worthy of the highest admiration.

This essay will argue that she has not been scrutinized with sufficient care, and that there is an important element of calculation in her personality. My purpose is to strengthen the anti-romantic reading of Twelfth Night, which, although it has had very able proponents, has yet to discover the 'worm i’ th’ bud' at the heart of the play (II. iv. 111). In the latter nineteenth century, dissatisfaction with Illyria centered on the mistreatment of Malvolio. Our century has taken more interest in Feste's profound disillusionment and in the aristocratic malaise of Orsino, and, to a lesser extent, Olivia. It is time to move from the periphery to the supposed romantic center of the play, and to find there a young woman with a distinctly unromantic attitude towards love. I begin with a key to Viola's personality provided by Dr Johnson in two succinct footnotes he wrote for Act I, scene ii of the play.

Viola, having come ashore after a shipwreck, determines from a sea captain that she is in Illyria, a land ruled by a bachelor, Duke Orsino, who woos the Countess Olivia. Viola decides: 'O that I serv’d that lady, / And might not be delivered to the world I Till I had made mine own occasion mellow / What my estate is' (41-44; italics added). Dr Johnson paraphrased the lines and offered a gloss:

I wish I might not be 'made publick' to the world, with regard to the 'state' of my birth and fortune, till I have gained a 'ripe opportunity' for my design. Viola seems to have formed a very deep design with very little premeditation: she is thrown by shipwreck on an unknown coast, hears that the prince is a batchelor, and resolves to supplant the lady whom he courts.

Dr Johnson's reason for concluding that these particular lines illustrate Viola's desire to wed the Duke may not be obvious but we should recall that in editing another play, Johnson suggested that the idiom to go 'to the world' meant marriage. In any event, Johnson is undoubtedly considering the lines in context, and he thinks that Viola's general intention is clear. A little later in the scene, Viola, on learning that Olivia is in mourning, changes her course of action. Dr Johnson commented: 'Viola is an excellent schemer, never at a loss; if she cannot serve the lady, she will serve the Duke'. Johnson, in effect, suggests that Shakespeare quickly shows that Viola is not introduced as an idealized romantic heroine. He might have said, more cautiously, that Shakespeare provides equivocal details so that we will prepare ourselves to watch Viola and make some very careful judgments. In any event, Johnson's successors, rather than taking up his lead, have been busy to eliminate any suggestion of duplicity on Viola's part. In 1790, Malone explained her quick moves on the basis of a source for the play, Riche His Farewell to Militarle Profession: Viola sailed for Illyria in search of Orsino, who is the man she loves. In 1821, James Boswell, the son of a more famous father, added to Malone's account: 'It would have been inconsistent with Viola's delicacy to have made an open confession of her love for the Duke to the Captain'. Later still (1854), R. G. White dismissed the whole controversy with great irony:

If there ever were an ingenuous, unsophisticated, unselfish character portrayed, it is this very Viola,—Dr Johnson's 'excellent schemer', who, wretched and in want, forms that 'very deep design' of supplanting a high-born beauty, of whom she had never heard, in the affections of a man of princely rank, whom she has never seen.
White read both Johnson and the text in a very literal-minded way and was baffled by what seemed an outrageous accusation. Spedding (1865) subsequently gave an eloquent defense of Viola as a romantic heroine who, in very trying circumstances after a shipwreck, does nothing inappropriate 'for a lady of her birth and breeding'.

This account of Viola's activity has remained intact in our own century. C. L. Barber, for example, writes that 'the shipwreck is made the occasion for Viola to exhibit an undaunted, aristocratic mastery of adversity'; and the New Arden Twelfth Night emphatically declares that Viola's 'disguise appears a natural step and neither a deep laid scheme nor an irresponsible caprice'. If Johnson is nevertheless right, then the whole character of the play has been misunderstood, even by critics who put an anti-romantic case. As Spedding pointed out in well-chosen words: 'Our conception of Viola's very nature, and with it the spirit of every scene in which she subsequently appears, and the complexion of the whole play, depends on' a correct determination of the issue. I am prepared to defend the essence of Johnson's analysis of Act I, scene ii, and to demonstrate Viola's subsequent 'scheming'.

Although Viola is safely ashore, the captain and the sailors (from the latter we hear nothing) are still her lifeline, and she treats them with calculation, beginning with the pretense of camaraderie: 'What country, friends, is this?' (1). The captain replies: 'This is Illyria, lady'. Viola then puns: 'And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium' (italics added). Viola wittily suggests that a confusion of sounds has caused her to miss her proper destination. She now expeditiously sets about soliciting grounds for hoping that the mistake will in due course be corrected: 'Perchance he is not drown'd—what think you, sailors?' (5). The captain takes his cue and cheers her, and she thanks him with gold (17). This gesture requires scrutiny. Not every romantic heroine has gold in her purse (especially after a shipwreck), nor takes gold out to thank a man for spiritual solace. But Viola, it may be, has a design. She perhaps wishes to demonstrate that she has money, and that she knows how to reward favors. Viola is ready to see if there is more help she can get from the captain.

And, as it turns out, he knows Illyria well, having been born and bred there (22-23). 'Who governs here?' is her immediate response, and when the captain replies 'A noble duke, in nature as in name' she wants only hard fact, not speculation about the duke's character: 'What is his name?' (26). Upon hearing the name, Viola's memory, sharp on critical detail, recalls: 'Orsino! I have heard my father name him. / He was a bachelor then' (28-29). It seems fair to infer that Viola shows immediate interest in establishing herself well in the dukedom, and a royal marriage is entertained as a possibility. She hesitates momentarily, for she is not one to risk unnecessary danger, and thinks of biding her time in the safety of Olivia's court. But when the captain tells her that Olivia will entertain no kind of 'suit' (45), the word catches Viola's attention, and the captain nods in confirmation, adding, 'No, not the Duke's'. Viola's path is now clear to her; her approach to the captain characteristically indirect.

She first addresses him with a compliment that incidentally reveals her knowledgeable in the ways of the world:

There is fair behaviour in thee, captain,
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.

(47-51)

She then proposes to disguise herself and enter the duke's court as a eunuch. 'I'll pay thee bounteously', she goes on to promise (52), and promptly urges: 'It may be worth thy pains; for I can sing / And speak to [the
Duke in many sorts of music' (57-58). Since music is 'the food of love' (I, i. 1), the direction of Viola's thoughts is plain enough. She may even exchange a smile with the captain when she blandly concludes: 'What else may hap, to time I will commit, / Only shape thou thy silence to my wit' (112-13). Only the least suspicious in the audience will be unprepared for Viola's contrivances at court.

The court, in English Renaissance drama, is a place where one seeks fortune, and where one's success—not to say life—depends upon pleasing a monarch. When Act I, scene iv, opens, Viola has disguised herself as Cesario, a male page. We may ask, why not a eunuch, as she had planned? Perhaps she has decided that a sexual identity, even if not her own, is still an asset. She has been at court 'three days', has already 'advanc'd', and is likely to advance further, if, as Valentine points out, 'the Duke continue these favors towards you' (1-4). Valentine is talking from bitter experience, for Cesario is replacing him at court. In Act i, scene i, Valentine, as Orsino's ambassador to Olivia, failed to gain entrance; Cesario is his successor. The duke enters, asks Valentine to stand aside (12), and gives Cesario 'his' instructions. Viola is most reluctant to accept the mission, for two very good reasons. First, she has her own designs on the duke. I say designs, for there has been no evidence yet, nor, I believe, is there reliable evidence subsequently, that Viola actually loves the duke. Second, while the duke mentions only the 'fortunes' that will be hers if she succeeds with Olivia (40), in fact, if she fails she will suffer Valentine's fate. The duke, however, is not to be refused, and Viola undertakes the task, in good faith, apparently.

She listens carefully as the duke urges her on her way. He tells Cesario 'to act my woes' (26), and that to do so 'shall become thee well . . . / [Olivia] will attend it better in thy youth / Than in a nuntio's of more grave aspect' (26-28)—with a stare for Valentine, no doubt. The duke goes on to describe why Cesario will appeal to Olivia, and in doing so reveals that he himself dotes on Cesario's lovely feminine features:

They shall yet belie thy happy years,  
That say thou art a man. Diana's lip  
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe  
Is as the maiden's organ; shrill and sound,  
And all is semblative a woman's part.  

(30-34)

Viola can see that the duke is attracted to her; perhaps she also wonders whether the duke is right, and her combination of masculine and feminine characteristics has novelty even among the women of a jaded Illyrian aristocracy. A course of action becomes clear to her. She will do no more than the duke instructs if she 'acts' a role and emphasizes her youthful appearance. Meanwhile, she can cultivate the duke's own interest in her.

The setting now shifts to Olivia's household, and details are soon provided which prove pertinent to our inquiry. Feste, Olivia's jester, is returning after an unexplained absence, and Maria, the lady in waiting, expects that he will have difficulty getting back into Olivia's favor. Nevertheless, he concentrates his skill—'Wit, and't be thy will, put me into good fooling' (I. v. 32-33)—and in a few short lines achieves his end. As Viola is about to enter and achieve comparable success, it behooves us to see whether the two employ parallel means. Feste sees past Olivia's initial reluctance to listen to him. He assumes that a person in mourning for an extended period of time is in need of amusement, and that a young woman has special needs. Therefore, in his introductory move, he disports his colorful wit before Olivia, much as a serpentine Satan plays before Eve in the garden. Feste knows that Maria wants a husband (27-28), and so does Olivia, for 'beauty's a flower' (52). Olivia is soon telling him that, 'for want of other idleness', she will let him 'prove' her a 'fool'. Olivia has a positive desire to be proved a fool—to the good fortune of both Feste and, as it turns out, Viola as well. With a performance requiring minimal skill, Feste soon has Olivia laughing at herself and indulging him.
At this point, Sir Toby enters with the information that a gentleman has come to call upon Olivia. It is immediately apparent that her mourning is little more than a polite way of saying 'no' to the duke, for she issues the instruction: 'If it be a suit from the Count, I am sick, or not at home' (108-09; italics added). But Cesario has cleverly declined to mention whose messenger 'he' is; Olivia is curious, and her curiosity becomes intolerable when Malvolio's description emphasizes Cesario's very youthful appearance: 'One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him' (161-62). Olivia agrees to see Cesario; as we know, the latter has already been advised, by the duke, of Olivia's predilections.

Within just a little over a hundred lines of Cesario's entrance, Olivia has fallen in love with 'him'. It has been very widely assumed that Olivia does so in spite of Cesario's sincere attempt to woo for Orsino. To take two illustrations from the critics. Harold C. Goddard can usually see through anyone and anything, but he nevertheless says of Viola that 'she never toys with [the] possibility for a moment' of manipulating Olivia's emotions for her own ends. Alexander Leggatt finds that Viola urges the suit 'with the generosity that is part of her nature'. Two other critics offer a more qualified account. Herbert Howarth begins very firmly: Cesario 'urges his entreaties on Olivia as no previous messenger has dared'. But towards the end of his discussion, he muses: Viola "unconsciously" wills Olivia to fall in love with her'. Even E. C. Pettet, writing on Shakespeare's 'detachment from romance', ventures no further than to suggest that in Viola's 'fine love speeches' to Olivia, there is sometimes 'a suggestion of parody'. In spite of the weight of critical opinion, and the fact that Olivia is certainly an easy victim, I believe we can discover a systematic effort on Viola's part to awaken romantic affection. Viola, on her entrance, does not invoke 'wit', as we have seen Feste do, but she is a self-proclaimed believer in wit (I. ii. 61) and there is no reason to suppose that in her secretive way she has not gone about making calculations of her own. These should accord with Feste's but Viola has an additional advantage: 'she' is a handsome young man. What, then, if she offered herself as a suitor? To do so has many real advantages, and as many dangers. If Olivia loved her, Viola could be sure of a reception at her court, and Orsino would therefore remain satisfied with his ambassador. However, if the duke were to hear a word of what she were up to, she would be in serious trouble indeed. Hence Viola will have to seduce Olivia without the latter being aware that she does; Viola must appear to refuse and to serve her lord loyally, while Olivia herself can trip head over heels in love. Viola's apparent coolness to the suit would also serve to prolong the wooing, and hence give the patient Viola time to work on the duke.

When Viola enters the room, she begins a dull, stylized address, only to interrupt herself to ask with apparent nervousness, 'if this be the lady of the house?' (171-72). It is improbable that Viola is really in doubt as to Olivia's identity, for only one of the women is veiled and Viola knows Olivia to be in mourning. Viola is presenting herself as an awkward and shy youth, who has carefully memorized lines, but who fears 'scorn' (175) and may easily be put out of a 'part' (179). She wishes to suggest that, behind the actor with not very interesting lines, lies a real person with a depth of feeling that Olivia might well wish to explore. Olivia is indeed interested, but Viola has yet to perfect her act, and Olivia's first guess at the person behind the mask is all too accurate: 'Are you a comedian?' she asks (182). Viola answers with a comic touch that she conceals from Olivia, whom she falsely reassures: 'No; . . . and yet (by the very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play' (183-84; italics added). Viola hints to the audience that she does not 'play' at all; she is in terrible earnest.

Olivia now shows an interest in engaging Viola in 'skipping' (201) dialogue, for she answers her question, 'Are you the lady of the house?' with 'If I do not usurp myself, I am' (184-86). Viola, like Feste, now reminds her that a young woman should marry: 'What is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve' (188-89). Olivia is flattered. Viola goes on to suggest that beyond the introduction to the speech she has memorized lies 'the heart of my message' (190-91). She realizes, therefore, that Olivia, in asking her to come to the point, is not requesting that she leave, as Maria seems to think. Viola quickly asks Olivia to silence Maria: 'Some mollification for your giant, sweet lady' (204). Johnson provides a pertinent footnote: 'Ladies, in romance, are guarded by giants, who repel all improper or troublesome advances' (italics added). Olivia is not wise enough to take a hint and allows Viola to ask twice for a private audience, the second time with a suggestion.
of the seductive: 'What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead: to your ears, divinity; to any other's, profanation' (215-17). Olivia replies: 'We will hear this divinity', and accedes to Viola's request (218-19).

Olivia and Viola alone together, the latter soon gives the conversation an intimate turn: 'Good madam, let me see your face' (230). Olivia picks up the implication and comments: 'Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text; but we will draw the curtain'. Olivia waits for Viola's response. Viola looks at her face and says: 'Excellently done, if God did it all'. This is a little light bantering, and, of course, an incidental crack at a rival. Viola then gets down to business, praising Olivia's beauty in lavish terms (239-43). Leggatt describes the ensuing interaction perfectly, but misses Viola's underlying strategy: Olivia 'keeps her defences up with conventional anti-Petrarchan jokes. Viola will have none of this, and persists'. Not realizing quite how vulnerable Olivia is at the moment, Viola urges Orsino's suit, rather than hinting at her own love. When Olivia quickly shuts to hear more, Viola replies with the most awful Petrarchanisms, and Olivia quickly shuts her up. Viola now makes the decisive move:

If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suff ring, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it.

(264-67; italics added)

Breathless, Olivia responds: 'Why, what would you?' and then Viola, with lyric passions, describes how fervently she would love, in famous lines beginning, 'Make me a willow cabin at your gate'. We have evidence (II. ii. 19-21) that from this point on Olivia speaks 'in starts distractedly'. 'You might do much', she says, and inquires of Cesario's parentage. 'Above my fortunes', is his obliging reply (278), thus reassuring her that he might not be an altogether unsuitable match. Olivia, greatly moved, breaks off the conference, instructing Cesario to give her refusal to his master, but for himself to come again, ostensibly to report the duke's reaction. Viola gone, Olivia comments, more truly than she knows, that Cesario 'with an invisible and subtle stealth' has crept 'in at mine eyes' (297-98).

Among modern editions of the play, the New Cambridge quotes this passage approvingly, and the New Arden is in essential agreement; Kittredge, however, insists that Viola 'has not failed to understand Olivia's words and manner in their recent interview'. To be even more cynical about Viola's motives, we can say that the return of the ring, along with Olivia's request, are clear signs to Viola that her plot has worked. She is not greatly surprised, and has long ago concluded on the need for secrecy; hence, she replies to Malvolio with perfect composure. The accuracy of this interpretation, and my general approach to Viola's character, are most fully tested by the speech she gives after Malvolio's exit.

The Folio text follows:
I left no Ring with her: what meanes this Lady? 17
Fortune forbid my out-side have not charm’d her:
She made good view of me, indeed so much,
That me thought her eyes had lost her tongue, 20
For she did speake in starts distractedly.
She loves me sure, the cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger:
None of my Lords Ring? Why he sent her none;
I am the man, if it be so, as tis, 25
Poore Lady, she were better love a dreame:
Disguise, I see thou art a wickednesse,
Wherein the pregnant enemie does much.
How easie is it, for the proper false
In women s waxen hearts to set their formes: 30
Alas, O frailti e is the cause, not wee, 31
For such as we are made, if such we bee: 32
[Riverside text: 'Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we, (31)
For such as we are made of, such we be.' ] (32)
How will this fadge? My master loves her deerely,
And I (poore monster) fond asmuch on him:
And she (mistaken) seemes to dote on me: 35
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my maisters love:
As I am woman (now alas the day)
What thriftlesse sighes shall poore Olivia breath?
O time, thou must untangle this, not I, 40
It is too hard a knot for me t’unty.

Undoubtedly many actresses have, like Ellen Terry, depicted Viola as pleased when she realizes that Olivia
has fallen in love with her.26 I would go further, and call Viola's mood triumphant. However, as is her
practice, she does not admit her guilt outright, but lets those in the audience who will appreciate her irony. She
begins by pointing out that she has just concurred in a statement that is palpably untrue: in fact, she 'left no
Ring' with Olivia. Viola now asks the audience whether it is wondering, 'What meanes this Lady?' She gives
the answer in the following line. While in Elizabethan English 'not' frequently follows a verbal negation
without yielding a positive meaning, Viola is intentionally equivocal.
Her 'fortune' depends on her 'charming'
Olivia—and she has succeeded. Viola promptly exhibits the evidence supporting her conclusions, and
suggests that she has already drawn the necessary inferences (19-21). She ends with the confident assertion:
'She loves me sure' (22), and adds that Malvolio's message is a final incontrovertible piece of evidence
(22-24). We should not be misled by the apparent tentativeness of 'if it be so' for by finishing the line with 'as
tis', she contradicts her false modesty (25). Viola follows with one line of mock sympathy for Olivia (26), and
four of mock lament for the way evil flourishes in the world (27-30). In line 28, many editors from Johnson on
have identified the 'pregnant enemy' as the devil, but Luce, in the original Arden edition, provides an
alternative: 'This may be Satan, or any designing foe' (italics added).27 The editor further defines 'pregnant':
'resourceful, ever ready with wiles'. The enemy, then, can be Viola, working silently with 'fangs of malice'.
Rather than feeling sorrow on account of the evil in the world, she exults as one of those 'proper false' who
have found it 'easie' to seduce women (29-30).

The next two lines are invariably emended much as they are in the Riverside Shakespeare (see insert in the
Folio text above). The assumption is that Viola, as a woman, identifies with women, and excuses the fraility
commonly associated with their nature. However, in the preceding lines, Viola has identified not with other
women, but with the men who seduce them. Therefore, the Folio text is correct, although the emendations
undoubtedly catch what may be carelessly heard in the lines. In point of fact, Viola starts off with a sympathetic ‘alas’, and then promptly excuses the ‘frailtie’ of seducers. To round off her offense, she teasingly adds, ‘if such we be’, as if to deny all she has seemed to be admitting about herself.

The passage closes with Viola looking over the damage she had done, and portraying herself as a poor helpless female caught in a terrible web. The couplet embodies this sentiment epigrammatically. That Viola does not know how to ‘unty’ the knot is perfectly true. The wise, however, will conclude that Viola is already looking around her, and will do all in her power to ‘unty’, as she tied, the knot, for her advantage. Another Shakespearean heroine who cloaks herself in the garb of patient Griselde is Helena, in Shakespeare’s next comedy, All’s Well That Ends Well. Critics have been far more willing to see an element of calculation in her. We may think that, like Viola, even in soliloquy she is not candid, so that when she claims she is leaving France to oblige Bertram, she in fact has a new plan to claim her reluctant husband (H. ii. 99-129). When Helena next appears, waiting on a street in Florence where Bertram is soon to pass, we should ask whether chance or design has brought her to the right place at the right time. Let us use equal caution on Viola’s subsequent entrance, in scene iv.

When the duke enters, he draws Cesario to him, but his attention shifts in mid-line: ‘Now, good Cesario, but that piece of song, / That old and antique song we heard last night’ (2-3). Viola concludes from this interruption that she must compete with the Duke’s sentimental interest in music, and therefore, when the duke calls her to him again, and asks ‘How dost thou like this tune?’ she responds in an intensely lyrical vein (20-22). The duke, visibly moved, says ‘Thou dost speak masterly’, and becomes interested in Cesario’s love-life. It turns out that Cesario has loved one of the duke’s ‘favor’ (25), ‘complexion’ (26), and ‘years’ (28). But the duke either misses Cesario’s implications, or shies away from them. Perhaps he feels protective of Cesario, or perhaps he simply cannot help giving expert advice on love. He warns Cesario against taking a woman older than himself, and Viola, for the moment, is stymied.

After Feste’s song, she pulls out all the stops by inventing a famous narrative. She tells the Duke: ‘My father had a daughter lov’d a man / As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your lordship’ (107-09). The duke of course wants to know more, and Viola tells him that the girl ‘never told her love’ and ‘pin’d in thought’ (110, 112). The story deeply impresses the duke, and he asks breathlessly, ‘But died thy sister of her love, my boy?’ Viola now has her chance, and she thinks of taking it:

I am all the daughters of my father’s house,
And all the brothers too—and yet I know not.
Sir, shall I to this lady?

(120-22)

At the last moment, Viola decides against trusting the changeable duke, and quickly brings his attention back to the ‘suit’ at hand. She has resigned herself to further waiting.

Viola’s strategy with Olivia remains unchanged in two subsequent interviews, which can therefore be passed over quickly. Viola of course needs to do very little to precipitate Olivia’s outpourings, but that little she does. For example, in Act III, scene i, she greets Olivia in public with a stiff formal compliment, and then asks for a private interview, and gets it (84-85, 88-89, 92-93). Viola promptly introduces herself as Olivia’s ‘servant’ (97, 102). The language of courtly love is sufficient provocation for Olivia, who replies with an outpouring of emotion. Later in the Act, Cesario returns once again—indication of ‘his’ interest, Olivia presumes—and in the midst of his adamant denials, Olivia places a jewel with her picture around his neck—Cesario accepts the gift! (H. iv. 208-209). But Olivia is the least of Viola’s problems.
Critics have noticed that Viola does not control events in the latter acts of the play, although they have not been as quick to notice her ability to handle unexpected situations. The first crisis occurs when, after the interview mentioned at the end of the last paragraph, Sir Toby foments conflict by having Sir Andrew challenge Cesario to a duel. In these circumstances our strategist is not rendered entirely helpless. She knows herself too well to meet the male world with a pale imitation of its 'macho'. Instead, she frankly admits that 'I am one that had rather go with sir priest than sir knight' (III. iv. 270-71), and quickly puts her cunning to work. She tries to extricate herself, first working on Sir Toby, and then, when he goes to Sir Andrew, by approaching Fabian in like manner. Finally, when Antonio enters and diverts the attention of the others, she quietly talks Sir Andrew out of both the duel and his horse (321-24)!

When he identifies her as Sebastian and accuses her of lack of faith, Viola must shape a careful reply. If she repudiates Antonio sharply, she will provoke his anger, and also forego any chance that, should the occasion arise, he could be made her ally. On the other hand, to treat him kindly and settle his confusion would invite an immediate search for Sebastian, with unforeseeable consequences for herself at the duke's court. Viola's temporary solution is to give Antonio 'half her purse—so she claims, anyway (346-47)—but not to explain his confusion. After Antonio leaves, under arrest, she reflects on what has happened. Taken at her word, she is still in doubt as to whether her brother has survived: Prove true, imagination, O prove true' (376). But she may be far from ingenuous. Not only must the mistake in identity lead to the natural conclusion that her brother survives, but Antonio actually names 'Sebastian' (366) and recalls rescuing him (360). And Viola herself admits that she looks exactly like her brother for 'him I imitate' (383). Viola therefore passes off on whoever will listen an excuse for not seeking her brother, and for not giving real aid to his friend, Antonio. She insists upon waiting until she can make 'occasion mellow' (I. ii. 43).

Viola is not on stage in Act IV, but an event takes place which could have grave consequences for her. She has brilliantly succeeded in appearing to reject Olivia's advances, and she therefore need not fear direct communication between the Duke and Olivia. However, Olivia now comes upon Sebastian, takes him for Cesario, woos him with new success, and quickly marries him. Therefore Viola, unbeknownst to herself, has a new problem at the beginning of Act V, and, to make matters worse, the Duke has decided to go to Olivia's court himself. As he and Cesario arrive, Antonio is brought before the duke. Fortunately, Viola has already decided how to handle this eventuality, and immediately tells the duke that Antonio has been kind to her, but is mad (66-68). Luck is on her side because Antonio happens to say that he has kept Cesario company for the last 'three months . . . both day and night' (94, 96). The duke quickly adopts Viola's explanation, saying to Antonio: 'Thy words are madness' (98). At this moment, Olivia enters.

She naturally thinks Cesario is her husband, and though she has promised him to keep the marriage secret, she knows no restraint and throws him longing glances. Viola rebukes her in order to show the duke that she is loyal to him, but Orsino seems to have been harboring suspicions, and quickly concludes that Cesario has betrayed him. The duke expresses a cruel intention, and Viola seems to submit:

Duke. Come, boy, with me, my thoughts are ripe in mischief.
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

Viola. And I most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.

(129-33)

This has been called 'Viola's supreme moment of self-sacrifice', but her lines are susceptible to more than one interpretation. As always, she has her wits about her. She has heard the duke finally accept Olivia's
refusal: 'Live you the marble-breasted tyrant still' (124); and although Orsino seems to have turned his anger on Cesario, he has nevertheless inadvertently declared his love in the lines just quoted (see also 1.126). And so, Viola has given voice to concealed exuberance. The 'thousand deaths' for which she is 'apt', and which she will die 'willingly', are—sexual deaths. Viola once again shares her irony only with the audience; on stage she remains perfectly composed, for she has now to manage the dénouement.

In a moment, the situation actually appears to worsen. As Viola starts to follow Orsino off stage, all the while protesting her love for him, Olivia blurs out: 'Cesario, husband, stay' (143). Orsino turns to Cesario accusingly, and says: 'Her husband, sirrah?' Viola's response is knowing: 'No, my lord, not I' (145; italics added). All the parts of the puzzle are now clear to Viola, and she awaits the appearance of her twin brother. Sebastian enters. The duke speaks, and Antonio, and Olivia, but not Viola. Finally, an incredulous Sebastian turns to Cesario and remarks: 'I never had a brother . . . I had a sister' (226, 228). He goes on to inquire, 'What kin are you to me? / What countryman? What name? What parentage?' (230-31). Viola conceals from him her masculine disguise and instead contrives to perform a duet with her brother. Finally, at the emotional climax, she admits the deception.

Her delay in doing so is the most famous crux of the play. One critic has explained that Shakespeare wishes to freeze the action 'in the contemplation of a miracle'. Another that he is 'fumbling with the details of the . . . plot'. Still another that Shakespeare has created an 'intensely The moving' but obviously rical moment.32 Theatdeal best explanation is a good simpler than these. Viola's goal has been to win the duke. A hundred-odd lines back, in his allusion to Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* (117-19), Orsino revealed himself as an avid reader of romances. Therefore Viola has now seized 'occasion', as she promised she would, to fashion a sentimental and melodramtic reunion with her brother. Her calculation, as always, is accurate. The duke speaks up immediately:

I shall have share in this most happy wrack.
Boy, thou has said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.

(266-68)

He looks forward to a wedding 'when golden time convents' (382). Viola is to be Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen' (388). He will go on living life as in a romance, and Viola will rule Orsino—and a dukedom.

The significance of the foregoing argument for interpretation of *Twelfth Night* may now be briefly explored, although a full discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.33 That a generation of critics concerned with the theme of appearance and reality in Shakespeare should nevertheless have failed to penetrate Viola's disguise indicates that we still have a great deal to learn about the play. Shakespeare himself is very nearly explicit about the kind of discernment needed. In Act I, scene v, while Feste and Maria are conversing together, he suddenly says to her: 'If Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of flesh as any in Illyria' (27-28). This comment perfectly explains Maria's efforts to reform Sir Toby in an earlier scene, and the truth of Feste's observation is confirmed by Maria's quick effort to hush him. Feste is unromantic, or realistic, call it 'what you will' about Maria's activity. In another scene, Feste looks Viola over, observes that she scurries as quickly as he does between Orsino's court and Olivia's, and, after begging money of Viola, seems to suggest that she is as much a 'beggar' as he is (HI. i. 54-55). It is really Maria and Viola who have most in common, because Feste is of a divided mind about currying favor. Maria and Viola both use their 'wit' to execute a careful plot; they channel their energies in the service of men of superior social rank and inferior abilities. Both are patient, and both prevail. We might conclude, therefore, by saying that in a hierarchical social system, or in any social system, for that matter, there is competition for rewards. Fools like Malvolio and Sir Andrew reveal their motives and fall on their faces; but an intricate web of deception is the norm, and he who would understand, must look beneath the glitter in a romantic comedy like *Twelfth Night*. 
Notes


8 Ibid. p. 365.

9 Ibid. p. 312.


11 James Boswell, The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare (London, 1821), XI, 347 (n. 2); also in Furness, I. ii. 45-47n.


13 James Spedding, Fraser's Magazine, August 1865; quoted in Furness, I. ii. 59n.

14 Barber, p. 241; The New Arden Twelfth Night, eds. J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975), p. lxiii. Both Barber and Spedding (n. 13) give Viola an aristocratic birth. I believe that there is no evidence in the play justifying this assumption, and certainly no evidence that in plotting for a duke she is not aspiring beyond her class. In Shakespeare's London theatre, Viola's accent would have given the audience a precise indication of her social rank (unless she spoke with an ambiguous foreign accent). All Shakespeare criticism suffers from the absence of a direct dramatic tradition surviving from the dramatist's day; we should
not make matters worse by inventing biographies out of whole cloth.

15 Spedding, in Furness, I. ii. 59n.


18 See I. ii. 36-41 and 45; I. iv. 18-20.

19 At Act III, scene i. lines 123-25, Viola first tells Olivia that she pities her, and when Olivia answers 'That's a degree to love', Viola's revealing comment is 'No, not a grize; for 'tis a vulgar proof/That very oft we pity enemies' (italics added). Olivia, naturally, does not get the point, but we should.

20 *Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 313.

21 Leggatt, p. 233.

22 In two subsequent passages, Olivia uses language which can be taken to suggest that she has an unconscious suspicion of what Viola is up to. Olivia blames Viola in the following lines: 'Have you not set mine honor at the stake, / And baited it with all th' unmuzzled thoughts / That tyrannous heart can think?' (III. i. 118-20). Later still, Olivia tells Viola that 'A fiend like thee might bear my soul to hell' (III. iv. 217).

23 Spedding in Furness, II. ii. 14n.


25 Our interpretation of Viola's character will survive speculation (were it to occur) concerning her motive for not accepting the ring, and then, when Malvolio has thrown it on the ground, for leaving it there while he is present. No one will ever be able to say that Viola took the gift, but Olivia can think that Viola accepted it covertly. As we will see, Olivia subsequently places a jewel on Viola (III. iv. 208-09), and later still (IV. ii. 2), we learn that she has given a 'pearl' to Sebastian, whom she mistakes for Cesario.

26 See Furness, II. ii. 27n and pp. 393-94. This is also the interpretation given to the passage by Anne Swift in a recent production of the play at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California.


29 Bertrand Evans, in *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1960) comes to similar conclusions about Viola's discoveries, but his assessment of her motives is entirely different, pp. 140-43. Viola also compromises her moral standing by allowing the captain she promised to help to remain in jail (V. i. 274-77).
New Arden *Twelfth Night*, p. lxxvi. See also Porter Williams, Jr, in Palmer, p. 184: 'Comedy here touches for a fleeting moment the pathos of tragedy'.

Sexual puns on 'death' and 'will' are too common to need documentation. Partridge, in *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (New York: Dutton, 1969), gives instances where 'apt' means 'sexually apt'; see also *Twelfth Night*, I. v. 26-28.


I am presently completing a book with a chapter on *Twelfth Night*.

**René Girard (essay date 1990)**


*[In the essay below, Girard evaluates Orsino's and Olivia's notions of human love and characterizes both characters as pseudo-narcissists. The critic maintains that in their twin obsessions with mimetic desire, they are identical personalities, each pursuing an inaccessible object and thus avoiding the disenchantment that must occur when desire is satisfied.]*

Orsino and Olivia are complex and refined characters. The duke has artistic and intellectual pretensions; before the curtain is raised, at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, his musicians are playing a piece of music which Orsino greatly enjoys and, when it is over, he wants to hear it again. "Give me excess of it," he says:

\[
\text{that surfeiting,} \\
\text{The appetite may sicken, and so die.}
\]

Once again, the music is heard and Orsino does indeed find it less beautiful than the first time. In a single instant, as he himself had predicted, his appe-tite has sickened and died:

\[
\text{Enough, no more,} \\
\text{'Tis not sweet now as it was before.}
\]

"Surfeiting" suggests our modern nausea, a compulsive disgust, a revulsion so extreme and definitive that the word is a little shocking in the context of art. If we read on, however, we soon find that Orsino is not exclusively interested in esthetics. In the experience he describes, the erotic life looms larger than the arts. The "spirit of love" dies in the embrace of its objects, regardless of their nature:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,} \\
\text{That notwithstanding thy capacity} \\
\text{Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,} \\
\text{Of what validity and pitch soe'er,} \\
\text{But falls into abatement and low price} \\
\text{Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy} \\
\text{That it alone is high fantastical.}
\end{align*}
\]

(1.1.1015)
It is traditional to compare the course of desire with physical appetite and its satiety. But a healthy individual, even when no longer hungry, does not find good food disgusting, unless, of course, he abuses it. Orsino's experience resembles indigestion and Anne Barton rightly observes: "This love is a kind of glutton that devours dainties only to vomit them up."¹

The ups and downs of normal hunger are less extreme than what Orsino describes. His language evokes a pathological version of the natural process. The slant of the duke's metaphor suggests a human nature wounded by original sin.

This man who says that desire never outlives possession is nevertheless in love. During the rest of the play, he never utters more than two sentences in a row without mentioning Olivia, but Olivia is inexplicably absent from his speech on the spirit of love. Olivia is the one permanent goal, the only fixed point in an existence that would be empty and incoherent without her. Orsino's sense of self visibly depends on the unflagging intensity of his desire for Olivia. But he argues that there is no such thing as an unflagging desire once its object is won. If Olivia belonged to the duke, would she lose her charm as quickly as the piece of music? The question never comes up explicitly.

One of the duke's attendants, Curio, interrupts his meditation on desire:

   Will you go hunt, my lord?

   DUKE. What, Curio?

   CUR. The hart.

   DUKE. Why, so I do, the noblest that I have.
   O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
   Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
   That instant what I turn'd into a hart,
   And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
   E'er since pursue me.

   (I.i. 16-22)

As soon as the conversation shifts away from desire, the duke remembers Olivia. It takes a hackneyed pun to remind him of his beloved. Orsino's passion seems more at ease among literary clichés than in the context of a serious debate about the life and death of desire.

Orsino's first tirade on the subject is part of a musical prelude to the whole play, but it is more than a decorative hors-d'oeuvre; it is essential to our understanding of the comedy. It must be interpreted in the light of what follows; what it leaves unsaid is just as important as what it actually says.

Like many disillusioned romantics, Orsino speaks cynically about desire in general but he will go on desiring romantically until the end of his life. His cynicism about the past is not really independent from his current passion but the connection is paradoxical and Orsino himself never makes it completely explicit. We must rely on indirect clues that Shakespeare provides for this very purpose; we can and we must uncover the truth that his character never fully acknowledges.

Before we have time to forget Orsino's first speech, he gives the second, so different from the first in some ways that it seems to demand a different author, and yet so similar in other ways that the author cannot fail to be the same:
DUKE. There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.

Alas, their love may be called appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt,
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

(II.iv.93-103)

According to this second speech, the only desires afflicted with the infirmities earlier described by Orsino as his own are feminine desires in general and those of Olivia in particular. Only women "suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt." To make the contradiction even more blatant, Orsino suggests that these same infirmities are uncharacteristic of men and especially of himself. He opposes the weakness and fickleness of feminine desire to the undying strength of his virile desire for Olivia.

Once again, desire is as hungry as the sea and it can "digest" whatever it devours. The metaphor sounds just as ominous as the first time; in the first tirade, however, the maritime digestion expressed a pathetic contrast between the before and the after of all desires, their apparent inexhaustibility before possession is achieved, their instant death as soon as it is achieved. This time, there is no after, no surfeit for Orsino himself, and we can easily understand why: the passion for Olivia is an eternal before.

Olivia must be the first woman who ever had the upper hand with Orsino, and Orsino realizes that she has for him the eyes that he himself has always had for the other women in his life, the women that he ruthlessly discarded, no doubt, after possessing them.

Whenever Orsino occupies in relation to women the position that Olivia now occupies in relation to him, he feels the same "surfeit" that he now detects in her. He reacts in the very manner that he denounces as specifically feminine when it is her reaction to him personally. The phenomenon is the same but its ethical connotation has shifted from neutral in the case of Orsino to negative in the case of Olivia and of women in general.

To Olivia the story of Orsino's love sounds like a piece of music repeated too many times. Orsino is the one, this time, who has fallen into "abatement and low price." Olivia is sincerely bored with his sempiternal passion. Who wants to make love to an already digested man? It would be a misunderstanding to suppose that Orsino and Olivia have been physically intimate and that he disappointed her as a lover. Orsino is the defeated partner in a battle of pseudo-narcissism. It just happened that Olivia did not respond to his advances and this is how her victory was achieved. This is the only way in which a woman can durably fascinate such a man as Orsino. Were Orsino in Olivia's place, he would feel and behave with her exactly as she now feels and behaves with him. If she gave up the type of superiority they both crave in their relations with the other sex, immediately, he would cease to love her. At a deeper level, Orsino realizes that he and Olivia are very much alike. The spectacular disharmony between them does not stem from a conflict of personalities or from some other intrinsic difference but from the very reverse, an almost perfect identity. When Olivia entered his life, Orsino for the first time lost a mimetic and metaphysical battle that he had always won with everyone else.
Shakespeare wants us to compare the two speeches of Orsino; proof of this lies in the conclusion of the second one: "Make no compare . . ." When we hear this kind of warning from such a man, we should know that a comparison is in order.

Even very intelligent people can be so obsessed with their mimetic rivals that they talk like Orsino on occasions when it would be better for them to keep silent. We always marvel at the naive compulsion that forces these people to divulge the very truth they are trying to hide, but we ourselves will make the same mistake at the first opportunity.

All individuals beset by mimetic desire are easily fooled into believing that the entire world shares their obsession with their current rival. Like all people caught in a mimetic spiral, Orsino wants to convince himself that he is enormously different from his "beloved enemy," whereas in reality there is no difference, and something in him obscurely knows this. The anti-Olivia "propaganda" of the second speech is really an extrapolation of the self-knowledge demonstrated in the first speech.

Orsino thinks that he understands Olivia's desire and he certainly does, but not because of what he says, not because Olivia is one more exemplar of the archetypal woman whom all frustrated men ritually execrate. The sexist cliché is really a mask for a science of desire that does not want to acknowledge its real source. Orsino recognizes in Olivia the successful pseudo-narcissist that he used to be but is no longer, because of Olivia.

Orsino rightly interprets his relationship to this particular woman as a reversal of his habitual experience with the other sex. His banal anti-feminism is an effort to hide the true nature of this reversal and the origin of his insight into Olivia.

The idea that the desire of women for men can be weakened by a specifically feminine self-centeredness has always been popular with men. Men still love to portray as narcissistic in an absolute and non-mimetic sense the women who spurn their sexual advances. Freud gave a new lease on life to that myth with his definition of "narcissism" as a genuine self-centeredness that would be primarily feminine. Freud claimed that he had diagnosed a specifically "feminine" inability to respond to the real "object-love" of genuinely masculine men. But, quite significantly, the genuinely masculine men have a regrettable penchant for squandering their precious object-love on the women who deserve it least, narcissistic women, of course.

This is exactly Orsino's illusion; his second speech seems patterned on Freud's *Introduction to Narcissism* and as soon as we compare the two speeches, the radical critique that Shakespeare intended emerges. When placed side by side, the two speeches suggest a deconstruction of Elizabethan self-love that really amounts to a deconstruction of the Freudian concept *avant la lettre*. The words change and the myth of a specifically feminine self-centeredness remains.

The metaphoric continuity of the two speeches indicates that Orsino projects upon Olivia his own experience of the dominant erotic position, the position that Olivia now occupies with him. The fact that his insight is projective does not mean that it is worthless. Our perspicacity in such matters is always rooted in self-criticism; mimetic desire is the same in all human beings, regardless of age, gender, race, culture, etc.

Being projected upon its own mimetic replica, Orsino's insight into himself (the first speech) generates some real knowledge of Olivia's behavior (the second speech), but the duke cannot acknowledge its source without acknowledging his kinship with his mimetic **double**, thus undermining his resentment against an attitude that he, himself, would have adopted with Olivia, had the opportunity presented itself.

**Mimetic doubles** are sharp-sighted in regard to one another but their vision is distorted by the need they all feel to abolish the reciprocity in which their perspicacity is rooted. They must indignantly deny that they have anything in common with their rivals and yet, the only possible basis for their remarkable "psychological
acumen” is this mimetic desire that divides them *because they share it*:

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

(Romans 2: 1)

Orsino slanders women not because he truly believes in the masculine superiority that he claims but because he feels inferior as the mimetic *double* whose desire is enslaved by the successful narcissism of his partner. The indifference that he disparages as feminine insubstantiality is really the source of the *metaphysical* prestige that Olivia would not enjoy for very long in his eyes, if she yielded to his desire.

Like all romantic thinkers, Orsino sees desire as an object/subject relationship exclusively; he systematically short-circuits the third dimension, the mimetic model/obstacle/rival that makes everything intelligible. This is an especially tempting illusion in cases of pseudo-narcissism, when all roles are played by the same individual. To Orsino, Olivia is simultaneously object, model, obstacle, and rival.

The view of desire as a subject/object relation is false even in the case of art, which esthetes love to bring up because it seems to prove the existence of the solipsistic desire in which they want to believe. In reality, the most powerful component of esthetic emotion is a godlike *otherness* in the admired work, a quality that too much familiarity may weaken or even destroy, as witnessed by the experiment of Orsino, the two successive performances of the same musical piece.

Like all divinities, beauty eludes the impurity of human contact and the illusion of unmediated desire is shattered. If this desire were truly unmediated, it would not be diminished by the continuous enjoyment of its object; it would survive the ordeal of possession and fulfillment would not turn to ashes. Unlike the romantics, Shakespeare rejects the theatrics of esthetic fetichism and this is part of his greatness.

The Orsino of the second speech is a frustrated lover dominated by the voice of his frustrated desire. The contradiction of the two speeches verifies the law that Orsino himself has formulated in the first: desire *seems* eternal and inexhaustible as long as it remains unsatisfied, and not one minute longer. The second speech is consistently inconsistent with the first because it is the voice of famished desire, the desire for Olivia, whereas the first is the voice of surfeit. From Olivia's standpoint, to surrender to Orsino's desire would be a bad idea.

The language and behavior of Orsino suggest that he is aware, more or less, of his own pseudo-narcissism and of everything we have just said about him. In spite of his own involvement, he is as lucid about it as Rosalind in *As You Like It*; he really understands what only outside observers understood in the earlier comedies. He embodies a more "advanced" version of the pseudo-narcissistic configuration.

He knows very well that his daily humiliations at the hands of Olivia are self-defeating. If he really wanted to seduce this woman, he would resort to the strategy outlined by Rosalind, feigned indifference, but he never does. What is the reason for Orsino's theatrically "romantic" behavior?

The duke knows that no desired object can fall into his hands and retain its appeal for very long. Only a victorious rival can invigorate desire; desire is irrevocably self-defeating. The only radical solution to its endless tyranny is total renunciation.

This policy is what all great religions recommend, all great ethical systems, all traditional wisdom. It is Hamlet's advice to Ophelia: *get thee to a nunnery*. Had she followed it, she would not have died the wretched death that she did.
Fortunately for desire, a rational loophole exists which enables the crafty spirit of love not to draw the correct lesson from its perpetual failures. Experience teaches us the unsatisfactory nature of all objects that can be possessed; it has nothing to say, strictly speaking, about objects that cannot be possessed. If we are punctiliously experimental about this matter, we can always claim that, as long as we do not possess these objects, we do not have enough information to dismiss them out of hand.

On the basis of a myopically interpreted experience, the absurdity of desire can never be demonstrated satisfactorily. A sophistic abuse of methodical doubt permits desire to reason as follows: "Since all objects that can be possessed prove valueless, I will renounce them once and for all in favor of those objects that cannot be possessed."

In *Twelfth Night*, this solution has a name, Olivia. She seems so impregnable that the duke can sincerely lament the fragility of all desire and yet remain supremely confident in the eternal duration of his desire for her.

The ocean of indifference that engulfs all other desires will never devour this particular one, Orsino thinks, for the very reason that it will never be satisfied. Olivia will remain forever inaccessible, not to Orsino alone but to all men. This creed remains obscure and Orsino avoids facing and formulating it explicitly, but it governs his life.

For the man who proclaims the bankruptcy of all desires, it still makes sense to desire Olivia. Orsino seems "irrational" as long as his real priority remains invisible. The real priority is not pleasure but desire at any price.

It is wrong to assume that, at all stages in its history, desire is seeking positive rewards. This was true perhaps in the initial phases, the ones portrayed in the early comedies. Orsino has reached a stage when, under the pressure of perpetual disenchantment, desire itself moves beyond the pleasure principle. Desire gives up pleasure in order to preserve itself as desire. Orsino is the first but not the last example of this desperate strategy.

The duke's desire for Olivia arises from the depth of his disenchantment and not in spite of it. A "rational" connection exists, but of such a nature that Orsino will never make it explicit, even to himself; we must deduce it from our comparison of the two speeches. In spite of his cynicism, Orsino is a man with a vast capacity for self-delusion.

To say that desire cannot survive the model's defeat is the same as saying that it cannot survive its own victory. The more desire learns about its own operation, the more intractable the dilemma becomes. Since desire dies of its own fulfillment, the road to eternal desire can only lie in the selection of a forever inaccessible object.

Orsino is the embodiment of this desire. The mimetic process takes time to unfold and, on this "historical" trajectory, Orsino belongs to a phase posterior to that of previous Shakespearean heroes. The chronological order of the comedies corresponds to a diachronic development of desire that leads from bad to worse. Orsino is not the end of the process, but he is not far from it.

His "hopeless" passion, I suggested, is a desperate move in a strategy of desire itself, a strategy of self-preservation. This is certainly true and yet a little misleading at the same time because this strategy demands no calculation, no planning of any sort and, in a sense, it does not deserve the name; it results from the normal drift of desire. All it takes to get there is a little too much success with women and then, all of a sudden, a little failure, the chance encounter of an Olivia. The quest for the perfect passion is hardly distinguishable from what happens to a blasé consumerist if and when he finally stumbles upon the forever
indigestible dish, the unconquerable object, the only object to which he can become durably attached.

By refusing to love him, Olivia renders a great service to the duke; she gives stability to his life. Deep down, the duke feels rather lucky; he is eager to perpetuate his sentimental deadlock with Olivia. When he and she finally come face to face in Act 5, the only words these strange accomplices exchange sound like a discreet acknowledgment of their negative partnership:

DUKE. Still so cruel?

OLIVIA. Still so constant, lord?

(v.i.110-11)

Orsino is confident that he can keep Olivia cruel forever. Since his desire is the model for her self-love, all he has to do, he thinks, to freeze the situation permanently in his favor, is to keep desiring her: she will keep rejecting not only him but all possible lovers; she will be the eternal prisoner of her monumental self-love, Orsino's personal gift to her. Even though he has fallen into "abatement and low price," Orsino feels that his prestige as a handsome young man and as a duke makes him superior to all potential suitors, so that Olivia will be forced to keep her part of the bargain; what she refuses to him she will never grant to any other man.

Orsino makes the usual mistake of "enslaved narcissists"; he has too much faith in the objective strength of his idol. This mistake is fatal. When he learns that Olivia has already betrayed him, he flies into a dreadful rage. Olivia is in love, and with whom? With Orsino's own ambassador! The irony of this is that, if something besides Olivia's narcissism is responsible for her falling in love, it is Orsino's behavior. He dispatched Cesario to his beloved because of the young man's personal charm, hoping that it would operate on Olivia as it did on him, and it certainly has; the duke's expectations are fulfilled beyond his wildest dream.

This plot is one more variation, of course, on the great Shakespearean theme of self-defeating mimetic lovers, who advertise the charms of their lovers to their rivals and the charms of their rivals to their lovers. The refined and subtle Orsino belongs to the same mimetic family as Valentine and Collatine. For a while, after he learns what has happened, he turns into a raving maniac. Olivia has fallen in love through Orsino's own mediation.

Notes


John Astington (essay date 1994)


[In the following essay, Astington explores the characterization of Malvolio in terms of the tension between paganism, Puritanism, and traditional Christian viewpoints in Twelfth Night. The critic compares Malvolio's humiliation to the mockery, exposure, and punishment of lust that was frequently a focus of traditional English folk festivals.]
... a good practise in it to make the steward beleue his Lady widdowe was in Loue with him by counterfayting a left'

John Manningham

He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

1 Corinthians, 7, 32-3

Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

1 Timothy, 5, 5-6

Fashionably enough, the central farcical scene of Twelfth Night concerns an act of reading. What Malvolio reads and how he reads it have significant connections both with other events in the play, and with the wider world of seventeenth-century English society. The letter he finds invites him to join the festive rituals of love—to disguise himself, to smile, and to become a wooer, on the expectation of ending the revelling with epithalamium and marriage. This model for human conduct—the argument of romantic comedy—is in fact endorsed by a secondary text hidden within the first, as we shall see. But Malvolio, reading the words eagerly in the light of his predisposition, sees no subtleties, let alone the gaping trap. The festival in which he has already begun to take part is not the affirmative and sustaining one he imagines, but a punitive, defaming, mocking ritual aimed at him, his pride, pretensions, and authority. His reading—or misreading—marks his entry to a festive world, and festivals, like texts, are ambiguous. Particularly his treatment at the hands of the plotters forms a suggestive inverse ritual to set against those patterns which are traced by the energies of misplaced and baffled erotic desire, eventually untangled and fulfilled.

In the last scene of the play Feste finally delivers Malvolio's letter, excusing himself with the observation that 'madman's epistles are no gospels'. One could say that Malvolio's mistake has been to fall into the trap of taking a mad epistle for gospel, but here Olivia is not to be diverted by Feste's attempt to superimpose a theatrical style on plain sense: Orsino's recognition that 'This savours not much of distraction' echoes her own. Earlier in the play, Toby has pre-empted another plain reader, Viola, by rewriting Sir Andrew's challenge and by avoiding committing it to paper: 'this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will breed no terror in the youth. He will find it comes from a clodpoll. In the course of the play we have, then, two epistles which are gospels, in so far as their sense, or lack of it, is revealed in their style, and one which is dressed as a dish of poison, devilish and heretical.

Malvolio, if he is indeed a 'kind of puritan', should have had some experience in the interpretation of difficult or ambiguous writings, but he capitulates so absolutely to the apparent sense of a text that even Maria is amazed at his extreme folly: 'Yon gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado, for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness.' Something has been wrong, clearly, with Malvolio's Puritan discipline, if he can fall so easily for 'some obscure epistles of love', taking the shadow for the substance in such an unguarded manner. In doing so, of course, he is unconsciously aping his betters, and it is the deluded Olivia who is readiest to understand and forgive him, pointedly comparing his case with hers twice in the play. Not that she is aware of her own delusion, however. She confidently assumes she is an accomplished reader of texts, and of bodies as texts, when she dismisses the first chapter of Orsino's heart, which Viola proposes as her gospel: 'O, I have read it. It
is heresy.

The revenge of foolery and holiday on Malvolio is motivated by his repressive and humourless sense of order, and by his self-conceit, but the terms of his humiliation are very deliberately chosen: not only is he made to transgress class barriers, but he is translated into a lover, about which role there is something deeply and fundamentally inappropriate. Malvolio's initial rule over the celibate, mourning household of Olivia is sterile and deathly. Sad and civil, he is customarily dressed in suits of solemn black, and he marks himself all too clearly as an enemy to the life of comic energy: his first line in the play invokes the pangs of death. Olivia's own brooding on death, however affected it may be, aligns her sympathetically with Malvolio's gloomy order: the entirely imaginary affection that Maria invents has at least a germ of plausibility about it. But Malvolio is valued by Olivia as a servant precisely because he appears to be passionless, 'Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow', a defender not only of wit, manners, and honesty, but of honesty in its sexual sense, a symbolic guardian at Olivia's gates. As a classically constructed blocking character, Malvolio inamorato is punished by the passion he apparently denies.

By the beginning of the box-tree scene, the treasons have already been planted in his mind, which is running on marriage: 'Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state—. . . Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown, having come from a day-bed where I have left Olivia sleeping.' Dreams of power and luxury, therefore, accompany the relatively sober, yet preposterous 'married to her'; indeed the fantasy of high social rank runs slightly ahead of dreams of sexual indulgence. Married in his mind, he encounters the fateful epistle, the very letters of which drip with concupiscence. The style of the text he reads is a clever mixture of obliquity and directness, fustian riddles, grandiloquence, and minor rhetorical flourishes with a rather dated air. The prose begins with a clear warning—'If this fall into thy hand, revolve'—and immediately passes to an apparently clear statement—'In my stars I am above thee'—followed by a fugai development on the theme of greatness, which Malvolio is naturally disposed to hear with pleasure. Within the famous tripartite clause, thrice repeated in the course of the play, there lurks, perhaps, another warning for the truly virtuous. That is to say that the construction of this part of the epistle is remarkably close to gospel. In the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St Matthew, Christ has been drawn by the Pharisees into a discussion of divorce and marriage. The complexities of morality and law lead the disciples to think that perhaps 'it is not good to marry'. In the King James Bible, Christ replies as follows:

11 But hee said vnto them, All men cannot receiue this saying saue they to whom it is giuen.

12 For there are some Eunuches, which were so borne from their mothers wombe: and there are some Eunuches, which were made Eunuches of men: and there be Eunuches, which haue made themselues Eunuches for the kingdome of heauens sake. He that is able to receiue it, let him receiue it.

Christ's words, he twice warns, are not to be understood by everyone, and the terms of his analogy are in many respects puzzling, but the evident centre of his meaning is that true greatness is not of this world, and that sexuality may be a bar to finding it. If Maria has intended this gospel text to serve as an allusive reflection beneath the surface of her epistle, the sense of the phrases begins to shimmer with opposites and distinctions: physical loss and spiritual gain, greatness and littleness (deficiency), fertility and sterility.

Malvolio has been offered an oblique warning about the futility of his marriage, if not a veiled insult, but fails to catch either. He would not, however, have known the gospel in the Authorized Version, and any kind of Puritan would have been most likely to be familiar with the Geneva Bible. The 1560 text translates the crucial verse in Matthew in a slightly different way:

For there are some chaste, which were so borne of (their) mothers bellie: and there be some chaste, which be made chaste by men: and there be some chaste, which haue made them
selues chaste for the kingdome of heauen.\textsuperscript{2}

The effect of 'chaste' is a good deal blander, and implies choice rather than compulsion or accident, although the second clause becomes puzzling in this respect. But the marginal glosses, a chief feature of the Calvinist bibles, leave the reader in no doubt over the sense in the first instance: 'the worde signifieth (gelded) and they were so made because they shuld, kepe the chambers of noble women: for they were judged chaste.' Malvolio, keeper of the chamber to Olivia, certainly wishes to be judged chaste, but is far from deeming himself unable to marry, from recognizing his own incapacity. The gloss on those that make themselves chaste, or who achieve chasteness, might we say, explains the phrase as a positive effect of grace, and of an effort of free will rather than negative self-abnegation or mutilation: Christ's phrase refers to those 'Which haue the gift of cotinece, & vse it to serue God with more free libertie.' And perhaps because the connection between chastity and godliness has an unfortunately Papist slant, the final sentence of the verse, Christ's second caveat, receives the following gloss: 'This gift is not commune for all men, but is verie rare, and give to fewe: therefore men may not rashly absteine from marriage.' The Puritan reading of the text, finally, is to endorse the argument of comedy. This is made particularly clear in Calvin's own commentary on these verses. Speaking of the disciples' uncertainty, he writes, perhaps rather surprisingly:

But why do they not think on their side how hard was the bondage of their wives? Simply because they are thinking only of themselves and their own convenience and are not motivated by the mind of the flesh that they forget others and want only themselves to be considered. Their ungodly ingratitude betrays itself that they reject this wonderful gift of God out of fear of one inconvenience or out of boredom. According to them it would be better to flee marriage altogether than to tie oneself to a perpetual bond of fellowship. But if God instituted marriage for the common welfare of the human race, it is not to be rejected because it carries with it some things which are less agreeable.\textsuperscript{3}

The world must be peopled, and the will of God followed. Malvolio may therefore have some sense of the buried text, but without necessarily reading it as being directed against marriage; God, or 'Jove', as he may have more innocously become by the time of the Folio text, seems to be overseeing the whole affair, including the interpretative spirit with which the sense of the words is received. Malvolio's reading of the letter, which he imagines to be free of 'imagination', could therefore be said to be a parody of the tendency of Puritan interpretation to read ambiguous texts in the direction of a theological programme, or to invoke the will of God to endorse personal predilections.

Godliness may render a man unfit for marriage, but the Geneva glosses also warn that 'Some by nature are vnable to marie, and some by arte'; 'The worde Eunuche is a generali word, and hath diuers kindes under it, as gelded men and bursten men.' By extension, one might say that the metaphoric application of physiological circumstances, Christ's starting point, hath divers kinds under it.\textsuperscript{4} Malvolio's spiritual sterility renders him unfit for comic marriage, whatever his physical potency may be. More importantly to the rituals of comedy, the gulling which is initiated in the box-tree scene is an extended episode of humiliation. Induced to declare himself no eunuch by nature, Malvolio then puts himself at risk of being made one by art. His self-exposure, capture, imprisonment, and binding—the entire course of his 'bafflement'—is not only the well-recognized expulsion of repressive order from festival and holiday, but an act of sexual degradation—a displaced gelding, through which Malvolio is emasculated by the laughter of the sexually united pairs:

Maria writ
The letter, at Sir Toby's great importance,
In recompense whereof he hath married her.

(\textit{Twelfth Night}, 5.1.359-61)
Yet however absurd the holy duty of marriage may seem in Malvolio's case—and it is not so much that the world has no need of more Malvolios as that he is contemplating marriage with the wrong person and for entirely the wrong reasons—it is extremely important to the play as a whole. 'If anyone imagines', says Calvin, 'that it is to his advantage to be without a wife and so without further consideration decides to be celibate, he is very much in error. For God, who declared that it was good that the woman should be the help meet for the man, will exact punishment for contempt of his ordinance. Men arrogate too much to themselves when they try The to exempt themselves heavenly calling, from their punishsolemnity of God's ment may be out of place in a comedy, as may the name of God itself, but the sense of 'heavenly calling' in sexual union is precisely in key with the magical happiness towards which the romantic comedies move. Resistance against this movement, or surprised acquiescence in it, is generally expressed with reference to purely natural or pagan forces, as when Viola speaks to Olivia about her beauty.

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.

(1.5.230-2)

Or when, at the end of the same scene, Olivia gives in to something beyond her own power to resist:

Fate, show thy force. Our selves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be; and be this so.

(1.5.300-1)

It is Olivia who most resists her obligation to marry by taking on a vow to what she imagines are higher things. Her withdrawal from the world is cast in the language of religious observance.

. . . like a cloistress she will veilèd walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine—

(1.1.27-9)

But the form of the observance, as Feste points out, is really without a religious object, an empty fetish like that of abjuring the sight and company of men, 'as if celibacy contained some meritorious service—just as the Papists imagine it is an angelic state. But all Christ intended', Calvin says of making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake, 'was that the unmarried should set the aim before them of being more ready for the exercises of religion if they are freed from all cares. It is foolish to imagine that celibacy is a virtue, for this is no more pleasing to God in itself than fasting is, nor does it deserve to be reckoned among the duties required of us.' The 'divinity' the disguised Viola brings to Olivia shows her the vanity of withdrawing from the world. False and true divinity continue to pursue each other, with ironic effect, throughout the play. Immediately following the scene in which a false priest catechizes the desperate Malvolio, Olivia marries the dream she has loved since the fifth scene of Act I.

If you mean well
Now go with me, and with this holy man,
Into the chantry by. There before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace.

(4.3.22-8)

The wonderful gift of God is celebrated in a religious ceremony which the seemingly arbitrary forces of nature, imagination, and sheer chance have helped bring about. The 'peace' Olivia looks forward to is precisely what has eluded Malvolio at the end of the play—but his symbolic and structural roles are very different from hers.

Viola's loss of a brother does not lead her to a cloistered withdrawal from the world, but she does pursue concealment, and specifically proposes a disguise which will remove her from the responsibilities of sexuality: 'Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.' She makes herself a eunuch not for the kingdom of heaven's sake but to gain some advantage over the forces of time and occasion, both of which eventually give her the peace they give Olivia. The exotic nature of Viola's proposed role, however, is unlikely to render her unobtrusive: in a Christian climate the eunuch was both freakish and foreign, specifically Turkish, as the Captain recognizes in his acknowledgment of Viola's request. Eunuchs might be fascinating in themselves as human types, but certainly by virtue of being involved in the mythologized fantasy world of Turkish sexuality. No more is made of the oddity of Viola's disguise—she is no Castrucchio, as Orsino's Illyria is not Volpone's Venice—but she retains a troublingly provocative physical presence, constantly drawing attention to her appearance from Orsino, Malvolio, Feste, and chiefly from Olivia. Disguise, and hence denial of sexual identity in her case, is a 'wickedness' as much as it is creative and liberating. It liberates, in fact, only for so long, and time first draws the knot of confusions tighter before untangling it. Olivia's claim on her as a husband, which she is able to corroborate with priestly authority, threatens first Viola's death and then the loss of the man she loves. So, once the appearance of Sebastian has begun to resolve the paradoxes, we have Viola's insistence, echoed by Orsino, that she resume her own clothes: 'Do not embrace me' she tells her brother, and the prohibition is implicitly extended to her future husband. As she is a man—or a eunuch—she is not ready to give herself to anyone.

Viola's superfluous disguise in Act 5 is matched by that of the humiliated Malvolio, still wearing the ludicrous costume he has been gulled into assuming by his reading of the letter—point devise, the very man. The 'notable shame' he has undergone has included his parading in the clothes and demeanour of an aspiring lover—a sexual role quite out of keeping with his peevish, repressed, sterile self-regard. One of the roles of festival customs, modern social historians agree, was to enforce communal order as much as temporarily to subvert it. David Underdown has described the clash in seventeenth-century English society between the cohesive function of festival and the godly order of those with a new vision of and programme for social organization:

The division in the English body politic which erupted in civil war in 1642 can be traced in part to the earlier emergence of two quite different constellations of social, political, and cultural forces, involving diametrically opposite responses to the problems of the time. On the one side stood those who put their trust in the traditional conception of the harmonious, vertically integrated society—a society in which the old bonds of paternalism, deference, and good neighbourliness were expressed in familiar religious and communal rituals—and wished to strengthen and preserve it. On the other stood those—mostly among the gentry and middling sort of the new parish élites—who wished to emphasize the moral and cultural distinctions which marked them off from their poorer, less disciplined neighbours, and to use their power to reform society according to their own principles of order and godliness.7

The church ale—at which cakes and ale were the traditional fare—was one typical site of this conflict. An ancient parish tradition—a kind of communal picnic with drinking, as well as piping, dancing, and sometimes dramatic activity—its function was to bring the parishioners together in a festive money-raising activity to
support the parish's charitable works. To the Puritan eye this praiseworthy end was entirely vitiated by the displays of unrighteousness the feast gave rise to. From about the time of Twelfth Night onwards there are numerous instances from across the country of festal customs being used against local Malvolios, in the course of which the representatives of authority were both mocked and, in extreme cases, physically assaulted.

Violence is in fact an entirely traditional ingredient of many forms of game and festival, and hence could give further cause to the godly to suppress festive customs. The liminal and group-bonding functions of football games with neighbouring villages, for example, are noted by Underdown: "Tis no festival unless there be some fightings' is a contemporary saying he quotes (p. 96). Personal or communal rivalries and disputes could therefore be sorted out—more or less symbolically—under the cover of festival licence. In Twelfth Night it is Sir Toby who is the lord of violent misrule, and he is perhaps not uncharacteristic of enthusiastic seventeenth-century revellers in that during his final appearance in the play he is both drunk and bleeding. The particular contest he has just lost, begun in jest and ended in earnest, is with a young stranger over his apparent sexual invasion into territory Toby may regard as his to defend, if not to bestow. However ironically, he has promised Olivia to Sir Andrew, and his oath to his gull earlier in the play is made on the physical manifestations of his own manliness: 'If thou hast her not i'th' end, call me cut' (2.3.180-1). Once Cesario shows some fighting spirit, male prowess is at stake: 'Come, my young soldier, put up your iron. You are well fleshed . . . Nay then, I must have an ounce or two of this malapert blood from you' (4.1.37-43).

Malvolio's heated imaginings about Olivia in the letter scene give rise to a string of violent stage-whispers from the box-tree—'O for a stone-bow to hit him in the eye!'; 'Fire and brimstone!'; 'Bolts and shackles!' (a premonition of Malvolio's punishment); 'Shall this fellow live?'; '. . . does not Toby take you a blow o' the lips, then?'; 'Out scab'; 'Marry, hang thee brock'; '. . . I'll cudgel him, and make him cry "O!"' After this, Malvolio is perhaps lucky to undergo the relatively lenient treatment he gets, although it is certainly a fairly frequent tendency in modern stagings of the play to emphasize the physical punishment in the revellers' teasing of him in 3.4, and since the eighteenth century the pain and privation of the dark house scene have often been stressed, to the degree that Malvolio has seemed on the edge of being mad indeed. His binding—promised by Sir Toby in 3.4—is not usually seen. He leaves the stage free, and while on Shakespeare's stage he may have been entirely invisible in 4.2, these days we tend to see an anguished face and beseeching, clutching hands as he pleads with Sir Topas and Feste. In any event, in fictional terms he must be free enough to write his letter, and when he re-emerges into the world of light he doesn't usually bear about him signs of his bondage (the far commoner stage tradition is for him to have straw sticking to his hair and clothes). Yet he is still dressed in his lover's garb, as I noted above, usually sadly muddied and ripped in performance, to signal the trials of constancy. The absurd costume, Maria's fantastical invention, includes the restricting bonds of the cross garters, which soon after he has put them on are already making him 'sad':

This does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering, but what of that?

(3.4.19-21)

The Grocer's Wife from The Knight of the Burning Pestle could tell him; there are dangers in putting on silly costumes: 'Tis no festival unless there be some fightings' is a contemporary saying he quotes (p. 96). Personal or communal rivalries and disputes could therefore be sorted out—more or less symbolically—under the cover of festival licence. In Twelfth Night it is Sir Toby who is the lord of violent misrule, and he is perhaps not uncharacteristic of enthusiastic seventeenth-century revellers in that during his final appearance in the play he is both drunk and bleeding. The particular contest he has just lost, begun in jest and ended in earnest, is with a young stranger over his apparent sexual invasion into territory Toby may regard as his to defend, if not to bestow. However ironically, he has promised Olivia to Sir Andrew, and his oath to his gull earlier in the play is made on the physical manifestations of his own manliness: 'If thou hast her not i'th' end, call me cut' (2.3.180-1). Once Cesario shows some fighting spirit, male prowess is at stake: 'Come, my young soldier, put up your iron. You are well fleshed . . . Nay then, I must have an ounce or two of this malapert blood from you' (4.1.37-43).

Malvolio's heated imaginings about Olivia in the letter scene give rise to a string of violent stage-whispers from the box-tree—'O for a stone-bow to hit him in the eye!'; 'Fire and brimstone!'; 'Bolts and shackles!' (a premonition of Malvolio's punishment); 'Shall this fellow live?'; '. . . does not Toby take you a blow o' the lips, then?'; 'Out scab'; 'Marry, hang thee brock'; '. . . I'll cudgel him, and make him cry "O!"' After this, Malvolio is perhaps lucky to undergo the relatively lenient treatment he gets, although it is certainly a fairly frequent tendency in modern stagings of the play to emphasize the physical punishment in the revellers' teasing of him in 3.4, and since the eighteenth century the pain and privation of the dark house scene have often been stressed, to the degree that Malvolio has seemed on the edge of being mad indeed. His binding—promised by Sir Toby in 3.4—is not usually seen. He leaves the stage free, and while on Shakespeare's stage he may have been entirely invisible in 4.2, these days we tend to see an anguished face and beseeching, clutching hands as he pleads with Sir Topas and Feste. In any event, in fictional terms he must be free enough to write his letter, and when he re-emerges into the world of light he doesn't usually bear about him signs of his bondage (the far commoner stage tradition is for him to have straw sticking to his hair and clothes). Yet he is still dressed in his lover's garb, as I noted above, usually sadly muddied and ripped in performance, to signal the trials of constancy. The absurd costume, Maria's fantastical invention, includes the restricting bonds of the cross garters, which soon after he has put them on are already making him 'sad':

This does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering, but what of that?

(3.4.19-21)
Malvolio. The previously unannounced Fabian enters the play in 2.5 as a further resentful victim of Malvolio's war on holiday pastimes: he has been 'brought . . . out o' favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here'. 'To anger him,' Toby replies, 'we'll have the bear again, and we will fool him black and blue'. Once again the promised violence happens only symbolically—Malvolio is not beaten up as is Captain Otter (as bear) by his wife (as dog) in Jonson's *Epicoene*—but we are reminded at this moment of the strong connections between festival and brutal punishment, and the evident need to give vent to disruptive and aggressive tendencies even in the midst of celebrations which affirmed the strength and mutual support of the community. Malvolio's bearishness remains in that he sees his tormentors as a 'pack'—hounds rather than people—at the end of the play.9 The violent accompaniments of festive activity are everywhere apparent in the social world surveyed by David Underdown: bear and bull baatings are the invariable entertainments at church ales. While one may have been attendant on feasting—the bull was baited before being butchered—the other patently was not. That the actual torturing of animals, whatever symbolic function it may have been recognized to carry, could itself take a symbolic form in festival is proved by an intriguing reference Underdown cites from Somerset in 1603, involving some trouble while someone was 'playing Christmas sports in a bear's skin' (p. 60). Such a winter-time activity—very reminiscent of Lanthorn Leatherhead's reported feats in *Bartholomew Fair* (3.4. 126-28)—may have as much to do with *The Winter's Tale* as with *Twelfth Night*, but the ritualized hunting that is expressed in animal baiting, and the deliberate arousal, in the case of cock-fighting, for example, of competitive sexual aggression in the animals, reveal an ambivalent fascination with purely physical power and instinctive drive as forces which must be celebrated, yet punished.10 Jonson, once again, more directly incorporates festive baatings and huntings into his comic structure, and his plays are to that extent crueler than Shakespeare's. Volpone's direct address to the audience following his sentence by the court—'This is called mortifying of a fox'—reminds us of the festive custom of hunting a fox or other small animal indoors, within the hall at a feast, frequently involving killing it by driving it into the fire. One of the fox's sins in *Volpone*, of course, is lust. The totemic sexual rituals associated with hunting and killing the stag, however, are clear enough in Shakespeare's work. The festive song in *As You Like It* is an anthem of male prowess and anxiety—the lusty horn is given to the victor as a sign that he is a potential victim of forces which lie outside his direct control. Falstaff's ritual punishment for lust at the end of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is suffered in the disguise of a male deer—he is symbolically pinched and burnt, rather than actually butchered and cooked. Falstaff's dis-horning, George Turberville tells us, exactly follows the English practice of dismembering the stag after the kill; following the removal of one sign of the deer's maleness, 'before that you go about to take off his skynne, the fyrst thing that must be taken from him, are his stones which hunters call his doulettes'. These form part of 'the dayntie morselles which appertaine to the Prince or chief personage on field',11 In Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* the cowardly and lustful Pharamond has paid the woodmen for the dowcets and head of a slain deer (4.2)—that he evidently needs them as aphrodisiacs hardly commends his unassisted sexual powers. Following the scenes of actual hunting in the fourth act, Pharamond becomes the human quarry of a popular riot in the fifth, when the citizens, like Laertes' Danish supporters, mutiny to reinstate Philaster. The language with which they threaten him deliberately recalls the hunting terms of Act 4, and his proposed punishment mockingly strips him of manhood.

**PHARAMOND** Gods keep me from these hell-hounds.

1 **CITIZEN** Shall's geld him, Captain?

**CAPTAIN** No, you shall spare his dowcets, my dear donsels; as you respect the ladies let them flourish. The curses of a longing woman kills as speedy as a plague, boys.

1 **CITIZEN** I'll have a leg, that's certain.

2 **CITIZEN** I'll have an arm.

2 **CITIZEN** He had no horns, sir, had he?
CAPTAIN No, sir, he's a pollard; what wouldst thou do with horns?

2 CITIZEN O, if he had, I would have made rare hafts and whistles of 'em; but his shin bones if they be sound shall serve me.

(5.4.53-74)12

Symbolic hunting therefore carries within it a potential for sexual shaming and degradation. Pharamond and Falstaff are both punished for lust by public exposure, and Malvolio's treatment clearly has something of a similar purpose, although it certainly lacks the direct physical violence the two former figures suffer. At least this is so in the text; there is a theatrical tradition of varying degrees of physical torture of Malvolio by Feste in 4.2. Malvolio's punishment is to be 'propertied', but largely to be forgotten, removed, and 'baffled' until his incandescent entry into Act 5. He is certainly punished for excess, but punished by deprivation, and his physical powerlessness in the dark house is to remind him of his unsuitability for the preposterous role he has taken on. A born eunuch, in Christ's terms, he is absurdly unfitted for the position of comic wooer and bridegroom.

The impotent lover, in body, mind, and social conduct, is a stock figure of erotic comedy. The absurdly enamoured father, the old man, the stupid heir, the pretentious braggart, the rake, all are variant threats to the union of the true lovers, and they must be outwitted, exposed, or otherwise removed in the course of the plot. In Jonson's Bartholomew Fair the egregious ninny Cokes, the contracted bridegroom of the witty but powerless Grace Wellborn, loses his fiancée to Quarlous in the liberating chaos of a festival atmosphere. He also loses his money, but in having his purse cut—twice—he is symbolically gelded of the manhood he so ineptly represents. He half recognizes what has happened to him in the words he addresses—mistakenly—to Overdo: 'Cannot a man's purse be at quiet for you, i' the master's pocket, but you must entice it forth, and debauch it?' (3.5.213-14), while Wasp scornfully tells his charge 'now you ha' got the trick of losing, you'd lose your breech, an't 'twere loose' (ibid. 221-3).13 Cokes, though he hardly cares in the regressively childish festive world he has entered, is symbolically shamed and neutered. His fascination with the puppets, babies, and trash is a complete identification—he, like the puppet Dionysius, has no sex. It is Jonson's disciple Richard Brome who writes the frankest version of what appears to be a submerged theme of festival and comedy when in his 1639-40 play The Court Beggar a doctor is held down across a table and threatened with castration at the hands of a 'Sowgelder' (4.2). His protests remind the audience of the dangerous uproar of popular holidays:

You dare not use this violence upon me
More rude than rage of Prentices.

The gelding turns out to be a 'counterfeit plot'—partly a deliberate degradation in revenge for the doctor's prior actions, and partly to scare him into confessing that the patient he is attending is, like Antonio in The Changeling, a sham madman. The scene could therefore be taken simply as a particularly risqué piece of farce used to enliven a rather creakily episodic plot, yet the larger question remains of why this particular action may have occurred to Brome as being suitable to a comedy filled with spurious and defective wooers.15

Nothing quite so specifically humiliating or violent turns up in the court records of pre-Restoration England, although there is a good deal of material connected with disorders and outrages arising from popular rituals of sexual control.16 The usual individual target for the community to direct its displeasure over aberrant sexual conduct was likely to be a woman; the whore, the adulteress, the scold, all suffered ritual mockery, exposure, and varyingly violent degrees of punishment. Yet the ceremonies which marked such disapproval—ridings,
parades, rhymes, lampoons, duckings, and so forth—were by no means directed at women alone. The man who suffered himself to be cuckolded or beaten was likely to be a target of mockery as an unmanly man, a man who couldn't wear the breeches. One particularly widespread custom, which has a literary record that stretches at least from Samuel Butler to Thomas Hardy, was the skimmington, a wild processional ride involving disguise, rough music, and, as Martin Ingram has written, 'mocking laughter, sometimes light-hearted, but often taking the form of hostile derision which could, on occasion, escalate into physical violence'.17 The ritual is clearly related to symbolic hunting, and indeed could feature participants dressed in horns or animal skins. If the custom arose to mock unconventional sexuality or deviant behaviour within a marriage its scope could be far wider, as Ingram explains:

While female domination and immorality were the characteristic pretexts for ridings, there were other occasions. A simple form of riding was sometimes used in a holiday context in 'trick or treat' games, and to punish people who refused to join in the festivities or who in other ways offended the holiday spirit. At Chichester in 1586, a game of 'tables' on New Year's Eve was rudely interrupted when William Brunne who then played the part of a lord of misrule came in . . . and said that that game was no Christmas game and so perforce took [one of the players] . . . from thence and made him ride on a staff to the High Cross.' The use of ridings to punish people who would not give money to Lords of Misrule on holidays was denounced by Philip Stubbes. Unfortunately, when refusal to take part in festivities (or, worse still, attempts to suppress such festivities) were based on Puritan principles, such ridings were apt to become distinctly less lighthearted and more elaborate. John Hole, the Puritan constable of Wells, discovered this to his cost in 1607. Hole and his associates tried to suppress the city's May games, which had been organised on a particularly grand scale that year in order to raise money for the repair of St Cuthbert's church. Hole's interference raised a storm of opposition, and he and his friends were savagely derided in a series of spectacular ridings performed before thousands of people.

(Ingram, pp. 170-1)

The John Hole case, which was surveyed by C. J. Sisson in Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age as long ago as 1936, is particularly suggestive about the treatment given Malvolio by the revellers of Twelfth Night. Hole, like Malvolio, set out to oppose holiday revels on principle; the revellers' revenge was character assassination, as Hole was accused of adultery with another godly objector to the festival, the delightfully named Mrs Yard. None of the surviving lampooning verses make what one would think to be the obvious jokes about hole and yard (suitably inverted in good festival fashion), but Hole is simultaneously accused of lechery and impotence, like Malvolio doubly mocked for sexual ambition and incapacity. Particularly the exposure of the Wells killjoys by theatricalizing them—staging them in disguises and caricatured paintings—by making them join, in effigy at least, the very celebrations they have tried to stop, reveals a direct relationship between festive rituals and the comic structure of such plays as Twelfth Night. In the play Malvolio is more subtly tricked into staging himself as a parodic festival figure—a grotesquely inept embodiment of the energy celebrated in holidays, and as such a betsy, a guy, a Jack-a-Lent, a cockshot man, at whom people can hardly forbear hurling things. Death, darkness, sterility, and ill luck are heaped on his back, and laughed out of the play.

His scapegoat function has frequently been remarked on, but one theoretical defence of festive customs, presumably including the shaming rituals, was that they were restorative and socially cohesive. The exhibition of conflict or aberrance under the special conditions of holiday licence would lead, with luck, to resolution and rehabilitation. Thus those accused as rioters at Rangeworthy near Bristol in 1611 defended themselves by pointing out that communal feasting was for 'the refreshing of the minds and spirits of the country people, being inured and tired with husbandry and continual labour . . . for preservation of mutual amity, acquaintance, and love . . . and allaying of strifes, discords and debates between neighbour and neighbour'.
This sounds remarkably like the spirit of Fabian's plea to Olivia not to let retributive justice inappropriately be applied to holiday jests:

Good madam, hear me speak, 
And let no quarrel nor no brawl to come 
Taint the condition of this present hour, 
Which I have wondered at. In hope it shall not, 
Most freely I confess myself and Toby 
Set this device against Malvolio here

How with a sportful malice it was followed 
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge 
If that the injuries be justly weighed 
That have on both sides passed.

(5.1.352-65).

But the victims of the Rangeworthy riot, a Puritan constable and his followers who were beaten when they tried to arrest musicians and dancers, did pursue their case through the courts, and hence we happen to know about the incident. David Underdown holds up this obscure rural scuffle as an emblem of a changing world: 'The Rangeworthy revel is thus a classic example of Jacobean cultural conflict. Rituals appropriate to a traditional society, enshrining ancient values of custom and good neighbourhood, were attacked by people in authority who put individual piety, sobriety, and hard work above the older co-operative virtues' (p. 63).

Malvolio refuses Fabian's open hand. He has, after all, been most notoriously abused, and excluded from achieving greatness in any sense. Donald Sinden's entertaining account of playing the part ends with his invocation of the bitterness of Malvolio's humiliation and disappointment. There is nothing for him following his exit, Sinden suggests, save suicide. 18 Yet surely only a particularly sensitive, late-Romantic Malvolio would be snuffed out by a device. I think the seventeenth-century man is heading for his lawyer, and Star Chamber.

To return, finally, to texts, it is worth noting that mock preaching was a recurrent element in popular revels, particularly those with a satiric thrust against a local community figure. Such was the play which Sir Edward Dymock had performed at his house in Kyme, Lincolnshire, in August 1601, and which guyed Henry, Earl of Lincoln. Following the play proper one John Cradock preached a mock sermon in a black gown and cap; a witness said that he wore 'A counterfeat beard, and standing in a pulpitt fixed to the maypole on kyme greene, having a pott of ale or beare hanginge by him in stead of a hower glasse.' The costume sounds remarkably like that of Sir Topas, but the performance was evidently a good deal more elaborate, though entirely in key with Feste's excellent fooling. Cradock 'did represent the person of a Minister or Priests, and did . . . utter . . . "The Marcie of Musterd Seed and the blessing of Bullbeefe and the peace of Pottelucke be with you all. Amen."' 19 Cradock's spoof text for the sermon, from 'The 22 chapter of the book of Hitroclites', led to a series of improbable romance tales and jests, possibly with further parodic reference to the formulae of the liturgy and scripture. Some years later in Wiltshire a drunken revel included the preaching from the pulpit within the parish church of a mock sermon on the text of 'the one and twentieth chapter of Maud Butcher and the seventh verse' (Ingram, p. 166). Mockery of ecclesiastical authority and liturgical frameworks for mock heroics may be thought particularly Rabelaisian revels, but they were evidently equally English, and survived to the years when they might be employed to deride Puritan earnestness. If they did not appear overtly in plays licensed for the public stage, that should not surprise us. The subtler parodic text Maria includes in the spurious letter is at once a test of Malvolio's reading, a word to the wary, and a libel on his sexuality; as such it lies entirely within the English festival tradition.
Notes

1 A further interpretation of Malvolio's chosen letters has been suggested by Leah Scragg: "Her C's, her U's, and her T's: Why That?": A New Reply for Sir Andrew Aguecheek', RES 42 (1991), 1-16. Her suggestion that the line may have some reference to cutpurses has an interesting incidental bearing on my argument in this essay: see below.

2 This translation is superseded by the 1582 (et seq.) Geneva New Testament, which gives the word as 'eunuches', and in every other respect is very close to the King James version. The Bishops' Bible (1568) uses 'chaste'.


4 That the text was read literally as well as metaphorically is demonstrated by its citation in the discussions over the Essex divorce case in 1614. George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted the passage as clear 'warrant' for annulment of marriage. King James, arguing against too narrow a definition of 'inability', denied that Christ's categories of male impotence were prescriptive. See The Narrative History of King James (London, 1651), pp. 95, 102. I am grateful to Professor Leslie Thomson for drawing my attention to this material.

5Harmony, p. 249.

6Harmony, p. 249.


15 For a political reading of the play see Martin Butler, Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642 (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 220-8. The aberrant sexual behaviour in the play might be said to be a further manifestation of the madness and corruption Butler locates as its organizing themes.

16 An incident related in a letter by Robert Gell to Sir Martin Stuteville in July 1628 concerns violent revenge for rape at the siege of La Rochelle. Ten men of the town dressed up as women to lure the guilty soldiers of the besieging army, who then 'were so received that all to save their lives yielded unto ye young men, and went into the town, where, being most severely and barbarously punished, they were sent back to glory in the camp of their exploit, for which they were never again fitted'. The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart., ed. J. O. Halliwell, 2 vols. (London, 1845), vol. 2, p. 201.
When Sebastian enters the last scene of *Twelfth Night* and begins to untangle the various intricacies of the plot, Duke Orsino describes his vision of Sebastian and Viola together in these words:

> One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons—
> A natural perspective that is and is not.

Orsino refers to a set of Renaissance artifacts, including complicated mirrors, which highlighted the effect of perspective on human vision. With some of these 'perspectives', a confusion of images would resolve themselves into clarity if viewed from one indirect position. In others, like Holbein's famous painting of 'The Ambassadors', two images could only be seen clearly from two entirely different points of view. Orsino's reference to a 'natural perspective that is and is not' implies not only that he thinks nature has produced before him what is usually the work of art by bringing two mirroring figures on the stage at once; he also suggests that one of these figures, Viola or Sebastian, is a confusion to the eye, and if one took the proper point of view, the confusion would be cleared. But the play reveals that things are more complicated than he would like: there is no view from which Viola will blend into Sebastian; the play proves that Orsino must learn to accept the confusion or the deeper clarity of two, equally viable, points of view.¹

Orsino’s reference to the 'perspective' reproduces the problem of gender in the play (are women and men twins in their mental and emotional abilities? do they have fundamentally different perspectives?). But it also evokes the play's twin issue: the relationship between gender and status. The play in fact treats these issues as reflections of each other: Viola's relationship to Orsino includes both that of woman to man and that of servant to master. More complexly, Viola's relationship to Orsino mirrors Malvolio's relationship to Olivia: both servants want to marry their masters; both men in these pairs are self-obsessed; both women seem far more intelligent than their male counterparts. Shakespeare considers the compatibility of servants and masters as he considers the comparability of men and women. When Orsino recognises the 'impropriety' of Viola's service to him, he puts it in terms of gender and status:

> So much against the mettle of your sex,
> So far beneath your soft and tender breeding.

(V, i, 322-3)
The artful rather than natural perspective of the play moves us to compare men and women, servants and masters, gender and status, and to ask if one can ever get all these issues clearly into view, while respecting their differences and understanding their connections.

The questions evoked by Orsino's reference to the 'perspective' are remarkably similar to those posed by the historian Joan Kelly in her article on gender and class, called 'The doubled vision of feminist theory'. Kelly urges feminist historians to recognise that a 'woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally'. She claims that feminists can see 'the relations of the sexes as formed by both socio-economic and sexual-familial structures in their systematic connectedness'. She posits a critical method which would acknowledge the differences of feminism and Marxism, and yet recognise that the issues of gender and class can only be clearly understood in their relation to each other:

'From this perspective, our personal, social and historical experience is seen to be shaped by the simultaneous operation of relations of work and sex; relations that are systematically bound to each other—and always have been so bound.'

Twelfth Night was written during a period before a woman's place was imagined as a separate sphere, since, for the Renaissance, a woman was considered to be analogous to other social inferiors in a hierarchical society. The Anglican homily on obedience substantiates its political claims through a mirroring set of obligations: 'some are in high degree, some in low, some Kings and Princes, some inferiors and subjects, Priests and laymen, Maisters and servauntes, Fathers and children, Husbands and Wives.' English society linked gender and status in its own, Renaissance version of Kelly's 'systematic connectedness'. The homily on marriage teaches wives to 'cease from commanding, and performe subjection' by using the same set of analogies: 'For when we ourselves doe teach our children to obey us as their parents, or when we reforme our servants, and tell them that they should obey their masters . . . If they should tell us againe our dueties, we should not thinke it well done.' The homilies testify to the flexibility of this system of correspondences, since women can be included as parents when it serves the purpose (in the homily on marriage) but excluded when it does not: the homily on obedience prefers 'Fathers and children'. Shakespeare, and other authors, constructed literary representations of these mirroring social estates sometimes to reinforce the ideology preached in the homilies, sometimes to challenge it, but primarily by evoking and manipulating what amounted to a cultural language of the analogies of subordination.

Kelly's article suggests that we need to include a historical perspective of both gender and class in our analysis of literature. My thesis is a development of hers: we can understand how gender operates in Renaissance literature only if we consider its relationship to status or class, and only through focused historical research about socio-economic structures, as Kelly puts it, as well as sexual-familial structures. We have to uncover, first, how representations of gender and status in a particular work operate within the Renaissance language of interconnection, and, second, how these representations express or elide actual conditions. Materialist feminists and, actually, all literary historicists have to create a 'perspective' of their own, in which gender and status, literature and history can be perceived in a modern account of their 'systematic connectedness'.

Twelfth Night dramatises the issue of social mobility through women who, though servants, are as capable as their male masters, and who rise out of their role as servants to become their master's mistresses. Our problem is to tease out the ideological significance inherent in the play's version of the cultural mirroring process, a version which links women and aspiring servants, marriage and social mobility. Twelfth Night considers advancement in terms of a marriage market which in the play is much more open to personal choice and status exogamy than it is in traditional society, and which also firmly closes down at particular moments. In the play, both men and women improve their lot through this open market, but the play explicitly compares the success of its women to the failure of particular men, who are excluded from the gifts of fortune for reasons which are culturally significant. Not only are female triumphs compared to male inadequacies; the proper attitude towards marriage becomes the mirroring reflection of the proper attitude towards social advancement. The play therefore transfers anxieties about fluid social relations onto gender relations, and solves the problem...
through its ideal of marriage. I will argue that the play dramatises the superiority of women to men in order to call into question the rigid structures of the traditional order, and, in the process, to validate certain forms of social mobility. Nevertheless, such questioning is contained through the play's model of marriage, which requires a 'loving' commitment to others. The ideology of the play resides in its formulation of love, which includes both dominant, traditional notions of interdependence, and newly emerging attitudes towards individual choice and personal desire, or, as the play puts it, 'will'.

As all critics of the play have noticed, desire or 'what you will' is the motivating force in the play, but this will or appetite is often hungry not only for music, drink or love, but for an improved social position. Maria's forged letter of love from Olivia to Malvolio, which promises him that 'thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so', is a jesting version of the projects of the other characters (II, v, 150-1). Sir Toby Belch seeks to better Sir Andrew Aguecheek's estate and his own by marrying Sir Andrew to his niece, Olivia. After Olivia marries Sebastian, and meets the unknowing Cesario in Act V, Olivia says:

Fear not, Cesario; take thy fortunes up,
Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art
As great as that thou fearest.

(V, i, 147-9)

Olivia points out the social distinction between Cesario and Duke Orsino, but exhorts the servant to embrace his new position as her husband, an estate which makes him as 'great' as his master. Marriage may be the goal of desire in the play, but these marriages can also elevate one of the partners to a higher social estate. Love and desire participate in the process of social mobility made most visible in Cesario's association with the Duke. Valentine says, 'If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced' (I, iv, 1-2). Orsino says:

Prosper well in this,
And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord
To call his fortunes thine.

(I, iv, 38-40)

Viola herself has explicitly chosen her place in the play: 'I'll serve this Duke' (I, ii, 55); her marriage to him at the end of the play turns Cesario's advancement into a love-match.

The notion that one's social estate could be subject to one's will or a matter of desire underlies the play's simultaneous consideration of the relation of man to woman, and of master to servant. When Viola woos Olivia for Orsino, but wins her heart for herself, the wonder of it lies not only in that a woman has been mistaken for a man, but that a woman has been mistaken for a gentleman. When alone, Olivia repeats to herself her questioning of Cesario, and reveals her attraction to what she takes to be his 'gentility':

'What is your parentage?'
'Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.
I am a gentleman.' I'll be sworn thou art.
Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit
Do give you fivefold blazon. Not so fast; soft, soft,
Unless the master were the man. How now?
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
Olivia feels the inappropriateness of falling in love with a servant, but we see that she has in fact fallen for a cleverly created illusion, Viola's capable representation of the attributes of an upper-class young man, with his tongue, face, limbs, actions and spirit. As Sir Andrew puts it, 'That youth's a rare courtier' (III, i, 88). The argument of some critics that Viola's nobility shines through her disguise must be qualified by the emphasis that the play puts on manipulating illusions and fashioning appearances. Viola's success at this task is measured by Sir Andrew Aguecheek's failure; he is both male and knight, but his inadequate wit and verbal awkwardness ensure that he will be 'put down' by both Maria and Sir Toby (I, iii, 79).

In the play, a gentleman is 'made' and made loveable not by his title or blood, but by his (or her) will. Olivia makes it quite clear that she cannot love Duke Orsino simply for his aristocratic blood, though he is 'noble' and of 'great estate', 'a gracious person' both 'in dimension and the shape of nature' (I, v, 255-60). Cesario instead wins Olivia's heart when he plays the wilful lover:

Viola

If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense;
I would not understand it.

Olivia
Why, what would you?
Viola
Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hallo your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.

Olivia
You might do much. What is your parentage?

(V, 262-75)

Viola's reference to and demonstration of her verbal talents reveal that a gentleman's 'tongue' and 'spirit' are the result of intelligence and will, rather than gender or the 'great estate' that supports Orsino. Olivia in fact only becomes interested in Cesario's parentage after she is impressed with his linguistic potency. Viola is as able as the clown, whom she commands for the skills that she, he and a successful courtier share:

He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons and the time.

(III, i, 63-4)

A good wit can turn a sentence inside out, like a 'chev'ril glove' (III, i, 12); he can turn a woman into a man or a servant into a master. Viola and Maria are twinned in the play because, whereas Viola can produce the appearance of a man, Maria can produce the appearance of her mistress, not only through the similarity of their handwriting, but through the use of language that convinces Malvolio that this is indeed 'my Lady's hand' (I, v, 84). The skilful intelligence of Viola and Maria wins for them marriages which improve their social estate: clearly for Maria, whose role as a gentlewoman-in-waiting places her beneath Sir Toby, kinsman to
Olivia; and mostly likely for Viola, whose father's noble position is never precisely identified, and is probably beneath the rank of Duke Orsino.\textsuperscript{8} When Sir Toby marries Maria in recompense for her 'device', the play represents through the advancement of a woman by marriage what was occurring for ambitious men in society: verbal agility could turn a servant into a master, make a gentleman into a peer or send a commoner into the ranks of the upper classes.

Commentators on the social order speak frequently and heatedly during this period about a fluidity in the status structure which they take to be common knowledge and objective fact. William Harrison claims that merchants 'often change estate with gentlemen, as gentlemen do with them, by a mutual conversion of the one into the other'. According to Harrison, many obtain gentility through attending the Inns of Court or the University, gaining the money and leisure to 'bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman', and purchasing a coat of arms from the heralds; by this process, they, 'being made so good cheap, bee called master . . . and reputed for a gentleman ever after'. Thomas Smith agrees with Harrison on this point, comments that the prince can 'make' gentlemen, esquires or peers, and, in a section entitled 'Whether the manner of England in making gentlemen so easily is to be allowed', decides that such changes of status are good for the realm, especially for the treasury. He also considers quite sympathetically the yeomen who 'doe come to such wealth, that they are able and daily doe buy the landes of unthriftie gentlemen'. By sending their sons to school and freeing them from manual labour, yeomen 'doe make their saide sonnes by these meanes gentlemen'. Thomas Wilson concurs that gentlemen have been 'overreched' by yeomen, and adds that city lawyers are in pursuit of a country seat: 'they undoe the country people and buy up all the lands that are to be sold.' Smith is less sympathetic to the phenomenon, as are a multitude of preachers and satirists. However, even a churchman like Robert Sanderson, middle-of-the-road Anglican minister, could in 1621 announce that such fluidity was not only the status quo, but to be preferred to a closed system of rank. In a sermon on vocation, Sanderson urges idle 'gallants' to find their own work:

\[\text{observe by what steps your worthy Progenitors raised their houses to the height of Gentry, or Nobility. Scarce shall you find a man of them, that gave an accession, or brought any noted Eminency to his house; but either serving in the Camp, or sweating at the Bar, or waiting at the Court, or adventuring on the Seas, or trucking in his Shop, or some other way industriously bestirring himself in some settled Calling and Course of Life.}\]

Only by equal labours can these young heirs merit 'those Ensigns of Honor and Gentry which [their ancestors] by industry atchieved.'\textsuperscript{9}

Modern historians who study social mobility agree in general with these views, but argue that the movement actually taking place was far less extensive than these comments imply. In his original account of the situation, Lawrence Stone represented the social mobility of the period as 'a seismic upheaval of unprecedented magnitude', and his figures suggest as much: between 1500 and 1700, the number of the upper classes trebled during a time when the population doubled; the number of peers rose from 60 to 160, of knights from 500 to 1,400, and of armigerous gentry from 'perhaps 5,000 to 15,000'.\textsuperscript{10} In his later work, Stone severely restricts his earlier assessment by claiming that newcomers were largely younger sons of the gentry, who, through the professions or trade, re-established their gentility. Nevertheless, he does admit to 'the influx of mercantile wealth into land in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century'.\textsuperscript{11} Keith Wrightson states that 'social mobility was a constant phenomenon in English society', since gentility was based on 'the acquisition and retention of landed wealth' rather than birth. He also claims that the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'produced a quickened pace of upward and downward social mobility'. He cites a study of Lancashire where 278 families lost their place among the gentry between 1600 and 1642, and 210 families (and perhaps 79 more) moved up into it. The rising families were in part those of wealthy townsmen, which Wrightson argues were largely younger sons of the gentry; nevertheless, by far the majority of newcomers were prosperous yeomen.\textsuperscript{12} Although Stone had originally defined marriage as 'the easiest road to riches', Wrightson concludes, as does Stone elsewhere, that very few marriages took place across status lines. There
were, however, some connections made between those in positions close to each other in rank or wealth: the peerage intermarried with the upper gentry, rich merchants and lawyers; the gentry with mercantile or yeoman families. Both of these historians agree that there was significant movement between ranks; they also believe that contemporary accounts of its range and frequency were exaggerated.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare creates a unique version of the age's Commentary about social mobility, since the play represents as primarily a female achievement the advancement noted by his contemporaries. One would like to classify this as pure myth; on the other hand, there is very little historical evidence about the social mobility of women. According to David Cressy:

> widows and women who were heads of households were the only women assumed to have any independence, but the polity was normally assumed to exclude women of all sorts . . .
>
> While a wife in England was accorded the rank or status of her man, she was, nonetheless *de jure* but the best of servants.  

The analogies of English social theory were quite inaccurate in their identification of wives with male children or male servants, since women were prohibited from most avenues for advancement. There is evidence that some daughters of rich merchants married into the gentry or peerage, but most marriages occurred within particular status groups. It is clear that studies of social mobility are severely lacking in evidence on women; more work needs to be done to investigate whether or not women improved their position through marriage or through trade. We can assume, however, that the play's representation of the mobility of its society through women is historically inaccurate, and curiously and significantly skewed in a way unlike the exaggerations of commentators.

*Twelfth Night* sets free a fluidity between the roles of man and woman, and master and servant in the case of Viola and Maria, but limits it severely and abruptly in the case of Malvolio. In *A Marxist Study of Shakespeare's Comedies*, Elliot Krieger argues that Malvolio's aspirations are ridiculed and exorcised by the play not in order to preserve the true 'liberty' of saturnalia, but 'to allow the aristocracy to achieve social consolidation.' He claims that whereas identity is generally mutable in the play, Malvolio's attempt to cross the line between servant and master is condemned as transgressive. Whereas Viola's enactment of gentility is rendered legitimate by our discovery at the end of the play of her 'noble' blood, Malvolio's inferior status ensures that his ambition will be viewed as presumption.  

Krieger is quite right to point out that the play balances the freedom of Viola's fluid identity against the strictures on Malvolio, and that such strictures finally reinforce class prejudice. But in this play such prejudice is more complex than Krieger suggests. The play includes a tentative but radical disruption of conventional categories of identity which is checked but not erased by its ending, and checked in a complicated way. Reducing Viola's astute role-playing to an expression of her nobility ignores the part she plays in this limited but tangible disruption as well as in its containment. Viola's performance as a courtier wins her prestige and potential financial rewards from Orsino and a proposal of marriage from Olivia; her noble breeding may make such success more likely, but her female gender makes it remarkable. Viola is never simply a noble person masquerading as a gentle person without wealth; her rendition of masculine gentility subtly suggests that all social roles can be impersonated. The play treats Viola very differently from Perdita in *Winter's Tale*, since *Twelfth Night* emphasises Viola's performative talent rather than her 'authentic' nobility. We may be convinced in Viola's first scene that she is no commoner: she speaks to the Captain and his sailors with authority, they defer to her, she pays them 'bounteously' (I, ii, 52). Yet the scene raises questions about whether Orsino's 'name' accurately represents his 'nature', or whether the Captain's 'outward character', either as behaviour or title, is related to his 'mind' (25, 50-1). These questions prepare us for Viola's experiments with appearance, partially because she has to negotiate in a world where titles may not be trustworthy, and partially because she herself will manipulate the relationship between seeming and being. The scene does not explicitly define Viola's status as either noble or gentle; rather, her rank is veiled from us just as Viola veils it.
from the people she will meet. Such masking has a purpose: we, and the characters, will know her through her
role-playing and her 'intent':

O that I served that lady,
And might not be delivered to the world,
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is . . .
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent.

(41-4, 53-5)

In these passages, to will or choose her way allows Viola to disrupt conventional definitions of identity: 'my
estate', 'what I am.' Not to be 'delivered to the world' is to withhold the details of one's family origins, gender
and present situation until one can give birth to oneself at the most propitious moment. Such a self-protective
delay replaces birth and status with a flexible identity, since not only can outer appearance be subject to one's
will, but this will can also be influenced by the practice of acting: Viola's disguise 'haply shall become / The
form of my intent.' The word 'form' reproduces the riddles about inner and outer identity that pervade the
scene, and the word 'become' increases the dilemma: will the disguise 'become' or be used as the outward form
of her inward intent? Will the 'matter' of her external costume represent decorously the inner structuring 'form'
or principle of her willed purpose? Will this disguise itself become or begin to dictate her desires? To what
extent do clothes make the man? Not only is rank replaced by intent in Viola's plot, but also the focus of the
scene on a correspondence between outer and inner quality is complicated by the suggestion that external
forms can determine internal states. When her estate is 'delivered' to us in the last act, it is only after we have
seen to what an extent her skilful use of disguise becomes her.

Malvolio also does not fit within Krieger's rigid schema. The play manipulates Malvolio's status titles for
dramatic purposes: when Malvolio is to appear presumptuous in his disciplining of Sir Toby, Toby cries, 'Art
thou more than a steward?' (II, iii, 113). When we are to recoil and laugh at Malvolio's desire to wed Olivia,
his analogy tricks us into overestimating the lowliness of his rank: 'There is example for't. The Lady of the
strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe' (II, v, 39-40). We find out only in the late prison scene, when
our sympathy is needed, that Malvolio is in fact not a commoner but a gentleman (IV, ii, 85; see also V, i,
277, 280). He is therefore not disenfranchised in any technical sense; he has already crossed over the most
significant boundary line in the society, and is already a legitimate member of the ruling classes. It is true that
a marriage between Malvolio and the Countess Olivia would be viewed as unconventional—it would be
analogous to the marriage between the Duchess of Malfi and her steward Antonio.17 But Malvolio's dream of
marrying Olivia is in principle no more socially disruptive than Olivia's dream of marrying what she takes to
be the gentleman Cesario. Shakespeare seems less intent on stigmatising characters for behaviour outside their
rank than on emphasising status differences at particular moments for particular purposes. The play veils and
manipulates the rank of Malvolio and Viola in order to encourage the audience to compare their relative
success at winning their desired marriages. When their status is identified, it seems unlikely that the
ideological point would be that women of undefined noble blood can marry dukes, whereas gentlemen cannot
marry countesses. We must search more deeply for Malvolio's offending characteristic.

The play presents the problem most forcefully in two conjoining scenes: Act II, scene iv, in which the Duke
and Cesario debate whether or not a woman's love is equal to a man's, and scene v, in which Malvolio
imagines himself to be equal to Olivia and superior to Sir Toby through the marriage that would make him
'Count Malvolio'. It is here that the play's interest in twin characters and twin issues becomes most complex:
Cesario is like Malvolio because both are servants who wish to marry their masters; Viola is like Maria
because both use language and counterfeited appearances to manage their chosen male subjects; Malvolio is
like Orsino because both are self-absorbed men for whom mastery consists in the exercise of power and the exclusion of any consideration of the perspectives of others. The play calls attention to its twin issues by repeating lines: when the Duke asks Cesario what sort of woman he has fallen in love with, Cesario replies, 'Of your complexion' (II, iv, 26). When Malvolio imagines Olivia's love for him, he remembers Olivia's previous remark that, should she love, 'it should be one of my complexion' (II, v, 23-4). The play invites us to consider love from two angles: Viola's self-abnegating, amorous desire and Malvolio's self-deluded dream of power. It also encourages us to consider Orsino's inadequate sense of women in terms of Malvolio's more explicitly identified 'self-love'. It is in the simultaneous exploration of the worthiness of women and the inadequacy of Malvolio that we find the play's ideological bias: the desire of an inferior to be matched with a superior is acceptable as long as it is motivated by love; to the extent that desire is self-interested, it is foolish and dangerous. In the world of the play, Malvolio represents ill will or bad will (mal: evil; voglio: I will or desire). He pursues his ends for the wrong reasons rather than the right. Viola's name, on the other hand, suggests a female, positive version of Malvolio, one whose will has become, let us say, musical, and capable of harmonising society rather than disrupting it. In this play, desire replaces reverence as the basis of the bond that links master and servant, man and woman; we could say that loving and erotic desire mediates the issue of social mobility in the play, since loving desire acknowledges choice and human will, but it also ensures devotion or a commitment to others. In *Twelfth Night*, ambition is acceptable, as long as it is the ambition to love. Our question is, why is such devoted desire identified with a woman rather than a man? What does such an identification make possible for the play and what does it obscure?

In *Twelfth Night*, the current and popular controversy over women mediates the dilemmas about social mobility. This allows the play to question quite fully the traditional ideology that those who rule are mentally or morally superior to those who are ruled, but it holds such questioning in check through an ideal of marriage and a model of marital contract which guards against the dangers of personal independence. The romantic love in the play acknowledges the power of desire, but ensures that such desire will flow into the channels of traditional, socially instituted bonds.

Act II, scene iv, allows Viola to confront the Duke with the value and power of female intelligence, but such intelligence is only discussed in terms of a woman's capacity to love. The erotic power of this scene consists not only in the Duke's ignorance that his man-to-man talk with Cesario about love finally allows Viola to express what she feels, but also in the fact that the scene stages between two potential lovers the debate about women which usually took place within the confines of contemporary treatises. Shakespeare stages the debate with a bias: Viola's concealed identity and love for Orsino ensure our sympathy for her point of view. The Duke claims that women cannot love as deeply as he does, but the scene suggests that his love for Olivia is superficial, inconstant and finally repressive, since he seems unwilling to imagine or believe that a woman could initiate a love of her own. The Duke's 'self-love' has already been revealed in the first scene of the play, when he proclaims that, after Olivia's grief over her brother dies out, the Duke himself will take his place as the new male sovereign, the 'one self king' reigning in Olivia's affections (I, i, 40). In their conversation in Act II, scene iv, Viola reminds the Duke that he may not be so successful, and offers him the possibility of seeing things from a woman's point of view:

> Viola Say that some Lady, as perhaps there is,
> Hath for your love as great a pang of heart
> As you have for Olivia. You cannot love her.
> You tell her so. Must she not then be answered?
> Duke There is no woman's sides
> Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
> As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
> So big to hold so much; they lack retention.

(II, iv, 89-96)
The Duke refuses to imagine that a woman could initiate desire as he does, and so he loses the point of the scene communicated to us: a woman, viola, loves as deeply as a man, and recognises that she cannot control her beloved's point of view.

The debate about love in this scene is a submerged exploration of the extent to which Renaissance masculinity depends on denying women a will of their own, and the independent perspective that goes with it. Viola deflates this masculine conceit by her words and her presence:

Duke Make no compare
   Between that love a woman can bear me
   And that I owe Olivia.
Viola Ay, but I know—
   Duke What dost thou know?
   Viola Too well what love women to men may owe.
   In faith, they are as true of heart as we.

(101-6)

When Viola interrupts the Duke's masculine and mastering order, 'Make no compare', she asserts that her knowledge and experience constitute an identity comparable to his own: 'Ay, but I know.' But what she knows is her erotic attachment to the Duke, 'what love women to men may owe', an attachment that ensures her willing participation in a marital system which fears more deeply the unattached woman than the brilliant wife. Viola's debate with the Duke exposes as masculine tyranny his desire to be Olivia's 'one self king', but protects him and the audience against the play's deeper fear of female independence, expressed in the Duke's reference to the story of Diana and Actaeon:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
   Methought she purged the air of pestilence,
   That instant was I turned into a hart,
   And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
   E'er since pursue me.

(I, i, 20-4)

The Duke speaks in the fanciful language of a poetic love, but his words reveal that he already fears rejection, since Olivia, like Diana, might refuse to be married; such a fear must be repressed because it would result in the dismemberment of a sense of masculinity which depends on female subservience. Again, the play questions Orsino's association of masculinity and power, but provides a new protection against the dangers of Diana: women will marry because they want to. When Sir Toby praises Maria for her victory over Malvolio, he calls her 'Penthesilea', the Amazon warrior with whom Achilles fell in love just before he killed her. These dangerous extremes of female independence and masculine tyranny are modified by Toby's affirmation that Maria is 'one that adores me' (II, iii, 176-9).

Viola's response to Orsino in their debate about love is similar to that of Jane Anger in the treatise 'Her Protection for Women' (1589), which answers a lost pamphlet by 'the surfeiting lover'. These two treatises took part in a series of exchanges which fuelled the controversy about women during the period.19 Like Viola, 'Her Protection for Women' declares that women should be recognised for their 'trueness of love' (p. 181), but the difference between the treatise and the play is registered in the difference between the name Jane Anger and that of Viola. Like Viola, Anger counters male views of female love, but less as a preface to marriage than as a reproof of men, uttered, as she says, in a 'choleric vein' (p. 173). Answering an opponent whose treatise seems to have renounced love and women as well, Anger uses the author's term for himself as
'surfeiting' to consider the destructive effects on women of defining male desire as an appetite. Orsino proclaims his inability to 'suffer surfeit' in his appetite for love, since he 'is all as hungry as the sea / and can digest as much' (II, iv, 100-1), but Anger points out the problem with the metaphor: men 'become ravenous hawks, who do not only seize upon us, but devour us' (p. 178). Her treatise clarifies the contradictory nature of Orsino's love, which he describes as both 'so strong a passion' that 'no woman's heart' is 'so big to hold so much', and as 'more longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, / Than women's are' (II, iv, 94-6, 33-4). His desire for Olivia is described as infinite, like the sea, but he uses words which suggest that marriage itself would be no solution:

Nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch so ever,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute.

(I, i, 11-14)

The Duke's description of desire implies that whether the lover surfeits or never surfeits, the fate of his wife will be the same:

For women are as roses, whose fair flow'r,
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

Viola's reply is full of pathos:

And so they are; alas, that they are so;
To die, even when they to perfection grow.

(II, v, 38-42)

Such a reply is quite different from Jane Anger's comment on the subject:

men's eyes are so curious, as be not all women equal with Venus for beauty, they cannot abide the sight of them; their stomachs so queasy, as do they taste but twice of one dish they straight surfeit, and needs must a new diet be provided for them.

(p. 178)

Viola's careful and caring instruction of the Duke as well as our sympathy for her concealed love prepare us for the harmony of their betrothal in the last scene of the play, but keep us from considering what their marriage will finally be like.

Jane Anger's treatise is unusual in its lack of interest in the subject of matrimony, since most pamphlet-writers defending women during this period praised them most highly for their capacity to be able companions to men. Nicholas Breton in 'The Praise of Vertuous Ladies' (1597) claims that a man should see a great part of a woman in himself, since Eve was made out of Adam, and this proves that a woman is 'no other substance but another himself. For every excellent man, there is an excellent woman, who is 'everie waies his match'. The treatise soon turns to the match it most prizes, that of marriage, but here the equality of women stressed by the treatise becomes a threat. The best companion to a wise man is a witty woman, but 'it is wisdom for a man to take heed that a woman be not wiser than himself.' Finally, the treatise states with a jesting tone, but a serious purpose that the only worthy 'wit' of a maid is to choose a husband well; of a married woman, to love none other; and of a widow, to provide for her children. This treatise suggests that the faculties which made women
everie waies' a man's 'match' could only usefully be exercised within the institution of marriage, and that even in marriage these capacities had to be restrained.\textsuperscript{20}

A woman's love was essential to a successful marriage, according to the manuals of the period, which prized marriage as a form of companionship rather than simply as a necessity for lawful procreation. For William Perkins, the creation of Eve proved that a woman should not rule her husband, since she did not come out of his head, nor be his slave, since she did not come out of his feet, but, since she came out of his side, 'man should take her as his mate.'\textsuperscript{21} But the equality that this notion of companionship seems to promise is quickly qualified by the manuals, and the love of a wife for her husband begins to appear as another form of masculine control. Edmund Tilney's \textit{Flower of Friendshippe} (1568) states:

\begin{quote}
\textnormal{equalitie is principally to be considered in thys matrimonial amitie, as well of yeares, as of the gifts of nature, and fortune. For equalnesse herein, maketh friendliness \ldots \text.{In this long and troublesome journey of matrimonie, the wise man maye not be contented onely with his spouses virginitie, but by little and little must gently procure that he maye also steale away her private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there maye be made one onely hart, which she will soone doe, if love raigne in her, and without this agreeable concord matrimonie hath but small pleasure \ldots or none at all, and the man, that is not lyked, and loved of his mate, holdeth his lyfe in continuall perill, his goodes in great jeopardie, his good name in suspect, and his whole house in perdition.}}
\end{quote}

John Dod and Richard Cleaver in \textit{The Godly Form of a Household} (1598) use almost the same words as Tilney, but their sense of the relationship between love and possession has increased: 'The husband ought not to bee satisfied that, he hath rob'd his wife of her virginitie, but in that he hath possession and use of her will.' Dod and Cleaver recognise the tension between the requirements that men rule and that women love: 'For although the husband shall have power to his wife, to feare and obey him, yet he shall never have strength to force her to love him.'\textsuperscript{22}

The marriage manuals emphasise the importance of personal choice and consent by the marriage partners, and such choice includes women as well as men, but the equality of choice does not extend much farther than the original decision. The literature on marriage during this period as well as current historical studies suggest that individual desire did influence marriage negotiations much more than we previously believed: Keith Wrightson has shown that Lawrence Stone overemphasised the capacity of aristocratic parents to determine marriages for their children, and ignored the extent to which lower-class marriages were initiated by the partners. Marriage manuals consistently acknowledge the fact of individual choice in their very structure, at the same time that they insist on parental approval. These manuals include chapters on consent and on the contractual nature of marriage, in order to stress the extent to which the marriage must be a matter of free will. It may finally be the case that marriage manuals were written for the children of the gentry or the middling sort' rather than for the aristocracy, whose marriages were more consistently determined by issues of status and wealth rather than personal choice. It is clear that they were written more often for men than for women. The voluntary nature of the marriage vow, in which the promise 'must not come from the lippes alone, but from the wel-liking and consent of the heart', nevertheless preceded a relationship in which a woman's love had to be matched by submission and obedience to her husband's will. Many marriage manuals suggest, in fact, that the only real choice appropriate for a woman after marriage was to choose to love her husband. In Tilney's \textit{The Flower of Friendshippe}, which celebrates 'perfite love' that 'knitteth loving heartes, in an insoluable knot of amitie', the female speaker, Lady Julia, urges women to apply themselves to their duty, not only to revere their husbands, but to love them:

\begin{quote}
The first thing, therefore, which the married woman must labour to intende, the first thing which she must with all her force, applie her whole minde unto, and the first thing which she must hartily put in execution, is to lyke, and love well. For reason doth bind us to love them,
\end{quote}
The fear of unloving wives in the marriage manuals is like the fear of female independence in *Twelfth Night*: in both cases, women refuse to authorise as mutually beneficial and as benevolent the form of social control inherent in the Renaissance institution of marriage. But this fear of the independent woman in *Twelfth Night* and the celebration of a romantic love that impels one to choose to be dependent on another mediates and controls the play's twin issue: the danger of self-interested rather than devoted servants. The play and its various literary and social sources testify to a society searching to articulate a new social bond between 'master' and 'servant', one which would acknowledge choice and ensure a new kind of dependability, based on contract rather than feudal obligation.

In Act II, scene v, which directly follows the debate about love between Orsino and Viola, Malvolio imagines his new estate as 'Count Malvolio', and the play reveals that such self-interest has always motivated his government within the house. It is clear that Malvolio does not pursue Olivia with the poetic abandon of the other lovers in the play; he sees her as his ticket to a higher social position. His desire for Olivia as well as his ethical severity is a mask for a will-to-power:

Fabian O, peace! Now he's deeply in. Look how imagination blows him.

Malvolio Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state—

Toby O for a stone bow, to hit him in the eye!

Malvolio Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown; having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping—... And then to have the humour of state; and after a demure travel of regard, telling them I know my place, as I would they should do theirs, to ask for my kinsman Toby—... Saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech.'

Toby What, what?

Malvolio 'You must amend your drunkenness'.

(II, v, 40-71)

Malvolio's fantasy reveals that his disciplinary zeal is impelled by a desire to dominate, unlike Viola's gracious deference. His imagined reproof, 'You must amend your drunkenness', is, like his branched velvet gown and his imperious looks, only another means by which he demonstrates his new position of power within the household. Malvolio's imagined reproof of Sir Toby is to be compared to the kindly correction of Orsino by Viola: their motives, according to the play, establish their difference. Malvolio's crime is not that he, as a gentleman, wants to marry a countess, or even that a steward wants to marry his mistress; it is that he will use his new position to disrupt traditional customs and rituals, and that such use of his 'prerogative' will be motivated by an ambition to establish his superiority and to impose his will on others. His sense of being virtuous is actually a desire for supremacy; for this reason, there will be no more cakes and ale, as Toby puts it (II, iii, 116-17). We find during the play that Malvolio has brought Fabian 'out o' favour with my lady' Olivia for bearbaiting, and put Viola's benevolent captain into jail for some unidentified crime (II, v, 6-7; V, i, 275-6). Although Maria calls Malvolio only 'a kind of Puritan', Malvolio's fantasy of power constitutes the play's critique of London disciplinarians, those Puritan aldermen who were perhaps gentlemen but had originally been merchants, who condemned holiday revelry, bearbaiting and the theatre: such a concern for civil rule, according to the play, masks a self-interested desire to govern, an unwillingness to accept traditional social bonds, and a willingness to disrupt rather than harmonise the social order. London Puritans and
Malvolio are like the 'politicians' and 'Brownists' that Sir Andrew fears (III, ii, 30-1): each is a type of 'separatist', one who does not respect the bonds that tie the community together, bonds which may be flexible and fluid, but which must continue to hold if society is to survive.

In 'Pierce Pennilesse: His Supplication to the Divell' (1592), Thomas Nash, Gent., attacks those newly rich men who have no respect for the 'noble' virtue of liberality, which he feels is the main source of income for struggling writers. The contempt for tradition on the part of these 'new men' is the result of a frenetic upward movement of tradesmen and lawyers, who dress 'as brave as any . . . Nobleman'. He makes it clear that he does not oppose social mobility per se, but only that worthy men are left impoverished, whereas the undeserving obtain higher estates through 'delicious gold' or are unjustly promoted like 'some such obscure upstart gallants, as without desert or service are raised from the plough, to be checkmate with Princes'. Indeed, such social advancement would be appropriate if granted to writers whose talents make them superior to their patrons: 'This is the lamentable condition of our Times, that men of Arte must seeke almes of Cormorants, and those that deserve best, be kept under by Dunces.' Like Twelfth Night, Nash questions the traditional notion that social superiors are necessarily better than those they govern, but he also attacks merchants and tradesmen who have no respect for the traditional nobility and no respect for the theatre. 'Pierce' claims that the ethical severity of those citizens who condemn playgoing only masks a desire to usurp the place of the traditional nobility:

I will defend [the theatre] against any Collier or clubfooted Usurer of them all, there is no immortalitie, can be given a man on earth like unto Playes. What talke I to them of immortalitie, that are the only underminers of Honour, and doe envie any man that is not sprung up by base Brokerie like themselves. They care not if all the ancient houses were rooted out, so that like the Burgomasters of the Low-Countries they might share the government amongst them as States, and be quarter-maisters of our Monarchie . . . [They respect] neither the right of Fame that is due to true Nobilitie deceased, nor what hopes of eternitie are to be proposed to adventurous mindes, to encourage them forward, but only their execrable luker, and filthie unquenchable avarice.

Social advancement is appropriate for 'adventurous mindes' and 'men of Arte', but not for those who seek to mount upward for the wrong reasons: a hunger for money and power over others. Such as these not only have no respect for the ancient houses of nobility, they want to cast society into a different form, so that, like the 'Burgomasters of the Low-Countries', they will be 'quarter-maisters of our Monarchie'. According to the treatise, this disruption of the social order is caused by the devil himself, 'Nicalao Malevolo . . . the great mister maister of hell'.

In 'Pierce Pennilesse', Nash reacts against Puritan attacks on the theatres and against the influence of the London city government on the Privy Council. Twelfth Night (1602) was produced only a few years after the office of the Master of the Revels had affirmed its capacity to license theatrical companies and restrict the days of their performances, as well as the bearbaiting that occurred nearby. Such courtly and civic control over theatrical revelry mirrored the repression of holiday pastimes in the Countryside in places like Shakespeare's Stratford. Local Puritan elites were prohibiting many village festivities, including the church ales, in the name of a more thorough 'civil rule' (II, iii, 122).

Nash's pamphlet illuminates one of the most important contexts for Twelfth Night: urban satire, including the Harvey-Nash quarrel, in which 'Pierce Pennilessse' figures, but also including the war of the theatres, occurring during this period and referring at times to this play. What You Will is one of John Marston's volleys in the war, and its connections to Twelfth Night, or What You Will clarify that, for these playwrights, the intersection between disguise and the problem of fluid social relations is commonplace. In a society where status categories are flexible, apparel becomes a 'god', and opinion, or 'what you will', according to Marston, determines all social value, including personal rank and identity. One of the central characters in Marston's
play, Albano, is a merchant who for a time loses his wife, his property and his name because people assume
that he is dead and the living person standing before them is an imposter. Whether *What You Will* appeared
before or after *Twelfth Night*, the attributes they share suggest that *Twelfth Night* was not only about revelry or
carnival, but about the difficulties of estimating the value of individuals when the externals of identity,
including rank and gender, are so easily imitated. It is therefore relevant that Shakespeare's play and probably
Marston's were put on before an Inns of Court audience, incipient lawyers, well versed in urban satire and
preparing for the successes and dangers of social advancement in the city. 'What you will' for Marston refers
to opinion, and for Shakespeare to desire, but both playwrights testify to a world in which individually
initiated attitudes and acts have replaced a shared consensus about appropriate behaviour and the rules for
evaluating it. Both plays fear such a world, in which every man and woman can be a phoenix; *Twelfth Night*
offers us women and servants who exchange their independence for a willing desire for another and so
preserve 'all relation'.

Malvolio may be a kind of Puritan, but he is also the conventional butt of urban satire, the social climber who
becomes obsessed with the externals of rank, 'the habit of some sir of note' (III, iv, 77-8), without a sense of
'true' worth and its significance for the community. Viola's decision to trust the Captain at the beginning of the
play takes on new importance in this context, because she, like all members of society, must learn to accept
and analyse a difference between external appearance and internal value:

> There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain,
> And though that nature with a beauteous wall
> Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
> I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
> With this thy fair and outward character.
>
>(I, i, 47-51)

Viola's trust in the Captain is a matter of judgement and of will, an opinion not a fact. The problems of
disguise in *Twelfth Night* take the play into the world of Ben Jonson's exploration of character and the
ambiguous relationship in his plays between inner worth and social rank.

For Jonson, the nobility are to be revered, but only if they

> Study the native frame of a true heart,
> An inward comeliness of bountie, knowledge,
> And spirit that may conforme them actually
> To God's high figures.
>
>(28)

In *Cynthia's Revels, Or the Fountayne of self-love* (1600), the Jonsonian surrogate Crites unmasks the
narcissism that motivates decadent aristocrats as well as ambitious courtiers; the play uses terms that look
forward to Shakespeare's presentation of the Duke and Malvolio. But unlike Shakespeare, Jonson proceeds to
define a positive version of self-love, which transforms narcissism into an honourable method of establishing
publicly one's inner value: 'allowable Self-love' quickens 'minds in the pursuit of honour', and impels
individuals to reach a social position which will justly match 'that true measure of one's self (V, vii, 26-35). In
the play, Cynthia the Queen singles out for promotion her playwright Crites, whom she describes as one
'whom learning, virtue, and our favour last / Exempteth from the gloomy multitude' (V, viii, 32-3).

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare pokes fun at a notion of 'allowable self-love' which results in the preferment
of its author. He associates such self-love with the colour yellow theatrically attributed to it in *Cynthia's Revels,*
and with an overly pretentious, censorious steward, who is convinced that his lady will thrust greatness upon him. Malvolio's 'self-love' satirises Jonson's version of individual value not only as self-indulgent but as socially divisive, because it privileges censuring the faults of others and praising the self over the more difficult task of preserving the harmony of social relations. *Twelfth Night* suggests that Jonson's version of merit is just as 'separatist' as the Puritans he derides in his comedies. The 'railing' that Viola's social music tames is not only that of the Puritans but that of the satirists.

Shakespeare is as interested as Jonson in the relationship between the 'name' and 'nature' of nobility, but he explores the issue through 'Viola' rather than 'Crites'. The name of the Duke, Orsino (or 'the little bear'), indicates that the Duke as well as Malvolio is the subject of the play's bearbaiting. Marston's Duke in *What You Will* is blatantly frivolous and sensual; audiences must have understood that Orsino's attitude towards love and women was not presented uncritically by *Twelfth Night*. But such criticism never becomes biting satire in Shakespeare's play: 'there is no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove' (I, v, 95-6).

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare celebrates the social arts, very like his own, which can turn a servant into a master, a glove-maker's son into a gentleman, a woman into a man, a man into a woman. Nevertheless, he reproves those who would use this social fluidity for their own benefit or as an opportunity to reorder the traditional structure according to new ethical and political principles. Such ethical and political blueprints, he suggests, are simply fantasies of power, which exchange the community good for private profit.

The play links the issues of gender and status in order to make marriage, with its inclusion of desire and its commitment to permanence, the model of all social bonds. The Priest's description of Olivia's marriage betrothal to Sebastian represents the play's dream of a perpetual community, in which each member willingly takes his or her place:

> A contract of eternal bond of love  
> Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands,  
> Attested by the holy close of lips,  
> Strengthened by interchangement of your rings.

(V, i, 156-9)

It is not a coincidence that in the last act, as the cases of mistaken identity mount up, willing service is coordinated with the contract of marriage, and the dangers of infidelity to such a contract are considered: Olivia's sense of her husband Cesario's betrayal is followed by Antonio's sense of his master Sebastian's betrayal, and then by Orsino's sense of his servant Cesario's betrayal. Antonio, of course, is the model for the new servant imagined by the play, since his service is based on desire rather than duty or reverence:

> I could not stay behind you. My desire  
> (More sharp than filed steel) did spur me forth;  
> . . . My willing love . . . Set forth in your pursuit.

(III, iii, 4-5, 11-13)

The marriage bonds that certify the socially acceptable 'willing love' of man and woman are forged by the 'true' priest in the play, who is opposed dramatically to the 'false' priest-fool, Sir Topas, who baits Malvolio. This carnivalesque figure reproaches others in society who have 'dissembled in such a gown' (IV, ii, 5-6), but also members of the aristocracy, who, like Chaucer's Sir Thopas, provide only an empty image of aristocratic superiority. Such an image becomes ridiculous when engendered by a non-aristocratic author-fool, like the narrator of the *Canterbury Tales*, who cannot get a tale of nobility quite right, but also when manipulated by a
Sir Toby, whose name is so close to the Sir Topas he concocts that he becomes implicated in his own critique. Such satirists as Sir Toby miss the point when they bait Malvolio: blood is not the issue, but rather some mysterious quality of inner nobility which Sir Toby himself does not possess.

Viola's 'courtesy' is evidence not only of this inner nobility, but of her willingness to use her performative talent for unselfish purposes, to spin out the modes of social behaviour that can preserve the ties that bind. Orsino and Olivia think nostalgically about 'the old age' or the 'merry world' before true love and loyal servants were replaced by 'these most brisk and giddy-paced times' (II, iv, 48; II, i, 100-1). *Twelfth Night* is plagued by a fear that when the witty whirl that is its surface and its plot shuts down, no trustworthy social order will remain: 'with hey, ho, the wind and the rain' (V, i, 391ff).

Perhaps this is one reason why the play so relentlessly excludes the figure of the merchant, although in the sources, the father of Viola and Sebastian is almost always a merchant, and frequently the father of Olivia is so as well. In Marston's play, Albano the merchant most forcefully represents the fragility of an identity based on fortune or chance, since he has achieved his status in the community through the power of wealth rather than the tradition of family lineage. In *Twelfth Night*, a play that is filled with imagery of the sea, merchants are never mentioned, although the play does refer to a new map of the world which includes the West Indies, and which is used to describe the lines on Malvolio's smiling face as he pursues his hopes with Olivia (II, ii, 76-8). The play evokes the sense of treasure that can be obtained from the sea, as well as the riches that can satisfy a desire which is as infinite as the sea. But the treasure from the ocean in this play is Viola and Sebastian; like aspirations for social ascent, commercial interests are turned into romantic appetites.

The play cannot afford the figure of the merchant because such a social role does not fit clearly enough into the traditional hierarchical order of servant and master. The relations of the commercial classes to the classes above them could not easily be described in terms of feudal norms—they are not mentioned in the homily on obedience—since they were constituted more by monetary exchange than by the traditional ideals of reverence and duty. Shakespeare has to consider Malvolio as 'a kind of Puritan'; a real Calvinist merchant would upset the delicate balance of a play which explores the issue of social mobility through the lens of willing servants rather than successful entrepreneurs.

The play solves the problem of self-interested desire through Viola's harmonious social bonding, and so projects anxieties about status relations onto gender relations. The play's fear of independent women is implicated in its fear of independent servants, since Viola's dependence is constituted in opposition to Malvolio's self-interest. Therefore sexual-familial structures are linked rather explicitly to socio-economic structures, as Kelly puts it, in such a way as to suggest that Viola's attitude to her labour as a servant to the Duke is praiseworthy because it partakes of her attitude towards her beloved, Orsino. As such, loving male-female relations mediate master-servant relations: both partners may be quite equal in intelligence and moral capacity, or indeed the subordinate may be superior to his or her master; nevertheless, an appreciative love should tie both together. Such a formula redefines traditional hierarchical bonds as more flexible in themselves, but also turns anything but the most loving commitment to one's superiors into 'self-love'.

The play's superimposition of labour relations onto marital relations results in a model of 'willing service' formed in the image of the 'mutual consent' required in the marriage contract. The history of the various kinds of contract during this period demonstrates that Shakespeare's model of contract is a selective one, since such an agreement could act as either a conservative or a disruptive force. At the time that the play was produced, changes in the law were eroding traditional restraints on business contracts, and strengthening the individual's control over these transactions. Such agreements required voluntary and mutual consent at the cost of feudal models of obligation, since deference to status was replaced with an interest in the market and personal profit. But such 'freedom' was not extended to labouring individuals, whose tendency to move throughout the country in pursuit of work had resulted in the passing of the Statute of Artificers (1563), which prohibited the sudden termination of contracts between employer and employed, and made illegal a horizontal mobility of
workers responsive to new commercial developments. Through its labour-contract clauses, the Statute sought to place labourers under the firm control of a 'master', and often within the structure of the employer's family and paternal authority. *Twelfth Night* also mediates between a status and a market society through marriage and the family: it dramatises voluntary consent and 'free' will as mitigating the rigidity of the master-servant relationship, but also as preserving this traditional bond at a time when market forces were wearing away its feudal foundations. Shakespeare may have taken his cue from the marriage manuals of the period, which employ the language of contractual 'freedom', but nevertheless hedge it about with a concern for status and authority: 'consent' includes parental agreement and 'equality' requires likeness in rank; both consent and equality fade quickly away before the customary necessities of male authority and female submission. Like the manuals and marital law during this period, Shakespeare attempts to negotiate between individual interests and those of traditional society. He follows Perkins by making marriage the model for 'the commonwealth'.

*Twelfth Night* imagines a world in which one's social estate is a matter of desire or will rather than birth or title. Such desire is innocent and successful to the extent that it moves one to be bound unselfishly to another. Shakespeare divides and conquers in his play not only by praising Viola and condemning Malvolio, but also by obscuring what Viola and Malvolio share in the play's various literary and social sources: a connection with a commercial class whose access to money has the power to upset the traditional link between high birth, wealth and status. The ideal that is set before women, servants and merchants in the play is that of loving and willing service, a Viola who chooses her man, but who also chooses to correct gently rather than dethrone the tyrant who will rule over her in the future. We might imagine a play about Mal-Viola (or Jane Anger), who does not wish the Duke well and says so, and whose female desire cannot so easily be presented as 'good will'. Just as Jonson in *Cynthia's Revels* presents himself in Crites, Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* presents himself in Viola, that figure so well versed in the 'arts' of social behaviour, far more intelligent than her superiors, who elects to preserve the social harmony rather than 'put down' her masters.

Notes


3 'An exhortation concerning good order, and obedience to rulers and magistrates,' and 'An homilie of the state of matrimonie', in *Certaine Sermons or Homilies appointed by the Queenes Majestie, to be declared and read by all Parsons, Vicars, and Curates . . .* (London, 1595), 13 and Gg7.

4 Of course, several Renaissance critics have already discussed quite successfully the relationship of gender and status in Renaissance drama. Frank Whigham's 'Sexual and social mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi* (PMLA, 100 [1985], pp. 167-86) is the best of this sort, and I am indebted to his discussion of social mobility. Nevertheless, in his essay, the gender issues tend to collapse into the status issues: 'the duchess's enterprise is not primarily private and romantic: it is, rather, a socially adaptive action that extends to the zone of gender conflict a maneuver actively in play in the arena of class conflict' (p. 171). Whigham's quotation from Kenneth Burke on *Venus and Adonis* at the beginning of the essay clarifies this: 'The real subject is not primarily sexual lewdness at all, but "social lewdness" mythically expressed in sexual terms.' If feminist
writers in the 1970s ignored problems of class (Paula Berggren, 'The woman's part: female sexuality as power in Shakespeare's plays', and Clara Claiborne Park, 'As we like it: how a girl can be smart and still popular', both in Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Neely, eds., The Woman's Part: Feminist criticism of Shakespeare [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980], pp. 17-34, 100-16), then new historicists and cultural materialists in the 1980s often reduced gender concerns into a symbolic means of articulating what is 'the real subject': status, or issues of power in general. See Leonard Tennenhouse, Power on Display: The politics of Shakespeare's genres (New York and London: Methuen, 1986) for a fascinating discussion of 'Staging carnival', which attends to the role of women and Queen Elizabeth in the process of inheritance, but which finally defines the comedies and Petrarchan literature as 'presenting us with a political crisis which must be understood and resolved in sexual terms' (p. 19). This is the problem, I think, with focusing exclusively on Queen Elizabeth in discussing these issues: the sexual-familial questions can too easily disappear before the political or socio-economic concerns. Jean Howard avoids this difficulty in 'Crossdressing, the theatre, and gender struggle in early modern England', (SQ, 39 [1988], pp. 418-40), in which she discusses the 'various manifestations of crossdressing' as 'an interlocking grid through which we can read aspects of class and gender struggle in the period', and the particularity with which she does so is enlightening and refreshing. She interprets Twelfth Night quite differently from the way I do, however, because she sees Viola's crossdressing as 'in no way adopted to protest gender inequities' (p. 431).

5 In an essay in this collection, 'The world turned upside down: inversion, gender and the state', Peter Stallybrass argues that 'there is no intrinsic connection between inversions of class [and] gender . . . Politics is precisely the work of making such connections.' I argue in this essay that Twelfth Night performs such work by coordinating the interests of women and servants, and by making female 'good will' the model for socially ambitious men.

6 It is not a coincidence that the centrality of 'will' to the play reproduces the role of 'will' in the sonnets, in which Shakespeare represents his own peculiar linking of love and the potential rewards of patronage. For a largely psychoanalytic account of will in the sonnets, see Joel Fineman, Shakespeare's Perjured Eye (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). My analysis of traditional and emergent attitudes in the play is indebted to Raymond Williams' discussion of his terms 'dominant', 'emergent' and 'residual' in Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 31-49, and in Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-8.

7 I disagree with those critics who diagnose and/or dismiss Viola's successes in this play as the result of her noble rank (Tennenhouse, Power on Display, p. 66; Elliot Krieger, A Marxist Study of Shakespeare's Comedies [London: Macmillan Press, 1979], pp. 105-30).

8 As with several other characters, the play confuses us about the status of Maria: she is represented by Sir Toby as 'my niece's chambermaid' (I, iii, 50), but is identified by Olivia as 'my gentlewoman' (I, v, 162). But the play continually groups her with the 'lighter people', as Malvolio puts it (V, i, 341). In her forged letter to Malvolio, Maria herself delineates the line she will eventually cross: 'Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants' (II, v, 149-50).


14 Cressy, 'Describing the social order', pp. 34-5.


17 See Whigham, 'Sexual and social mobility in The Duchess of Malfi'

18 See Catherine Belsey's illuminating and convincing reading of this scene in 'Disrupting sexual difference: meaning and gender in the comedies', in John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 166-90. Belsey argues that Viola-as-Cesario calls 'into question that set of relations between terms which proposes as inevitable an antithesis between masculine and feminine, men and women' (p. 167). I am arguing that the difference between the categories of servant and master are also questioned by the play, and that Viola's success and 'good will' in disrupting these differences in scene iv are compared to Malvolio's failure in scene v. Viola's noble rank, like her role as a wife, is affirmed at the end of the play, and, as Belsey says, closes off 'the glimpsed transgression . . . But the plays are more than their endings' (pp. 187-8).


23 For discussions on individual choice in marriage, see Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, pp. 85-93, 117, 178-95, 270-95; Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680, pp. 70-88; Susan Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 70-6, 105-8; and William and Mallevile Haller, 'The Puritan art of love', Huntington Library Quarterly, 5 (1941-2), pp. 254-6, 265. Cleaver insists on the 'consent of the heart' (p. 115) and includes discussions on choice, consent, and contract (pp. 96-129). Perkins includes chapters entitled 'Of the Contract', 'Of the choice of persons fit for marriage' and 'Of consent in the Contract' (pp. 18, 23, 68). See Tilney, D4, for Lady Julia's advice on the choice of husbands and the practicality of love after the marriage has occurred.


29 I am not the first to entertain the notion that Malvolio may represent Jonson; John Hollander considers the possibility for reasons quite different from my own in his insightful and informative essay, Twelfth Night and the morality of indulgence', The Sewanee Review, 68 (1959), pp. 220-38. Hollander dismisses the possibility, but reminds us that Marston's What You Will 'devotes much effort to lampooning Jonson' (p. 238). See V, vii, 26-35 in Cynthia's Revels for the yellow colour of 'allowable self-love', which later turns up as Malvolio's stockings.
30 As Hollander points out, the Duke's name and na-ture are affirmed as equally 'noble' (I, ii, 25), but the name 'Orsino' suggests quite another character. Jean Howard offers a different interpretation of Shakespeare's treatment of Orsino in her article 'Crossdressing' (p. 432).

31 Antonio is also the character left without a clear social position at the end of the play, since Sebastian never explicitly claims him as his man, nor frees him from Orsino's indictment. The play's tentative sympathy for this homoerotic relationship cannot save it from an exclusion from the community produced at the end of the play and most literally from the social legitimacy of marital bonds. Like that of the other characters, the 'desire' of Antonio for Sebastian begins by flowing into the traditional bonds of master and servant; therefore accounts of its homoeroticism have to be historicised. Nevertheless, Antonio is left at the end of the play a 'masterless' man.


Douglas E. Green (essay date 1992)


[In the following essay, Green discusses the portrayal of love and gender in Twelfth Night, maintaining that while the play exposes the narcissism and self-centeredness of masculine love, its ending—with Viola still costumed as Cesario—reinforces the idea that men are the only trustworthy objects of desire.]

However much we may argue about Shakespearean texts, we never doubt that they mean something—and they do, although not quite in the way the old introductory Shakespeare course descriptions once implied. Because "Shakespeare is," according to Alan Sinfield, "one of the places where ideology is made," 1 we have
lately had a proliferation of multiply explicated Shakespeares, deconstructing and deconstructed Shakespeares, Marxist Shakespeares, psychoanalytic Shakespeares, new historicist Shakespeares, and feminist Shakespeares. In her book *The Social Production of Art*, the Marxist-feminist theorist Janet Wolff discusses the implications of this sort of "interpretation as recreation": "What is far more important than the fact that, as a literary critical exercise, we may attempt to recover an author's meaning, is the fact that this meaning is effectively dead. What an author intended, or even meant to his or her contemporary public and first readers, is only of interest insofar as that original meaning has historically informed the present reading of the text." For many Shakespeareans that is a par-ticularly bitter pill. But as much recent feminist and new historical criticism has shown, the various constructions of gender in Shakespeare's plays do not transcend their historical determinants. In connection with *Twelfth Night*, the kind of romantic comedy still admired for the pluck of its heroine, I shall suggest at least one of the dangers of persisting in the myth of a transcendent Shakespeare.

The construction of gender in *Twelfth Night* raises special issues for the modern reader or audience, which the mere insertion of women into roles originally written with boy-actors in mind does not eradicate, but further complicates. Stephen Greenblatt has recently argued that "licit sexuality in *Twelfth Night*—the only craving that the play can represent as capable of finding satisfaction—depends upon a [natural] movement that deviates from the desired object straight in one's path toward a marginal object, a body one scarcely knows." Thus, fortunately for Olivia and Viola, Sebastian and Orsino (or rather Antonio?), this deviating "nature is," according to Greenblatt, "an unbalancing act." But even if we endorse wholeheartedly Greenblatt's intertextual conjunction of Renaissance medical discourse and *Twelfth Night*'s construction of gender and identity, we modern readers still face our own problematic transcription of the text's construction of gender: how do our diverse re-constitutions of the women's roles, usually without regard to the textual residue of the original mode of production, affect the representation of women on the stage, not to mention their place in the world? The question reminds us that, for feminist critics as well as others, interpretation has present, as well as past, historical and political import. In her provocative psychoanalytic account of gender and genre in Shakespeare, Linda Bamber has claimed that, even in the comedies, "insofar as the Self is within drama and human, it counts itself a member of the dominant social group," whereas "the feminine is Other to society's rules and regulations, to its hierarchies of power, and to the impersonality of its systems and sanctions." But if, as Luce Irigaray asserts, "any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine,'" then Shakespeare's*Twelfth Night*, insofar as it aims to represent versions of woman as desiring subject, not only suggests anxiety about feminine identity and desire, but ultimately denies any Other consciousness at all—that is, any consciousness not constituted in masculine terms. Thus, unlike her literary cousin Rosalind, Viola never returns from boyhood to even the illusion of womanhood; instead she remains Cesario—a colony of that "little Caesar," the boy-actor inscribed in the text, sign of the masculine as prototype of subjectivity.

*Twelfth Night* essentially exiles all but traditionally deceptive and erratic images of women from the stage; the puckish Maria, weaver of Toby's beloved "device," is the rule, not the exception. Her deceptive letter to Malvolio replicates various postures and disguises of Olivia and Viola, but with a difference: it exposes the dangers of feminine wiles and desire, as do Maria's appeal to Sir Toby and her own attraction to him. On the one hand, as her handwriting indicates, Maria is her mistress's diminutive double; as such, she suggests problems with Olivia's rule over the house and indirectly implicates her mistress in the deception of Malvolio. Though her household seems to respect and even fear Olivia, the chaos of the subplot undermines the illusion of her governance. And since Maria uses her mistress's "being addicted to a melancholy" as part of the ruse, Olivia's own excesses are at least tangentially linked to Malvolio's cruelly comic imprisonment.

On the other hand, like Viola, Maria masquerades, albeit in the written word only. As in the obvious anagrammatic play among the names Viola, Olivia, and Malvolio, there is in Maria's writing a material illustration of the slipperiness of words that Viola and Feste note and employ in witty quibbles:

Viola. Thy reason, man?
Furthermore, like Viola but with greater impetus, Maria maneuvers her way into marriage through her clever deception. True, she uses a "device" (2.5.182), whereas Viola merely assumes a disguise. Still, the audience's sense of Viola's cleverness derives at least in part from her convincing masquerade; subliminally, Viola's clever deception belies her virginal innocence, which has to be reintroduced through the duel manque with Sir Andrew. Finally, the anti-romantic marriage between Maria and Toby exposes many of the artificial conventions of Twelfth Night's romantic main plot—both its chaotic courtships and its protean marital resolutions. Though I do not wish to overstate the importance of Maria, I do want to unmask the disguised implications of the sub-plot for issues of gender in the main.

Needless to say, the subplot's innuendoes hardly tell us everything we need to know about characters in the main plot; in particular, they seem to cast but a shadow of a doubt on Olivia, that remarkable characterization of a woman in love. Olivia recognizes and, unlike Orsino, takes responsibility for the swiftness and instability of her own passion and acknowledges that under its influence "ourselves we do not owe" (1.5.296). From her first encounter with Cesario, Olivia recognizes the pitfalls of the path down which she is headed: "I do not know what, and fear to find / Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind" (312-13). In each successive encounter, she articulates her own precarious position as a female suitor and yet persists in her desires: "Under your hard construction must I sit, / To force that on you in a shameful cunning / Which you knew none of yours. What might you think?" (3.1.117-19). Like Viola, she submits to her fate as an unrequited lover (1.5.314-15); but, unlike the disguised female orphan and rather like Maria, she exercises her powers—feminine (she unveils her face [1.5.237]) and aristocratic (she arranges the betrothal [4.3] and later calls the priest as witness [5.1])—to get what she wants. Olivia is adept both at disguise and deferral—just why has she adopted that excessive posture of mourning that she so readily discards when the right love comes along? —and at assertive forthright action—her most effective commands to Toby and his cohorts occur when having mistaken the besieged Sebastian for Cesario, she defends her beloved: "Rudesby, be gone!" (4.1.50).

But repressed anxiety about such headstrong women surfaces in the text. Finally, Olivia's attraction to the gentlemanly but impoverished Cesario also indicates a desire to retain the kind of authority in marriage that union with Orsino, a social superior, precludes; as Sir Toby remarks, "She'll none o' the' Count; she'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit; I have heard her swear't" (1.3.106-8). Olivia's superior social standing seems to guarantee, if not an equal place in the marriage she wants (Sebastian does, after all, beat her kinsman [5.1.207]), at least a better place than most married women could hope for. As we shall see, though this nearer equality between husband and wife is offered as an ideal, the final scene casts some doubt on its extra-theatrical efficacy and, from the masculine perspective of one such as Orsino, even on its desirability.

The debate between Viola and Orsino addresses the issue of difference between feminine and masculine desire. As a lover, Orsino claims at times an imaginative capaciousness and mutability as great as the "sea" (1.1.9-15; 2.4.101-2), an image whose feminine associations many critics have noted. If Olivia has to adopt the uncharacteristic role of female suitor, Orsino often speaks of being in love as a feminine disposition: "Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, / More longing, wavering sooner lost and worn / Than women's are" (2.4.33-35). By universalizing aspects of the love experience traditionally associated with one or the other gender, Shakespeare seems to eradicate the difference between men and women in love. What Viola, in a moment of solitary candor, says of the smitten Olivia applies equally to the masculine fancy of Orsino: "How easy it is for the proper false / In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!" (2.2.28-29). In this instance, both man and woman are erratic, unstable, unpredictable—in other words, conventionally feminine.
But Viola's remark is only half the story; it belies her later claim, in the person of Cesario, that women "are as true of heart as we [men]" (2.4.105). Though the play suggests that men in love are as erratic as women—we should note that Orsino, like many another Renaissance misogynist, considers fickleness essential to women whether or not they are in love—Shakespeare is also claiming in turn that women can be as faithful as men: "She [Cesario's fictive sister] sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?" (2.4.115-16). By conjuring up the Patient Griselda—that feminine prototype of steadfastness—Viola-Cesario and Shakespeare undercut the masculinist sentiments of Orsino. In this way, virtue in love is extended to women; love's transforming power is made universal. The fact that the contradictory statements about women's faith and fickleness in comparison to men's come from the girl-boy Viola-Cesario helps to create the illusion that, at least in matters of the heart, men and women are more or less on an equal footing. Through the boy-actor masquerading as a woman imitating a man, Shakespeare attempts to erase sexual difference: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too" (2.4.121-22).

But because this illusion of universality requires the skills of a boy-actor, the mode of production itself accords the masculine a peculiar privilege. Here we see a very basic sense in which "any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'": in this Elizabethan script, subjective experience is constituted in masculine terms by men. Thus, afflicted with his own version of Malvolio's self-love, Orsino too claims the "trick of singularity" in love (2.5.151), by defining himself as lover in the very manner that men in patriarchal society have defined themselves, the self, and subjectivity itself—as not feminine. Indeed, in the key exchange with Cesario, cited earlier, Orsino predicates the depth of his desire and his very being on his difference from the woman, the mere object of desire. In contrast to Olivia's, Orsino's passion makes him more himself: "Make no compare / Between that love a woman can bear me / And that I owe Olivia" (2.4.100-102).

Of course, it is not quite so simple; as we have seen, Orsino likes to have it both ways. Even his appropriation of the oceanic capacity of the feminine exposes the extent to which this "man is the measure of all things," including femininity. There is no lack of self-possession here, but a fruitless attempt to possess or appropriate all through the imaginative capacity (often for roleplaying or at least posturing) that love occasions. Unfortunately for Orsino, who seems to believe his protestations at least as much as he presumably believes that Olivia is the only socially suitable match in town (5.1.110 ff.), his love's fancy does not extend much beyond the Petrarchan conceits and conventional courtly attitudes of the masculine, lover. Moreover, since Orsino's various declarations, unlike Olivia's or for that matter Viola's, are made in absentia and in isolation or in company supposedly of his own sex, they underscore masculine self-absorption and self-affirmation in love.

Certainly, given Orsino's rather sudden change of heart at the end, Viola's comment on women's being "as true of heart as we [men]" (2.4.105) suggests the instability of all desiring subjects, masculine as well as feminine. But it is through the image of woman that Shakespeare figures this lack of control, as we see in Orsino's long-awaited confrontation with Olivia in the final scene. Only when he has been repeatedly and undeniably thwarted, does he come in person and then prove the depth of his unrequited love by the will to murder—not the unfaithful woman herself but the object of ostensibly feminine desire: "But this your minion, whom I know you love, / And whom, by heaven, I swear I tender dearly, / Him will I tear out of that cruel eye / Where he sits crowned in his master's spite" (5.1.123-26). Orsino's violent verbal attack on Olivia and his threat against Cesario reveal almost as much as the play's omission of Cesario's transformation back into Viola. Most obviously, they cast all responsibility for his troubles on women, actual or disguised. They expose, furthermore, what Coppélia Kahn calls "his fear of losing himself in passion." That fear—particularly masculine, as I see it—is underscored by the threat against Cesario, the annihilation of Orsino's own ambiguous object of desire; Orsino unmasks once again his need to "defend against Eros as a threat to the integrity and stability of the self." Whereas Olivia hauls forth a priest to declare and ratify the love relation she wants (a marital one both we and undoubtedly Queen Elizabeth might question), Orsino's anti-social behavior, which culminates in the threat of violence against the boy-girl he loves, exposes masculine paranoiac
about the loss of self in love and about the indefiniteness of his own desire. Indeed, the indeterminacy of his own desire is suggested by Cesario (the boy playing a girl playing a boy), the target standing in for Olivia—who by the way is also played by a boy. Though the play certainly exposes many of the inconsistencies and contradictions of masculine love like Orsino's, the Shakespearean solution, the play's resolution, is nonetheless problematic, especially from a modern perspective.

The problems derive in large part from the comedy's mode of production; the boy-actor who plays Viola-Cesario remains a boy even after Orsino has declared his "share in this most happy wrack" (5.1.258). I cannot quite agree with Coppélia Kahn about "what Viola herself never forgets: that no matter how the duke and countess see her, she is not androgynous but irreducibly a woman."22 In fact, Viola's witty disclaimer—"a little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man" (3.4.307-9)—is a two-edged sword, not only undercutting the female character's masculine bravado but also underscoring the boy-actor's irreducible, or at least incipient, manhood.23 Though Orsino seems to deny it in his last lines, he finds his "mistress and his fancy's queen" in the boy Cesario, and not in Viola (5.1.377)—at least in terms of the visual tableau, a fact somewhat obscured in Phyllis Rackin's excellent article.24 The theatrical presence of the boy-actor as a boy manifests what, in The Daughter's Seduction, Jane Gallop calls "homosexuality" or the "sexuality of sames"—precisely the effect that Lisa Jardine claims the boy-players generally evoked, according to Renaissance commentators, both homophobic and otherwise.25 The dramatic resolution of the sexual play and the sexual tensions belies any acceptance of an Other by Orsino; it still relies on what Peter Erickson sees in As You Like It as the "security of male bodies mirroring and confirming a common physical identity."26 Oddly enough, by having Orsino accept his lover untransformed (in some ways a radical move compared to As You Like It's conservative ritualism and mystification of marriage),27 Shakespeare replicates the very narcissism and self-absorption of masculine love that the play supposedly unmasks. In this sense, the self-expulsion of the ill-willed, vengeful, self-loving Malvolio is the text's greatest deception.

Furthermore, Erickson's claim that the comedies' narcissistic mirroring "depends precisely on relief from the specifically genital demand associated with the opposite sex" is especially applicable to Twelfth Night, where the appearance of Viola's male twin Sebastian underscores the all-male mode of production.28 According to Kahn, "In Twelfth Night ... the twin and other doubles function at first as projections of emotional obstacles to identity and then, in Viola and Sebastian, as the fulfillment of a wish for a way around the obstacles."29 But the all-male Elizabethan production and its textual inscription in Orsino's remarks—that in Cesario "all is semblative a woman's part" (1.5.34) and that only "other habits" make the woman (5.1.386)—complicate the fulfillment of Viola's, the play's, and the critic-reader's wish that "imagination . . . prove true" (3.4.384). As Phyllis Rackin explains, "without the illusion (Viola's disguise as a boy), the right characters would not have fallen in love; without the reality, they could not have married. In the figure of Sebastian, gender and sex correspond, both within the play world and between the play and the audience."30 Sebastian apparently re-solves the play's problems because in him theatrical and actual sexual identity are one and the same; for the same reason, I maintain, the object of Orsino's transferred affections never transforms himself from Cesario back to that theatrical illusion—the girl Viola. Even though the transformation only requires the boy-actor's resumption of his "woman's weeds" (5.1.271), there is in a meta-dramatic sense more truth in the undisguised Viola's remaining Cesario, in her showing herself—like Sebastian, but in another way—both "maid and man" (5.1.261).

The uneasy Renaissance conflation of two "contradictory accounts of the origin of gender" that Greenblatt outlines in his discussion of the play may underlie some of the "slippage" in identities. In one version, the domination of male or female seed determines identity; "a double nature becomes single." In the other theory, "the unitary genital structure," conceived as essentially male, "divides into two distinct forms, internal [female] and external [male];" "a single nature becomes double."31 But how do we explain the relative values the play assigns to and by gender? Along with Malvolio's accusations of "Notorious wrong" by Olivia (5.1.327-28), who is at the end the one theatrically disguised boy remaining on stage, the image of Orsino with Cesario corroborates the traditional privilege the text accords to masculinity, as well as its imputation of
duplicity to femininity. The bias of the text in this case is not nature's "bias" (5.1.258), but the culture's—akin
to men's age-old wish for a singlesex utopia, a world without women. The minor Sebastian-Antonio plot
exposes this sub-text. Antonio's homoerotic infatuation with Sebastian, his "willing love" (3.3.11), is an
unmasked version of Orsino's attraction to Cesario and, again, given the mode of production, even of the
relationship between Sebastian and Olivia. In fact, it brings to the fore the all-male mode of production. When
Antonio mistakes Viola-Cesario for the adored Sebastian, the error involves an indictment not only of beauty
without virtue, but also of the disjunction between exterior and interior—in other words, of Viola's
masquerade as "unkind" or unnatural: "Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame. / In nature there's no
blemish but the mind; / None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind" (3.4.375-77, 377n). Is it an accident that
Antonio directs his accusations at a female character, who has already acknowledged her disguise "a
wickedness" and herself a "monster"?

The moment recalls Viola's own words to the Captain in act 1, words that conjure up the traditional masculine
suspicion of feminine beauty: "There is a fair behaviour in thee, Captain; / And though that nature with a
beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee I will believe thou hast a mind that suits / With this
thy fair and outward character" (1.3.47-51). Indeed, the proof that Viola is a virtuous woman, that she is
worthy to be loved, and that she is everything she claims and seems to be requires not only her reunion with
the brother she imitates to the life (3.4.389-93), but also her conforming to the masculine standards of truth
reiterated by Antonio—an absolute correspondence between interior and exterior, spirit and body, even word
and thing. Is it then an accident that Antonio, whose very presence exposes the inability of the theatrical
illusion to achieve such a correspondence, "is left out in the cold," displaced by a second boy-actor
masquerading as a woman, the Lady Olivia, without any authority calling to "entreat him to a peace" (5.1.379);
emphasis mine)?

The ultimate corroboration of social order and expectations through the mediation of laws
conceived as natural or providential makes this text's intersection with our own culture a problematic one.
Though the "pleasure" of the play is less concerned with "truth of identity" than the "titillation" aroused by the
"dangers that follow from the disruption of sexual difference," this comedy also closes down the
possibilities implicit in Viola-Cesario's admission of sexual indeterminacy—"I am not what I am" (3.1.143)—and in Antonio's undisguised and unresolved homoerotic attraction.

Why then has Shakespeare refused to return to the initial illusion in which boy plays girl, the illusion that
corroborates the traditional social union of male and female in marriage? I propose that, although other
Shakespearean comedies may also manifest uneasiness toward their feisty heroines, Twelfth Night exiles its
heroine—perhaps more thoroughly than it exiles Malvolio himself. Herein lies the danger of a supposedly
transcendant Shakespeare, and herein lies as well the problem for the modern reader (or viewer or performer),
who wishes to avoid complicity in this text's "bias." Ultimately there is not even the pretense of a sovereign
female consciousness. Viola remains in masculine guise because that is the sign of her truth; Orsino can trust
her only insofar as she is "masculine." Indeed, in the end, we realize that the play's model for true love is not
heterosexual, but rather "homosexual" in Gallop's sense—the love of Antonio for Sebastian and, by a
comforting displacement, of Orsino for Cesario née Viola. In contrast to the androgynous epilogue of As You
Like It, the last of Shakespeare's high comedies elevates the heroine by eradicating her, by letting her be
absorbed into the masculine; for as Viola herself says, and as the play's dramatic illusion underscores, women
"die, even as they to perfection grow" (2.4.40).

Notes

1 Alan Sinfield, "Introduction: Reproductions, Interventions," in Political Shakespeare, ed. Jonathan

2 See the excellent bibliographies—and commentaries—in Edward Pechter's "The New Historicism and Its
"Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," PMLA 102

4 See Pechter, passim.


6 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 68. Not long after I had presented the original version of this paper at the CEMERS conference (October 1987), Greenblatt's controversial essay on "Fiction and Friction" appeared in the foregoing collection of essays (66-93, 175-84) and has since become the center of a debate among feminist and new historical critics of *Twelfth Night*, not least for the authority it grants Renaissance medical discourse on gender and for the effect its general acceptance might have on political and, in particular, feminist criticism. (See, for instance, Jean Howard, 422-23.) Therefore, since I am addressing concerns relevant to the current debate, it seems appropriate to note some points of agreement and disagreement between Greenblatt's views and mine.


13 E.g., Kahn, 225.

14 For the reference to Patient Griselda and further implications of this image, see Catherine Belsey's "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: Methuen, 1985), 186-87.

Greenblatt notes that "if a crucial step in male individuation is separation from the female, this separation is enacted inversely in the rites of crossdressing; characters like Rosalind and Viola pass through the state of being men in order to become women. Shakespearean women are in this sense the representation of Shakespearean men, the projected mirror images of masculine self-differentiation" (92). But when is Viola seen as a woman again? Whereas she remains Cesario, the boy-actor has undergone the passage through femininity to masculinity—and in this case, he never closes the circle by re-appearing in female guise. At the end of *Twelfth Night* the boy-actor remains true to himself; indeed, even in developing the heroine, the text manifests an unconscious association between individuation and maleness.

Relevant to this point is Toril Moi's discussion of Kristevan "positionality" in *Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 166-67.

Williamson, 35.

Kahn, 226-27.

Ibid.

On the issue of Elizabeth and marriage, see Marcus, passim, as well as Greenblatt, 68-69.

Kahn, 228.

In contrast, Rackin notes the boy-player's economic dependency, an extra-dramatic extension of the feminine role, which underscores the indeterminacy of the boy-heroine both on and off the stage (33).

Rackin, 38.


Peter Erickson, 5.

Regarding the ending of *As You Like It* and that play's quite different construction of gender, see my article on "The 'Unexpressive She': Is There Really a Rosalind?," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 2, no. 2 (1988): 41-52.

Peter Erickson, 5. Erickson's insightful comments have meta-dramatic significance that he suggests but often does not discuss in detail.

Kahn, 225.

Rackin, 38.

Greenblatt, 84.
See Greenblatt's explanation of the "metaphor from the game of bowls" and nature's bias; heterosexuality is
conceived as a normal, "happy swerving" (68). Greenblatt's argument is fascinating, and the pattern he
describes does indeed resemble the plot of a Shakespearean comedy (86). But unlike Greenblatt I would argue
that, however problematic the Renaissance accounts of gender, the valuation of the genders is less so; at the
very least the second theory of gender—with its play upon the male organ, the latter's inward or outward,
hidden or open, disposition—is less ambiguous about the primacy of male nature and hence of masculinity.
Indeed, if one combines this view of sexuality with Viola's and Antonio's talk about truth, the correspondence
between interior and exterior, one finds that women are never quite themselves. 

Twelfth Night, as well as the
context that gave rise to it, tends to promote the truth that shows itself—in Sebastian and in Viola-Cesario,
emblem of the theater of boys and men that represents the world of women and men. For a provocative
historicist reading that differs from Greenblatt's, see Howard, 430-33.

Rackin, 37.

Greenblatt notes that, though Renaissance church and state sanctioned only the heterosexual consummation
of desire, "it did not follow that desire was inherently heterosexual. The delicious confusions of Twelfth Night
depend on the mobility of desire. And if poor Antonio is left out in the cold, Orsino does in a sense get his
Cesario" (93). But though Greenblatt mentions also the way in which the all-male cast of Shakespeare's
theater embodies a double-sided Renaissance view of gender, he eschews the implications, for us, of the
inscription in the text of this mode of production and this construction of gender. What values are inherent in
these "delicious confusions," this "set of exchanges and transformations"? To formulate the matter at its most
extreme, do the play's exile of the explicitly homosexual and the enforced masquerade of woman within
marriage (or, in another sense, the absence of women altogether) recommend themselves, as immediately and
unequivocally as Greenblatt implies, to the modern reader? What does it mean to accept Greenblatt's brilliant
"corollary" theory about the play—"that men love women precisely as representations, a love the original
performances of these plays literalized in the person of the boy actor" (93)? Pleasurable, "delicious
confusions" perhaps—but not neutral ones, not ones without present ideological efficacy, given the place of
Shakespeare in our culture.

Belsey, 185.

Irene G. Dash (essay date 1997)

SOURCE: "Challenging Conventions: Twelfth Night" in Women's Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays, University

[In the essay below, Dash stresses the similarities between Viola and Olivia as young, single, upper-class
women who, for a brief period, challenge patriarchal restraints on female independence. She also calls
attention to the textual alternations put in place by generations of theatrical directors which have minimized
the difficulties Viola and Olivia face as they try to resolve the tension between erotic desire and the norms of
society.]

"But if she cannot love you, sir?"
"I cannot be so answer'd."

(II.iv.87-88)

Endowed with wealth, their lives graced by neither fathers, brothers, husbands, nor lovers, the two major
women characters of Twelfth Night briefly challenge patterns of patriarchy. Not revolutionaries, but merely
young women grasping at suddenly available freedom, each would taste independence in her own way. One
retreats behind the garb of mourning for her dead brother while the other, also turning to her supposedly dead
Shakespeare takes the contemporary debate about women's attire, for example, holds it lightly in his hand, turns it like a multifaceted prism, reflecting and refracting the light, then puts it down, revealing the larger issue that it illuminates: women's independence.\textsuperscript{1} With humor and insight, he asks how important is conformity in dress in defining an acceptable woman? Is the woman in breeches really a monster as some of the tracts of the period proclaim because the blurring of fashion could lead to "confusion . . . something that can't be accommodated, a monster" (Shepherd, 1-2)? Or is she related to the tradition of the warrior woman who, like Britomart in Spenser's \textit{Faerie Queene}, fights for virtuous ends (Shepherd, 67)? Denying these extremes and laughing at the debate, the dramatist offers another answer in \textit{Twelfth Night}. In the mode of the modern social scientist, he presents a case and a control, revealing that whether dressed in her own garments—those proper to her sex—or in the borrowed clothes of the other sex, a single woman when young and wealthy faces problems in a patriarchal society, especially if she dares to fall in love and opt for marriage.

Although the play's two major women characters, Viola and Olivia, often have been presented on stage as exact opposites because one wears skirts, the other, breeches, the dramatist has carefully sculpted their roles as parallels—not the wealthy, self-confident, or arrogant Countess in skirts compared with the poor, clever, girl-disguised-as-a-page in breeches, but two bright, literate, young women, each with a sense of herself, each in her own way trying to cope, and each believing she has power. Economic independence and the absence of male authority figures in their families seem to promise self-sovereignty. The play explores the options each woman chooses, the resulting interaction between the two women, and the impact of sexual drives and patriarchal mores on their lives.

And here their difference in attire leads the women into unexpected situations and deflects them on their road to freedom. Disguised as the youth Cesario, Viola wins the heart of the independent Olivia but also, in this disguise, loses her heart to the Duke Orsino. Clothes, rather than freeing her, confine her to silence. In contrast, the woman in skirts forthrightly expresses her desire, overtly pursuing the "youth" Cesario.

As a result, Olivia suffers both in criticism and staging. Since patriarchal values favor the compliant woman over the aggressive one, Viola's breeches, ironically, appear far less threatening than Olivia's decision-making and husband-wooing. By endowing the young women with so many similar attributes with the potential for independence, the dramatist not only explores the limits on that independence for women, but also illuminates what is acceptable and unacceptable in women's behavior.

Even in the twentieth century, acceptable behavior for a young woman has been linked with her loss of independence. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women's "erotic urges" in a male-dominated society cause the problem. She writes of the decision women reach at maturity after having struggled during adolescence with the choice between self as primary and self as "Other." Using the term \textit{subject} to refer to a person's perception of herself as central, or primary, de Beauvoir writes: "For the young woman, . . . there is a contradiction. . . . A conflict breaks out between her original claim to be subject, active, free," and the pressure of "her erotic urges" which dictates that she "accept herself as passive object" (314).\textsuperscript{2} In \textit{Twelfth Night} Shakespeare lightly dramatizes the shift in goals for both women. Because this is a comedy, the painfulness of the dilemma is not stressed as it is, for example, in a tragedy such as \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, where Juliet has not yet recognized the necessity to "accept herself as passive object" and struggles to retain her self-sovereignty even while expressing her "erotic urges."\textsuperscript{3} Here, in the comedy, Viola says merely, "O time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie" (II.ii.40-41). But the dramatist's choice of opposite-sex twins, the weakness of Viola's argument for donning disguise, the basic social equality between the two women, and the subsequent hasty desire of each to discard the protective pose she has chosen suggest
the applicability of de Beauvoir's comment.

The difference, however, in the ways the two women react to their "erotic urges" explains their "acceptability" in the eyes of critics, directors, and audiences. Unlike Viola, Olivia refuses to perceive herself as "Other," seeking instead to solve her problems by aggressively taking charge. After having claimed fealty to her dead brother's memory and adopting a vow of seven years of mourning, a period meant to discourage all the suitors who do not appeal to her, she then changes her mind about marriage when an attractive young "male" arrives at her door. Still retaining that sense of self as "subject, active, free," she nevertheless pursues Cesario, the disguised Viola. Thus in some ways, Olivia resembles Helena of All's Well That Ends Well But Shakespeare has not only endowed Olivia with freedom, wealth, and power, he has also created an alternative double to her in Viola. Unlike Viola, however, Olivia refuses to leave everything for time "to untangle." Thus, while partially illustrating de Beauvoir's thesis—of the effect of "erotic urges" on women's decision-making—Olivia fails to conform to the properly acceptable behavior for a woman.

Behavior is ultimately more important for society than appearance: the debate on women's dress withers before that larger issue of woman's forwardness. Stage productions and criticism of Twelfth Night attack Olivia's violation of conformity in a variety of ways. First, they blur or ignore the many similarities between the women, magnifying Viola's role as a servant, and excising lines indicating her wealth and class. Thus, she becomes the "poor servant girl" as contrasted with the wealthy, aggressive Countess. In criticism, a blatant example of bias appears in William Winter's introduction to Augustin Daly's large souvenir promptbook of the 1893 production of the play. Winter writes that "Viola is Shakespeare's ideal of the patient idolatry and devoted, silent self-sacrifice of perfect love" (5). In contrast, Olivia draws the following comment:

The poet has emphasized his meaning, furthermore, by the expedient of contrast between the two women. Olivia—self-absorbed, ostentatious in her mourning, acquisitive and voracious in her love, self-willed in her conduct, conventional in her character, physically very beautiful but spiritually insignificant—while she is precisely the sort of woman for whom men go wild, serves but to throw the immeasurable superiority of Viola into stronger relief.

(6)

This hardly defines the Olivia whom we meet in the play—the young woman who graciously speaks of Orsino's virtues although she "cannot love him" (I.V.257); who good-naturedly accepts the criticism of her fool; and who even apologizes to the disguised Viola.

Although extreme in its language, Winter's reaction is not isolated. It had both predecessors and successors. Mrs. Inchbald's edition (1808), for example, faults Olivia for another aspect of her behavior, citing the "impudence of women in placing their affections, their happiness, on men younger than themselves" (4). For Inchbald the text itself warns against this in the Duke's words to Viola:

Let stil the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him
So sways she level in her husband's heart, & C

(4-5)

Unfortunately, the editor lifts the speech out of context—a humorous context. The lines occur during a conversation between Duke Orsino and Cesario. Attempting to express herself as a man, Viola describes the person she loves (the Duke) as one "About your years, my lord" (II.iv.28). This leads to his swift reply that Cesario should choose a woman younger than "himself." The humor of the exchange is apparently lost on the indignant editor who even censures Olivia's treatment of her glum steward, the egocentric, puritanical
Malvolio. He, like the Duke, has dreams of marrying her. Misreading his role in the play, Inchbald recommends him:

It might nevertheless be asked by a partizan (sic) of Malvolio's, whether this credulous steward was much deceived, in imputing a degraded taste, in the sentiments of love, to his fair Lady Olivia as she actually did fall in love with a domestic; and one who, from his extreme youth, was perhaps a greater reproach to her discretion, than had she cast a tender regard upon her old and faithful servant.

Prejudice against a strong woman who fails to conform to accepted societal patterns leads the editor astray. She forgets that Cesario is not a youthful domestic but a young woman whose background very much resembles Olivia's, as the dramatist subtly informs us.

Using a sophisticated theatrical methodology, Shakespeare introduces each woman in a different way—playing upon potential audience bias even while revealing the similarities between the women. Shipwrecked in a foreign land, Viola strides ashore, speaks in her own voice, paints a picture of her misfortunes, and quickly decides how to deal with them. During her first appearance, in scene 2, she also reveals her background. In contrast, hearsay precedes Olivia's entrance. In scene after scene a variety of characters evaluate her decision to mourn her brother's death for seven years. Some of these characters also raise questions about the proper behavior for a young countess. Through this technique, the dramatist employs a series of incomplete vignettes by others to suggest the obstacles confronting her.

Critics and actor-managers—or directors—often fall into the trap. They accept the hearsay about Olivia then find the lovesick Duke Orsino—whom we meet in the opening scene—just as irrational as the woman he so passionately wants to marry but who emphatically rejects him. Herschel Baker, for example, calls them "a pair of high-born lovers [who] indulge a set of attitudes untested by experience" (xxiv) and writes of "Orsino's egomania" and "Olivia's silly posture of bereavement" (xxx). Geoffrey Bullough, too, observes that "by the end of the first scene we know by Olivia's oath to spend seven years grieving indoors that she is akin to [the Duke] in sensibility" (2:278). Actually, we never see Olivia weeping or miserable; the closest she comes to discussing her mourning is in her opening scene when her clown berates her, and she responds by commending his cleverness. Hearsay, primarily, reveals her "silly posture of bereavement." On the other hand, Orsino exhibits his foolishness through his own actions and words in the play's opening scene although many of his lines are frequently cut from productions to make him seem less silly.4

That opening scene appears to have a purpose—to establish the world of Illyria, a mythic, ancient, unavailable world. Again we witness the dramatist's skill. For while he offers realistic reasons to suggest the kinds of options available to women who might freely move in society as equals of men, he quickly withdraws those options by creating this world. Though not inhabited by otherworldly creatures, this land of Illyria derives its magic from the sequential arrangement of scenes, keynoted by Orsino at the start. Unlike Hippolyta and Theseus, who provide a frame through which we, the audience, move into the enchanted wood on a midsummer's night, or the weird sisters who set the mood for Macbeth, here the lovesick Duke sets the distinctive tone and establishes the particularities of place.

The opening scene not only immerses us in that unrecognizable and slightly skewed world of Illyria but also provides the first glimpse of Olivia through the eyes of the Duke. In love with love as well as the Countess, he seeks solace in music. "That strain again," the Duke commands, noting, "it had a dying fall" (I.i.4). And then abruptly, three lines later, "Enough, no more, / 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before" (7-8). He stops the instrumentalist then continues, his lines a mockery of the Petrarchan sonneteer's lyric to his love. Although the comedy later ranges between low, raucous farce and sophisticated verbal jousting, this opening scene carries
the audience to that mythical land where both women seek to understand the meaning of freedom.

Recounting how he lost his heart, including a pun on the word *hart*, the Duke speaks in labored metaphors. Languishing in adoration of Olivia, he offers a portrait of the lover according to the most exaggerated sonnet conventions:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,  
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!  
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,  
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,  
E'er since pursue me.

(I.i.18-22)

Poor Orsino, transformed into a hart, has been pursued by his desires. Enhancing the otherworldly quality of this scene, Shakespeare dubs the courier "Valentine." He, too, contributes to the portrait of Olivia by admitting his failure to deliver Orsino's message. Denied an audience, Valentine reports on Olivia:

The element itself, till seven years' heat,  
Shall not behold her face at ample view;

(25-26)

Since the message was conveyed by Olivia's "handmaid," whom we later discover to be Maria, a woman with a tendency to trickery and a love of giving instructions, we cannot be certain whether Valentine's language and delivery characterize the speech patterns in Illyria, or whether they belong specifically to Valentine, Maria, or Olivia. The message has been sifted through two messengers; thus we are twice-removed from Olivia. Valentine continues his report:

... like a cloistress she will veiled walk,  
And water once a day her chamber round  
With eye-offending brine;

(27-29)

Once again an overblown metaphor colors the speech as the reporter describes a woman constantly weeping, a condition never to be witnessed by the audience. Shakespeare has begun the portrait that he will develop in each succeeding scene. Here, indeed, we might agree with Baker's evaluation, until we meet the young Countess.

In this dual portrait—of Orsino as well as Olivia—our sympathies hardly go out to the fatuous Duke even while we wonder what sort of woman would make such a vow. Shakespeare's audience may have recognized the satire on the Renaissance courtier—as we do not; however, Orsino's method of wooing proved as unconvincing to the young Countess as it does to us today. As for her seven-year vow, while it seems an extreme measure, it certainly should have discouraged this persistent wooer. Like the women of *Love's Labour's Lost* and Queen Elizabeth herself, Olivia chooses to postpone marriage. Unlike the women of the earlier play, whose one-year wait may imply later acceptance, Olivia's drastic seven-year postponement should prove sufficiently discouraging to send all her suitors elsewhere.

Ironically, at this early moment in the play, Orsino admires her decision even while wondering how she will respond when she does fall in love:
O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love when the rich golden shaft
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
That live in her.

(32-36)

Despite the awkwardness of this metaphor, as critics have noted, Orsino's shaft hits the mark. Olivia will soon offer love, gifts, and marriage to Viola disguised as the Duke's page, Cesario.

Lyrical, musical, with a touch of melancholy as well as humor, this first scene, with its shimmering surface, quickly dissolves before the next in which we hear the simplicity and directness of Viola's language. Differing in style and tone from Orsino, she tramps ashore and immediately questions the sea captain who has rescued her from shipwreck: "What country, friends, is this?" (I.ii.1) "This is Illyria, lady" (2), he replies. This is the land where she is unknown, where the Duke Orsino rules, and the young Countess Olivia rejects his advances. This is the land where Viola, herself, will seek new identity. In language revealing her skill with words and sensitivity to puns, she continues: "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium" (3-4). Even while she captures the resonances in language between "Illyria" and "Elysium"—between life and death—she attempts to sum up her own situation at this moment. We may be in the distant land of Illyria, but we are listening to a realistic young woman with practical wisdom, an ear for words, and a sense of the ludicrous in contrasting Illyria with Elysium.

This short exchange reveals a good deal about her: her concern for her brother, her obvious upper-class background and education through her reference to "Elysium," and her positive attitude: "Perchance he is not drown'd—what think you, sailors?" (5). In five lines, she poses three questions. And when the captain suggests that her brother may also have survived—tied "To a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea," (11-14)—Viola answers with the directness already evident:

For saying so, there's gold. (18)

This first impetuous offer of gold springs from her reaction to his words of hope. She will reward his reassurance with money, a learned pattern, indicating her upper-class background. Later, a second, more considered promise grows from her resolve to conceal her true, female identity and pose as a eunuch. "I'll pay thee bounteously" (52), she vows.

Viola's social status emerges again when, in seeking to convince the captain to recommend her (in her disguise) to the Duke, she lists her musical skills.

... For I can sing
And speak to him in many sorts of music
That will allow me very worth his service.

(57-59)

Critics have noted that she never does sing in the play. They therefore cite this as one of the many inconsistencies that tend to thwart audience expectations. M. M. Mahood writes in an otherwise perceptive analysis: "A further puzzle created by the second scene is that it leads us to expect Viola will sing to the Duke, but she never does so" (17). Nor is Mahood alone. Others, including W. W. Greg in his bibliographical and textual study The Shakespeare First Folio, had earlier seemed to establish this expectation as a fact:
It is almost certain from the insistence on Viola's musical accomplishments at I.ii.57-58 that she was meant to be a singer, and from the awkward opening of II.iv that the song "Come away, come away death" has been transferred from her to Feste.

(297)

More likely the insistence on musical training was meant to strengthen her class identification. As Warnicke points out, at this time upper-class young women frequently received a limited musical education (117 and passim). Nor would such an education qualify Viola as a professional—the role of Feste in this play. Rather she is providing one of her several "job qualifications" even if she does not use them once she is employed.

Scene 2 must be understood as Shakespeare's swift, frank introduction of Viola—one that will not be repeated. Rather than anticipating specific later actions, it sketches in her upper-class background. Not only her offers of money and reference to Elysium, but her indication of a musical education, would have been familiar clues to contemporary audiences. In addition, despite its ambiguity, her quick response to the captain's mention of Orsino, "I have heard my father name him" (I.ii.28), followed by the delightful specific, "He was a bachelor then" (29)—leading audiences to believe that the Duke and her father knew one another (never actually confirmed in the text)—seems to reinforce the class connection. Not until the play's closing moments does she refer to her earlier life again, except in momentary lapses, such as her lines:

My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

(Il.iv. 107-9)

Or it surfaces in her boast of her parentage to Olivia: "Above my fortunes, yet my state is well: / I am a gentleman" (I.v.278-79). In that instance, however, the gender shift masks her identity. But at this point in the play, scene 2 prepares the audience for the combat of wits that will ensue between the two women of similar backgrounds when they finally confront one another three scenes later.

Yet societal values and accepted stereotypes about women blur those similarities and stress the women's differences. As I pointed out earlier, hostility to the young woman who would defy conventions creeps into the criticism just as sympathy for Viola, who suffers in silence, develops. Like the critics, editors and actor-managers, too, prefer to sharpen the contrast between this shipwrecked young woman soon to masquerade in breeches and the wealthy young Countess Olivia who exercises nonconformist attitudes towards men.

To strengthen the difference between the women, staged versions help reshape Viola by excising her line "For saying so, there's gold" (I.ii.18) and deemphasizing her class through costuming. The excision has persisted from the eighteenth century into the twentieth. The Bell edition (1773), for example, which claims to record the play "As Performed at the Theatres-Royal," jettisons Viola's offer of gold to the captain, suggesting what audiences saw at Drury Lane and Covent Garden after 1741. Mrs. Inchbald (1808), >as we have seen, refers to Olivia's falling in love "with a domestic" (4-5) and John Philip Kemble, whose acting version, first published in 1810, becomes the standard for theatrical productions for close to a century, also excises the reference to gold. By >the end of the nineteenth century, Henry Irving creates his own version, one which stresses his role of Malvolio. Nevertheless, Irving adopts many of Kemble's excisions, including Viola's offer of a reward. In the twentieth century, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, among others, also excises the line, perhaps thinking it unseemly for a young woman to be so comfortable with money. More likely, Tree is following a tradition both in text and attitude towards Viola.
As well as introducing her, scene 2 further develops the portrait of Olivia through hearsay. The captain narrates and Viola listens. A down-to-earth and non-involved spectator, he responds to Viola's query about Orsino's bachelorhood with uncertainty, assuring her only that a month earlier, before the captain left, Orsino was seeking Olivia's hand:

And then ’twas fresh in murmur (as you know
What great ones do, the less will prattle of)
That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.

(I.ii.32-34)

In scene 1, Orsino had provided the emotional background; in scene 2, the captain fills in many of the publicly known details about the young woman. A "virtuous maid," the phrase identifying her youth and unmarried status, she is also:

. . . the daughter of a count
That died some twelvemonth since, then
leaving her
In the protection of his son, her brother,
Who shortly also died;

(36-39)

Alone and wealthy, Olivia has much in common with the young woman listening. Malcolmson makes a similar point although she leaves Viola's exact status in doubt: "The scene does not explicitly define Viola's status as either noble or gentle; rather, her rank is veiled from us just as Viola veils it from the people she will meet. . . . [W]e, and the characters, will know her through her role-playing and her 'intent" (37). Although staging tends to obscure Viola's status, I believe that the dramatist offers sufficient clues both in her speeches and her actions to indicate her upper-class background.

As the captain continues, he also helps identify Illyria's social system, one that places an unmarried woman under the governance of a male in the family. Finally, the captain speaks of the Countess's actions now that her brother's protection has ceased. In deference to the love she bore him: "'They say, she hath abjur'd the company / And sight of men" (40-41). Omitting any reference to the seven-year limit on the mourning period, relayed by Orsino's messenger in scene 1, the captain's "they say" confirms his general reliance on hearsay and his distance from Olivia. When, therefore, Viola resolves to serve this countess, the captain quickly discourages her:

That were hard to compass,
Because she will admit no kind of suit,
No, not the Duke's.

(44-46)

Obviously, if the Duke has failed, Viola should not even consider such an option. Accepting the captain's advice, she quickly shifts her objective and decides on wearing breeches: "I'll serve this duke; / Thou shalt present me as a eunuch to him" (55-56).

Critics have questioned the ease with which Viola changes her mind, considering her later persistence and success in meeting Olivia. As Ruth Nevo observes, although Viola, upon hearing of Olivia's loss, exclaims, "O that I served that lady," she "does not fly to the Countess Olivia for succour, woman to woman, despite her
sympathy for a fellow-mourner. Instead she chooses to be adventurously epicene in the Duke's entourage" (205). Nevo believes that Viola makes a sacrifice here by asking to be presented as a eunuch, a rational explanation for her high voice and feminine appearance. More importantly, the young woman's transformation permits her to enjoy the freedom of action allowed her twin brother, and formerly denied her because of her sex. The speed of her decision also leads C. L. Barber to comment that "the shipwreck is made the occasion for Viola to exhibit an undaunted, aristocratic mastery of adversity—she settles what she shall do next almost as though picking out a costume for a masquerade" (241). He is less concerned with the reason for her choice than with her free and easy manner, her language in making the decision. Unlike these modern critics, Samuel Johnson expresses disdain for Viola's actions and considers this a plot weakness:

Viola seems to have formed a very deep design with very little premeditation: she is thrown by shipwreck on an unknown coast, hears that the prince is a batchelor, and resolves to supplant the lady whom he courts.

(7:312)

The play, however, refutes this theory, as we discover later on when Viola, having fallen in love with the Duke, bemoans the limitations placed on her by disguise then courts the Countess for him.

Differing from Johnson, most actor-managers and directors, as well as critics, favor Viola over Olivia. To focus more sharply on the disguised young woman, these men often transpose the first and second scenes. Again Kemble's influential version dominates. It opens with noise, thunder, and lightning, heralding Viola's arrival on the shores of Illyria. Beerbohm Tree, in 1901, dramatizes Viola's weakness on arrival although the text offers no such suggestion. Sailors bring her ashore "as if insensible. She is put reclining on the steps. Wet dress. Sailors with chest and bundles." Winthrop Ames, in 1906, also has the sailors "supporting a woman, then carrying in a child" (a character added for pathos, I suspect). Augustin Daly, the famous American manager at the end of the nineteenth century, goes even further. He opens the play with the arrival of Viola's brother on the shores of Illyria, eliminating all suspense as to whether or not her twin has survived.

Despite Daly's more radical alteration of sequence, it was only a temporary aberration whereas Kemble's pattern has persisted. As recently as the summer of 1986, New York audiences were treated to a Kemble format under the aegis of Joseph Papp, the production opening with Viola's arrival in Illyria. Possibly the drive for realism and interest in plot development contributed to the decision to open with the second scene. More likely, however, the uncreased emphasis on the heroic Viola in contrast to the foolish Olivia was responsible.

Unfortunately, that transposition sacrifices the airy, wistful tone of the first scene with all its implications and resonances—a scene as important to the play as the three witches who open Macbeth or the ghost on the ramparts who chills the air with foreboding in Hamlet. In Shakespeare's sequence, Orsino's impassioned pleas and posing in the first scene add credibility to Olivia's decision whereas when the play opens with scene 2, she sounds arbitrary and unreasonable since the sea captain warns Viola of the impossibility of meeting this woman.

Shakespeare's scene sequence (as Clifford Leech observed) has its own specific validity and dictates a pattern of relationships (36-37). The patterns in the plays usually affect and often heighten the impact of the work on the audience. Shakespeare's method resembles that of the painter who establishes positive and negative areas of a painting, each helping to illuminate the other while through both he weaves color, line, and design that unify the whole. In Twelfth Night, Orsino's opening scene provides the background (or negative) area—of fantasy—against which Viola's realistic approach proves refreshing. Woven through both is the slowly developing character of Olivia.
Scene 3 intensifies the portrait of the Countess. This time the dramatist takes us closer to her world, introducing us to the ebullient and varied characters who inhabit her home. There, the multidimensional, and skewed, characterization continues to grow as others' words fill in the blank spaces of the sketch first begun by Orsino. The robustious, roaring, frequently drunk Sir Toby, identified in the cast list as "uncle to Olivia," introduces us to the comic characters even while he stews, "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life" (I.iii.1-3). Maria, the serving woman, rather than answering, sharply reprimands, "Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions to your ill hours" (5-6), bearing witness to a more dynamic Olivia than thus far promised by either Orsino or the sea captain. With these two speeches, Shakespeare has catapulted us into Olivia's household and established the firmness of the mistress's control. She has accepted the obligations of her position. A life of mourning has led neither to a retreat from reality nor to an abdication of responsibility, merely an affirmation of the single life.

Challenges to that single life, however, seem endless. Suitors spring up everywhere. Even Sir Toby has a candidate—his drinking companion, the foolish Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a gull easily separated from his money. Nevertheless, Sir Andrew, skeptical of his chances, would withdraw from the field, admitting, "Your niece will not be seen, or if she be, it's four to one she'll none of me. The Count himself here hard by woos her" (I.iii.106-8). For the third time, we hear of the Count's persistent wooing. Anxious to prevent the departure of his wealthy drinking mate, Sir Toby confidently insists, "She'll none o' th' Count. She'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit" (109-10). Although his motive is suspect, Sir Toby, while he ultimately will prove wrong about the "degree" of Olivia's intelligence, or wit, is correct about her rejection of the Count and probably about her youthful age. Sir Andrew does not contradict him.

Interestingly, critics, too, have wrestled with the question of her age while directors have indicated their opinion through dress, make-up, and stage movement. They usually decide in favor of seniority, thus emphasizing the ways in which an older woman can be bested by a younger, more conventional one. The hostility to the older, aggressive woman on stage remains; she is a subject for laughter and audience mockery. And here the language of the text may inadvertently contribute to this misreading, for whereas Olivia is acting herself, a young single woman, Viola, playing a man's role, is described as "not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy" (I.v.156-57). Leo Salingar in 1958, for example, considers the Countess, "psychologically an elder sister to Viola" (125). Although not censorious, as was Mrs. Inchbald in 1808, Salingar resembles Inchbald in stressing an age differential between the two women. However nowhere, neither in the language nor actions, does the text indicate an Olivia chronologically older or more psychologically mature than Viola. On the contrary, perhaps because of her disguise and the challenges it poses, Viola reveals keen insights into both her condition and Olivia's, insights unavailable to the deceived Countess.

In fact, Sir Toby's comment supports the notion that the two young women were approximately of the same age, thus reinforcing the similarities introduced at the start. Only later, when trapped in a comic relationship and engaged in wit combats built on disguise does confusion arise as to their respective ages. This, however, may result from costuming and staging. For example, an illustration of an older Olivia actually appears in the pages of costume designs in an Augustin Daly souvenir promptbook. Her face looks a bit pinched as well as haughty, in contrast with the illustration for Viola, who, with blonde, curly hair worn in a version of a wide pageboy, has an innocent, inquiring, friendly look on her face and stands in a deferential pose. Although both illustrations seem to have provided the basis for the women's costumes, they must also reflect perceptions of the characters in the nineteenth century.

Occasionally, of course, some independent thinking occurs and we read in a promptbook, "Olivia's youth should be emphasized in every way possible to make her love affair with so callow a stripling as Viola convincing" (Ames prompt, facing I.v.294-95). The comment is sparked by Olivia's soliloquy at the close of the scene where she first meets Viola. Again in a 1988 production at Stratford, Ontario, Olivia's youthfulness was stressed when she giggled with delight at discovering this new young "man," then subsequently discarded
her black dress for a pink one.

As the play moves towards this moment when the two women meet, their divergent introductions continue: Olivia's through hearsay, Viola's through direct presentation. In scene 4 Orsino describes his passionate love for the incomparable Olivia, meanwhile confessing to his new page, the disguised Viola, "I have unclasp'd / To thee the book even of my secret soul" (I.iv.13-14). Incredibly, she has won her way into his confidence in a mere three days. Despite her brief period of service, Orsino is revealing all his innermost thoughts to her. The ease with which she accomplishes this suggests that she had no trouble being accepted in an aristocratic household because she could draw on the mores of her upper-class background to adjust to her new situation. But Viola has lost her heart to him even as he is entrusting her with his most precious errand, the wooing of Olivia. Shakespeare thus presents the first challenge to a wealthy young woman who would gain freedom from her sexual identity by donning male attire. Breeches have their drawbacks; but so do skirts, as Olivia too will soon discover.

When she finally sweeps onto the stage in scene 5, in all her grandeur or loneliness, certainty or uncertainty, age or youth, arrogance or self-confidence, she has been thoroughly characterized by the conflicting impressions passed on by others. John Russell Brown writes of the silences in the play—the moments when words are not spoken but audience attention is riveted to a character (28). Surely audiences are waiting to see just what she looks like, how she carries herself, and how she behaves. But the tendency to tamper with the text again changes the portrait. Just as the transposition of the play's first two scenes combined with the omission of many of the Duke's foolish self-pitying lines alter audiences' perceptions of him, and excision of Viola's reference to gold masks her upper-class background, so standard cuts in scene 5—some going back to the early nineteenth century—affect our first impression of Olivia.

Although the scene opens with twenty-five lines of teasing conversation between Maria and the Clown—lines preparing the audience for the Countess's annoyance with him—they seldom reach the stage. Henry Irving, John Philip Kemble, Augustin Daly, and Herbert Beerbohm Tree, among others, chopped off some or all of the exchange. As a result, Olivia usually sounds arbitrary and arrogant at her entrance. To the Clown's "God bless thee, lady!" (I.v.36-37), she replies, "Take the fool away" (38). Nor does his "Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady," (39-40) amuse her. Olivia angrily charges, "Go to, y' are a dry fool; I'll no more of you. Besides, you grow dishonest" (41-42). In the conversation usually omitted, however, Shakespeare provides an explanation for this behavior. Officiously acting as her mistress's surrogate, Maria reprimands the Clown for his several absences. In their exchange lies the rational basis for Olivia's opening speeches, particularly her anger at the Clown. The excision contributes to a one-sided and distorted impression of her.

In fact, in the full text, she proves a tolerant manager of this conglomerate household. We glimpse her reasonable governance particularly when she allows the Fool his famous argument against mourning for her brother. "I think his soul is in hell, madonna" (68), he begins, quickly contradicted by her, "I know his soul is in heaven, fool" (69), leading to his conclusion, "The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (70-71). The reasoning wins her admiration. "What think you of this fool, Malvolio? doth he not mend?" (73-74), she laughingly concedes. But her steward, a somber man with a great sense of self-importance, is not amused. Olivia then criticizes him, offering astute character analysis in her reprimand: "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets" (90-93). Shakespeare has endowed her with a directness of language that matches Viola's. But in some promptbooks, such as those based on the Daly edition (p. 16, 77V 21; p. 22, TN 10), the second sentence, with its analogy to "bird-bolts" and "cannon-bullets," has been excised. As written, the full text reveals Olivia's strengths. During the brief time that she is on stage, she appears neither unintelligent, intolerant, nor humorless. Nor does she exhibit any extremes of grief.
Rather, the young Countess appears well qualified for the battle of wits that will follow between her and Viola—two women who have, in their own ways, built their independent personas on the death (or seeming death) of their brothers, one through mourning, the other through disguise. The equality of their verbal gifts emerges at their first meeting. Sent to woo Olivia for Orsino, Viola combines flattery with insolence. "Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty—I pray you tell me if this be the lady of the house. . . . I would be loath to cast away my speech; for besides that it is excellently well penn'd, I have taken great pains to con it" (I.v.170-74), she complains. When Olivia answers only "Whence came you, sir?" (177), Viola persists in her emphasis on the prepared speech being spoken to the properly identified Olivia: "I can say little more than I have studied, and that question's out of my part" (178-79).

Seeming to be aware of what Viola is doing, Olivia queries next, "Are you a comedian?" (182). To this Viola somewhat saucily responds, "No, my profound heart; and yet (by the very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play" (183-84). Why the expression "by the very fangs of malice"? What is its relevance? Does it have an underlying message or reveal her envy of Olivia? For surely, a suitor would not be using the "fangs of malice" to support an argument. Rather while the phrase may suggest an arrogance and a pose of self-confidence on Viola's part, it may also reflect her attempt to simulate male assertiveness first by swearing and then by calling up this strange phrase, perhaps a substitute for "by the devil." In closing, she repeats her request, "Are you the lady of the house?" (184-85). Finally Olivia gives an almost direct answer—although still equivocating—"If I do not usurp myself, I am" (186). But Viola responds in kind. "Most certain, if you are she, you do usurp yourself (187-88). And then once more she refers to her memorized speech "in praise" of Olivia, the suggestion being that not Olivia herself, but the conventions of love are responsible for this praise.

This short exchange is usually reduced on the stage. Since drama is built on the interaction between characters—in other words, since dialogue helps define personality—the omissions alter the portraits of the women. The section leading to Olivia's question "Are you a comedian?" and Viola's mixed answer with its "fangs of malice" are frequently excised. What remains is Olivia's simple "If I do not usurp myself, I am." Nor do audiences usually hear Olivia's sardonic ad-monition to Viola to "Come to what is important in't. I forgive you the praise" (192-93), indicating her sense of humor and awareness of the verbal battle under way. In the subsequent conversation, the cuts in Olivia's lines are rather curious. "Speak your office" (207) is all that remains of a speech that includes "Sure you have some hideous matter to deliver, when the courtesy of it is so fearful" (206-7). Eliminated too is the contretemps touched off by Viola's "I hold the olive in my hand" (209-10)—an offer she finds difficult to sustain after Olivia's simple observation "Yet you began rudely" (212). Viola immediately takes up the challenge, "The rudeness that hath appear'd in me have I learn'd from my entertainment" (214-15).

Their verbal combat continues, intensified by Viola's request that Olivia raise her veil although as the Countess notes, "You are now out of your text" (232). Nevertheless, she agrees to "draw the curtain, and show . . . the picture" (233), challenging, "Is't not well done?" (235) A too-quick response springs from the woman in breeches, "Excellently done, if God did all" (236). Just as sharply, however, Olivia retorts, "'Tis in grain, sir, 'twill endure wind and weather" (237-38). But much of this verbal jousting disappears from the stage, and Viola's speech begins instead with the flattering, "'Tis beauty truly blent" (239).

Consider too, the exchange triggered by Olivia's wonderful speech outlining the "divers schedules" of her beauty:

> It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labell'd to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me?

(I.v.245-49)
Undaunted, the page Cesario/Viola disapprovingly comments: "I see what you are; you are too proud; / But if you were the devil, you are fair" (250-51). And then, as if remembering her mission, she jumps from critical direct address to her major subject, "My lord and master loves you" (252). Promptbooks, reflecting stage productions, tend to retain only the last line, omitting Olivia's "schedule" of her beauty as well as Viola's accusation of pride. Thus the text, mocking the ideal of courtly love, emphasizes pertness and honesty over flattery. These excisions rob the portrait of Viola of irony and reduce Olivia to a stolid, unimaginative woman.

Finally, cut too is her gracious observation:

- Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him,
- Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
- Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
- In voices well divul'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,
- And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
- A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.

(257-62)

The speech indicates Olivia's sensitivity as she lists his specific strengths. It is a remarkable statement to give to a young woman, since it suggests less an emotional reaction than a thoughtful evaluation of the man she rejects. She mentions none of his weaknesses but bases her decision only on her own taste: "I cannot love him," implying also that nothing in the future will change her mind. Adamant in her insistence that she will never love Orsino, the Countess repeats the words yet again near the scene's close. Viola understands and later attempts, unsuccessfully, to explain Olivia's point of view to Orsino.

Historically, most of the speech disappears from the stage. Kemble's version, setting the pattern for those to follow, combines the single opening line with the speech's closing, resulting in the cryptic, abbreviated message: "Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him: / He might have took his answer long ago" (Kemble, 1810, p. 19). Conforming to the developing portrait of her in criticism, an arbitrary Olivia emerges here. Other acting texts follow Kemble's lead. Beerbohm Tree (1901) retains the first line of the speech. Augustin Daly (1893), Henry Irving (1884), and others retain its first three lines. These productions span almost an entire century and surely must have affected criticism.

In fact, in 1865, decrying this omission, Spedding writes:

These lines are left out in the acting, which is surely a great mistake. As addressed by Olivia to Viola, they have a peculiar and pathetic meaning, and it is strange that the mixed emotions which they must have excited in her should not have been made one of the "points" in the play.

(Fraser's Magazine; quoted in Variorum Twelfth Night, 90)

The lines not only affect Viola, who herself would like to "be his wife" (I.iv.42) but also illuminate the character of Olivia. She knows her own heart and mind; she can recognize virtue in others, even someone who is a bit foolish, like Orsino. Of course, she has only seen that side of him which is tangled in the conventions of wooing. Viola, on the other hand, hears a more relaxed man confiding his ideas not only about wooing and women but also about life generally. Employed as his page, she has also found him generous and trusting, having given her, an unknown youth, a position and quickly taken her into his confidence. Like Hermia and Helena, who encounter two different aspects of Demetrius in the early scenes of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Viola and Olivia encounter two different Orsinos.
Unmoved by the Orsino she knows, Olivia is captivated by his envoy, Viola. In this disguised woman of comparable background and wit, Olivia finds the perfect wooer—the one who verbalizes her own dream of what wooing should be: a challenging wit exchange between equals; honesty; and an absence of posing. Direct language can open a path to the heart. In scene 5, Viola adopts this method. Without realizing it, she once again departs from her "text" (232). This time she delivers an impassioned love lyric. Though meant to win Olivia for Orsino, it also reveals something of Viola's own feelings for the Duke: "If I did love you in my master's flame, / . . . I would. . . . / Make me a willow cabin at your gate, / . . . Hallo your name to the reverberate hills, / And make the babbling gossip of the air / Cry out 'Olivia'" (264-74).

The speech overwhelms the young Countess as it does the audience. Here are lines that differ from Orsino's flowery words; familiar images flood the language. One need not search for hidden meanings, merely visualize the youth standing before a simple cabin and hear him hallowing the name "Olivia." The air and the hills echo the name; the speaker captivates the listener, who admits in soliloquy after the young page leaves:

    How now?  
    Even so quickly may one catch the plague?  
    Methinks I feel this youth's perfections  
    With an invisible and subtle stealth  
    To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.

(294-98)

But she doesn't "let it be." Instead, Olivia immediately sends Malvolio on a false errand, to return to the young Cesario a ring he never gave her. Each woman has been caught in an emotional response that will alter her self-perception and her desire for anonymity or privacy. No longer thinking of the brother she was mourning, Olivia seeks only to assure a return visit from Orsino's youthful page.

Perhaps squeamish about the possible impact of individual lines or simply choosing to cut at this point, actor-managers excised and revised. Charles Kean, the mid-nineteenth-century manager, for example, crossed out some of Olivia's speech above, specifically those lines expressing admiration for "this youth" (296-98). The intention was probably to remove any suggestion of Olivia's being homosexually attracted to Viola. In this comedy of mistaken identity, however, Shakespeare, not only suggests such an attachment, but then, through the sequential arrangement of scenes quickly offers an alternative possibility.

Olivia's startling emotional discovery precipitates an immediate scene change to the lost Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, who has survived the shipwreck. Derrida argues that the meanings of words are constantly being modified by the next signifier (Moi, 105-7). Building on Derrida's insight, I propose that meaning in drama derives not only from verbal signifiers, particularly the interaction of characters as they speak on stage, but also from the sequence of scenes as they unfold. This arrangement affects both our first, immediate response as well as the modification of that response. Moreover, because theater differs from the written text in at least one significant detail, it addresses a captive audience who must listen and react as the play progresses, this "deferral of meaning" occurs to a far larger extent with drama than with written literature since a reader may put down a book and stop reading.

The young Countess's comment about the disguised youth now takes on a different perspective with the introduction of Sebastian. His presence holds the promise of a possible new pairing, although audiences will have to wait to see when, and if, Sebastian meets Olivia and how that meeting will develop. The striking physical similarity between the twins will eventually resolve Olivia's dilemma. She will later woo Sebastian as Cesario although, as Heilbrun points out, Shakespeare, himself the father of opposite sex twins, surely
knew such an indistinguishable resemblance to be impossible (37).

Similarities do, however, exist. Like Viola, Sebastian is first introduced with a sea captain, Antonio, who rescued him. Also like her, Viola's brother arouses intense feelings of affection, in his case from Antonio, who would serve the youth. And again like her, Sebastian stubbornly resists. "If you will not undo what you have done, that is, kill him whom you have recover'd, desire it not" (II.i.37-39), the young man insists before departing. Left alone on stage, Antonio, in soliloquy, first blesses the youth: "The gentleness of all the gods go with thee!" then reveals the intensity of his feelings.

I have many enemies in Orsino's court,  
Else would I very shortly see thee there.  
But come what may, I do adore thee so  
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.  

(II.i.44-48)

The speech suggests a strong, even if one-sided, affection. The captain will risk capture for the pleasure of following Sebastian.

Brother, like sister, rejects an implied homosexual relationship. Unlike Viola, however, Sebastian is not suffering from a misreading of his sexual identity since no disguise exists. And so the soliloquy is seldom heard on stage. The Bell version retains only a form of the first line, "The gentleness of the Gods go with thee!" (335), after which the two men "exeunt severally" (335). Kemble's text, followed by the French edition (TN 18) and others, transforms Antonio's first line into part of a brief dialogue, Sebastian answering with an invented line, "Fare ye well."

This first scene between Sebastian and Antonio often changes not only its shape, but also its place in the sequence. Despite its importance in the pattern of alternating scenes that illuminate the development of the two principal women characters, actor-managers and directors have often reshuffled the text—sometimes to simplify plot, sometimes to stress Malvolio's role (although it is shorter than those of Viola and Olivia), and sometimes to sustain a contrast between the women, favoring the disguised youth in breeches. Again Kemble's text set the example, transposing the Folio sequence by placing Malvolio's scene with Viola immediately after Olivia's order to "return the ring," although the introduction of Sebastian interferes with such a smooth narrative sequence.17 Other directors, such as Irving, who played Malvolio, have withheld Sebastian's surprise appearance until later in the play.18 Focusing on his own role, Irving also abbre-viated the women's lines.19 Other actor-managers tended to fall into similar patterns, sometimes stripping the scene of most of its intense lines with their homoerotic implications, sometimes transposing the sequence, and often doing both.

Occasionally, as in the Sothern and Marlowe production at the beginning of the twentieth century, the scene was even merged with the second brief Sebastian-Antonio scene even though each of these functions differently. The first creates that happy shock of recognition of the physical resemblances between the twins; it also introduces the relationship between the two men. The second adds important plot elements: the captain decides to remain in Illyria, despite the hazards, then lends his purse to Sebastian, later seeking to retrieve it from Sebastian's double, Viola. The scene also testifies to the intensity of Antonio's affection for the youth. Sequentially, the second scene separates Maria's description of Malvolio in yellow garters from his actual appearance on stage.

In contrast, the Sothern-Marlowe merged scene (II.ii. in typescript—TN 31) retains only the factual information necessary for the plot's later development. It begins with the opening of Shakespeare's second of the two scenes (III.iii.1-15) where Antonio reveals his decision to accompany the young man, but it excises
specific references to his love for Sebastian. Next follows the youth's disclosure of his identity, plucked from the earlier scene (II.i), thus confirming as well Viola's upper-class background. Finally, returning to the later scene, this new mongrel concludes with Antonio giving his purse to Sebastian. Sequentially, it follows Malvolio's outburst to the drunken Sir Toby and Sir Andrew (II.iii) and precedes Viola's debate with Orsino on love (II.iv). Although in many ways the Sothern-Marlowe version defeats the purposes of the two separate scenes, it does not subvert the play's ability to construct strong parallels between two wealthy, young, single women who have lost father and brother. That was Daly's contribution and he achieved it by opening the play with Sebastian's arrival in Illyria. This assured audiences that the relationship between Olivia and Viola was just a game and that Viola's early quest for independence had no reality since her brother lived.

Shakespeare, however, not only raises this issue of independence but also further develops it in Viola's retort to Malvolio when he delivers the ring. For the dramatist here offers a significant example of women bonding. Knowing she never gave Olivia a ring, the disguised page nevertheless answers the steward: "She took the ring of me, I'll none of it" (12). Although the line has puzzled some editors, it seems consistent with Viola's constant makeshift attempts both to conceal her disguise and to reveal her insights as a woman into another woman's actions. This will occur again two scenes later when she attempts to explain to the Duke Olivia's feelings for him, but instead nearly trips over her own identity. Clearly in her scene with Malvolio, Viola understands what has occurred, as her soliloquy, following his brusque departure, indicates: "I left no ring with her. . . . / Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her" (II.ii.17-18). Indeed it has. But Sebastian's arrival may promise a "happy ending," even while the play continues to explore the women's struggles, whether in breeches or skirts, to assert their sense of self.

In the scenes that follow, Olivia's struggle once more comes to the fore, again through hearsay and inference as Shakespeare thrusts us ever more intimately into the dynamics of her household. Again the challenge to her independence grows out of her position as a marriageable, wealthy young woman. When the drunken Sir Toby and Sir Andrew wobble in, raucously singing, Maria first reprimands them, invoking the name of her mistress, but then later joins them. Less flexible, Malvolio, awakened from sleep by this boisterous crew, more vehemently chastises them, again invoking Olivia's name:

My lady bade me tell you, that though she harbors you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house; if not, and it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.

(II.iii.95-101)

Since he never carries out the threat but is himself bested, his lines indicate his misreading of Olivia, exhibiting his lust for power and his method of exercising it. Betraying his ambition as well as his vulnerability to the gulling he will later suffer, his speech illuminates the extent and intensiveness of another of Olivia's pursuers. He will readily adopt cross-garters and attempt to smile in his effort to win her hand and, with it, permanent power as her husband. Little disappears from this comic scene in staged versions—only the songs. First omitted from the Bell edition, they are later excised by Kemble and Irving who substitute other, briefer drinking songs.

A far different fate on stage meets the scene which follows: the debate between Viola and Orsino on men's and women's capacity for love. The scene loses much of its substance through cutting. It is full of inconsistencies and contradictions in Orsino's arguments while stressing at the same time the complexity of Viola's position as she strives to convey to the Duke something of a woman's point of view. Filled with humor and further mockery of the conventions of the Petrarchan lover, it continues the portrait of Orsino begun in the first scene—a silly lover drowning in self-pity. Again, his desire for music opens the scene:
that piece of song,
That old and antique song we heard last night;
Methought it did relieve my passion much,
More than light airs and recollected terms
Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times.

(II.iv.2-6)

Still seeking to "relieve" his passion, Orsino sounds very much like the melancholy character we met earlier. But this request for music does not appear in the Bell edition, the Kemble edition, or the French edition, basically covering a century of staging. Instead, in those editions, the scene opens with Orsino attempting to warn his page of what to expect from love. "Come hither boy," the Duke instructs, "If ever thou shalt love, / In the sweet pangs of it remember me" (15-16). Observing Cesario/Viola's downcast expression, her master quizzes her about her beloved's appearance: "Of your complexion" and "about your years" (26, 28), confesses the disguised woman.

Her lines trigger Orsino's first dissertation on love, which will eventually be contradicted by his second. 
"[H]owever we do praise ourselves, / Our fancies are more giddy . . . Than women's are" (32-35), he claims, advising Cesario to choose a woman younger than himself. Later, however, when describing his own love for Olivia, the Duke contradicts himself, insisting, "no woman's heart / So big, to hold so much; they lack retention" (95-96). He also compares a woman's love which "may be call'd appetite" (97) with his own, which is "all as hungry as the sea" (100). Kemble and Bell omit the first assertion and Kemble, Bell, Irving, Daly, and Sothern and Marlowe omit its contradiction. As a result of these excisions, the Duke sounds consistent, a quality that Shakespeare denies him. The elimination of both groups of quotes by Bell and Kemble alters the scene's emphasis, losing much of its irony.

In these editions, reflecting stage performances, not only do the contradictions disappear, but also Orsino turns into a fairly direct, attractive man. Reduced, the text's long lecture on love becomes merely a brief comment to Viola/Cesario on her beloved, "too old, by heaven" (29), followed immediately by the direction: "Get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty" (80), Olivia. Covering a mere two pages in the Kemble text, the scene fails to develop the portrait of a melancholy and self-pitying Orsino resembling Shakespeare's Duke. Instead, it becomes a brief interlude of disagreement between the disguised page and the man she loves in which she stumbles when trying to fictionalize her love for him.

Juxtaposing the young page's clearly reasoned defense of Olivia against the Duke's confused and contradictory comments on men's and women's capacity to love, Shakespeare in this scene once again illustrates women bonding and also gives Viola rational arguments favoring a woman's right to free choice. Furthermore, the scene reaffirms Viola's sense of her own identity; she is always emotionally and intellectually clearly a woman. Attempting to deliver Olivia's message and sensitive to its intention, Viola tries to convince Orsino of its finality, transposing Olivia's words. "But if she cannot love you, sir?" (II.iv.87, emphasis added here and throughout this paragraph). In response, the Duke retains only the original "cannot." "I cannot be so answer'd" (88), he insists. Viola then cites the parallel of an imaginary woman (herself) in love with him. Suppose "You cannot love her" (91). The pronouns have shifted from that first expression by Olivia but the body of the line has been restored. The debate surrounding a woman's right to express or reject love on a plane equal to a man's is given clear expression through Viola as Cesario, the young lad, while the refusal of the man, Orsino, to respect Olivia's wishes resonates through the text.

In this scene, Viola seems torn between revealing her identity and maintaining her disguise. Earlier she had decided, "Time, thou must untangle this, not I" (II.ii.40). But here that resolve weakens, when, in trying to convince the Duke, she says, "My father had a daughter lov'd a man / As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your lordship" (II.iv.107-9). "And what's her history?" (109) the Duke quickly asks. Surely her
answer, "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too" (120-21), should have led to a full revelation. But the Duke is so self-absorbed in his own feelings that his ear is not keyed to Viola's words. And so she continues in her role as his messenger.

Having chosen her disguise almost whimsically, she finds its advantages quickly fading. First, her success in winning a place with the Duke has led to her appointment as his surrogate wooer although she confesses, in soliloquy: "Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife" (I.iv.42). Then her enchantment of Olivia further intensifies Viola's problem. Next, when she tries to explain the other woman's position to the Duke, he refuses to listen. Later, despite her protests, Sir Andrew challenges her to a duel for Olivia's hand, leading Viola to muse to herself: "A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man" (III.iv.302-3). And finally, she must confront the issue of a dual identity, having become embroiled in the circle of pursued and pursuer. The problems Viola faces caused by her disguise are, if less life threatening, more subtle and emotionally complex than those that confront Shakespeare's other women in breeches: Rosalind of *As You Like It*, Imogen of *Cymbeline*, and Jessica of *The Merchant of Venice*, who choose disguise to evade pursuit; Julia of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, who concealed herself to pursue her lover; or Portia and Nerissa, who dress as lawyer and law clerk to save their husbands' friend.

If, however, Shakespeare were less interested in realistic reasons for the disguise than in the larger concept—the relationship of sexuality to women's economic independence—the silliness of the breeches controversy would be exposed by the similarities between the women's plights. Although differently dressed, both must revise their self-perceptions, modifying them to accommodate erotic urges as these affect women's lives in such a society. Viola's choice of disguise, like Olivia's choice of mourning, tests the limits of self-sovereignty when supported by economic independence.

Thus their new erotic interests conflict with their development of independence. Nevertheless, both women persevere in their chosen direction. Viola remains in service to Orsino, wooing Olivia, while she, in turn, continues her forthright pursuit of Cesario. Two other brief exchanges mark the women's time alone together. In the earlier one (III.i.93-164), Olivia apologizes for sending the false message and the ring and quite directly declares her love. In the second (III.iv.201-17), an exchange of less than twenty lines within a much longer scene, she acknowledges having compromised herself:

I have said too much unto a heart of stone,
And laid mine honor too unchary on't.
There's something in me that reproves my fault;
But such a headstrong potent fault it is
That it but mocks reproof.

(201-5)

Recognition but not retraction leads to her next speech, "Here, wear this jewel for me, 'tis my picture" (208), promising Viola, "it hath no tongue to vex you" (209). Olivia is ready to embark on what appears to be a cross-class marriage to a young page. Is she using her wealth to lure a husband, who, in fact has the virtues of a woman and is, perhaps, therefore attractive? In the text, ambiguity then prevails. Does Viola accept the jewel? No hint appears in the language. Her response, like so many of her answers to Olivia, evades the subject, asking instead, "your true love for my master" (213).

Further evasion appears in promptbooks, many of which excise this brief moment between the disguised woman and the lady who openly vows her love. For example, the encounter is crossed out by Charles Kean, who used a Kemble text (*TN* 14). And the Irving version retains only the last four lines of the women's conversation. Their brief moment is then over: no apologies for having declared her love, and no giving Viola "this jewel" that contains Olivia's picture (*TN* 15, p. 52). Was Viola's behavior not exemplary enough for the
adaptors? Was the intensity of Olivia's passion, directed as it was to a woman, embarrassing? Probably both. In the text, the exchange amplifies their portraits, which have been acquiring dimension with each new scene.

Like a juggler, Shakespeare keeps aloft the atmosphere of romance as well as the realities of drunks and duels and always, whether directly or through hearsay, he illuminates the challenges facing the two women. Perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the middle section of the play are we witness to this balancing act. Act 3, scene 2 includes the conning of Sir Andrew (into penning a challenge to Cesario) and the report on Malvolio's appearance (wearing yellow cross-garters)—both men wishing to win Olivia through their actions.

Opening in her garden, scene 4 of act 3 shows the Countess ranging from one interest to another in quick succession.

    I have sent after him; he says he'll come.  
    How shall I feast him? What bestow of him?  
    For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd.  
    I speak too loud.  

(1-4)

The excitement generated within this speech, even including the suggestion that it is spoken in a whisper reveals an altered Olivia—one neither disinterested nor in mourning. The Bell edition contains a footnote on her appearance: "Olivia should possess beauty of countenance, elegance of figure, grace of deportment, and sensibility of speech" [bottom, p. 357, vol. 5, of Bell edition]. The edition also records a seemingly slight alteration in the opening line, but one which changes the idea. It reads: "I have sent after him; say he will come. / How shall I feast him? What bestow on him?" (emphasis added, p. 357). The conditional here contradicts the straight assertion in the Folio. Her lines reflect her excitement.

She then changes the subject, "Where's Malvolio?" (5). Asking for him and commenting that his sad state suits her well, Olivia learns from Maria that he is as one "possessed." When he appears before her in yellow garters and smiling, she attempts to understand this sudden change, but the arrival of Cesario cuts short the interview, leading Olivia to assign Malvolio to Maria and Sir Toby—thus asking his gullers to be his handlers. After the steward's triumphant soliloquy celebrating what he believes to be his new status—the prospective husband to Olivia—the scene moves without a pause to Sir Andrew's timidly worded letter of challenge to Cesario. Here both Viola and Olivia are the subjects—the one's problems created by her disguise, the other's by her lack of disguise, but clearly her marriageability. Thus both illuminate challenges to the women's pursuit of their own independence. The brief interlude between the two women follows.

The focus then shifts to Viola. Suddenly her resemblance to her brother fades as she faces the "terror," Sir Andrew, an equally reluctant adversary. Their swords at the ready, both participants back off from one another, even as Antonio, mistaking Viola for Sebastian, interrupts their duel, finds himself under arrest by officers, requests his purse of "Sebastian," and denied, offers Viola her first inkling that her brother lives.

    He nam'd Sebastian. I my brother know  
    Yet living in my glass; even such and so  
    In favor was my brother, and he went  
    Still in this fashion, color, ornament,  
    For him I imitate.  

(379-83)
We discover how completely Viola has mimicked her brother and are prepared for the confusion that will result.

The dramatist next adds depth and shading to the design, for the following scene has the cinematic quality of a "double take." "Will you make me believe that I am not sent for you?" (IV.i.1-2), challenges the Clown to Cesario's double, Sebastian. But we have already witnessed the interview between Viola and Olivia. Replaying an earlier moment, the Clown's confrontational attack seems to precede the previous scene. But the take is skewed. The line is addressed to Sebastian, not Viola/Cesario, and the outcome differs from the expected. We are caught in Shakespeare's double time as he confirms, through witnesses, the extraordinary resemblance between the twins. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby provide the next testimony. Again challenging the character they assume to be Orsino's page, they little realize they are encountering a different adversary. Finally, Olivia rushes out to save one she believes to be Cesario, but instead overwhelms Sebastian: "Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep; / If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!" (IV.i.62-63). Brother, like sister, uses a classical allusion. Just as a painter places small dabs of similar colors strategically throughout his painting to orchestrate its parts and help unify it, the writer paints resemblances through language and literary references.

Culminating in Olivia's "Would thou'dst be rul'd by me!" (64), this scene has carried the accidental disguise motif to its climax, when Sebastian replies, "Madam, I will," and Olivia joyously exclaims, "O, say so, and so be!" (65) and departs to plan a wedding. In contrast, a scene of intentional disguise follows, its darkness contrasting with the light of the previous scene as well as the subsequent one. Both literally and figuratively, darkness prevails as Sir Toby, Maria, and the Clown seek to frustrate Malvolio and convince him he is mad while keeping him imprisoned in darkness and calling it light. Again, Olivia, though absent is present: hearsay and hope, Malvolio's hope of marriage, keep her in the audience's consciousness.

Darkness then gives way to light. "This is the air, that is the glorious sun" (IV.iii.1), Sebastian marvels in soliloquy at Olivia's gifts, then later follows her to church to exchange vows. The soliloquy wanders over several topics, but always with Olivia at its core. Wondering what has happened to Antonio and wishing for his advice, the youth speculates,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For though my soul disputes well with my sense,} \\
\text{That this may be some error, but no madness,} \\
\text{Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune} \\
\text{So far exceed all instance, all discourse,} \\
\text{That I am ready to distrust mine eyes,} \\
\text{And wrangle with my reason that persuades me} \\
\text{To any other trust but that I am mad,} \\
\text{Or else the lady's mad.}
\end{align*}
\]

(9-16)

Debating with himself as to whether she is mad, he concludes this to be impossible—else she could not run her house, command her followers, and manage her affairs with such skill and "stable bearing" (19). Here in the testimony of a stranger who has observed the lady in action we are told of her ability.

But again the glorification of Olivia falls before the actor-manager's or director's pen. Since she is here challenging patterns of patriarchy, these producers of the play seem to assert that her more positive features need not be emphasized. Cuts in Sebastian's soliloquy appear in early promptbooks or acting versions and continue well into the twentieth century although they outline her skills. Clearly, the lines testify to her never having left this world, but merely having divorced herself from availability to suitors. And so, acting texts excise. Kemble omits the lines as do the Oxberry and the French texts (TN 9). By the time we reach the
Sothern-Marlowe version the soliloquy has been reduced to its first four lines, followed by its last two. With only its skeleton remaining, this abbreviated scene is then attached to the beginning of the closing scene (V.i) without a break.

Meanwhile, Viola is confronting the clear possibility that her brother lives. Although a joyous prospect, it will end her adventure into independence just as Olivia's decision to marry will end hers. In the single scene in act 5, Shakespeare, for the last time, presents the challenges the two single young women face and weaves together fact and fantasy, for this is Illyria.

Maria, too, has won her objective. Although she does not appear in the scene, we learn that through her successful plot to ensnare Malvolio "at Sir Toby's" wish, he hath "In recompense . . . married her" (363-64). A strong character, Maria differs from the other two women, having persistently sought marriage. Viola and Olivia, however, have had a momentary chance at self-ownership.

The conflict between the qualities referred to by de Beauvoir—the sense of the self being primary, and the "erotic urges and social pressures" to conform—is dramatized. By refusing to sacrifice the sense of self being primary, Olivia wins a husband; but he is only a facsimile of the "man" she pursued. However, because Sebastian's easy compliance to Olivia's proposal of marriage sharply contrasts with the passion of his rejection of Antonio earlier, one must question its reality. It is almost as if the dramatist were sending a signal to the audience to observe the character of the twin so as to realize the challenge to realism in the ending.

Critics have noted the weakness of this ending—its basic disregard for logic. Anne Barton, for example, observes that in *Twelfth Night* "Shakespeare began to unbuild his own comic form at its point of greatest vulnerability: the ending" (171). The brief scene between Antonio and Sebastian at the beginning of act 2 contributes to the absence of logic in the ending. In the earlier scene, the youth exhibits qualities clearly out of character with his impulsive actions near the comedy's close. One need only compare the attitude of Bertram to Helena with that of Sebastian to Olivia, a total stranger who asks him to marry her thinking he is Cesario, to see Shakespeare's lack of interest in a realistic ending. Nor do audiences react negatively to this strange and speedy marriage where the characters do not know one another. Because this is a comedy and because the young man himself does not object, we accept the convention of marriage as the outcome and delight that here in Illyria, Viola's twin brother shows up at just the right moment.

We also realize that the relationship between the two people to be married is inconsequential in this play, as is the need for a realistic reason for Viola's decision to disguise. Rather, the comedy seems to concentrate more closely on the changes in the women's self-perception from "primary" to "other" as they accept their identities as sexual beings in a male-dominated world. Attire, whether breeches or skirts, fades in importance as the dramatist explores the potential for independence by single women with wealth when unhampered by brothers or fathers.

Notes

1 Louis B. Wright, 491-507 and passim. Juliet Dusin-berre ascribes the debates on women's rights in the late sixteenth century to the rise of Puritanism, which encouraged mutual respect between husband and wife. See especially the introduction and 231-40. Linda T. Fitz, although less optimistic about women's achieving new rights, believes that the magnitude of the literature dictating what women should do indicates that they were not following prescribed paths: "the irrepressible spirit of those Renaissance English women . . . made sober treatises necessary" (18). Preceding the earliest production of *Twelfth Night*, works such as Jane Anger's (1589) appeared and, as late as 1620, the John Chamberlain letter records the king's "express commandment . . . to inveigh vehemently against the insolencie of . . . women." See Edward Phillips Statham, 182-83. See also Lisa Jardine, 9-36, where she also discusses the censuring of boys playing women's roles. She also quotes a letter of John Rainoldes in 1592 citing Scripture that says: "a woman shall not weare that which pertaineth to a
man, neither shall a man put on women's raiment: for all that do so are abomination to the Lord thy god" (14).

As Linda Woodbridge writes:

> In 1620, a controversy about women which had been simmering for nearly fifty years came to a boil in two essays, "Hic Mulier," an attack on women who wear masculine clothing, and "Haec-Vir," an answering defense which attacks male foppishness. In the unpromising context of fashion, the two essays really joined combat on the nature of the sexes... The transvestite controversy began, as nearly as we can tell, in about the 1570s, when some women began adopting masculine attire.

(139)

Woodbridge then cites George Gascoigne's satire *The Steele Glas*, 1576; Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses*, 1583; and William Averell's *A mervailous combat of contrarieties*, 1588 (Woodbridge, 140). She concludes that because the movement received no attention in the 1590s and early 1600s it "was apparently quiescent," comments not arising again until 1606 when Henry Parrot's *The Mous Trap* and Richard Niccols's *The Cuckow* appeared. According to Woodbridge, the movement then gained momentum, "climaxing between 1615 and 1620" (141). This supposes that because we have no literature during the intervening years, either none existed or women suddenly gave up this attire only to don it again around 1615 when Swetnam's *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* appeared, followed by the anonymous *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman: Being a Medicine to cure the Coltish Disease of the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times*, 1620, and the anonymous response a week later, *Haec-Vir; or, The Womanish Man: Being an Answere to the late Booke intituled Hic-Mulier. Exprest in a briefe Dialogue between Haec-Vir the Womanish Man, and Hic-Mulier the Man-Woman* (Woodbridge, 142-46).

2 Although some critics use the terms self and other to describe Shakespeare's relationship to, or perception of, his male and female characters, my reference is to de Beauvoir's use of these terms as they describe the self-perceptions of men and women.

3 See the chapter "Growing Up," on *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Wooing, Wedding, and Power*.

4 Aside from the scene transposition, which I discuss later, the following lines are excised in these works: the Bell edition; the Kemble edition and those deriving from it; the Irving edition where the scene is compressed with the later scene 4; the French edition; *TN* 21 (listed as "Ada Rehan's" but using the French text, not that of Augustin Daly, her manager); and the Southern-Marlowe typescript—among others:

> O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,  
> That notwithstanding thy capacity  
> Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,  
> Of what validity and pitch soe'er,  
> But falls into abatement and low price  
> Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy  
> That it alone is high fantastical.

(I.i.9-15)

Also frequently cut are the scene's closing lines also spoken by the Duke:

> Away before me to sweet beds of flow'rs,  
> Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bow'rs.
5 See Stephen Booth's article ("Twelfth Night: 1.1") on the verbal incongruities in this scene and the ways in which these incongruities prepare us for the rest of the play.

6 Robert Kimbrough, in an excellent article on androgyny, theorizes that Viola adopts male disguise to prevent being sent home immediately by the Duke (her father's friend) if she appear at his palace in her own attire ("Androgyny," 29).

7 Several versions that barely resembled Shakespeare's were presented during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, no acting edition of the play appeared before 1750 although Hogan records productions, referring to several of these as "the original" (1:545-57). I suspect, however, that the Bell edition recorded what had been performed during the 1740s, prior to its publication. Odell notes only that: 'both the Clown's songs, 'O Mistress mine,' and 'Come away, come away, Death,' with their surrounding context are omitted, more's the pity, but nothing of importance, otherwise, is cast aside" (II.29). Obviously, to Odell, Viola's reference to gold was unimportant; to paraphrase Odell, "more's the pity."

8 As well as productions that used Kemble editions of 1810, 1811, and 1815 into the late 1850s, the Modern Standard Drama edition published by William Taylor and Company with Samuel French as general agent includes many of the same inserts and textual changes as do the Kemble editions. Because the French publications hardly ever bear a date, one must usually date them by the cast list for a particular production, which is printed in the edition. Among the books I have seen are those of William Burton, 1852, and Miss Neilson, dated 2/78. Thomas Hailes Lacy (1867) also followed Kemble's format. Charles Kean altered Kemble's 1811 edition of Twelfth Night, for the performance of 28 September 1850. See also Folger prompts TN 16, TN 17, 73V 4, TN 5, TN 3, TN 18; also Shattuck, 469-89.

9 While Henry Irving's adaptation differs somewhat from Kemble's, it contains many of the same excisions and follows Kemble by beginning at scene 2. Irving, however, does not introduce scene 1 until after I.iv.7. Thus Viola is present during his mooning for Olivia although the scene itself is much abbreviated, containing only lines 1 to 8 and 16 to 38. See Folger promptbooks TN 13, TN 15.

10 See Schochet, 65-66, for a discussion of the hierarchical structure in the patriarchal family in Renaissance England. Obviously the dramatist was drawing on generally accepted patterns in his society. In this play, however, both Viola and Olivia have temporarily been freed from this pattern.

11 Salingar's article has many fine insights, particularly where he compares Shakespeare's play with his sources. As a matter of fact, Salingar may have made this statement because he was transferring the identity of a source character for Olivia to Shakespeare's Olivia.

12 The illustration is taken from Cassell, Petter & Galpin (G. Greatbach, Sculpt, [i.e. engraver]; C. Green, Pinxt [this word means he drew the original illustration]). Greatbach flourished in mid nineteenth century.

13 Daly's illustrations of the performance have a warmer and younger looking Olivia than appears in the designs for the role.

14 Folger prompts: 16, 17 (Kemble); 15 (Irving); 10, 21, 29 (Daly). University of Bristol: HBT 138 (Tree).

15 Excised by Irving (TN 15).

16 Although some critics have read this phrase as an indication that she has formerly been weeping and now her eyes are tearing for joy, I believe that she is referring to the image of Cesario that is creeping into her heart
through her eyes. The language is ambiguous.

Daly, Irving, Tree, and others followed Kemble's lead although often slightly altering the exact sequential revision. Henry Irving, after first adopting Kemble's opening with Viola's I.ii, then moved immediately to "Court-yard of Olivia's house" (11), with Sir Toby's line "What a plague means my niece, to take the death of her brother thus?" Since Irving played Malvolio, the play was reshaped to emphasize the comedic scenes, while yet retaining Viola's role, played by Ellen Terry. Orsino's Palace, the setting of the third scene, opens as does I.v., where Viola as Cesario has already won her way into the Duke's favor. Only after having established this time sequence, does Irving insert Shakespeare's opening lines, "If music be the food of love, play on" (15), continuing with abbreviated material from that first scene, and then moving on to Orsino's conversation with Cesario and his assignment to her to woo Olivia.

It follows the second interlude between Viola and the Duke (H.iv), where she almost discloses her identity (III.ii in Irving's version—TN 15).

According to the Concordance, Viola has 13.0 percent of the speeches, 13.0 percent of the lines and 13.2 percent of the words; Olivia has 12.7 percent of the speeches, 12.0 percent of the lines and 11.8 percent of the words. Actually the longest role belongs to Sir Toby who has 16.5 percent of the speeches, 14.0 percent of the lines, and 13.8 percent of the words, whereas Malvolio trails with 9.4 percent of the speeches, 11.0 percent of the lines, and 11.4 percent of the words. However Malvolio's role has frequently been taken by a lead actor since it allows for great antics and hamming. Spevack, Concordance 1:1162-1213.

Irving begins his scene here, eliminating the earlier reference to Cesario. Sothern-Marlowe too delete the reference although it clearly anticipates the later intense interview between the two young women. Rather, in the Sothern-Marlowe typescript Maria's description of Malvolio (in the text's III.ii) immediately precedes his actual appearance (in the text's III.iv) without a break.

Acknowledging the foolishness of excising the last six lines (16-21), the editor of the Bell edition even comments, "Why omit these lines? to us they seem necessary" (338), then prints them in small type at the bottom of the page. Daly also omits them. The entire soliloquy is crossed out in the Irving prompt, while Charles Kean (TN 14) cuts the entire scene.

Several critics have recently written on the importance of the impact of the full text rather than of the ending, noting an overemphasis on closure. See, for example, Belsey, 187-88, and Jensen, 99-117.

**Bibliography**


[Kemble, J. P.] *Twelfth Night; or What you will*. A Comedy. Revised by J. P. Kemble; & now first published as it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. London: Printed for the theatre, 1810. Folger prompts TN 16 (ms. cast list for 1818; bookplate and autograph of Walter Lacy; bookplate of Sir Henry Irving).


——. *Twelfth Night; or, What you will*. A comedy. Revised by J. P. Kemble; & now first published as it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. London: Printed for the Theatre. 1811 "Operatic version" by Frederick Reynolds, 1820 at Covent Garden. Folger prompt TN 17.

——. *Twelfth Night; or What you will*; a comedy. Revised by J. P. Kemble; and now published as it is performed at the Theatres Royal. London: Printed for John Miller, and sold in the theatres, 1815. Folger prompts TN 4 (in ink at top of p. 5: "Mr. J. B. Buckstone . . . 1859." ms. cast list for "July 2d 1856 Haymarket"), TN 6.


**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 46): Further Reading**


Evaluates the characters in *Twelfth Night* with reference to the theme of constancy versus flexibility. On one hand, Bellringer contends, Sir Toby and the other members of Olivia's household are each ruled by a single passion; by contrast, Orsino, Feste, Sebastian, and Viola demonstrate a willingness to modify their behavior and adapt to changing circumstances.


Offers textual evidence to support the notion that Fabian is a member of the landed gentry, not one of Olivia's serving men. Brewer sees Fabian as a dramatic type or stock character—a humorous older gentleman who is contemptuous of parvenus and social climbers.


A psychoanalytic evaluation of Olivia's steward and his connection to the main plot. From Cahill's perspective, Malvolio's confusion of identity and desire reflects the principal characters' search for love and selfhood.

Callaghan, Dymphna. "'And all is semblative a woman's part': Body Politics and *Twelfth Night.*" *Textual Practice* 7, No. 3 (Winter 1993): 428-52.

A feminist reading of the play's representations of the female body. Focusing on the scene in which Malvolio parses the forged letter, Callaghan asserts that both here and throughout *Twelfth Night*, the female body—as well as men who try to improve their social status—are ridiculed and disciplined because they threaten the patriarchal system.


Analyzes the linguistic and dramatic expressions of double perspectives in *Twelfth Night*. Carroll compares the characters who rigidly resist change with those whose capacity for self-transformation permits them to achieve redemption. His discussion of *Twelfth Night*
appears on pp. 80-102 of this chapter.


Assesses the application of the Aristotelian concept of anagnorisis to modern European dramatic theory—specifically to literary analyses of Corneille's Héraclius and Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Translating anagnorisis as "recognition," Cave reads Twelfth Night as a comedy that both exploits and exposes rhetorical tricks, creating cognitive confusion of form and meaning.


Traces the structural development of the principal and secondary plots as well as Shakespeare's elaboration on the theme of love.


Discusses Feste as an emblem of the humanist tradition of Folly, which satirized human pretension and self-delusion. As Feste points out the affectations of all the other characters on stage, Davies notes, he implicitly mocks the audience's own hypocrisies and poses.


Argues that Viola's fleeting reference to emasculation—"present me as an eunuch" (I.ii.56)—is rich in significance for the play as a whole. Elam lays out the long tradition of the theme of castration—from Terence to Italian Renaissance commedia to post-Reformation English comedy—which Shakespeare drew on and reworked.


Uses Twelfth Night to compare semiotic and mimetic approaches to literary criticism. In Freund's judgment, the play illustrates the indeterminacy of language and is a perfect example of the challenge of recovering meaning from a text.


An analysis of the direct and indirect theatrical notation that governs the gestures, grouping, and movement of characters in the play's final scene. Hasler calls attention to the series of entrances that culminate in the appearance of Sebastian; the jarring interlude with Malvolio; and, most importantly, the way Cesario/Viola remains the focus of attention despite the fact that she is given few lines to speak.

Evaluates allusions in the play to Christian and other religious doctrines. In Hunt's view, the play satirizes the Puritan notion that Providence can be relied on to operate directly in human affairs and instead demonstrates that Providence works obliquely, through such natural agents as Time and Fortune.


Discerns in Twelfth Night a reflection of the sexual vulnerability of boys and young women in early modern England. The financial dependence of Viola and Sebastian leads each of them into household service, Jardine notes, and because of their subservient status both are objects of general erotic desire until they are safely married.


Praises Twelfth Night as the capstone of Shakespearean romantic comedy and comments particularly on its fully rounded characterization, the play's uniquely lyrical atmosphere, and the masterful way in which various plot strands are instigated.

Priest, Dale G. "O r else this is a dream': Ambivalence and Madness in Twelfth Night” CLA Journal: Official Quarterly Publication of the College Language Association XXXIV, No. 3 (March 1991): 371-83.

Focuses on the "darkhouse" scene—Feste's badgering of the imprisoned Malvolio—and the play's ambiguous treatment of comic madness. Priest claims that Twelfth Night demonstrates that madness can be a carnivalesque release from social decorum, a psychological delusion, or a perceptive vision of the illogical nature of human existence.


Assesses the significance of Malvolio's repetition of "C. . .U. . .T. . .P" as he reads the forged missive in II. v. Elizabethan audiences would have enjoyed the bawdy implications of these initials, she remarks—"cut" was a vulgarism for the vagina, and "p" a slang abbreviation for "piss"—but this sequence of letters would also remind them to safeguard their wallets against cutpurses and pickpockets, who found golden opportunities in theatrical playhouses.


Compares Twelfth Night's depiction of Cesario/Viola with other English plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras that also feature a heroine disguised as a male. Shapiro contends that Shakespeare's treatment of the homoerotic possibilities inherent in this role is both fresh and subtle.


Suggests that the design of Twelfth Night is governed by the principle of reciprocity—the continuing process of give-and-take that binds individuals together in a healthy community.
Slichts asserts that the action of the play moves from isolation and self-absorption toward each character's recognition of the necessity for mutual obligation and dependency in human society.


Theorizes that Shakespeare heavily revised Twelfth Night after its completion and early staging. Smidt believes that the role of Feste is an interpolation, written to bring the famous Elizabethan stage clown Robert Armin into the cast, and that when Shakespeare added this character he overlooked the resulting textual anomalies—especially the mix-up of parts between Fabian and Feste.


Maintains that in this play Shakespeare shows folly as a positive value, indeed the principal means of coming to terms with human frailty and the harshness of the world. Tromly points out that it is delusion itself, created by Viola's disguise, that liberates Orsino and Olivia from their self-absorption and draws them into human society.


Remarks on the nature of Feste's foolery, calling attention to the differences between Feste and Shakespeare's other court jester clowns.


An extensive overview of the play. The editors discuss a variety of issues, including Twelfth Night's stage history, its Latin and Italian models, its complex presentation of romantic love, its characterization, and its dramatic structure.


Views Twelfth Night as Shakespeare's most graceful and mellow comedy, but acknowledges an undertone of poignancy as well. Emphasizing Shakespeare's mature artistry Weiss proceeds through the play scene by scene to demonstrate its author's surehanded control of tone, characterization, and dramatic effects.


Examines the paradoxical nature of time in Twelfth Night and As You Like It. Westerweel argues that each character in these two comedies inhabits a different and distinctive world of time; in the case of Twelfth Night, he calls particular attention to Orsino's fanciful image of a pastoral golden age, Feste's solid footing in the present, and Viola's belief in providential time.

Finds consistency in the characterization of Orsino and Olivia, and contends that the apparently sudden shifts in their affections in the final scene are psychologically plausible. Westlund proposes that Orsino and Olivia are initially narcissistic and lack self-confidence, but Viola's receptivity to their needs helps them gain less idealistic appraisals of themselves, so they can recognize appropriate objects of desire.


Analyzes the gulling of Malvolio in relation to both the prevailing theme of festivity and the underlying tone of melancholy in Twelfth Night. In Willbern's judgment, the steward is punished for three reasons: his rationality, his social-climbing, and his latent desire to sleep with Olivia.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 62): Introduction

Twelfth Night

Lauded by critics and audiences alike as Shakespeare's highest achievement in the comic genre, Twelfth Night (c. 1600-01) is an intricate inquiry into the nature of love, gender roles, and the intertwining of life's tragic and comic experiences. A number of critics remain particularly fascinated with the complexity of the play's exploration of gender identity, as there are numerous layers to the characters' gender roles, as well as to their sexual attractions. Referred to as a subplot, the story of Malvolio and those who seek to punish him for his puritanical ways threatens to steal the show, as some critics have pointed out. The relationship between the main plot and this subordinate plot is therefore the focus of much critical examination. Additionally, the play's ending—in which so much confusion is undone in so short a time—also attracts a great deal of scholarly attention, particularly since Viola remains dressed as a male right up to the play's end, becoming Shakespeare's only cross-dressed heroine to do so.

The sexual relationships and gender roles in Twelfth Night are multi-layered. For example, Viola, a female character (who was played by a male in the Elizabethan theater), is dressed as a male, Cesario, throughout most of the play. As a male, Viola woos Olivia for Orsino, resulting in Olivia falling in love with Viola-as-Cesario. At the same time, Viola, though dressed as a man, falls in love with Orsino. Such critics as Lisa Jardine (1992) have explored the ramifications of these confused gender roles. Jardine focuses in particular on how the relationship between economic dependency and sexual availability in Elizabethan England informs the play's attitudes towards cross-dressing. Both Viola and Sebastian, observes Jardine, are forced to seek dependent positions in households outside the circle of family relations, making Viola/Cesario sexually available to Orsino, and Sebastian sexually available to Olivia. In his analysis of gender issues in Twelfth Night, Michael Shapiro (1996) emphasizes the Elizabethan theatrical practice of men playing women's parts. Shapiro studies the psychological “anxiety” resulting from the theatrical portrayal of both sexual and emotional intimacy, examining in particular the relationship between Viola and Olivia, in which the audience witnesses the intensity of the exchanges between two women, played by two men, and the relationship between Orsino and Viola, in which Orsino is drawn to the feminine qualities of Viola's Cesario. Like Shapiro, Casey Charles (see Further Reading) maintains that the relationship between Viola and Olivia is a significant one, more central to the play than many critics have acknowledged. The relationship between the two women, along with the attractions between Antonio and Sebastian and Orsino and Cesario, emphasize that homoerotic desire is a primary concern in the play. Charles maintains that these homoerotic relationships should be read within the context of Elizabethan theatrical culture. The critic continues with a discussion of...
the way the dramatization of homoerotic attractions criticizes the social ideal of “imperative heterosexuality” by underscoring the way sexuality is socially constructed through gender identity.

The subplot, centering on the punishment of Malvolio, highlights some of the darker aspects of *Twelfth Night*. Many critics have noted the severity of Malvolio’s punishment—he is humiliated, imprisoned in a dark chamber, and made to feel as if he has lost his sanity. This is perhaps more than he deserves, some audiences and critics feel. Harry Levin (1976) examines Malvolio’s role in the play, commenting that the character is not present in Shakespeare's sources, yet his role becomes a “stellar” one. Arguing that Shakespeare’s primary concern was to highlight the triumphant comic spirit, Levin suggests that the darkness integrated into Malvolio’s story, much like the tragedy and death that inform the circumstances of the lovers in the main plot, serves the purpose of intensifying the victory of the comic spirit. Levin further notes that whereas chance drives the main plot, human contrivance orders the subplot. Jane K. Brown (1990) also explores the differences between the main plot and subplot. The critic finds that the two plots correspond to the two worlds depicted in the play—one ruled by Orsino and one governed by Olivia. Brown goes on to discuss the way Shakespeare represented the two realms differently, through the use of allegorical language in Olivia’s world, and metaphorical discourse in Orsino’s. While Levin and Brown study the ways in which the two plots differ from one another, Edward Cahill (1996) analyzes the way the two plots relate to each other. Cahill contends that both explore similar issues, such as identity and desire, both use disguise and performance, and both feature the pursuit of marriage. The critic also observes that the failure of the subplot to resolve itself injects a bit of tragedy into the play’s otherwise comic ending.

The ending of the play has also been a focus of criticism. The fact that Viola remains dressed as Cesario at the play’s end has been noted by a number of critics, who suggest that Shakespeare allowed this in order to heighten the effect of the denouement, or to make a statement about gender identity. Jörg Hasler (1974) studies the influence of Shakespeare’s earlier comedies on the ending of *Twelfth Night*, examining the dramatic form of Viola’s ordeal at the play’s end and comparing it to the endings of *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Measure for Measure*. Hasler finds that all three plays end similarly, with the heroines standing in the center of the chaos. The critic also examines the endings of other Shakespearean plays for cases of mistaken identity, shipwreck stories, and similar patterns found in *Twelfth Night*. Yu Jin Ko (see Further Reading) begins an analysis of the play’s ending by noting the similarity between Viola’s rejection of Sebastian’s embrace and Jesus’s resisting Mary Magdalene’s embrace after his resurrection. Ko demonstrates that this Biblical allusion serves to heighten the sense of longing, and argues that this intensified yearning is exploited throughout the play, largely in sexual terms. Ko explores how Viola’s cross-dressing prolongs the sexual yearnings of both Olivia and Orsino, and examines the “curiously absorbing” nature of longing as it is dramatized in *Twelfth Night*.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 62): Criticism: Overviews And General Studies**


[In the following essay, Mangan focuses on Shakespeare’s extensive reworking of themes, characters, and situations used in *Twelfth Night*, noting that Shakespeare revised his previous attitudes toward many of the ideas explored in the play.]

‘GIVE ME EXCESS OF IT’

*Twelfth Night* is a play characterized by excess. In the first few lines Orsino calls for an excess of music, and from that moment on the play stages a variety of excesses. On the most mundane level there are the literal
excesses of Sir Toby and his drinking partners and their revelries. There are the excessive and obsessive emotional states of Orsino and Olivia; the one overwhelmed by his unrequited love for the other, who is herself trapped in mourning for her dead brother and sworn to wear a veil for seven years. People act and react excessively, too: the trick which Maria and Sir Toby play against Malvolio is funny to begin with, but eventually turns sour. Audiences frequently find the ‘mad-house’ scene, in which Feste torments the imprisoned steward, uncomfortable, and even Sir Toby thinks that things have been taken too far and says that he ‘would we were well rid of this knavery’. The play encompasses an extraordinary range of tones and moods, from melancholy to revelry. There is even an excess of characters in the play: Fabian seems to appear from nowhere and for no apparent reason in Act II Scene v, and then takes over the part which Feste seemed about to play in the early stages of the plot against Malvolio.

As for the plot, Shakespearean comedy is typically complicated in its narrative structure: even so, *Twelfth Night* is unusually ambitious in the number of narratives which it sets going simultaneously, and the complexity with which they need to interrelate. It attempts simultaneously to create both the accelerating fugue-like structure of a good farce, and also a series of characters who are allowed their own space to develop emotionally complex or subtle relationships with each other and with the audience. There are so many narratives going on at the same time that it is easy for an audience to lose track of everything that is happening. Plots of disguise and cross-dressing become interwoven with stories of mistaken identities, separated twins and (again) lost brothers; tricks are played on several characters simultaneously; and there is not one love-story but many.

As in *As You Like It*, all sorts of variations are played upon the theme of love and desire. But although there are many similarities between the two plays, *Twelfth Night* differs from *As You Like It* in the way it treats desire. In *As You Like It* a single kind of love-relationship, romantic love, was parodied in a variety of ways up and down the social classes. But the triangle of desire in which Viola is caught does not involve low-life shepherdesses like Phoebe, patently minor characters who can be relegated at the end of the play to their proper station in the sub-plot: she is adored by the Lady Olivia. Moreover, in *Twelfth Night* love takes on a greater variety of forms. Apart from Orsino's and Olivia's obsessive states there is also Viola's unspoken longing for Orsino; Olivia's impossible desire for Cesario (finally translated into possibility by the appearance of Sebastian); Orsino's fondness for ‘Cesario’ (which changes quite peremptorily into a willingness to marry Viola); Malvolio’s self-interested pursuit of his mistress, which leads to its own kind of excess as he dresses in his ridiculous costume; Sir Andrew's hopes of marriage with Olivia; Antonio's adoration of Sebastian; the fictional sister invented by Viola and her male counterpart, the flamboyant and imaginary lover in the ‘willow cabin’ at the gate; Sir Toby's marriage to his partner-in-crime Maria; and not least the filial love of Sebastian and Viola, which is as intense as any relationship in the play. *Twelfth Night* is clearly concerned to show how many faces love and desire can have.

Perhaps, too, how many faces comedy can have. It seems at times that there is more material here than can be accommodated in a single play—and this is not entirely surprising, for into *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare cram a whole series of themes, characters, scenes and situations which he has already used in several previous plays.

*Twelfth Night* re-works, for example, the cross-dressing plot from *As You Like It*, with Viola following Rosalind's lead in donning male attire as protection, and then having to deal with the contradictions which arise from that disguise once people start falling in love with each other. Like another cross-dressed Shakespearean heroine, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Viola becomes page to the man she loves, and then finds herself in the uncomfortable position of having to plead his cause to another woman. The cross-dressing plot is then interwoven with the ‘identical twins’ plot which was the central narrative of *The Comedy of Errors*. As in that earlier play, twins are separated by storm and shipwreck; one of them arrives in a strange city to find an unknown woman who lays claim to his love; people are confined in lunatic asylums; misunderstandings arise about ransoms and gifts of gold; and old enmities between cities put at risk the lives...
of men who are seeking the person they love. From *Much Ado About Nothing* comes the scene in which someone is tricked into believing that someone else is in love with them, while the tricksters look on. From *As You Like It* again comes the slightly dissonant ending: just as Jaques in the earlier play refused to join in the celebrations and return to court with the rest of the company, so Malvolio here, much more harshly, rejects the apologies and attempts at reconciliation, storming off-stage with threats of revenge.

Characters reappear, too. The figure of the jester, of course, has been used before, and Feste bears more than a slight resemblance to Touchstone, as Shakespeare and Robert Armin continue to develop the specialized clown rôle as a trademark of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Several other stock characters, too, probably bear witness to the particular skills or comic routines of other actors: the inept lover Master Slender from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, for example, reappears as Sir Andrew Aguecheek; the witty female servant Maria has antecedents in Hero's waiting women, Margaret and Ursula in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Viola, as we have seen, replays Rosalind's breeches part. It has often been pointed out that Sir Toby is an Illyrian equivalent of Falstaff: like the fat knight of the *Henry IV* plays and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he is a descendant of the figures of misrule from seasonal entertainments. Like Falstaff, Sir Toby has gathered round him a group of like-minded revellers, with the result that Malvolio accuses him of trying to turn Olivia's house into an 'ale-house'—as if Falstaff's Eastcheap haunts were to be imported into Illyria. Even *Hamlet* finds echoes in *Twelfth Night*, although this is perhaps less surprising than it might seem at first, since the comedy and the tragedy were written very close together in and around 1600-1. At any rate, both of them start with a figure displaying all the signs of mourning: Hamlet's 'inky cloak' is worn in mourning for his father, Olivia's veil is in memory of her brother. In this respect Olivia may also remind readers and audiences of Portia in the early phases of *The Merchant of Venice*, as both are potentially prevented from loving by the influence of a dead relative.

The list could go on. Nor is there anything unusual in itself about the fact that this play contains reworkings of old stories, characters and situations. Throughout his career Shakespeare continually re-uses material, adapting not only other writers' works for the stage (as was common enough in Elizabethan playwriting practice), but reworking his own ideas and narratives, giving new meanings to the stories he tells. What makes *Twelfth Night* special is the relentlessness of these reworkings, the (again) excessiveness of them. It is true that shipwrecks, lost relatives, mistaken identities and love-triangles are standard fare in romantic comedy, but in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare seems to be attempting—almost desperately—to cram everything in. *Twelfth Night* is a compendium of Shakespearean comedy, and in it it is possible to see Shakespeare taking further, revising and rethinking his attitudes to some of the ideas which comedy had already been a vehicle for expressing.

‘AT OUR FEAST WE HAD A PLAY’

It may seem that this spotting of sources and intertextual relationships is a rather academic exercise: relevant to the classroom, perhaps, but not to the stage. Would Shakespeare have expected his audience to pick up references like these? Would they have noticed, or bothered about, the similarities between one play and another? As it happens we can answer this question with a qualified ‘yes’. While we have no way of knowing how Elizabethan audiences in general reacted to the play, or what sort of expectations or understandings they had of it, we do have evidence of the response of one spectator at a performance of *Twelfth Night*.

*Twelfth Night*, like most of Shakespeare's plays, was written with various possible audiences in mind. It was to be performed at the still-new Globe Theatre, of course, but the Lord Chamberlain's Men would also have hoped, like Bottom and his friends, to be commissioned for performances at court on the occasion of various festivities and celebrations. There is even a tradition that the play was first performed before the Queen on 6 January 1601, on *Twelfth Night* itself, although there is little or no evidence for such a performance (indeed there is no record of a performance of this play at the court of either Elizabeth or James until 6 April 1618, two years after Shakespeare's death). There was, however, a performance at another prestigious, and possibly
better-paying, venue in 1602. A student of law at the Middle Temple, John Manningham, kept a commonplace book in which he noted all sorts of details about his life. This book is known as ‘Manningham's Diary’, and the first entry for February 1602 reads:

At our feast we had a play called ['mid' crossed out] Twelve Night or What You Will, much like the Comedy of Errors or Menaechmi in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practice in it to make the steward believe his Lady widow was in love with him by counterfeiting a letter, as from his Lady in general terms, telling him what she liked best in him and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel etc. And then when he came to practice making him believe they took him to be mad.  

This diary entry suggests something of the nature of the audience for which Shakespeare was writing, by showing us something of the mind of one Elizabethan play-goer: not a statistically relevant sample, of course, but useful nonetheless. It is a mind which is extremely well-stocked: Manningham, clearly, is well-read in both contemporary English, recent Italian and classical Latin drama. He not only picks up the resemblance to the Comedy of Errors, but is also able to trace both Shakespearean plays back to their common source in Plautus's Menaechmi. In addition there is the interesting slip of the pen in Manningham's first line: the word 'mid' is crossed out—as if he might have been about to write 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', briefly confusing one Shakespearean play with another (which also has a title referring to one specific night of the year). It is unlikely to have been pure coincidence that led Manningham to make the link with the earlier Shakespeare comedies. It would seem that Shakespeare as a writer had made enough of a name for himself by 1602 for an informed play-goer like Manningham to be able to discern an oeuvre. Manningham, it seems, was aware not merely of watching a play but of watching a play by a particular writer, William Shakespeare.

Manningham is judicious in his spotting of sources. Having recognized the twins' plot from The Comedy of Errors and Menaechmi, he goes on to consider the cross-dressing plot, which he correctly traces back to Italian comic traditions. Here, in fact, he may be conflating memories of two plays: the play which he names, Gl'Inganni (The Deceptions), tells the story of a woman who cross-dresses and takes the masculine name of Cesare, just as Viola in Twelfth Night becomes Cesario. It is also possible, however, that Manningham is actually thinking of another play, the anonymous Gl'Ingannati (The Deceived), which resembles Twelfth Night even more closely. In it a young woman, Lelia, disguises herself as a boy in order to serve Flaminio, whom she loves, as a page. Flaminio employs her as a messenger to Isabella, the woman he loves unrequittedly, and Isabella then falls in love with Lelia. Like Viola, Lelia is saved from these complications by the appearance of her long-lost brother Fabrizio, who falls in love with Isabella, leaving Flaminio and Lelia free to marry each other.

We should not assume that the sophisticated awareness of intertextuality which Manningham shows was typical of play-goers in Shakespeare's London. Clearly, though, Shakespeare was writing for an audience which included a proportion of very well-informed aficionados of the theatre, spectators whose experience of one play could be immediately related to memories of others. He might well have been able to expect that the self-referential and intertextual elements of Twelfth Night would not have been altogether lost on his audience.

Other things about Manningham's diary entry deserve comment. There is his evidence, for example, that Twelfth Night was performed at a feast. This particular play is especially suited to such an occasion: Sir Toby and his fellow-revellers in particular enact a story-line which is in itself ‘festive’, and the play bears the title of a feast. It would have been nice if Manningham's diary had provided evidence of the play being performed at some Twelfth Night celebrations; however, the feast at which Twelfth Night was presented to the Middle Temple seems, from the date of Manningham's diary entry, to have been to celebrate Candlemas rather than Twelfth Night.
The diary entry also gives a sense of what Manningham remembered most vividly from the performance. The romantic plot is mentioned only as it relates to sources, but what seems to have stuck in Manningham's mind is the trick played on Malvolio by Maria, Sir Toby and Feste. What Manningham carries away from the play is precisely the opposite of what the editors of the Arden edition of the play, J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, speaking for twentieth-century scholarship, say the modern reader is likely to experience:

It is probably true to say that a twentieth-century reader, suddenly invited to recall *Twelfth Night*, will think first of Viola's scene with Olivia and Orsino (I. iv and II. iv), and in particular of her 'willow cabin' and ‘Patience on a monument’ speeches.²

They compare this with a typically nineteenth-century perspective on the play, represented by the words of the Victorian scholar F. J. Furnivall, writing in 1877, who saw the below-stairs plot as a rather irritating distraction, behind which the beauties of the romantic plot might be glimpsed:

The self-conceited Malvolio is brought to the front, the drunkards and the Clown come next; none of these touches any heart; and it's not till we look past them, that we feel the beauty of the characters who stand in half-light behind.⁴

Manningham's memories are different again from this. He is not particularly interested in the shadowy half-light of romantic beauty; for him the ‘self-conceited’ Malvolio's smiling, his yellow cross-gartered stockings and the tricks played upon him by Sir Toby and his companions are what make the greatest impression:

A good practice in it to make the steward believe his Lady widow was in love with him by counterfeiting a letter, as from his Lady in general terms, telling him what she liked best in him and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel etc. And then when he came to practice making him believe they took him to be mad.⁵

These varying responses provide some useful information about the diversity of ways in which different ages have related to the ‘same’ play. The changing structures of feeling over the centuries, and the changing expectations both of art and life which people have brought to the text in various ages has meant that different generations have privileged different parts of the story. In addition, though, it is worth noting how the Arden editors resolutely talk about ‘the reader’ rather than ‘the spectator’ or ‘the audience’. Manningham's response, on the other hand, is to a performance rather than to a text. It may be that the differences in perspective which exist between Manningham and the Arden edition owe something to the difference between reading *Twelfth Night* and watching it.

A play is a paradoxical kind of literary hybrid, one whose ‘success’ is in part measured by the number of times the text gets staged and re-staged. In the course of this process, of course, the play gets altered from its original appearance. *Twelfth Night*‘s history on the English stage between the 1600s and the mid-twentieth century includes such radical transformations as a version played at James I's court in 1623 entitled merely *Malvolio*; a Restoration adaptation by William D'Avenant; an incorporation of sections of it in Charles Burnaby's *Love Betray'd: or the Agreeable Disappointment*; an 1820s musical version by Frederick Reynolds containing ‘Songs, Glees and Choruses’ from other Shakespeare plays.⁶ Just as Shakespeare cannibalized previous plays (including, as we have seen, his own) to create his texts, so his texts are cannibalized by later generations of theatre practitioners. But it is not only a matter of rewritings and adaptations. For each new staging, each new stage, each change of cast or venue means a different experience for the audience.

Manningham's diary entry tells us about an early staging of *Twelfth Night*, and reflects accurately an important theatrical dimension of the play which is not always obvious to the reader: the way in which the apparent main plot, the romance involving Viola, Orsino and Olivia, frequently has trouble holding its own in competition with the ‘sub-plot’, and the below-stairs activities of puritanical stewards and drunken knights.
threaten continually to take centre stage. As with that 1623 performance at court, *Twelfth Night* can easily metamorphose into *Malvolio*.

‘I SMELL A DEVICE’

Let us focus, then, on the below-stairs plot. Act II Scene iii sees the ‘low-life’ characters of the play, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste and (after a little persuasion) Maria holding a late-night party. They drink, they sing—and they disturb Malvolio, who bursts into the scene full of righteous indignation:

*Malvolio* My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons nor time with you?

(II, iii, ll. 33-9)

His diatribe has little effect on the revellers. Despite Malvolio's attempt to quieten them, they continue with their drinking and singing. Sir Toby retorts, ‘Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?’ (II, iii, ll. 109-11).

In this below-stairs plot of *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare stages once again the battle between Carnival and Lent. The confrontation between Sir Toby and Malvolio is emblematic: on the one side Malvolio's ‘virtuous’ mean-spiritedness, on the other Sir Toby, the representative of revelry, with a surname which speaks for itself, and a first name which is pointedly and familiarly English in this alien world of Illyria. As in the famous painting by Bruegel, the personifications of Carnival and Lent confront each other directly.

The title of the play itself draws attention to this confrontation. In Elizabeth's court, as elsewhere in Europe, the Feast of the Epiphany on 6 January, Twelfth Night, was the occasion of the final phase of Christmas-time celebrations, and

… one of the most brilliant and joyful court occasions. Before stepping down, the Lord of Misrule would announce his desire to round off with a kind of apotheosis and a whole succession of spectacular displays of music, dancing and feasting bursting like fireworks one after the other … *Twelfth Night* provided a fine occasion to hand out these titles of king and queen, which appear to have been very popular amongst the rites and traditions of folklore. It was a mimetic ritual of royalty that was probably a survival from the old Saturnalia, giving the king of the evening a chance to masquerade as the monarch, derisively aping his authority … Masquerades and fancy-dress mummings are another feature of the lavish amusements of *Twelfth Night* … *Twelfth Night* was the festival which brought to an end the long, eventful period of ‘Yuletide’ revels …?  

The ambiguous nature of these *Twelfth Night* celebrations is significant. It was a time of revelry, a carnival time at which the world might be turned upside-down, a celebration presided over by the Lord of Misrule and the ‘King of the Bean’ (a mock king elected by means of a dried bean hidden in the festive cake: whoever found it in his portion was elected ‘king’). Yet it also marked the end of revelling: the Christmas holiday was almost over and a return to work and the realities of midwinter imminent. We retain a memory of this in present-day Christmas customs: *Twelfth Night* is the night the decorations come down. The confrontation between the riotous world of Sir Toby and the sober world of Malvolio could hardly take place in a more fitting context than that of *Twelfth Night*.  

738
Sir Toby and his drinking companions comprise an carnivalesque underworld, an alternative society to the ‘official’ world of Olivia and Orsino. This world has all the essential characteristics of Bakhtin's definitions of carnival. The pleasures of the body are paramount; language—especially in Feste's hands—runs riot; and traditional hierarchies and class boundaries have become virtually irrelevant. Knights carouse with servants, fools and other unspecified members of the household. Sir Toby breaks all the rules of Elizabethan decorum by marrying his sister's ‘waiting-gentlewoman’, thus honouring at one remove Falstaff's promise of marriage to Mistress Quickly. The analogy with Falstaff works theatrically as well as socially. While the social details of the fictional settings are different, the dramatic functions of the two figures are so similar that it is difficult to imagine that the part of Sir Toby was not played by the same actor who created Falstaff.

There are important differences, it is true. Whereas in the history plays Falstaff had to carry the main weight of the plays' foolery, with Pistol, Bardolph, Nym and Mistress Quickly very definitely supporting rôles, Twelfth Night spreads the comic burden more evenly. There is a fully-developed fool rôle in the character of Feste, and another excellent comic part in Sir Andrew Aguecheek; Maria, too, is a more interesting and better-established part than Mistress Quickly—indeed she has inherited some of the attributes not only of the witty servant, but also of Shakespeare's witty heroines such as Rosalind and Beatrice. Another important distinction between Twelfth Night and the Henry IV plays is geographical: in the history plays the world of Bankside was physically as well as socially distant from the court, whereas in Illyria Sir Toby's alternative world exists within the same household as the official one. In Twelfth Night the confrontation between the forces of authority and those of licence is played out on a domestic scale. It is not a class conflict, nor is it strictly to do with law and order. There is no opposition between the so-called ‘respectable’ world and a criminal ‘class’. Sir Toby is Olivia's kinsman and the revellers are of her household.

The significance of these similarities and differences between Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch can be seen if we view the confrontation between Sir Toby and Malvolio as a reworking of the confrontation between Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice in Henry IV Part 2. In that play, which was first acted a year or two before Twelfth Night, the main narrative concerned the way in which Prince Hal, re-fashioning himself in heroic mode in order to become the warrior-hero Henry V, distanced himself from Falstaff's subversive carnival influence, and aligned himself with the forces of authority, sobriety, law and order, represented in their most extreme form by the Lord Chief Justice. In an early scene in the play the Lord Chief Justice encounters Falstaff and reprimands him, just as Malvolio reprimands Sir Toby. But whereas Malvolio is routed, the Lord Chief Justice is not: Falstaff attempts to answer him, but cannot get the better of him. Eventually, in Henry IV Part 2 the forces of authority triumph over those of revelry, and Falstaff is banished and imprisoned. Twelfth Night replays the same contest but with a different result: here it is the forces of revelry which prevail, and Malvolio who is imprisoned, ridiculed and tormented.

In production it is tempting to represent Malvolio as a stereotyped Puritan figure while Sir Toby becomes the Cavalier of popular imagination: aristocratic and rather dissolute. Such a staging has some historical justification. One of the main social and economic tensions of early-seventeenth-century England involved the shift of real power away from the established but by now fading nobility, whose influence was based on land and tradition, towards the rising middle classes. They were much influenced by Puritan thought, and they were the sector of society which would, on the whole, profit most from the emerging capitalist economy. Thus the confrontation between Carnival and Lent might also be seen as a confrontation between the old order and the new, with Sir Toby representing the traditional values of an already-sentimentalized ‘Merrie England’ which is being challenged by the likes of the socially ambitious Malvolio. Since, historically, this was a tension which finally erupted in civil war, it gives a sinister power to Malvolio's final line in the play. Humiliated and enraged he exits, vowing ‘I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you’ (V, i, l. 374). That revenge was forty years brewing and when it came it brought with it Oliver Cromwell.

Caricature Puritans, with names such as Zeal-of-the Land Busy and Tribulation Wholesome, appear on the London stage during this period in Ben Jonson's plays, and Malvolio is a recognizable kinsman to these
stereotyped figures: self-righteous, overbearing, a hypocrite and a killjoy. His speech is ostentatiously moralizing and he names ‘Jove’ frequently and self-importantly, exclaiming piously, for example, that ‘Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked’ (III, iv, l. 81). Some scholars, incidentally, suggest that the word ‘Jove’ is used here, rather than ‘God’, as a later emendation to the text in accordance with the 1606 Act ‘to Restraine Abuses of Players’ which outlawed profanity in plays. Yet the word ‘God’ is used later in the same scene by Andrew Aguecheek, and both the Clown and Viola name ‘God’ directly in Act I Scene v. It is more likely that this slightly pretentious name for God is simply a feature of Malvolio’s idiolect, the function of which is to strengthen the impression of Elizabethan Puritanism: the word contains resonances of the Old Testament ‘Jehovah’ and the Old Testament was a particular source of inspiration for Puritan preachers and pamphleteers. This kind of stereotyped Puritan was an easy and indeed almost an inevitable target for the Elizabethan playwright: Puritan-led attacks on the stage ensured not only the animosity of most playwrights, but also that of the audience, who by definition were not opposed to the theatre.

Yet it is important not to oversimplify. If Malvolio is, in this loose sense of the word, puritanical, the term ‘Puritan’ itself is, as historians repeatedly remind us, a notoriously slippery one. It was used at the time to refer to a whole spectrum of Protestant thought and belief (not all of which was ascetically dismissive of worldly pleasure) and a variety of associated political positions ranging from the moderate to the revolutionary. As David Underdown says, ‘The term is impossible to define with precision, can mean anything its users want it to mean, and there are modern historians who would like to abandon it altogether’. Nonetheless, the historical movement which we know as Puritanism had certain discernible features. When historians use the word ‘Puritan’ they generally mean those people who wished

... to emphasize more strongly the Calvinist heritage of the Church of England; to elevate preaching and scripture above sacraments and rituals, the notions of the calling, the elect, the ‘saint’, the distinctive virtue of the divinely predestined, above the equal worth of all sinful Christians … [Puritanism] gave its adherents the comforting belief that they were entrusted by God with the special duty of resisting the tide of sin and disorder that surged around them. Through preaching, prayer, the study of scripture, and regular self-examination, it provided a strategy for cultivating the personal qualities necessary to these ends.

Shakespeare goes to some lengths to distance Malvolio from this more precise definition of Puritanism. He expressly states that he does not want simply to label him ‘Puritan’. When Toby asks Maria to tell the company something about Malvolio, the following conversation ensues:

Maria Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan.
Sir Andrew O, if I thought that I'd beat him like a dog.
Sir Toby What, for being a puritan? Thy exquisite reason, dear knight.
Sir Andrew I have no exquisite reason for't, but I have reason good enough.
Maria The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass that cons state ... grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.

(II, iii, ll. 135-46)

Maria characterizes Malvolio as ‘a time-pleaser’, one whose ‘Puritanism’ has nothing to do with belief or faith. Shakespeare typically draws back from commenting on any specific contemporary theological, philosophical or political position, and contents himself with satirizing the more general and traditional vice of hypocrisy, showing how the trappings of religion are manipulated by the likes of Malvolio in order to further their own ambitions and feed their own vanity. But, as Maria sees, Malvolio’s ambition and vanity are the very handles by which the revellers can catch hold of him.

‘ARE ALL THE PEOPLE MAD?’
John Manningham enjoyed the humour of the prank which the revellers play on Malvolio. A ‘good practice’, he called it. Yet the plot against Malvolio calls forth a cruel kind of laughter, the laughter of ridicule. Pulled down from his seat of power and imprisoned ‘in a dark room and bound’, Malvolio is both tortured and humiliated. There is a further psychological torment which Sir Toby and his companions inflict upon Malvolio, however, ‘making him believe they took him to be mad’, as Manningham puts it.

Acting, as he thinks, on his mistress's instructions, Malvolio adopts uncharacteristic dress and behaviour. He appears to Olivia, yellow-stockinged, cross-gartered, talking unintelligibly and wearing a smile; the Lenten figure has put on, in effect, the garb of Carnival. Acting as he does so far out of his accustomed character, it is small wonder that Olivia is made to think he is deranged.

Malvolio 'Remember who commended thy yellow stockings'—
Olivia 'Thy yellow stockings’?
Malvolio, ‘And wished to see thee cross-gartered.’
Olivia 'Cross-gartered’?
Malvolio ‘Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so.’
Olivia Am I made?
Malvolio 'If not, let me see thee a servant still.’
Olivia Why, this is very midsummer madness.

(III, iv, ll. 45-54)

In fact the revellers' aim is crueler than this: it is to make Malvolio doubt his own sanity. The techniques which they use on the hapless steward are the classic techniques of brainwashing: sensory deprivation combined with false or contradictory information designed to throw into doubt the subject's usual ways of making sense of the world. In the guise of Sir Topas the priest, Feste visits Malvolio in his dark room:

Malvolio Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have Feste Fie, thou dishonest Satan ... Say'st thou that house is dark?
Malvolio As hell, Sir Topas.
Feste Why it hath bay windows, transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south-north ... lustrous as ebony, and yet complainest thou of obstruction?
Malvolio I am not mad, Sir Topas; I say to you this house is dark.
Feste Madman, thou errest.

(IV, ii, ll. 29-43)

Feste describes a reality to Malvolio which is the opposite of what his senses tell him is the truth. The fact that he does so in nonsensical and contradictory terms (‘bay windows, transparent as barricadoes, clerestories toward the south-north ... lustrous as ebony’) only increases the sense of disorientation. Malvolio repeatedly affirms that he is not mad, yet his sanity is under severe attack in this scene.

But it is not only Malvolio who is threatened with madness: a kind of madness seems endemic to Illyria. It is the dominant metaphor of the play. According to Feste, Sir Toby is a ‘madman’ because of his drink (I, v, l. 126); Orsino thinks Antonio's ‘words are madness’ (V, i, l. 95) because of his claim to know ‘Cesario’; Olivia worries that Viola's unconventionally assertive wooing on behalf of Orsino might amount to madness (I, v, l. 191) and, as we have just seen, is later convinced that the yellow-stockinged Malvolio is suffering from ‘midsummer madness’ (III, iv, l. 54). Malvolio himself, on the other hand, sees madness in the riotous living of Sir Toby and his friends, and demands of them ‘My masters, are you mad?’ (II, iii, l. 83). And Sebastian, who finds himself at the centre of the whole network of misunderstandings suspects first of all that in Illyria ‘all the people [are] mad’ (IV, i, l. 26), and then that the madness might be confined either to Olivia or himself:

This is the air, that is the glorious sun.
This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't,
[And] though my soul disputes well with my sense
That this may be some error but no madness
Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad
Or else the lady's mad.

(IV, iii, ll. 1-2, 9-16)

These repeated references to madness are hardly surprising in a world where people's sensual impressions are often deceiving, and where identities are not always what they appear. Significantly, this speech in which Sebastian tries to make sense of what is happening to him comes immediately after Malvolio's 'madhouse' scene. For, in an odd way, Sebastian and Malvolio are in similar situations. For both of them normal meanings and the evidence of their senses are not operating. Madness is offered as the most rational explanation!

In comedy a little madness can be a liberating thing. The heroes and heroines of Shakespearean comedies typically go through a series of disorienting experiences which eventually act benevolently upon them. The lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream are made ‘wood within this wood’, and are unable to tell what is real and what is not, but at the end Jack ends up with Jill. In The Taming of the Shrew it happens more blatantly and cruelly; yet Petruchio engineers the brainwashing of Kate which has her agreeing that the sun is the moon precisely in order to browbeat her into the supposed ‘happiness’ of a conventional marriage. The pattern works more subtly in Twelfth Night: Viola's traumatic ‘loss’ of her brother and the disguise she assumes as a result mean that temporarily she loses her own identity and throws other people's perceptions of reality out of kilter; yet an equilibrium is reinstated at the end with a joyful reconciliation with Sebastian and eventual marriage to the man she loves. The ‘madness’ that Sebastian fears is an example of this comedic pattern in which people lose themselves and find themselves once more, often changed for the better by the experience. For Malvolio, however, the pattern does not offer up its traditional rewards.

Like others in the play, he aspires to Olivia's hand. It is one of the signs of Malvolio's ambition that he yearns to rise above his present station in life by marrying Olivia, and much is made (especially by Sir Toby) of his presumption in so aspiring. But Malvolio is by no means the only one whose desire crosses social boundaries: the question of marriage between socially unequal partners is raised several times in the play, from the moment when Sir Toby first tells Sir Andrew that one of Olivia's reasons for rejecting Orsino is that 'She'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years or wit' (I, v, ll. 105-6). Actually it is not at all clear that Orsino is above her in any of these things, yet the marker has been set down. From then on a series of relationships is projected between men and women of unequal status. Malvolio's desire for Olivia is treated comically, as something scandalous, yet Olivia falls in love with Orsino's 'messenger' whom Malvolio can look down on socially. Maria herself marries out of her class when at the end of the play she is wedded to Sir Toby. Nobody makes much of this. But for the steward Malvolio, being in 'love', entering the domain of desire, ends in humiliation and fury. When Viola rejects her customary identity and dresses up in male clothing, it works to her good. When Malvolio rejects his, and dresses up as a lover rather than a steward and disguises himself in smiles, he is made to look ridiculous. The ‘madness’ Sebastian experiences is a kind of bliss; Malvolio's is a torment, and his spell in the madhouse leads not to a comedic repentance and reconciliation, but to threats of revenge. Malvolio suffers all the disorientations of comedy, but reaps none of the recompense: what acts upon others benevolently acts upon Malvolio … malevolently.

That complex latinate pun which is Malvolio's name reads both forwards and backwards. ‘Mal’ and ‘volio’ can be put together to suggest ‘I want something badly’ or (more literally) ‘I wish ill’—and both are true of Malvolio. It is also true that he becomes the object of others' malevolence, and that they wish him ill. But further: just as the names of Viola and Olivia echo and rewrite themselves in each other, so Malvolio's name,
too, picks up that same phonetic theme of vowels and consonants: V.L.O.A.I. Malvolio … Mal-Olivia … Mal-viola … Male-viola. He even misreads it himself in his desire to see himself as the object of Olivia's affections:

‘M.O.A.I. doth sway my life’ Nay, but first let me see, let me see, let me see … ‘M.’
Malvolio—’M’—why, that begins my name … But then there is no consonancy in the sequel. That suffers under probation. ‘A’ should follow, but ‘O’ does … And then ‘I’ comes behind … ‘M.O.A.I.’ This simulation is not as the former, and yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name.

(II, v, ll. 109-10, 122-3, 126-8, 135-7)

Malvolio's eagerness is self-alienating: it allows him to mistake even his own name.

The relationships between names and people, and between words and meaning, are continually under a strain in Twelfth Night. They come under such strain because of ambition, subterfuge, trickery and disguise. They are put under strain most notably by the clown, Feste. In the guise of Sir Topas, Feste creates for Malvolio an illusory world of unreliable meanings. Elsewhere in the play his wit and wordplay are aimed at subverting ‘normal’ meanings—at proving, for example, that the Lady Olivia, not he himself, is the real fool. In the following exchange with Viola/Cesario, he turns his attention to language itself:

(Enter Viola as Cesario and Feste the clown, with [pipe and] tabor)
Viola Save thee friend, and thy music! Dost thou live by thy tabor?
Feste No, sir, I live by the church.
Viola Art thou a churchman?
Feste No such matter, sir. I do live by the church for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church.
Viola So thou may'st say the king lies by a beggar, if a beggar dwell near him; or the church stands by thy tabor, if thy tabor stand by the church.
Feste You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit—how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!
Viola Nay, that's certain: they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.
Feste I would therefore my sister had no name, sir.
Viola Why, man?
Feste Why, sir, her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But I
Viola Thy reason, man?
Feste Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words, and words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them.
Viola I warrant thou art a merry fellow and car'st for nothing.

(III, i, ll. 1-26)

It is a verbal duel, of the kind Shakespeare's comedies revel in. Later in the play Viola/Cesario will be tricked into a duel of weapons with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and will come out of that little better than he/she comes out of this. The followers of carnival in Illyria, it seems, show scant respect for the romantic hero(ine), and insist on challenging and tricking him/her. Here Feste, the clown, outmanoeuvres Viola at every turn and fulfils the fool's traditional function of being able to reduce everything to meaninglessness. It is a paradox of the play that he does so by virtue of his great skill in playing with meanings. Viola's final quoted remark evinces a frustration but also an analysis. Feste's ability to ‘dally nicely with words’ leads, she is suggesting, not merely to wantonness but to nihilism, to the point where he cares for nothing.

These wordplays about words sound oddly modern. Feste's remarks about the cheveril glove insist on what his own speeches go on to prove, and indeed enact: the slipperiness of language. Signified and signifier do not, in Feste's world, match neatly: it is the truth and also the falsehood of words that allow the anarchic clown to be taken—however briefly—for a churchman. Yet perhaps the ‘mistake’ is not so outrageous after all, for the function of the fool may be allied in many ways, both straight and parodic, to that of preacher. Certainly, this relation is stressed in Twelfth Night: as well as this moment, there is the scene we have already looked at in
which Feste takes on the character of a priest in his impersonation of Sir Topas. Earlier, too, Feste has taken
on the part of a priest in a rôle-play catechism of Olivia, in which he undertakes to prove that she, not he, is
the ‘real’ fool.

In the exchange with Viola the disguised heroine cannot keep up with Feste, and after a couple of attempts to
‘bandy words’ with him becomes reduced to the rôle of straight man (or woman?), feeding him the necessary
questions to allow him to elaborate upon his paradoxes. The speed at which these paradoxes follow one
another demonstrates the truth of Feste’s linguistic scepticism; they encompass philosophy, the law and
sexuality: the falseness of words is linked (with what now seems a depressing inevitability) to the common
Renaissance theme of the falseness of women. This does more than merely imply a link between a world in
which language is no longer to be trusted and one in which sexual licence is paramount. For once again, in the
person of Viola/Cesario the audience have before them an image of another kind of false woman—doubly so
indeed, given the cross-casting of the Elizabethan theatre. What Feste says of his ‘sister’, that ‘her name’s a
word and to dally with that word might make [her] wanton’, has a kind of aptitude to Viola/Cesario, whose
two names themselves denote the duality of her gendered identity.

Feste takes one idea and spins others from it, linking linguistics to economics and changing legal and
mercantile practices: ‘words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them’, says Feste. In the emerging
capitalist economy a person’s promise is invested not merely in the spoken word but in the legality of a written
‘bond’. The legal status of everyday speech is minimal compared to that of the formally drawn-up legal
document, and Feste makes the point that truth can no longer be expected to reside in the mere ‘word’ of a
person. Yet we have already seen in the preceding ‘letter scene’ that the written word is no more to be trusted
than the spoken—and as Shylock discovered in *The Merchant of Venice*, legal bonds are also composed of
words, whose significance may be open to more than one reading.

And Feste’s sceptical inquiry into language is itself a verbal fabric. He concedes as much as he parries Viola’s
request for ‘a reason’, and then goes on, typically, to make the point work for him: if words are not to be
trusted they cannot be used to prove reason. And thus a central paradox of contemporary linguistics is
articulated by a Shakespearean fool: that there is no extralinguistic standpoint from which to analyse language
itself. It is the poststructuralist catchphrase: there is nothing outside the text. And yet, of course, by means of
an elegant double-take the analysis is after all validated. The rascality of words is proved because Feste’s
sentence is both self-reflexive and also demonstrative; even as he speaks his words manifest their own
slipperiness. When Viola asks ‘Thy reason, man?’ she is requesting his motive or his justification for a
preceding remark. When he replies that ‘words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them’ he is
talking about ‘reason’ as logic. Thus the sense of the word ‘reason’ itself hovers uncertainly between the two
meanings, and the very inadequacy of language to act as a logical tool proves its own logical point.

Feste’s job is to destabilize meanings; he claims as much himself:

Viola Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?
Feste No indeed, sir, the Lady Olivia has no folly ... I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter

(III, i, ll. 30-1, 34-5)

In the view of this ‘corrupter of words’, language is—indeed all sign-systems are—deceptive and ambiguous;
and he proves the point by exploiting their deceptiveness and ambiguity. Viola understands this element of
ambiguity well enough, being herself the epitome of ambiguity, the signifier which belies its signified.

‘LIKE PATIENCE ON A MONUMENT’

Viola Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy it is for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman, now, alas the day,
What thriftless sigh shall poor Olivia breathe!
O time, thou must untangle this, not I.
It is too hard a knot for me t' untie.

(II, ii, ll. 27-41)

This speech of Viola's shows the difference in tone between *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Viola is in a predicament not unlike Rosalind's in the earlier play: disguised as a boy she is in close proximity to the man she loves but remains unknown to him; meanwhile Olivia has fallen in love with her boy-persona, as Phoebe did with Rosalind's. *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* share the cross-dressing plot, with its destabilizing of gender identities, but the two plays use the same material in very different ways.

Rosalind enjoys her rôle as Ganymede; it empowers her and allows her to improvise rôle-play games with Orlando. Her response to the love entanglement with Phoebe is to stage the masque which makes all clear: she sorts it out. Viola on the other hand, declares that it is all too hard for her and that she will just leave it to time to sort it all out. And so she does. Eventually her twin brother turns up, they are reunited, Olivia and Orsino recognize the ‘true’ objects of their affection and the love-relationships sort themselves out accordingly: time, as Viola hoped it would, untangles things, not she.

Viola is the opposite of Rosalind, who enjoyed rôle-playing to the extent of inventing further rôles within the rôles. Rosalind's male disguise allowed her to take the initiative in wooing Orlando; in her love for Orsino Viola behaves as passively as any Renaissance patriarch could wish. Having taken the single active step of disguising herself, she does little more thereafter than wait for him to notice her. The language of love which she has learnt is one of passivity:

```
Viola My father had a daughter loved a man
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman
I should your lordship.
Orsino And what's her history?
Viola A blank, my lord. She never told her love
But let concealment, like the worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
```

(II, iv, ll. 107-15)

She is describing herself, of course. Not entirely, but with sufficient accuracy for us to recognize that concealment is working on her, too, ‘like the worm i’ th’ bud’. She can only articulate her love for Orsino in the subjunctive mood.

And so it is not merely that Viola is comparatively passive: she is positively uncomfortable with the disguise she has assumed. While *As You Like It* revelled in the complexities engendered by the cross-dressing plot, *Twelfth Night* continually expresses anxiety about them. Viola considers herself not liberated by her
rôle-playing but trapped by it and doubly unfulfilled. ‘As I am a man / My state is desperate for my master's
love. / As I am a woman now, alas the day …’ (II, ii, ll. 35-8). And although she later argues with Orsino that
women are ‘as true of heart as [men]’, here her assumed masculine identity gives her a voice in which she
articulates misogynistic Renaissance truisms about ‘women's waxen hearts’ and their ‘frailty’. There is little
liberation here. Viola sees herself as a freak and a grotesque; she refers to herself, significantly, as ‘poor
monster’! The moralizing tone of that self-disparaging comment is revealing: Viola finds herself in agreement
with the anti-theatrical propagandists who condemned play-acting as inherently sinful. Disguise, she exclaims,
is ‘a wickedness / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much’. This is the language of the Elizabethan
anti-theatrical pamphleteers, who similarly condemned cross-dressing:

And so, if any man do put on woman's raiment, he is dishonested and defiled, because he
transgresseth the bounds of modesty and comeliness, and weareth that which God's law
forbiddeth him to wear, which man's law affirmeth he cannot wear without reproof … [M]en's
wearing of women's raiment, though in plays, [is] a heinous crime … Players are abomination
that put on women's raiment.¹²

The moralists' usual condemnation was, as it is here, of boy actors dressing up as women. Ironically, Viola's
line about disguise being a wickedness is written to be spoken by a boy actor who is not dressed up as a
woman but who (like the boy actor playing Rosalind in As You Like It) has become visible in his own gender
once more. Once again, a gap has been created between the line spoken and the actor who speaks it. This gap
disturbs any simple acceptance of what Viola says: clearly, on another level, the play does not endorse the
message that disguise is a wickedness—otherwise there would be no play. Even so, cross-dressing in Twelfth
Night has the air of a desperate experiment rather than of the playful risk-taking which it had in As You Like It.
If madness is a central metaphor in this play, then Viola experiences her disguise as something akin to
schizophrenia: it alienates her from herself, creating a split personality. She refers to herself in the third person
(‘My father had a daughter …’) and speaks as a divided self (‘As I am a man … As I am a woman’).

It also gives rise to a set of questions about gender identity which are taken more seriously than they were in
As You Like It. In As You Like It homoerotic attraction tended to be treated quite lightly: Phoebe's crush on
Ganymede never amounted to much dramatically, and the complex rôle-playing between Ganymede and
Orlando was always counterbalanced by the fact that Orlando's attention was continually fixed on the ‘absent’
Rosalind of his imagination. In Twelfth Night, however, Olivia's desire for ‘Cesario’ is depicted as something
much more uncontrollable, powerful and painful. It is the passion which can break the depressive hold which
melancholy has had on her since her brother's death; it is more important to her than her dignity:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.
Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,
For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause.

(III, i, ll. 147-51)

Another kind of sexual tension exists between Orsino and Viola: charged this time by her desire for him
coupled with his response to her ambiguous sexual persona. While Orsino, like Orlando in As You Like It,
remains infatuated with an absent woman, we are left in no doubt that Cesario is present for him in a way that
Ganymede never is for Orlando. The language in which he addresses Cesario makes the point:

Orsino ... Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.
Viola and her friend the sea-captain had originally agreed that she would be presented at Orsino’s court as a ‘eunuch’, but there is nothing unsexed about the attraction Orsino feels for ‘Cesario’. The physicality of his language is sensuous even without the double-entendres of ‘organ’ and ‘part’. Moreover, the conversation between them is continually about sexual desire: ostensibly about Orsino’s desire for Olivia, but continually charged by the unspoken actuality of Viola’s desire for Orsino.

The gender confusions of *Twelfth Night* are given a context in the portrayal of the relationship between Antonio and Sebastian. In this *Twelfth Night* recognizes, in a way that *As You Like It* does not, a homosexual love-relationship. Antonio’s love for Sebastian is couched time and time again in the language of erotic attraction, language drawn from the registers of Elizabethan love poetry: ‘I do adore thee so’ (II, i, l. 42); ‘My desire, / More sharp than filed steel, did spur me forth’ (III, iii, ll. 4-5); ‘to his image, which methought did promise / Most venerable worth, did I devotion’ (III, iv, ll. 354-5). He talks of the ‘witchcraft’ which led him to follow Sebastian, whom he calls ‘this god’ (III, iv, l. 357) and to whose physical beauty he continually refers. ‘My love without retention or restraint’ (another image of excess!) is how he describes his feelings for Sebastian, and his actions in defence of the young man he says he adores bear out his words.13

Antonio’s adoration of Sebastian gives a depth and a seriousness to the gender confusions of *Twelfth Night*; the stakes here are higher than they were in *As You Like It*. There a fairytale logic was available to make everything fit neatly into conventional patterns, so that cruel brothers repented and became kind, and all the complications of the interwoven love-plots could be sorted out by the stage-managed appearance of Hymen, announcing ‘Peace, ho! I bar confusion’ (*As You Like It*, V, iv, l. 123). The love-plots of *Twelfth Night* are more urgent and there is a continual sense that things could get out of control.

In both the Viola-Olivia and the Viola-Orsino relationships, then, the text toys with the possibility of same-sex eroticism more intensely than was the case in *As You Like It*. By balancing these two relationships the play does not allow the audience to explain away the gender confusions easily. Some critics have rationalized the attraction Orsino manifests for Cesario by arguing that what he is ‘really’ responding to is the woman underneath—but if that is so, the same logic leads to the conclusion that Olivia is also ‘really’ attracted not to Cesario but to Viola. Olivia, faced at the end with the realization that she had fallen in love with a girl, is reassured by Sebastian that her mistake was natural enough:

> So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.  
> But nature to her bias drew in that.  
> You would have been contracted to a maid,  
> Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived.  
> You are betrothed both to a maid and man.

(V, i, ll. 257-61)

Sebastian’s reassurance, however, does not so much dispel ambiguity as reinforce it: Olivia is betrothed ‘both to a maid and man’.

This is typical of the final scene of *Twelfth Night*: like the last scene of so many Shakespeare comedies it both offers and resists closure. Narratives are brought to a climax, yet not everything is resolved: the play leaves a great deal open. The scene contains an immense amount of action: again, it works through excess. It is worth summarizing the scene just to show how much there is going on in it:

Feste teases Fabian about the contents of Malvolio’s letter; Orsino arrives, and Feste goes through a begging routine with him; Antonio is brought on and his story, including background incidents about his battles against Illyria, is told, ending with his accusation...
against Viola; Olivia arrives, and Orsino encounters on stage for the first time the woman he has been obsessed with throughout the play; Olivia encounters ‘Cesario’ and confusion arises—firstly because she now thinks he is Sebastian, and secondly because Orsino begins to suspect that ‘Cesario’ has been wooing Olivia on his own behalf; his disappointment at Olivia's rejection is expressed in threats of violence against Cesario, who still professes faithfulness to him, and they begin to depart together; Olivia prevents their exit by revealing that she and Sebastian (Cesario, as she thinks) are married, and sends for the priest to prove it; the priest arrives and confirms the marriage; Orsino's anger against Cesario turns to disgust and he rejects him; meanwhile Cesario's protestations of innocence are making Olivia concerned about ‘his’ love for her.

At this point the action suddenly switches from melodrama to farce: Andrew Aguecheek arrives with a bloodied head (having been fighting with the real Sebastian off-stage); he espies Viola and panics, reprising an earlier encounter between them; then Sir Toby arrives, also with a bloody head, and in a foul temper, rejecting Sir Andrew's offer of help, and going off-stage again almost immediately.

At this point Sebastian finally comes on. Initially he does not notice Viola, although she sees him. He is joyfully reunited with Antonio, and only after that does he see his sister. Carefully, almost tentatively, they begin to come together, testing each other's identity with details of shared memories; Sebastian refers uneasily to the paradox of Olivia's love for Cesario; Viola explains that the sea-captain who saved her life has been imprisoned by Malvolio's request for some unspecified offence.

This reintroduces the Malvolio plot: Feste arrives with the letter and attempts to make a joke of it; Fabian is given the job of reading the letter, which is sober and serious, and Malvolio is sent for; while he is being fetched, attention turns back to the love-plot, with Orsino offering his hand to Viola; Malvolio arrives and he tells his story; Olivia is shown the letter which originally trapped him, and she explains that it is Maria's handwriting; Malvolio is offered recompense; the moment of potential reconciliation is marred by Feste's spiteful interruption as he quotes Malvolio's own words back at him; Malvolio stalks off with threats against the whole company; Orsino sends somebody off to try and persuade him to a peace; addressing Viola, Orsino promises that they will be lovers when she returns to her female attire. At last, the clown steps forward to sing a final song, with the melancholy refrain ‘And the rain it raineth every day’.

All this in about three hundred and eighty lines!

It is not only the number of different actions within this one scene which is extraordinary (each paragraph of the above amounts to a small scene or routine in itself), but the variety of them, the speed with which they follow on one from another, and the resulting emotional range of the scene. Its tone continually shifts, moment by moment, between intensity and frivolity, violence and tenderness, melodrama and downright farce, celebration and discord, wonder and harshness, laughter and melancholy. It starts with a couple of (by now familiar) clown routines. Antonio's entry picks up the narrative, laying out his part of the story so far in a way which seems to prepare for a dénouement in which all the confusions are unravelled. This is interrupted, though, by the Olivia-Orsino encounter, the climax of another strand of the plot. But far from reaching a resolution, this meeting seems only to complicate things further and threaten the ending with tragedy. These complications are then repeated, but in a different key, as Sir Andrew and Sir Toby pass across the stage. Yet even this tiny scene-within-a-scene contains a sharp tonal shift. It looks as if it is going to be a moment of pure farce; then, without warning, Sir Toby turns to Sir Andrew, insults him, and casts him off with a snarl. The carnivalesque high spirits of their roistering end in a moment of rejection as bitter as that experienced by
The moment at which things do begin to unravel themselves is, of course, the moment when Viola and Sebastian both appear on stage together: from now on, things begin to make sense. Yet some of the surprise value of this moment of revelation was preempted earlier in the play, when Viola first guessed, in Act III Scene iv, that all the confusions were due to her brother's being in Illyria. And then, just as the scene seems set to concentrate on reunions, betrothals and marriages, this, too, is interrupted by the as-yet-unresolved Malvolio plot. The confrontation between Malvolio and his mistress also shifts through a variety of emotional tones, from the comedy of Feste's attempt at 'vox', through the pathos of Malvolio's own account, the offer of reconciliation by Olivia, the interruption of that by Feste, spitefully quoting Malvolio's own words back at him, to the anger of Malvolio's exit. The ending of *Twelfth Night*, in fact, is structured as a series of interruptions. It is this structure which prevents the positive mood of the narrative's romantic-comedy climax from completely dominating the end of the play: the harmony is established and celebrated—but across it can be heard the notes of discord.

Contributing to the same destabilizing effect is the fact that narratives are left unfinished—notably, of course, the Malvolio story itself. Who pursues Malvolio to ‘entreat him to a peace’? With what result? What about the power he still holds over Viola's friend the sea-captain, whose story is so strangely re-introduced in these final moments of the play? Most directly, the audience is left with the question of Malvolio's powerful final threat: what sort of revenge is he envisaging? His exit line contains such a blatant promise of the story's continuance, that if Shakespeare were writing for television or the movies we would assume he was setting up the sequel. But it is not only the Malvolio plot which is left unfinished. The reunion of Viola and Sebastian is not fully celebrated; she says to him:

Do not embrace me till each circumstance  
Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump  
That I am Viola, which to confirm  
I'll bring you to a captain in this town  
Where lie my maiden weeds.

(V, i, ll. 249-53)

Viola's return to her own female identity is incomplete; unlike Rosalind she never appears on stage again as a woman, and as a result Orsino cannot yet begin to see her as Viola. Even at the very end of the play she is still ‘Cesario’ to him:

Cesario come—  
For so you shall be while you are a man;  
But when in other habits you are seen,  
Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen.

(V, i, ll. 381-4)

Thus Orsino, like Olivia, leaves the stage without having fully resolved the ambiguities about whom he is actually in love with, and the promised love-relationship between him and Viola is deferred until after the play's ending. Feste's final song trips through a nonsense-version of Jaques' Seven Ages speech, set against the gloomy refrain of wind and rain. Its last stanza perfunctorily shrugs away all the problems and uncertainties of the play’s ending with an insouciant nonsense of its own:

A great while ago the world begun  
With hey ho, the wind and the rain,  
But that’s all one, our play is done,  
And we’ll strive to please you every day.
And so Carnival gives way to Lent, and the play named after the final day of revelling is finally done.

Notes

4. Quoted in ibid., p. lxxix.
5. Quoted in ibid., p. xxvi.
6. Ibid., pp. lxxix-lxxxiii.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 62): Criticism: The Ending


[In the essay below, originally published in 1974, Hasler analyzes the influence of Shakespeare's earlier comedies on the last scene of Twelfth Night.]

The final resolution of *Twelfth Night* evolves from a process which engages the whole of the play's last scene. Furthermore, there is no lack of consistent theatrical notation in this scene. Employed with remarkable singleness of purpose, it is instrumental in shaping the build-up towards the strong impact of Viola's revelation. Apart from the unusually extensive control of the action, a study of this ending also invites us to glance back at some features of earlier comedies. The view of *Twelfth Night* as the consummation of Shakespearian comedy is widely accepted. At the same time, few commentators neglect to mention the extent to which Shakespeare here draws on his preceding experiments. Barrett Wendell even went so far as to “recognize the *Twelfth Night*—with all its perennial delights—a masterpiece not of invention, but of recapitulation.” This remark has been much quoted, though it perhaps unduly neglects the transmutations that go with Shakespeare's self-borrowings. Harold Jenkins sums up this particular aspect of *Twelfth Night* when he suggests that

… in however short a time Shakespeare ultimately wrote this play, he had in a sense been composing it during the previous decade.
The final scene begins very quickly. Orsino has decided to go and see Olivia himself. At her house he meets Feste who, irked a little by Orsino's condescension, does a stint of his most artful begging. The mood is relaxed, as so often in Illyria; we get an impression of unlimited leisure and time to jest away. Having exhausted Orsino's bounty, Feste leaves to inform Olivia of her visitor, when suddenly the scene darkens and Viola's trials begin. Antonio is brought in by officers. Viola is first to notice them:

Here comes the man, sir, that did rescue me

V.1.44

she says to Orsino. This is more than the usual formula for putting the spotlight on an actor making his entry. We infer that Viola has obviously told Orsino about the duel Toby inflicted on her. Her reference to that adventure, however, is vague enough to be misunderstood: she thinks of the duel and how this strange seaman got her out of it, but Antonio most likely relates her words to the shipwreck where he rescued Sebastian. To him, her remark sounds like an acknowledgement of their acquaintance, and this can only deepen his grief at her renewed denials later on. As he explains to Orsino why, in spite of the grave risk involved, he exposed himself to “the danger of its adverse town,” he points an accusing finger at Viola:

... A witchcraft drew me hither:
That most ingrateful boy there by your side(5)
From the rude sea's enrag'd and foamy mouth
Did I redeem; ...

70

Antonio very forcefully directs the focus of attention on the young “culprit.” What is more, he “places” Viola at Orsino's side, stressing that at this juncture she is very much the Duke's loyal servant. She is where she most desires to be. This is important in view of the imminent, explosive encounter with Olivia.

Viola's predicament, with Olivia doting on her while she secretly pines for Orsino, is quite enough to have to bear without the puzzling complaints of Antonio. The heavy deictic emphasis is kept up throughout his indictment of the “youth,” and must contribute not a little to Viola's embarrassment.

Did I expose myself, pure for his love,
Into the danger of this adverse town; ...

76

There is no time to investigate the matter further, however. Orsino forgets the moving accents of the seemingly betrayed man when Olivia approaches:

Here comes the Countess; now heaven walks on earth

91

he fatuously exclaims. His hyperbole is too blatantly out of tune with reality: it soon becomes ridiculous in the light of the reception he gets from the Countess, and the childish wrath with which he tries to force her affections. Dismissing Antonio for the time being, he stuns him with his assertion that

Three months this youth hath tended upon me.
Olivia and her attendants are not allowed to obliterate the person around whom everything turns in this scene. Almost immediately “this youth” is back in focus, in preparation for what follows, viz. Olivia’s most astonishing breach of etiquette inspired by her love for Cesario.

Oli. What would my lord, but that he may not have,
Wherein Olivia may seem serviceable?
Cesario, you do not keep promise with me.
Vio. Madam?
Duke. Gracious Olivia—
Oli. What do you say, Cesario? Good my lord—(6)

95

Olivia sees her “husband” at Orsino’s side, still posing, she thinks, as a servant. This sight is enough to make her forget her manners. She begins by addressing Orsino—then she interrupts herself to speak to the page at his side. The baffled Orsino tries to regain her attention, but she is only interested in Cesario. The tension now mounts rapidly, to Viola’s embarrassment. She steadfastly sticks to her rôle as Orsino’s man:

My lord would speak; my duty hushes me.

101

This—almost a rebuke—is all that Olivia gets out of her, and it does not improve the Countess’ temper at all. She adopts a quite unprecedented tone to rid herself of Orsino:

If it be aught to the old tune, my lord,
It is as fat and fulsome to mine ear
As howling after music.

102

Rejected more bluntly than ever, Orsino indulges in positively childish tantrums which, even at this later hour, make one wonder whether he will ever grow up. He elects to try his hand at a new posture, that of “a savage jealousy That sometime savours nobly.” Since Olivia reserves her love for Cesario, he will do away with Cesario:

But this your minion, whom I know you love,
And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly,
Him will I tear out of that cruel eye
Where he sits crowned in his master’s spite.
Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in mischief:
I’ll sacrifice the lamb that I do love
To spite a raven’s heart within a dove.

119

Viola, still by his side, is ready—“most jocund, apt, and willingly,”—to be sacrificed like a lamb. Olivia now tastes the same bitter cup as Antonio. “Where goes Cesario?” she asks as Viola obediently follows Orsino. Viola’s answer is a passionate declaration of love for the irate Duke, curious enough on the lips of a “youth.” The Countess is brought so low by this that she begins to sound like the adolescent lovers of A Midsummer Night’s Dream in their most plaintive despair:

Ay me, detested! How am I beguil’d!
In her ignorance of Sebastian's existence, let alone of what has occurred between him and Olivia, Viola is bound to appear shamefully, heartlessly, false:

Who does beguile you? Who does do you wrong?

Orsino and “Cesario” have almost disappeared when Olivia finally says the electrifying word that stops them in their tracks:

Whither, my lord? Cesario, husband, stay.

There now develops a tug-of-war between the outraged Duke of Illyria and the injured, deeply disappointed Olivia. They both turn on Viola. Orsino with the vehemence of a nobleman betrayed by his servant (“Her husband, sirrah?”), Olivia lamenting the “baseness” of Cesario’s “fear.” This naturally brings about a visible shift: Viola is no longer at the side of her amazed, incredulous master, but rather half-way between him and Olivia. Duke and Countess both stare at her in disbelief. All eyes, in fact, are on her, the mortified, confused bone of contention. Bernard Beckerman has observed that in the last scene of *Twelfth Night*:

Orsino and Olivia … jointly direct the uncovering of the mystery by calling upon others to act rather than by acting themselves. The focus thus lies between them.7

Between them, until Sebastian appears, stands Viola. Caught in the middle as she is, her situation steadily worsens. In her love of Cesario, Olivia appeals to him to show some manly courage. Ironically, she now actually echoes Maria’s letter to Malvolio urging the steward not to be afraid of greatness:

Fear not, Cesario, take thy fortunes up;

Viola may well begin to doubt her own sanity when the Priest enters. He comes at Olivia’s request to unfold in her words

Hath newly pass’d between this youth and me. ...—what thou dost know

After a glance at “this youth” the Priest promptly asserts that “A contract of eternal bond of love” has indeed been confirmed, attested, strengthened and sealed only two hours ago. The grave Priest’s report, essentially not a narrative but a listing of the symbolic gestures of the formal betrothal, is curiously abstract, drained of all life and devoid of any individualizing details:

A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirm'd by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strength'ned by interchangement of your rings;
And all the ceremony of this compact
Seal'd in my function, by my testimony;

753
Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave,
I have travell'd but two hours.

150

The whole emphasis is on the awesome solemnity and binding power of the ceremony he performed. Against such testimony Viola is helpless. Meanwhile Orsino has recovered the power of speech, and she has to listen to his wild abuse of her:

O thou dissembling cub! What wilt thou be,
When time hath sow'd a grizzle on thy case?

158

What is worse, he is now quite prepared to give up Cesario, as well as to renounce Olivia:

Farewell, and take her; but direct thy feet
Where thou and I henceforth may never meet.

162

The finality of the closing couplet strongly suggests that Orsino is again on the point of leaving. Viola can only protest, knowing that it is of no avail against the word of the Priest. She follows Orsino in despair:

Vio. My lord, I do protest—
Oli. O, do not swear!
Hold little faith, though thou has too much fear.

164

As “Cesario” walks away from her once again, even the doting Olivia loses patience with him: she interrupts him immediately. The incident causes the three figures to be spaced out more widely across the stage. In view of the sequel it is essential that Viola, in pursuit of Orsino, should move away from Olivia. For one thing, Sir Andrew does not see “Cesario” until he is pointed out to him. What is more, Sebastian does not notice his sister for quite some time. This can only be managed without awkwardness if Viola stands at a sufficient distance from Olivia, quite apart from the symmetrical arrangement of the twins, which also requires some space between them.

This time Orsino is prevented from actually leaving by the comic-pathetic appearance of Sir Andrew with his head “broken,” clamouiring for a surgeon. Like all the preceding arrivals, he has a grievance against Cesario. His case, though, is an amusing variation on this recurrent motif. He is not aware of Cesario's presence—probably he enters with his mauled head bent down. He also assumes that everyone knows whom he is talking about:

Oli. What's the matter?
Sir And. Has broke my head across, and has given
Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb too.

168

Olivia therefore has to ask “Who has done this, Sir Andrew?” and on hearing that it was “The Count's gentleman, one Cesario,” it is Orsino's turn to be amazed. After all, he has long ago declared that “Diana's lip Is not more smooth and rubious” than that of his lovely page, whose whole person “is semblative a woman's
part.” It is therefore with understandable scepticism that he makes sure:

My gentleman, Cesario?

Sir Andrew's reaction indicates that Orsino incredulously points to “Cesario” as he asks the question. The effect on Aguecheek is quite spectacular:

Od's lifelings, here he is! You broke my head for nothing; ...

The foolish knight recoils from the mere sight of Viola—what could be more incriminating? But there is more to come. The pace accelerates as new accusers turn up at ever shorter intervals. Aguecheek is followed by Sir Toby. In contrast to Sir Andrew, he is above—or past—complaining. In answer to Orsino's questions, he will only say:

That's all one; has hurt me and there's th' end on't ...

He can walk only slowly, with difficulty. He has overheard Sir Andrew berating Cesario:

If a bloody coxcomb be a hurt, you have hurt me

before he is near enough to be noticed by his friend: “Here comes Sir Toby halting …” For once there is no accusing finger for Viola. Toby seems too overwhelmed with the fact that the stripling was equal to hurting him—there is certainly no more than a tired nod in the direction of Viola.

This is the last we see of these knights, for Olivia promptly sends them off to bed. The striving for symmetry begins to make itself felt. The two votaries of cakes and ale have played their part; there is no room for them in the final tableau. Moreover, at this stage any confrontation between Toby (or Maria) and Malvolio must be avoided.

While the audience is aware that Sebastian is somewhere about Olivia's house, and bound to turn up sooner or later, Viola has gone from bad to worse. She is caught in a maze from which it must seem to her impossible to extricate herself. On an increasingly crowded stage she finds herself surrounded by accusers. Surveying the portion of the scene we have so far discussed, we see that it definitely belongs to Viola. Until Sebastian's entrance baffles all, Shakespeare consistently keeps the focus of attention on her, in spite of the fact that she has little to say. The situation and the technique employed are reminiscent of Hero's arraignment in church. As in the case of Hero, of course, everybody talks about Viola. She is the target of a general wrath. We have seen how at every stage, the gestic impulses of passionate address, and especially the gestic force of that basic tool, the demonstrative, help to keep Viola at the calm centre of the tornado. The others make all the noise, but while they come, have their say, and then make room for the next plaintiff, Viola remains, always involved, always concerned.

A comedy, in the words of Harold Jenkins, “is a play in which the situation holds some threat of disaster but issues in the achievement of happiness.” This may remind us more immediately of the merchant Antonio or
of Aegon. In *Twelfth Night* the concrete threats against Viola do not materialize before the finale. Viola's experience here is not unlike that of Isabella. In *Measure for Measure* it is the accuser who goes through an ordeal until at last she is taken seriously, listened to, and then vindicated by Mariana's and ultimately the Duke's own testimony.

It is instructive to examine the way in which Viola's ordeal is given its dramatic form. We have observed how every new arrival brings his own, incomprehensible accusations. J. L. Styan has briefly surveyed this technique of “successive entrances” from *Henry VI* to *King Lear*. The ending of *Twelfth Night* he views primarily in terms of control. At the end of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, he says, Shakespeare orders a crowded stage for a scene of artificial symmetry, the visual pattern acquiring some of the qualities of tableaux. Yet Shakespeare had also to overcome the disadvantage of the confusing impact of a full stage …

One method of controlling the action was to fill the stage by a mechanical procession of entrances. The spectator's attention is taken by each new figure and each new voice.

The final scene of *Twelfth Night* blends this technical advantage of successive entrances with the purpose the device serves in the histories and tragedies, when a series of messengers with progressively worsening news creates a feeling of calamity and imminent doom, or tests the endurance of the hero. We can now see that the passage under review represents an elaborate adaptation of that pattern to the needs of comedy. The mere messengers have been replaced by important figures with whom we are well acquainted, and who all confront the treacherous youth of their imagination in their own characteristic way: the honest, devoted “pirate” Antonio meets Cesario with forthright indignation at his ingratitude; the noble, enamoured Olivia with more restrained, yet deep disappointment; Aguecheek with undisguised terror, Toby still bemused with the shock of being beaten by the young stripling of a gentleman. Furthermore, there is of course a final entrance, Sebastian's, which sets things right again.

An incidental, comic adaptation of the same pattern in its basic form occurs in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Dr. Caius and Evans revenge themselves on the Host of the Garter: one after the other, in a sequence bluntly pre-arranged, Bardolph, Evans and Caius appear like messengers at the door, just long enough to shout their increasingly alarming news about the “Germans” who have stolen the Host's horses. There is another succession of entrances, again comically calamitous, at the end of the play. Here, Page and his wife are both thwarted by a counter-plot of their daughter Anne. Slender, Master Page's favourite choice for Anne, first returns with a tale of woe: his white fairy turned out to be “a great lubberly boy.” No sooner has Mistress Page explained the misfortune by revealing her own stratagem in favour of Caius, than the doctor bursts on the scene in one of his rages: the fairy in green was a boy too. Now the successful Fenton brings in his Anne to ask pardon of his good father and mother. To our delight, the parental plotters are outplotted, but we are also pleased to see that resentment is remarkably short-lived.

Earlier, in the finale of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare had used a witty inversion of the successive entrances pattern. There the wager between the three husbands causes them, one by one, to send for their wives. Now it is precisely the non-appearance of the first two wives that spells disaster. Lucentio “bids” his mistress to come to him, but Biondello returns alone. Hortensio, though he cautiously “entreats” the widow to come, fares no better: Biondello has only a defiant message for him. Thus the effect is all the more breathtaking when Kate, “commanded” to come, appears in the doorway:

*Bap.* Now, by my holidame, here comes Katherina!

*TS V.ii.99*
In these cases, as in Twelfth Night, the series of entrances strikes us as a formal pattern of more or less transparent artificiality. The sequence works towards a final, important effect. This is not the same as, for instance, the entirely “natural” yet carefully spaced-out returns of Portia and Bassanio, each preceded by a harbinger, from Venice to Belmont.

As Toby and Aguecheek limp away, attended by Feste and Fabian, Sebastian hurries in. There is no time for anyone to mirror his approach, as had been done in the case of Antonio, Olivia and Toby. Yet his is surely the most effective entrance of them all. Eager to justify himself to Olivia, he makes straight for her, ignoring everyone else. This partly explains why he does not notice Viola at first. His entrance, of course, is the one that will undo all the confusion caused by the preceding ones. It sheds light on everything at a stroke. Nevertheless, before meeting his sister, he is made to settle very quickly the various questions, one by one. Almost every line he speaks solves a problem. As the audience knows everything already, no time is wasted in dwelling on this, and Sebastian cannot ignore Viola too long without artificiality.

I am sorry, madam, I have hurt your kinsman.

V.i.201

His apology solves the mystery of Toby's “hurt.” The contrite offender mirrors Olivia's consternation at the sight of this second Cesario:

You throw a strange regard upon me, and by that
I do perceive it hath offended you.

204

His next words confirm the Priest's account of a secret betrothal:

Pardon me, sweet one, even for the vows
We made each other but so late ago.

206

Olivia must begin to grasp that this is her husband. Next, he recognizes a familiar face, and his most affectionate greeting disposes of the riddle which has so oppressed Antonio:

Antonio, O my dear Antonio!
How have the hours rack'd and tortur'd me
Since I have lost thee!

210

Full of joyful emotion himself, Sebastian still spreads nothing but amazement around him. As with Olivia, Sebastian notices the extreme astonishment of Antonio, and again he misunderstands it:

Ant. Sebastian are you?
Seb. Fear'st thou that, Antonio?

213

For Olivia, Orsino, Antonio and Viola everything falls into place in the whirlwind of Sebastian's entrance. His preoccupation with Olivia and then with Antonio must be quite intense and passionate to keep him from noticing Viola. At the same time it is quite likely that the spectators—who do not need to be
enlightened—will not give Sebastian's words their full attention. They are inevitably absorbed by the visual impact of the twins, simultaneously present for the first time. Orsino and Antonio draw our attention to this very emphatically:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons!
A natural perspective, that is and is not.
How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?

Both stress the stage-picture created by the resemblance of brother and disguised sister, Sebastian very animated, Viola transfixed. These baffled reactions are not meant as “asides.” At the very moment when Orsino speaks, Sebastian discovers his friend Antonio; it looks as if he is too rapt to heed the strange talk about a “natural perspective.” In contrast to this he does listen to Antonio's stunned comment, and prompted by the deictic “these two creatures” he finally becomes aware of Viola.

When their eyes meet at last, the result is an immediate slowing down of the pace, even a momentary halt, very effective after the tempo sustained since Sebastian's exciting entrance.

Seb. Do I stand there? I never had a brother;
Nor can there be that deity in my nature
Of here and everywhere. I had a sister
Whom the blind waves and surges have devour'd.

There follows the exquisitely beautiful duologue in which the twins gradually identify each other. Their meeting having been put off until now, the positive recognition, viz. the revelation of Viola, is thus further delayed. They are not allowed to race into each other's arms. Nevill Coghill has an excellent passage describing why a delayed recognition can be so particularly moving. He rightly stresses the visual element in this:

It is in the delay that we taste the recognition most feelingly: for with our eyes we see that a longed-for thing is about to happen, even before it has begun: we see the certainty of a joy to come, delayed in order to prolong the thrill of having it in prospect. This is an experience in art that I think can most feelingly be given through the medium of theatre …

As to the peculiar delicacy and restraint of the twins' duologue, Alice Shalvi has observed how

the use of the third person in their mention of Viola is a beautifully subtle method of indicating the way in which neither wants to be overwhelmed by emotion, even while it excellently conveys the emotion that is pent up, and implied by, their words.

As regards gesture and grouping, Viola's speech concluding the recognition-passage is particularly interesting:

If nothing lets to make us happy both
But this my masculine usurp'd attire,
Do not embrace me till each circumstance
Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump
That I am Viola; which to confirm,
I'll bring you to a captain in this town,
Where lie my maiden weeds; by whose gentle help
I was preserv'd to serve this noble Count.
All the occurrence of my fortune since
Hath been between this lady and this lord.

241

The desire to withhold the inner surge of joy until the last shadow of a doubt has been removed is most clearly
in evidence when Viola requests her brother not to embrace her. This however seems to pose a real problem in
performance. Whereas scholars may easily take Viola's words at their face-value, there are few producers who
can deny their Sebastian the emotional relief of a brotherly embrace. Alice Shalvi, pursuing her theme of
restraint, finds it significant that

Shakespeare even makes Viola delay her brother's happy embrace until she shall have
abandoned her doublet for a gown, and the same is true of her betrothal to Orsino.16

This is very persuasive, and soundly based on the text. Yet when it comes to producing the scene, Viola's
cautious reserve seems to overtax our strength and even to border on the unnatural. The principle of
postponing the happy celebrations is here driven to its limits. Producers must feel that before Sebastian can
turn to Olivia to stress the lighter side of what has occurred,

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook,

251

“each circumstance …” has surely cohered and jumped. In accordance with this, the beginning of Viola's
critical sentence tends to get slurred over, while the end, “That I am Viola,” is detached from the rest as much
as possible and given the special emphasis of a solemn affirmation.

In Viola's concluding line Shakespeare again hints at the intended stage-picture. During much of the scene,
when she was the bone of contention, and again now, when the twins meet at the centre of the stage, Viola has
been placed between “this lady and this lord.” The dangers inherent in her false position between Orsino and
Olivia had only been latent before this final scene. Now it has all come to a head. Viola's place on stage
therefore symbolizes the “occurrence” of her fortune since she came to Illyria, her ambiguous rôle as a
go-between

... between this lady and this lord.

250

Her last words contain a strong gestic impulse to stress her position in the danger zone between the two proud,
noble personages, at the very point when this scenic image is about to be replaced by a new constellation.
After the arrival of Sebastian and the ensuing revelation of Viola, the happy, permanent equilibrium of two
couples is substituted for the uneasy, precarious symmetry of the triangle.

Sebastian, as we have seen, is a resolving figure par excellence, since his mere entrance at the right moment
disposes of all the confusions at a stroke. To achieve this startling effect, Shakespeare exploits a theme he has
introduced into the play only at a very late stage. Harold Jenkins has pointed out that in Twelfth Night the
dramatist “is, in fact, combining the plots of The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Comedy of Errors”:

He does not, however, combine them in equal degree. The heartsick heroine who in page's
disguise takes messages of love to another woman provided little more than an episode in the
complicated relations of the two gentlemen of Verona; but in Twelfth Night this episode has
grown into the central situation from which the play draws its life. On the other hand, the confusion of twins which entertained us for five acts in *The Comedy of Errors* appears now as little more than an adroit device to bring a happy ending.\textsuperscript{17}

This hardly overstates the case. The theme of mistaken identity only begins to make its contribution when Sebastian and Antonio have at last found their way to the capital of Illyria. From the first, of course, there is the similarity in the shipwreck stories of *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, but not before III.iv. does Antonio mistake Viola for Sebastian. In IV.i. Feste for his part believes Sebastian to be Viola. Sebastian's exasperation on that occasion recalls the atmosphere of Ephesus:

Are all the people mad?

*TNIV.i.26*

he exclaims, in a mood of frustration not unlike that of the Syracusan Antipholus when he concludes that

There's none but witches do inhabit here.

*CEIII.ii.154*

In line with Jenkins' observation, however, most echoes of *The Comedy of Errors* occur in the last scene. Antonio's sad experience reminds us most strongly of Shakespeare's first comedy. Like Ategon, he believes himself shamefully betrayed by one he loves.\textsuperscript{18} Just as Duke Solinus of Ephesus confounds Aegeon:

I tell thee, Syracusan, twenty years
Have I been patron to Antipholus,
During which time he ne'er saw Syracusa,

*CEV.i.325*

so Duke Orsino of Illyria reduces Antonio to silence with an unanswerable rebuttal:

...—fellow, thy words are madness.
Three months this youth hath tended upon me—...

*TNV.i.92*

At the point when everyone stands amazed by the likeness of the twins, there is even a literal echo. Duke Solinus, beholding the Dromios and Antipholuses together, had wondered:

One of these men is genius to the other;
And so of these. Which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? ...

*CEV.i.331*

Pointing at Sebastian in disbelief (“So went he suited”) Viola says to Sebastian her brother:

Such a Sebastian was my brother too;
So went he suited to his watery tomb;
If spirits can assume both form and suit,
You come to fright us.
Yet even such a verbal parallel in a similar situation does not necessarily imply the simple repetition of an old idea. In *Twelfth Night*, “spirit” takes on an additional meaning: it is beyond a Dromio or Antipholus to answer, like Sebastian:

```
A spirit I am indeed,
But am in that dimension grossly clad
Which from the womb I did participate.
```

Solinus thinks in terms of *genius* as the attendant spirit of a man, Viola at first fears she has to deal with her brother’s “ghost” returned from the grave, like a Hamlet senior or a Banquo, and Sebastian uses the same word to refer to his immortal soul.

Olivia now faces her real husband, and it is all visibly too much for her. Orsino reassures her with new-found consideration and sympathy:

```
Be not amaz'd; right noble is his blood.
```

Then it is time for him to grapple with the changed situation himself, to address himself to the newly revealed Viola. Whereas Sebastian, having served his turn, is heard of no more, the fate of his sister remains the central concern of the audience. Orsino now gives the first, veiled, and as yet conditional intimation of his intentions towards the girl:

```
If this be so, as yet the glass seems true,
I shall have share in this most happy wreck. (19)
```

Though he could easily be more specific, his meaning is obviously in the spectators' mind when he now faces Cesario/Viola. Addressing her still as a “boy,” he reminds her of her former pledges which, now he knows she is a woman, take on a new significance:

```
Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.
```

This gives Viola her second opportunity to express the full depth of her love for him. His response to her fervent and solemn declaration is ambiguous, to say the least: his gestic reaction may give her hope, but his words are strangely guarded and reserved.

```
Give me thy hand;
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.
```

Now as before, the writing focuses on Viola. Explicit gestic notation, such as Orsino's imperative (“Give me thy hand”) invariably refers to her. In contrast to this, we do not know what is going on between Olivia and
her husband. In their case, everything is already settled, whereas Orsino quite understandably needs some time to adjust himself: he cannot transfer his affections from Olivia to Viola too fast, or he risks appearing in too comic a light. It is almost as if he reserved his position until he knows whether Viola's true “outside” can charm him as her male disguise had charmed Olivia. The awkwardness of his situation must explain the discrepancy between his instinctive gesture and his noncommittal words.

Nevertheless, things seem to be drawing to a close. Yet there is still that other matter, the strange frenzy of Olivia's steward, who even now languishes in the “dark house.” Orsino's reference to her “woman's weeds” reminds Viola of the captain with whom she left her things in I.ii. That self-same sea-captain, she reveals, “Is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit …” This—Viola's last speech, by the way—in turn reminds Olivia of her steward. The New Cambridge Shakespeare notes that “we have heard nothing before of this lawsuit” and explains: “it is Shakespeare's device for bringing Malvolio back upon the scene.” Yet Shakespeare goes out of his way to show that he does not need the mysterious lawsuit to bring Malvolio back. Before Olivia can even send for the “madman,” Feste comes in, unbidden by anyone, with Malvolio's letter of complaint. Enter Clowne with a letter, and Fabian, as the Folio direction puts it. Evidently there must be some other point to this curious coincidence which led to a case, “Malvolio vs. Captain.” Our recollection of the trusty Captain and of Viola's high opinion of him engages our sympathies on his side. The wrong done to Malvolio, on the other hand, will shortly be so much emphasized that we might mistakenly conclude he was more sinned against than sinning. So Clifford Leech may well be right with his reading:

It is evident that the ambitious steward has exercised authority with a long arm: our realization of that moderates our pity for him.

A sizeable section of the scene is now set aside for the conclusion to the Malvolio-intrigue; the upshot, however, will be that it cannot be truly concluded at all. Olivia and the gull himself must at least learn what really happened. Fabian, who was not among the instigators, is the ideal man to tell them. Viola has had no part in all this, yet Shakespeare does not allow her to be totally eclipsed for such a long time. Having heard Malvolio's letter, Olivia sends for him. While we are waiting, she uses the lull to attend to her own business:

My lord, so please you, these things further thought on,
To think me as well a sister as a wife,
One day shall crown th'alliance on't, so please you,
Here at my house, and at my proper cost.

303

Some reflection has taught her that there is really nothing left to prevent her and Orsino being friends. She moves towards reconciliation. At the same time, she already deals with an important point which is normally part of the closing-speech: she will arrange for the festivities to come. She foresees a double marriage: a curious feature of her speech is the request to Orsino

To think me as well a sister as a wife.

304

She hopes she will be no less acceptable to him as a sister-in-law than she would have been as his wife. Yet Orsino, as we have seen, has not really committed himself to Viola as yet. Could it be that Olivia, sympathizing with Viola in her predicament, indulges in a bit of gentle prompting on behalf of the girl she once fell in love with? If so, it certainly works: Orsino briefly thanks her and then again turns to Viola:

Your master quits you; and, for your service done him,
So much against the mettle of your sex,
So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
And since you call'd me master for so long,
Here is my hand; you shall from this time be
Your master's mistress.

Now he no longer speaks to “Cesario.” He recognizes and indeed stresses her womanhood and her noble birth, acknowledging all she has done for him. This is not without irony when we remember the vanity with which he used to pontificate about the inferiority of a woman's love to that of a man. He repeats his former gesture, and even here the change from “Give me thy hand” (264) to “Here is my hand” is surely significant. It looks more like a pledge this time—and he comes out with a well-nigh unequivocal proposal. In the case of Viola, we know very well that the Duke's proposal is welcome, but no more than Isabella in Measure for Measure is she permitted to respond. We never hear another word from her after her mention of Malvolio's suit against the Captain. Perhaps the promise in Orsino's words makes her speechless, but there is also the fact that “the madman” now comes in, escorted by the ever-useful Fabian. The investigation of Malvolio's misadventure is resumed.

This short interlude (from Fabian's exit to his return with the steward) inserted into the segment devoted to Malvolio helps to achieve two important effects. It has a bearing on Orsino's switch from Olivia to Viola, which requires to be handled with delicacy and tact. The interlude is a device which allows the change to be effected in three evenly spaced-out steps, so that it appears like a gradual process which is not truly completed even at the end of the play, while assuring us of Viola's future happiness. The other consequence of this insertion concerns Malvolio and his influence on the mood of the ending: many things usually left until the end are already settled before Malvolio enters, so that very little will be left for Orsino's closing-speech. As a result, the totally unreconciled, defiant exit-line

I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you

hits the audience as late as possible, only ten lines before everyone else withdraws too, leaving us alone with Feste and his epilogue-song. This harsh and jarring note, placed where it has maximum effect, justifies the view that “the most interesting thing in Twelfth Night is its ultimate drawing back from a secure sense of harmony.” Malvolio's last words reverberate in Olivia's sympathetic reaction:

He hath been most notoriously abus'd

which is doubly effective because it echoes Malvolio's first, solemn (if mistaken) accusation when he came in:

Madam, you have done me wrong,
Notorious wrong.

The sorry business is even allowed to spill over into Orsino's closing-speech:

Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace;
He hath not told us of the captain yet.
It is remarkable how consistently Shakespeare discourages too simple, black-and-white judgements of the issue. In referring to the Captain, Orsino provides an immediate corrective to Olivia's sympathy for her steward. We may already have winced at the word “pack,” and now, lest we feel too much pity, we are further reminded of the nasty streak in Malvolio. With the steward in the “dark house,” Maria's jest has no doubt gone a little too far, but on the other hand Malvolio himself is apparently quite prepared to put decent men in prison. It will not be easy to placate him, but Orsino will at least try.

Even if we avoid the gross mistake of turning Malvolio into a tragic figure, his appearance in V.i. is bound to have a sobering effect on the play's ending. With his furious departure, however, his person at least is removed from sight before the actual conclusion. Shakespeare continues to tidy up the stage for the final speech when Orsino says:

Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace.

Though there is no stage-direction in the Folio, and modern editors refrain from supplying one, it would look absurd if no one stirred at Orsino's command. No doubt the invaluable Fabian, perhaps with one or more of Orsino's men, leaves in pursuit of the “madly-us'd” Malvolio: When therefore Orsino closes the play, the two couples have to share the stage only with Antonio and Feste, who are at a respectful distance with attendants, officers, and possibly the Priest.

After all the thoughtful preparation by Olivia, there are no loose threads left for Orsino to tie up:

He hath not told us of the captain yet.
When that is known, and golden time convents,
A solemn combination shall be made
Of our dear souls. Meantime, sweet sister,
We will not part from hence, Cesario, come;
For so you shall be while you are a man;
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.
[Exeunt all but the Clown.]

Even at the very end Orsino's tone remains singularly subdued. However beautiful his phrase about “golden time,” he still rather ungraciously insists on checking the truth of Viola's story. We, the audience, shall of course never know the circumstances which delivered the Captain into the power of Malvolio. When Orsino knows, and when Viola sheds her disguise, the marriage will take place. In looking forward to the consummation of Viola's desires, Orsino speaks almost with the gravity of the Priest: “A solemn combination Of … souls” will be made. He avoids all mention of “triumphs,” “mirth,” “revels” or “jollity.” We are not invited, as in earlier comedies, to think in terms of merry-making festivity.

Then he addresses Olivia, and one short sentence now suffices to set all things aright between them. In calling her “sweet sister,” taking up her own word of l.313, he accepts her offer of friendship together with the invitation to stay at her house. “Cesario, come” prepares the imminent departure: most likely he takes her by the hand a third time. He will lead her out. Orsino and Viola leave as a couple, like Olivia and Sebastian. Nevertheless, his restraint keeps the upper hand to the end:

... Cesario, come;
For so you shall be while you are a man.
The last time he spoke to her, he had been mindful of her “soft and tender breeding,” now he playfully reverts to treating her according to her male disguise. Only the final couplet reassures us that Viola will reap her reward. Orsino reiterates his proposal in much the same terms as he had used before:

But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

In keeping with the theatrical notation throughout the scene, the place of honour belongs to Viola. Orsino's final gesture is addressed to her, and so are the last words of the play.

Notes

1. There has been little change in this since H. B. Charlton, in his *Shakespearian Comedy* (London, 1938) discussed the play, together with *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, in a chapter entitled “The Consummation.”
4. Duke. Belong you to the Lady Olivia, friends?
   Clo. Ay, sir, we are some of her trappings.

5. Italics mine throughout this chapter.
6. Whereas the *New Variorum* edition (1901) says this “probably accompanied by a gesture to the Duke to keep silent and let Cesario speak” (l. 110, n., p. 286), it has become “a polite request to Orsino to let Viola speak first” in M. M. Mahood's *New Penguin* edition of 1968 (l. 104, n., p. 180). The distinction may be a nice one, but Olivia's next speech rather indicates that she is beyond making polite requests.
8. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed and Launce never make it to the forest of the outlaws. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the mechanicals are withdrawn first, to make room for Theseus' closing-speech and the incantations of the fairies. In *The Merchant of Venice* Launcelot Gobbo only just fleets across the stage, announcing the return of Bassanio. Even this brief intrusion into Belmont has been much resented. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Dogberry is remunerated and firmly dismissed before the last scene begins. The elimination of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby has thus numerous precedents. While clowns are withdrawn, however, the fool will return. Feste has a word to say to Malvolio, and he is even entrusted with the epilogue-song. Similarly, *As You Like It* has room for Touchstone and his Audrey.
9. Jenkins, p. 73. One cannot help suspecting that Orsino's extravagant threat to kill Cesario owes something to the desire to frighten us with a sufficiently lurid disaster. Northrop Frye's statement that “comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself” also comes to mind here: “Even in New Comedy, the dramatist usually tries to bring his action as close to a tragic overthrow of the hero as he can get it and reverses his movement as suddenly as possible.” “The Argument of Comedy,” in *Essays in Shakespearian Criticism*, ed J. L. Calderwood and H. E. Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), p. 53.
12. Styan, p. 111, shows the ultimate refinement of this method in *Lear*, I.i.v., where “the succession of
entrances is used to ... jar upon the nerves of the hero, each entrance a signal for the redoubling of his fury.”

17. Jenkins, p. 73.
18. Aæge. ... but perhaps, my son,
   Thou sham’st to acknowledge me in misery.

*CEV*.i.320

Ant.
Not meaning to partake with me in danger,
Taught him to face me out of his acquaintance,
And grew a twenty years removed thing
While one would wink; ...

*TNV*.i.80

19. The central position of *Twelfth Night* in Shakespeare's work and the peculiar wealth of this play are both illustrated by the fact that while it harks back to his first comedy, it also looks forward to his last plays. Viola's Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love!

*III.iv*.368

and Orsino's reference to “this most happy wreck” evoke an idea which is central to *Pericles* and important in *The Tempest*. Likewise, the delayed recognition between Viola and Sebastian looks like a sketch for the much more protracted, almost painfully moving reunion of Pericles and Marina in *Pericles*, V.i.

21. See I.ii.47:

There is a fair behaviour in thee, Captain;
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.

23. Malvolio's appearance in V.i. is so important to Shakespeare that he breaks one of his rules. The audience is informed of what it already knows. However, we are rewarded with a piece of authentic, and welcome, news: Toby has married Maria after all.
24. H. H. Furness, in the *New Variorum* edition (1901), l.333, n., p. 308, sees her motive as somewhat more selfish. According to him, Olivia “wishes to silence the Duke's importunities for ever, by marrying him to Viola.” Since Olivia is as good as married to Sebastian, however, it would appear that Orsino is already silenced.
25. Leech, p. 38. In earlier comedies, villains and others who threaten to jeopardize the sense of harmony are either removed long before the end (Shylock), or converted and then allowed to participate in the happy ending (Oliver), or we hear that they will be duly punished (Don John). Some remove themselves because they cannot abide what others call happiness (Jaques). Malvolio is in a quite different category. His case produces a much more subtle effect, as Clifford Leech points out in his account of the peculiar uneasiness we sometimes feel in Illyria:
To put Malvolio on a tragic level is to disregard the general effect of his appearance on the stage: rather, he is one of those comic figures at whom it is too easy to laugh, so easy that, before we know it, we have done harm and are ashamed.

(“Twelfth Night” and Shakespearian Comedy, p. 44).

Even if we add to this the agonizing experience of Antonio, for example, it remains an exaggeration to maintain that “the predominant mood” in Twelfth Night is “one of suffering.” (Shalvi, p. 168). When Malvolio is on stage in V.i., we may be disturbed even while the theatre echoes with our laughter. A comparable incident, though much less disturbing, is Dr. Caius' furious departure at the end of The Merry Wives of Windsor. He too voluntarily withdraws from the festive community, and storms out with the cry: “… be gar, I'll raise all Windsor.” (V.v.198). His exit has however no appreciable effect on the good humour of the ending. It is eclipsed by the generous rehabilitation of Falstaff, the “villain” who threatened the social order of Windsor. Once he is punished and even turned into a victim by the vicious “fairies,” he is invited to Mistress Page's “country fire.”

**Criticism: Gender Issues: Lisa Jardine (essay date 1992)**


[In the following essay, Jardine examines the treatment of crossdressing in Twelfth Night, as well as the relationship between economic dependency and sexual availability in early modern England.]

Viola: He nam'd Sebastian. I my brother know
Yet living in my glass; even such and so
In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate.

(3.4.389-93)²

[Ingling Pyander]
Walking the city, as my wonted use,
There was I subject to this foul abuse:
Troubled with many thoughts, pacing along,
It was my chance to shoulder in a throng;
Thrust to the channel I was, but crowding her,
I spied Pyander in a nymph's attire:
No nymph more fair than did Pyander seem,
Had not Pyander then Pyander been;
No Lady with a fairer face more grac'd,
But that Pyander's self himself defac'd;
Never was boy so pleasing to the heart
As was Pyander for a woman's part;
Never did woman foster such another,
As was Pyander, but Pyander's mother.
Fool that I was in my affection!
More happy I, had it been a vision;
So far entangled was my soul by love,
That force perforce I must Pyander move:
The issue of which proof did testify
Ingling Pyander's damnèd villainy.

O, so I was besotted by her words,
His words, that no part of a she affords!
For had he been a she, injurious boy,
I had not been so subject to annoy.(3)

This paper\(^1\) tries to accommodate some of the apparently contradictory currents stirred by these two cross-dressing passages, to provide a single, coherent version of the erotic possibilities contained under a kind of rubric of transvestism in the early modern period. For, in the current text-critical literature, we seem to be being told both that these are texts of sexual fantasy, disturbing and transgressive, and that these texts record some ‘actual’ possibility for individualized, subversive affirmation of sexuality.\(^4\) I do not myself believe we shall ever know how many cross-dressed youths and young women were to be found on the streets of London around 1600, but I do believe that it is possible to show that the distinctive ways in which the textual imputation of their existence function in the various narratives which have come down to us can be resolved into a consistent positioning of dominant to dependent member of the early modern community.\(^5\)

I have, of course, spoken about cross-dressing before, in Still Harping on Daughters (Jardine 1983). But that was in the context of an argument specifically focused on the irrelevance of any detectable emotional intensity associated with the cross-dressed boy-player to any reconstruction, on the basis of the drama of the age of Shakespeare, of a peculiarly female early modern intensity of feeling. Here my argument will be differently focused: upon the way in which, in the early modern period, erotic attention—an attention bound up with sexual availability and historically specific forms of economic dependency—is focused upon boys and upon women in the same way. So that, crucially, sexuality signifies as absence of difference as it is inscribed upon the bodies of those equivalently ‘mastered’ within the early modern household, and who are placed homologously in relation to that household's domestic economy. Inside the household, I shall argue, dependent youths and dependent women are expected to ‘submit’, under the order of familial authority, to those above them. And the strong ideological hold of the patriarchal household ensures that, in the space outside the household—in the newer market economy whose values govern the street and the public place—the tropes which produce structural dependency as vulnerability and availability are readily mobilized to police the circulation of young people.

Outside the household, the freely circulating woman is ‘loose’ (uncontained)—is strictly ‘out of place’,\(^6\) and her very comeliness in conjunction with her unprotectedness (no male kin with her) signifies as availability (as it continues, residually, to do today). And outside the household the dependent boy (the ‘youth’) is also constructed, via the patriarchal household, as ‘at risk’—more legitimately in transit on ‘business’, but also, in his transactional availability, sexually vulnerable.\(^7\) In the street, the bodies of the boy and the unmarried woman elide as they carry the message of equivalent sexual availability—male and female prostitution is represented textually (and probably fantasized communally) as transvestism. The boy discovered as a girl reveals her availability for public intercourse; the girl dis-covered as a boy reveals that intention to sodomy for financial gain.\(^8\) The boy who walks the street cross-dressed as that comely girl (whether in reality or in fantasy/grotesque fiction) does not, therefore, misrepresent himself—he conceals (and then reveals) the range of sexual possibilities available. The girl who enters the male preserve (ordinary, tavern or gaming-house) cross-dressed does not misrepresent herself, either. She is, in any case, ‘loose’, and eases the process of crossing the threshold into the male domain—controls the manner of presenting herself in a suitable location for paid sex.\(^9\)

I suggest that the way in which dependency functions in relation to representations of the sexual in early modern English culture is vital to a suitably historicized reading of cross-dressing and gender confusion in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.\(^10\) Here I shall try to show this set of relations in operation in the complex gender doubling and twinning of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.

‘The household was the classic form of patriarchy’, writes Alan Bray (1982: 51). In the period with which we are concerned, ‘family’ and ‘household’, as descriptions of the ordered unit for communal living, designate
groupings which include both close and distant kin, and a range of non-kin. There is a constant ‘drift of young persons’ (as David Herlihy calls it), a flow of young adolescents into and out of the wealthier households—both of distant kin, and of non-kin in ‘service’. And, in addition to the body of young well-to-do dependents in the wealthy household, there were numbers of adolescent servants: ‘The great majority of the adolescent population probably entered some form of service or apprenticeship’, writes Ralph Houlbrooke. In Ealing, in 1599, about a quarter of the total population of 427 was in service of some kind (1984: 173). Of the eighty-five households in Ealing, ‘a staggering 34.2 per cent of them contained one or more servants’ (Bray 1982: 50-1). Finally, ‘in the upper and middle ranks of society children were commonly sent away from home to another household’ (Houlbrooke 1984: 150), as part of their education. (Whilst they resided in Calais, the Lisles placed two of their daughters with French families of a wealth and status corresponding to their own (St Clare Byrne 1985: 126-7). ‘The patriarchal household with its servants was an institution that touched the lives of an immense number of people’ (to quote Bray again); ‘it was an institution that necessarily influenced the sexual lives of those who lived within it’ (1982: 51). That patriarchal household exercised its considerable authority and wielded its extensive economic power predominately over young men and women between the ages of 14 and 24.

It is against this kind of background that Susan Amussen locates patriarchal authority at the most fundamental levels of consciousness-formation in the period:

[The catechism] asserted that the family was the fundamental social institution, and that order in families was both necessary for and parallel to, order in the state. In the catechism, this idea is developed in the discussion of the Fifth Commandment, to ‘honour thy father and mother’. The 1559 Prayer Book's catechism … summarized …

My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would should do unto me: to love, honour, and succour my father and mother: to honour and obey the King and all that are put in authority under him: to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters: … to learn and labour truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.

(1988: 35-6)

In the middle to upper ranks of society, deference and submissiveness were internalized in the form of ‘good manners’:

In a society in which service was the most important avenue to advancement at all levels, one of the most essential skills was the ability to make oneself acceptable to superiors. … Marks of respect to be shown in conversation with superiors included baring the head, dropping the right knee, keeping silence till spoken to, listening carefully and answering sensibly and shortly. Compliance with commands was to be immediate, response to praise heartily grateful.

(Houlbrooke 1984: 147)

For dependent youth, obedience was both a condition of their economic support, and an internalized state.

In 1630, Meredith Davy of Minehead, was prosecuted for sodomy at the Somerset Court of Quarter Sessions.

According to the evidence of his master's apprentice, a boy ‘aged twelve years or thereabouts’ called John Vicary, with whom he shared a bed, Davy had been in the habit of having sexual
relations with the boy on Sunday and holiday nights after he had been drinking; eventually the boy cried out and Davy ended up before the Justices.

(Bray 1982: 48)

As Bray glosses this:

The young apprentice would have had a lower standing in the household than Davy, who was an adult; and it was presumably this which encouraged him—wrongly as it turned out—to think that he could take advantage of the boy. It is an important point. In a household of any substantial size the distinction in their status would have been only one of a series of such distinctions; it was part of the nature of the household itself. The household was a hierarchical institution, in which each of its members had a clearly defined position. It was also a patriarchal institution, in which the pre-eminent position was that of the master; and the distinction in status between master and servant was in some respects a model for distinctions between the servants themselves.

(ibid.)

And, if we stay with this case just a little longer, once the alleged social transgression had taken place, the outcome of the discovery and prosecution seems to support the view that such activity was regarded as only slightly beyond the boundaries set on allowable demands for ‘submission’ from one considerably lower in the social hierarchy of the household.

Richard Bryant, the servant who slept in the room with Davy and the boy … eventually took the matter to the mistress of the household, but it is striking as one reads his evidence how long it took him to realize what was going on and how reluctant he is likely to appear to us now to have been to draw the obvious conclusions.

(Bray 1982: 77)

Finally, at the end of the boy, John Vinlay's, evidence, he notes: ‘since which time [Davy] hath layn quietly with him’. In other words, household life continued unchanged—the boy continued to share a bed with (hence, to be in a position of submission to) the alleged assaulter. Davy himself ‘denieth that he ever used any unclean action with the said boy as they lay in bed together; and more he sayeth not’ (Bray 1982: 69).

In Twelfth Night the twin siblings, Viola and Sebastian, are of good family and fatherless. They are, therefore, obliged to become dependent on households other than those of their own close kin. Indeed, one might argue that finding a place in the domestic economy of a household other than that of their family of birth is the initiation of the drama—they are shipwrecked on an unspecified voyage, and voyages are (in narrative) conventionally quests or searches. In addition to the careful specification of their being orphaned before the age of majority (‘when Viola from her birth / Had numbered thirteen years’), the audience are persistently reminded of the extreme youth of both twins (since each resembles the other so completely):

Olivia: Of what personage and years is he?
Mal: Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy: as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when ... man. He is very well-favoured, and he speaks very shrewishly. One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him.

(1.5.157-64)

After the shipwreck, the first objective of the siblings is to transform their state from vagrancy to service (or, possibly, from wage-labour to service—Sebastian's 'gets' Antonio's purse, while Viola's relationship with the
captain is constructed as a cash-transaction). Both twins make immediately for the court of the Duke who 'governs here'. Both exchange their non-renewable cash assets (Viola's purse; Sebastian's borrowed purse) for the security of 'service' within a wealthy household ('I'll serve this duke' (1.3.55); 'I am bound to the Count Orsino's court' (2.2.41-2)). Viola's cross-dressing eases her way into Orsino's service. Sebastian, mis-taken for Cesario, takes Olivia to be spontaneously offering an invitation to enter her service—an invitation he accepts as the very 'dream' he wished for: 'Go with me to my house ... would thou'dst be rul'd by me!' (4.1.53,63).

The eroticization of Viola/Cesario and of Sebastian is dramatically constructed in terms of their relationship to the domestic economy, and the place they occupy in relation to the heads of their adopted households. In the case of both Cesario's and Sebastian's 'place', this is fraught with erotic possibility in the very process of being established as 'service' (something which by now we might expect, in the light of the discussion of the early modern household at the beginning of this paper). The audience is entirely aware of the ambiguity in Sebastian's 'retention' by Olivia—he reads it as an invitation to enter her service, she offers it as a profession of passionate, sexual love and a marriage proposal. But Orsino's attachment to his new 'young gentleman', Cesario, is no less charged with erotic possibilities:

Val.: If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. Viola: You either fear his humour, or my negligence, that you call in question the continuance of his love. Is he inconstant, sir, in his favours? (1.4.1-8)

'Love' here hovers dangerously between the mutual bond of service and passionate emotional attachment. And the confusions possible in the Orsino/Viola service relationship are clinched shortly thereafter:

Duke: O then unfold the passion of my love, Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith; It shall become thee well to act my woes: She will attend it better in thy youth, Than in a nuncio's of more grave aspect. Viola: I think not so, my lord. Duke: Dear lad, believe it; For they shall yet belle thy happy years, That say thou art a man; Diana's lip Is not more smooth and rubious: thy small pipe Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound, And all is semblative a woman's part. I know thy constellation is right apt For this affair ... ... Prosper well in this, And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord, To call his fortunes thine. Viola: I'll do my best To woo your lady: [Aside] yet, a barful strife! Who'er I woo, myself would be his wife. (1.5.24-42)

As Orsino eroticizes Viola in relation to Olivia he specifies the possibilities for eroticizing his own attention to the 'small pipe' and the 'maiden's organ' of the preferred youth in his service. As 'pipe' and 'organ' are 'semblative a woman's part' they position Cesario as desired dependent of Orsino—as available for his own sexual pleasure. So that when Orsino takes the hand of Cesario, at the close of the play, and claims her as his sexual partner, he does no more than confirm the terms of his original engagement with his 'young gentleman'.
Duke: Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never should'st love woman like to me.
Viola: And all those sayings will I over-swear,
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orbed continent the fire
That severs day from night.
Duke: Give me thy hand,
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.

(15.1.265-71)²⁶

Of course, the erotic twist in Twelfth Night is achieved by the irony that it is Olivia—the lady of significant independent means and a disinclination to submit herself and her lands to any 'master'²⁷—whose eroticized relationship of ‘service’ with Cesario is most socially and sexually transgressive. I think critics are right in seeing this as Olivia's ‘come-uppance’—patriarchy’s retribution for mis-taking the conventions both of service and of marriage as a female head of household in an order explicitly designated male in its defining relationships.²⁸

In the resolution of the play, however, the easy redeployment of the erotic possibilities of Viola's and Sebastian's service to the households of Orsino and Olivia, respectively, literally resolves the union of the two lines. At the end of the play, the marriages of the twin siblings to Olivia and Orsino effect what Orsino's courtship of Olivia was originally designed to achieve—the Orsino and Olivia households enter into a kin relationship with one another:

Olivia: My lord, so please you, these things further thought on,
To think me as well a sister, as a wife,
One day shall crown th'alliance on't so please you,
Here at my house, and at my proper cost.
Duke: Madam, I am most apt t'embace your offer.
[To Viola] Your master quits you; and for your service done him,
So much against the mettle of your sex,
So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
And since you call'd me master for so long,
Here is my hand; you shall from this time be
Your master's mistress.
Olivia: A sister! you are she.

(5.1.315-25)

The happy ending is one in which the erotic potential of service is appropriately contained within the admissible boundaries of the patriarchal household—dependent women 'mastered' by husbands or brothers; dependent boys elevated by marriage into masters and heads of households themselves (even desired dependent girls regulated into dependent younger sisters). But, to return to my opening remarks, this is romance—a fictional resolution in which insuperable problems are superable, convenient twinning can iron out the crumpled social fabric of early modern life. In the street, the problem remains—the troubling possibility, ‘in a throng’, that those who appear to be available in the market place, gender-wise, are not what they seem (either are not available, but in transit between households, or are cross-dressed and marketing sodomy for female prostitution, female prostitution for boy-playing). In the market place, the disreputable sexual favours sought from passing, available ‘youth’ blatantly fail to comply with the procreative requirements of reputable, marital intercourse. And the very confusion which hovers around desirability surely points to the historic specificity of early modern eroticism. Eroticism, in the early modern period, is not gender-specific, is not grounded in the sex of the possibly ‘submissive’ partner, but is an expectation of that very submissiveness. As twentieth-century readers we recognize the eroticism of gender confusion, and reintroduce that confusion as a feature of the dramatic narrative. Whereas, for the Elizabethan theatre
audience, it may be the very clarity of the mistakenness—the very indifference to gendering—which is designed to elicit the pleasurable response from the audience.29

Notes

1. Since I wrote this paper, Alan Bray published his crucial article on homosexuality and male friendship in Elizabethan England (1990: 1-19). I have also benefited from discussion of a draft of this paper with Alan Bray, and wish to express my gratitude to him.

2. All references to Twelfth Night are to the Arden edition.


5. Most of the textual accounts of cross-dressing (whether on the stage or in the street), like the ‘Ingling’ verse just cited and the Rainolds poem I use in Still Harping on Daughters, are clearly already adjusted to the fictional tropes of cross-dressing/illicit desire. Even sumptuary rules (as cited by Howard and others) aspire to control excesses which threaten good order—which is to say, dress which signifies, on which disorder is inscribed. The deposition relating to Mary Frith is a good example of the textual difficulties: in the record (whose narrative shape is controlled by the recording clerk and ‘his Lordship’, the bishop (?) who interrogates), the ‘immodest and lascivious speeches’, and ‘shame of her sexe’ collides with the slender textual traces of her refusal to accept the charge ‘being pressed’, ‘whether she had not bryn dishonest of her body & hath not also drawne other women to lewdnes by her persuasions & by carrying her self lyke a bawde’. To cross-dress is to signify as (to ‘carry onself’ as) a bawd (deposition transcribed in full in Mulholland 1987: 262-3). The spate of ‘Moll Frith’ plays which accompanied her court appearance seize upon the event’s bawdy potential (Mulholland 1987: 13)—for example, by suggesting she might ‘take her own part’ in the play (which ‘part’, and how related to stage cross-dressing?) and that she would play the viol on stage (the lewd possibilities of viol playing are considerable, as Howard points out in her essay for this volume). In a paper for the 1989 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Stallybrass quoted Augustin Philips's will in which he left his apprentice various specified desirable items of clothing, and his ‘bass viol’. Here too it seems possible that the legacy has been adjusted to the tropes of (intimate) devoted service—the bass viol and the shared items of dress connoting the closeness of the master-servant relationship.

6. It is fascinating that this exactly corresponds to Mary Douglas's ‘dirt is matter out of place’ (1966).

7. See R. Ascham, The Scholemaster, and its ‘morals’ source, Xenophon's Cyropaedia. I am extremely grateful to Lorna Hutson for making the vulnerability of the ‘youth’ clear to me, and for all the helpful discussion we had on this paper.

8. Throughout this paper I use the contemporary term ‘sodomy’ rather than the nineteenth-century ‘homosexuality’, or any of its cognates. In this I follow Bray (1982: 13-14), and Bullough in Bullough and Brundage (1982: 55-71).

9. To see how far back this goes as a fictionalizing of ‘loose’ women transgressively entering the male preserve see Knighton's Chronicon (1348), quoted in Rickert (1949: 217). I am grateful to Rob Pope for bringing this passage to my attention.

10. This, I now think, is a more correct version of what I wrote earlier: ‘The dependent role of the boy player doubles for the dependency which is women's lot, creating a sensuality which is independent of the sex of the desired figure, and which is particularly erotic when the sex is confused’ (1983: 24).

11. For a clear account of the consistent use of the terms ‘family’ and ‘household’ to designate those who cohabit under a single roof, as dependants of one adult male in the eighteenth century see Tadmor (1989). In Bray (1982), see especially the clear account on pp. 44-6.

12. ‘The overall pattern in the circulation of members between [households of specified levels of wealth, in fifteenth-century Florence] was similar for men and for women, but there are also some significant
differences in the movements of the two sexes. The richest households tend to gather in both boys and girls as they age, from birth up to their middle teens. At exact age 15, the 25 per cent of wealthy households contain 45 per cent of the boys and 43.5 per cent of the girls (as opposed to 39 per cent and 35 per cent respectively of the cohort of babies, age 0-2). This drift of children primarily means that wealthy households were taking in orphaned relatives. The incoming children probably also included many young relatives who had lost their fathers, and whose mothers had remarried and deserted them [sic]. The mother joined the household of her new husband, but usually did not take her children with her. The kindred of her late husband had to look to their care. … If we had data on servants and apprentices [registered with their household of birth in the Florentine census] we would undoubtedly observe an even more massive drift of young persons into and out of the homes of the wealthy. We know from other sources that “life-cycle” servants were numerous at Florence, as widely in traditional society. These young people, girls especially, spent their years of late childhood in service; they thereby earned their keep and accumulated from their earnings the dowry they needed for marriage’ (Herlihy 1985: 153).

14. Data from Laslett and Wall. See also Beier (1985: 22-6); and Laslett’s introduction, passim, for the complexity of the early modern household or family.
15. See also Bray (1982: 45), and the work in progress on early modern adolescence and service by Paul Griffiths (Clare College, Cambridge), especially his unpublished paper, 1990.
16. For the classic statement see Laslett (1972: 10): ‘The seventeenth century patriarchal family had many of the characteristics of the patriarchal household. It included not only wife and children, but often younger brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces: male superiority and primogeniture were unquestioned. Most striking was the presence of very large numbers of servants, whose subjection to the head of household was absolute.’
17. For a brilliant account of the ambiguities concerning the relationship between service and sexual favours contained within the early modern patriarchal household, see Cynthia Herrup’s paper on the trial of the Earl of Castlehaven. I read this paper while I was working on my own, and Herrup’s argument was tremendously helpful in sharpening my own perception of the relationship between household dependency and the construction of sexuality.
18. On sexual exploitation of servants in general see, most recently, Amussen (1988: 159). In Othello, the shared bed in service, used by Iago to enflame Othello’s jealousy, fully exploits the sexual availability of the bedfellow: ‘I lay with Cassio lately, … In sleep I heard him say “Sweet Desdemona, / Let us be wary, let us hide our loves;” / And then, sir, would he … kiss me hard, / As if he pluck’d up kisses by the roots, / That grew upon my lips, then laid his leg / Over my thigh, and sigh’d, and kiss’d’ (3.3.419-31).
19. There is a steady, interesting insistence in the text on the good birth of the twins, and on their having full purses at their disposal. This seems to place them pivotally between the household economy and that of the market place. Although employment in the former was, historically, as precarious as that in the latter (wage-labour), there is no question that in the play-text only the household is seen as a suitable ‘place’ for Viola and Sebastian. On wage-labour versus service see Beier (1985).
20. ‘My father was that Sebastian of Messaline whom I know you have heard of. He left behind him myself and a sister, both born in an hour’ (2.1.16-19); ‘My father … died that day when Viola from her birth / Had numbered thirteen years’; ‘O, that record is lively in my soul! / He finished indeed his mortal act / That day that made my sister thirteen years’ (5.1.240-6).
21. See also the Duke’s emphasis on the extreme youth of Cesario when he cautions him against marrying an older woman (2.4.24-39). In the same passage the Duke calls Viola ‘boy’. Sebastian (mirror-image of the cross-dressed Viola) is consistently referred to as ‘youth’ (for example 3.4.368).
22. See Beier (1985) for a gloss on the security of service versus the insecurity of waged labour (the temporarily full purse).
23. It perfectly fulfils the trope of serving devotion, as represented in saints’ lives and romance. See Jardine (1983).
In terms of tropes, here is the moralizers' trope of the vulnerable boy captured in service by dominating female householders. See Ascham, and of course, Plautus's *Menaechmi* and Secchi's *Gl'Ingannati* (both of which link this play with *A Comedy of Errors*). In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* the two tropes are run into one, when Julia takes the name Sebastian (a straightforward signifier of male dependency and vulnerability) in order to pursue her fickle lover in faithful service. See Beier (1985: 22): ‘Regarding [living-in service] we are told that the master/servant relationship was the lynch-pin of a patriarchal society in which “every relationship could be seen as a love-relationship”.’

In the source story the heroine, dressed as a boy, fears she may be asked by her master for ‘bedroom favours’. For a related discussion of the ambiguities of ‘love’ in the context of patronage see Barrell (1988: 18-43) on ‘love’ and patronage in Shakespeare's sonnet 29.

I think the ‘woman's weeds’ line is quite close in its possibilities to the seductively transgressive Pyander.

John Manningham's diary (1602) records a performance he saw of the play: ‘A good practise in it to make the steward beleue his Lady widdowe was in Loue w/th him by counterfayting a lett/ / as from his Lady in generall teames telling him what shee liked best in him / and p[re]scribing his gesture in smiling his apparraille / &c./. And then when he came to practise making him beleue they tooke him to be mad’ (Arden *Twelfth Night*, xxvi). Manningham's mistaken memory (‘widow’ when Olivia in fact mourns the deaths of her father and brother) confirms the fact that as a figure she is recognizably the independent woman of means whose own will and desires figure troublingly strongly in choice of husband (and thus, continuation of the paternal line).

Olivia's femaleness is also the cause of her steward Malvolio's mis-taking their service relationship as passionate ‘love’.

So, my final note addresses the vexed question of Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*. On this reading, Moll is neither male nor female, or both male and female, confusing the several traditions which represent economic dependency via cross-dressing in private and in public. So the joke about the promise that Moll herself would come and play her own part in the play, *in place of* the boy who ‘actually’ takes it, is that it simply makes no difference to the ‘performance’. Either way, that figure is replete with erotic potential.

**Works Cited**


**Criticism: Gender Issues: Michael Shapiro (essay date 1996)**


[In the following essay, Shapiro investigates Twelfth Night's exploration of sexual identity within the context of Elizabethan theatrical portrayals of sexual and emotional intimacy between men and between women.]

Now dated around 1601,¹Twelfth Night, Shakespeare's fourth play with a cross-dressed heroine, continues his variations on this motif. Indeed, after Two Gentlemen each play of this type seems to be a deliberate variation on its predecessor(s). Three earlier plays stress the masculine side of the boy heroine's disguised identity. Two use pert Lylian pages and the third a doctor of the law. In part, the vigor of these male personas supports the assertiveness the heroine needs to control the outcome of the play. In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare enlarged the male persona that the boy heroine assumed along with male disguise. At times, the actor playing Viola displays Ganymed's audacity if not Balthazar's commanding resourcefulness. At other times, the role calls for
different aspects of boyishness—delicacy and shyness. The two sides of Cesario's personality represent Viola's tendencies toward assertiveness and vulnerability, modulated to suit a young male servant. Cesario's double nature is underscored farcically by his terror of dueling but more interestingly by his appearance in highly charged duet scenes both with the man he serves and has come to love and with a woman who has fallen in love with him. In *Twelfth Night*, more explicitly than in previous plays involving heroines in male disguise, Shakespeare exploited the play-boy's dexterous articulation of layered sexual identities by accenting the very sexuality of these identities. Some subsequent playwrights, such as Barry, Middleton, and Brome, picked up this variation and in turn modified it in characteristic ways, while Shirley alone surpassed Shakespeare in exploring the anxieties created by the homoerotic potentialities of the play-boy/female page.

**THE STAGING OF INTIMACY**

Although Viola plays a page who is at different moments both cheeky and shy, who attracts a woman and who is attracted to a man, the complex figure of male actor/female character/male disguise did not, I believe, fuse into a single androgynous entity. The young male performers who specialized in female roles were not genderless but boys or young men, not yet but potentially adult males. They were androgynous only in the sense that they might be sex objects both to some men and to some women. When they played romantic heroines, they must have been capable of representing sexually mature and responsive young women. In plays in which such women adopt male disguise, these same performers probably played female and male identities in contrasting ways. Indeterminacy of gender in disguised heroine plays occurred only when dramatists like Fletcher, Chapman, or Middleton wished to create uncertainty, if not actual surprise, in their audiences by withholding explicit knowledge of the page's female identity. As separate moments in a play highlighted the discrete layers of sexual identity belonging to actor, heroine, and disguised persona, various images of heterosexual and homosexual intimacy crossed the consciousness of individual spectators, arousing types of anxieties peculiar to their own personal histories. Antitheatrical writers object to the images of women being represented on the stage, to the effeminization of the male performer, and to his use as an object of erotic excitement. Given the lack of reliable data and the probable heterogeneity of playhouse audiences, it seems impossible to specify which particular responses were elicited in which spectators by which types of theatrical combinations. Nor is it necessary to do so, for nearly any likely response to the representation of intimacy added excitement and risk to the form of play known as play going.

Some psychoanalysts suggest that spectators respond to theatrical representations of intimacy as primal fantasies, like children imagining that they are watching their parents in sexual intercourse. Such representation in Shakespeare's day might have included scenes of kissing, caressing, and embracing, as well as scenes depicting emotional relations implying or leading to sexual exchange. The psychoanalytic model suggests a rich mixture of responses, possibly including elements of desire, pleasure, jealousy, embarrassment, guilt, or fear. Because the precise components of this mixture vary widely among individuals, I refer to it by the general term *anxiety*.

As readers may recall from their own (early) experience, such moments of theatricalized intimacy may also test spectators' identification with protagonists. Juvenile audiences, one recalls, would snicker, hoot, and groan whenever their role models strayed into love scenes, even if these sexual exchanges were carefully stylized and stopped far short of implying intercourse, let alone representing it. Adult spectators may feel similar anxieties but rarely express them as open derision. Although the precise nature of the anxiety may vary with one's gender, social status, and personal experience, dramatized portrayals of sexual and emotional intimacy can be troubling because exciting and exciting because troubling. One adult defense against such anxieties is to dismiss what is happening on screen or stage as “only a film” or “only a play,” that is, to use aesthetic distance as a psychological barrier.

But one of the theater's most potent effects is precisely the blurring of boundaries between art and life, an effect easily created when spectators are in the physical presence of live actors who are publicly saying words.
and occasionally performing actions usually reserved for secluded situations. By means of conventions and codes, theater also blurs the distinction between physical and emotional intimacy, for what actors do and say onstage may be intended to imply far greater physical or emotional intimacy than what is being enacted.\(^2\)

The codes and conventions of Shakespeare's day, more restrictive than those of the late twentieth century, implied what could not be shown or what one was to imagine might be about to take place offstage. Passionate scenes between lovers and would-be lovers that seem tamely decorous to modern spectators might well have evoked stronger responses in the period and might have served as the equivalent of theatricalized primal scenes. Often the language surpasses the stage action in emotional intensity, as in Robert Greene's *James the Fourth*, where a woman who falls in love with a female page speaks of her "insatiate lust" even though her behavior, to judge from the text, is chastely self-restrained. Because of its unusual reliance on intimate duet scenes, *Twelfth Night*, which even by Elizabethan standards is restrained in the ways it dramatizes sexual attraction, needs to be understood in a context of theatrical representations of both sexual and emotional intimacy.

In the Renaissance theater, cross-gender casting added another set of anxieties because of the culture's official condemnation of homosexuality and the obsessive focusing of Puritan antitheatrical attacks on theatrical transvestism. Scenes of heterosexual physical intimacy in the world of the play could be seen as involving homoerotic acts in the world of the playhouse. How pervasive this view was among actual audiences is debatable, for very few plays do anything to authorize a puritanical response, but it seems likely that many spectators were aware of the condemnation of theatrical cross-dressing expressed in antitheatrical treatises and elsewhere throughout the period.

Addressing just such anxieties over the plays he produced at Christ Church College, Oxford, between 1582 and 1592, William Gager denied that his staging of heterosexual love scenes involved any actions that could be construed as homoerotic:

> As for the danger of kissinge bewtifull boyes, … it is untrwe, … that owre Eurymachus did kisse owre Melantho. I have enquyred of the partyes themselves, whether any suche action was used by them, and thay constantly denye it; sure I ame, no suche thinge was taught. If you conjecture there was kissinge because Melantho spake this verse, *Furtiva nullus oscula Eurymachus dabit*, … yet, therby no kissinge can be proved agaynst us, but that rather, that thinge only in wordes was expressed.\(^3\)

If Gager's attitude is representative, university productions did not *enact* sexual passion but rather *indicated* it through words alone, perhaps accompanied by chastely stylized stage business, as in some scholastic productions today. Gager also differentiated academic productions, ostensibly done for pedagogic purposes, from those of the commercial theater.\(^4\)

Unlike Gager's pupils, Elizabethan professional troupes did not hesitate to dramatize moments of physical intimacy, and apparently did so with greater naturalism and intensity. J. G. B. Streett's catalog of examples suggests that English Renaissance plays call for considerably more kissing, caressing, and fondling than earlier scholars wished to acknowledge.\(^5\) One example comes from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1588-90), a play written long before the alleged decadence of the late Jacobean and Caroline periods. In the famous bower scene, Horatio and Bel-Imperia sit down ("for pleasure asketh ease") and then graphically describe their progression from hand-holding to footsie, kisses, close embraces, and finally—just before his killers interrupt them—to Horatio's plea that Bel-Imperia "stay a while, and I will die with thee."\(^6\) Gager's argument, that verbal expressions of emotional and physical intimacy need not necessitate physicalization, would not seem to apply to so explicit a listing of gestures.
It is hard to imagine the actors not doing what the characters say they are doing. By our standards, the actors might have seemed detached, but even if stylized or coded the physical gestures represent the sexual expression of passionate love, in this case a clandestine tryst rather than the simple kiss of Gager's example. Moments like this one aroused the ire of William Prynne, who was hardly an objective source and who probably relied on secondhand reports. Nevertheless Kyd's play provided a graphic example of what a Puritan like Prynne, in his antitheatrical tract entitled *Histrio-Mastix* (pub. 1633), called "those immodest gestures" or "those real lively representations of the actors of venery, which attend and set out Stage-playes."

Such representations of heterosexual sexual activity, however naturalistically staged, probably evoked or accented the presence of the male actors, especially if, as Heywood claims, they were easily recognized by spectators. The aesthetic defense against anxiety caused by scenes of heterosexual intimacy—“it’s only a play”—led to another source of anxiety by activating audiences' dual consciousness of play-boys and female characters and so evoking concern over (and sometimes interest in) what the male actors were doing with their own bodies.

Although most plays do not activate dual consciousness by explicit allusions at such moments, boy-bride plays do so by incorporating female impersonation into the world of the play, so that the audience finds itself in the position of those characters who are in on the joke, that is, watching a boy make other men believe he is a woman. If consciousness of the play-boy was accented by the reflexive effect of male disguise, then any intimate scenes involving a female page may have further underscored the homoerotic nature of the relationship at the metatheatrical level.

**STAGING MALE HOMOSEXUAL INTIMACY: FARRANT'S THE WARS OF CYRUS**

This complex of anxieties over the presentation of intimacy at both mimetic and theatrical levels can be illustrated by the subplot of *The Wars of Cyrus*. The play was probably written by Richard Farrant for the Chapel Children and performed in the first Blackfriars theater in the late 1570s, although it was not published until 1594. Both the subplot, adapted from Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, and the main plot are variants of the captive-heroine motif often used in plays performed by the children’s troupes in the 1570s and 1580s. Alexandra, the heroine of the subplot, escapes from captivity by exchanging clothing and identities with her page, Libanio. Both mistress and page are played by two young male actors capable of depicting boys or women equally well. One plays a woman impersonating a boy, a female page; the other a boy impersonating a woman, a boy bride.

Libanio impersonates his mistress well enough to excite Dinon, their guard. As Alexandra, Libanio initially protests that “I am too young to love” (l. 894), while Dinon offers to buy her favors, but she then coyly implies that it is not the offer of wealth but passion itself that makes her “blush to say I love my Lord” (l. 935). When Dinon presses further—“And when thou blushes[t] Dinon's heart is fired; / Therefore to quench it give a gentle grant” (ll. 936-37)—Libanio parries by seeming to redefine “grant” in purely verbal terms: “My honor being preserved, my grant is given” (l. 938).

It is not clear from the text exactly how Dinon understands Libanio's ambiguous reply, nor whether he understands “honor” to mean reputation or virginity. Perhaps verbal capitulation is enough to satisfy him, or perhaps it is intended as a symbolic indication of sexual submission. In either case, he quickly falls into a state of lassitude, asking Libanio to “lull me asleep with sweetness of thy voice” (l. 942). In the context of this play, the song might have functioned as a symbolic indicator of sexual intimacy—the equivalent of the closing of the bedroom door in films of an earlier day. Although the song seems to put Dinon into state of repose, in describing this encounter to other men later in the play, Libanio disingenuously attributes the guard's sleepiness to other causes: “long continued talke, / And heat of sunne reflecting on the bankes, / Or happlie with the ratling harmonie / [of] Euphrates his gliding streames” (ll. 1112-15).
Whether or not the page's sexual submission was symbolically indicated, the boy bride immediately resumes his male identity. Having compromised his manliness by the assumption of female disguise and by allowing Dinon to see and perhaps to use him as a woman, Libanio now moves to redeem his own virility. The moment Dinon falls asleep, Libanio prepares to kill him with the guard's own sword, “the sworde that hangde loose dangling by his side” (l. 1120), but which he appropriates as his own in the soliloquy preceding the murder:

Sleep, Dinon! Then, Libanio, draw thy sword
And manly thrust it in his slumbering heart!
... Now Dinon dies! Alas, I cannot strike!
This habit makes me over pitiful.
Remember that thou art Libanio—
No woman, but a bondman! Strike and fly!

(ll. 944-57)

To reaffirm his own masculine identity, Libanio rejects both compassion and self-pity as feminine attributes induced by his wearing of women's garments, and he commits an act of “manly” violence. Only such an act will cleanse him of the shame of being “taken” as a woman, and permit him to accept the title that other men later bestow on him, “president of manly fortitude” (l. 1128), in which there may have lurked a further irony depending on the age of the play-boy cast in the role.

This subplot betrays considerable uneasiness about the risk to male sexual identity when boys or young men impersonate women too successfully. Within the world of the play, Libanio's impersonation of Alexandra reflects exactly what young male actors often did in the world of the playhouse—portray women who aroused the sexual interest of male characters and, so it was said, of male spectators as well. In most plays, such anxieties are unacknowledged and remain confined to the metatheatrical level. Boy-bride plays like this one, however, bring such concerns to conscious attention. Most of them, like Epicoene, focus ridicule on the man who mistook the boy bride for a woman. The Wars of Cyrus, however, sees the “mistake” from the point of view of the boy, dramatizing underlying concerns about the effects of cross-gender casting on male sexuality. That concern was brought to the surface more subtly in plays like Twelfth Night, where, instead of reinscribing female impersonation within the world of the play, cross-gender disguise reflexively underscored the presence of the male actor in the female role.

STAGING INTIMACY BETWEEN WOMEN: GREENE'S JAMES THE FOURTH

Unlike The Wars of Cyrus, which dramatizes the attraction of a man to a boy bride, Greene's James the Fourth (Queen's? c. 1590) depicts a woman's infatuation with a female page. As such it is a precursor of Twelfth Night, the only one of Shakespeare's disguised heroine plays to explore the relationship between the protagonist and another woman. Greene makes far more of Lady Cuthbert Anderson's desire for the disguised Dorothea, queen of Scots, than Cinthio did in the source (Hecatommithi III.i). Cinthio's novella denies any sexual basis to the relationship between Arenopia and her rescuer by informing the reader that “the wife of the knight [who nurses the female page back to health] liked her very much indeed, not lasciviously but … as a brother.” Greene devotes parts of two scenes to Lady Anderson's “insatiate lust” for the disguised Dorothea, yet does so with restraint. In V.i., the presence of Nano, Dorothea's dwarf, prevents Lady Anderson from wooing her patient too ardent. Six lines before the end of the scene, Dorothea sends Nano away and Lady Anderson is finally alone with the object of her affections for the first time. Their brief dialogue is formalistically intensified by rhymed stichomythia but nevertheless gives intimacy a very wide berth:

L. And. Now, sir, what cheer? Come, taste this broth I bring.
Dor. My grief is past, I feel no further sting.
L. And. Where is your dwarf? Why hath he left you, sir?
Dor. For some affairs; he is not travelled far.
L. And. If so you please, come in and take your rest.
Dor. Fear keeps awake a discontented breast.

(ll. 94-99)

In another context, Lady Anderson’s invitation might sound seductive; here it resembles the professional solicitude of a hospital nurse.

In V.v, Nano is again present and forces Dorothea to reveal her identity by offering to wager with Lady Anderson that “My master here will prove a married wife” (l. 21). Blushing but relieved, Dorothea verifies Nano's claim, while Lady Anderson, deeply stung, modulates from anger to shame and does so not in asides or soliloquy but in conversation with Nano and Dorothea:

L. And. Deceitful beauty, hast thou scorned me so?
Nano. Nay, muse not, madam, for she tells you true.
L. And. Beauty bred love, and love hath bred my shame.
Nano. And women's faces work more wrongs than these;
Take comfort, madam, to cure your disease.
And yet she loves a man as well as you,
Only this difference, she cannot fancy too.
L. And. Blush, grieve, and die in thine insatiate lust!

(ll. 46-53)

Then, in response to Dorothea's offer of friendship, still referring to the queen as “my lord,” she expresses her continued love (“although not as I desired”), acknowledges her “false heart,” and asks “pardon [of her] most gracious princess” (ll. 56-60). These rapid transitions skate quickly over Lady Anderson's complicated emotional states. Her reactions result from her having made amorous advances toward a character she has discovered to be of her own sex, a situation inversely reflected in the fact that both actors were male, as Dorothea's cross-gender disguise would have reminded the audience.

SHAKESPEARE’S STAGING OF INTIMACY BETWEEN WOMEN: VIOLA AND OLIVIA

In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare puts greater pressure on the relationship between mistress and female page than either Lyly or Greene had done. In his earlier disguised-heroine plays, he did not allow any of his female pages to play intimate scenes with female characters, even though the source for Two Gentlemen had explored just such a relationship. In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare keeps Olivia and Viola together alone on stage three times in order to dramatize Olivia's deepening passion.

Each of these encounters begins by announcing a private rendezvous. In their first meeting, I.v, Olivia finds herself intrigued by this stranger, who had been saucy at her gates but who now seems respectful, if resolute. Her interest piqued, Olivia dismisses her attendants: “Give us this place alone, we will hear this divinity” (ll. 218-19). Olivia's scorning of Orsino's suit, coupled with her pride and vanity, drive Cesario to declare what he would do “If I did love you in my master's flame” (l. 264), a declaration that for the first time in the scene diverts Olivia's attention away from her own role as the “cruel fair” and on to the person standing before her: “Why, what would you?” (l. 267). Cesario's answer, the energetic (and perhaps urgent) “willow cabin” speech, keeps Olivia's attention riveted on this audacious youth: “You might do much. / What is your parentage?” (ll. 276-77). In Olivia's next speech, she abruptly modulates from haughtiness toward Orsino to seductive charm toward Cesario:

Get you to your lord.
I cannot love him; let him send no more—
Unless (perchance) you come to me again
To tell me how he takes it.
This first exchange, ending with Olivia's realization that she has caught the "plague," compresses and dramatizes what Shakespeare's probable source, Riche's "Of Apolonius and Silla," reports took place only after Julina (Olivia) had "many tymes taken the gaze of this young youth." Julina is straightforward in revealing her feelings to the duke's emissary: "it is enough that you have saied for your maister; from henceforthe, either speake for your self or saie nothyng at all." In two other duet scenes, Shakespeare dramatized Olivia's growing infatuation, and her attempts both to conceal and expose enough of it to extract a reciprocal response from Cesario.

Privacy is again stressed in the second meeting, when Cesario returns to woo on Orsino's behalf. He asks to speak alone with Olivia, who sends the other characters off: “Let the garden door be shut, and leave me to my hearing” (III.i.92-93). Her next words imply a desire for even closer contact: “Give me your hand, sir.” She asks the servant’s name but becomes angry when Cesario reopens Orsino's courtship, and then—as tactfully as she can—points out that she has virtually thrown herself at Cesario:

To one of your receiving

Enough is shown; a cypress, not a bosom,
Hides my heart.

(II. 119-21)

Unable to make Cesario acknowledge her feelings, let alone reciprocate them, Olivia orders him to leave but then abruptly orders him to “Stay!” (l. 137). In one of the most reflexive moments in the play, each character accuses the other of not being “what you are” (l. 139). In their first meeting, Cesario had denied being a “comedian” but admitted “I am not that I play” (I.v.184), alluding both to the female character and metatheatrically to the performer. Here the line is repeated in revised form—“I am not what I am” (l. 141)—and underscores both of those layers of identity, as well as seeming to point beyond them to more profound ontological realms. But the dialogue returns abruptly to the mimetic level with Olivia's wish that “you were as I would have you be” (l. 142), Viola's “contempt and anger” (l. 146), and Olivia's aside, followed by her formal Petrarchan declaration of passion in rhymed couplets:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honor, truth, and every thing,
I love thee so, that maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

(ll. 149-52)

In matched rhymed couplets, Cesario refuses to accept any woman's love, and the scene ends with one last plaintive appeal from Olivia—“Yet come again.” But the urgent command is retracted, seemingly restated in less imperious but passionate terms (“for thou perhaps mayst move”), until it is masked by the duplicitous hint of her receptivity to Orsino's suit (“The heart which now abhors, to like his love” [ll. 163-64]). Olivia's entreaty to a social inferior plus her sudden abandonment of her vow of mourning, however lightly held, is a sure sign that powerful forces of sexual attraction are stirring in her.

More than in any of the possible sources and analogues, the scene emphasizes the desperation of Olivia's wooing, however restrained by decorum, as well as stressing Viola's confused mixture of embarrassment and anger. An Italian dramatic treatment of the same source material, Gl’Ingannati, avoided such delicate feelings in favor of franker physicalization of the mistress's "insatiable lust" framed by coarse onstage commentary. In II.vi, the only duet scene between Isabella (Olivia) and Lelia (Viola) in her disguise as Fabio (Cesario), the lady reveals her attraction to the page by inviting him to “Come into the doorway a little” (2:308). She kisses
him, just offstage, according to two voyeuristic servants, after which Lelia returns to offer her own cynical and self-absorbed appraisal of the situation: “On the one hand I am having fun at the expense of her who believes me a man, on the other I should like to get out of this scrape” (2:309). Viola is never approached as directly as this, nor is she amused by Olivia's plight: “Poor lady, she were better love a dream” (III.ii.26). Instead of Isabella's advances and Lelia's mockery, Shakespeare offers Olivia's enthrallment by the mysterious servant, an enthrallment she barely checked by her upper-class self-restraint. Less physically explicit than Gl'Ingannati, Twelfth Night suggests deeper wells of sexual passion and adds Viola’s empathy with one she finds no less a victim of this bizarre triangle than herself and Orsino.

The third duet scene between Olivia and Cesario, embedded in III.iv, compresses their encounter into fifteen lines. Olivia does not need to demand privacy, as Fabian sees her coming with Cesario and warns Maria and Sir Toby to “give them way” (ll. 196-97). Jettisoning aristocratic reserve, Olivia complains that she has acted dishonorably in flinging herself at Cesario in order to bind him to her, while Cesario tries to make her empathize with Orsino's feelings of rejection so that he can renew Orsino's courtship. In each of these encounters, insistence on privacy leads one to expect physical intimacy, as in Gl'Ingannati, but Shakespeare dramatizes the emotional entanglements—Olivia's desire, vulnerability, and humiliation; Viola's bewilderment, irritation, and embarrassment. As in James the Fourth, the audience witnesses an intense interaction between two women, while the theatrical level involves the interaction of two male performers.15

MALE DISGUISE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF HETEROSEXUAL INTIMACY

Shakespeare's willingness to explore the problems of intimacy in scenes between a heroine in male disguise and the man she loves is all the more remarkable considering how few precedents he had to draw on in narrative or dramatic treatments of the material. In many narrative versions, particularly those in the chivalric tradition, the disguised heroine serves as faithful page or squire to her lover or husband. The emotional pressure of such proximity is rarely explored, even though she may sleep in the same room or bed, or on the same plot of ground, although Boccaccio and other writers of novelle develop the erotic possibilities of such scenes of intimacy.16

Until the Jacobean period, even when English playwrights dramatized moments of heterosexual intimacy, they rarely did so in scenes involving a heroine in male disguise, probably because of the reflexive power of the assumed male identity to call attention to the gender of the play-boy and so raise the kinds of anxieties alluded to by Gager and exorcised by Farrant in The Wars of Cyrus. Before Twelfth Night, stage heroines in male disguise are denied scenes of emotional intimacy with their husbands, lovers, or other men. Neronis, disguised as a page in Clyomon, meets her beloved, the title character, alone in the woods, but, as he too has concealed his identity, they fail to recognize each other. Once Dorothea, the heroine of James the Fourth, dons male disguise, her only private encounter with a man, the assassin Jacques, is violent but is not sexual. Once Julia and Portia don male disguise, they have no duet scenes with Proteus or Bassanio. As Ganymed, Rosalind has one such moment with Orlando, but, as was noted, it was broken off in part because it suggested more intensity of feeling than either of them wished.

When Italian dramatists brought the disguised heroine and her beloved onstage, they usually sought broad comic effects, just as they did when the disguised heroine is wooed by another woman. In Gl'Ingannati, for example, Flamminio (Orsino) tells Fabio (Cesario) that he once loved “one named Lelia who I have often wished to say is the very image of you” (2:303). But when Flamminio repudiates Lelia in another duet, he fails to grasp the significance of the page's visible reaction:

Flamm. You have lost your colour. Go home; have a hot cloth on your chest and a rub behind the shoulders. … What strange accidents befall us men! … he seems to love me so much that if he were a woman I should think him lovesick for me.

(2:310)
Whereas the author of *Gl'Ingannati* stresses the comic effects of Flamminio's inability to see through Lelia's disguise, Shakespeare achieves quite different effects in *Twelfth Night*, in part because he stresses the female page's femininity rather than her boyishness. Alexander Leggatt observes that such stress on the female page's femininity is unusual: “Normally, when another character describes one of these disguised heroines, the emphasis is on the pert boyishness one imagines as a quality of the boy actor himself.” Viola is also less self-assertive than Julia, Portia, or Rosalind. Although she initially displays a brisk resolve to take control of her life, as the play unfolds she feels herself trapped by events she cannot subdue to her will, and she soon throws herself on the mercy of Time to untangle the knot that is too hard for her to untie.

The circumstances of Viola's disguising also accentuate her relative helplessness. The other three heroines arrange their disguisings. Viola's depends on the cooperation of the captain, and she sees in male disguise no possibilities for parodying male folly. By the end of II.ii, she regards “disguise” as “a wickedness / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much” (ll. 27-28). Neither a doctor of law nor the saucy lackey, Viola instructs the captain to “present me as an eunuch” (I.ii.56).

Viola is also more isolated than Shakespeare's other heroines in male disguise. Her confidant, the captain, never returns after his initial appearance, leaving her with no Celia or Nerissa on stage through whom she can activate her identity as a woman. She therefore speaks in riddles to the other characters—“I am not that I play” (I.v.184), “I am not what I am” (III.i.141), and “I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too” (II.iv.120-21), and she frequently turns to the audience for soliloquies and asides, as neither Portia nor Rosalind need to do. While these moments establish a strong rapport with the audience, they do not “mock or undermine others, as comic asides conventionally do,” but rather express her feelings of impotence and evoke pathos. She may take over the play, but she cannot control the plot.

Intimate moments between the disguised heroine and the man she loves are lightly sketched in Riche's “Of Apolonius and Silla,” where the page rises to the status of trusted valet: “Silvio [Cesario] pleased his maister so well that above all the reste of his servantes aboute hym he had the greatest credite, and the Duke put him moste in trust” (2:350-51). Leslie Hotson suggested that Shakespeare amplified and intensified Riche's narrative to make his Duke Orsino resemble Elizabeth's visitor of the same name from Italy. Whatever the reasons, Shakespeare deviated not only from his source, but also from contemporary theatrical treatments of the heroine in male disguise and from his own previous treatments of the motif. He placed Viola, disguised as Cesario, in two scenes (one of them divided into two subscenes) with Orsino; and he dramatized the duke's growing attachment to his new “male” servant.

These scenes necessarily included material Riche had already narrated in earlier episodes. Silla had fallen in love with the duke when he visited her father and travels by sea to the duke's court so that “she might againe take the vewe of her beloved Apolonius” (2:348). Viola, shipwrecked by fortune, recalls hearing of Orsino when the captain mentions him as the local ruler. By denying Viola any previous involvement with Orsino, Shakespeare had to dramatize her falling in love with him at some point after she had taken on the identity of Cesario.

In fact, Orsino's attraction to Cesario is presented first. In the opening lines of their first scene together, Liv, Valentine, one of Orsino's servants, paraphrases Riche's description of their rapidly developing intimacy:

> If the Duke continue these favors towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanc'd; he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.

(ll. 1-4)

He then dramatizes this relationship directly. Orsino's entering line, “Who saw Cesario, ho?” (l. 10), implies a sense of urgency, and his order to his other servants when he notes Cesario's presence—“Stand you awhile
aloof”—is a demand for privacy that emphasizes the intensity of the bond that has suddenly grown between them. His next lines make the point explicitly:

Thou know'st no less but all. I have unclasp'd
To thee the book even of my secret soul.

(ll. 12-14)

The text inscribed in this book is Orsino's self-induced love for Olivia, which Shakespeare parodies as Petrarchist narcissism. In this mode, Orsino three times urges Cesario to plead “the passion of my love” (l. 24) to Olivia, while each time the page tries to point out the futility of the errand. Cesario's appeal to his youth and immaturity calls forth from Orsino a protest that plays reflexively across the various layers of Viola's identity:

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man. Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

(ll. 29-34)

No less a victim than Olivia of Viola's cross-gender disguise, Orsino may without knowing it be responding to the woman beneath the disguise, but he takes Cesario to be what the audience knows the performer is—a pubescent male, or as Malvolio puts it, “not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy” (I.v.156-57).

As several critics observe, Cesario has the same effect on Orsino that he has on Olivia, drawing both characters out of self-absorption by riveting their attention onto himself. But whereas Olivia was attracted by the audacity of one who dared to be “saucy at my gates” (I.v.197), Orsino finds himself drawn to the feminine qualities of his page. By making Cesario appear both as an effeminate boy and as a saucy lackey, Shakespeare guided the boy actor toward a fresher treatment of the heroine's male disguise. Based on the view expressed by Rosalind that “boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color” (III.ii.414-15), Cesario's feminine male persona, like the image of the master-mistress of sonnet 20, must have made Orsino's attraction to him both more understandable and more troubling.

But unlike the speaker at the end of the sonnet, Orsino never explicitly dissociates himself from a sexual relationship with Cesario, and the actor can choose whether or not to make the duke self-conscious about his attachment to the youth. As elsewhere in the play, the text gives him several opportunities to shift his focus away from Cesario by redirecting the conversation to his “love” for Olivia. Here, the transition from intense focus on the page to the resumption of Petrarchist posturing may occur gradually through the next line and a half—“I know thy constellation is right apt / For this affair”—or may be abruptly signaled by the phrase that follows, an imperiously vague command to his servants—“Some four or five attend him”—which in turn is followed by more Petrarchist self-dramatization—“All, if you will, for I myself am best / When least in company” (Iiv.35-38). After a short exhortation to Cesario, he leaves, allowing Viola an aside, a rhymed couplet that ends the scene and that is the first time the audience knows she has fallen in love with her master: “Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife” (ll. 41-42).

Cesario and Orsino are once again in intimate conversation in II.iv, a scene that has no equivalent in Riche's tale. Riche simply announces that the duke has chosen Silvio [Cesario] “to bee his messenger to carrie the tokens and love letters to the Ladie Julina [Olivia].” In Twelfth Night, this second conversation is interrupted
by Feste's song and then resumed with even greater intensity. Both parts of the conversation, moreover, repeat
the rhythm of II.iv: they begin with Orsino's insistence on privacy with Cesario, they require him to oscillate
between his self-indulgent passion for Olivia and his troubled but intense absorption in Cesario, and they
present that absorption in terms that reflect and activate the spectators' sense of Viola's multiple identities and
hence of desire's possibilities.

In the first part of II.iv, Orsino sends Curio away to seek Feste and then summons Cesario to “Come hither,
boy” (l. 29).  But again, the message he offers in this private moment is in fact a self-indulgent gesture
toward himself as the model for “all true lovers” (l. 17), and again it is Viola/Cesario whose genuinely wistful
response to the music attracts his focus on to him/her rather than on his own alleged passions:

Duke. Thou dost speak masterly.
My life upon't, young though thou art, thine eye
Hath stay'd upon some favor that it loves.
Hath it not, boy?
Vio. A little, by your favor.
Duke. What kind of woman is't?
Vio. Of your complexion.
Duke. She is not worth thee then. What years, i'faith?
Vio. About your years, my lord.
Duke. Too old, by heaven. Let still the woman take
An elder than herself.

(ll. 22-30)

Orsino's interest in Cesario's melancholy response to the music initiates an inquiry into the experience that
underlies it. Dale Priest notes how that experience reaches out to implicate Orsino himself, as when Cesario
implies to Orsino that the “favor” that his eye lingers lovingly upon is the duke's countenance. Cesario's
concentration on Orsino's complexion and years causes the duke to assume an avuncular tone, as if he is
evading or resisting this deepening involvement with this mysterious creature “That can sing both high and
low” (II.iii.40-41).

After Feste's song, Orsino again demands to be left alone with his page: “Let all the rest give place” (II.iv.79).
Once more, his first words are a Petrarchist exhortation to “get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty” (l. 80),
which lead again to an insistence on the preciousness of his feelings:

Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

(ll. 101-3)

Viola's incomplete response “but I know—” may be deliberately unfinished or broken off by Orsino. The
choice determines whether his question, “What dost thou know?” (l. 104) indicates rapt curiosity or scornful
dismissal. Viola's next speech introduces herself in thinly veiled form:

My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

(ll. 107-9)

As if enchanted, Orsino is drawn further into the story: “What's her history?” Viola tells how “she pin'd in
thought” and how “she sate like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief” (ll. 109, 112, 114-15). Like
Rosalind, she breaks the spell herself by abruptly altering her tone, speaking as Cesario, himself “in standing water, between boy and man” (I.v.159), on behalf of “we men.” But Orsino remains spellbound: “But died thy sister of her love, my boy?” Viola's riddling answer alludes to her layered genders:

I am all the daughters of my father's house
And all the brothers too—and yet I know not.

(II.iv.119-21)

She then once more assumes the brisk tones of Cesario—“Sir, shall I to this lady?”—and this time Orsino follows her lead, ending the scene by resuming his Petrarchist guise:

To her in haste; give her this jewel; say
My love can give no place, bide no denay [sic].

(II.iv.221-24)

In the modern theater, the audience's knowledge of Cesario's identity, which gives it the advantage of dramatic irony over Orsino in these duet scenes, is reinforced by the “theatrical irony” of the presence of a female performer in the role of the disguised heroine. Orsino found Cesario “semblative [of] a woman's part” (I.iv.34), but his failure to perceive Viola's female presence often makes him a more absurd figure than he was originally. On the Elizabethan stage, however, where Viola's assumption of male disguise blended with the play-boy's resumption of male identity, Orsino was protected from such ridicule. But the play then generated anxiety about homoerotic intimacy at the metatheatrical level, between an adult male actor and one of the troupe's apprentices.

Similar anxieties were evoked at its mimetic level by Antonio's selfless and reckless passion for Sebastian, which Shakespeare added to the material he adapted from Riche's tale. Antonio echoes Orsino's eroticized friendship with Cesario, and for some spectators probably evoked the homoeroticism that enemies of the stage associated with the playhouse. Although most critics claim that Antonio, like his namesake in The Merchant of Venice, loses his friend to marriage, enabling the play to create “a context in which sexual ambiguity presages fulfillment rather than damnation,” Joseph Pequigney argues that Sebastian never casts off Antonio's love and that a homosexual liaison is consistent with “the diverse bisexual fictions that make up Twelfth Night,” as well as an even more explicit replication of alleged homoeroticism within the acting company.  

TWELFTH NIGHT: THE FINAL SCENE

The intimate scenes between Orsino and Viola contrast sharply with the crowded, bustling farce of the low-comic scenes, as Jean Howard has observed in her study of the play's varying tonalities. They also help to prepare the spectator for the violence of Orsino's outburst when he hears that Cesario has married Olivia. That outburst was anticipated by Antonio's reaction to Sebastian's evident duplicity, in which he compared “that most ingrateful boy” to “a witchcraft” (V.i.76-77). The strength of Orsino's outrage indicates a wound deeper than his alleged affection for Olivia. When she enters, he observes her presence (instead of greeting her) in a single line of Petrarchan cliché, “Here comes the Countess, now heaven walks on earth” (V.i.97). Abruptly resuming his interrogation of Antonio, he then fails to answer her direct question addressed to him (“What would my lord … ?” [l. 101]), a failure that would be either the result or the cause of her immediately turning to Cesario. His first direct address to her in the play, “Gracious Olivia—” (l. 105) either runs out of steam or is cut short by Olivia. By contrast, his discovery of Cesario's apparent betrayal of him elicits an explosion of homicidal vengefulness nominally addressed to Olivia but in fact aimed primarily at his page: “Why should I not (had I the heart to do it), … Kill what I
love?” (ll. 117-28). While Olivia remains the “marble-breasted tyrant” she has always been in his Petrarchist fantasy, Cesario, whom he tendered dearly, has shocked him with an act of betrayal. He then turns to the page, whom he orders to the slaughter:

Come, boy, with me, my thoughts are ripe in mischief.
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

(ll. 129-31)

Viola/Cesario's reply, matching Orsino's concluding couplet, meets the duke's homicidal threats with a martyr's eagerness:

And I most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.

(ll. 132-33)

Turning to Olivia, the page explains himself in couplets that are the most direct sentiments Viola has uttered about Orsino since the brief soliloquy following their first meeting:

More than I love these eyes, more than my life,
More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife.

(ll. 134-36)

Accentuated by rhyme, these impassioned speeches articulate in public the nature of the relationship Orsino and Viola have played out in and between the lines of their intimate scenes together. As John Russell Brown has noted, Orsino's agonized sense of betrayal arises more from the loss of Cesario than from the loss of Olivia, a reaction that permits the audience to accept his love for Viola when her true sex is revealed.30

Even after that revelation, Orsino twice refers to her as if she were male. On the theatrical level she still was and always would be male, but on another level Orsino wants to establish continuity with their earlier moments of intimacy:

Duke. Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.
Vio. And all those sayings will I over swear,
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orbed continent the fire
That severs day from night.
Duke. Give me thy hand,
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.

(V.i.267-73)

A few lines later, he speaks to her in her female identity, and then offers his own hand (“Here is my hand”) to “your master's mistress” (ll. 325-26). Orsino ends the scene by announcing that “a solemn combination shall be made / Of our dear souls” (ll. 383-84) and turns once more to his beloved:

For so you shall be while you are a man;
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

(ll. 385-88)

Although using the page's name may represent a wish to retain the relationship with his male servant, the final couplet restates the desire to see Viola dressed “in her woman's weeds” and can therefore define Orsino’s final attitude more as impatience or relief than as uncertainty or disappointment about her gender.  

Whether Viola removes a hat or releases bound-up hair, like Julia, she remains in male attire despite her resumption of female identity and the performer’s resumption of whatever mannerisms, if any in this case, were used to signify it. Her page's apparel may in fact now accentuate her feminine identity, but Orsino's comment on the gender specificity of her clothing and his use of the name Cesario, whatever his own attitude, underscored the presence of the boy actor for the audience.

Such reflexive allusion to the actor's maleness generated emotional crosscurrents counter to the play's drive toward heterosexual union. This prospect is always potentially present in the world of the playhouse when heterosexual intimacy is portrayed by an all-male company, but usually remains dormant unless something reflexive—like continued verbal reference to the abandoned but still visible cross-gender disguise—calls attention to the principle of layers of gender identity and so keeps spectators alert to all of the layers involved.

In modern productions, the allusions to Viola's male identity are comic rather than reflexive or metatheatrical, and the marriages that end the play seem “natural”; that is, the genders of the characters match those of the performers. But in the original production, these final allusions to the male component of Viola's identity actually underscored the existence of another level of pretense, in which the two brides-to-be in the play were young male actors. Calling attention to that pretense, which the audience had thought it had agreed to accept without question, now threatened to undercut the conventional ending in heterosexual union. For some spectators, the play's exposure of its own artificiality might even have implied another and very different ending based on the gender of the actors, and perhaps on suspicions that boy actors served as catamites within all-male companies. For other spectators, the stress on the play-boy's presence simply demonstrated with more explicitness than usual what they “always knew” a play to be—a theatrical illusion they had paid to see and could see again, along with others like it, whenever they sought diversion from “the wind and the rain.”

In As You Like It, a similar movement toward the world of the playhouse, which also stresses the gender of the boy actor, is delayed until the epilogue. In Twelfth Night, by contrast, Viola remains in male attire, is still referred to as “boy” by Orsino—either out of habit or with self-conscious irony or possibly both, seriatim. In the absence of an epilogue, the audience's final impression of Viola includes her still contending with disguise as “a wickedness.” G. K. Hunter's summation of the general differences between the heroines also applies to the boy actresses in their final appearances: “Rosalind is able to use her disguise as a genuine and joyous extension of her personality; Viola suffers constriction and discomfiture in her role.” Hunter may be right about Viola, but not about the performer, for in the absence of sequential off-layering, the male garb proclaims the simultaneous presence of all three layers of identity. The movement from play to playhouse negotiated by the epilogue in As You Like It occurs in Twelfth Night in Feste's final song. Alone onstage, Feste sings a kind of autobiographical sketch, tracing a few stages in a life cycle to suggest that pain and suffering are as inevitable and relentless as the “rain it raineth every day,” and have been so since “the world begun” (V.i.405). With its surprisingly self-referential third line—“But that's all one, our play is done”—the last stanza sets the song's darker vision in the context of yet another vision—one that redefines the play just performed as a compassionate even if commercial effort to provide solace for the gloominess of the human condition: “And we'll strive to please you every day.”

FEMALE PAGES AND SENSATIONALIZED INTIMACY: FOUR VARIATIONS
Most other English dramatists who took up the heroine in male disguise followed *James the Fourth* rather than *Twelfth Night* in that female pages appear in intimate scenes only with female characters. Within the world of the play there is never any suggestion of lesbianism (evidently too threatening or incredible an idea for the commercial stage of the period), so that the pursuing women are simply foolishly mistaken about the object of their affections. Unlike Shakespeare, other English dramatists not only ridicule the lady's obsessive infatuation with the shy page, but frequently heighten the farcical effects by multiplication and “surprise,” as well as by coarsening the tone of intimate scenes. Four of these plays rework intimate moments or relationships found in *Twelfth Night*.

**RAM ALLEY**

Lording Barry's *Ram Alley* (King's Revels, 1607-8), is one of the first plays to multiply intimate moments by having the female page interact with more than one female character. The heroine, Constantia, who has donned male attire to follow the man she loves, enters his service as a page and beholds him wooing the wealthy Widow Taffeta. Like Orsino, Boutcher does not pursue his intended with genuine fervor, but instead of serving as his emissary, as Viola does, the page, presumably adopting a man-about-town air, advises him to approach the mistress by way of her servant, “for you must know / These waiting-maids are to their mistresses / Like porches unto doors: you pass the one / Before you can have entrance at the other.” The equivalent in *Twelfth Night* would be to have a suavely urbane Cesario urge Orsino to make love to Maria in order to obtain Olivia. The page recoils, however, when the Maria figure, of course depicted by another play-boy, attempts to seduce him:

A pretty knave, i'faith! Come home tonight,  
Shalt have a posset and candi'd eringoes,  
A bed if need be too. I love a life  
To play with such baboons as thou.

(ll. 817-20)

The bawdy tone of these passages typifies the coarseness of the play. For example, Barry makes Constantia fear not that she will be shamed if discovered wearing male attire but that her own sexual excitement at seeing male apparel will give her away:

Lord, how my feminine blood stirs at the sight  
Of these same breeches! Methinks this codpiece  
Should betray me.

(ll. 7-9)

Writing for a minor boy company when the vogue for children's troupes was ending, Barry burlesqued the conventions of cross-gender disguise by turning tactful scenes of intimacy into sexual farce.

**NO WIT, NO HELP LIKE A WOMAN'S**

For the main plot of *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (Lady Elizabeth's? c. 1611), Middleton adapted an Italian academic comedy, Porta's *La Sorella*, but the subplot, which is entirely his invention, is a farcical reworking of the Viola-Olivia relationship in *Twelfth Night*. It is also a female version of his own early city comedies, in which a “prodigal daughter,” Kate Low-water, outwits a greedy widow, Lady Goldenfleece, who, together with her late husband, had bilked Kate and her husband of their estate. Early in this play, Kate enters the widow's house disguised as “a gallant gentleman, her husband like a serving-man after her” (II.i.169). As a swaggering gallant, Kate drives away the rival suitors and hopes to regain her property by winning the widow's heart. The plan goes beyond the verbal audacity with which Viola unintentionally
arouses Olivia's love. Kate will “put her to't, i'faith” (II.iii.94), that is, gain the widow's heart by all but conquering her body. Kate instructs her husband to stand by, ostensibly to rescue the widow from rape but really to prevent the disclosing of Kate's gender. But the widow is taken with Kate's exhibition of macho bravado and declares that she will marry this “beardless youth”: “with this kiss / I choose him for my husband” (ll. 186-87). As in *Twelfth Night*, a twin brother, split off from the heroine, arrives to provide a match for the widow and to facilitate Kate's undisguising: “You can but put me to my book, sweet brother, / And I've my neck-verse perfect, here and here” (ll. 343-44). Exactly where the performer locates his “neck-verse” is not clear from the text. The editor of the Regents edition here adds a stage direction, “Removes her disguise, revealing her bosom,” along with a note to the effect that “Mistress Low-water's neck-verse … is her breasts” (125), without explaining how this effect might have been created by a young male actor.

Far coarser than Shakespeare's duets between Cesario and Olivia, Middleton here achieves broad comic effects: one play-boy oscillates between Kate's feminine modesty and a brazen male persona, while the other depicts the tension between the widow's feigned coyness and her genuine sexual excitement. Kate's impersonation of a brash youth evokes the presence of both male performers, again articulating the separate layers of gender identity in the enactment of both roles, highlighting the artistry required to negotiate them, and exaggerating the well-worn roles of cheeky female page and lusty, avaricious widow into opportunities for theatrical virtuosity.

**ANYTHING FOR A QUIET LIFE**

Further elaboration of situations first found in *Twelfth Night* is illustrated by *Anything for A Quiet Life* (1619), where Middleton used an intimate scene between mistress and page in a drastically abbreviated subplot. To make the page's revelation of gender a surprise to the audience, or at least to cloud it in uncertainty, Middleton does not reveal that Selenger, Lord Beaufort's servant, is Mistress George Cressingham.

Selenger, who is pursued by Mistress Knavesby, is a shy rather than a saucy version of the page, a mere pawn of the clever wench in control of the intrigue. Unlike Olivia, who is truly infatuated with Cesario, Mistress Knavesby is merely using the page to discourage Lord Beaufort from trying to seduce her. She literally entangles Selenger in her intrigue by asking the page to hold a skein of yarn for her to unwind and then grasping it in such a way as to hold him her “prisoner”:

```
for, look you, you are mine now, my captive manacled, I have your hands in bondage.
```

(III.i.42-44)

Both characters use the stage business as a conceit for sexual entrapment and resistance that threatens at one point to become more than a conceit:

```
Mis. G. Cres. ... pray you, release me now.
Mis. Kna. I could kiss you now, spite of your teeth, if it please me.
Mis. G. Cres. But you could not, for I could bite you with the spite of my teeth, if it pleases me.
```

(ll. 47-51)

They spar until Lord Beaufort enters, seeking his prey. He takes in the sight with exquisite politesse, simply observing that “you are busy” (l. 85), and offers to withdraw. Mistress Knavesby frees her captive, who leaves with a smutty masculine retort: “I'll ne'er give both my hands at once again to a woman's command; I'll put one finger in a hole rather” (ll. 92-93).
In the final scene, when Beaufort tells Knavesby that his wife has slept with the page, Mistress Knavesby confesses that “we lay together in bed” (V.ii.218), but Middleton then directs the audience's attention to the presence of “Mistress George Cressingham in female attire” (l. 214), to use the words of the stage direction. The revelation may or may not have surprised the audience, but her undisguising was either cut from the text or, given the audience's familiarity with the motif, could have been assumed to take place offstage.

A MAD COUPLE WELL MATCHED

Richard Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Matched* (Beeston's Boys? 1636?) involves the heroine in male disguise with three different women. Although Brome never informs the audience that “this beardless Bellamy” is a woman, enough hints are furnished to arouse suspicion. In a scene reminiscent of the first meeting between Olivia and Viola, a citizen's wife named Alicia Saleware is the first woman to fall for Bellamy. She receives this “handsome youth,” an emissary of his employer, Lord Lovely, willfully misinterprets his remarks, kisses him, and fawns over him. In a subsequent scene, Lady Thrivewell, who has also fallen for young Bellamy, is seen in intimate conversation with the page. Mistress Crosstill, a widow, is the third woman to fall for Bellamy and tries to woo him even at the same time she herself is being wooed by a widow-hunting gallant.

Toward the end of the play, her brother, Fitzgerald, suddenly appears, demanding that Lord Lovely produce his sister Amy, who left home two years ago to attend his Lordship. Bellamy then enters “in a woman's habit” and explains that she adopted “a masculine boldness” to be near the man she loved but feared she could never marry (V.ii.246-47). Unlike Orsino, Lovely did not find himself attracted to Bellamy, but he is as quick as the duke of Illyria was to propose to his former page.

MALE HOMOSEXUALITY SENSATIONALIZED: SHIRLEY'S THE GRATEFUL SERVANT

Not until Shirley's *The Grateful Servant* (Queen Henrietta's, 1629) did another playwright explore the anxieties that an Orsino might feel about his attraction to his page. To stress the point, Shirley made the audience wait until IV.iii for explicit revelation of the gender of the page, a delicate lad named Dulcino, who attracted not one but two adult males and appeared in duet scenes with each of them.

The first of these Orsino figures is Foscari, whom the page serves out of gratitude for having been “rescued … from the Banditti.” Although Foscari claims to love Cleona, he is so strongly attached to Dulcino, this “sweet-faced thing, … [with whom] some ladies / Might change their beauties” (21). In a scene that recalls Orsino's avuncular advice about women to Cesario, Foscari warns Dulcino against the wiles of “some wanton lady [who] hath beheld thy face” (19), and, fearing that this “boy, so young and beautiful, / [is] apt to be seduced” by some court lady, he promotes him from his servant to “my companion” (20). Dulcino carries Foscari's messages to Cleona, who never becomes infatuated with the messenger as Olivia does with Cesario, and Shirley even has Cleona's comic servant spy upon the lady and the page in order to keep their duet at the level of farce. When Foscari decides to take monastic vows, he insists that Dulcino accompany him. The page agrees and is later extricated from this plight not through the removal of disguise but through the intervention of Father Valentio, who recognizes him as Leonora, the missing princess of Milan.

The second Orsino figure is the duke of Savoy, who had fallen in love with Leonora from her picture and hoped to marry her, but hearing of her father's plans for another match half-heartedly decides to court Cleona, Foscari's beloved. While visiting Cleona, however, he first sees Dulcino and is love-struck by the sight: “What boy is that? … It is no common face” (31). Shirley points up the contrast between the duke's perfunctory wooing of Cleona and his excited discovery of Dulcino with an abrupt midline shift:

There is a virtuous magic in your eye,  
For wheresoe'er it casts a beam, it does  
Create a goodness; [to Cleona] you've a handsome boy.
In act III, when told that Cleona is ill, he first inquires for “the pretty boy I told thee of” before announcing that “we are resolv’d to comfort her” (50-51).

In the opening soliloquy of IV.ii, the duke tries to deny any sexual interest in the missing Dulcino but recognizes the nature of his “foolish passion”:

Our hot Italian doth affect these boys
For sin; I've no such flame, and yet methought
He did appear most lovely; nay, in his absence,
I cherish his idea; but I must
Exclude him while he hath but soft impression;
Being removed already in his person,
I lose him with less trouble.

(64)

Only in Dulcino's absence can the duke maintain a platonic attitude toward the page. Shakespeare hinted at such anxieties in Orsino but never allowed him to pine for Cesario so explicitly nor to express relief when the page he loves turns out to be a woman. Shirley's duke is more direct:

I'll do my heart that justice to proclaim
Thou mad'st a deep impression; as a boy
I loved thee too; for it could be no other,
But with a divine flame; fair Leonora,
Like to a perfect magnet, though enclos'd
Within an ivory box, through the white wall
Shot forth embracing virtue: now, oh now,
Our destinies are kind.

(90-91)

Foscari is astonished—“This is a mystery, Dulcino!”—but resumes his courtship of Cleona, the second choice to Dulcino of both men throughout the play. One almost wishes that Leonora's twin brother would wander on stage to provide a match for Foscari.

In *The Grateful Servant*, as in *Twelfth Night*, adult male characters feel themselves attracted to a shy and delicate page whom they discover to be a female character, played as always by a male actor. Although reflexive allusions to the performer's gender are, as we have seen, inherent in virtually any play with a cross-dressed heroine, these two plays, and some of the others surveyed in this chapter, are exceptional. Their uniqueness lies in their linking the intimacy between characters in the world of the play to possibilities of intimate homoerotic relations between performers in the world of the playhouse.

In Shakespeare's previous disguised-heroine plays, we noted fleeting glances at male homoerotic behavior involving play-boys as cross-dressed female characters, as in the use of the name Ganymed, or in Nerrisa's offstage success while disguised as a clerk in obtaining Gratiano's ring. Given the allegations that play-boys were catamites, such glancing allusions must have produced a modicum of resonance. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare brought these extradramatic resonances more fully into the world of the play than he had in previous works, and he was followed in this regard, albeit in different ways, by such dramatists as Barry, Middleton, and Brome. Shirley went further than Shakespeare by doubling the Orsino figure and by making one of the two worry about his sexual inclinations, thus articulating what in *Twelfth Night* had been confined to a possible subtext of the master-page relationship.
It was at least seven years before Shakespeare wrote another play with a heroine in male disguise, and that work, *Cymbeline*, moved in yet another direction. There the short-lived relationship between eroticized female page and master, that is, between Fidele and the Roman general, Lucius, is treated more explicitly than in the plays before *Twelfth Night*, even if it has less structural and thematic centrality than the mutual infatuation between Cesario and Orsino.

**Notes**

1. For discussions of the date of *Twelfth Night*, see the introductions by Elizabeth Story Donno, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-3; and J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, eds. (London: Methuen, 1975), xxvi-xxxv.

2. Performers too feel anxiety when performing scenes that involve or suggest sexual intimacy. In an interview with Leslie Bennetts published in *New York Times*, November 17, 1987, C 11, both Kenneth Welsh and Kathy Bates describe anxieties they felt when performing in Terrence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, “a two-character play which begins in Frankie's bed with the frenzied sounds of lovemaking, requiring some discreetly handled nudity.” Mr. Welsh attributed his fear to the fact that “the play demands so much intimacy, not only physical but emotional,” while Ms. Bates ascribed her initial reluctance to take the role to “fear of intimacy … a big one for me.”


5. John G. B. Streett, “Some Aspects of the Influence of the Boy-Actress Convention on the Plays of Shakespeare and Some of His Contemporary Dramatists” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford, 1973), chap. 3. Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, 107-8, suggests commercial troupes were more willing than academic troupes to involve female characters in explicitly sexual stage business because the roles were played by “full time professional apprentices, not gentlemanly youths dragooned into acting just once or twice in their lives.”


7. Pryme, *Histrio-Mastix*, 386, 166. The general problem of equipping male actors to display female breasts is discussed by June Schlueuter, “‘Stuffed, as they say, with honorable parts’: Female Breasts on the English Renaissance Stage,” *ShY* 3 (1992): 117-42. She also cites the ending of John Day's *Law Tricks* (Queen's Revels, c. 1604), ed. John Crow, Malone Society Reprints 89 (London: Malone Society, 1949 [1950]), V.ii, where a female character's “bosome bare” (l. 2168) is supposedly exposed to the view of another character, but not necessarily of the audience, to verify her female identity. (I am grateful to Alan Dessen for supplying both Schlueuter and me with this example.) There are also examples of stage business involving “petting”: in Fletcher's *Love's Pilgrimage*, a woman nursing the wounds of a lecherous man pretending to have been injured in battle, asks him, “What do you mean, why do you kisse my breasts?” (IV.iii.62); in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1613-22), ed. Roma Gill (London: Ernest Benn, 1968), the duke tells Bianca that he can “feel thy breast shake like a turtle panting / Under a loving hand that makes much on't” (II.ii.322-23); in Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass*, the stage direction describes Wittipol's “playing with her [Mrs. Fitzdottrell's] paps” (II.vi.70).

edition.


11. Sanders, ed., *James the Fourth*, xlv; and Berry, *Shakespeare's Comic Rites*, 82.


15. Clifford Leech, “*Twelfth Night* and *Shakespearian Comedy*” (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 50, has stressed the affective implications of the audience's awareness of the performers' gender in the scenes between the two boy heroines: “we must remember that in a modern production the use of actresses for the women's parts materially lessens the disturbing quality.” Some modern spectators of either gender might disagree. For example, Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 25-26, speculates on the detachment of women spectators from scenes of intimacy between female characters played by female impersonators. Matthew H. Wikander, “As Secret as Maidenhead: The Profession of the Boy-Actress in *Twelfth Night*,” *CompD* 20 (1986-87): 352, suggests still another dimension: “What in the first exchanges between Olivia and Viola seems sexual rivalry might … also be construed as professional rivalry, for both ‘ladies’ enjoy the same marginal status in the company of which they are apprentice members.”


18. J. Dennis Huston, “‘When I Came to Man's Estate’: *Twelfth Night* and Problems of Identity,” *MLQ* 33 (1972): 275, notes that despite this line Cesario is always described as a page and never as a eunuch.


22. Joseph Pequigney, *Such Is My Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 30-41, regards sonnet 20 as an attempt by the speaker to deny what he is also in the process of acknowledging as homoerotic attraction.

23. As Wikander observes, “As Secret as Maidenhead,” 350, activating the audience's awareness of the gender of the boy actress threatens to make “Orsino's interest in Viola's mouth and throat … not merely bawdy but obscene.” Jan Kott, “Shakespeare's Bitter Arcadia,” in *Shakespeare Our
Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborski, 2d ed. (London: Methuen, 1967), 202ff., reads Orsino's description of Cesario as that of an "ephebe"—what Jardine, Still Harping, 17, quoting the opening lines of Marlowe's and Nashe's Dido (Chapel Children, c. 1586), calls a "female wanton boy." In a more recent work, "Twins and Travesties: Gender, Dependency, and Sexual Availability in Twelfth Night," in E.P., 27-38, Jardine modifies her views significantly by stressing the real or presumed sexual availability of young household servants of either sex, but in my view she again somewhat overstates her case: "Eroticism, in the early modern period, is not gender-specific, is not grounded in the sex of the possibly 'submissive' partner, but is an expectation of that very submissiveness" (34).

24. Alexander Pope's insertion at this point of a stage direction, "Exit Curio," makes sense of "Enter Curio and others" two dozen lines later.

25. Priest, "Shakespeare's Subjunctive Leads," 38. See OED for the range of meanings of "favor," which also includes trinket, beauty, permission, and graciousness, as well as face.


29. Taylor, To Analyze Delight, 93, finds Orsino's agony deepened by allusions to Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac, as well as by the folio punctuation of two other passages.


33. Adelman, "Male Bonding," 85-90, sees the addresses to Viola as if she were male as evidence of Orsino's wish for union with an androgynous figure, either to legitimize his bisexuality or to integrate love and friendship. Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, 267, laments Viola's loss of the androgyne's freedom.


36. Lording Barry, Ram Alley, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Nottingham: Nottingham Drama Texts, 1981), 5, II. 1-6. All references to the play are to this edition and are cited in the text.

37. For the history of the Children of the King's Revels, see Harold N. Hillebrand, The Child Actors (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1926), 220-36.

38. The date is established by Johnson, ed., No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's, xi-xiii. All references to the play are to this edition and are cited in the text. On the source, see D. J. Gordon, "Middleton's No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's and Della Porta's La Sorella," RES 17 (1941): 413-14; and Rowe, Thomas Middleton, 114-30.

The kind of comedy that was practiced by Shakespeare has repeatedly challenged definition. Though his last comedies have been retrospectively classified as romances, most of their components are equally characteristic of his earlier ones: love, adventure, coincidence, recognition, and occasional pathos. The problem is not simplified by the circumstance that his greatest comic character, Falstaff, was far more impressive in two histories than he is in The Merry Wives of Windsor. Traditional definitions of the comic somehow fail to hit the Shakespearean mark, perhaps because they tend to emphasize the spectatorial attitude of ridicule. Shakespeare’s attitude is more participatory; its emphasis falls upon playfulness, man at play, the esthetic principle that Johan Huizinga has so brilliantly illuminated in his historico-cultural study, Homo Ludens. Whereas we may laugh at Ben Jonson’s characters, we generally laugh with Shakespeare’s; indeed, if we begin by laughing at Falstaff or the clowns, we end by laughing with them at ourselves; semantically speaking, they are therefore not ridiculous but ludicrous. The critical approach that best succeeds in catching this spirit, it would seem to me, is that of C. L. Barber in Shakespeare's Festive Comedy. That the same approach can be applied to Plautus, as Erich Segal has convincingly demonstrated in his book Roman Laughter, suggests that “the Saturnalian pattern” may well be universal. Twelfth Night very appropriately marks the culmination of Professor Barber’s argument. Since the play is so rich and the argument so fertile, I am tempted to add a few notes here, encouraged by his gracious recollection that our personal dialogue on comedy has extended over many years.

Any speculation about Twelfth Night might start with its alternative title, which has no counterpart among the other plays in the First Folio. The subtitle What You Will echoes the common and casual phrase that Olivia uses at one point in addressing Malvolio (I.v.109); it would later be used as a title by John Marston; and the German version is simply entitled Was ihn wollt. It is not equivalent to As You Like It, Bernard Shaw would argue; the latter means “this is the sort of play you would like”; the former means “it doesn’t really matter what you call this play.” To designate it by the seasonal dating would have touched off some associations, especially since Twelfth Night signaled the grand finale to the Christmas entertainment at Queen Elizabeth’s court, and sometimes featured a performance by Shakespeare’s company. But the English term seems relatively vague, when contrasted with the overtones of the French and Italian translations. La Nuit des Rois almost seems to promise a visitation of the Magi; Shakespeare anticlimatically gives us, instead, the iconological joke about “We Three” and a clownish snatch of song from Sir Toby, “Three merry men be we” (II.iii.17, 76-7). La Notte dell’Epifania may also hold theological—or at least, in Joycean terms, psychological—connotations. Shakespeare merely seems concerned to promise his audience a pleasant surprise by evoking a winter holiday, even as he did with the opposite season in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Festivals are the matrices of drama, after all, and that “holiday humor” in which the transvested Rosalind invites Orlando to rehearse his wooing sets the prevalent mood for Shakespearean comedy (As You Like It, IV.i.69).

Some of Shakespeare’s other comedies have titles so broadly general that they could be interchanged without much loss of meaning: The Comedy of Errors, Much Ado About Nothing, All’s Well That Ends Well. Twelfth Night, which has figured more prominently in the repertory than most of the others, has frequently been cited by concrete reference to its most memorable characterization. Thus Charles I entitled it “Malvolio” in his inscribed copy of the Second Folio, and a court production for James I was entered into the records under that name. As it happens, five of the other parts in the play are actually longer than Malvolio’s: in order of length,
Sir Toby's, Viola's, Olivia's, Feste's, and even Sir Andrew's. Yet stage history has gradually made it clear that, with slightly less than ten per cent of the lines, this has come to be regarded as the stellar role. The other roles I have listed offer varied opportunities to actors and actresses, and Viola's embodies the special attraction of the hoydenish heroine in tights. That advantage is somewhat lessened by the complication of having to be passed off as identical with her unexpected twin brother Sebastian. Hence the plot "wants credibility," as Dr. Johnson put it, though our incredulity is all but disarmed by the Pirandellian comment of Fabian: "If this were play'd upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (III.iv.127-8). Henry Irving, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and many other stars have absurdly twinkled in the part of Malvolio. There may be a latent significance in the fact that the leading actor of the Restoration, Thomas Betterton, played the adversary role of Sir Toby Belch.

The impression registered in the diary of John Manningham, who had attended a performance at the Middle Temple in 1602, is particularly significant:

At our feast wee had a play called "Twelue Night, or What You Will", much like the Commedy of Errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practise in it to make the Steward beleeeve his Lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his aparaille, &c., and then when he came to practise making him beleeeue they tooke him to be mad.

It is true that Shakespeare's adaptation from Plautus had likewise dealt with a pair of twins divided by shipwreck and reunited after the contretemps of mistaken identity. Manningham might also have mentioned The Two Gentlemen of Verona, where the heroine disguises herself as a page so that she may serve the man she loves. And Manningham's Italian cross-reference has led the source-hunters to various plays and novelle which are quite analogous to the main plot. But the episode he singles out for praise does not figure in any of them. Malvolio, with no established source behind him, must be reckoned as one of Shakespeare's originals. Efforts to discern an actual prototype in the court gossip about Sir William Knollys, who was Comptroller to Her Majesty's Household, have carried little conviction. Nor is there much topical implication in Maria's qualified epithet, "a kind of puritan," which she herself immediately rejects in favor of "timepleaser" and "affectioned ass" (II.iii.140, 148). There is not very much in common between Jonson's Ananias or Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and this Italianate upstart who aspires to "be proud" and "read politic authors" (II.v.161). He is undoubtedly puritanical in the psychological sense; as Professor Barber perceptively comments, "he is like a Puritan because he is hostile to holiday." William Archer considered him more of a Philistine than a Puritan, more to be approached as a sequence of "comic effects" than as "a consistent, closely-observed type," and therefore somewhat opaquey presented as a personality. "He has no sense of humour," so Archer summed it up, "—that is the head and front of his offending."

In a formal as well as a functional manner, he is thus an intruder into the play. Shakespeare's plot, as its forerunners had shown, could have got along without him. Olivia already had two suitors to be rejected, plus the masculine twin who was ready to replace his sister as the object of Olivia's choice. The lovesick Duke Orsino, after the fiasco of his vicarious courtship, could submit no less quickly and rather more gracefully than she to this sudden change of partners. The odd-man out, Sir Andrew, might have weakly borne the full onus of the underplot, insofar as it burlesques the main plot and has its agor in the reluctant duel. Music sets the keynote at the beginning, at the conclusion, and throughout. Illyria would almost seem to be the idyllic setting for an operetta. Yet, despite the roistering-sorts of melody and the high-kicking capers of the roisterers, the cadence often has a dying fall. "O mistress mine" is balanced against "Come away, death," and the singer Feste—whom G. L. Kittredge called "the merriest of Shakespeare's fools"—shares his concluding refrain with the tragic Fool of King Lear: "For the rain it raineth every day" (II.iii.39ff; iv.51ff.; V.i.392; cf. King Lear, III.ii.77). Even in the sunniest of Shakespeare's comedies, there are shadows now and then, and it is worth remembering that Twelfth Night was probably conceived in the same year as Hamlet. The aura of
melancholy emanates from Olivia's household, but it extends to Orsino's palace because of his unwelcome suit. Widow-like, the veiled Olivia mourns her dead brother; Viola, the go-between, though she depicts herself as the mourning figure of “Patience on a monument,” cherishes justified hopes for her own brother lost at sea (II.iv.114).

Together, these adventurous siblings are destined to dispel the shade that has overcast the Illyrian horizon. Olivia's house of mourning should have been, and will again become, a house of mirth—to reverse the language of Ecclesiastes. Toward the end her kinsman, Sir Toby Belch, and his gregarious crew of what Malvolio will term “the lighter people” have been doing their damnedest to turn the kitchen into a tavern and to obliterate the differences between night and day (V.i.339). Over their eructations the hard-drinking Sir Toby fitly presides as a sort of miniature Falstaff, the local agent of revelry and misrule. “Th'art a scholar,” he tells his eager gull Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the carpet knight whose linguistic accomplishments are as limited as his skills at fencing and dancing. “Let us therefore eat and drink” (II.iii.13-4). Sir Andrew's surname bespeaks his pallid face and quivering figure; all his claims to wit and gallantry and bravado only exist in order to be put down. When Feste asks “Would you have a love-song, or a song of good life?” and Toby responds, “A love-song, a love-song,” Andrew gives himself away by blurring out, “Ay, ay, I care not for good life” (35-8). Akin to Justice Shallow and Master Slender, he is the ancestor of those witless foplings who will strive so vainly to cut a caper in Restoration comedy. And yet this ninny is not without his touch of Shakespearean poignance. When his mentor Toby—who is, if nothing else, a genuine bon vivant—complacently avows himself to be adored by Maria, Andrew sighs, “I was adored once too” (181). Behind that sigh lies some namby-pamby case history, about which we are relieved to hear no more.

Maria, the classic soubrette, is the most effectual of the plotters against Malvolio, and her recompense for forging the letter is marriage with Sir Toby. This provides a comic parallel for the two romantic betrothals, and it is announced by Fabian in the absence of the less-than-joyful couple, Toby having been discomfited along with Andrew by Sebastian. Since Andrew has essentially been a figure of fun, not a funster, he is gradually supplanted among the merrymakers by Fabian. It is Fabian who faces Olivia in the final disentanglement, backed by the festive exultations of the fool. Feste's maxim—“Better a witty fool than a foolish wit”—underlines the implicit contrast between himself and Andrew (I.v.36). One of the jester's assumed personae is that of the Vice, the principal mischief-maker in the old-fashioned morality plays (IV.ii.124). As “an allow'd fool,” he has the privilege of raillery, which we hear that Olivia's father “took much delight in” (I.v.94; II.iv.12). Her father's death, which cannot have happened very long before, has presumably added to her brother's in deepening the gloom of the abode where she now finds herself mistress. Shakespeare has gone out of his way to darken the background of the conventional situation among the lovers, possibly reflecting the widespread preoccupation with the theme of melancholia during the early years of the seventeenth century. If so, his ultimate concern was to lift the clouds, to brighten the effect of the picture as a whole by the deft use of chiaroscuro, to heighten the triumph of the comic spirit by presenting it under attack. And, of course, with the rise of Puritanism, it was increasingly subject to attackers.

Such considerations may help to explain why Shakespeare went even farther by introducing the character of Malvolio—a superimposition so marked that one of the commentators, F. G. Fleay, has argued that the two plots are separable and may have been composed at different times. That seems too mechanical an inference, since Shakespeare has taken pains to unify them; since Olivia is “addicted to a melancholy,” it follows that she should employ a majordomo who is “sad and civil,” as she says, “And suits well for a servant with my fortunes” (II.v.202; III.iv.5-6). Though she tolerates Feste, her first impulse is to dismiss him from her company. His response is both a catechism and a syllogism, demonstrating that she should not mourn because her brother is better off in heaven and proving the fool's dialectical point that his interlocutor must be still more foolish than he: “Take away the fool, gentlemen” (I.v.71-2). She is mildly cheered by the nimbleness of the repartee; but Malvolio is distinctly not amused; and his hostile and humorless reaction is our introduction to him. Gleefully and ironically recalling this exchange, Feste will reveal the natural antipathy that was bound to operate between himself and Malvolio: “‘Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? An you smile not,
he's gagged.’ And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges” (V.i.374-7). Malvolio and Feste are brought together and kept at odds by a certain complementarity, like that between the melancholy Jaques and the festive Touchstone in As You Like It or the clowns and the “humorous men” of Jonson and Marston. The pretensions of the Alazon are thus laid open to the exposures of the Eiron.

The issue is sharply drawn by Sir Toby's entrance speech: “What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life” (I.iii.1-2). As a master of the revels, he and his fellow revelers embody the forces of life, on the one hand. On the other, the interloping Malvolio represents the force of care, which has usurped a temporary control over once-carefree Illyria. It is not for nothing that his name signifies “ill-wisher.” He is the perennial spoilsport, fighting an aggressive rearguard action against a crapulous playboy and his Bacchanalian cohorts. As Olivia's steward, Malvolio's functions are more than ceremonial; he can not only cut off the daily bounties of existence; he can threaten, and he does, to expel the incumbent devotees of good living. After Toby's rhetorical question on behalf of cakes and ale, seconded by Feste's plea for ginger, their prodigal levity takes the offensive against his false dignity. By a convention which is not less amusing because it is artificial, the practical jokers overhear—and react to—the soliloquy expressing Malvolio's fantasies and delusions of grandeur: “To be Count Malvolio! ...” (II.v.35). It brings home the self-love and the ambition to regulate the lives of others that they have resented all along. And it plays into the trap that Maria has baited, the letter that he is obliging enough to read aloud. To act out its malevolent instructions is to betray his solemn and pompous nature. Not only must this non-laugher—this agelast, as Meredith would classify him—doff his somber black for yellow stockings and cross-garters, but he must force his atrabilious features into an unremitting smile.

The romance of the main plot is ordered, or disordered, by the workings of chance: Viola has been saved “perchance,” and so may Sebastian be (I.ii.6, 7). The satire of the underplot is managed by human contrivance, which motivates the duel and fabricates the letter. Malvolio ascribes his prospective elevation to a wise providence (“it is Jove's doing”), but we know that it is a hoax on the part of Maria and her tosspot companions (III.iv.74-5). He is thereby prompted to strut through his grand scene of hubris, all the more ironic in its deliberate reduction of self-importance to silliness. Instead of having greatness thrust upon him, he is thereupon thrust down into a dark room, where he is bound and treated like a madman—like the Ephesian Antipholus in The Comedy of Errors, whose questioners look for symptoms of derangement in his answers. Malvolio's most pertinacious visitor and inquisitor is Feste, who has thrown himself into the persona of the neighboring curate Sir Topas. When the prisoner complains that the house is dark as hell, the pseudocurate replies in Feste's vein of Rabelaisian nonsense: “Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony; and yet complainest thou of obstruction” (IV.ii.36-9). At the height of his vainglory, Malvolio has admitted that his sartorial alteration had caused “some obstruction in the blood;” but this was nothing, if the result pleased Olivia; and to her inquiry about the state of his health he has answered, “Not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs” (III.iv.21, 26-7). The trouble was that so black a mind could never have become accustomed to bright colors.

It is therefore fitting that he be plunged into literal darkness, although Feste's paradoxes seem to suggest that brightness may have something to do with the eye of the beholder. Maria had begun by requesting Sir Toby to “confine” himself “within the modest limits of order,” and he had blustered back with a pun: “Confine? I'll confine myself no finer than I am” (I.iii.8-11). When we see Malvolio confined, we may be weak enough to feel sorry for him; Charles Lamb, with Romantic perversity, has even worked up “a kind of tragic interest”, and some of those leading actors who have appeared in the part have made the most of that potentiality. However, though Shakespeare's laughingstocks have a way of enlisting our sympathies, though we may be torn by Prince Hal's repudiation of Falstaff, though Shylock and Jaques may take with them some measure of respect when they make their solitary departures, we should be glad to get rid of Malvolio. Poetic justice prevails in comedy if not in tragedy, and it requires that he be finally “baffled” (V.i.369). Olivia can charitably speak, as his patron, of his having been “notoriously abuses” (379). But his parting vow of revenge has been neutralized by Fabian's wish that “sportful malice”—a combination of the ludicrous and the ridiculous—“May
rather pluck on laughter than revenge” (365-6). Nor, having witnessed his threat of expulsion to Sir Toby and his crew, should we repine at seeing this gloomy interloper expelled. As a sycophant, a social climber, and an officious snob, he well deserves to be put back in his place—or, as Jonson would have it, in his humor, for Malvolio seems to have a Jonsonian rather than a Shakespearean temperament.

What we have been watching is a reenactment of a timeless ritual, whose theatrical manifestation takes the obvious form of the villain foiled, and whose deeper roots in folklore go back to the scapegoat cast into the outer darkness. The business of baiting him is not a sadistic gesture but a cathartic impulse of Schadenfreude: an affirmation of Life against Care, if we allow Sir Toby to lay down the terms of our allegory. We could point to an illustration so rich in detail and so panoramic in design that it might prove distracting, if it were not so sharply focused on the conflict before us, Pieter Breughel's *Battle between Carnival and Lent*. There the jolly corpulent personification of *Mardi Gras*, astride a cask of wine and armed with a spit impaling a roasted pig, jousts against a grim penitential hag carted by a monk and a nun, and flourishing a paddle replete with two herrings. Beggars and buffoons and many others, the highly variegated proponents of revelry and of self-mortification, intermingle in the teeming crowd. Which of the antagonists will gain the upper hand? Each of them, in due season. J. G. Frazer has instanced many analogues for the observance, both in the Burial of the Carnival and in the mock-sacrifice of Jack o' Lent. Shakespeare loaded his dice on the side of carnival, in that hungover hanger-on, Sir Toby, as against the lenten Malvolio, that prince of wet-blankets. But Shakespeare was writing a comedy—and, what is more, a comedy written in defense of the comic spirit. He could commit himself, in this case, to the wisdom of folly and to the ultimate foolishness of the conventional wisdom. But, in his dramaturgy, he was moving onward to care, to death, to mourning, and toward tragedy.

**Criticism: Plot And Subplot: Jane K. Brown (essay date 1990)**


*In the following essay, Brown contends that Twelfth Night has two plots, one ruled by Olivia and one ruled by Orsino. These plots, argues Brown, are dramatized differently and correspond to two distinct worlds within the play.*

Doubleness of all sorts is typical of Shakespearean comedy. Nowhere, however, is doubling so fully worked out as in *Twelfth Night: or, What You Will*, the only play for which Shakespeare himself provided a double title, as Anne Barton points out.1 The play's *dramatis personae* reveals not only the twins at its center, but two rulers (a countess and a duke referred to as count), two sea captains, two authority figures (an uncle and a steward) in the house of the countess (who has lost father and brother), that uncle comically echoed in his friend Sir Andrew, two gentlemen attending on the duke, and even the clown unaccountably split into the figures of Feste and Fabian—a doubling so gratuitous that the roles are often collapsed into one in performance. Theme, structure and plot all turn on the various dualities the play explores, and everything is resolved in a moment of wonder at the doubleness of the play's and our own vision.

For this reason it is a particularly appropriate text in which to explore the kind of doubleness that concerns me today. My argument will be that *Twelfth Night* is a play of two plots corresponding to two worlds in the play, and that these worlds are represented differently. By represented differently I mean that the relation of language to reality in each is different. Thus, I will argue, the play operates in two modes of aesthetic illusion; furthermore, it contains reflections on its own doubleness and on the range of possible dramatic illusions open to it.
I.

We have become so accustomed to “high” and “low” plotting in Shakespeare that I must point out that I am not drawing that distinction here. I will not group Orsino, Olivia, Viola and Sebastian on the one hand, and Malvolio and the clowns on the other, and thus not high characters versus low, aristocrats versus servants, nor romantic lovers versus clowns. Partly, such distinctions do not work here, for clownish as Sir Toby is, as Olivia's uncle he is nevertheless an aristocrat. Indeed, Barbara Everett has remarked both on the interesting proximity of the romantics Orsino and Olivia to the low characters in the play, and also on the discrepancy between the high seriousness of Orsino's dreams of Olivia and what we actually see of her. I am concerned instead with a distinction implied by the way characters interact on stage, and this distinction turns out to be one of style and dramatic mode, not one of content or theme.

In these terms, the two worlds of _Twelfth Night_ are marked by the presence of their two rulers, the Duke Orsino and the Countess Olivia. Orsino would like their worlds to be one, but Olivia is opposed, so their double messenger Viola/Cesario must form the only link between them, except for occasional visits by Feste to Orsino's court. All the action takes place either at Orsino's court, in the absence of Olivia, or in Olivia's house without Orsino. In the first two acts everything happens within these two enclosures, except only the brief symmetrical scenes at the coast between Viola and Sebastian and their respective captains. Only gradually does the play escape these enclosures as Viola or Sebastian encounter other characters on the street, though never very far from Olivia's house. Orsino and Olivia meet on stage outside of Olivia's walls only at the end of the play and only as the cast assembles for the grand finale.

Their separation has less to do with suspense than with the fact that they were never destined for one another. The audience thus has a split view of the play. On the one hand we see the growth of Orsino's relationship with Viola. At Olivia's house, on the other hand, we see developing the relationship that results in the marriage of Olivia and Sebastian. Since Olivia responds only to Cesario's appearance and highly schooled rhetoric, it does not matter that Sebastian's courtship is actually conducted by Viola; in effect, he has wooed Olivia by proxy, as Orsino attempted to do. Viola is supposed to connect the two worlds, but, by virtue of her being a twin, instead divides the play into two plots.

These two plots are parallel to one another. Orsino and Olivia are tied by the initial letter of their Italianate names, by their rank (Orsino is repeatedly referred to in the play as count, not duke), and by their melancholy situations. Within three lines of the opening, the incapacitated Orsino's thoughts of love lead to death (“The appetite may sicken, and so die”, I.i.3; reiterated in the next line with “dying fall”); Feste sings him a song about death (II.iv.73) and invokes the protection of “the melancholy god” for him. His love is a torment, exposing him to the “fell and cruel hounds” (I.i.22) of his desires. Apart from Olivia, only Viola can focus his affections, and only after deciding to marry Viola can he make plans and function as a ruler. He seems like a fairy-tale prince under an enchantment that is finally lifted by Viola. Olivia's melancholy is more obvious. She will mourn the deaths of her father and brother for seven years, and lives in the dubious company of her melancholic steward Malvolio and her riotous uncle, Sir Toby Belch. From this self-imposed imprisonment she is freed by Viola, who wins her trust and love as she did Orsino's. Viola is thus not only the messenger linking the plots, but the redeemer in each, an angel figuratively as well as literally (“messenger” being the root meaning of angel). Viola's identical role in the two plots is the wedge that keeps them separate.

II.

Let me attempt now to characterize the differences in the use of language and therefore in the kinds of illusion that prevail in these two worlds. In Orsino's world we find assertive metaphoric language from the very first line of the play: “If music be the food of love, play on.” The conditional, “If music be the food of love”, makes metaphor the central issue, an issue whose importance is elaborated by the further proliferation: “Give me excess of it, that surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die.” Similarly the rest of the speech bristles
with extended metaphors and similes—“like the sweet sound / That breathes on a bank of violets”, “Receiveth as the sea”, “That instant was I turn'd into a hart”, “like fell and cruel hounds”. This metaphorical language is extremely labile; in his fantastical fancy Orsino moves rapidly from love to death, from Olivia's purity to his own suffering. How do we keep up with the rapid transformations of “like the sweet sound / That breathes upon a bank of violets, / Stealing and giving odor”, with the shifts from sound to breath to the sight of the violets, with the confusion between giving and stealing? Or with the abrupt fall from “validity” to “abatement and low price” a few lines later? Such lavish metaphor and simile and such elaborate transformations of given into fanciful imagery are equally typical of Orsino's speeches and of Viola speaking to or for her master.

The concreteness of language at Olivia's house forms a striking contrast. We first encounter Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew; they discuss the same topics as Orsino, food (and drink) and love. Maria berates Sir Toby for drinking too much and for bringing Sir Andrew to woo Olivia. Love expresses itself in this scene not in chaste longing for a Diana but in the direct language of “accost”, which Sir Andrew then misunderstands even more concretely as Maria's name. Another parody of Orsino's “food of love” motif appears in Malvolio, who in I.v is “sick of self-love” and tastes “with a distempered appetite”. Here the motif leads not to flights of fancy, but to the comic predictability of the bilious steward. In II.i Feste will join the crew and the music will be as concretely present as the drinking; one will not be a metaphor for the other. Whenever, in Olivia's realm, words are understood to be metaphors, there is sure to be trouble: when Sir Andrew asks after Maria's metaphor in bringing his hand to the buttery-bar, he gets lost; the two knights cannot agree at the end of the scene whether Taurus represents sides and heart or legs and thighs. Things are little different when Olivia comes on stage. Olivia is introduced to us in an exchange with her fool, and she echoes Maria's complaints about dry jests. Indeed, Olivia is surrounded by a whole pack of fools, for Malvolio and Sir Toby enter in quick succession, both unable to dismiss the importunate Viola at the gates. Their language is none of it fluid or metaphorical. It is characterized—again—not by flights of fancy, but by repeated stumbles into the literal: the humor in all these exchanges involves a more literal, more concrete, meaning for a word than the one first assumed or the reduction of word to name. Repetition and a focus on the word as word or object provide the logic and continuity in this wordplay. Consequently it engenders a certain rigidity that accords with Olivia's rigidity in excluding the world in order to mourn the death of her brother, and that contrasts with the lability of Orsino's language. This is the dominant (though not exclusive) linguistic mode of Olivia's world.

Viola participates in the modes of both plots. Her disguise at Orsino's court divorces her from her real self, who loves Orsino. Since she may not love him when she is his page, she must interject hypothetical relatives and elaborate similes between them—“My father had a daughter lov’d a man / As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your lordship” (II.iv.107-109). All of her conversation with Orsino is in this “as if” mode. But at Olivia's house, Viola's disguise causes her sense of self to be rigid rather than labile. To Olivia she reports her master's love with literal honesty, and repels Olivia's advances with the same literalism: there is nothing metaphoric about her inability to satisfy the countess. Olivia and her followers may fail to understand, but the audience knows that Viola means exactly what she says. In Orsino's house only the fact of disguise was significant, but in Olivia's it is the content that matters; by impersonating her brother Viola smooths the later transfer of Olivia's passion. (The play emphasizes this continuity by showing Antonio's irrational adoration of Sebastian in II.i just after Viola has awakened the same irrational adoration in Olivia.) In Olivia's realm Viola's language is double. When she speaks for Orsino she uses the most beautiful conventional love language in the play. Her exchange with Olivia in I.v is instructive in this regard, for there Olivia undermines Viola's metaphors with her literalizing wordplay, reducing Viola's words “as secret as maidenhead” to heretical text, her own “graces” to objects on a schedule. Viola's speeches on behalf of Orsino continue in his hypothetical, metaphoric mode, but for herself she is equally capable of entering into witty exchanges with Feste and Olivia that depend on their literalizing reductiveness. Thus once again the contrast between the realms is between metaphorical displacement and literal directness. This difference extends beyond spoken language to include dramatic gesture. Let us compare, for example, Orsino's and Olivia's expressions of trust in Viola. In IV.1v Orsino tells Viola/Cesario that he has already opened to him “the book even of [his] secret
soul” (14). Typically, Orsino expresses his confidence in words, and in the metaphor of his soul as book. But when Viola tries to recite his “text” to Olivia in the next scene, Olivia enters into the image as game and reduces the text to heresy (I.v.229). Orsino's metaphor destroyed, Viola nevertheless wins Olivia's heart by asking her to lift her veil, which she does, emphasizing the concreteness of the gesture by itemizing her beauty as a schedule of discrete objects. But Olivia's wordplay should not obscure the significance of her action: removing the veil she had sworn to wear for seven years and revealing herself to (presumably) male eyes is an exact parallel to Orsino’s declaration of trust in the preceding scene. Here it is expressed not metaphorically but concretely, allegorically. Viola has operated in two different modes of illusion in the two scenes.

Finally, the names of the characters, too, operate in alternative modes of representation. The figures unambiguously associated with Olivia's house have speaking or allegorical names. Sir Toby Belch speaks loudly of gluttony. Olivia is an allegory for peace, a meaning that is underlined when Viola says, “I hold the olive in my hand; my words are as full of peace as matter” (I.v.209-210), and again by the constant use of “Peace” as a command for silence among Olivia's rowdy followers. She is an appropriate allegory for a Christmas season play that celebrates “peace on earth, good will to men” by bringing peace out of her disorderly house and driving ill will (i.e. Malvolio) from the stage. Malvolio's name is thus also a simple allegory. Orsino, on the other hand, means “little bear”. A bear is not an abstraction like ill will nor a traditional public symbol like the olive. Orsino is rather, in his melancholy and self-involvement, a little bearish; this is a relation of name to person that is not designation, but similitude, and is thus appropriate to his metaphoric mode.

Viola's and Sebastian's position between the plots is also reflected in their names. Viola means violet, the flower evoked in Orsino's opening speech, and she behaves rather like a shrinking violet in her relation to him. If this is the significance of her name, it is based, like Orsino's, on similitude; it is metaphoric. But the name also evokes music (viol, violin), a sense emphasized by the importance of music to Orsino and by her plan to recommend herself to the duke by her musical ability. She is the singing angelic messenger who makes peace manifest in the world, and in this respect her name is allegorical. Sebastian is similarly double. The Greek root “sebas” means “that which evokes religious awe”. Sebastian's appearance next to his sister evokes the wonder and astonishment of all present. Not only does this event seem supernatural, but it is also part of Viola's message of Christmas, and is thus religious. At the same time, this wonder is buried in a natural man and in a not too uncommon name whose meaning is obscure to those with too little Greek. The association with religious wonder is more likely to be evoked because Sebastian bears the same name as a saint who was widely portrayed as a handsome young man. Thus his name also speaks both allegorically and by similitude.

In summary, we are dealing here with an opposition between metaphorical and allegorical discourse. The first term requires no clarification, but the second may. I mean allegorical in the sense that this language meets the three major criteria recently so clearly specified for allegory by Maureen Quilligan. The language of Olivia's realm is allegorical first because it is profoundly conscious of itself as language, a consciousness manifested in the ceaseless punning, and further even as text, as we will see in the baiting of Malvolio; second it is consistently literal and concrete—it means its own words, not what its words represent or stand for. Third, this language comments on and elaborates its grounding Biblical pretext, “Peace on earth, good will toward men”. As Quilligan insists, allegorical writing is different from allegorical interpretation or allegoresis. Allegoresis will be rejected in Malvolio's misreading of Maria’s note and will in fact be associated with metaphoric language in the play. Thus to refer to the Olivia plot as allegorical is not to deny the reality or the humanity of the characters, nor to say the play is about something other than what it seems. True allegory is literal and does not refer beyond itself; such is the case in Olivia's world.

III.
It is time now to explore the interaction between the modes of illusion associated with the two plots. Let us begin with the play's reflections on the metaphor of "text". As we saw above, the initial confrontation between Viola and Olivia is couched in terms of Orsino's "text". Nevertheless, while the beauty of Viola's language evokes repeated comment, the real damage to Olivia's heart is done by her eye: "Methinks", she says, "I feel this youth's perfections / [...] To creep in at mine eyes" (I.v.296-98). Similarly Olivia's first turn to Viola is marked by lifting her veil and revealing her image, and Antonio later refers to Sebastian/Viola as an "image" that has failed him (III.iv.362; cf. "idol" three lines later). Orsino's imagery of text is defeated by Olivia's image. The baiting of Malvolio attacks metaphorical text at a more parodic level. The joke turns first on mistaking Maria's handwriting for Olivia's, that is, it depends on the literal letters of Maria's note. Second, it depends on Malvolio's misinterpretation of the letters M O A I, which he tries to make "resemble", as he says (II.v.120), his own name, by crushing the "simulation" to make it bow to himself (139-141). His violent interpretation (allegoresis) in terms of similitude parodies the dependence on simile and similarity in the Orsino plot, just as Malvolio himself parodies Orsino's melancholy self-involvement and love for Olivia. Malvolio has, we might say, interpreted the text, but ignored the absurd image of himself cross-gartered in yellow stockings. At the same time, there is all the noise made by the on-stage spectators as they shout "Peace": the ready divorce of word from meaning here points up the inherent danger in reasoning by similitude, linguistic or otherwise.

Feste is the focus for some of the most important reflection on language and dramatic form in the play. As Olivia's "corruptor of words" (III.i.36) he reduces all words to concrete absurdity, to themselves as words and not just as the most concrete object signified by them. Unlike Malvolio or Orsino, he does not need to "corrupt" words by forcing them to resemble other things; he knows that words inherently possess the quality of suggesting things other than themselves. Thus his apparently nonsensical formulation, "that that is is" (IV.i.16), anticipates and prepares the revealed doubleness of Viola and Sebastian that arouses such peace-making wonder at the end of the play—"A natural perspective, that is and is not!" (V.i.216-217). Indeed, Feste's anticipation of Viola's doubleness suggests that he should be understood as a parody of her, just as Malvolio is a parody of Orsino. Except for Viola, Feste is the only link between the two worlds of the play, and like her he is a musician. It is surely to emphasize this likeness that the two have a scene to themselves that does nothing to further the plot, right at the center of the play. Feste, whose name derives from Festus, lord of misrule at Epiphany, and thus suggests perhaps good will, mediates for Malvolio with Olivia just as Viola does for Orsino. He is, finally, the only character in the play beside Viola to appear on stage in disguise. As he virtuosically wavers between the roles of Sir Topas the curate and Feste in Act IV he parodies Viola's fluttering between the roles of Viola and Cesario, preparing, as we have seen, the more miraculous doubleness of Viola and Sebastian. If Malvolio reveals and carries off the ill will implicit in Orsino's bearish love for Olivia, Feste's wise fooling reveals Viola's healing of the madness of Illyria to be the good will of the clown. Unlike Malvolio, Feste remains on stage to speak the final word, appropriately, for he is the figure who embodies the mediating grace of play-acting.

In this regard Feste's position on dramatic art is all-important. What matters in Feste's gay alternation of roles between himself and the curate is not that he is taken for Sir Topas, but the pleasure that he and we take in the act of representation. Malvolio misreads Feste's representation mimetically, taking him to be two people: Sir Topas, on the one hand, and a Feste literally opposed to freeing Malvolio on the other. And Malvolio is, as a result, the one spectator (auditor, actually), who derives no pleasure from Feste's performance. Here the triumphant Feste takes the opportunity to connect himself to an older dramatic tradition, alluding to King Gorboduc (IV.i.13), subject of the first Senecan tragedy in English, and to the Old Vice of the morality in his song at the end of the scene. In Feste's fooling two modes of representation are thus confronted, the mimetic and the festive, and the distinction between them is understood to be historical.

A final reflection on the mode of the play emerges from the allusions to bear baiting. Sir Andrew regrets that he has devoted more of his life to bear-baiting than to the arts (I.iii.93); Fabian is in trouble with Olivia over a bear-baiting. Orsino ("little bear") sees himself as set upon by the hounds of his unrequited desires (I.i.20-22);
Olivia describes her honor as a bear set upon at the stake (III.i.118-120). When Fabian takes revenge on Malvolio (for bringing him out of favor with Olivia over the bear-baiting) by participating in baiting Malvolio, we are once more dealing with a concrete parody of the metaphoric baiting of love. Lest there be any doubt of the implicit context, we are told that Viola flees the equivalent baiting of her by Toby and Fabian “as if a bear were at [her] heels” (III.iv.295). This pattern of allusion is interesting, because bear-baiting was a popular public spectacle of virtually equivalent status to theater, and apparently on occasion used the same facilities. The play is thus laced with references to an alternative, generally older mode of public spectacle; a play that sees itself as a near descendant of public bear-baiting is once again calling attention to its non-mimetic aspects.

Such reflections on the play's own illusions suggest a strong preference for its allegorical over its mimetic mode of representation. And indeed, though I have spoken of two equivalent worlds in the play, much more attention is devoted to the Olivia plot than to the Orsino plot. The play does not just tolerate the allegorical mode, it privileges it. Given this distinction and given the hint from Feste's allusions to the Vice that it is a historical one, I would like to draw it more explicitly as I conclude. I have called Orsino's plot mimetic. In his metaphoric mode every divergence from the literal to the figurative level of meaning is clearly marked. Whenever characters become other than what they appear they express their intention to don a disguise, and repeatedly remind us when they are disguised. Similarly when things become other than what they seem the transition is marked by the rhetorical structure of simile or metaphor. Indeed, it is also necessary to mark when things are just what they seem: Orsino, we are told, is noble “in nature as in name” (I.i.25). Unless signification is marked, things are only what they seem. In this sense we may say the plot is mimetic; it offers us the imitation of nature, the second artificial nature implied in the *ut pictura poesis* tradition of early neoclassicism. Thus what we see on stage is an illusion of reality, and it depends on the prevailing metaphoric diction to import significance beyond the literal into its sphere. Olivia's world, on the other hand, is allegorical precisely because it does not take note of the divergence of the figurative from the literal. There is no divergence, because the figurative is always presumed to be incarnate in the literal. Allegory is always concrete in this sense that what you see is what it means. There can, therefore, be no divergence between name and nature in Olivia's world, and the issue need never be raised; nor can there be disguise, only self-consciously theatrical role-playing.

Historically, then, Orsino stands near the very beginning of the tradition of the modern dramatic character we associate with the neoclassical illusion of reality school, for he is, essentially, a melancholy duke who cheers up at the end of the play. Olivia, on the other hand, is Peace in the garb of a countess, and belongs to the allegorical or non-illusionist tradition, in which characters are embodied significations, and hers is the preferred mode of the play. Such preference is, I would suggest, typical of Shakespeare: even *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which celebrates the transformative and proliferative power of metaphor above all, moves in the last act to the parodic, concrete, allegorical realm of the mechanicals. And overall Shakespeare's career moves toward the allegorical, non-mimetic four romances, and the most unrealistic history *Henry VIII*. It would be a mistake to see this preference simply as conservatism on Shakespeare's part. The allegorical mode for which he opts has another eighty years of rich development on the continent—in the sophisticated yet popular Jesuit moralities of Jakob Bidermann, in the powerful martyr tragedies of Andreas Gryphius, but most of all in the flowering of allegorical comedies, tragedies, and Corpus Christi plays in Spain that we associate with the names of Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and above all Calderón de la Barca. Rather we should see him as experimenting with neoclassical strategies of representation as he experimented with neoclassical plot structure in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*.

In this experimental doubleness resides, I think, the peculiar elusiveness of the play, which is visible in readers' discomfort to attribute to it any meaning at all. It also explains the most popular controversy about the play, that over the degree of sympathy we are to feel with Malvolio. If we respond in the mode of the Olivia plot, Malvolio is ill will personified and we rejoice at his departure; but if we carry over the responses evoked by the mimetic Orsino plot, we are inclined to sympathize with his plight at the end. And since, as we
have seen, Malvolio parodies or reflects Orsino in the Olivia plot, we are indeed tempted to accord him some
of the same dignity we would to Orsino. At the same time, this parodistic linkage invites us to react less
sympathetically to Orsino as personified melancholy. Small wonder there has been confusion. If, however, we
are sensitive to the play of the different modes in the text, part of our pleasure in it derives from our own
agility in discovering and adjusting our responses. Both the play and our response to it thus become
explorations of the complexity of aesthetic illusion.

Notes

3. Kenneth Muir remarks in passing on the “contrast between the levels of reality represented by the two
main plots” in Taming of the Shrew (Introduction to Shakespeare. The Comedies, p. 4). In this respect
Taming of the Shrew seems to me to have most in common with Twelfth Night. Here again the
distinction between plots cannot be social, for the two heroines are sisters; much more important is
the difference in the characters’ relations to their language and therefore in the kind of illusion in each.
4. The play is cited according to *The Riverside Shakespeare*.
5. For detailed discussions of the play as an Epiphany and Christmas season play, see Lewalski:
“Thematic Patterns”, and Hassel: Renaissance Drama, pp. 77-86. I focus here more on the
implications of the literal aspects of the plot than on the implications of character development. As a
result I would not subscribe to Lewalski’s views of Viola and Sebastian as Christ-like (p. 176); Viola
is rather just what she is called in the play, a messenger (Greek: ‘angelos’).
6. I am grateful to my colleague Charles Barrack for this suggestion.
7. I exploit Quilligan’s defining characteristics in The Language of Allegory, although I recognize she
intended to describe a narrative genre, not a general linguistic mode. I have left out her
reader-oriented categories, whose potential application to drama is beyond the scope of this essay.
Elizabeth Freund, in “Twelfth Night and the Tyranny of Interpretation”, has recently explored the
tension between mimesis and semiosis in the language of the play, focusing largely on the clowns.
While Freund sees Twelfth Night as paradigmatic for the functioning of all literary language, the lines
she draws are not unrelated to those drawn here; metaphorical language will be shown below to be
associated with mimetic action, while the definition of allegory used here is essentially a semiotic
one.
10. A striking parallel example of the use of bears to call attention to non-mimetic dramatic form occurs
in Jakob Bidermann’s Cenodoxus (1602), III.viii, where a prank involving a trained bear is connected
to significant discussion of the nature of dramatic illusion. Closer to home is the bear who apparently
eats Antigonus in A Winter’s Tale, III.iii; it is the first figure to appear as the play moves into the
pastoral mode, and thus again associated with the play’s self-consciousness about genre.
11. Cox, in “Henry VIII and the Masque”, for example, argues that it exploits the dramaturgy of the court
masque.
12. Elaborated with particular delicacy and elegance by Barbara Everett (“Or What You Will”), who sees
both the play’s reticence and its ultimate seriousness. Compare also Lewalski’s extreme hesitation to
offer her reading too seriously as allegory (“Thematic Patterns”, p. 177), and Stephen Booth’s
interesting ruminations on the coherence of the play’s language in “Twelfth Night 1.1: The Audience
as Malvolio”.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 62): Further Reading

CRITICISM

807

Asserts that same-sex attraction—explored in the relationships of Olivia and Viola, Antonio and Sebastian, and Orsino and Viola-as-Cesario—is a crucial issue in Twelfth Night. Charles maintains that the portrayal of homoerotic attraction serves as a way of representing the social construction of sexuality through gender identity.


Explores the ways in which the concept of “madness” is treated in Twelfth Night, noting that words such as “mad” and “madness” are used more often in Twelfth Night than in Shakespeare’s other plays.


Studies the nature of the illicit attractions in Twelfth Night.


Offers an overview of the plot and characters in Twelfth Night.


Argues that through his portrayals of Malvolio and Viola, Shakespeare represented the controversy within the English Church over whether Providence works principally through a primary cause, or through a secondary agent.


Compares the portrayal of gulling in Twelfth Night (in which both Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are deceived) with contemporary narratives of “underworld literature” in which deception, known colloquially as cony-catching, cozening, and gulling, is fully treated.


Explores both the trivial and the more significant of the unanswered questions that arise from a reading of Twelfth Night.


Examines the similarity between Viola’s rejection of Sebastian’s embrace and Jesus’s resisting Mary Magdalene’s embrace after his resurrection.

Discusses the textual features of the Folio, contrasting them with later texts, and examines the numerous performance options inspired by “this Shakespearean original.”


Maintains that the play's comic movement from chaos to harmony may be described as a transformation of fragmented isolation to cohesive mutuality.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 74): Introduction

Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night, considered by many scholars to be one of the finest Elizabethan romantic comedies, offers a penetrating examination of gender roles, sexual attraction, and the nature of love. The play relates the adventures of the shipwrecked Viola, who disguises herself as a male and takes a position in the court of Orsino. The disguised Viola, who calls herself Cesario, falls in love with Orsino. Orsino, however, is in love with Olivia, and sends Viola/Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf. The situation spins further out of control when Olivia falls in love with the disguised Viola. The play's subplot centers on the puritanical Malvolio and the punishment he endures at the hands of his fellow servants. Modern critics, as well as directors of the stage and screen, are interested in the complexities of the plot and subplot, and the relation between the two, as well as the play's interpretation of gender roles, sexuality, and love. Other areas of critical concern include the play's relationship to Elizabethan culture and issues pertaining to its genre and structure.

Examining Twelfth Night as an example of festive comedy, Elias Schwartz (1967) contends that the play's merriment and celebratory atmosphere reveal a vision of life as good and joyful, despite its admitted limitations. Schwartz also contrasts the play with satiric comedy—in which characters are often disliked and become objects of derision—and emphasizes that the play should not be viewed as satire. In his study of Twelfth Night's structure, Porter Williams, Jr. (see Further Reading) identifies a connection between plot and theme. The mistakes the protagonists make, Williams argues, not only generate the action of the plot, but also reveal aspects of the play's underlying themes, which include deception and the nature of love. As critics attempt to unlock the relationship between the play's plot and subplot, they often focus on Malvolio, who is the center of the play's subplot. In their introduction to Twelfth Night, Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (1994) find that Malvolio serves as a means of binding the plot and subplot, and that his “gulling” provides additional insights into the play's treatment of love and the behavior of the lovers. Similarly, David Willbern (1978) identifies Malvolio with integration. In exploring Malvolio's relationship to the play's festive aspects, Willbern demonstrates that Malvolio's puritanical attempts to deny carnal passion in many ways reflects the illusion of romanticism explored in the main plot. According to the critic “both represent denials and sublimations.”

The play's highly charged sexual atmosphere makes Twelfth Night a popular choice for film and stage adaptation. In 1996, Trevor Nunn directed a film version of Twelfth Night in which he offered his interpretation of the play's sexual and gender issues. Donald Lyons (1997) regards the film as a success, praises the accomplishments of the principal actors, and observes that the film teases the boundaries of “heterosexual decorum” but never oversteps them. Like Lyons, Marla F. Magro and Mark Douglas (2001) find that Nunn's film maintains a heterosexual stance, and note that the film attempts to erase the play's homosexual undertones. Laurie Osborne (2002) also assesses Nunn's Twelfth Night, focusing on the director's reliance on film editing to provide a sense of character continuity. Robert Brustein (1998) reviews Nicholas Hytner's stage adaptation of Twelfth Night, performed at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater. The critic contends that despite its Hollywood casting, including Helen Hunt as Viola and Kyra Sedgewick as
Olivia, the production failed to explore the play's deeper issues and complexities. Brustein also states that Hunt's performance was “clean” and “clear,” whereas Sedgewick's Olivia was overly energetic. Similarly, David Patrick Stearns (1998) describes Hunt's efforts as solid and sincere, but notes that Hunt overlooked the subtextual potential of Viola's character. Like Brustein, Stearns finds that Sedgewick went to comic extremes in her portrayal of Olivia. According to Ted Merwin (1999), the production lacked a sense of eroticism on several levels; for example, the stage design conveyed only languor, and the romance between Paul Rudd's Orsino and Hunt's Viola was never ignited. Merwin applauds the performances of supporting cast members, particularly Philip Bosco's Malvolio, but contends that the production as a whole failed to convey Twelfth Night's emotional disorder and eventual resolution.

Approaching the play's gender issues through an analysis of Viola's disguise, Keir Elam (1996) observes that Viola intends to disguise herself not as a boy, but as a eunuch. Elam explores the cultural history of castration as it relates to drama in general and Viola's role in Twelfth Night in particular. Elam demonstrates that Viola's disguise conveys her desire to hide her own biological sexuality, as well as her apparent masculinity, in order to shield herself entirely from all manner of sexual threats. Elam further describes Viola's eunuch disguise as a gesture of self-effacement with historical and theatrical significance. Critics are also interested in the ways Twelfth Night reflects Renaissance England's society and culture. John Kerrigan (1997) studies the play within the context of the Renaissance conventions regarding secrecy and gossip, finding that gossip is a means—both in early modern society and in the play—of maintaining social bonds. Kerrigan also discusses the affinity between Cesario and Malvolio, noting that as servants both characters are expected to be discreet. Angela Hurworth (1999) explores the representation of deception, or gulling, in Twelfth Night. Hurworth highlights the links between criminal deception as it is described in Elizabethan narratives of the “underworld” and the deception found in the play. Twelfth Night also reflects religious ideas prevalent in Renaissance England. Paul Dean (2001) finds that the play fuses Renaissance Platonic tradition and the theology of St. Augustine relating to the doctrine of the Trinity. Using the device of twins, Dean argues, Shakespeare explored the notion that two individuals are united as one through love, a concept that was understood by Neoplatonists to be analogous to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 74): Criticism: Overviews And General Studies


[In the following excerpt, Warren and Wells survey Twelfth Night's setting, sources, themes, and major characters. The critics' discussion is often informed by insights gleaned from twentieth-century stagings of the play.]

Twelfth Night is one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays in the modern theatre, and its success seems to have begun early; the sole surviving reference to it during Shakespeare's lifetime is to a performance. On 2 February 1602, John Manningham, then a law student of the Middle Temple in London, wrote in his diary:

At our feast we had a play called Twelfth Night, or What You Will, much like The Comedy of Errors or Menaechmi in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practice in it to make the steward believe his lady widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter as from his lady, in general terms telling him what she liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel, etc., and then when he came to practise, making him believe they took him to be mad.1
This must have been an early performance. The play was probably written in 1601, either immediately before or straight after Hamlet. Both plays were therefore written at the midpoint of Shakespeare's career, when he was at the height of his powers, so their theatrical success is not surprising.

The play has not, however, always been as popular in the theatre as it is today. Although it was among the earliest of Shakespeare's plays to be revived when the London theatres reopened after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, only three performances in the later part of the seventeenth century are known, and Samuel Pepys attended each of them. On 11 September 1661 he entered the theatre simply because the King was going to be there. ‘So I, against my own mind and resolution, could not forbear to go in, which did make the play seem a burden to me, and I took no pleasure at all in it.’ Nevertheless he saw it again on Twelfth Night 1663, when he found it ‘but a silly play, and not relating at all to the name or day’, and yet again, though with no more enthusiasm, on 20 January 1669, ‘as it is now revived’ (which may imply adaptation, though no alteration survives from his period), this time calling it ‘one of the weakest plays that ever I saw on the stage’.

Pepys seems to have reflected the taste of his age: the play then left the repertory for over eighty years. William Burnaby drew on it for his Love Betray'd of 1703, a very free adaptation, mostly in prose, which retains fewer than sixty of Shakespeare's lines. Only two performances are known, one in February 1703 and the other in March 1705. Twelfth Night shared in the general neglect of Shakespeare's comedies during the early part of the eighteenth century but returned to the English stage in January 1741, with Charles Macklin as Malvolio. After this, while not receiving as many performances as The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, or The Merry Wives of Windsor, it remained in the repertory of either Covent Garden or Drury Lane for the rest of the century. The acting version printed in Bell's edition in 1774 is substantially Shakespeare's text with a few cuts, including two of Feste's songs; J. P. Kemble's acting edition of 1811 also makes only comparatively minor changes, including the transposition of the first and second scenes, a practice which still occasionally happens at the present time.

In 1820 Frederic Reynolds, along with the composer Henry Bishop, put on at Covent Garden a heavily adapted version introducing 'Songs, Glees, and Choruses, the Poetry selected entirely from the Plays, Poems, and Sonnets of Shakespeare' and adding also the masque from The Tempest. This adaptation, which was indulgently reviewed by Leigh Hunt, continued in performance at intervals over several years; the text has not survived.

Shakespeare's play had been introduced to New York in 1804, and it was the American actresses Charlotte and Susan Cushman, appearing as Viola and Olivia, who brought it back to the London stage in 1846, at the Haymarket Theatre. Other notable nineteenth-century productions included those of Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells in 1848, Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre in 1850, and one at the Olympic Theatre in 1865, in which the text was altered so that Kate Terry could play both Viola and Sebastian. Henry Irving's production at the Lyceum Theatre in 1884, in which he played Malvolio with Ellen Terry as Viola, was not a great success, and Augustin Daly's took remarkable liberties with the text.

These were all performances in the nineteenth-century pictorial tradition, but in 1895 William Poel's semi-professional Elizabethan Stage Society acted the play 'after the manner of the sixteenth century' (though not without abbreviation), impressing Bernard Shaw with 'the immense advantage of the platform stage to the actor'. The winds of change were blowing, even though Beerbohm Tree's version at His Majesty's Theatre in 1901, in which he played Malvolio, reverted to traditional methods. It had what George Odell described as 'the most extraordinary single setting I have ever beheld. It was the garden of Olivia, extending terrace by terrace to the extreme back of the stage, with very real grass, real fountains, paths and descending steps. I never saw anything approaching it for beauty and vraisemblance'—but the disadvantage was that it had to be used 'for many of the Shakespearian episodes for which it was absurdly inappropriate'. This was the last major production of Twelfth Night in the high Victorian style. In 1912 Harley Granville Barker directed it at
the Savoy Theatre, London, in a production which, influenced partly by Poel, laid the foundations for the many twentieth-century stagings of this play, some of whose insights have made an important contribution to the rest of this introduction.12

A ‘TWELFTH NIGHT’ PLAY?

It is interesting that the earliest recorded performance should have been at a celebratory feast: John Manningham saw it on 2 February, which was Candlemas, the festival of the blessing of candles to celebrate the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Catholic feast which, like others, survived into post-Reformation England. Both the other early performances we know about were also given privately to celebrate festive occasions: by the King's Men at court on Easter Monday, 6 April 1618, and again at Candlemas, 2 February 1623, before Charles I at Whitehall. This inevitably prompts us to ask whether Twelfth Night was conceived and performed as a play especially suited to private performances on festive occasions. It seems unlikely that such a successful stage play would have been reserved for private performance; but on Twelfth Night 1601 Shakespeare's company performed an unspecified play before Queen Elizabeth I and her chief guest, Don Virginio Orsino, at Whitehall, and Leslie Hotson has argued in The First Night of 'Twelfth Night' (1954) that the play was rapidly put together for this occasion. Although his book sheds much valuable light on details of the text, from which the commentary in this edition has benefited, his main argument has not won general acceptance; it is likelier that the ducal visitor and the festive occasion suggested the name of Shakespeare's duke and the title of his play, which was probably written later that year.

Opinion varies about how far the title provides a clue for interpretation. In spite of Pepys's view that the play was irrelevant to the day, it was often performed on or around 6 January in the later eighteenth century. Like the feast of Candlemas, the elaborate festivities associated with Twelfth Night were a survival of medieval customs into post-Reformation England. L. G. Salingar conveniently summarizes those features of the play which relate to the period of licensed ‘misrule’, revelry, and topsy-turvydom traditionally associated with the Twelve Days of Christmas, of which Twelfth Night was the conclusion and the climax:

The sub-plot shows a prolonged season of misrule, or ‘uncivil rule’, in Olivia's household, with Sir Toby turning night into day; there are drinking, dancing, and singing, scenes of mock wooing, a mock sword fight, and the gulling of an unpopular member of the household, with Feste mumming it as a priest and attempting a mock exorcism in the manner of the Feast of Fools.13

Both the principal actions of the play present reversals of established norms such as the period of misrule encouraged: in the main plot, the Duke Orsino is educated out of his aberrant state of love-melancholy by his servant, who then becomes her ‘master's mistress’ (5.1.317); in the sub-plot, Olivia's steward aspires to become his mistress's master. And during the drinking scene, Sir Toby's quotation of an unidentified song, ‘O' the twelfth day of December’ (2.3.79), may be his drunken version of the carol ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’, perhaps identifying the party as his own version of a Twelfth Night revel.14

Modern directors have taken diametrically opposed views of the usefulness of the associations of Twelfth Night to performance, as Michael Billington's conversations with some of them in Directors' Shakespeare (1990), a valuable account of the theatrical issues, makes clear. For Terry Hands, ‘Twelfth Night meant just that—the sixth of January, the moment when you take down the decorations and Christmas is over. The festive moment has passed, and this is now the cruelest point of the year’, and the drinking scene is an attempt ‘to put their Christmas tree back up’ (pp. 2, 8).15 On the other hand, John Barton, who directed a long-running and almost universally admired production for the Royal Shakespeare Company (1969-71), finds the play less wintry than ‘autumnal in mood’ (p. 7). In this respect, Barton agrees with Peter Hall, who directed another much admired autumnal staging (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1958-60, and again at the Playhouse, London, in 1991); while for Bill Alexander, director of the RSC's 1987-8 production, ‘the title was a kind of
distraction’ (p. 3).

That title, however, is not simply *Twelfth Night*. Both the earliest sources, John Manningham's diary and the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays (1623), the sole authority for the text of the play, call it *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*; perhaps the permissive *What You Will* is intended to qualify too rigorous an insistence upon *Twelfth Night* and its associations of misrule.¹⁶ Such openness would be entirely characteristic of a play which establishes so subtle a balance between contrasting elements that it has often been characterized as ‘elusive’ in mood and overall effect. John Gielgud, who directed what seems to have been a rather unsuccessful production at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1955, comments: ‘It is so difficult to combine the romance of the play with the cruelty of the jokes against Malvolio, jokes which are in any case archaic and difficult. The different elements in the play are hard to balance properly.’¹⁷ For this reason, as Michael Billington points out in his introduction to *Directors' Shakespeare*, ‘different characters become, at different times, the pivot of the play [but] the quartet of RSC directors suggests that Sir Toby is the motor that drives the plot and Feste the character who determines the mood’ (p. ix).

It may be that one reason why John Barton's and Peter Hall's autumnal versions were so successful in achieving just that elusive balance between contrasting elements that Gielgud mentions, between sweet and sour, laughter and tears, was that autumn itself is a season of contrasts: serene, warm days edged by chilly nights, mist, and lengthening shadows. Keats catches precisely this quality in his ode ‘To Autumn’ where he defines the perfection of the autumn day by reminding the reader of those things that threaten it—the hint of transience in the ‘soft-dying day’ and in the ‘gathering swallows’, about to depart to escape the approach of winter. And he might be describing the quality of *Twelfth Night* itself when he writes in his ‘Ode on Melancholy’ that ‘in the very temple of delight il'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine’. This combination of happiness and sadness, to the point where an awareness of the one is essential to the full experience and appreciation of the other, is characteristic of the mood of *Twelfth Night*, epitomized in the lines in which Orsino and Viola discuss female perfection,

ORSINO

For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

VIOLA

And so they are. Alas that they are so:

To die even when they to perfection grow

(2.4.37-40),

or in Viola's phrase about her imaginary sister ‘Smiling at grief’ (2.4.115), or in Feste's comparison of Orsino's mind to an opal, an iridescent jewel that changes its appearance in the varying light (2.4.74).

An autumnal mood also suits the revels of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, which carry a sense of the best days being past, of having to make the most of every moment while it lasts. Feste perfectly catches this mood in the song he sings to them in the drinking scene: ‘Present mirth hath present laughter. … uth's a stuff will not endure’ (2.3.46, 50). Perhaps the need to indulge in ‘present laughter’ explains the rather desperate tone of the revelry in most performances, and more particularly how the joke against Malvolio comes to be pushed to the extreme of attempting to drive him mad. Making the most of passing moments is as much a part of *Twelfth Night*, the end of a period of mid-winter revels, as it is of autumn; and references to other seasons in the text—‘More matter for a May morning’ (3.4.137) and ‘this is very midsummer madness’ (3.4.53)—allude to
other periods of Elizabethan revelry, May Day and Midsummer Eve, not necessarily to a particular season in which the action takes place—although Bill Alexander, the director who felt that ‘the title was a kind of distraction’, departed as far from mid-winter as possible and set his 1987 RSC version in the brightly-lit summer sunshine of a fishing village on the Illyrian coast. This leads naturally to the ways in which various stagings have presented Illyria, and to the more general question ‘Where—or what—is Illyria?’

ILLYRIA

Illyria was the ancient name of an area of the Adriatic coast roughly corresponding to what was for long known as Yugoslavia. In the classical world, Illyria had a reputation for piracy: the Illyrians' attacks on Adriatic shipping led to Roman intervention, and the area became the Roman province of Illyricum. Shakespeare was clearly aware of its reputation since his only other reference to it, in the phrase ‘Bargulus, the strong Illyrian pirate’ (Contention 4.1.108), is a translation of ‘Bardulis Illyrius latro’, from Cicero's De Officiis 2.11, a work used as a textbook in Elizabethan schools. This association of Illyria with piracy may have contributed to the vivid evocation of a ferocious sea-battle between Antonio and Orsino at 5.1.45-70, and to the ambiguous presentation of Antonio in general, discussed in a later section of this introduction.

In Shakespeare's day Illyria was a series of city-states controlled by the Venetian republic. Possibly Shakespeare conceives of Orsino and Olivia as neighbouring rulers of these city-states, for whom a marriage alliance might appear natural; yet Orsino and Olivia seem just as much to be neighbouring Elizabethan aristocrats; Olivia's household is presented in precise detail, complete with steward, waiting-gentlewoman, fool, and sponging elderly relative. The coexistence of the remote and the familiar in Shakespeare's Illyria—nicely characterized in a review by Hugh Leonard as ‘a fairyland with back-streets’ (Plays and Players, August 1966, p. 16)—suggests to some interpreters that it should be ‘magical, romantic, Illyrian in that sense’ (John Barton), or even a country of the mind: ‘The place is defined by the characters and the journey they undertake … which is an emotional journey’ (Terry Hands, in Directors' Shakespeare, pp. 8, 9). Each of these aspects of Illyria—the geographical or Mediterranean, the specifically English, the magical, and the sense of a country of the mind—can be illustrated by the prominence each has been given in notable stagings, though of course to emphasize one aspect need not exclude the others, and in the most balanced productions does not do so.

For Shakespeare's company, working on an unlocalized stage and wearing what was for them modern dress, the question of design choices presumably did not arise; and the staging of the play is exceptionally undemanding of theatrical resources. Later actors and directors, since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, have sought to provide a visual equivalent for the play's poetic and dramatic qualities. In the nineteenth century there was a fashion for elaborately realistic and sometimes would-be ‘historical’ settings. Since Illyria in Shakespeare's time ‘was under the rule of the Venetian republic’, a note in H. H. Furness's 1901 New Variorum edition explains, ‘the custom has long prevailed of treating the piece as a romantic and poetic picture of Venetian manners in the seventeenth century. Some stage managers have used Greek dresses. For the purposes of the stage, there must be a “local habitation”’ (p. 4). In a New York production of 1904, for instance, a kind of ‘Illyrian’ national dress was evolved, using elements of Greek, Balkan, even Turkish costumes. The twins each wore a skirted robe with a sleeveless jacket trimmed with braid, a fez, and a sash around the waist with a scimitar. Harley Granville Barker's Savoy production in 1912 reacted against such ‘realistic’ designs by setting a stylized garden with brightly coloured, cone-shaped formal trees against a yellow and black abstract drop-cloth for Orsino's court; but even he made a concession to prevailing ‘Illyrian’ styles by dressing Orsino in oriental robes, complete with turban.

Although Bill Alexander at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1987 attempted to evoke the actual Illyria of Shakespeare's time, his aim was not the historical but the timeless. 'Those white-washed buildings were the same, arguably, in the sixteenth century as they are in the twentieth century.' The costuming was ‘Elizabethan Illyrian’, that is, ‘Greek-Yugoslav dress of that period’—and in fact it was not far removed from the
nineteenth century's attempts to create an 'Illyrian' style. But Alexander also addressed the important question why, since so much of the society in the play seems so English, Shakespeare bothered to set it in Illyria at all: ‘I think he does it for its compression value: … when people are displaced, their characteristics become heightened’ so that there is ‘an intensification of human behaviour’ (Directors' Shakespeare, pp. 12, 32). His evocation of the historical Illyria, then, was ultimately directed at sharpening the audience's sense of the psychology of the play.

And so, in a completely contrasting style, was Peter Hall's very English view at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1958. Derek Granger in his review pointed out that the play ‘marvellously lends itself to a close pictorial re-working’ and that Lila de Nobili's designs were ‘permissibly explicit; we are in fact in a Caroline park on a sunny late afternoon at the very end of September; the light is gold and gauzy, the shadows are umber, the sunflowers glow against the garden wall and there is just the hint of a nip in the air’ (Financial Times, 23 April 1958). The use of painted gauzes allowed the perspectives of a seventeenth-century long gallery for Orsino's court … to blend swiftly into Olivia's walled garden. The advantage of these designs, as A. Alvarez put it when the production was revived in 1960, was that they provided ‘a kind of visual parallel for the play's complexities’ (New Statesman, 28 May 1960), and in particular reflected its changing moods; as one vista melted into another, the production precisely caught that shifting, ‘elusive’ quality often mentioned in connection with the play, its balancing of happiness and melancholy. That balance was further enchanted by Hall's decision to set the play some thirty years after its probable date of composition, in a Caroline world of lace collars, silks, and plumed hats which recalled Van Dyck's images of Charles I's court, in which autumnal colours often temper court splendour with a hint that the golden moment cannot last. Roy Walker summarized some advantages of presenting Illyria like this: the ‘choice of Cavalier costume gave the maximum thematic contrast with Malvolio's Puritan habit, served the opposition of amours and austerity, and … eased the problem of the identical twins with a hair-style equally suitable to boy and girl’.21

The Illyria of John Barton's RSC production (1969-71) was in some respects a visual distillation of Hall's. Christopher Morley's design was a receding, slatted gauze box which proved very flexible. Set with candelabra and dimly lit, it resembled Hall's in suggesting Orsino's enclosed ducal hall; but when the gauze box was back-lit, it evoked a mysterious world beyond. This was crucial to Barton's view of the ‘magical, romantic’ nature of Illyria, and it was especially effective at the first appearance of Viola: the doors at the back of the gauze box flew open and she suddenly materialized amid swirling spray, rising like Venus from the sea; her long flowing hair also carried a suggestion of Alice in Wonderland. But the magical was balanced with the wittily human as Viola gradually recovered her bearings and resolved on positive action, especially once she assumed her page's disguise. Barton back-lit the gauze not only to suggest ‘magic and the sea and the world outside that they'd come from’ (Directors' Shakespeare, p. 10), but also to intensify moments that were at once mysterious and intensely human, above all for the reunion of the twins …, and he underscored such moments with the recurrent sound of the sea, a device adopted by several directors since. Barton's production was first given in a season that concentrated on Shakespeare's late romances; and one consequence was to make the audience especially aware of the ways in which Twelfth Night anticipates those plays: in the use of the sea as both destroyer and renewer; in the sense of characters undertaking emotional journeys; and in the final renewal of a family relationship which is as important as (or more important than) the coming together of lovers upon which comedy usually concentrates.22

An Illyria very far removed from all these was Peter Gill's at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1974. Here, more than in any other production, Illyria was a country of the mind. The key to this interpretation was a huge, dominating mural of Narcissus gazing infatuatedly at his reflection in the water, suggesting the extent to which the characters are prisoners of their own obsessions. As Irving Wardle put it, Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio, ‘in his own way the greatest narcissist of the lot (and the only one who finally resists cure)’, are all ‘intoxicated with their own reflections, and the function of Viola and Sebastian is to put them through an Ovidian obstacle course from which they learn to turn away from the mirror and form real attachments’ (The Times, 24 August 1974). But the production was concerned with body as well as with mind: Peter Ansorge focused something
essential about the play as well as the staging when he defined this Illyria as ‘a highly refined, erotic trap … in which the characters must learn to read the subtext of their desires’ (Plays and Players, October 1974, p. 31). So as well as presenting various visual images of Illyria, these stagings used design to focus important aspects of the play to which subsequent sections of this introduction must return.

‘MOST LIKE … THAT IN ITALIAN CALLED “INGANNI”’

In the diary entry describing the Twelfth Night performance he saw in 1602, John Manningham called the play ‘much like The Comedy of Errors or Menaechmi in Plautus' (the principal source of The Comedy of Errors), but added that it was ‘most like and near to that in Italian called Inganni’. He shrewdly identified the main influences on both the twins story and the love story. There were at least two Italian comedies called Gl’Inganni (‘The Mistakes’), one by Nicolò Secchi (performed in 1547, first published in Florence in 1562 and frequently reprinted) and one by Curzio Gonzaga (published in Venice in 1592). Both appear to derive from an anonymous play, Gl’Ingannati (‘The Deceived’), first performed at Siena in 1531 by a literary society called the ‘Intronati’ (‘Thunderstruck by Love’) and published in Venice in 1537. All these dramatize the central situation of Twelfth Night: a girl disguised as a page woos another lady on behalf of the master whom she loves; the lady then falls in love with the ‘page’, but subsequently marries ‘his’ twin brother. The story recurs in two English prose narratives: Barnaby Riche reworks it in Riche his Farewell to Military Profession (1581); and there is a variant in an episode in Emanuel Forde’s romance The Famous History of Parismus (1598). It was, in other words, a story that was ‘in the air’ at the time; and it is worth considering some points of comparison (and contrast) between these works and Twelfth Night, not to ‘prove’ debts which are unprovable, but to indicate the kind of story that Shakespeare is using, and modifying, for his main plot.

After a prologue and two introductory scenes which contain two references to Twelfth Night (la notte di beffana—the Epiphany), the disguised heroine of Gl’Ingannati makes her first appearance and instantly establishes the tone of the play:

It is indeed very rash of me, when I think of it, to come out in the streets so early, considering the wild practices of these licentious youths of Modena. Oh, how awful it would be if one … seized me by force, and, dragging me into a house, wanted to make sure whether I am a man or a woman!

(Bullough’s translation, cited throughout, p. 292)

Here there is a titillating, salacious flirting with the sexual ambiguities of the disguised heroine. To some extent, this is inherent in the situation, however and by whoever it is dramatized; but this bald statement announces the main source of interest in Gl’Ingannati; and a similarly blunt statement occurs later when the heroine describes her master whom she loves: ‘He looked me up and down from head to foot so closely that I feared he would recognize me’ (p. 296). Unlike Viola, this disguised heroine has followed and is now serving a man who deserted her, so there is a double risk of recognition, both of sex and of identity; but even allowing for this, Gl’Ingannati expresses the potential of the situation in a blunter way than Orsino does:

Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden’s organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman’s part.

Diana’s lip

(1.4.31-4)

All these Italian versions have the heroine hint at her love for her master, as Viola does in her allegory of a sister who died of love (2.4.88-115), but once more this is inherent in the situation: a disguised heroine needs
some statement of her feelings, however reticent. The heroine's assumed name in *Gl'Ingannati*, Fabio, may have suggested Fabian's name to Shakespeare, though another possibility is suggested in the Commentary to 2.5.1. In Curzio Gonzaga's *Gl'Inganni*, the heroine assumes the name ‘Cesare’: this looks like the origin of Viola's choice of ‘Cesario’ for her male disguise. It is interesting that Viola, like the Italian heroines, does not use her brother's name, whereas the heroine in Barnaby Riche's version does, thus making the confusion of the twins much more complete, more ‘plausible’, and, for the brother, even more bewildering.

Shakespeare may have read these Italian plays, or possibly come across the stories through performances by the *commedia dell'arte*, which often drew upon published Italian plays and which was especially fond of plots involving twins (was that where John Manningham too came across *Gl'Inganni*?); but the immediate stimulus was almost certainly provided by Barnaby Riche's story of Apollonius and Silla in *Riche his Farewell to Military Profession*, perhaps by way of Matteo Bandello's version of the story in his *Novelle* (1554) or François de Belleforest's French translation of it (1570).

Riche's narrative sets out to show how lovers drink from ‘the cup of error’:

> for to love them that hate us, to follow them that fly from us, to fawn on them that frown on us, to curry favour with them that disdain us, … who will not confess this to be an erroneous love, neither grounded upon wit nor reason?

(Bullough, p. 345)

This sentence might even have been the spark that set off Shakespeare's choice of main plot; he echoes its phrasing at Olivia's declaration of her love for ‘Cesario’: ‘Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide’ (3.1.150). When Riche's Duke Apollonius courts Lady Julina ‘according to the manner of wooers: besides fair words, sorrowful sighs, and piteous countenances, there must be sending of loving letters [to] become a scholar in love's school’ (p. 351), he anticipates not only Orsino's formal wooing of Olivia, but still more the lesson in courtship given by Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*:

> Say that upon the altar of her beauty
> You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart.
> Write till your ink be dry, and with your tears
> Moist it again …

(3.2.72-5)

And when Duke Apollonius (Orsino) sends Silla (Viola) to woo Lady Julina (Olivia), and Julina falls ‘into as great a liking with the man as the master was with herself’ (pp. 351-2), the phrasing is close to Olivia's ‘Unless the master were the man’ (1.5.284) and to Viola's soliloquy on the complicated situation (2.2.33-9). Closer still is the similarity between Julina's ‘it is enough that you have said for your master; from henceforth, either speak for yourself or say nothing at all’ (p. 352) and Olivia's

> I bade you never speak again of him;
> But would you undertake another suit,
> I had rather hear you to solicit that
> Than music from the spheres.

(3.1.105-8)

Riche's handling of the crisis of the story is closer than the Italian plays to *Twelfth Night*. Julina protests to Duke Apollonius that she is married to Silvio/Silla, ‘whose personage I regard more than mine own life’ (p. 356), a phrase that Shakespeare transfers to Viola/Cesario, who protests that she loves Orsino ‘more than my
life’ (5.1.131); Julia urges Silla ‘Fear not then … to keep your faith and promise which you have made unto me’ (p. 358), as Olivia urges Viola: ‘Hold little faith, though thou hast too much fear’ (5.1.167). But Shakespeare's revelation of the heroine's sex is necessarily very different from Riche's, since he was using a boy actor. Riche says: ‘And here withal loosing his garments down to his stomach’, the ‘page’ ‘shewed Julina his breasts and pretty teats, surmounting far the whiteness of snow itself’ (p. 361). Riche's handling of this revelation, with its somewhat titillating lingering over the heroine's breasts, is a measure of the important difference between Riche's tone and Shakespeare's, despite the similarities of plot and the verbal echoes; and still more is Riche's suggestive address to the 'gentlewomen' readers to avoid Julina's example: ‘For God's love take heed, and let this be an example to you, when you be with child, how you swear who is the father’ (p. 359). Although in some ways Riche is more romantic than the Italians, his tone here is much closer to theirs than to Shakespeare's—as it is also in the treatment of the relationship between the equivalents of Sebastian and Olivia: whereas Olivia's predecessors take the heroine's twin to bed, and in Secchi's and Riche's versions become pregnant and so precipitate the crisis of the story, Olivia marries Sebastian.

In some respects, Shakespeare's tone is closer to the other work that may have provided him with his immediate stimulus, Emanuel Forde's *Parismus* of 1598. This narrative seems to have given him the names of his two heroines. Prince Parismus, about to be married to the daughter of Queen Olivia, sleeps with Violetta, who under cover of darkness mistakes him for 'her accustomed friend'; she subsequently follows Parismus disguised as the page Adonius and, while staying at a hermit's cell, has to share a bed with Parismus and his friend Pollipus:

> Poor Adonius with blushing cheeks put off his apparel, and seemed to be abashed when he was in his shirt, and tenderly leapt into the bed ..., where the poor soul lay close at Parismus' back, the very sweet touch of whose body seemed to ravish her with joy: and on the other side not acquainted with such bedfellows, she seemed as it were metamorphosed with a kind of delightful fear.

*(Bullough, p. 367)*

Forde's alternation between 'he' and 'she' when describing Violetta/Adonius underlines the ambiguity of the disguised heroine. Her 'delightful fear' is again something that is inherent in the relationship of the heroine and the master she loves, as most performances of the Viola/Orsino scenes bring out. For example, Hilary Spurling, reviewing the RSC's 1966 production, noted how ‘an aura of desire, narrowly and deliciously averted, hangs over all the scenes between Orsino and his “dear lad”, Viola/Cesario. At one point, as his page, she undresses him, draws off his gloves, half-caressing, half-shrinking from the touch’ (*Spectator*, 24 June 1966).

But then *Parismus* takes a surprising turn. Parismus himself is reunited with the daughter of Queen Olivia, and Violetta sympathetically looks after Pollipus, who is in love with her but does not recognize her in her page's disguise, and she gradually comes to love him:

> Often time he would spend many hours in secret complaints and protestations of his loyal love. ... [She] beheld the ... constancy of his resolution, for that he determined to spend his life in her service, and also the pleasure she took in his company, being never from him in the day time, and his bedfellow in the night, that she was privy to all his actions, using many kindnesses, which he full little thought proceeded from such affection.

*(Bullough, pp. 368-9)*

While the situation is not exactly the same as in *Twelfth Night*, since Pollipus' constant resolution is to Violetta herself rather than to another woman, and Violetta, unlike Viola, only gradually falls in love, the
image of a disguised heroine attending and ultimately curing her beloved's love-sickness, while their relationship matures without the man being aware of it, is very likely to have had its effect on the genesis of Twelfth Night. And both Forde and Shakespeare share a quality notably absent from Riche and the Italian plays: tenderness.

A CENTRAL COMEDY

If Forde, Riche, and the Italians provided Shakespeare with different elements of his main plot, those features were modified through the experience of writing his own earlier plays. In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, for instance, Julia follows her lover Proteus in boy's disguise, only to find that he has transferred his attentions to Silvia, and she becomes an agent in his wooing. There is a bittersweet exchange between Proteus and Julia which anticipates both Viola's expressing her love obliquely and her 'ring' soliloquy (2.2.17-41). Disguised as the page Sebastian, Julia refers to herself as a woman:

She dreams on him that has forgot her love;
You dote on her that cares not for your love.
'Tis pity love should be so contrary.

(4.4.79-81)

But in this version, as Harold Jenkins points out, 'the lady fails to fall in love with the page at all, which is really a little surprising of her, since she had done so in Shakespeare's source [Montemayor's Diana]. It is almost as though Shakespeare were reserving this crowning situation, in which the mistress loves the woman-page, for treatment in some later play'.

John Manningham recognized that Twelfth Night was also 'much like The Comedy of Errors or Menaechmi in Plautus'. Although Shakespeare derived the central scenes of confusion over the twins from Plautus' Menaechmi (and from another Plautus play, Amphitruo), he also placed these within a framework story of a family separated by shipwreck and ultimately reunited after much wandering, which was drawn chiefly from the story of Apollonius of Tyre that he used again much later in his career for the main plot of Pericles. He introduced other material into The Comedy of Errors which is relevant to Twelfth Night. He moved the setting from Epidamnus in Plautus to Ephesus, partly because, as the centre of the cult of Diana, Ephesus had a reputation for witchcraft and the occult in the ancient world (and in the Bible), and would therefore provide an apt context for scenes of apparent madness and exorcism; this is much developed in Twelfth Night both in the way in which Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio seem to be suffering from various kinds of madness, and in the mock-exorcism of Malvolio by Feste as Sir Topaz. By setting the action of the two plays in Ephesus and Illyria, Shakespeare located them, however approximately, on Mediterranean sea-coasts. The Comedy of Errors opens under the shadow of bloody inter-city trade war, and this reappears in Twelfth Night to sharpen the acrimonious confrontation between Antonio and Orsino at the start of the final scene.

But of course the most important connection between The Comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night is in the handling of the twins. In Plautus, as in Errors, they are the same sex. The Italian plays, and commedia dell'arte scenarios based on them, established a new tradition by making them a boy and a girl, and Shakespeare may have been attracted to this variant for personal reasons: he was the father of boy and girl twins, Hamnet and Judith. However that may be, the twins introduce a vein of particularly intense emotion into Twelfth Night. Shakespeare's son Hamnet died in 1596 at the age of eleven, and Shakespeare may have known what modern research into bereaved twins has demonstrated: that the death of a twin seems to cause a sense of desolation different in kind from other bereavements, and the surviving twin often tries to 'compensate' for the loss by attempting to assume the other's identity. Shakespeare had already touched on a twin's sense of lost identity when separated from a brother in The Comedy of Errors:

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop …
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

(1.2.35-40)

Such perceptions may have helped to sharpen the poignancy of Viola's initial reaction to her brother's loss—

And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother he is in Elysium

(1.2.2-3)—

and to her decision to assume her brother's persona for her disguise:

In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate.

(3.4.371-4)

This speech has another, more down-to-earth function: Shakespeare takes care to make the twins' identical clothing seem plausible here, while in *Errors* two pairs of twins separated since infancy wear identical clothes on one particular day.

In fact, the treatment of the twins is one measure of the difference between the two plays. *The Comedy of Errors* is basically a comedy of situation with psychological touches, *Twelfth Night* a comedy of character built upon a comedy of situation. In *The Comedy of Errors*, despite the fact that Antipholus of Syracuse has come to Ephesus specifically *looking* for his brother, he still fails to make the obvious deduction when everybody appears to recognize him and calls him by his name—although it is true that Shakespeare has to some extent prepared for this by making Antipholus aware of Ephesus' evil reputation as a centre of

    nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
    Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
    Soul-killing witches that deform the body

(1.2.98-100),

so that he half-expects strange things to happen to him. By contrast, when Antonio mistakes Viola for Sebastian, she immediately deduces the facts: 'He named Sebastian. I my brother know t living in my glass' (3.4.370-1). Yet she conceals this information from others, pretending at the start of the final scene that Antonio's words to her seem merely 'distraction' (5.1.62), until the truth is confirmed by Sebastian's appearance. This holding-back greatly intensifies both the pathos and the ecstasy of their climactic reunion.

There are also important resemblances, not so much in story-line as in mood and technique, between *Twelfth Night* and another of Shakespeare's earlier comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Like Orsino and Olivia, the young lords in this play are idealists, swearing to renounce the world (and specifically the company of women) for three years' secluded study. The play is about their growing up. The ladies of the French court lure them from their idealism to an acceptance of a more down-to-earth reality, as Viola lures Orsino and Olivia from theirs. Although this involves the lords in breaking their oaths to study, and Olivia breaks her promise to retire for seven years in mourning for her brother, at least these forswearings are on the side of life. The lords, like Orsino and Olivia, begin an emotional journey to maturity, but this is not necessarily a solemn thing: in *Love's
Labour's Lost, its first stage culminates in the brilliant tour de force of a multiple eavesdropping scene, in which the lords overhear one another admit their love for the ladies—a scene which in its technical bravura anticipates Malvolio's letter scene in Twelfth Night.

The climax of the lords' journey to maturity in Love's Labour's Lost is much more sombre, as a black-clad messenger interrupts the festivities at the end of the play with news of the death of the Princess's father. Faced with such a harsh intrusion of reality, and with parting from the ladies, the lords are compelled to drop the conventional forms of wooing they have used so far and say just what they feel. But the shadow of death has been cast across the brilliant surface of the play on several earlier occasions, from the King's urge in his opening speech to evade mortality by seeking an immortality guaranteed through the achievements of learning, to Catherine's poignantly simple statement about her sister who died of love: Cupid 'made her melancholy, sad, and heavy, so she died' (5.2.14-15); this anticipates Viola's expression of her own love through an allegory of a sister who died of love:

She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

(2.4.112-15)

In some respects the treatment of death in Love's Labour's Lost is tougher than in Twelfth Night: Catherine's sister actually died, whereas Viola leaves the issue of death ambiguous, for obvious metaphorical reasons. But Love's Labour's Lost anticipates in important ways the persistent vein of melancholy and awareness of mortality that shadows the revels in Twelfth Night and deepens the happiness achieved. It is as if Shakespeare feels that the resolutions of comedy must be put to the test of being set against harsher experience if they are to be convincing.

In its emphasis upon the emotional journeys of the characters; in making the reunion of the members of a family as important as the love story; in the use of storm and of sexual disguise; and in setting ultimate happiness against harsher experiences, Twelfth Night looks forward to the late romances as well as back to the earlier comedies. At the climax of Pericles, Shakespeare even reworks Viola's image of her sister sitting 'like patience on a monument' in order to express the way in which Marina lures Pericles from the 'extremity' of his violent despair by her smiling patience:

Like patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling
Extremity out of act.

(Scene 21. 126-8)

In Cymbeline, Shakespeare creates a heroine, Imogen, who closely resembles Viola in her candid integrity but who is put through much harsher, more extreme experiences, and who expresses her sense of utter desolation at the apparent death of her husband with a spare simplicity which is a further paring-down of Viola's direct style: 'I am nothing; or if not, thing to be were better' (4.2.369-70). And when at the end of Twelfth Night Orsino shows to Viola 'a savage jealousy at sometime savours nobly' (5.1.115-16), he anticipates the far more explosive sexual violence of Posthumus in Cymbeline and Leontes in The Winter's Tale. Leontes in particular goes on an emotional journey from a jealousy which borders on sadism to a spiritual 're-creation' performed in a 'wide gap of time' (5.3.155), that time in which Viola also puts her trust (2.2.40-1). The sea which separates but also reunites the twins in The Comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night is an instrument both of destruction and restoration in The Tempest too: 'Though the seas threaten, they are merciful. have cursed them without cause' (5.1.181-2). Twelfth Night is a central comedy in more than just its chronological position.
half-way through Shakespeare's working life.

KINDS OF LOVE

In reviewing Peter Hall's 1991 production of *Twelfth Night*, John Gross began by glancing briefly at academic criticism of the play:

*Twelfth Night* is about deception, about the difference between true love and its egocentric counterfeits. Orsino is in love with love, Olivia is in love with grief, Malvolio is in love with himself. So say the textbooks, and up to a point they are obviously right.

But when you put it that way, half the magic evaporates. The play's moods are much too various to be summed up in a formula, its colours much too delicate; the lessons it teaches are less important than the world it creates, and its language races ahead—magnificently—of anything that the plot requires.

(*Sunday Telegraph*, 3 March 1991)

The tension which Gross focuses here between what the ‘textbooks’ say and the rich experience that the play offers in performance may be demonstrated by considering Orsino's opening scene.

Gareth Lloyd Evans conveniently reflects a common critical view of Orsino. His ‘first speech has all the languid self-indulgence of a man [who lives] in an illusion of love’. But when Alan Howard actually played the part like that at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1966, Lloyd Evans complained, because Howard gave the impression ‘of high-class petulance, inbred stupidity and self-indulgence’. It is interesting, however, that even a performance of Orsino which, reflecting critical fashion, verged on caricature, nevertheless suggested more than caricature, at least to Hilary Spurling in her review: this Orsino stands

listening in an attitude of conscious ecstasy, a rose in one outstretched hand, [and his] delivery of the famous first speech … shows a Renaissance delight in luxury and artifice.

Also more than a hint, in his glistening eyes and sensuous lips, of Renaissance barbarity—‘my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, er since pursue me.’

(*Spectator*, 24 June 1966)

What she focuses here is the sheer range of Orsino's language. In speaking of its ‘Renaissance delight in luxury and artifice’, she points out that Orsino's opening speech starts off from an artificial Renaissance code of behaviour like that followed by Riche's Duke Apollonius or recommended by Shakespeare's Proteus in the passages quoted on p. 17 above: to that extent, he exemplifies the traditional melancholy lover; but as John Gross puts it, the language ‘races ahead’ of this basic situation, and complicates it:

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.

(1.1.1-3)

Orsino's desire to be fed by the music to the point where he becomes sick of it can be interpreted as an expression merely of self-indulgence; but the additional implication that the music acts as a stimulus for, as much as a satiation of, the appetite is clarified by an illuminating parallel usage in Sonnet 56, where Shakespeare uses the same metaphor of feeding, not to express delusion, but to suggest that love needs to be
constantly stimulated in order to avoid killing ‘The spirit of love with a perpetual dullness’ (7-8):

Sweet love, renew thy force. Be it not said
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
Which but today by feeding is allayed,
Tomorrow sharpened in his former might.

(1-4)

It is this stimulus that Orsino seeks in his opening speech; and if his lines suggest excess, they also suggest an emotional responsiveness, a potential for feeling, which is developed in the sensuous beauty of the following lines about the music:

O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour.

(1.1.5-7)

It is true that he quickly tires of the music—‘Enough, no more, is not so sweet now as it was before’—but at least his changeableness ensures that he will not ‘kill e spirit of love with a perpetual dullness’, as the Sonnet puts it. His language does not only indicate limitation or absurdity.

Nor is his ensuing comparison of the ‘spirit of love’ to the sea simply extravagant. As Harold Jenkins says, ‘if the spirit of love is … as unstable as the sea, it is also as living and capacious’:

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,
Of what validity and pitch so e'er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute!

(1.1.9-14)

The image has a vigorous life as well as extravagance. So, to an even greater extent, has Orsino's subsequent comparison of himself to the huntsman Actaeon, torn in pieces by his own hounds (see fig. 3), to which Hilary Spurling alludes in her account of Alan Howard's performance:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

(1.1.18-22)

This speech, even more than Orsino's first one, demonstrates the double effect of the language. On the one hand, Orsino's image of Olivia as a purifying goddess and his comparison of himself to a classical huntsman might be thought simply examples of what Hilary Spurling calls ‘Renaissance artifice’; but the use to which they are put is not artificial at all. The ‘pestilence’, plague, was an everpresent threat to the audience listening to Orsino; and the ferocity of the ‘fell and cruel hounds’ makes real and immediate the pangs of frustrated desire—and this ferocity lurking beneath the artifice prepares, incidentally, for Orsino's homicidal outburst when he thinks himself betrayed in the final scene. So from the start of the play, the language is two-edged: if
it is artificial and even satirical in that it draws upon fashion and convention, that fashion is tempered by an immediacy and vigour which suggest that Orsino is at least capable of powerful feeling and, most important, of development under Viola's influence.

A further dimension is given to the scene by the music. It is almost as if the printed text is a blueprint for the total experience of words and music together—which of course is how Shakespeare has conceived it, ‘hearing’ the musical phrases, played and repeated, blending with the spoken text. The music can take many forms. In the first performances it may have been a single instrument or a consort, but the plangent sound of the lute blends particularly well with the language, especially in expressing the ‘dying fall’ of line 4. In any case, the combination of musical beauty and sensuous language is a crucial part of an audience's experience of the scene, and further complicates any view that Orsino is being satirized or caricatured.

There is, however, a further suggestion of artifice and the following of convention in Valentine's account of Olivia's mourning for her dead brother:

The element itself till seven years' heat
Shall not behold her face at ample view,
But like a cloistress she will veiled walk
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine—all this to season
A brother's dead love …

(1.1.25-30)

The word ‘element’ seems to have been a fashionable affectation; it is used by Malvolio to express superiority (3.4.119) and mocked by Feste as ‘over-worn’ (3.1.58): whether the affectation here is Olivia's own or Valentine's veiled criticism of her is not clear, but such subsequent phrases as ‘like a cloistress’, ‘water … her chamber’, ‘eye-offending brine’, and ‘season’ also suggest affectation. It is good to mourn the dead, but not to carry mourning to extremes; and there could be no greater contrast than with Viola's style as she arrives on stage a mere ten lines later, shipwrecked and mourning the brother she has lost:

And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother he is in Elysium.

(1.2.2-3)

Elysium is the heaven of classical mythology, but there is nothing artificial or ‘literary’ about the lines: Viola expresses her sense of bereavement with a direct simplicity which is characteristic of much of her language, except when she is being consciously ‘poetical’ (discussed in the next section), and which differs sharply both from Orsino's elaborate style and from the language used by Valentine to describe Olivia. That contrast swiftly and economically sets up the main line of the romantic plot: as Orsino and Olivia come into contact with Viola, her unaffected directness draws them from their affectations, and reveals the positive qualities that those mannerisms partly conceal.

The process has begun in Viola's very next scene, now in her disguise as the page Cesario. Orsino's first words to her are:

Thou know'st no less but all: I have unclasped
To thee the book even of my secret soul.

(1.4.13-14)
In noticeable contrast to the language he used to describe his love for Olivia, he now comes quickly to the point. He has met somebody whom he trusts, and has simply opened his heart to his page without fuss. Their relationship, and the foundation of their ultimate marriage, based not on wooing from afar but on getting to know one another, is established in a mere two lines.

Shakespeare also does a great deal of work in a short space of time in the scene where Olivia first appears (1.5). Here he introduces no fewer than three major characters—Olivia herself, Malvolio, and Feste—so that the audience can compare Olivia's and Malvolio's reactions to Feste. When Feste proves Olivia a fool 'to mourn for [her] brother's soul being in heaven' (1.5.65-6), she is able to accept the 'proof' and to laugh at herself. Shakespeare specifically invites the audience to compare Olivia's reaction with Malvolio's by having her ask Malvolio for his opinion, and he is not amused: 'I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal' (1.5.78-9)—words that Feste does not forget, and turns back upon Malvolio in the final scene. Olivia shrewdly characterizes Malvolio: 'O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio … There is no slander in an allowed fool, though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet man, though he do nothing but reprove' (1.5.85-91). By equating Malvolio's faults with Feste's, Olivia delicately but firmly puts Malvolio in his place; and by allying herself with the wise fool rather than with the repressive steward, she emerges as a much more complex and interesting character than the first scene has led us to expect. Far from being either the purifying goddess described by Orsino, or the cloistered idealist shutting herself away for seven years described by Valentine, she is a great lady in charge of her household whom grief has not deprived either of a sense of humour or of a capacity to size up other people. Both stand her in good stead in her first encounter with Viola.

‘MAKE ME A WILLOW CABIN’: VIOLA AND OLIVIA

The Viola/Olivia scene opens with an exchange about the most appropriate expression for a declaration of love, and so recalls the complexities of Orsino's language in the first scene, appropriately enough since Viola is his ambassador. Unable to recognize Olivia, or pretending not to recognize her, Viola launches into Orsino's prepared speech, 'Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty', only to break off and ask anticlimactically 'if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her' (1.5.162-4), thus drawing attention to the risk of inappropriateness in conventional compliments. Far from being in any way thrown by Viola's irony, Olivia is quick to catch her tone and to match her in distrusting cliché:

VIOLA

... I will on with my speech in your praise, and then show you the heart of my message.

OLIVIA

Come to what is important in't, I forgive you the praise.

VIOLA

Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical.

OLIVIA

It is the more like to be feigned, I pray you keep it in.

(1.5.181-9)

Viola and Olivia are equals in poise and wit, and as so often Shakespeare uses wit to suggest relationship, or potential relationship. The two characters strike up an immediate rapport, which during the course of the scene develops on Olivia's side into interest and finally love; as with the Viola/Orsino relationship, Olivia's love has
its origins in their compatible personalities.

Once Olivia has got rid of her attendants, what she calls a ‘skipping … dialogue’ (l. 193) begins to intensify. First, when she unveils at Viola's request and asks ‘Is't not well done?’, Viola's witty quip ‘Excellently done, if God did all’ is countered by Olivia's unperturbed, equally quick-witted reply: ‘Tis in grain sir, 'twill endure wind and weather’ (224-7). And when Viola goes on to suggest that Olivia must not die without leaving a ‘copy’ of her beauty, a child, Olivia wittily plays upon the word ‘copy’, taking the scene back into prose as she does so. Now it is she, not Viola, who deflates poetic compliments, mockingly reducing the various aspects of her beauty to a list of items on a ‘schedule’ or inventory, ‘as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth’ (ll. 235-7). The two of them are more clearly matched than ever in witty presence of mind.

The major transition in the scene comes when Viola, ironically in view of what is to happen, raises the idea of herself, as Cesario, loving Olivia, and demonstrates how she would go about her wooing in her famous ‘willow cabin’ speech (ll. 257-65). This is the perfect example of a passage which starts off from a basis of fashion and convention but goes far beyond the merely extravagant. As Harold Jenkins points out, ‘the willow is the emblem of forsaken love and those songs that issue from it in the dead of night … are easily recognizable as the traditional love-laments’. But as he also says, the parody ‘is of the kind that does not belittle but transfigures its original’ and Olivia ‘starts to listen’.33 The situation is again two-edged. Part of the reason that Olivia starts to listen is that she is susceptible to this kind of language when delivered with this power, and an atmosphere of erotic ambiguity is established which dominates the Viola/Olivia scenes as it does the Viola/Orsino ones. The dramatist Simon Gray writes illuminatingly about this ambiguity: the speech ‘is not a classic of romantic persuasiveness for nothing. If it is ironic in its exaggerations, it is also insidiously enticing in its rhythms … and consequently the comedy in [Viola's] relationship with Olivia is both intensely erotic and dangerous’ (New Statesman, 28 August 1969).

Olivia registers the power of the willow cabin speech with the simple phrase ‘You might do much.’ She then takes the scene on to its next stage by asking ‘What is your parentage?’, the significance of which is that she is attempting to find out if ‘Cesario’ is of the rank that would qualify ‘him’ as a potential husband. Her defences are down, her interest clear. In the soliloquy at the end of the scene, Shakespeare has given her a valuable sense of self-mockery: she herself is surprised at the speed and suddenness with which she has fallen in love: ‘How now? en so quickly may one catch the plague?’ (ll. 284-5). At the same time the comparison of love to the ever-threatening plague, echoing the first scene, gives a touch of sombre reality to her situation, and this duality is further developed in her second scene with Viola. There is certainly comedy of situation in Olivia's declaration of love to the ‘page’, but it is balanced by the lyrical freshness and beauty of her imagery, and then by her increasing desperation:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,
I love thee so that maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

(3.1.147-50)

As so often in Shakespearian comedy, an event is seen from more than one perspective: what may appear humorously incongruous to an onlooker is no joke to the person experiencing it. The language takes the character well beyond mere confusion of situation. Olivia's emotions have been roused and fired, and moreover she is aware both of the pain and the irony of her situation as an oncoming wooer.

But the moment needs careful handling, and the age of the character (and of the actress) is an important consideration. In an account which emphasizes the openness of the text to a variety of interpretations,
particularly in the matter of the characters' ages, John Russell Brown points out that Olivia can be of 'mature years', a gracious lady of the manor, or 'a very young girl' who forgets 'her “discreet” bearing in breathless eagerness' as she falls in love with Cesario. But the limitations of this openness have often been rather sharply demonstrated in performance. At the 1980 Canadian Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, for instance, a mature Olivia threw herself at a young Viola only to be greeted by a strident comment from a woman in the audience, 'That's really quite embarrassing'—perhaps because Olivia appeared to be cradle-snatching, perhaps because one woman was making love to another. Olivia, of course, falls in love with the 'boy'; but it is part of the sexually ambiguous potential of the scene, as Trevor Nunn privately suggests, that Olivia unconsciously senses and responds to the feminine qualities of the 'boy'. Nunn argues particularly from the impression given by the matching youth, compatible personalities, and sympathy beneath the wit-combats, of Dorothy Tutin and Geraldine McEwan at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1958; but extreme youth can also bring its problems, as Robert Speaight explains: 'Olivia must, at least, be the competent mistress of a great household; a serious young woman capable of sudden silliness, or—if you prefer—a silly young woman capable of sudden seriousness. To make her incapable of any seriousness whatsoever blunt[s] the impact of Viola on her fantasy.' A careful balance needs to be struck between youth and maturity, between innocence and experience.

‘SHE NEVER TOLD HER LOVE’: VIOLA AND ORSINO

The long scene between Viola, Orsino, and Feste (2.4) is the emotional heart of the play. It is also the scene which best exemplifies the play's 'elusive' quality, its shifting, bittersweet mood; and as in the first scene the music makes a powerful contribution. The scene falls into three clearly defined sections: Feste sings 'Come away death' in the middle of the scene, with intimate conversations between Viola and Orsino on either side. But the song permeates the first section of the scene as well, since Orsino asks the musician or musicians to play the tune before Feste arrives, and the characters' reactions to it focus the changing moods of the scene—by turns melancholy, heartfelt, humorous, ironic—and especially the steadily developing relationship of Orsino and Viola. For example, Viola's 'masterly' description of the music—'It gives a very echo to the seat ere love is throned' (2.4.20-1)—leads Orsino to ask questions about Viola herself and with whom she is in love. Her oblique replies, and witty puns like 'by your favour', implying both 'by your leave' and 'someone who resembles you', establish the only way in which her disguise allows her to speak of her love—through hints and half-truths; and Orsino's reactions, like 'She is not worth thee then' and 'Too old, by heaven', show a valuable capacity to laugh at himself, a significant development from his first scene (ll. 22-8).

The second phase of the scene begins with Feste's arrival and the discussion of the song. There is a slight problem here. Orsino calls it 'old and plain', a folk-song such as people sing when sitting at work in the sun, about 'the innocence of love'. But the text is actually quite elaborate. The point is probably that the sentiment of the song, concerning a lover who is about to die of unrequited love and who asks to be buried uncommemorated and forgotten, is about primal emotions. It is certainly perfectly suited to the singer, as Feste's songs always are: it fuels Orsino's love-melancholy, but it is also very relevant to Viola, who no doubt thinks that she may well go to her grave without being able to declare her love. So for all its elaboration, the song celebrates unspoken emotion and is thus absolutely relevant to the content of the scene. It is easy when reading to forget the reactions of characters who are not speaking, which of course staging brings out: Ronald Bryden, for instance, wrote of the 'glimpses of unspoken tenderness' in John Barton's production, such as Judi Dench's Viola 'biting her lip as she watches the effect of Feste's hymn to death on Orsino' (Observer, 24 August 1969). But the song is relevant to Feste too: since he is almost certainly of an older generation—'a fool that the lady Olivia's father took much delight in' (2.4.11-12)—a song that is 'old and plain' suits this singer as it does his audience, for different reasons, and its melancholy fits the wry manner he displays elsewhere.

The impression that the song is suited to the singer also derives from the enjoyment Feste gets out of it—'I take pleasure in singing, sir'—and it is his involvement in his art which motivates his barbed reaction when
Orsino offers to pay him: ‘pleasure will be paid, one time or another’. Feste is not slow to accept—or to ask for—money elsewhere (2.3.25, 30-4; 3.1.42-53; 4.1.20-2; 5.1.22-43), but here he seems to bridle at Orsino's assumption that art is simply something to be used and that it can be switched off and on to order. And when Orsino dismisses him, Feste delivers one of the most remarkable speeches in the play:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing.

(ll. 72-7)

Here Feste openly criticizes Orsino's moody changeableness: ‘changeable taffeta’ was a standard Elizabethan term for shot silk, which keeps changing colour with the light, as the opal also does (see the notes to 2.4.73-4). He then accuses Orsino of lacking constancy—something that Orsino specifically prided himself upon at l. 18. Not surprisingly, Orsino is stung by this and dismisses everyone except Viola. While Feste's ‘opal’ and ‘changeable taffeta’ are apt descriptions for at least a part of Orsino's personality, they might also serve as apt images for the shifting moods of both the scene and the play as a whole.

Partly, no doubt, because he is smarting at Feste's criticism of his inconstancy, Orsino is at his most self-centred when he proclaims that no woman's love is like his (ll. 92-102). Such male chauvinism is too much for Viola, the living denial of it, and she bursts out ‘Ay, but I know—’. This was a particularly memorable moment in Dorothy Tutin's performance in Peter Hall's 1958-60 production, well caught by Michael Billington as ‘a soaring cry from the heart halted just in time and brought down in the vocal scale to a more moderate “Too well what love women to men may owe” (Directors' Shakespeare, p. xviii).’ This impassioned broken line is very characteristic of Viola. In her candour, she cannot bear to hear Orsino going on about what is not true, and has to stop him even at the risk of almost revealing her identity. And the half-line emphasizes that in her page's disguise she is frustrated from making the declaration of love she longs to make. But her impassioned outburst also reawakens Orsino's interest in Viola herself and her feelings expressed at the start of the scene, and this leads to the emotional climax, Viola's oblique statement of her love in the allegory of an imaginary sister.

Once more, as in her ‘willow cabin’ speech, Viola starts off from convention but transforms it: the traditional Elizabethan comparison of ladies' skin to damask roses, and the proverb, which Shakespeare also uses in Sonnet 35, that the ‘canker’ (worm) 'lives in sweetest bud' (l. 4), perfectly express the hidden grief eating away at her heart:

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek.

(ll. 110-12)

Viola then proceeds to transform the traditional image of the pining, melancholy lover into something more complex:

She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

(ll. 112-15)
That final phrase, with smiles and tears inseparable, is very characteristic both of the play and of Viola herself: she can see the humorous as well as the sad side of situations. In her earlier soliloquy when Malvolio gave her Olivia's ring, for instance, she was able to combine sympathy for Olivia with a witty appreciation of the irony of her situation:

Poor lady, she were better love a dream!
... As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman, now alas the day,
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!

(2.2.26-39)

Viola's speech draws Orsino from his self-absorption to an interest in her and her story: ‘But died thy sister of her love, my boy?’ Her reply is packed with a variety of emotional implications:

I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too; and yet I know not.

(ll. 119-21)

G. K. Hunter brings out some of these implications:

the doubleness of expression involves more than a pattern of wit; it evokes Viola's complex relationship of frustration and fulfilment, which is what the page role allows to her, at the same time as it reminds us of her brother, and her aloneness in the world. ... Viola says, ‘a woman may die of love’, ‘I may die of love for you’, ‘I am alone in the world—but I am not even sure of that’, ... and no doubt other things as well.37

Performers naturally seize upon this potential. Judi Dench, for instance, has a vocal characteristic, a little break or catch in the voice, which she can exploit to great expressive effect; she used it here on ‘brothers’, with a slight hesitation before the word: she was clearly thinking of Sebastian.

But Viola does not simply sit and pine: in the scene's final change of mood, she snaps out of her sorrow and has to remind Orsino, who is now absorbed in her and her story, of Olivia: ‘Sir, shall I to this lady?’ This moment, with Orsino more interested in Viola than Olivia, makes it clear that the basis of their relationship and ultimate marriage is fully established. One reason why Orsino has no more scenes until the finale is that no more are needed; Shakespeare's economical craftsmanship has done the work. As Gareth Lloyd Evans wrote of Orsino in John Barton's production, he ‘has mewled about ideal love and compromises with a sweet actuality which, unknown to him, is as near to the ideal as he will ever achieve’.38 He and Viola are friends first, lovers subsequently; at the end of the play, he marries someone he has come to know.

The final moments of this scene are usually highly charged in performance, as Orsino becomes more engrossed in Viola, and this interest is often expressed in physical ways which arise naturally out of the intensity of the scene. At Salzburg in 1972, for instance, Klaus Maria Brandauer actually kissed ‘Cesario’; and in Peter Gill's 1974 RSC production, John Price's Orsino clasped Jane Lapotaire's androgynous Viola sympathetically to his bare chest, thus making the moment even more difficult for her; behind them, on the walls of William Dudley's set, was scrawled a line from Sonnet 23: ‘O learn to read what silent love hath writ’ (l. 13). This Viola was the perfect image of ‘silent love’. Since she was also very convincing in her boy's disguise, and since Orsino responded so physically to ‘Cesario’, this staging focused attention on the sexually ambiguous potential of the relationships in this play, not only those between Orsino and Viola, and Viola and Olivia, but more particularly that between Antonio and Sebastian, which was also very physically expressed,
with passionate embraces between them at parting and at reunion.

ANTONIO AND SEBASTIAN

The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian is another of the differing ‘kinds of love’ depicted in the play; but Shakespeare has dramatized it in a way that makes it hard to focus precisely. The difficulties begin in their first scene (2.1). It is surprising that this is in prose; even if the scene is regarded as a simple narrative link, the usual medium for that in a Shakespeare play is blank verse, as in the next scene for these two characters (3.3). Moreover, it is very unlike the vigorous, energetic prose so far spoken, being formal, even mannered, with its abstractions and balanced cadences, as in Sebastian's ‘The malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours’ (ll. 4-5). It is possible that this style is meant to suggest a sense of strain in the relationship. Antonio loving Sebastian but being uncertain how best to express it, Sebastian half-aware of this, perhaps partly reciprocating it, while also preoccupied with his grieving for Viola. The verse lines embedded in the prose, for instance ‘though it was said she much resembled me’ (ll. 22-3), may suggest intense emotion reined in by the controlled, contained style, and Sebastian is close to tears at ll. 37-8. Strong feeling beneath the formal surface is also implied in Antonio's phrase ‘If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant’ (ll. 31-2), which employs the Petrarchan conceit of the cruel mistress murdering her loving servant; and once Sebastian has left, the constraint of prose gives way to the liberation of verse as Antonio expresses his love directly: ‘I do adore thee so at danger shall seem sport, and I will go’ (ll. 42-3).

Some of the tensions beneath the prose in this scene may linger beneath the verse of their next conversation. In Sebastian's

> I can no other answer make but thanks,
> And thanks; and ever oft good turns ...

(3.3.13-15),

the third line is two syllables short, which may suggest an embarrassed pause after ‘And thanks’, Sebastian appreciating Antonio's generosity but implying that he is trying to find the right way of telling Antonio that he cannot fully reciprocate his love—before the conversation turns to the less emotionally fraught topic of seeing the sights of the town. Antonio's generosity emerges again when he gives Sebastian his purse; and this motivates his outraged sense of betrayal when ‘Cesario’ subsequently denies him the purse in the scene of his arrest. This moment is typical of the technique of the play: the comedy of situation created by the mock duel draws from Antonio an outburst of intense suffering, and a public declaration of his love for Sebastian, whom he relieved with ‘sanctity of love’ and to whose ‘venerable’ ‘image’ he offered ‘devotion’. His passion is summed up in the intense phrase ‘O, how vile an idol proves this god!’ (3.4.352-6). Here Antonio uses not so much the language of Petrarchan conceit as the expression of intense love in terms of religious devotion such as Shakespeare uses in some of his most powerful Sonnets:

> How many a holy and obsequious tear
> Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye

(31.5-6)

or

> Let not my love be called idolatry,
> Nor my beloved as an idol show ...

(105.1-2)
And although Viola has caused his statement of anguished disappointment through her apparent ingratitude, it is a nice irony that in fact she agrees with Antonio in being generous and hating ingratitude (3.4.344-7). This obliquely makes the point that, like Viola, Antonio provides a kind of emotional ground bass for the declarations of love in the play—often wrung from him by the twists of the plot, both here and in the final scene, which will be considered later.

At the same time, the play does not sentimentalize Antonio. The suspicion of piracy, for instance, which hangs about him is never conclusively dispelled. The evidence centres on two accounts of the sea-battle between Antonio and Orsino at 3.3.26-37 and 5.1.45-70. While not denying that he is Orsino's enemy, Antonio does deny that he is 'thief or pirate' (5.1.68-70); yet earlier he admits to Sebastian that the quarrel might have since been answered in repaying

What we took from them, which for traffic's sake
Most of our city did. Only myself stood out ...

(3.33-5)

This is presumably intended to communicate Antonio's stubborn integrity; but if he alone did not return the spoils, was he not technically guilty of piracy? Moreover, there is a noticeable discrepancy between Antonio's claim that his participation in the sea-fight was not of ‘a bloody nature’ (3.3.30), and the Officer's accusation that in the battle Orsino's 'young nephew Titus lost his leg' (5.1.57), implying that this was Antonio's fault. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, Antonio attempting to play down his ferocity and perhaps piracy to Sebastian, his enemies exaggerating both. Even so, the discrepancy suggests that Antonio is not being wholly candid with Sebastian, though his basic integrity is not in doubt.

There is a discrepancy of a different kind, a double time scheme, involving Sebastian's and Viola's rescue and arrival in Orsino's city. At 1.4.3, it is stated that ‘three days’ have elapsed since Viola arrived at court, but in the final scene both Antonio and Orsino refer to ‘three months’ elapsing since the shipwreck (5.1.89, 94). This seems to be Shakespearian sleight of hand, in order to underline the maturing affection of Orsino for Viola and Antonio for Sebastian, but Joseph Pequigneys uses this ambiguity as part of his attempt to ‘secure the homoerotic character of the friendship’:

for months [Sebastian] has continuously remained with an adoring older man who is frankly desirous of him, who showered him with ‘kindnesses’ [3.4.341] and who, moreover, saved him from death at sea and nursed him back to health. It is the classic homoerotic relationship, wherein the mature lover serves as guide and mentor to the young beloved.39

He further suggests that Sebastian's use of the alias Roderigo (2.1.15) is ‘unexplained’ but that it can be ‘seen as a means to hide his identity, his true name and family connections, during a drawn-out sexual liaison with a stranger in strange lands’. The alias can equally be explained as Sebastian's circumspection while unsure how far he could trust Antonio (perhaps because of the suspicion of piracy), or simply as a common motif in myth or folk-tale that to reveal your identity places you in other people's power. This is, for example, one of the reasons why Marina is so reluctant to reveal her identity in Pericles (Scene 21, 90-130, 175-7). But even if the arguments put forward by Pequigneys and others do not ‘secure’ the Antonio/Sebastian relationship as homoerotic, it is certainly true that the text permits, even if it does not demand, a homoerotic interpretation.41

THE GULLING OF MALVOLIO

Yet another aspect of love and lovers' behaviour is dramatized in the Malvolio story. By presenting Malvolio as an extravagant wooer of Olivia, the play provides a perspective on the Orsino/Olivia/Viola story and binds the main plot and the sub-plot tightly together, with Olivia at the centre of both, wooed by Orsino,
Viola/Cesario, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio.

Malvolio has made a big impact from the beginning. In his account of the earliest recorded performance, John Manningham thought it ‘a good practice’—a good practical joke—‘to make the steward believe his lady widow was in love with him’ (Olivia's mourning black must have misled Manningham into forgetting that she was mourning a brother, not a husband). He also seems to have found the later stages of the gulling—‘making him believe they took him to be mad’—all part of the fun: Shakespeare's contemporaries were notoriously cruel in their attitude to madmen. Manningham's account does not necessarily imply that Malvolio was played exclusively for broadly humorous effect; but when, in a commendatory poem to Shakespeare's *Poems* written before 1636 and published in 1640, Leonard Digges says that

*The Cockpit galleries, boxes, all are full
To hear Malvolio, that cross-gartered gull* (ll. 59-60),

the word ‘gull’ (fool) does not suggest that much sympathy was wasted on Malvolio. But after the only major gap in the play's post-Restoration performing history, Charles Macklin revived the play in 1741 and played Malvolio himself; he was also a famous Shylock, but none of the reviews suggests that he emphasized the strong vein of humour in Shylock's part, so it is possible that the tendency of leading actors (and commentators) to look for pathos, sympathy, or quasi-tragedy in Malvolio began with Macklin.

The first firm evidence for such an interpretation, however, comes in Charles Lamb's description of Robert Bensley as Malvolio in his essay ‘On Some of the Old Actors’. Lamb argues that ‘Malvolio is not essentially ludicrous’ but the ‘master of the household to a great Princess’ and that the humour derives from the incongruity between his puritanical rectitude and the context in which he finds himself: ‘his morality and his manners are misplaced in Illyria.’ When Robert Bensley's Malvolio was lost in his fantasies of greatness, Lamb ‘rather admired than pitied the lunacy’, and he ‘never saw the catastrophe of this character, while Bensley played it, without a kind of tragic interest’.

Lamb's essay was published in 1823, but Bensley's last performances as Malvolio were in 1792, when Lamb was only seventeen, so it is possible that the ‘tragic interest’ was Lamb's rather than Bensley's, especially since Sylvan Barnet provides evidence that Bensley's performance contained grotesque elements too; but it represents a reading of the character that has been attempted by many actors since. Henry Irving, for instance, seems to have drawn upon Lamb's essay for his quasi-tragic Malvolio in 1884, a performance widely regarded as a failure.

Even so, while most actors have seized upon the opportunities for broadly comic effect in the part, they have also striven for something ‘human’ and complex.

A notable example of this approach was Laurence Olivier’s Malvolio at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1955. In a lecture given in Stratford at the time, Olivier said that since the part must be funny and yet ‘tragic, too’, he had chosen to play Malvolio as a social ‘upstart’ so that the notion of Olivia being in love with him would be absurd yet also pathetic (quoted in *The Times*, 27 August 1955). Ivor Brown described the result: ‘a diligent, self-made domestic official, over-eager to keep order, a common, uneasy [social] climber with a tortured lisp. … The actor, not so much over-weening as under-weening, provided a plausible and untheatrical Malvolio, brilliant in many details.’ Some of those details, however, seemed to offer moments of farce that were at odds with the search for a plausibly human characterization, as when Olivier fell backwards off a bench in his ecstasies during the letter scene, or when his trousers fell down from under his nightshirt in the drinking scene. The relative disappointment with which this performance was received may have derived from the uneasy alternation between farcical gags and a striving for sympathy. It is worth trying to assess how far the text itself strikes a balance between these two extremes.
The first point to make is that Malvolio's name is against him. ‘Malvolio’ means ‘ill-will’, formed from Italian *mal* (bad) and *voglia* (desire) on analogy with, and in contrast to, ‘Benvolio’ in *Romeo and Juliet* who is Romeo's good friend and a would-be peacemaker. The name Shakespeare has created for him carries a suggestion of adverse criticism and even of caricature. Leonard Digges's allusion to ‘Malvolio, that cross-gartered gull’ quoted above is given in the modernized spelling of the Oxford *Complete Works* of Shakespeare. But the original spells the name ‘Malvoglio’, so if this is the author's spelling rather than the compositor's, Digges had clearly grasped the significance of the name; this *may* imply that the part was performed as a caricature in the first half of the seventeenth century, and support John Manningham's relish of the ‘practice’ against Malvolio. However that may be, Shakespeare reinforces the negative implications of the name when he introduces Olivia and Malvolio together and contrasts her generous reaction to Feste with Malvolio's dismissive one (1.5.68-93). Yet it is interesting that what were by general consent the two outstanding Malvolios of recent years, Donald Sinden (in John Barton's production) and Eric Porter (in Peter Hall's), both got a big laugh on their very first word in answer to Olivia's ‘What think you of this fool, Malvolio? Doth he not mend?’, which is ‘Yes’ (1.5.68-70). This is not something which anyone is likely to *pick up from reading alone*; it marks the distance between text and performance. Nor did either actor impose anything upon the line; each simply packed into that monosyllable the censorious sourness of the whole sentence—‘Yes, and shall do, till the pangs of death shake him’—and of Malvolio's attitudes in general. Charles Lamb was right to say that Malvolio is ‘cold, austere, repelling’—but he is also very funny. In this part, as often elsewhere, Shakespeare makes his points through laughter.

Lamb was also, however, right to stress that Shakespeare establishes Malvolio as a reliable, even essential, steward in a great household: his repressiveness and lack of generosity need not interfere with his efficient discharge of his duties, and may even help them. He is obviously useful, for instance, in dealing with unwelcome embassies from Orsino, as Olivia's casual instructions imply: ‘Go you, Malvolio. If it be a suit from the Count, I am sick, or not at home—what you will to dismiss it’ (1.5.103-4). Malvolio will cope. If he fails to do so in this case, that is because he comes up against someone more able than himself, whose positiveness and efficiency make her a more valuable servant for her master than Malvolio is for his. Malvolio is contrasted with Viola as well as Olivia, especially in his encounter with her over the ring (2.2). With the ring, Olivia has sent an invitation: ‘If that the youth will come this way tomorrow, I'll give him reasons for't’ (1.5.295-6). But Malvolio's version of this characteristically turns a positive suggestion into a negative one, ‘that you be never so hardy to come again in his affairs, unless it be to report your lord's taking of this’ (2.2.9-11). For all his efficiency, or officiousness, on Olivia's behalf, he actually does her a disservice here because he is not sensitive to what Olivia means, as Viola is: quickly sizing up the situation, with characteristic generosity she conceals Olivia's rash indiscretion from her steward: ‘She took the ring of me, I'll none of it’ (2.2.12). This tiny exchange points the difference between an ungenerous nature and a generous one with brilliant economy.

When Malvolio breaks up the drinking party (2.3), he is again legitimately exercising his stewardship. Maria makes the point just before his entry: ‘If my lady have not called up her steward Malvolio and bid him turn you out of doors, never trust me’ (2.3.68-70); and sure enough Malvolio says ‘My lady bade me tell you …’ when he does appear (ll. 89-90). But other evidence suggests that his representing Olivia will not be among the audience's main impressions of the scene. First, there is the nature of Malvolio's entry. The Folio text's direction is merely a terse ‘Enter Malvolio’, but that gives no idea of the size and impact of the theatrical moment. The drunken singing has been escalating; Maria's attempt to check it only intensifies it; and then Malvolio appears, the man who runs the household dragged out of bed in the middle of the night. In Granville Barker's 1912 production, Malvolio appeared in his normal severe garb with its white puritan collar …, but most productions dress him in a nightshirt, usually with his steward's chain over it, and sometimes with a dressing-gown and a nightcap, or his steward's hat, as well; at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1966, Ian Holm had his hair in curlers beneath the nightcap. … The audience's chief impression is of an incongruity, more or less riotous depending on the staging, between Malvolio and the others, in which they are unlikely to think of him primarily as Olivia's representative.
What is more, Malvolio does not mention Olivia at first. He accuses the others of madness and calls them ‘tinkers’, an extremely abusive term. He only mentions Olivia in order to threaten Toby with dismissal: ‘she is very willing to bid you farewell’ (2.3.94). This is the cue for Sir Toby and Feste to adapt a lover’s song of farewell in order to raise the question of Malvolio himself, rather than Sir Toby, being dismissed (ll. 95-105). Then the scene turns ugly as Sir Toby rises to Malvolio’s challenge—spurred into doing so, it is interesting to note, by Feste’s jibe ‘you dare not’ —and pulls rank on Malvolio: ‘Art any more than a steward?’ (ll. 106-7). The crucial point about Malvolio's stewardship here is that it is used to emphasize the personal conflict between Malvolio and Toby, which leads directly into the next major development of this area of the play—the plot against him. As she conceives this, Maria makes the point that he is only ‘a kind of puritan’, implying that his puritanism is a façade: ‘The dev’l a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass …’ (ll. 130, 136-7). What lies behind the efficient steward and repressive puritan emerges in Malvolio’s most extended scene, his discovery of the letter.

Before Malvolio enters, Maria tells the others that he ‘has been yonder i’the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow’ (2.5.14-15), and it is important that Malvolio should be entertaining fantasies of greatness, and specifically about being married to Olivia, before he even reads the letter: he is thus the more susceptible to its contents. Fantasizing about being ‘Count Malvolio’, he cites an instance where the barriers of class were crossed—‘the Lady of the Strachey married the yeoman of the wardrobe’ (ll. 32-7)—in the process revealing his interest in salacious gossip beneath his puritan exterior. The letter itself begins with a short poem and an ‘alphabetical position’ which draws upon the Elizabethan love of verbal games and acrostics:

‘I may command where I adore, 
But silence like a Lucrece knife
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore.
M.O.A.I. doth sway my life.’

(ll. 100-3)

The quatrain is a parody of those Elizabethan love poems which are more intent on displaying ingenuity than on expressing feeling. Both the yellow stockings and the cross-gartering are also associated with traditional lovers’ behaviour (see the Commentary to 2.5.144-5), and in his enthusiasm to wear them ‘even with the swiftness of putting on’ (l. 162), Malvolio allows his hitherto concealed fantasies of being a courtly lover to take over from the severe fronts of steward and puritan that have so far concealed them. The crowning touch in this transformation comes with his sudden address to Jove (ll. 162-8), and his assumption that the ruler of the classical gods, famed for his amorous exploits, is the perfect patron deity for him in his moment of triumph. That it should be a ‘kind of puritan’ who talks like this only emphasizes the incongruity between Malvolio the puritan steward and Malvolio the courtly lover.

This incongruity is much developed when he amazes Olivia by appearing before her wearing the yellow stockings and cross-garters, and quoting phrases that mean nothing to her (3.4.14-61); in the process, his place in the total scheme of the play becomes clear. As Irving Wardle wrote of Eric Porter’s performance, Malvolio becomes the play’s ‘supreme victim of erotic delusion’ (Independent on Sunday, 3 March 1991); so his love-delusions, as Harold Jenkins points out, ‘fall into perspective as a parody of the more delicate aberrations of his mistress and her suitor. Like them Malvolio aspires towards an illusory ideal of love, but his mistake is a grosser one than theirs, his posturings more extravagant and grotesque’. Olivia herself makes the point just as he appears: ‘I am as mad as he, sad and merry madness equal be’ (3.4.14-15). The strong element of sheer fantasy he expresses in the letter scene and repeats in his soliloquy after Olivia has left in this one, when he once more attributes his success to Jove (3.4.72-80), makes the crucial point that as a lover he is so much more extreme in his behaviour than Olivia and Orsino that by comparison with them their ‘delicate aberrations’ seem modest and susceptible of cure. We have already seen the start of Orsino's cure in his involvement with ‘Cesario’; Malvolio's seems much less likely in view of the element of sheer fantasy involved in his love...
delusions. In this soliloquy, these fantasies are expressed with stewardly logic, working out how everything fits: ‘Why, everything adheres together that no dram of a scruple, no scruple of a scruple, no obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance—what can be said?—nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes’ (3.4.75-9). This is where the real importance of Malvolio's stewardship emerges: the more the actor makes Malvolio a steward of genuine capacity and substance in the early scenes, as Eric Porter for instance did, the greater the incongruity here; the more seriously Malvolio takes himself, the funnier he is—a basic principle of Shakespearian comedy, or any comedy.

There is no hint so far of potential heartbreak or quasi-tragedy in the presentation of Malvolio. But just after his exit in 3.4, the gulling plot takes another and more sinister turn. Maria's ‘device’ has completely succeeded, but when she proposes to pursue it still further, Fabian says ‘Why, we shall make him mad indeed’, and Sir Toby seizes upon the idea: ‘Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound’ (3.4.126-30). Before we see that (4.2), however, the attention shifts to the other major intrigue of this section of the play, the mock duel between Viola and Sir Andrew; and these scenes of intrigue raise some problems which have not affected the course of the play so far. …

Notes

1. The document is reproduced in S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford, 1975), p. 156. Presumably the actors were Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men; they were unlikely to relinquish a new play to anyone else, and in any case the text was not generally available, since it was not published before the First Folio of 1623, and was only then entered in the Stationers' Register, on 8 November 1623. See Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, p. 32.

2. Other pointers to this date are: (i) references to ‘the Sophy’—the Shah of Persia (2.5.170; 3.4.269)—probably postdate Sir Robert Shirley's return from Persia, in a ship named *The Sophy*, in 1599; (ii) an apparent allusion to the Arctic voyage of William Barents in 1596-7 (3.2.24-6); an English account was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1598, the earliest surviving edition dated 1609; (iii) ‘the new map with the augmentation of the Indies’ (3.2.74) appears to be one published in Hakluyt’s *Voyages* in 1599 and reissued in 1600; (iv) some of the snatches of song in 2.3 probably draw on Robert Jones's *First Book of Songs or Airs* (1600). See Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, p. 123, for a more detailed discussion of the dating.


4. The play was reprinted by the Cornmarket Press in 1969. Charles Molloy's *The Half-Pay Officers*, of 1720, listed by e.g. Campbell and Quinn in *A Shakespeare Encyclopaedia* (1966) as an adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, bears scarcely any relation to Shakespeare's play. It is described by George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), 1.248, and was reprinted by the Cornmarket Press in 1969.

5. Full information on performances from 1660 to 1800 is given in *The London Stage*, 11 vols. (Carbondale, Illinois, 1965-8).


11. Odell, 2.455.

14. In Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, 1959), C. L. Barber argues that Shakespearian comedy draws on the forms and traditions of Elizabethan holidays (not just Twelfth Night) to create a pattern of festive release leading to psychological clarification: ‘People are caught up by delusions or misapprehensions which take them out of themselves, bringing out what they would keep hidden or did not know was there’ (p. 242).
16. Barbara Everett argues that ‘the “sub-title” is really no sub-title, but a generic, perhaps primary, and certainly important part of the title’ (‘Or What You Will’, EC 35 (1985), 294-314; p. 304). She points out that ‘Marston's What You Will, though not published till 1607, was almost certainly written and first performed not long before the first performance of Shakespeare’s comedy’, so this may have necessitated a change in Shakespeare's title (p. 313).
19. There is a photograph of the twins in SS 32 (Cambridge, 1979), facing p. 88.
20. There are several photographs in Dennis Kennedy, Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 136-47.
23. Several of these texts are conveniently gathered together in Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, vol. 2 (1958), pp. 286-372. They are discussed in Bullough, in Robert C. Melzi, ‘From Lelia to Viola’, Renaissance Drama, 9 (1966), 67-81, and in Salingar (see p. 5 n. 1 above).
25. Other interesting verbal similarities are the use of ‘leasing’ (rather than ‘lying’) by Riche (Bullough, pp. 357, 360) and by Feste (1.5.92); and of ‘denay’, rather than ‘deny’ by Riche (pp. 357, 359) and by Orsino (2.4.124). Silla's passions are said to be ‘contagious’ (p. 347), like Feste's singing (2.3.52); Julina's bitterly ironical remark that she has ‘so charily preserved mine honour’ (p. 360) recalls Olivia's that she has ‘laid mine honour too unchary out’ (3.4.195).
27. This means, of course, that they cannot be physically identical, an advantage when casting them.
32. Peter Thomson goes so far as to say that the ‘highly wrought language of his first speech is designed to be a verbal accompaniment to the melody’ rather than the other way round (Shakespeare's Theatre, 2nd edn., 1992, p. 92).
33. ‘Shakespeare's Twelfth Night’ (see p. 20 n. 1), p. 177.
34. Shakespeare's Plays in Performance (1966), p. 209. In an earlier book, Brown emphasizes the youth of the characters. He calculates that since Sebastian is the same age as Viola and ‘still beardless
enough to be imitated’, they cannot be more than about nineteen; Orsino is of ‘fresh and stainless youth’ and believes that the man should be older than the woman, so must be older than Olivia; ‘by the same token Olivia should be younger than Sebastian and hence younger than Viola’. This may, as he says, ‘be pushing consistency too far’; but it is worth remembering at a time when Shakespeare’s heroines are usually played by actresses rather than boy actors (Shakespeare and his Comedies (1957), pp. 176-7).

36. Dorothy Tutin’s performance is preserved in a sound recording (Argo ZPR 186-8 (1961)), as are those of two other members of Hall’s cast, Patrick Wymark (Sir Toby, 1958-60) and Derek Godfrey (Orsino, 1960).
40. Stephen Orgel, for example, calls Antonio and Sebastian an ‘overtly homosexual couple’ (‘Nobody's Perfect: Or Why Did the English Stage take Boys for Women?’, South Atlantic Quarterly, 88 (1989), 7-29; p. 27).
41. In an account of sexual ambiguity and hermaphroditism in the Renaissance, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that the blurring of accustomed sexual distinctions in the play, especially as represented by an all-male cast, is such that Sebastian and Viola become ‘indistinguishable’ figures. Perhaps this pushes the play's sexually ambiguous potential rather far; but his discussion focuses ‘the sexual energies that [are] transfigured in the comedies and the melancholy darkness that lies just beyond the transfiguration’ (Shakespearean Negotiations (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 91, 184).
42. Stephen Greenblatt (see previous note) argues that this slip is the ‘normalization’ of the ‘major male wish-fulfillment fantasy’ of marrying a wealthy widow (pp. 69, 176).
48. ‘Shakespeare's Twelfth Night’ (see p. 20 n. 1), p. 185.

Abbreviations and References

The following references are used in the introduction, in the collations and in the commentary. In all bibliographical references, the place of publication is London, unless otherwise specified.

Editions of Shakespeare

F, F1: The First Folio, 1623
F2: The Second Folio, 1632
F3: The Third Folio, 1663


Collier MS: *Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Plays from Early Manuscript Corrections of the Folio*, 1632 (1853)


Harness: *Dramatic Works, with notes … By the Rev. William Harness*, 8 vols. (1825)


Riverside: G. B. Evans (textual editor), *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, 1974)

Rowe: Nicholas Rowe, *Works*, 6 vols. (1709)

Rowe 1714: Nicholas Rowe, *Works*, 8 vols. (1714)


Other Works


Bullough: Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (1957-75)


EC: *Essays in Criticism*

ELR: *English Literary Renaissance*


Mason: John Monck Mason, *Comments on the Last Edition of Shakespeare’s Plays* (Dublin, 1785)


NQ: *Notes and Queries*


PQ: *Philological Quarterly*


RES: *Review of English Studies*

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 74): Criticism: Character Studies


[In the following essay, Willbern relates Malvolio and his downfall to the play's theme of festivity.]

Malvolio, that humorless steward, sick of merrymakers and self-love, seems almost a stranger to the festive world of Illyria. His very first words reveal his acrimonious opinion of Feste, the soul of festivity:

OLI.

What think you of this fool, Malvolio? doth he not mend?

MAL.

Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool.

(I. v. 73-77)

Everything about Malvolio's character sets him apart from frivolity.

Even his vocabulary isolates Malvolio. When he chastises a rowdy Sir Toby by demanding “Is there no respect of place, person, nor time in you?” Toby quips, “We did keep time, sir, in our catches” (II. iii. 91-94). For the solemn steward and the carousing knight, the word “time” has different meanings. Malvolio hears only a cacophonous violation of decorum; Toby hears only melody and lyrics. When, a few lines later, Toby and Feste “converse” with Malvolio in song, Malvolio simply does not understand (II. iii. 102 ff.).

But while Malvolio may have no use for festivity, festivity has considerable use for him. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall consider the steward's collision with the merrymakers, the nature of the damage he suffers,
and its relevance to the general theme of festivity.

I

When Malvolio falls into Maria's cunning trap and makes his sole concession to frivolity by donning yellow cross-garters, the desires he has previously hidden beneath a staid composure suddenly emerge exultant. On the surface Malvolio's wish is to be a social climber, “to be Count Malvolio.” Yet there is a deeper desire here, and even though cross-gartering “does make some obstruction in the blood,” as he complains, it does not obstruct an unwitting expression of the steward's strongest yearning: to sleep with his lady Olivia. In the forged letter scene, he alludes to a daydream of “having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping” (II. v. 48-49). And he jumps eagerly at an imagined opportunity when Olivia, thinking that a man who dresses so oddly and smiles so incessantly must be deranged, suggests rest: “Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?” she asks. “To bed?” he exclaims. “Ay, sweet heart, and I'll come to thee” (III. iv. 29-31).

But Malvolio's latent sexual wishes are also evident in his reading of the forged letter. While his fantasy of leaving Olivia in their shared day-bed is romantic enough, his remark to Toby about fortune “having cast me on your niece” (II. v. 69-70) may be less so, and his spelling lesson betrays the crudest carnality. “By my life,” he swears,”this is my lady's hand. These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus makes she her great P's.” After thus spelling out the carnal focus of his fantasies, he sounds out the word itself, hidden within a term of disdain: “It is, in contempt of question, her hand” (II. v. 86-88). It must have been important to Shakespeare that the bawdy secret be heard, for Andrew immediately repeats, “Her c's, her u's, and her t's: Why that?”

Some fine and famous Shakespeareans have been unable or unwilling to hear the answer to this question. Arthur Innes reasoned in 1895 that “probably Shakespeare merely named letters that would sound well.” G. L. Kittredge considered Andrew's question “impossible to answer.” Once the bawdy note is sounded, of course, the question is embarrassingly easy to answer.

In one sense, the event illustrates Shakespeare's insight into the psychology of the bluenose censor, secretly fascinated by and desirous of the eroticism he condemns. But it may also demonstrate Shakespeare's playful insight into his own wordplay, so frequently erotic. As the body lies at the basis of metaphor, bawdiness is basic to much punning: playing around with language.

II

But Malvolio is not playing; he is being played, for a fool. His hidden desire emerges, but only cryptically. Later, Feste, with his characteristically well-disguised perspicacity, mockingly underscores Malvolio's latent wantonness. “Sir Topas, Sir Topas, good Sir Topas,” cries Malvolio from his prison, “Go to my lady.” To which the dissembling Feste replies, “Out, hyperbolical fiend! how vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?” (IV. ii. 23-26). Until his surrender to festivity, Malvolio's black suit and anticomic bearing have concealed his “fiend”; now it is out in the open.

Up to the moment of his fall, Malvolio had been able to keep his overt behavior and his covert desires neatly separate, thereby maintaining the condition he had earlier demanded of Toby the reveler: “If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house” (II. iii. 98-99). But Malvolio's careful division between act and desire, reason and fantasy, collapses when he falls into Maria's trap, even though he himself is certain he has maintained it yet. “I do not now fool myself,” he asserts,” to let imagination jade me, for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me” (II. v. 164-65). From the inverted perspective in which reason “excites” rather than informs, Malvolio finds the way to shape the letter in terms of himself, and then to reform himself in terms of the letter: “M. O. A. I. … If I could make that resemble something in me!” (II. v. 109-20). It requires only a little “crush” to make the fit. Excited by false reasons, his reason fails him. His
“madness” is thus his conviction that he is not mad, his illusion of maintaining control over circumstances when in fact he has lost control. “O peace!” Fabian cautions the impatient Andrew as they watch Malvolio drawing the net more tightly about himself: “Now he's deeply in. Look how imagination blows him” (II. v. 42-43). As he cleverly decipheres the forged letter, Malvolio believes that his supreme reason is shaping his destiny: “Thou art made,” he reads, “if thou desir’st to be so” (II. v. 155). Instead of making him, however, his desire unmakes him. His efforts to reform his image lead to disgrace: a fall from grace which is not only personal and social, but has spiritual resonance as well.

Feste is not merely joking when he refers to Malvolio's “fiend.” For indeed, the steward behaves, as Toby and Maria maliciously observe, as though he were “possessed.” Maria claims that “Yond gull Malvolio is turn'd heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be sav’d by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings” (III. ii. 69-73). Malvolio's plight is comical, of course, but there is an undercurrent of seriousness throughout. Malvolio surely means to be saved by believing rightly, but erroneous beliefs and impure desires have placed his soul in precarious balance. A bit of Feste's seeming nonsense clarifies the situation. After paralleling himself and Malvolio (incarcerated) with the medieval figures of Vice and Devil, Feste departs with a song whose final line is “Adieu, goodman devil” (IV. ii. 120-31). A typical Festean riddle, the phrase makes appropriate sense. It is a syntactic representation of the basic Morality Play scheme: “man” is centered between “good” and “devil” and should turn in the right direction, “à Dieu.” This moment of mini-allegory prefigures Feste's later banter with Orsino, when the Duke tells the clown, “O, you give me ill counsel,” and Feste continues: “Put your grace in your pocket, sir, for this once, and let your flesh and blood obey it” (V. i. 31-33). Feste's counsel here echoes the voice of the archdeceiver, perched on his victim's left shoulder: “let your flesh and blood run free,” he advises, “just for this once. Don't worry about your soul, just hide it and the possibility of grace away temporarily, ‘in your pocket, sir.’” Such brief transgressions, however, will not be forgotten. “Pleasure will be paid,” Feste reminds us, “one time or another” (II. iv. 70-71).

III

The underlying seriousness of Malvolio's fall is further suggested by the nature of the punishment he suffers. On one level, he is imprisoned for the “madness” of being rigidly sane in a frivolous world. On another level, his humbling is a direct rebuke to his social-climbing aspirations. On a yet deeper level, he is punished for his hidden concupiscence, with the punishment combining various symbolic “deaths.” Malvolio is not only mortified; metaphorically he is also mortally assaulted, killed, and buried. “I have dogg'd him,” gloats Toby, “like his murtherer” (III. ii. 76). The steward who wanted to possess his lady is instead thrown into a small dark hole: having wished for a bed, he finds a grave. He complains to Feste, the singer of “Come away, come away, death, / And in sad cypress let me be laid” (II. iv. 51-52), saying that “they have laid me here in hideous darkness” (IV. ii. 29-30). Malvolio does symbolically “die,” but not as he had hoped; his is not the sexual death of Feste's ambiguous song, but the comic scapegoat death of a victimized gull.

Even when released from his symbolic cell, however, the unrepentant steward refuses to participate in the lovers' celebrations. Faced again with merriment, he steadfastly clings to sobriety. His letter to Olivia from his cell—signed, accurately, “the madly-us'd Malvolio”—is calm, reasonable, and correctly descriptive of his treatment (V. i. 302-11). His only request is “Tell me why.”

Why have you suffer'd me to be imprison'd,
Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest,
And made the most notorious geck and gull
That e'er invention play'd on? Tell me why!

(V. i. 341-44)
He receives no answer, and although Olivia promises him future justice, he is not appeased. The steward who earlier declared to Toby, Maria, and Fabian, “I am not of your element” (III. iv. 124), is thus alone at play's end. While Feste remains to sing his lovely and melancholy song, Malvolio exits, snarling promised revenge.  

As Malvolio departs, he leaves behind an unresolved conclusion to the play, taking with him the key to any clear resolution. For all its conventional comic devices of repaired unions, the ending of *Twelfth Night* is indeterminate. We look for the settlement of disputes and the reunion of fragmented relationships, “confirm’d by mutual joinder of their hands,” as the priest says of Olivia and Sebastian (V. i. 157). But though the final scene of *Twelfth Night* is in fact constructed so as to allow “mutual joinder,” no such resolution occurs. The prolonged hesitation of Viola and Sebastian to identify each other, which includes a careful scrutiny of all the evidence (names, sex, moles, age, clothing), finally results not in any embrace of recognition but in Viola's odd provision of postponement:

Do not embrace me till each circumstance  
Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump  
That I am Viola.

(V. i. 251-53)

One expects a coherence of circumstance, place, time, and fortune at the conclusion of a successful comedy—and *Twelfth Night* has often been viewed as a paradigm of the form. But Shakespeare deliberately defers a denouement, and the play ends before we see one enacted. Viola maintains that the resumption of her true identity depends upon the old captain who brought her to Illyria, the captain who has kept her “maiden weeds.” The captain, however, has been jailed by Malvolio, “upon some action” (V. i. 275-76). Malvolio is therefore essential to a final resolution of the plot; the ultimate coherence of time and circumstance depends upon the mistreated gull. When he stalks out, swearing revenge, he also disrupts the plot, refusing to fulfill his essential role in the final “mutual joinder.” Orsino commands, “Pursue him and entreat him to a peace; he hath not told us of the captain yet” (V. i. 380-81). But we hear no more from Malvolio, nor from anyone else, for the play almost immediately concludes, with the loose ends of its unfinished plot knotted abruptly into Feste's final song.

Similar gestures of irresolution occur at the end of almost all of Shakespeare's comedies—as though he was habitually skeptical of the resolutions the genre typically provided. Whether through hints of failed marriage at the end of *As You Like It*, or the sudden mournful disruption at the end of *Love's Labor's Lost*, or the preposterous rapid-fire revelations at the end of *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare usually complicates the conventional comic ending, stressing the fragility of its artifice. As Feste's concluding song suggests in *Twelfth Night*, the momentary pleasures of plays and other toys are only transient episodes in a larger season of folly, thievery, drunkenness, and old age. To the extent that the tidy finales of conventional comedies deny such larger, extradramatic realities, Shakespeare seems to have been uneasy with them: the ending of *The Tempest* is his final manifestation of this uneasiness.

IV

An aspect of Shakespeare's distrust of romantic conventions underlies Malvolio's spelling lesson, to return to that scene for a moment. I want to ask Andrew Aguecheek's question once more, and offer a speculative answer. “Her c’s, her u's, and her t’s: why that?” Why, indeed? Why does Shakespeare so carefully embed this grossest of verbal improprieties in a play which even Eric Partridge calls “the cleanest comedy except *A Midsummer Night's Dream*”?  

One answer involves what Shakespeare evidently considered the natural and undeniable bases of human behavior. The romantic comedy of *Twelfth Night* transmutes our basic appetites, sublimating carnal hunger
into romantic yearning: food becomes music, as Orsino's opening speech reveals (but melancholy music, with “a dying fall”). *Twelfth Night* enacts an elaborate dance around a central core of carnality, which Malvolio's unconscious cryptogram literally spells out. The idealized festivity of *Twelfth Night* is to its secret erotic core as the innocent Maypole dance is to the symbol around which it revolves—except that the joys and celebrations of Maygames are muted in Shakespeare's play by wintry, “dying” tones of mourning and loss. Erotic desire and symbolic death intermix throughout the play, creating a continuous undertone of romantic melancholy best personified in the figure of Feste. Festivity and loss are presented as reciprocal: carnival is a farewell to the carnal (carne-vale).

What makes *Twelfth Night* ultimately so melancholy, however, is not the sounding of these baser tones in the music of love, but the futile (albeit beautiful) effort spent trying to deny the facts of desire and death with the artificial toys of romantic wish-fulfillment. Finally it won't work. In retrospect, the festive fantasy of innocent indulgence looks like another version of the puritanical Malvolio's effort to deny or repudiate base carnal desire. Illyria's romanticism is psychologically reciprocal to Malvolio's rigidity and restraint: both represent denials and sublimations. Feste's final song seems to admit the futility of both defenses against the real world.

For all their mutual antipathy, Malvolio and Feste are symbolic brothers: both estranged from yet integral to the festive yet melancholy world of Illyria. To achieve a comic world of reunion and restoration, it is necessary to omit or deny or banish their respective melancholies. But, since melancholy preceded and prompted the merriment, this is impossible. Malvolio therefore retreats to his threats of vengeance, Feste to his ambiguous lyric. Finally both characters withdraw from the comic world. But without them and the impulses of restraint and loss they represent, that comic world has no motivation, no “reason” for being.

At Malvolio's fall we laughed all. Yet without the (scape) goat, there would have been no carnival to provide either the fall or the merriment attending it.

**Notes**

2. Specifically, Malvolio complains that the revelers are violating the traditional “three Unities” of Renaissance dramatic criticism. John Hollander has noted this analogy in his excellent essay, “*Twelfth Night* and the Morality of Indulgence,” *Sewanee Review*, 67 (1959), 220-38.
3. For a brief discussion of Malvolio from this point of view, see Frank L. Hoskins, “Misalliance: A Significant Theme in Tudor and Stuart Drama,” *Renaissance Papers 1956* (University of South Carolina), pp. 72-73.
The figure of the despiser of festivity exists, but he does not disappear. As C. L. Barber put it, “in the long run, in the 1640’s, Malvolio was revenged on the whole pack of them.” See Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 257. Just as Malvolio again subdues his imaginative desires and regains his solemn bearing, the Puritans finally suppressed the dramatic imagination and enforced zealous sobriety.


10. Criticism: Production Reviews: Donald Lyons (review date February 1997)


[In the following review of Trevor Nunn's 1996 film version of Twelfth Night, Lyons describes the effort as undeniably successful, and finds that although the film teases the boundaries of “heterosexual decorum,” it never oversteps them. Additionally, Lyons praises the film's principal actors: Imogen Stubbs as Viola/Cesario, Helena Bonham Carter as Olivia, and Toby Stephens as Orsino.]

It is sometimes foolishly asserted—recently, for example, by the critic Anthony Lane in the New Yorker—that Shakespeare “works” better on the screen than in the theater. Those knotty iambic pentameters can be spoken softly, and hence understood; soliloquies can be rendered as voice-overs, and hence made dramatically plausible. But if theater conventions are artificial and limiting, the same is true of film, which is hardly the transparent or naturalistic medium it may appear to be. And quite apart from the issue of technique, there is the issue of interpretation: fashions in filming Shakespeare reflect the day as dimly or as brightly as does the mirror of the stage.

We are now in the midst of a mild movie renaissance for the Bard, with four new movies of different plays having been released in the last months alone. …

In addition to these two failures [Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet and Al Pacino's Looking for Richard], however, the current season has also given us large, bright, intelligent, and relatively straightforward versions of Hamlet and Twelfth Night. …

But that brings us to Trevor Nunn's lovely Twelfth Night, a much more unqualified success. It too is a movie that flirts in passing with contemporary preoccupations, but in the end is content to know, love, and serve the Bard.

Nunn, the longtime head of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and recently appointed director of the Royal National Theater, has previously made two undistinguished films (Hedda and Lady Jane). This time he gets it right. He has set his tale in the same era as Branagh's Hamlet—a generic late-19th century—but his place, the mythical kingdom of Illyria, is much greener and more summery than Branagh's chilly Denmark. Nunn and his cinematographer Clive Tickner have cast a pre-Raphaelite glow over the film, which was shot along the wild coast and in the formal gardens of Cornwall. These settings work beautifully to complement the glow of the central story: a young woman impersonates a man and has to contend with both the attraction of another woman to her male persona and her own attraction to a man who treats her as a guy. Although the film exploits its erotic situations with a knowingness very much of the 1990's, Nunn resists every opportunity to turn sly flirtatiousness into campy gender-bending. Heterosexual decorum is teased but never “subverted.”.
The principals are also right on pitch. Imogen Stubbs, as the disguise-wearing Viola/Cesario, devotes less energy to parodying masculinity than to showing the awkwardness of loving and being beloved in the wrong places. Helena Bonham Carter, a pillar of British costume dramas who herself played Ophelia in the not-bad 1990 Franco Zeffirelli/Mel Gibson Hamlet, makes a surprisingly animated, sexy, and likably foolish Olivia, smitten with Viola/Cesario. Toby Stephens as Orsino, who is besotted with the unreceptive Olivia and shares his fond confidences with an in-turn-besotted Viola/Cesario, engagingly presents the figure of a man who can combine authority and modesty. The final resolution of all these confusions is an immensely pleasing and deft piece of romantic cinema.

This is a Twelfth Night that deserves to be seen and savored. And so, for all its missteps, does Branagh's Hamlet. The two plays had, in the trajectory of Shakespeare's career, some interesting connections. Twelfth Night was the last play of its kind, the last “festive comedy” he wrote; and it came right before Hamlet, which has been seen by scholars as a deliberate abandonment of comedy. As the critic C. L. Barber has noted, in Twelfth Night “the unnatural can appear only in outsiders, intruders who are mocked and expelled,” whereas in Hamlet “it is insiders who are unnatural.”

A mark of the playwright's genius was the ability to hold such antithetical ideas in so close and creative a tension. Likewise, a mark of good Shakespeare productions is to let his stories, ideas, and language breathe. By doing so, Kenneth Branagh and, especially, Trevor Nunn go some way toward redeeming the damage caused by the interposition of cute ideas—whether toxic, like Grunge Shakespeare, or relatively benign, like Method Shakespeare—between ourselves and the plays.

Criticism: Production Reviews: David Patrick Stearns (review date 17 July 1998)


[In the following review, Stearns assesses the production of Twelfth Night directed by Nicholas Hytner, which featured Helen Hunt as Viola. Stearns describes the production as a whole as lavish but not overdone, and comments that Hunt's performance was sincere and strong but failed to fully reveal the subtextual potential of the role.]

In Broadway shorthand, the summer's hot ticket is “the Helen Hunt Twelfth Night.”

That's how much theatergoers are anticipating the Oscar-winning actress' rare stage appearance. But truth be told, Lincoln Center's production (*** out of four) of Shakespeare's misbegotten-love comedy is so sumptuously produced and provocatively cast that she could phone in her performance and no one would be terribly upset.

After so much Shakespeare that's been either low-budget or high-concept (a nice word for gimmicky), it's refreshing that this staging by Nicholas Hytner (The Madness of King George, Broadway's Carousel) treats Shakespeare's comedy with the kind of lavish but well-considered theatricality he delivered in Miss Saigon. Of course, that approach means a bit of vulgarity and some uneven casting—but love it or hate it, this is a major revival that simply must be seen.

Taking a cue from Shakespeare's freewheeling mixture of time, place and style, the production, which opened Thursday and runs through Aug. 30, conjures the imaginary kingdom of Illyria with a mixture of period flavors: Renaissance Italy dominates, though there are hints of the Middle East in the luxurious rugs and lily-strewn pools.
There are encroachments from the 20th century, too, but somehow they never seem jarringly postmodern. These touches mostly arise from interpretation rather than theatrical conceit: If a character walks on in a bow tie, it's a comment on his personality, not just a visual joke.

Water is a major metaphor in Bob Crowley's picturesque set, which is sort of a wading pool with platforms. Much like the forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the water cleanses, refreshes and transforms characters while driving the plot. After Viola survives the shipwreck that separates her from her brother, she emerges from a dream-like haze of ocean spray: It's a breathtaking effect, and it underscores that the event was a life-changing one—the kind of experience that might prompt bold decisions. Like, say, a woman's disguising herself as a man.

If it's all marvelously cinematic, too many performances have a kind of cinematic restraint. Much of the Act I setup is handled dryly. Even the great character actor Philip Bosco is uncharacteristically buttoned up, playing Malvolio's romantic disappointment more for tragedy than comedy. But most of the cast members blossom at some point, particularly Brian Murray as the sodden Toby Belch and David Patrick Kelly as an unusually scruffy, outspoken court jester.

Hunt (Viola) stays surprisingly earthbound. Though her interpretive choices are solid and sincerely executed, she doesn't dig deeply enough into the subtextual possibilities of a character who passes herself off as a man throughout much of the play. As the countess who mistakenly loves her, Kyra Sedgwick (Olivia) goes to such comic extremes that you'd never know she's an aristocrat. With his pantherlike moves, Paul Rudd makes his imposing Duke a man of unstoppable sexual desires, which lets him dominate a play that keeps him offstage for long periods.

In fact, the production seems so dedicated to his physical enshrinement (was there an executive order that his chest never be covered?) that he's a likely candidate for *People* magazine's “Sexiest Man Alive” moniker. Thank goodness he can also act.

**Criticism: Production Reviews: Robert Brustein (review date 7 September 1998)**


*In the following review of Nicholas Hytner's *Twelfth Night*, Brustein contends that the production failed to explore the play's deeper issues and complexities. Brustein applauds Helen Hunt's solid interpretation of Viola, but notes that Kyra Sedgwick's Olivia is somewhat hyperactive.*

Summer Shakespeare has always been a joy because summer is a season that belongs to Shakespeare. No other dramatist has imagined so vividly the bracing pleasures of life in the woods. A country boy himself, he gave his own name to a rustic in *As You Like It* and his mother's name to the Forest of Arden. The allure of that Arcadian world, where the banished Duke Senior finds “tongues in trees” and “sermons in stones,” not to mention the magical properties of Titania's fairy kingdom, the coastal beauties of Duke Orsino's Illyria, the bumptious rusticity of Polixenes's Bohemia, and other such bucolic sites, provide a storehouse of images that remain an indelible source of comfort through the long winter months. Two recent summer Shakespeare productions lovingly capture those recreational images—not just through verbal metaphors but through the splendors of their physical design.

Nicholas Hytner's version of *Twelfth Night* at the Vivian Beaumont is distinguished by another exquisite setting from Bob Crowley, an Irish scenic artist who is finally receiving the recognition here he has long
deserved. Crowley's last assignment with Hytner was Carousel, a musical the designer turned into a dazzling retrospective of early twentieth-century American art. Enhanced by Catherine Zuber's costumes, Crowley's Twelfth Night is set in an exotic court out of The Arabian Nights, bounded by circular wharves stretching out to a distant sea. Even before the lights come up, Orsino (Paul Rudd)—a bare-chested, long-haired Eastern potentate—is lolling languorously near a bathing pool in a drug-induced torpor, listening to Jeanine Tesori's Oriental melodies being played on bongos and gamelans. Drowsy, languid, overfed on the food of love (music), this Orsino is almost always in the company of musicians. Accompanied by three sailors, Viola (Helen Hunt) enters from far upstage, in a seagreen gown, wading through shimmering water and mist. Accompanied by her ladies in waiting, the Countess Olivia (Kyra Sedgwick) enacts her grief in a large arbor under huge black umbrellas, moving in rhythm to a requiem.

In tune with contemporary fashion, the production is set in no consistent culture, place, or time. Sir Toby Belch (Brian Murray) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Max Wright) wear contemporary Western clothes, and, at one point, eat some Chinese takeout. The acid fool Feste (David Patrick Kelly) hops about in a green suit, an orange knitted cap, and sandals, and sings "Oh Mistress Mine" in the style of a soft rock ballad with electric guitar arpeggios. When Malvolio dons his yellow stockings, he attaches them to a pair of shorts.

The problem is that Hytner's inspiration seems to have stopped with the sets and costumes. Certainly, Brian Murray's Sir Toby and Max Wright's Aguecheek are an engaging pair of clowns. Looking and sounding like the old movie actor Cecil Kellaway, Murray plays that renegade sot with all the florid gestures of a classical ham. But his exploitation of Sir Andrew has a streak of mean cunning, suggestive of the way that, later, Iago will gull Roderigo. As for Max Wright, he makes another rich artistic gift to Lincoln Center, following his contribution last year as Lebedev in Ivanov. His voice quavering through his glottis like a constipated bellows, his body jerking through space like a mechanical toy, he becomes the very embodiment of craven idiocy, of false bravado. Terrified by Sebastian, he jumps into Orsino's pool and frantically backstrokes away. I also admired the way David Patrick Kelly managed to emphasize not so much Feste's amiable charm as his bitter foolery. He is largely motivated by a sour vindictiveness toward Malvolio ("And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges").

Alas, this gifted acting trio is not helped much either by Amy Hill's flat Maria (cast against type as a buxom Amazon), or by Philip Bosco's humorless Malvolio. I once described Bosco as an American actor who looked like Sir Michael Redgrave and sounded like Sir John Gielgud. Here he seems to be bucking for his own knighthood, giving an elocutionary performance that would not seem out of place at the Royal National Theatre. Bosco's Malvolio is pompous all right, but it's questionable whether that quality belongs more to the character or the actor.

Helen Hunt gives a clean, clear, cool interpretation of Viola. She reads the verse in a controlled, informal manner, and moves with considerable grace and poise. But her air of sangfroid would have been more appropriate in the role of Olivia. Hunt would certainly have given a better account of that proud, regal woman than Kyra Sedgwick, whose brassy, squeaky hyperactivity belongs in a sitcom. (Her charms become more vivid when, having jumped into the pool with Sebastian, she emerges with her dress clinging to her wet body.) Hytner has staged a fine recognition scene where the reunion of Viola and Sebastian rises in an emotional swell, and there are other good things in the evening. But the deeper issues of the play often seem to be scanted, especially the ambiguous sexuality of the relationship between Olivia and Viola. Most of the pleasures of this Lincoln Center Twelfth Night are absorbed through the eyes. …

**Criticism: Production Reviews: Ted Merwin (review date 1999)**

In the following review, Merwin offers a mixed appraisal of Nicholas Hytner's production of Twelfth Night. The critic argues that Hytner and stage designer Bob Crowley failed to create an atmosphere of eroticism, and that the romance between Paul Rudd's Orsino and Helen Hunt's Viola was lukewarm at best. However, Merwin offers high praise for the performances of the supporting cast, particularly Philip Bosco's Malvolio.)

A splashy new production of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in New York was a feature attraction of the 1998 Lincoln Center Festival last summer. The well-traveled team of English director Nicholas Hytner and Irish stage designer Bob Crowley, who in 1994 brought to the Beaumont, from London's Royal National Theatre, an uncommonly dark and disturbing (and intensely stirring) production of Carousel, this time opted for a strategy of almost total immersion. They turned Twelfth Night into a kind of cross between productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream (beginning with Peter Brook-inspired light bulbs descending from the ceiling) and The Tempest (including a spectacular on-stage rainstorm)—a very wet dream, indeed.

In fact, Viola (played by Helen Hunt, fresh from her Academy Award) emerged dripping wet from the shipwreck to start the play. Water was a constant symbol: a large rectangular pool upstage and smaller pools downstage occupied much of the acting area, so that characters generally made their entrances and exits over flat bridges—curves which united at the end of the play for the two couples to make a grand exit. The water effect reached its zenith with a tension-breaking downpour that nicely formed its own conceptual bridge from the disappointments and cruelties caused by the characters' misunderstandings and mistaken identities, to the final scenes of recognition and reconciliation.

A multitude of Eastern motifs also heightened the play's atmosphere of fantasy. China silk hangings surrounded the stage floor, which was painted with an exquisite blue peacock design taken from Persian carpets and embellished with patterns inspired by Indian illuminated manuscripts. Crowley's set also provided three different perspectives of Olivia's house on different-sized drops, which nicely reminded the audience how far from that anchor-point each scene was taking place. Catherine Zuber's costumes ranged from what appeared to be Turkish harem outfits (for Olivia) to stunning blue and white guards' uniforms. Natasha Katz's lighting was also striking, beginning with the large bulbs which descended from the ceiling, like sacred Buddhist candles, and including a light-induced ripple effect on the upstage pool. But it was the directorial touches which were most impressive: one especially memorable moment was a procession of Olivia's retainers, holding tall Japanese-style umbrellas, over a hanamichi-type ramp.

Unfortunately, if the director and designer were aiming for an overall mood of erotically-charged languor, then for the most part only the languor came through. From the opening tableau, in which Duke Orsino and his men are stretched out on the stage (making it hard to identify, at first, who is speaking the famous opening speech about the relationship between music and love), many of the all-star cast seemed listless. More importantly, the romance between Orsino (played by a long-haired, bare-chested Paul Rudd) and Viola (played with low-key irony by Hunt) never really seemed to catch fire, despite her stripping him almost naked at one point (giving him an excuse to jump in one of the pools). Olivia (played by a glamorous but shrill Kyra Sedgwick) was, quite literally, all over the place; she bounded and lunged over the stage in increasingly revealing outfits which reduced her from supposed sexual unavailability to what seemed more like sexual desperation.

The supporting cast was uniformly superb, from a perfectly fussy and self-deluded Malvolio by Philip Bosco (whose performance in the famous letter-reading scene was a priceless puncturing of vainglory) to precise comic turns by Brian Murray as an almost-Falstaffian Sir Toby Belch, and Max Wright as an unusually doddering Sir Andrew Aguecheek (who, perhaps too predictably, ended up falling into one of the pools). And David Patrick Kelly stole the show as a short, hump-backed Feste, crooning the rhythmic, quasi-Country and Western songs written for the production by Jenine Tesori.
In the first of a “platform series,” inspired by informal talks with theatre artists at the Royal National, Crowley spoke in the lobby of the Beaumont on the evening before the final preview. He explained that the play's use of twins as a metaphor for the self-knowledge that comes from true reflection led him to produce his flooded-stage “environment.” The characters' investment in perpetuating their images of themselves, he said, made him realize the artificiality and affectation which underlay their self-conceptions; this provoked him and Hytner to “ransack the East” for the highly stylized designs and staging methods which the production employed. But if Crowley was happily true to what he called the “anarchy at the heart of Shakespeare,” his stated “dislike for symmetry in stage design” revealed the production's ineffectiveness. Inasmuch as Twelfth Night is preoccupied with the effects of disrupted equilibrium in human affairs, the production ultimately failed to render convincingly this emotional disorder and its resolution.

**Criticism: Production Reviews: Marla F. Magro and Mark Douglas (essay date 2001)**


[In the following essay, Magro and Douglas analyze the treatment of gender issues in Trevor Nunn's 1996 film adaptation of Twelfth Night, and maintain that Nunn's production suppresses the play's homosexual aspects.]

The date of 23 April 2000 was celebrated as usual as St George's Day and the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 1564. It was also the feast of Easter in the ecclesiastical calendar. BBC Radio 3 marked this millennial intersection of Christianity, nationality and sanctioned culture by dedicating the day's programming to Shakespeare. One week later, Carol Vorderman, British television's reigning popular intellectual, failed to identify Sir Toby Belch as the comic knight in Twelfth Night when she appeared on the May Day celebrity edition of ITV's top-rating gameshow Who Wants to be a Millionaire? Vorderman's subsequent avowal that the work of Shakespeare is ‘dull as ditchwater’ was widely quoted in the media. Now, it is neither the intention of this chapter to adjudicate between these competing evaluations of the contemporary status and social value of Shakespeare's work nor to engage in questions about the complex aesthetic codes, educational capital and cultural competencies at stake in the making of such judgements. Rather, we aim to examine Trevor Nunn's recent cinematic treatment of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (1996), which makes claim to the contemporary representation of sexuality despite its period setting and framing. Our concerns here are two-fold. First, we will figure this conservative representation of Shakespeare in the context of the contemporary ascendancy of the costume drama and the nostalgic mood of 1990s television and cinema. Secondly, we seek to establish and contextualise what we argue are politically reactionary naturalisations of white heterosexuality in Nunn's film by placing it within a fin de siècle cultural milieu which insistently promulgates a sexual ideology in which white, heterosexual and, ultimately, monogamous sex is figured as the constitutive model for sexual behaviour and subjectivity.

The current vogue for costume drama genre in television and cinema was initiated by the commercial successes of Merchant-Ivory's sanitised and romanticised reinventions of the past, beginning with the adaptation of E. M. Forster's A Room with a View (1985). In fact, the latter was released in the wake of David Lean's orientalist epic A Passage to India (1984). These soft-focus texts and their proliferating progeny offer preferred strategies of historical understanding by encoding history, colonialism and the aesthetics of English class stratification within seductive codes of linear narrativity, melodrama and visual spectacle. The latter codes obviate historical contradictions, cultural ruptures and social tensions (those moments in which the explanatory power of history as linear and progressive breaks down) and in their place insert the totalising myth of heterosexual romantic love, set, usually, within an exotic, heritage or pastoral mise-en-scène. The
success of these films, we suggest, lies not only in their spectacular appeal (lavish costumes, scenery and locations) but also in the fact that they give the armchair historian facile, easy-to-employ decoding strategies for making sense of the historical process. In this respect Nunn's decision to set his production of *Twelfth Night* in ‘West Barbary’, the wild and romantic landscape of Cornwall (Lanhydrock, Prideaux Place, St Michael's Mount), functions to idealise and abstract the historical context of the film, creating a dispersed sense of nostalgia for the romantic, lyrical countryside. In the same manner the ‘Globe-heritage’ representation of early modern London in John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) engages the nostalgic myth of pre-industrial metropolitan life and theatrical community.1

The analysis of *Twelfth Night* in terms of its channelling of erotic desire into heteronormative narration does not in itself represent a particularly new trend in cultural criticism (Butler, Rubin, Sedgwick). What is interesting about this pre-millennial film, however, is the manner in which it seeks to establish a sexual mythology within the cultural framework of late Victorian England. We are interested in both why and how at this particular historical conjunction the Shakespearean texts and author-function are used as cultural masterpieces and paternal author(ity) for legitimating and buttressing what are clearly late twentieth-century discourses on sex. What is of particular interest here is the dramatic mobilisation of *Twelfth Night*, arguably Shakespeare's most provocative text in its representation of ambivalent sexual object-choice and culturally shaped discourses of desire, in creating a nostalgic myth of romantic, courtly love for both popular and middle-brow consumption. In Nunn's cinematic revisioning, moments of gender and sexual ambiguity involving misrecognition and misrepresentation are ultimately used to reaffirm established, normative heterosexuality, rather than asserting the existence and positive cultural value of diverse and multiple sexualities.

The alliance between the Shakespeare sign and narratives of romantic heterosexuality strikes us as a particularly uneasy one. Craig Dionne has pointed out how in the context of North American popular culture the Shakespeare sign is configured as something outside or ‘in excess of heterosexuality’.2 Likewise, the cultural work that Shakespeare and his textual production perform in *Twelfth Night*, while nostalgically presenting a cultural system purged of nonstraight sexualities, overflows its own signifying boundaries. There is a representational surplus in this film and other contemporary representations of Shakespeare and his texts that allows for the deconstruction of their ostensibly homophobic meaning. In other words, the de-queering of Shakespeare suggests that a queer Shakespeare may be lurking uneasily beneath the surface.

**FILM, NOSTALGIA AND SHAKESPEARE**

The proliferation of period and costume drama genres in British and American cinema and television during the 1980s and 1990s is symptomatic of an Anglo-American cultural obsession with the past, reflected too in the rise in the popularity of historical theme parks ranging from Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, to the web of country houses and gardens making up the British heritage industry. The connections here are mutually reinforcing. Imelda Whelehan has noted, for example, that ‘Lyme Hall in Cheshire, used to represent Pemberley in the 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a National Trust property accustomed to around 800 visitors a week late in the season; yet, in the autumn of 1995, 5500 visitors arrived during the final two days of opening’.3 This postmodern commodification of the past signifies a cultural immersion in a nostalgia so thick and impenetrable that, as Frederic Jameson has observed, ‘we are unable today to focus on our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our current experience’.4 Jameson ascribes this mode of nostalgia to films that not only directly represent the past but also to those films like *Star Wars* that convey the past metonymically. That is, while *Star Wars* is ostensibly a narrative of futuristic intergalactic heroes and villains, its central tropes culturally enact a deep American yearning to return to the innocence of the 1950s ‘Saturday afternoon serial of the Buck Rogers type’,5 a period which for white American cinema and television audiences iconically signifies a moment of pre-lapsarian wholesomeness. Here the nostalgic motive in fact encodes in symbolic forms the political unconscious of a white supremacist culture, the unspeakable desire to return to the Eisenhower era, a time prior to mass
mobilisations in the name of civil rights against racist and sexist power hierarchies.

Germane to this point is Lynn Spigel's research into women's popular memory, 1950s sitcom reruns and nostalgia shows on North American network and cable television. Spigel found that while some of the research participants acknowledged 'these television images were more exclusive to the white middle class than representative of all women', this acknowledgment by no means precluded 'backlash discourses' pitting 'femininity against feminism' and the construction of the 1950s by way of 'nostalgic longing for the “good old days” when girls were girls and boys made money'. It is also worth noting here that Trevor Nunn's decision to place his production of Twelfth Night in the late Victorian era stemmed from a desire to have the film ‘set at a time when, in their silhouette, men were clearly men—no frills and lace—and when conversely women were expected to be very cosmetic, frail and delicate creatures, to be protected from the harsher realities'.

The dialectical logic of Jameson's analysis of film and nostalgia invites possible reconfigurations or reversals of the terms of that analysis. Accordingly if films about the future can convey the past metonymically, then films set in the past can be decoded as metonymic representations of present cultural and political debates. In this context, the political unconscious of the costume drama provides a framework for understanding how the genre functions as a ‘safe’ signifying space for articulating ideas that may not be acceptably aired in contemporary cinema. In other words, the historical milieu of these productions provides an alibi for the industry that produces them; a director can always argue that she is not providing a forum for regressive politics, rather, ‘that's just the way it was back then’. Such a move brings to the fore the issue of history and its relationship to contemporary culture. The question then shifts from why period or costume dramas are so popular with contemporary audiences to how history functions as a sign in cinema and in popular memory. Following Spigel we understand popular memory as those constructions of the past ‘enmeshed in knowledge circulated by dominant social institutions’, particularly by television and cinema. What exactly is the costume drama made to speak that cannot be spoken in films which directly represent contemporary culture? Despite their patently conservative stance vis-à-vis cultural discourses of sexuality, do these films offer the possibility for oppositional readings? And, more to the point of this chapter, how and why are Shakespeare's name and works invoked in postmodern costume dramas? Does Shakespeare as author-function have a stable signifying meaning?

As we noted above, the current ubiquity of costume drama in television and cinema was inaugurated by the commercial success and critical acclaim of films such as A Room With a View (1985), Howards End (1992) and The Remains of the Day (1993), all from the production team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory. Merchant-Ivory films demonstrated to audiences, the film industry and critics alike that the costume drama was not an obsolescent genre doomed to commercial morbidity. Quite the contrary, as Lynda E. Booth and Richard Burt remark:

Up until the very recent Jane Austen fueled and Merchant-Ivory underwritten revival of period film anything considered ‘classical’ had become equated with a kind of artsy-fartsy cultural elitism that was bound not to make money and was something thus left to the independent film producer aiming at the art houses or the Sundance film festival.

Exotic locales, lavish and ‘authentic’ period costumes and the omnipresent romantic diegesis have an appeal for both middlebrow and popular audiences trained in the conventions of the Hollywood style. History in these films invites audience identification with residual modes of gentility and the melodramatic entanglements of love: the otherness of the past is glossed over and the temporal and cultural distance signified by period costumes and historical locations are foreshortened by familiar narrative discourses, stable actors, intertextual references and the romantic spectacle of heterosexual melodrama.
An exemplary text in respect of this cinematic elision of history is Anthony Minghella's blockbuster adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1996). In the first instance, John Seale's epic desert photography combines with the poignant romance of the plot to mystify the story's colonial setting. Secondly, the narrative of political betrayal—Ralph Fiennes's role as Nazi collaborator—is intersected by the melodramatic narrative of romantic treachery and duplicity and appears to offer a dubious exit from history. In *The English Patient*, then, the complexity and contradictions of history are ironed out; social relations are simplified to be displaced onto the romance of the white, heterosexual main characters. Audiences can leave the cinema (or the sofa) assured, in the slogan of the middlebrow North American Arts & Entertainment cable channel, that this was 'time well spent'. Here they have absorbed a bit of history, been entertained and avoided the sort of ethical complacency encouraged by, say, going to see a shock genre piece like *Scream 3*.

The catalogue of film titles listed above suggests that the nineteenth century remains a popular historical period for the costume drama. Notably, Branagh's *Hamlet*, Hoffman's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and Nunn's *Twelfth Night* all eschew a Renaissance backdrop for nineteenth- or turn-of-the-century settings. Citing Giddings et al., Imelda Whelehan suggests that recycling of nineteenth-century settings in the historical drama is due, in part, to their historical accessibility; the nineteenth century is, after all, relatively recent history. Whelehan further observes that the craving for images of the nineteenth century on big and small screens 'are all symptomatic of the condition of the national psyche which is shedding layers of modernity and reverting to its own past tones under the stress of contemporary economic, political and social crisis'. Similarly, Spigel found in her research into women's popular memory and reruns of 1950s sitcoms widespread 'nostalgia for a better past' represented in the worlds of *Leave it to Beaver* and the 1950s pastiche *Happy Days*.

However, what do we make of recent films dealing with either the Renaissance or the Shakespeare author-function and their critical and commercial popularity? Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998) and *Shakespeare in Love* bear witness to the increasing popularity of the Renaissance and Shakespeare as tropes amenable to the commercially lucrative codes of the costume drama; *Shakespeare in Love* was nominated for an impressive thirteen Academy Awards and won seven, including Best Picture, Best Actress and Best Original Screenplay, while *Elizabeth* was nominated for Best Picture and Best Actress. All of this at a time when pundits are bemoaning the decline of Shakespeare in the classroom and the 'dumbing down' of university and college English Literature curriculum, and when the G2 section of the *Guardian* featured a cover picture of the Bard overlaid by a multiple-choice question text, *à la Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* 'Question: “Who is this Very Famous Man?” Possible answers: A: William Shakespeare, B: William the Conquerer, C: William Hague, D: Who Cares?’

Unlike the nineteenth century, neither the Renaissance nor Shakespeare has the advantage of historical proximity. Indeed, for the majority of contemporary viewers Elizabethan England must seem oddly foreign, another world. A symptomatic reading of nostalgia in film and television productions in which representations of Elizabethan England or the Bardic voice signal crises in the national psyche is one mode of understanding the putative nostalgia these texts evince. Another, complementary mode, we suggest, is to interrogate the meaning(s) these films create through their formal techniques and diegesis and ask why those meanings were rendered in the format of the costume drama. In other words, what kind of alibis do the costume drama and Shakespeare as legitimating author-function provide? What are adaptations of a text like *Twelfth Night* saying about contemporary sex and gender issues? Could the same meaning be created in an adaptation of the play that had a contemporary setting? And finally, what are the relationships between questions of nostalgia, authenticity and fidelity in adaptations of Shakespearean texts?

**GENDER TROUBLE IN ILLYRIA: TREVOR NUNN’S TWELFTH NIGHT**

Trevor Nunn’s adaptation of *Twelfth Night* sees itself as offering a sophisticated and even postmodern interpretation of Shakespeare's complex rendering of Renaissance gender confusion. The website for the film's
video release boldly proclaims that ‘[b]efore Priscilla crossed the desert, Wong Foo met Julie Newmar, and the Birdcage was unlocked, there was Twelfth Night’.\(^{18}\) Through the invocation of contemporary films that treat matters such as cross-dressing, homosexuality and gender misrecognition the website suggests that the Renaissance text of Twelfth Night historically precedes them. Nunn's adaptation of Twelfth Night, the publicity proposes, is both modern and true to the integral meaning of Shakespeare's text. For Nunn Twelfth Night ‘is an examination of gender; Shakespeare is fascinated with what is attractive about the woman in man and the man in woman. “Gender-bending” we call it these days.’\(^{19}\) Presumably the gender and sexual issues in the primary text are retained in this film version. According to this logic Nunn's film satisfies the opposing demands of authenticity and postmodern sophistication without sacrificing either. Nunn's valorisation of authenticity is evinced even in the casting of the film. Accordingly, Telluride's corporate publicity for the film announces the superiority of British theatre-trained actors and their mannered speech over Hollywood stars who are unable to ‘speak Shakespeare's lines’: ‘the film succeeds in part due to Nunn's decision to ignore the box-office lure of Hollywood stars, and to cast all the parts with outstanding British actors who can actually speak Shakespeare's lines with proper cadence and clarity’.\(^{20}\) If the casting decisions signify Nunn's fidelity to the aural style of British Shakespearean performance, his alteration of dialogue, scenes and historical setting of the primary text positions him as an experimental director who is willing to take liberties with the source material.

Following from this assumption, the publicity material and Twelfth Night itself draw on contemporary understandings of gender and non-straight sexualities, suggesting that the Renaissance text understands gender and sexuality in a manner similar to the late twentieth century. The historical distance between Shakespeare's text (c. 1601) and contemporary models of gender and sexuality is telescoped to the point where difference is put under erasure. Drawing on the familiar humanist assumption that human nature is essentially the same across historical epochs and cultural milieus, both publicity material and film represent sexuality as fundamentally unvarying. This counter-factual assumption projects the same universal sexual scheme across widely divergent cultural contexts in the name of the tranhistorical and transcultural Bard. Under the auspices of this false universality, three drag queens crossing the Australian outback and confronting often violent homophobia is equivalent to a pastoral romp in the fictional land of Illyria. Shakespeare is the universal signifier who does the cultural work of aestheticising what are political issues. It is precisely because of the social legitimacy of Shakespeare as a sign of high culture that adjacent universalising tropes come into play.

Contrary to the ahistorical construction of sexuality and gender posited above, the aligning of sexuality and gendered subjectivity with identity is a nineteenth-century phenomenon. In modern Western culture sex has had an increasingly privileged relationship to truth about the self. In the first volume of The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that the Christian tradition of sexual confession gradually evolved into a scienta sexualis:

> nearly one hundred and fifty years have gone into the making of a complex machinery for producing true discourses on sex: a deployment that spans a wide segment of history in that it connects the ancient injunction of confession to clinical listening methods. It is this deployment that enables something called ‘sexuality’ to embody the truth of sexuality and its pleasures.\(^{21}\)

Sex, then, has since the nineteenth century been framed as an epistemological issue from which two processes emerge: ‘we demand that sex speak the truth … and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our deeply buried consciousness’.\(^{22}\) It is significant, then, that Nunn's Twelfth Night poses problems of sex and gender as problems of truth. Here the problem of truth is metonymically played out through the truth of Viola's identity as a woman and the socially sanctioned couplings that resolve the gender confusion.\(^{23}\)
The opening scene of Nunn's Twelfth Night is suggestive of the gender confusion touted in the website publicity material. Dressed as veiled harem girls, the identical twins Viola (Imogen Stubbs) and Sebastian (Steven Macintosh) are shown entertaining the other guests on a ship with the musical number 'O mistress mine'. As they sing, the sound of a baritone male voice (Sebastian's) gives the lie to the illusion that both performers are female soprano or mezzosoprano singers. This auditory effect 'is actually achieved by alternately overdubbing two female voices and one male voice'. However, since both performers are veiled and heavily made-up it is impossible at the visual level to ascertain which harem girl is really a man. The humour of the scene derives from a regressive striptease in which Sebastian turns to Viola and removes her veil. Viola, however, is wearing a moustache and so appears at first to be the female impersonator. To the delight of the other passengers, Sebastian tears off Viola's moustache, exposing her impersonation of a man impersonating a woman. Viola then removes Sebastian's veil, revealing another moustachioed harem girl. Just as Viola prepares to expose the 'true' impersonator by attempting to remove Sebastian's (real) moustache, the ship founders.

As Richard Burt has pointed out, this scene 'raises the possibility of an infinite regress of false revelations in which any gender marker always has to be put in quotation marks as a performative signifier'. The stripping away of accretive layers of gender signifiers (voice, veil, moustache) illustrates Judith Butler's point that gender is a performance whose signifying gestures posit an originary or authentic sexual identity. 'Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.'

The drag sequence in the opening scene raises the prospect that the film will perform a critique of the fixity of sexual identity and the 'naturalness' of gender. However, this expectation is soon undermined by two contrary performative elements. At the same time that the film uses a technological apparatus to undercut the assumption that voice is an essentially gendered characteristic, it invokes the sovereign author-function, the anchoring voice of the patriarchal Bard-as-storyteller. Speaking in 'pseudo-Elizabethan verse', the male voiceover of the prologue begins: 'I'll tell thee a tale. Now list to me …' As the opening credits appear on the screen the voiceover is interwoven with the film's thematic music—the nostalgic 'The Rain It Raineth Every Day'. The male voiceover interpolates the drag scene and subsequent shipwreck for the film audience. The authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator, Shakespeare as storyteller, guides the spectator's vision through the title sequence by steering our attention away from the gender-bending of the preceding drag sequence to the 'real' genders of the twins and the high drama of the shipwreck. Absurdly, though the ship is in imminent danger of sinking, Sebastian still has time to wipe off his make-up and don masculine attire—a naval officer's uniform—while Viola hurriedly removes her long black wig to reveal 'natural' long blond hair. The suggestion here is crucial to the logic of the narrative: the prologue must establish the authentic genders of the twins before the film proper can begin.

The male voiceover also provides a distraction from the second element of the scene that we wish to foreground—the Antonio character. In many readings of the play, Antonio is singled out as a gay character, the Antonio/Sebastian frustrated love story serving as a parallel to the other 'false' romances in the narrative based on gender misrecognition (Cesario/Olivia), obsessive desire (Orsino/Olivia), social promotion (Malvolio/Olivia) and comic courting (Andrew Aguecheek/Olivia). Excluded from the heterosexual economy and potential procreative plenitude of the play's final scene, Antonio's desire for Sebastian is frequently interpreted as having no place in the traditional comedic finale, the pairing-off of the principal characters. The text of the play, however, is vague concerning Antonio's actions, demeanour and physical positioning in this final scene, offering no stage direction. Taking into consideration the play's silence on this matter, the way in which a production deals with the Antonio character can provide an index to how that production envisages the sexual meaning and possibilities of the narrative.

The opening sequence of Nunn's film is organised by a shot/reverse-shot camera movement that links the performing twins by a long-shot to medium close-up of Antonio (Nicholas Farrell). This establishes an
(homo)erotic triangulation which the film will eventually disavow. As the ship breaks upon the rocks, Viola is thrown overboard. While Antonio attempts to hold him back, Sebastian desperately throws himself into the water to save his sister. The twins are temporarily reunited under water in a moment of amniotic oneness, only to be separated by a strong current that ‘divides what naught had ever kept apart’. Though the voiceover insists that the strong currents and sinking boat are responsible for severing Viola and Sebastian, the visual logic and dramatic action of the scene position Antonio as the dividing element between the twins. Antonio tries to stop Sebastian from jumping in after Viola and, at the moment the twins are separated, he is preparing to jump into the water to save Sebastian (Viola has already been rescued by the captain). This complex visual diegesis combines with the matrimonial parlance of the voiceover—’what naught had ever kept apart’—to suggest that Antonio is a dramatic bar between the twins and symbolically disruptive of stable heterosexual relations.

The climatic pairing-off sequence in Nunn's *Twelfth Night* restores the ‘natural perspective’ (V.i.217)\(^{29}\) by which all the plot's misunderstandings and misrecognitions are resolved into authentic genders and desire is demonstrated to be essentially heterosexual. In this heteronormative context, as Olivia (Helena Bonham Carter) and Sebastian and Viola and Orsino (Toby Stephens) pair off happily, Antonio looks on with a slightly poignant but accepting smile, an attitude of resigned tolerance in the face of the inevitable romantic closure of the narrative. Along with Feste (Ben Kingsley), Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Richard E. Grant) and Malvolio (Nigel Hawthorne), Antonio is shown leaving Olivia’s house to clear the way for the finale in which the couples, dressed according to their appropriate genders, perform a nuptial country dance. This pairing-off scene echoes the drag scene at the beginning of the film by having Sebastian peel away Viola-Cesario's moustache to reveal the ‘real’ Viola underneath. The pairing-off scene, however, enacts a closure that is only partially achieved by the interruption of the shipwreck in the early drag scene. In fact, the entire narrative structure of the film pushes toward the ultimate closing down of radical possibilities for gender identification and sexual identity.

The audience is given privileged knowledge about Viola's transformation into the male courtier Cesario. After the shipwreck, Viola finds herself on the foreign and hostile shores of Illyria and, believing her brother to have been drowned, strategically dons masculine attire and presents herself at the all-male court of the Count Orsino. With the aid of the captain who saved her, Viola transforms herself into a dashing if slightly fey young man. Her spectacular transformation involves the casting away of her feminine garments (dress, corset, shoes, jewellery), cutting her hair, binding her breasts stuffing her trousers with a rag, and learning to walk and talk like a male courtier. Her masquerade works so well that she is accepted into Orsino's court and becomes Olivia's object of desire.

It is significant that, as Richard Burt argues, there is never any question of the articulation of lesbian desire in Nunn's *Twelfth Night*. Olivia's attraction to Cesario and Cesario's resultant consternation is played ‘strictly for laughs’\(^ {30}\). During the scene in which Olivia declares her love for Cesario, the camera lingers on Cesario's discomfiture and since we are in on the trick of her disguise we are forced to identify with Cesario's comical distress. The foreclosure on lesbian representation and desire in Nunn's *Twelfth Night* (like the ‘gender-bending’ twentieth-century films with which it is favourably compared) and exclusive concern with homoerotic possibilities between men is ultimately symptomatic of its sexual conservatism. That is, unlike *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Twelfth Night* finally attempts to contain the very potential for same-sex desire it has explored.

The moment of negation of same-sex desire occurs in a sequence in which Cesario and Orsino are being serenaded by a guitar-playing Feste. Notably, the film comes teasingly close to allowing for same-sex desire on the part of Orsino. As Feste sings a romantic tune Cesario and Orsino lean close together and Cesario slowly tilts up his head to kiss Orsino. At the moment their lips are on the point of touching, Feste (who the film suggests is aware that Cesario is a woman; he has seen her emerge from a cave following the shipwreck and will return her cast-off necklace in the revelation scene) ends the song and Cesario and Orsino abruptly
separate. Feste’s reaction is one of feigned unawareness. This scene repeats the erotic triangle set-up at the beginning of the film between Sebastian, Viola and Antonio. This triangulation, however, sets the heterosexual structure of the narrative to rights. Rather than Antonio's intervening and destabilising homoerotic gaze, here the voyeuristic gaze of Feste brings Orsino and Cesario together. It is significant that, like the audience, Feste is in on the joke and hence his gaze functions to bring about the heterosexual resolution of the film. Notably, in the shot/reverse-shot movement that structures this scene, the camera’s point of view is both that of Feste and an omniscient observer. As he plays the guitar, Feste is seated to the left of and below Cesario and Orsino. The camera is initially positioned over Feste's left shoulder. We see what he sees: the developing intimacy between Orsino and Cesario. However, as the scene unfolds, the camera observes Cesario and Orsino in profile, a point of view that Feste clearly cannot possess. The viewer is thereby also drawn into the erotic triangulation as voyeur as well. Knowing what Feste appears to know, that Cesario is a woman, the audience can safely indulge in some homoerotic titillation without guilt. Importantly, it is the male gaze (Feste's and the camera's) that orchestrates the heterosexual rapprochement of the film. In brief, not only does Nunn’s *Twelfth Night* attempt to put homosexuality under erasure but it also legitimates the authority and potency of the male gaze.

What is particularly interesting here is that the terms of this legitimisation of the male gaze are predicated upon Feste's nonparticipation in the heterosexual discourse of romance. That is, the voyeuristic economy depends expressly upon Feste's diegetic role as narrator; Feste observes and orchestrates the erotic triangulation, functioning as narrative copula but never as the subject or object of desire. This voyeuristic quality, the structures of observation, vision and narration, are in fact the characteristics ascribed by Viola to the professional fool:

This fellow's wise enough to play the fool;
And, to do that well, craves a kind of wit:
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of the persons, and the time;
And, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art.

(III.i. 60-66, emphasis added)

Viola’s soliloquy, of course, is also a metacommentary on the attributes of the professional playwright. At several points in Nunn’s *Twelfth Night* there is the suggestion that Feste occupies the position of the Shakespeare author-function. The film's theme song ‘The Rain It Raineth Every Day’ is a framing vehicle whereby the author-function is articulated through Feste as performer. To reiterate, the title sequence establishes and connects an authorial voice with the musical theme while the closing shots link Feste's rendition of the theme song with the insistent heteronormativity of the dance finale. Similarly, Richard Burt has noted that the voyeuristic character of the Shakespeare persona is a recurrent trope in pornographic treatments of Shakespearean texts. Here he is present only to oversee but never to participate in the sexual economy. This nonproductive, one might even say queer sexuality, can be opposed to the Romantic and Freudian rendition of Will’s erotic persona in Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*. In this volume, Elizabeth Klett rightly observes that Will's authorial productivity is represented in ‘stereotypically phallic imagery’:

Will himself seems painfully aware that his writer's block is intimately connected to his sexual performance; in his session with Dr Moth, he describes his problem in terms that make the connection abundantly clear: ‘It’s as if my quill is broken. As if the organ of the imagination has dried up. As if the proud tower of my genius has collapsed … Nothing comes … It is like trying to pick a lock with a wet herring.’

857
In light of the foregoing discussion, what are we to make of Nunn's *Twelfth Night* as an ironic postmodern production that simultaneously guarantees the legitimacy of heterosexual relations? The film mobilises notions of the literary text, Shakespeare author-function and history to create a myth of heterosexual romantic love that is stable across the centuries. As Simon Shepherd points out, Shakespeare's life and his texts have become 'national cultural property' and as such academic critics and the film industry construct both the texts and the Shakespeare biography as transcending history rather than being products of the historical process.³³ So, despite disclaimers to the contrary, *Twelfth Night* is not about 'gender-bending' but rather an authorisation of heterosexual romance.

What we find of particular note in this film is the manner in which it rehearses homosexual desire and then disavows it in order to postulate the naturalness and transparency of heterosexual relations. The film's status as a potentially destabilising text in its treatment of sexuality and gender makes it an optimal instance of the rehearsal/disavowal configuration built into its narrative structure. The moments of homoeroticism signify much more than gender-bending titillation. Rather, they represent and enact homosexual desire in order to construct heterosexuality as natural and definitive, drawing attention to the very queerness they are meant to purge. By deconstructing the hetero-homo opposition we can see that not only is the transparency of heterosexuality spurious but it is heterosexuality that is the dependent concept, relying on homosexuality to provide it with its seeming authenticity. Following Harold Beaver's influential essay 'Homosexual Signs' we believe that

the aim must be to reverse the rhetorical opposition of what is ‘transparent’ or ‘natural’ and what is ‘derivative’ or contrived by demonstrating that the qualities predicated of ‘homosexuality’ (as a dependent term) are in fact a condition of ‘heterosexuality’; that ‘heterosexuality’, far from possessing a privileged status, must itself be treated as a dependent term.³⁴

Given the recent *furor* over Section 28 (actually Section 2A of the 1986 Local Government Act), legislation installed by the Thatcher government that forbids local authorities from intentionally promoting homosexuality and New Labour's 'on message' policy that schools must now positively promote marriage and the family, the mobilisation of England's national author to naturalise heterosexuality and erase homosexuality from history seems particularly pernicious. Perhaps it is intellectually naïve to expect the film industry, particularly a film industry in which Hollywood studios are hegemonic, to present us with politically savvy and interesting filmic texts that appeal to the culturally disenfranchised. As Elayne Tobin has pointedly remarked, to continually assume the posture of being 'gatekeepers of positive representation',³⁵ cultural critics who expose the bad faith of the film industry are being disingenuous: why, after all, should we expect Hollywood, or the film industry in general, to be sympathetic to our concerns? Tobin offers an important consideration here. However, we believe that cultural critique need not serve merely a negative function. We hope our analysis has demonstrated that Nunn's film contains ideological complexities and ambiguities, demonstrating that every representation contains within itself an oppositional or subversive reading. Though *Twelfth Night* may sound the trumpet of nostalgia for a heterosexual historical past that never was, this representation is always equivocal and will always attempt to cover its tracks. It is in these ghostly footprints that we can find the evidence for a counter-reading that suggests that maybe there is something queer about Shakespeare after all.

**Notes**

1. For brief consideration of the uses of the Elizabethan London *mise-en-scène* in *Shakespeare in Love*, see Elizabeth Klett's chapter 'Shakespeare in Love and the end(s) of history' in this volume.
5. Ibid., p. 16.
7. Ibid., 28.
10. The latter point is partly rhetorical because the variability in the meaning of Shakespeare can be anecdotally illustrated. The writers of this chapter were driving west on the M5 on Sunday, 23 April 2000 listening to the Easter bank holiday Shakespeare programming on Radio 3 and also discussing Richard Burt's *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* (1998). Burt's study is in part concerned with pornographic representations and uses of Shakespeare in such film productions as *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), a text which alludes to imagined pornographic interactive CD-ROMs including *As You Lick It, Et Tu Blow Job* and *Much Ado About Humping*. *Tromeo and Juliet* and the middle-brow homage to Shakespeare broadcast on Radio 3 are suggestive of the heterogeneous range of connotations and values signified by the contemporary Shakespeare sign.
12. Branagh's Hamlet is set in an opulent *fin de siècle* Denmark, while Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in late nineteenth-century Italy, complete with the newly invented bicycle as an index to the film's turn-of-the-century setting.
15. Spigel, 29.
16. As the final draft of this chapter was finished, Sarah Hall of the *Guardian* reported that Cambridge University was considering demoting the Bard, abolishing the examination paper on Shakespeare to make room for modern literature. Frank Kermode, one of the country's foremost literary critics, quickly responded to this threat against Shakespeare's canonical supremacy, arguing that 'the whole of our literature has to be estimated in relation to him. This [the scrapping of Shakespeare] seems to me a foolishness. It would certainly change the whole balance of the course and would be a net loss to put it mildly.' 3 May 2000, G2, 8.
20. Boose and Burt, p. 16.
22. Ibid., p. 69.
23. Similarly in *Shakespeare in Love* the truth/sex dyad is enacted through the terms of Queen Elizabeth's wager ‘can a play show the very truth and nature of love?’ The answer at both the diegetic and extra-diegetic levels is an emphatic ‘yes’. Shakespeare as universal literary genius can reproduce the nature of love because he himself has felt it, and this itself is an anachronistic projection of Romantic expressive ideology. And, more importantly perhaps, Shakespeare can demonstrate the ‘very truth and nature of love’ because he is one of us, a modern subject in search of the truth of love (for ‘love’ read ‘heterosexual love’), the truth of which will also reveal something about himself. For further discussion of *Shakespeare in Love*’s satirical treatment of Freudian tropes, see Elizabeth Klett’s chapter in this volume.
25. Ibid., p. 177.
29. The text used is *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Further references are incorporated into the text.
31. Interestingly, there is a corresponding scene in Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* in which Will and Thomas-Viola are observed by a third person, the boatman as voyeur. For a fuller description of this scene, see Klett in this volume. To Klett's description we want to add that, like Feste, the boatman legitimizes heterosexuality precisely to the extent that he functions as a voyeur. In fact, the playwright as voyeur is enacted in a comic manner by the young John Webster whose pubescent sexual desire is articulated through an economy of espionage, sadism and bloody spectacle. Here any notion of perversity is displaced onto the comic figure of the young Webster whose later cultural production will enact the dark night of the Jacobean soul as opposed to the ‘golden age’ of Elizabethan courtly heterosexuality.
32. Klett, above, p. 34.

Criticism: Production Reviews: Laurie Osborne (essay date 2002)


*[In the following essay, Osborne studies the ways in which Trevor Nunn's film adaptation of Twelfth Night adopts a heavy-handed approach to film editing and textual rearrangement in order to produce the effect of character continuity.]*

After contrasting traditionalist readings of continuous, interiorized Shakespearean characters and poststructuralist analyses of their fragmentation and discontinuity, Alan Sinfield concludes that “some Shakespearean dramatis personae are written so as to suggest, not just an intermittent, gestural, and problematic subjectivity, but a continuous or developing interiority or consciousness; and we should seek a way of talking about this that does not slide back into character criticism or essentialist humanism.”¹ Sinfield pursues this new way of talking about character, or rather “character effects,” by noting the history of responses to particular figures; he argues that a character such as Macbeth, for example, “is not a mysterious natural essence. Rather he is situated at the intersection of discourses and historical forces that are competing, we might say, to fill up his subjectivity.”² Recent Shakespearean films speak directly both to critical concerns with discontinuity or inexplicable characterizations in Shakespearean plays and to readings of “a continuous or developing interiority or consciousness.” To put it another way, these films help us see how we also produce “coherent characters” from discontinuous fragments.
Specifically, the radical use of crosscutting and intercutting in such recent works as Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* (1996) and Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1996) reveal how film editing produces cinematic fragments that paradoxically “fill up” the subjectivity of early modern characters. Although this essay concentrates primarily on Nunn's *Twelfth Night, Looking for Richard* is perhaps most blatant in using cutting and fragments to create continuity in character. The film presents only brief scenes of *Richard III* in its quest to explore whether Richard is relevant today. For example, the crucial and critically vexed scene of Richard's wooing of Anne is spliced into a series of cross-cut scenes in which the actors worry, first, about the scene itself and whether it can work and, second, about which actress is best suited for the part.

By juxtaposing the crosscut scenes discussing the play with act 1, scene 2, Pacino suggests that looking for Richard requires looking for Anne. Although critics have not necessarily been kind to Winona Ryder as the choice for this very difficult scene, the action itself takes on a compelling continuity in contrast to the intercut scenes that precede and follow it. Set against the talking heads of scholars discussing Anne's dilemma and the earnest round robin of actors debating the scene's purposes, this scene, like many chosen by Pacino for inclusion here, seems at first to play continuously. However, Pacino uses startling cutaway shots to himself—outdoors, out of costume, and without Anne—to maintain attention definitively on Richard. Three interruptions mark the scene. Her spitting at him cuts away to his fierce declaration, “I'll have her.” At her announcement of contempt, Pacino inserts a brief of image of himself, smiling, in the same visual context as the declaration—a swift reminder that he will have her. Her capitulation and rejoicing “to see you are become so penitent” (2.2.220) yields immediately to the alternate setting and Pacino's bark of laughter.

These cutaways are all the more effective as emphasis on Richard's coherence of purpose because of the startling shift from the darkened, seemingly interior and somber lushness of the “performance” to the bright daylight, exterior shots of just Pacino, unkempt with his characteristic backwards baseball cap, leaning on what looks like a contemporary metal sculpture. In a scene that is labeled “Lady Anne” and that presents such a provocative reversal in Anne's responses, Pacino uses cutaways to underscore Richard's single-minded focus and coherence. Moreover, like so many of the play's characters, Anne does not need continuity beyond this scene within the structure of Pacino's film because the quest here is for Richard's character, itself a monster of discontinuity, broken into by actors, critics, and crucial scenes. Even Kevin Spacey's Buckingham or Alec Baldwin's Clarence, who appear more than once, may command our interest but do not survive the obsessive attention to Richard himself as a character.

In *Twelfth Night*, Trevor Nunn also uses extensive film editing and rearrangements to elaborate character. Because of his cinematic choices, *Twelfth Night* has provoked radically contradictory reviews that often extend their critique to filming Shakespeare generally. Stanley Kauffmann laments the film as a disaster and concludes that “the film medium is like an x-ray that enlarges the flaws in plays,” in his assessment, the flaw of Malvolio's treatment. At the opposite extreme, John Podhoretz suggests that “Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* is a glorious piece of work, and one that brings to mind a heretical question: Is it perhaps the case that the cinema is the ideal medium for Shakespeare?” My answer to that question is that cinema is certainly the ideal medium for Shakespeare in the twentieth century, largely because film both creates and reinscribes our ideologically based expectations about character.

In *Twelfth Night*, Trevor Nunn also uses extensive film editing and rearrangements to elaborate character. Because of his cinematic choices, *Twelfth Night* has provoked radically contradictory reviews that often extend their critique to filming Shakespeare generally. Stanley Kauffmann laments the film as a disaster and concludes that “the film medium is like an x-ray that enlarges the flaws in plays,” in his assessment, the flaw of Malvolio's treatment. At the opposite extreme, John Podhoretz suggests that “Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* is a glorious piece of work, and one that brings to mind a heretical question: Is it perhaps the case that the cinema is the ideal medium for Shakespeare?” My answer to that question is that cinema is certainly the ideal medium for Shakespeare in the twentieth century, largely because film both creates and reinscribes our ideologically based expectations about character.

Other critics of Shakespearean film have made comparable claims, often using the structures of stage criticism to justify film's suitability for the plays. In *Shakespeare, Cinema, and Society*, John Collick effectively demonstrates that early film developed out of Victorian stage display in ways that persisted even until the BBC Shakespeare plays. Peter Donaldson places the great film auteurs implicitly in the crucial interpretive place that actor/directors have held since the late eighteenth century. Critics from Barbara Hodgdon to Douglas Lanier look to the valuable and provocative interpretations that individual films, like individual stagings, have brought to the text. My argument here follows these in several features: it draws upon the continuity from the play's stage traditions as they are reworked in the film, it analyzes Nunn's approach as an auteur's vision, and it concentrates on the cinematic potential for Shakespearean performance, which this film
My discussion actually runs closest to Lorne Buchman's analysis of how film techniques relate to and rewrite Shakespearean dramaturgy. In particular, I share Buchman's interest in how spectators interact with the temporal display allowed (or disabled) by film; however, I do not agree that difficulties in analyzing time in Shakespearean film arise because “Shakespeare's own temporal structure is so close to that of the film medium itself.” In fact, what I find most intriguing about the current trend of restoring the text in films like Nunn's *Twelfth Night* and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) is the implicit affirmation that fuller texts require very aggressive film editing—less cutting of the text requires more elaborate cutting in the film. In Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, twentieth-century constructions of character emerge from within ideologies of romantic love and gender; moreover, these constructions thrive through film cuts rather than the textual cuts used in earlier centuries.

Since film editing most obviously influences the audience's sense of time, I find Franco Zeffirelli's description of that effect compelling: “You see, cinema creates a different chemistry, a different taste, and the attention of the audience moves so fast. Really, fantasy gallops in the audience in movies. They know all before the image is finished.” The speed Zeffirelli notes is everywhere in cinematic editing of late twentieth-century Shakespearean films, ranging from Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) to Branagh's *Hamlet*. From a postmodern perspective, these quick cuts—or “flash cuts,” as Branagh calls them in his screenplay edition—offer the interplay of surfaces without depth. However, as Buchman points out, the spectator's interaction with these disruptions of expectation, like that of Iser's readers interacting with the disruptive text, produces a dynamic sense of time in film. And, I argue, this dynamic is produced in *Twelfth Night*'s film editing to invoke depth of character for the twentieth-century spectator. The resultant “galloping fantasies” significantly extend and revise the stage practices that produced the “character effects” of earlier centuries. Nunn's cinematic solutions for apparent problems in the Shakespearean text on stage actually reveal the ideological imperatives of character construction in both the early modern and twentieth-century versions.

In his *Twelfth Night*, Nunn clearly draws upon changes made in performances since the late 1700s and often recuperates what typically was excised from the text. The film recasts in a modern idiom of crosscutting and the short take both the discontinuity of character produced by the twinning in the Renaissance text and the “character problems” that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics discovered within the play. As a result, far from agreeing with one of Nunn's detractors, who claims problems “can be laid at the feet of the director, who's hugely experienced in the theater but has his limitations when it comes to … the camera,” I see Nunn's film growing from stage conventions into quite thorough cinematic practice.

His *Twelfth Night* continues traditional theatrical changes, for example, opening the play with Viola's landing (1.2) rather than Orsino's speech (1.1). However, that reversal is translated through film convention: Viola's landing functions as part of the opening credits, as Nunn points out, “before the work proper, which would still begin with one of the most famous opening lines in the canon, ‘If music be the food of love, play on.’” Moreover, Nunn also employs a cinematic flexibility of setting and sequence to enact extreme revisions of the scenes between Orsino and Viola. Thus, his construction of these characters both draws on current cinematic models for displaying “depth” of character and on the Renaissance strategy of creating character through onstage relationships, suggested in the variable early speech headings. The interactions between Orsino and Viola are clearly key in the creation of both characters in the film; Nunn's several elaborations and elongations of that association actually emphasize the hierarchical connections between master and servant that underlie their mutual attraction in the Folio text. In this way, the Renaissance investment in the hierarchical nature of erotic involvement serves as the occasion for living up to twentieth-century assumptions that “true love,” as opposed to lust, develops over time.

Nunn not only draws out Viola's involvement with Orsino, but also he brings her into the play early. Viola appears in act 1, scene 1, as the hapless musician first called upon to play “that strain again” and then
forestalled because “‘tis not so sweet now as it was before” (1.1. 4, 8). However, her presence is silent, unlike earlier stage performances, including those of Charles Calvert and Henry Irving, who combined and condensed act 1, scenes 1 and 4; none that I know have registered Viola's silent presence in Orsino's first scene. Moreover, Orsino connects with this musician specifically, first by walking over to stop his piano performance (“No more” [1.2.7]) and second by addressing Cesario directly in close-up before the premature ending of the scene. Whereas the early modern text exploits the conventions of the patronage system and the favoritism obvious in Orsino's confiding in Cesario after just three days, Nunn chooses to show the early moments of Cesario's service in order to mark out Orsino's awareness of his page from the start of the film and to track the development of their intimacy.

In a move that recuperates the closeness displayed in the Folio text, Nunn also restores a large proportion of the lines typically cut from act 2, scene 4, where Orsino once again sends Cesario off to woo Olivia. From the early nineteenth century on, 2.4 has undergone radical cutting, including the omission of all of Feste's role in the scene as well as the excision of Orsino's discourse on men's wavering love and its causes. Not only does Nunn retain Orsino's advice to Cesario about why “he” should choose a woman younger than himself, he also keeps the call for Feste to sing as well as the song itself. However, Nunn revises the scene just as radically as those early performances did: he intercuts act 2, scene 3, and act 2, scene 4, and disperses the remaining conversations between Orsino and Cesario throughout the film. The song that plays behind their initial conversation in 2.4 is the one that Feste sings to the below-stairs crowd in 2.3. And the song of the “fair cruel maid” is shifted well into act 3, the occasion for the near-kiss between Orsino and his page in the barn, which is the prelude to Orsino's perhaps overly vehement command: “once more, Cesario, / Get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty” (2.4.79-80). No other performance, not even John Dexter's inventively reordered 1968 television production, has so radically dispersed the various moments and moods of Cesario's second scene with Orsino. Nunn effectively keeps Viola and Orsino right before our eyes almost right up until the denouement.

These choices for Twelfth Night yield significant insight into characterization as reworked in cinematic productions of Shakespeare. In film, fragments paradoxically produce coherence and apparent depth of character within the sustained development of a relationship that critics since the eighteenth century have found both crucial and difficult. Samuel Johnson's early objections to Viola as an “excellent schemer” found their way into Francis Gentleman's commentary in Bell's 1774 edition of Shakespeare's plays: “Viola—it is very singular that a young lady, just escaped from a shipwreck, under apprehension for her brother, should so suddenly form a design upon the duke, whom she had never seen: But when Shakespeare wanted to push on his plot, he was not very ceremonious with probability.” By the mid-nineteenth century, Mrs. Elliott, whose praise for Viola is unstinting, finds Orsino problematic as the object of her affection: “It is earnestly to be hoped that Viola won as good a husband as she deserved. Orsino is no hero.” In the 1888 introduction to the Henry Irving Shakespeare, Arthur Symons offers the following brutal assessment of the problems posed by Orsino and Viola together:

The great defect of Twelfth Night as an acting comedy lies, no doubt, in the fact that the love interest never takes very much hold on our sympathies. Viola is a charming young woman and makes a pretty boy; but who can possibly sympathize with her in her ardent pursuit of such a lover as Orsino, a man whose elaborate sentimentality reminds one of those delicacies which cloy rather than delight the appetite, and whose plastic readiness to transfer his affections makes one suspect they were, after all, scarcely worth such trouble to win.

The distaste that Symons displays for the crucial love between Viola and Orsino reveals the difficulties caused by nineteenth-century perception of Viola's character: idealizing her constancy throws Orsino's “weakness” into sharp relief. Orsino's apparent inconsistencies, especially in 2.4, were anathema in the nineteenth century because of the high value set on coherence and consistency in characters. The result was that Viola's relationship to Orsino became the radical flaw in the play.
Nunn takes a distinctively cinematic approach to the “problem,” which he frames specifically in terms of theater: “the biggest problem of the play in stage performance is that Orsino, who dominates the early part of the work, drops out at the end of Act Two and doesn't return again until the last scene of Act Five.” Nunn reworks the relationship between Orsino and Viola through the distinctive temporal strategies of film and edits their scenes together in three ways: he films continuous scenic sequences across a series of settings; he crosscuts pairs of scenes, like 2.3 and 2.4, so that continuous action becomes discontinuous by virtue of apparently simultaneous interactions; and he literally divides up both of the scenes between Viola and Orsino and spreads them throughout the film. Nunn uses these several strategies to earn the emotional impact of Viola's most famous, self-revelatory speech about her imaginary sister and the poignancy of her voice-over declaration “Whoe'er I woo myself would be his wife” (1.4.42), which he has moved to the end of their penultimate meeting in the film. As a result, the fragments and combined scenes produce a coherence in their developing relationship that a twentieth-century audience both “reads” and helps to produce as the film progresses.

The first of the displaced moments from the theatrical text emphasizes Viola's “tending” to Orsino and underscores what Nunn argues are the crucial difficulties of Cesario's disguise: “It was important to me that Viola, converting herself into her brother, Sebastian (who she believes has drowned), should have to face considerable physical and temperamental challenges.” For example, Cesario's appearance in act 1, scene 1, follows directly from the emotional trauma of shearing her locks and the physical pain of confining her breasts in the disguise; the difficulties of playing the piano and passing as male in this scene, which seems to include all of Orsino's court, abruptly gives way to the emotional pain of remembering her brother's death when Orsino looks straight at her in praising Olivia—”She that hath a heart of that fine frame / To pay this debt of love but to a brother” (1.1.34-35). Her brief flashback to the scene of her drowning brother vividly invokes the parallels between Viola and Olivia's situations while beginning to reveal what Viola might find so appealing about Orsino—his speech makes it seem that he knows the book of her secret soul. This first scene marks Viola's literal repositioning in the text and initiates the almost subliminal expansion of their relationship.

Nunn's strategies reveal an investment in the relationship developing over time, especially in contrast to the concentrated interactions between Orsino and Viola in the Folio. Love, according to current assumptions evident in film, television, and even romance novels, both arises from and generates continuous interaction. Nunn's *Twelfth Night* displays and reproduces this ideology. However, this film also, paradoxically, demonstrates that the impression of such “continuity” can only be achieved through the fragmentation and dispersal of scenes between the two.

When Nunn breaks Viola's encounters with Orsino into smaller, separate scenes, the time that will untangle Viola's dilemma becomes three months of service most convincingly, especially when scenes that run continuously are filmed in different locations and situations. For example, act 1, scene 4, plays continuously, but its temporal frame is visually extended. Orsino first interrupts Cesario's fencing lesson, “Who saw Cesario, ho?” (1.4.10) and then leads him out to the seaside to ask his help. Nunn's screenplay even registers an imagined length of time in this cut: “ORSINO is sitting by the sea, with the castle in the background, next to CESARIO, having told the whole story of his love for OLIVIA.” After Orsino teases him about his near-girlishness, inadvertently threatening both the false mustache above the lip “more smooth and rubious” (1.4.32) and her concealed breasts by grabbing the front of Cesario's jacket, Cesario punches him to get free and knocks Orsino over onto his injured arm. Nunn then cuts to Orsino, reclining as in the opening scene on his couch with his arm in a sling, as he reaches for Cesario's hand: “I know thy constellation is right apt / For this affair” (1.4.35-36). Although the scene's lines flow without interruption, the three complete scene changes and interaction of injury and forgiveness elongate the exchange. The abandonment of Orsino's sling by the middle of the film serves as a further subliminal reminder that, as Orsino puts it, “Three months this youth hath tended upon me” (5.1.97).
Beyond revisions in setting which nonetheless maintain textual continuity, Nunn also uses interwoven scenes to create “character effects” in Viola and Orsino. Although some critics have complained that “the film compulsively cross-cuts among the characters, rarely allowing a scene to build,” in fact that film strategy accomplishes several things. First, like extending a single scene across several settings, the crosscutting stretches out the conversation between Orsino and Cesario. Second, the strategy of intercutting the two scenes, uses specific aspects of the text, for instance, Feste's song, to illuminate the content of the scenes as well as Nunn's interpretation. All in all, Nunn fleshes out the verbal and thematic connections between sequential scenes—a cinematic underscoring of the diptych/triptych structure that Mark Rose has discussed in Shakespearean scenic construction. Nunn portrays as simultaneous the actions in two plots that explore the yearning singled out by some critics as the central insight of Nunn's production.

As Podhoretz's glowing review suggests, “two scenes are combined into an exquisitely edited expression of the way in which sister and duke and noblewoman pine for each other,” but the intermingling of act 2, scenes 1 and 2, is actually even richer, given the backdrop of Feste's song. “Oh Mistress mine” is the song that the twins originally sing on the boat before the shipwreck. Whereas their voices combined jest with the line “that can sing both high and low” during the boat scene because they do sing both high and low, in the middle of the film that line marks a cut to Olivia half-sleeping as she hears the singing from the kitchen. The scene thus foreshadows the replacement of Sebastian's low voice for Viola's high one in her affair of the heart.

Nunn also uses songs to mark significant parallels linking 2.3 and 2.4. For example, when Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby ask for a song, the scene cuts immediately to Orsino's request for a song. The account of this missing singer that Curio gives—“Feste the jester, my lord, a fool that the Lady Olivia's father took much delight in” (2.4.11-12)—cuts back to Feste's question to the revelers in the kitchen about what kind of song they would like. The song itself makes a vivid bridge between the two scenes, underscoring both the ambivalently voiced lover and the invocation of transitory youth in both scenes. For example, “high and low” not only functions as voice-over for Olivia but as the cue to cut back to Orsino's music room with the same tune playing in the background and his question to his page “How dost thou like this tune?” (2.4.20). Viola's “masterly” (2.4.22) response yields to Feste's verse “Every wise man's son doth know” (2.3.45). The “present laughter” (2.3.49) of the song then becomes Orsino's laughter at Cesario when perceiving that the youth's eye “hath stay'd upon some favour that it loves” (2.4.24). During their entire exchange, the music of Feste's song plays in the background, creating aural continuity between the interleaved scenes. When Orsino's comments on women as roses culminate in Cesario's lament, “alas, that they are so: / To die, even when they to perfection grow!” (2.4.40-41), the song's response in the cut back to the kitchen is that “what's to come is still unsure” (2.3.50). As Maria begins to sing with Feste, they arrive at the carpe diem motif in song, expressing her longing and the lament that “youth's a stuff will not endure” (2.3.53). That echo of Orsino's and Cesario's comments about women becomes a refrain repeated four times and a commentary on Maria's lost youth and palpable longing for Sir Toby in this production.

Nunn uses Feste's role rather than cutting it, as the nineteenth-century productions did, in order to emphasize part of what he thinks the play is about: “It's about mortality, the transience of youth, the transience of the happiness that we associate with youth.” Nonetheless, he has changed the song that Orsino requests at the beginning of act 2, scene 4, from “Come Way, Death” to “Oh, Mistress Mine,” in effect doubling the number of scenes that use song and lyrics to elaborate Orsino's relationship with Cesario. The impression of unrequited longing created by “Oh, Mistress Mine” is reinforced by a very brief, final, silent cutaway first to Cesario looking at Orsino and then to Orsino looking at Cesario after the song closes. Even Andrew Aguecheek, whose face on film supplies us with powerful emotional cues when, for example, he says, “I was adored once” (2.3.181). These images, especially the silent close-up, implicitly refute Mark Rose's contention that “the presentation of character in Shakespeare is perhaps less like a modern film in which the figures are in constant motion than an album of snapshot stills to be contemplated in sequence, each photo showing the subject in a different light, a different stage of development.” Shakespearean filmmakers incorporate these visual parallels without sacrificing the “constant motion”: the cut itself becomes the constant motion that
engages the audience in comparing different views of a single character or comparing different characters entirely.

Although the entire sequence takes place continuously over the card table, the conversation is extended and builds audience involvement. The two scenes also become mutually interpretive. For example, the overt clues marking out Maria's painful longing for Sir Toby underscore the more subtle hints of Viola's apparently futile desire for Orsino—even though we have not yet heard about her love in the film. With this crosscutting, Nunn teaches his audience to expect and to “read” the brief scenes between Orsino and Viola with which he has seeded the rest of the film. Feste's song effectively situates the brief encounters between Orsino and Viola as evidence of desire functioning below everyday activities. Thus this scene prepares the audience still more thoroughly to perceive the “depth” of character in the yearning that underpins Viola's subsequent brief scenes with Orsino.

This strategy works especially well since Nunn creates a series of dislocated, composite scenes that flesh out and elaborate the closing conversations of act 2, scene 4. One pair of scenes interpolated into act 3 offers Viola the combination of “physical and temperamental challenges” I have already mentioned in the opening scene. Cesario's appearance, riding hard and jumping her horse with the Duke's court, leads directly to Orsino's calling for the “boy” to help him in the bath. Cesario's response to the physical difficulty of jumping the hedge (“cries of distress welling up in her”) yields to “the most compromising position so far.” The actual summons is taken from 2.4—“Come hither, boy” (2.4.15)—but the speech Orsino gives from his bath continues his early meditation about how Olivia's love for her brother augurs well for her later love, while Cesario, at first embarrassed and then bemused, bathes his back:

How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
That live in her. When liver, brain, and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and fill'd
Her sweet perfections with one self king.

(1.1.35-49)

This speech, completing the one interrupted in act 1, scene 1, applies as vividly to Viola as Olivia, as Nunn once again draws out the parallels implicit in the Shakespearean text and allows Viola to hear this meditation. The accompanying action, the lingering intimacy of Cesario sponging Orsino's back, shows Viola in just the position that Orsino is imagining for Olivia—having taken him as her “one self king.”

What the Renaissance text implies in scenic parallels between act 1, scenes 1 and 2, Nunn's film interweaves explicitly for a twentieth-century audience. When Viola herself breaks off this moment, she reverts to act 2: “Sir, shall I to this lady?” (2.4.123). His response, though lacking the jewel he sends in the Folio text, follows directly: “Ay, that's the theme, / To her in haste; [Give her this jewel;] say, / My love can give no place, bide no delay” (2.4.123-25—bracketed material has been omitted). The physical challenge of riding like a man is juxtaposed here with the emotional challenge of acting the page to the man she loves and recalling the death of her brother. The two are spliced together in a scene that combines one speech from 1.1 with fragments from 2.4. Such brief sequences encourage an awareness of Viola's hopeless desire operating “beneath” her direct service to the Duke throughout the film, creating the sense of a coherent character through carefully dispersed fragments.

In a second reworked and relocated scene from 2.4, Nunn offers yet another location—the billiards room—and a useful separation of Orsino's contradictory representations of love. In this encounter, shifted still later in act 3 after Sebastian's meeting with Antonio in Illyria (normally 3.3), the film explicitly stages Orsino's advice to Cesario in the context of the two “men” playing billiards:
If ever thou shalt love, remember me;  
For such as I am, all true lovers are,  
He takes his shot and misses badly.  
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,  
Save in the constant image of the creature  
That is beloved.

(Nunn 74; 2.4.15-20)

In this context, Orsino's comment is a laughing excuse for his failed motion—he has missed his shot. Nunn thus displaces and recasts Orsino's claim of constancy well away from his account earlier in the film of wavering male affection that must choose a younger woman to “hold its bent” (2.4.37). The scene also offers Cesario the first chance to present her greater constancy; to her surprise, her motion is not skittish, and she makes her shot.

Moreover, this brief scene introduces the remainder of 2.4, which, like 1.4, emphasizes different moods by stretching the encounter across different settings. After Cesario successfully sinks his ball, Nunn cuts away to the two rushing down to the barn to solicit the song from Feste. The scene then resumes where it left off several sequences before with Orsino's request to the fool for “that old and antic song we heard last night” (2.4.3). The actual song from 2.4 that Feste sings provides the backdrop for the growing closeness of the two characters listening, as first Orsino crosses the room and places his arm behind Cesario and, next, in an over-the-shoulder shot, Nunn shows Cesario gradually leaning back as if to kiss Orsino. At Feste's final line of the song, the point of view cuts to a head-on two-shot of the pair, startled out of the intimate moment. Feste's reactions both during the song and immediately thereafter draw direct attention to the near-kiss—the measure of the intimacy the pair achieve by “act 3” of Nunn's film.

The scene continues directly from there, but only after Orsino and Cesario abruptly rush outside to stand by the sea. Shouting to be heard above the surf (much louder now than ‘twas before), both Orsino and Cesario seem pushed beyond the “normal” friendly interaction of the game of billiards. In Orsino's case, the abrupt command, “Once more, Cesario” (2.4. 80) seems an almost desperate attempt to gain heterosexual equilibrium; moreover, Cesario both reveals and hides her love simultaneously in the story of her sister. Her speech serves both as a forceful defense for women “as true of heart as we” and a self-revelation that paradoxically seems to promise silence about “his” feelings for Orsino—“she never told her love” (2.4.107, 111). Through these sequences, Imogene Stubbs fully earns the poetry and poignancy of the “Patience on a monument” speech as she smiles at grief with a tear flowing down her cheek. Only after this scene, in fact the next morning when Cesario returns to Orsino still on the battlements, does Nunn produce Viola's telling comment from the end of 1.4: “Who'er I woo myself would be his wife” (1.4.42). The filmed fragments of her scenes with Orsino have effectively built up the conflict between her “interior” grief and love and her “exterior” participation in Orsino's household.

Thus Nunn elaborates the growing closeness between Orsino and his page by elongating the interactions of the playtext through filmic time. He claims to “alter the chronology so that the Viola/Orsino story could continue developing throughout, by being interleaved between Olivia scenes and Malvolio scenes, so that we never lose sight of the relationship about which we are required to be so joyously happy at the end.” This development actually builds the relationship in a variety of ways. Music room, seaside, riding country, bath, billiards room, battlements—all these varied settings demonstrate how thoroughly Cesario tends upon her lord. The dispersal of their concentrated time together illuminates Viola's life in Orsino's court while expanding Orsino's character and separating some of the startling, even incoherent reversals in his various speeches about love in 2.4. Most important, even continuous scenes, especially the crucial last one hundred lines of 2.4, spread across a variety of settings and an array of sounds—silence, song, surf—display the evolving relationship between Orsino and Cesario in visual and aural variations that justify the changes in tone and Orsino's sudden changes of attitude.
In fact, through film editing, Nunn resolves the inconstancy that leads Arthur Symons ultimately to dismiss Orsino as “a sentimental egoist.” Symons's distaste for Orsino's character derives from the scene he describes as “Shakespeare's judgment on him,” namely, Orsino's “shallow words on woman's incapacity for love (2.4), so contradictory with what he has said the moment before, an inconsistency so exquisitely characteristic; both said with the same lack of vital sincerity.” In the twentieth century such inconsistencies of character have been attributed to Shakespearean scene structure or even Renaissance ideology. Rose suggests that “a Shakespearean scene, when it is concerned with ‘character,’ will show us a figure in a given emotional posture, or assuming one, switching from joy to grief”; more recently, Sinfield argues that “when critics believe they find a continuous consciousness … [in Shakespearean characters], they are responding to cues planted in the text for the initial audiences.” In planting film cues for a twentieth-century audience, Nunn separates Orsino's inconsistent assertions across space and time; he disperses Orsino's emotional postures rather than radically cutting an already comparatively small role as the nineteenth-century performances did. In Nunn's version, Orsino's inconsistency in act 2, scene 4, becomes less striking because his conflicting comments occur in different locations, even at different times. Moreover, these interactions in the film's configuration register his complex responses to Cesario as their relationship develops.

The success of these techniques suggests that such fragmentation—or intimations of fragmentation in changing settings—functions as the twentieth-century technique for developing character. Whereas the lengthy sustained intimacy of 2.4 in the Folio marks out the mutual definition of the two principals in the Renaissance theatrical context, and the eighteenth- to nineteenth-century versions simply cut Orsino's role to promote character consistency and ameliorate his suitability as Viola's love object, in twentieth-century film we can have almost all of the complicated interaction between the two characters, but only if those varied interactions extend across the surface of the action and allow us to supply their imagined depths. In both the seventeenth-century play and the twentieth-century film, the conventions registering the mutual attraction of Orsino and Viola expose ideologies of erotic union. The playtext stages multiple emotional postures that show Orsino's influence over Viola, displaying erotic alliance as hierarchical at its core; the film deploys fragments to convey long-term, continuous interaction. As a result, each in different ways and at different times produces “character effects.”

At the same time that the film editing of Orsino's and Cesario's relationship and characters exploits twentieth-century ideologies of romantic love, Nunn's treatment of the twins invokes ideologies of gender. As a result, he tests the limits of creating character complexity through cinematic fragments. Viola's abilities, developed through her tenure in Orsino's court, match her brother's, offering a version of gender equality in her mirroring of him. However, his appearances and their addition to Cesario's character and activities ultimately make Cesario an unreadably complicated figure, whose “depth” becomes obscurity when too many pieces of cinematic behavior are attributed to “him.”

In the process, Nunn uses the same strategies of intercutting and expansion in elaborating the relationship between Olivia and Sebastian as he has between Viola and Orsino. However, the later crosscutting, which mingles 3.4 and 4.1 and again 4.2 and 4.3, more significantly exposes, in the first pair of scenes, the potential to confuse the twins and, in the second pair, the madness that seems to result. Cesario's resistent reactions to Olivia's household are, at first, mirrored explicitly in her brother's responses. Cesario's final plea that Olivia love Orsino leads into Feste's question of Sebastian: “Will you make me believe that I am not sent for you?” (4.1.1). However, Sebastian's response is limited to “Go to, go to, thou art a foolish fellow”(4.1.2) before Nunn returns to Cesario listening to Olivia, who declaims, “Come again tomorrow. [Fare thee well;] / A fiend like thee might bear my soul to hell” (3.4.218-19). Cesario's attempt to depart cuts to and echoes Sebastian trying to shake Feste's persistence: “Let me be clear of thee” (4.1.2-3). After Sebastian walks off, with Feste swaggering along behind, Nunn then cuts quickly back to 3.4 and a side shot of Cesario walking, collar up and in the same coat as her brother, just before she is stopped by Toby for the duel. In addition to establishing the twins' parallel reactions to Olivia's solicitations, this scenic juxtaposition invites our confusion of the two characters as well as Feste's.
This echoing effect develops further in the unexpected interruption of Cesario's duel at the end of act 4, scene 1, when the mistaking of the twins for each other becomes part of Viola's experience as well. When Antonio is dragged off, pleading for the money Sebastian has been holding for him, Nunn cuts to Sebastian denying that he knows Feste yet a third time: “I prithee, foolish Greek, depart from me, / There's money for thee, if you tarry longer, / I shall give worse payment” (4.1.18-20). Unfortunately, as he denies that he knows Feste, he performs the same sleight of hand that Cesario did earlier when giving money to the fool. In this context the switch of hands in the coin trick not only further convinces Feste that Sebastian is Cesario but also resonates thematically with the money that Antonio has given into the other twin's hand. In effect, the twins embody the coin trick. Viola's purse is almost empty but Sebastian's is full; the hand that appears to hold the money is empty, while the identical but opposite hand actually does have the coin. The comparable abilities of the twins as entertainers from before the shipwreck emerge here as the sign that they are a single person.

This doubling underscores the emergent and contested Western ideas about gender equality that prove almost as significant to Viola's character as is her relationship with Orsino. Of all the Twelfth Night films I have seen, this one best creates the twinning of brother and sister. Viola's “training” in Orsino's military court gives her rough equality to her brother that extends beyond dress. This Viola plays cards and billiards as well or better than a man; she rides and jumps obstacles successfully, even if she gives muffled cries of distress; “Cesario” even (for once) acquits himself well in the duel. Although Antonio still interrupts to fight on “Sebastian's” behalf, Viola is at that point putting her fencing tuition into practice and fighting well against Aguecheek. This Viola is not only “as true of heart” as a man; she is also as competent as a man in several pursuits that face her during her adoption of male attire. Like the coin trick, which convinces Feste that the twins are the same person, Viola's skills as well as Sebastian's arrival make their ultimate confusion for each other unavoidable. By encouraging the audience to share the bemusement of the doubling, Nunn adds layers to Viola's character, playing upon twentieth-century gender ideologies as well as romantic ideologies in his construction of her plausibility as a character.

As Nunn very carefully places Sebastian in a world going mad even before Olivia lays claim to him, the film produces the Illyrians as the audience to the twins as a single character. The wholly unexpected assault by Aguecheek becomes the penultimate oddity in a series of strange encounters that Sebastian experiences. His question, “Are all the people mad?” (4.1.26), and his aggressive response to Aguecheek and Toby are all the more justified because his interactions with Olivia's household and his confusion at misidentification not only parallel Viola's final solo visit to Olivia (duel for no cause, strangers claiming to know her) but also immediately echo that experience. The simultaneity of the twins' experiences, “both born in an hour” (2.1.19), is restored cinematically as simultaneous experiences registered in crosscutting. At the same time, the audience becomes more aware of the confusion arising from mistaking the twins for each other as Olivia pleads, “Be ruled by me” (4.1.63). His acceptance of her and his willingness now to keep the madness or dream that has overcome him find an echo transported from 3.4 as Nunn cuts away to Viola, sitting by the sea: “Prove true, imagination, O prove true” (3.4.384). On the one hand, from the audience's privileged position, “reading” Cesario's character at the end of the film apparently presents no problem; on the other hand, the discontinuities perceived by the Illyrians, most notably Orsino and Olivia, disrupt that character completely, in part because “Cesario” is a product of their imaginations supplying the “interior” logic of “his” character according to their own assumptions about servants and young gentlemen.

However, Nunn also significantly challenges the audience's superior knowledge in his filming of the twins. He provokes his audience's confusion by substituting Imogene Stubbs for Steven Mackintosh when Olivia spies Feste and “Cesario” outside her window just after this exchange. He also uses the same sleight of film several other times, interchanging Mackintosh for Stubbs when “she” rides away from Olivia's house after her second visit and again when Malvolio, crossgartered and convinced of her regard, peers through the window at Olivia and “Cesario” walking from audience right to left outside the window. In turn, Stubbs stands in for Mackintosh at the start of the first scene between Antonio and Sebastian on the quayside and outside the church where Feste spies “him” with Olivia. When asked about this cinematic indirection, Nunn
acknowledges that “the twin trick was played on the audience several times, though that wasn’t quite my intention—rather to imprint swift physical images on the audience’s collective retina so that the final moment of re-union would be credible and moving.” In fact, Nunn himself is not sure how many times Cesario was filmed for Sebastian or vice versa. Whenever such substitutions occur, the film audience occupies the position of the Illyrians: they see the twin that they expect to see, projecting the identity of the actor-as-character into the situation that should present one or the other twin in terms of filmed and filial coherence.

The dangers attached to believing the imagination, to projecting a complete character from a partial view, become the core of the next pair of intercut scenes, foreshadowed by a brief cutaway to Malvolio (“they have laid me here in darkness. The world shall know it”). The crosscutting interleaving 4.2 and 4.3 hinges on the madness that Malvolio denies and Sebastian suspects. Malvolio’s certainty that Olivia loves him finally rests on far less direct evidence than does Sebastian’s; as a result, their responses prove different yet interrelated.

The intercutting of these two scenes, while again drawing out the encounters with the Illyrians, explicitly uses references to madness as the cinematic pivot linking the gulling of Malvolio to the good luck of Sebastian. After all, Malvolio’s insistence that the house is dark and that he is not mad leads immediately into Sebastian’s opening speech in 4.3, in which he tries to determine who is mad:

This is the air, that is the glorious sun,
This pearl she gave me, I do feel it, and see it,
And though ’tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
Yet ’tis not madness.

(4.3.1-4)

Unlike Malvolio, Sebastian wavers on the subject of his own sanity; he is “ready to distrust [his] eyes” (4.3.13) as he looks at his reflection in one of Olivia’s mirrors. His reflection, echo to the doubling that makes the twins so confusing throughout the last two acts of the play, leads him to “wrangle with my reason that persuades me / To any other trust, but that I am mad” (4.3.14-15). Not so Malvolio whose immediate line following the cut back to 4.2 is “I am not mad” (4.2.41). Malvolio’s encounter with Feste offers another possibility besides madness for the confusion that both Sebastian and Malvolio are experiencing. After Malvolio begs Feste to “convey what I will set down to my lady” (4.2.115-16), Nunn cuts back to Sebastian in 4.3: “Or else the lady’s mad” (4.3.16). But the proof of Olivia’s sanity surrounds him in her well-ordered gardens and household. As Sebastian notes, if she were mad, “She could not sway her house, command her followers, / Take and give back affairs, and their dispatch, / With such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing” (4.3.17-19). Of course, the crosscutting underscores that at least one of her followers is not being swayed or commanded with “smooth, discreet and stable bearing.”

As in the previous scene, where Sebastian accepts confusion and follows Olivia, here he again abandons his attempts to reason out his situation and promises, “I’ll follow this good man, and go with you, / And having sworn truth, ever will be true” (4.3.32-33). Nunn then cuts away to Feste and Malvolio on truth and madness:

CLOWN.

[I will help you too’t.] But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit?

MALVOLIO.

Believe me I am not, I tell thee true.

(4.2.116-18)
This telling interchange happens before Sebastian's promise of truth in the Folio; Nunn's filming and cuts make the parallels more direct and pointed. Sebastian's primacy apparently sets his logic as the more valid one, but “truth” itself is suspect since Sebastian, like Malvolio, is caught up in mistaken identity.

The extensive elongation of the very short 4.3 by crosscutting it with one of the play's longest scenes, 4.2 (even though substantially cut here), sets the evolution of Sebastian's mistaken involvement with Olivia against the consequences of Malvolio's erroneous belief that she loves him. Not only does Sebastian's hesitancy show well against Malvolio's unyielding self-delusion, but also the extended time frame and parallels develop both Sebastian's character and his relationship with Olivia beyond the two brief encounters they have before their marriage in the Folio text. In this way, the striking fragmentations and rearrangements of the play's text in Trevor Nunn's Twelfth Night not only answer the critical queries about Viola's sudden affection for Orsino, which extend from the eighteenth century, but also attempt comparable effects in making Olivia's mistake more acceptable. Nonetheless, this development is not and cannot be as thorough as the elaboration provided by the combination of 2.3 and 2.4 and by the dispersal of composite scenes between Viola and Orsino. Even though this mingling of 4.2 and 4.3 does extend Olivia's involvement with Sebastian and sets the level of confusion between the twins as high as possible, the layering of these fragments actually exposes how characters in Illyria interpret and try to make coherent their encounters with Cesario in assessing “his” character. Their mistaken reactions to the partial views offered them by Viola and Sebastian underscore how expectations set by gender and romantic ideology produce “Cesario” ultimately as an impossible character.

The twin relationship in Nunn's film calls into question the emerging fullness of “Cesario's” character by displaying Viola as complexly grounded in shifting ideologies of gender. Extending from the seventeenth-century text through the British nineteenth-century setting (“where the differences between men and women were at their greatest … the last years of the previous century took those attitudes to extremes exemplified in the dress silhouettes of the two genders”) to a twentieth-century audience, Nunn's film emphasizes Viola's abilities, once driven, to enact and dress the male part. The plausibility of mistaking one twin for the other derives not just from the excellent casting or even the camera tricks, but from the establishment of male and female characters whose talents, tricks, and even abilities prove closer to interchangeable than in any previous Twelfth Night film. In fact, the casting here is even more effective than those films that use a single actress for both roles and are consequently compelled to emphasize gender differences. Nunn's film as a whole works through the equality and blend of genders predicted in their opening performance, largely because this Twelfth Night reflects a particularly twentieth-century Western set of assumptions about gender equity—given equal opportunity. Sebastian's incursions into Cesario's Illyria expose how the Illyrians' mistaken constructions of Cesario mirror our investment in “reading” Viola's character within her extended association with Orsino.

Trevor Nunn's Twelfth Night reveals our twentieth-century investment in character as a complex weave of gender identity and erotic alliance. The “depth” of Viola's character proves inextricably linked to the depth of her love, which can only be shown through her ongoing relationship with Orsino. The paradox, of course, is that both her character and their relationship are signaled by dispersed fragments of the text, echoed and emphasized by the comparable strategies applied to Sebastian's interactions with Olivia. As a result, the film exposes a peculiarly twentieth-century “filling up of subjectivities”: scenic parallels both confuse and establish gender identity, and only short, disjointed interactions can produce the required continuity. In Nunn's Twelfth Night, our “natural perspective” on the twins, like that in Shakespeare's play, proves at once fragmented and continuous—and therefore ideological rather than “natural.”

Notes

2. Sinfield, 63.
15. In “‘The very names of the Persons’: Editing and the Invention of Dramatick Character” in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), Randall McLeod examines the variations in stage directions in *All's Well* in order to argue that characters on stage seem to be reconfigured—and renamed—according to their relationships to other characters on stage. Such variable naming does not appear in the 1623 Folio *Twelfth Night*, except insofar as Orsino wavers between being called “Count” and “Duke.” Some textual critics have taken this variation as a sign of textual revision in the play, but the naming has implications for characters as well since the counts in Shakespeare's plays have less authority and more involvement with love than do the dukes.
16. This distinction between “true love” and lust is a common feature in popular romance fiction, as analyzed by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
18. Osborne, 92-96.
22. Nunn, xii.
24. For a discussion of how underanalyzed are the effects of romantic ideologies as they affect the reception of Shakespeare's plays, see Linda Charnes, “‘What's Love Got to Do with It?’ Reading the Liberal Humanist Romance in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,*” *Textual Practice* 6, no. 1 (1992): 1-16.
27. Mark Rose, in Shakespearean Stage Design (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), draws attention to the roots of Shakespearean scenic structure in the visual arts, especially in the juxtaposition of scenes that “reflect upon” each other. Rose only addresses Twelfth Night specifically in his comments on the structural effects of the opening scenes; in Shakespeare’s Art of Orchestration (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), Jean Howard analyzes more fully the dynamic development from scene to scene between stasis and motioning the comedy.

28. Podhoretz, 47.
29. Nunn, 42.
32. Nunn, Screenplay, 54.
33. Nunn allows Viola's glances to give this information almost as early as the first scene. Certainly her interest in him is clear as early as the seaside scene when he first sends her to Olivia; however, it is an interest that we as the audience must supply out of our interpretation of the cinematic gaze she offers of him rather than the revelation of a spoken declaration.
34. Nunn, Screenplay, xii.
35. Symons, 257.
36. Rose, 9.
37. Sinfield, 63.
38. Trevor Nunn, Letter to Author, 8 May 1997. I wrote to inquire about the doubling I had noticed only to discover that the substitutions also appeared in places I had not recognized, despite several viewings.
40. Nunn, Screenplay, 8-9.
41. Osborne, 124-36.

Works Cited


Nunn, Trevor. Letter to Author. 8 May 1997.


Films Cited


**Criticism: Themes: Elias Schwartz (essay date April 1967)**


[In the following essay, Schwartz presents Twelfth Night as an example of “festive” comedy, in which the atmosphere of merriment expresses a vision of human life that focuses on life's joy, not its limitations. Schwartz additionally contrasts festive comedy with satiric comedy, emphasizing that the play should not be viewed as satire.]

Although Aristotle does not take up the nature of comedy in the *Poetics*, he does throw out a few remarks which are as intelligent and useful as anything that has been said on the subject. Comedy, he says, differs from tragedy in imitating men worse, rather than better, than we are. And he defines the laughable as a species of ugliness: “a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others.” We may derive from these remarks a fairly clear account of one kind of comedy—what might be called the satiric type. In satiric comedy, the characters are worse than we are, so that we do not identify ourselves with them. Even when painful things happen to these characters, we remain detached enough for these events to be painless for us. The activities of these characters, furthermore, never eventuates in pain for those with whom we do sympathize. Should this occur, the comic mood of the play would evaporate.

To such an esthetic disaster Ben Jonson comes perilously close in *Volpone*. I refer to the moment when it appears that nothing can prevent Volpone from ravishing Celia, one of the two decent people in the play. While Volpone is gulling the avaricious birds, we identify ourselves in some degree with Volpone. But here our concern for Celia, her helplessness, and the apparent certainty of her fate, make the scene painful rather than funny.

The sort of comedy Aristotle has in mind when he makes his few remarks is the kind where—as in Jonson and Molière—the satirized characters depart more or less from what author and audience assume to be proper behavior. This departure constitutes a kind of deformity which is not painful, and it makes us laugh. The norm from which such characters depart is usually the social code of a dominant class; the laughter is socially binding, promoting a sense of solidarity among the laughers and reinforcing the code by ridiculing any departure from it.

In Shakespeare's gay comedies, this Aristotelian formula does not work. His characters—the important ones, at any rate—are not worse than we are; on the contrary, they are better than we are or on the same level. They may be foolish, but only in the way that the best of men are foolish. The laughter they evoke is not satiric laughter, but indulgent laughter. We laugh, in a way, at ourselves, because we do not stand apart from, or look down on, these characters, but identify ourselves with them.

What keeps such a comedy from being painful? Chiefly plotting and tone. In Shakespeare's gay comedies, the plot and tone are so finely controlled that we never anticipate a serious outcome; we know that everything will turn out well in the end, no matter how foolishly these people behave. Their foolishness, moreover, is not a falling away from some implicit social code; it involves, rather, the inherent foolishness of human nature, the
inborn limitations of human existence. And this foolishness is not ridiculed, but accepted, celebrated. The concerns of this life are viewed as ultimately trivial and foolish in the light of the next one; yet the joys of this life are acknowledged as real. Indeed, it is not only foolish but prideful to reject these transient delights, because this means rejecting one's humanity, setting oneself up as more than human.

This is the sort of comedy of which Shakespeare is the greatest master. He could write the satiric type too, but he was most at home in what C. L. Barber has called “festive” comedy. It was probably this type that Dr. Johnson had in mind when he remarked that Shakespeare was by nature a comic, rather than a tragic, writer. In any case, it is important to understand the distinctions I have made in order to interpret properly such a play as Twelfth Night, the most nearly perfect festive comedy that has come down to us.

For Twelfth Night is not a satiric comedy; nor is it a patchwork of inane revelry. Its meaning is commensurate with, and depends upon, its festive form and feeling. Its very merriment and festive ambience convey a profound and genial vision of human life. It is a vision of the goodness and joy in life despite its limitations—almost because of them; a vision of the foolishness of men and a full acceptance of folly, because such acceptance establishes man's proper place in the world, pulls down his vanity, makes the fullest enjoyment of life possible. The play is also touched with a curious, elusive sadness, deriving from the implicit recognition of the shortness of human life, an awareness that the best of worldly goods will soon be gone forever.

This complex attitude is eminently fitting in a play given the name of, and probably performed on, Twelfth Night, the last of the great Christmas holidays. It was a day climaxing the joy and license traditional on these days, a final moment of merriment before the days of order and sobriety to follow. “Holiday, for the Elizabethan sensibility,” writes C. L. Barber,

implied a contrast with “everyday,” when brightness falls from the air. Occasions like May-day and the Winter Revels, with their cult of natural vitality, were maintained within a civilization whose sad-brow view of life focused on the mortality implicit in vitality. The tolerant disillusion of Anglican or Catholic culture allowed nature to have its day, all the more headlong because it was only one day. But the release of that one day was understood to be a temporary license, a “misrule” which implied rule, so that the acceptance of nature was qualified. Holiday affirmations in praise of folly were limited by the underlying assumption that the natural in man is only one part of him, the part that will fade.

(Barber p. 601)

Orsino, Olivia, and Sir Toby are each foolish in their own way. Yet they are all lovable because they never take themselves too seriously; they are redeemed by an awareness of their own affectation. It is this elusive quality—shared by all the chief characters except Sir Andrew and Malvolio—which at once sets them apart as deserving their good fortune and guarantees that nothing really bad will happen to them. What makes Malvolio the “enemy” is not only his pharisaical egoism, but his lack of self-awareness, what we call today a sense of humor. In the festive world of Twelfth Night, this is the greatest, almost the only, sin.

The most prominent “device” of the play is a form of dramatic irony. Usually we associate dramatic irony with tragedy, especially Greek tragedy, where it serves to elicit a sense of bitter mockery at man's aspirations. When Oedipus says to his supplicant Thebans: “You have your several griefs, each for himself; / But my heart bears the weight of my own, and yours / And all my people's sorrows,” we discern a truth that he does not intend. We respond with mingled fascination and horror, for we know that this truth will be his undoing. In the Agamemnon, the irony is usually intended but the fictive hearer is unaware of it—as in Clytemnestra's double-edged assurance to Agamemnon: “Of pleasure found with other men, or any breath / Of scandal, I know no more than how to dip hot steel.”
Both these modes are used in *Twelfth Night*, but the effect is quite different. Instead of bitter mockery, we get a genial acceptance of the way things are. Instead of reluctantly acquiescing in the apparently inevitable but inscrutable order that directs an Oedipus or an Agamemnon to his doom, we whole-heartedly accept the order which brings the foolish to their senses.

This peculiar use of dramatic irony is closely related to the play's thematic heart. Everyone in the play is to some degree foolish, and everyone is to some degree fooled. Orsino is fooled by Viola, Olivia by Viola and Sebastian. Sir Toby and Fabian fool Viola and Sir Andrew, and the three men are fooled by her. Malvolio, of course, is fooled to the top of his bent, and, since he is the greatest fool of all, this is as it should be. Much of our pleasure in the play comes from our godlike knowledge of the truth of things as contrasted with the ignorance of those in the play. Such a double vision reinforces our sense of the generic folly of men, for those in the play are, after all, like us.

The most charming moments of the play involve this sort of light-hearted irony. In the fourth scene, the Duke (whom we suspect from the start to be falling in love with Cesario-Viola) sends Viola to Olivia for the first time. When Viola protests that she is not suitable for such a commission, the Duke replies:

> ... they shall yet belie thy happy years  
> That say thou art a man. Diana's lip  
> Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe  
> Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,  
> And all is semblative a woman's part.  
> And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord  
> To call his fortunes thine.  
> ... Prosper well in this,  
>

We know, of course, that Cesario is Viola (being played by a boy). So we take the Duke's first words in a sense that he does not intend—as, in this case, Viola herself must take them. There is a two-fold irony in his describing her as “semblative a woman's part,” because she is playing a role, just as the boy actor is playing her. The Duke's reference to Viola's voice—“as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound”—involves a whimsical *double entendre*: she *is* a maiden in the technical sense, and “organ” refers not only to her voice. There is, finally, some beforehand ironic pointing in the Duke's last lines: Viola will, as we know she longs to do, eventually call the Duke's fortunes hers.

An even more brilliant instance of the method occurs at II.iv.15ff. Here the Duke's tenderness, his ease in opening his heart to Cesario-Viola hints at submerged love, as though the loveliness of Viola has affected him in spite of her disguise, as though he responds unwittingly to Viola's love for him. Our full awareness of the situation lends the whole passage a kind of solemn whimsicality, the mood which the Duke has up to now merely affected. “If ever thou shalt love,” Orsino tells her, “In the sweet pangs of it remember me.” Viola does love and she has no need of reminders from her beloved. When the Duke almost guesses her secret:

> My life upon 't, young though thou art, thine eye  
> Hath stay'd upon some favour that it loves,  
> Hath it not, boy?  
>

the “boy” replies: “A little, by your favour.” (“Favour” is a three-way pun.)

**DUKE.**

What kind of woman is 't?

**VIOLA.**

Of your complexion.
DUKE.

She is not worth thee then.

The charm of this is dramatic, not merely verbal. The “boy” tells the Duke that she loves him, and the Duke comes close to revealing his love for her in his estimate of the “boy's” worth. A woman of Orsino's temperament is not good enough for Cesario—so highly does Orsino regard his “boy.” But we know that a man of his temperament is good enough for Viola, because she already loves him, and, besides, his own humility makes him worthy.

When the Duke hears that Cesario's beloved is “About your years,” he objects: “Too old, by heaven!” But his judgment is affirmative as well as negative, for, if a woman of the Duke's age is too old for Cesario, a man of his age is just right for Viola. Viola listens with pounding heart as Orsino goes on to confirm her belief that he is for her:

Let still the woman take
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart;
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won,
Than women's are.

His acknowledgement of the fickleness of men's love is encouraging. But at the end of the passage we are brought back to the sweet melancholy of Viola's present predicament: she must, the Duke with unwitting cruelty reminds her, gather her rose buds while she may, women being

as roses, whose fair flow'r,
Being once display'd doth fall that very hour.

At which, Viola, with the charming candor about sexual fulfillment that appears in Shakespeare's most maidenly maidens, laments:

And so they are; alas, that they are so!
To die, even when they to perfection grow!

Which conveys, not only her love-longing for Orsino, but her awareness that her time is flying.

On a more general level, the passage expresses a sense of the ultimate sadness of human life: that it is folly not to make the most of life's joys, folly not to seize the day which will endure but the twinkling of an eye. In the emotional logic of the play, this is the feeling that underlies the more explicit one that life is to be rejoiced in. This, indeed, is the burden of Feste's song in the previous scene:

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty!
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

All the “wise” people in the play have this attitude; if they depart from it, their lapse is temporary. In Viola the attitude is manifest in the quality of the verse she speaks, as well as in her actions. And Orsino ought not to deceive us. His pangs of unrequited love are qualified by his affectation, by his parodying of Petrarchan attitudes and rhetoric:
O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

We are aware, therefore, that he does not take his own postures seriously, that he secretly smiles at his own affectation. He knows and accepts and so redeems his folly.

This ought to be made clear in the performance. Even while he protests his pain and eternal love for Olivia, it ought to be apparent that he is falling in love with Cesario-Viola. This will give the proper ironic touch when he protests (to Viola, who truly loves him) that

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart ...

... Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

Viola replies with delicate pathos and irony that she knows

Too well what love women to men may owe.
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

And she goes on to tell the sad tale of her own situation, in the course of which she glances at the true nature of Orsino's present passion:

We men may say more, swear more; but indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows but little in our love.

Orsino, in effect, is being upbraided for his departure from the norm of wisdom, for affecting a love he does not feel. Yet he never departs so far that he needs more than gentle correction by the whirligig of time. When the time comes, he will make an easy transition from Olivia to Viola.

Olivia, too, is gently chastised. She is more errant than Orsino, but she, too, is fundamentally wise. This is certified for us by her defense of Feste and the Fool's function and by her outspoken censure of Malvolio. Her fault, like Orsino's, consists in a kind of pride or egoism. It is exemplified early in the play by her attitude toward her brother's death. Viola, who serves throughout the play as a kind of norm of human wisdom, has also lost a brother—or so she believes. Her attitude is the proper one: saddened by his loss, she tempers her grief with the knowledge that he is in Elysium. And she sets out to make the most of life in spite of death by searching for love and marriage. She thus stands in emphatic contrast to Olivia, who, because death has taken a brother and a father, rejects not merely Orsino's suit, but life itself. “I see you what you are,” Viola tells her, “you are too proud.” And this, of course, is the point of Feste's witty proof that Olivia is a fool to mourn for a brother she believes is in Heaven.

Olivia will learn to accept and rejoice in life, and Viola in the garb of Cesario will be her teacher. It is right that she should learn of her limitations as a human being through a love which she cannot control. And it is right, too, that the one she loves should be a woman in disguise: this suggests the narcissistic streak in her nature which, ironically, assists in its own destruction. Olivia falls at first sight, overpowered by love and
suddenly aware that she is no longer a master of her fate. “Ourselves we do not owe,” she says at the end of Act I. “What is decreed must be—and be this so!” In a way she is rationalizing her passion, but she is also speaking truer than she knows: she is becoming acquainted with the inherent irrationality of human nature, and when she accepts it in herself, she will be a fully human person, possessed of the wisdom appropriate to one. At first, as Viola discerns, she thinks she is not what she is. But we will see her happy yet, for her sin is venial, and, having atoned for it, she will receive her reward in Sebastian, a male Viola.

Though Sir Toby carries to an extreme the attitude of wanton revelry, he is never, in the world of the play, felt to be culpable. One reason for this is that he is intelligent and, even when far from sober, fully aware of what he is doing. Another is that he is deliberately opposing his niece's foolish attitude toward life and death. “What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life!” These are the first words we have from Sir Toby, and the play as a whole demonstrates that he is right. He is furthermore, Malvolio's natural and symbolic antagonist: his inebriate irresponsibility “becomes” in the dramatic context something positive; he is the leader of the forces opposing proud sobriety and pompous, priggish “virtue.” It is Sir Toby who speaks the famous sentence that might serve as epigraph for the play: “Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?”

Sir Andrew Aguecheek is in one sense separate from the group I have just discussed; in another sense he is part of it. Utterly lacking in intelligence and self-awareness, Sir Andrew is yet never the object of satirical laughter—only Malvolio is. The laughter he evokes is indulgent, almost grateful; it is very close to the sort of laughter evoked by the blunders of children. Such laughter cannot be satirical, because the blunderer is not culpable. Sir Andrew's stupidity is natural: he was born that way and therein he is not guilty. He is a pure embodiment of that irrationality and blindness which, in the others, is but one of many traits.

He is, moreover, without guile or malice. One feels, indeed, that he would be incapable of performing a malicious act, even should he so desire. Our attitude toward him therefore approximates that of Sir Toby and his friends: they do not make fun of him, but have fun with him, all the while rather liking than despising him. It is his stupidity and cowardice and ineptitude, joined to his naive belief that he excels in all noble accomplishments, that provokes laughter, especially when he is expertly managed by Sir Toby. Is Sir Andrew a good dancer? “Wherefore,” exclaims Sir Toby, “are these gifts hid? … Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig. I would not so much as make water but in a sinka-pace.” Picture the hopelessly clumsy Sir Andrew affecting courtly grace, dancing a lively cinquepace while making water, as Sir Toby fancies him—such comic incongruity needs no analysis.

Perhaps the best instance of the peculiar comic effect Sir Andrew provides is the challenge he composes for Cesario-Viola. It is not merely the absurd nonsequiturs that are funny, but the fact that they have a kind of rationale in the character of Sir Andrew: they are at once stupid and pretending to wit, at once a revelation of cowardice and an attempt at courtly bravado. “Thou com'st to the Lady Olivia, and in my sight she uses thee kindly. But thou liest in thy throat; that is not the matter I challenge thee for. … I will waylay thee going home; where if it be thy chance to kill me—thou kill'st me like a rogue and a villain.” This has the form of a challenge, but it is really a plea that the recipient spare the life of the challenger. The absurdity is compounded in the wonderful Chaplinesque scene where the coward and the terrified Cesario-Viola perform their duel-dance of terror, neither one capable of hurting a fly.

Aguecheek's character, as Dr. Johnson puts it, is “that of natural fatuity, and is therefore not the proper prey of a satirist.” Malvolio, on the other hand, is the satirist’s proper prey: he is the only one satirized in the play. Those who would sympathize with him, who would regard him as shabbily treated, ought to re-read Olivia's retort to Malvolio's attack on Feste. It is perhaps the only time that Olivia really bristles. “O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper’d appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for birdbolts that you deem cannon bullets.” But that is just what Malvolio will never learn. It is what Orsino and Olivia know both by social inheritance and natural endowment. It is a kind of
natural nobility of soul, and its possession justifies the socially advantageous marriages of Viola, Sebastian and Maria. Aguecheek, who is too stupid to know about such matters, and who aspires to Olivia's hand, has, quite rightly, no chance at all.

But Malvolio is not stupid and he also aspires. This is why he is culpable: he ought to know better. But he is sick of self-love and tastes with a distempered appetite. He is further away than anyone in the play from that generous, guiltless, free disposition which constitutes the ideal of the play. If Olivia and Orsino are touched with egoism, Malvolio is sick of it. The trick that is played upon him is eminently appropriate, for he is, quite literally, mad. To take things for cannon bullets that are really birdbolts is to be out of touch with reality—and so to be mad. To regard folly and festivity as improper to this life is to be out of touch with truth—and so to be mad. To regard oneself as without defect is to think of oneself as more than human—and so to be mad.

Maria's trick is not, as is often assumed, the beginning of Malvolio's belief that he is loved by Olivia and that he eminently deserves her love. He believes this beforehand. As Samuel Johnson perceived, Malvolio “is betrayed to ridicule merely by his pride.” In II.iii Maria characterizes him as “so cram'd, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him.” Just before she plants her letter, she tells us that he has been “yonder i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour.” And he has been obsessed by the idea of his elevation to the nobility through marriage. “'Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she did affect me; and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion.”

The truth is that Malvolio is mad: he is a classic instance of what the psychoanalyst calls erotomania. His treatment for madness is therefore well deserved, though apparently it is unsuccessful and the prognosis is bad. His attitude toward life—his self-love, his “seriousness”—are inexcusable in the world of the play, and we should never pity him. He profits not at all from his experience. When Feste twits him good-humoredly about his gulling, Malvolio is as straight-laced, as mean-minded, as ever: “I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” he growls.

But the others have learned enough about their own foolishness to accept it wisely, and their reward, as it should be, is marriage. Viola has Orsino, Olivia has Sebastian, Maria has Sir Toby. Aguecheek has but a cracked pate and an empty purse, but everyone, we feel, has what he deserves. Feste has his revenge—and a song to sing, one that sums up with charming inanity that genial acceptance of human joy and sorrow which is the pervading motive and feeling of the play.

When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,
For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came, alas! to wive,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
By swaggering could I never thrive,
For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came unto my beds,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
With tobspots still had drunken heads,
For the rain it raineth every day.
A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.

Satiric comedy, as we have noted, involves our dislike of those who are the objects of our laughter. Now such antipathy severely limits the possibilities of the form both as to thought and feeling. The characters in satiric comedy tend to be types, embodiments of particular vices or social aberrations, rather than “real” human beings. Festive comedy, on the other hand, deals with fully human creatures, with whom we sympathize and in whom we see ourselves—see, not just particular vices, but our complex humanity in all its richness and mortal foolishness. And we accept this with mind and heart. Shakespeare's comedy, Enid Welsford remarks, “is not a judgment but an embrace.” It presents a vision, not of types which depart from some social code or rationalized moral system, but of the ultimate absurdity of human life. It sees human beings, even at their best, as limited mortal creatures, and rather than lamenting this truth, celebrates it, rejoices in it.

It is often said that satiric comedy is a highly intellectual form. What this means, no doubt, is that the response of the audience to such a play is mainly cerebral. Aware of the code implicit in the play, the audience perceives the precise nature of departures from it and sits in judgment on the sinners. This is, of course, an intellectual response. Yet it is a very limited one. Compared to the profound—one might say, metaphysical—vision at the heart of Shakespeare's comedy, and to the whole-souled response elicited by it, satiric comedy seems not merely limited, but superficial.

Notes

1. C. L. Barber in “The Saturnalian Pattern in Shakespeare's Comedy,” Sewanee Review, LIX (Oct. 1951), 593-611, has convincingly argued for the formal dependence of Shakespeare's comedies upon the kind of feeling and attitude embodied in the traditional festivals of the Christian year.
2. Theodor Reik (The Need to be Loved, New York, 1963, pp. 53-54) observes that the trick played on Malvolio may be considered a device for projecting “mental processes cast on the external world. … If we think of the statements in the forged letter as externalizations of Malvolio's thoughts and emotions, we have a remarkably clear picture of erotomania with all its symptoms. … When … the inevitable disappointment occurs and Malvolio lands in prison, he is full of accusations against his mistress who has given him so many unmistakable signs of her love.”

Criticism: Themes: Keir Elam (essay date spring 1996)


[In the following essay, Elam uses Viola's reference to her cross-dressing, in which she states she will play the role of a eunuch, as an entry point for discussing the cultural history of castration as it appears in literature and the theater.]

I. FORWARD TO THE PAST

This essay is like Hamlet's crab: it goes forward only by going backward. Or, to put it another way, it is a work in progress that has turned irresistibly into a work in regress. A work in progress because the historical and textual ground I cover here is too vast to allow anything resembling definitive results. And a work in regress because, while my original aim was to investigate the representation of social intercourse in Twelfth Night within the context of early modern codes of behavior, the further I proceed with the project, the more I
find myself having to work my way back through the play's long theatrical ancestry. The difficulty—appropriately enough for this comedy—lies in the mediation between its twin modes of historicity: one social and synchronic (its place within the early modern context), the other dramatic and diachronic (its theatrical ancestry). The problem of reconciling these not altogether compatible twins is especially acute in the case of Twelfth Night but is certainly not limited to this play and indeed raises certain issues regarding the historical reading of Renaissance drama in general. What follows is therefore offered, inter alia, as a contribution to the debate concerning the historical contextualization of Renaissance dramatic texts.

The particular site of this meeting or clash between different kinds of historicity is Viola's enigmatic reference to her transvestism on her first appearance in the comedy. Viola, in planning to take on a new identity, refers to her disguise not as a form of crossdressing or a change of gender roles but as an actual canceling of biological sexuality. She is to play the part not of a boy but of a castrate:

VIOLA

Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.

It may be worth thy pains; for I can sing,

And speak to him in many sorts of music,

That will allow me very worth his service.

What else may hap, to time I will commit;

Only shape thou thy silence to my wit.

CAPTAIN

Be you his eunuch, and your mute I'll be:

When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes not see.

(1.2.55-63)\textsuperscript{1}

Twelfth Night is a play full of enigmas. Some of these, such as Feste's riddles, take the form of local verbal games. Others, beginning with the play's title, are of a broader interpretative kind, posing questions about meaning or reference which the events of the comedy do little to resolve. Viola's “as an eunuch” statement belongs to this second category in that its referential force apparently fails to correspond to later developments within the plot: “No further reference,” we are told, “is made to this part of [Viola's] plan,” since “in fact, Viola disguises herself as a page.”\textsuperscript{2} And if Viola explains her choice of role with “for I can sing,” the explanation itself has been considered problematical, as it makes “a proposal which is never realized in the play”\textsuperscript{3} given that Viola does not sing. What, then, is she referring to, or indeed talking about, in the earlier scene?

There are two broad ways of looking at Viola's statement, one literal and the other figurative. Both imply some kind of loss. If the statement is literal, paraphrasable as “in the guise of a eunuch,” then there seems to be something missing or “castrated” in the play itself. It has often been suggested that Viola's proposed mimesis of a castrate is merely the result of a Shakespearean change of plot or even simple absentmindedness, because no further mention is made—or so it is said—of her putative eunuchhood or of her musical ability: “Since this first idea is not picked up, some argue for a revision of the text.”\textsuperscript{4} But, as we will see, this may
well not be the play's only allusion to the image of Viola as castrated male, and perhaps we should not be
overhasty in assuming that Viola, or Shakespeare, merely abandons the announced role.

If we read the statement figuratively, as a species of simile—"as if I were a eunuch"—then we hypothesize
not a missing plot but rather a notionally missing or castrated part, a part that Viola does not literally possess
to begin with. But then why should she posit disfigurement and loss, in the form of castration, as a mode of
gain, something to her advantage? From either point of view, the literal or the figurative, it remains one of the
more intriguingly cryptic moments in the comedy. A moment that leads, I would argue, in the two quite
different historical directions I mentioned: out to early modern society and back to the dramatic and theatrical
past.

II. PRIVATE INHIBITIONS, PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

Let us begin with early modern society. Recent criticism of Shakespeare's comedies has made considerable
advances in recovering their historical sitedness. One of the more promising and still open areas of
exploration is what we might term the plays' microhistorical matrix, that is to say, the modes and codes of
early modern social intercourse insofar as they constrain interpersonal "behavior" in the plays. What seems
to lend itself especially well to the investigation of social intercourse in the drama, and in Twelfth Night in
particular, is the abundant body of recent enquiry into the forms and norms of conduct in Renaissance Europe,
especially the (predominantly French) brand of microhistoriography dealing with what is variously known as
the vie privée or the vie quotidienne, and focusing on the development of privacy, of intimacy, and of
minimal or minimalist modes of behavior within the boudoir, the walled garden, and the studiolo.

A pertinent case in point is the third volume of the Philippe Ariès-Georges Duby History of Private Life,7
dedicated to the spaces, signs, and conventions of the early modern "civility" that found its chief expression
precisely in new forms of exchange: the exchange of gifts, of letters, of love tokens but also of conversational
formulae, courtesy rituals, and codified gestures. The development of such intimacy rites in the Renaissance is
part of what Norbert Elias terms the Proces der Zivilisation, the "civilizing process," and of what Ariès calls
"privatisation," the privatizing process, which he defines as the "transition … from a form of sociability in
which private and public are confounded to one in which they are distinct, and in which the private may even
subsume or curtail the public." The primary sign of this new civilized privacy is the formation of a mode of
one-to-one symbolic exchange that encompasses both the verbal and the corporeal.

Twelfth Night, with its twin Renaissance domestic settings, its intricate plot of "private" passions, and its
correspondingly intimate discursive mode, seems a particularly suitable case for microhistorical treatment in
Ariès's terms for early modern civility—the more so as it is a comedy intensely and constantly preoccupied
with the very business of one-to-one symbolic exchange. The giving and interpreting of letters (Sir Andrew's
challenge to Viola, "Olivia's" cryptic billet doux to Malvolio); of money (Sir Andrew's financing of Sir
Toby, Viola's reward to the Captain, Antonio's entrusting of his purse to Sebastian); and of gifts, the
traditional exchange-objects of Twelfth Night celebrations (Olivia's ring to Viola, Orsino's jewels to Olivia,
Olivia's pearl to Sebastian), constitute the main stuff of the dramatic action.

The first of the comedy's exemplary exchanges of civility in Ariès's terms for Renaissance minimalism occurs
in the second scene, in which the shipwrecked Viola, having just escaped death by drowning, is comforted by
the ship's gentlemanly Captain and, in exchange for his kindly and encouraging discourse, gives him money
("For saying so, there's gold" [1.2.18]). The courteous Captain proceeds to praise first Orsino's perfect
nobility, then Olivia's perfect virtue; he, in turn, is complimented by Viola for his "fair behavior" (l. 47), his
linguistic and gestural signs of gentility. This ultrapolite dialogue is as close as one can get, given the
dramatic circumstances, to Ariès's "literature of civility [which] reveals how the chivalric customs of the
Middle Ages were transformed into rules of conduct and etiquette."
It is in this context of conversational etiquette or “fair behavior” that Viola announces her intention to assume a disguise, one that has itself been seen as an expression of early modern civility. “What enables Viola to bring off her role in disguise,” writes C. L. Barber, “is her perfect courtesy, in the large humanistic meaning of that term as the Renaissance used it, the *corteziania* of Castiglione. … [G]entility shows through her disguise as does the fact that she is a woman.”

This brings us to the first possible interpretation of Viola's enigmatic reference. It is quite plausible to see Viola's “as an eunuch” allusion, in its figurative guise, as a manifestation of the corporeal decorum or inhibition that constituted an essential ingredient of early modern codes of civility: in Ariès's words, “A new modesty emerged, a new concern with hiding certain parts of the body and certain acts.” Viola intends to hide (“conceal me what I am” [1.2.53]) not only her innate sexuality but also her assumed masculinity, thereby ensuring a double barrier of chastity against potential sexual dangers in the world of Orsino's court and a doubled *privatisation* (through the self-privation of her “private” parts) in her personal dealings with the courtiers. “What I am, and what I would,” she tells Olivia, “are as secret as maidenhead” (1.5.218-19).

Barber's reference to Castiglione's *corteziania* is appropriate in this respect, since it is in the first great Renaissance courtesy book, *The Courtier* (1528), within the context of conversational exchange at the idealized court of Urbino, that both the rules of the new civility and the modes of female decorum are codified. As Michael Curtin suggests, “What was essential to courtesy-book conduct was the emergence of a pacified and orderly civil society out of the relatively violent and chaotic Middle Ages.” This pacified and orderly civil society in a sense “feminized” medieval militarism. It is fitting, therefore, that at the center of the courteous exchanges in *The Courtier* is a woman, the Countess Elisabetta Gonzaga, who exemplifies the virtues of wit and modesty, honesty (in the sense of chastity) and self-restraint. Cesare Gonzaga praises Elisabetta's selfless acceptance of the sexual importance of her husband, Duke Guidobaldo: the duchess “has lived with her husband for fifteen years like a widow, and … has not only steadfastly refused ever to tell this to anyone in the world but, after being urged by her own people to escape from this widowhood, chose rather to suffer exile, poverty and all kinds of hardship.”

Other episodes in *The Courtier* confirm the virtues of female sexual abnegation. Cesare Gonzaga tells the “true” story of tragic self-sacrifice by a young girl who, being in love with a lord forced to marry another, pines from her unexpressed and unrealized desire,

> “though the girl wisely concealed it and sought in every way possible to rid herself of desires which were now hopeless. All the while, she never faltered in her determination to remain chaste; and seeing that there was no honourable way in which she could have the one whom alone she adored, she chose not to wish for him in any way. … And with that firm resolve, the wretched girl, overcome by the most bitter anguish and wasted by her lingering passion, died after three years, preferring to renounce the joys and satisfaction for which she pined, and finally life itself, rather than her honour.”

Gonzaga's story of death as erotic self-sacrifice is particularly pertinent to Viola's “as an eunuch” repression of her own sexuality, since it bears more than a generic resemblance to the story Viola later tells Orsino of her “sister”-self, who similarly wastes away from unexpressed desire:

---

VIOLA

My father had a daughter lov'd a man,

As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,

I should your lordship.
ORSINO

And what's her history?

VIOLA

A blank, my lord: she never told her love,

But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud

Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,

And with a green and yellow melancholy

She sat like Patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed? ...

ORSINO

But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

VIOLA

I am all the daughters of my father's house,

And all the brothers too: and yet I know not.

(2.4.108-22)

Viola's celebrated “blank” suggests her emptied or castrated subjectivity through the cutting asunder of her desire for Orsino; it also suggests the virtual nature of her history, which remains to be written or performed, and in which her “concealment” might or might not end tragically, like Gonzaga's narrative. Moreover, the context of Viola's tale of female self-“castration” is analogous to that of Cesare Gonzaga's narrative: both stories are told in response to misogynistic affirmations of women's biological inferiority and incapacity for self-restraint. Gonzaga responds to Gaspare Pallavicino's argument that women are mistakes of nature, mere males *manqués*: “Nature … would, if possible, constantly bring forth men; and when a woman is born this is a mistake or defect, and contrary to Nature's wishes.” Such biological imperfection can be remedied, claims Pallavicino, only through sexual intercourse, whereby the woman receives what, thanks to nature's bungling, she lacks (the phallus): “because in the sexual act the woman is perfected by the man, whereas the man is made imperfect.” At the same time, the desperate search for the perfection that only intercourse can provide leads women to destructive promiscuity: “don’t believe that men are more incontinent than women ... countless evils arise from the incontinence of women which do not so from the incontinence of men.”

Viola similarly responds to Orsino's contention that women are biologically and morally inferior because “they lack retention”—in the two senses that they lack the capacity for real love and that they lack self-restraint (with a possible third allusion to women's incontinence or uncontrollable menstrual flows)—and are at the same time dominated by mere animal “appetite” (2.4.97, 98). The irony in Viola's situation, of course, is that in order to exercise the very capacity for love and restraint she attributes to women, she must dress as a man, albeit an imperfect or “castrated” man; her male disguise itself represents the self-punishing bridling of her sexuality. She is in danger of unwittingly confirming Pallavicino's contention that women aspire to be males in order to attain the perfection (or phallus) denied to them at birth: “every woman wants to be a man, by reason of a certain instinct that teaches her to desire her own perfection.”
Viola's disguised entry into Orsino's court and her behavior once there seem, then, to embody, or perhaps
disembody, the Renaissance codification of the feminine in her renunciation of exterior sexuality, or in her
renunciation of self in favor of her lost male alter ego, her “dead” twin, Sebastian.

But the Freudian implications of the Courtier connection suggest that one can take the figurative reading of
Viola's self-“castration” a good deal further. In her “as an eunuch” speech Viola prefigures her castrato
performance as a musical mode of verbal persuasion: “I can … speak to him in many sorts of music.” On one
level this is a precocious dramatic insight on Viola's part, predicting how her civilized discourse will prove
fatally attractive first to Olivia and then to Orsino. But on a broader cultural level it can be seen as a
precocious psychoanalytical insight, bearing in mind that, for post-Freudian psychoanalysis, the castration
complex is, in the words of Laplanche and Pontalis, “the a priori condition that governs interhuman exchange
as the exchange of sexual objects.”

In Freudian theory “castration” is an indispensable, if potentially snare-ridden, rite of passage towards
adulthood: “The castration complex … is of the profoundest importance in the formation alike of character
and of neuroses.” And it is a rite common to both sexes. In a 1920 footnote added to his 1905 essay on
infantile sexuality, Freud affirms, “We are justified in speaking of a castration complex in women as well.
Both male and female children form a theory that women no less than men originally had a penis, but that
they have lost it by castration.” Freud's notion of castration anxiety as the founding moment of adult
subjectivity and sociality becomes for Lacan the causative principle not only for gender differentiation but for
the very possibility of intersubjective desire and interpersonal exchange.

Given that for Lacan “the phallus is a signifier,” indeed the signifier, it is only the symbolic interchange of the
phallus that permits both signification and love; here lies the role of the woman in assuming or “becoming”
the phallus, signifier of the Other's desire, through the castration of her femininity: “paradoxical as this
formulation might seem, I would say that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the
desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes
through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved.” This is as close
a description as one can find of Viola's eunuch role with regard to its effects on Olivia and Orsino: rejecting
“an essential part of her femininity” through “masquerade,” Viola achieves precisely the paradoxical result of
becoming the signifier of the Other's desire. She is loved for—or through—what she is not, as she hints in her
teasing revelation / hiding of her “real” gender both to Olivia (“I swear I am not that I play” [1.5.185]; “I am
not what I am” [3.1.143]) and to Orsino (“My father had a daughter loved a man. … I am all the daughters of
my father's house, / And all the brothers too”).

At the same time, Lacan makes castration responsible for the institution of the Symbolic order, of the Law, of
the Name of the Father, and thus of signification itself. “It is in the name of the father that we must recognize
the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure
of the law.” The castration threat, effecting the incest taboo, is anthropologically and historically responsible
not only for the maturation of the child but for the acculturation of human society, replacing “natural” sexual
exchange with symbolic exchange: “The primordial Law is therefore that which … superimposes the kingdom
of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating.”

The castration complex is thus synonymous with the process of discursivization, which in turn constitutes the
process of civilization. The “natural” law of coupling gives over to the law of symbolic interchange. Sexual
relationships, says Lacan, do not exist, there being no real complementarity between the sexes. They are
substituted for by discursive relationships. Love is exclusively an effect of language, a cultural event. This
process involves a loss both physical—that is, the necessary diminution of natural libido—and personal—the
loss of what Lacan terms “an essential part of [the woman's] femininity.” Loss is the price paid for cultural
gain, namely for language itself.
Here, then, is where Viola's own pre-announced loss becomes her potential gain: her participation in the intimate rituals of speech-, letter-, and gift-exchange—in a word, in the new amorous and “civil” symbolic order—is made possible only by her temporary assumption of a castrated or “blank” role. As Laurie E. Osborne writes, with reference to the deferrals and deviations of desire in the comedy, “The love tokens, letter or jewel, addressed to the beloved throughout this comedy establish the symbolic order linking the lover to the beloved creating two blanks or positions to be filled.”28

In its figurative force, therefore, Viola’s “eunuch” lends itself to both a historical and a psychoanalytical reading in terms of the privatizing and discursivizing of intercourse, within the bounds of Elias's “civilization” and Lacan's “kingdom of culture.” Given the close correspondence between behavior in Twelfth Night and the private-life codes of courtesy and intimacy, there is a strong temptation to make an unmediated leap from the civilized tête-à-têtes of the historians’ Renaissance domestic interiors to the textualized interchanges of the comedy and back. There may, however, be hidden dangers in this direct move from the boudoir to the Globe (or Middle Temple). The first danger is what we might term the privacy fallacy, taking Shakespeare's representation of vie-priveée intimacy for the real thing, as if the two spheres of exchange belonged to a single cultural common market with all customs barriers removed. This entails ignoring the mediation of that other set of early modern conventions which governed not domestic but theatrical interaction. The process of privatisation identified by Ariès, in which “the private may even subsume or curtail the public,” is in certain respects the opposite of what took place on the Elizabethan stage, which, in representing scenes of intimacy, enacted a publicization of the private sphere, taking it into a public arena where the collective subsumed the individual rather than the reverse. We should not be seduced into forgetting that the close encounters conducted within the courts of Orsino and Olivia are at the same time open displays obeying quite different rules of communicative transaction.

A second and related peril in passing from the whispered sweet nothings of the historians' Renaissance walled garden to the discursive delicacies of Olivia's hortus conclusus is the risk run by some recent historical criticism of naïve mimeticism. This annihilates another potent source of mediation, namely the conventions of comic drama, with their own vitality, their own longue durée that does not necessarily bend to every change in what Ariès and his colleagues term cultural mentalité. If Viola’s ways of using, disguising, and describing her body are closely related to Renaissance conventions of corporeal and behavioral exchange, it is equally true that such verbal and bodily intercourse is a primary constituent of the dramatic and theatrical conventions the play inherits. The problem—a theoretical but also an eminently interpretative problem—is, therefore, how to place the comedy within the network of early modern social constraints without doing violence to its powerful theatrical and dramatic mediacy.

There is more to Viola’s “eunuch” conceit, both historically and theatrically, than a civilized gesture of self-effacement or self-disembodiment. Her apparent private inhibition is also, in more ways than one, a public exhibition. And in order to understand both the full contemporary historicity and the full theatricality of her reference—in its literal as well as its figurative force—it is necessary to look at the comedy's use of dramatic history and, in particular, at its reworking of the castration topos that Viola brings into play.

III. THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

In order to go ahead in this discussion, therefore, we need to go back in time some 1,762 years from the first performance of Twelfth Night. Viola's plan to become an unmanned man signaled to its more learned spectators the play's debt to the New Comedy prototype of all crossdressing drama, Terence's Eunuchus, revered by Shakespeare's contemporaries as a classical model and imitated in many Tudor and Jacobean plays, from Udall's Ralph Roister Doister to Jonson's Epicoene. Together with Plautus's plays of twins and doubles, it is also the primary model for the original version of the Viola story, the Sienese Ingannati, as well as many another sixteenth-century Italian comedy. Eunuchus has never been considered one of Shakespeare's sources, and it is not the primary purpose of this essay to demonstrate a direct derivation, although I believe
that traces of such a derivation are present in *Twelfth Night*. What is at stake, rather, is the theatrical and cultural history of the eunuch trope itself and the ways in which Shakespeare reworks this history.

Viola’s “present me as an eunuch” request finds two different kinds of parallel in Terence’s comedy: the literal and the fictitious. The play offers a “real” castrate in the guise of Horus, a slave presented as a gift to the courtesan Thais. The main plot, however, hinges on the ploy of a young lover, Chaerea, who, in order to gain access to his beloved, the slave-girl Pamphila—likewise owned by Thais—takes Horus’s place as castrate servant in the courtesan’s household. Chaerea thus presents himself at Thais’s court “as an eunuch” and so as his own negative image, a minus sign standing for what is in fact an emphatic plus, as he goes on to demonstrate when he finally gains access to Pamphila’s bed and thus to her sleeping body.

Why this doubling of eunuchs, this redundancy of castration in Terence’s play? *Eunuchus*, as Terence admits in the prologue, is itself a “double,” being largely derived from a lost play of the same title by Menander, who in turn inherited the castration topos from the Old Comedy. Indeed, castration might be said to be a founding trope of comedy as dramatic genre. This is probably due historically and anthropologically to the derivation of comic drama from the phallophoria, the fertility-invoking phallic procession, for which castration represented a negative, fertility-threatening force. Terence’s *Eunuchus* revives this tradition, rendering the topic fully explicit and doubly central, and greatly elaborating its social and theatrical implications.

The immediate reason for the play’s redundant emphasis on castration lies in the occasion of its first performance. As with symbolic castration rites in the Old Comedy, the performative context for Terence’s “eunuch” was one of religious festivity. The comedy was first staged in 161 bc during the Megalensian games in honor of the Great Mother Cybele. The cult of the Asiatic goddess Cybele had been introduced into Rome by Elagabalus in 204 bc and was inextricably connected with castration rituals. Attis, the vegetarian god associated with the cult, died and was resurrected after castrating himself; Cybele’s priests were traditionally eunuchs, while Elagabalus himself was notorious for having his friends’ bodies symbolically shaved and his own testicles tied up when celebrating the rites of Cybele and Attis. In this ritualistic and surgical context, focusing on the literal or symbolic removal of the testicles rather than on the phantasmic missing phallus, the fruits of castration are direct: unmanning is synonymous with self-transcendence and with “rebirth” in the guise of regression to a pure infantile state. In offering the spectacle of an oxymoronically potent castrate, Terence seems to be dramatizing, and perhaps burlesquing, the Roman cult of self-mutilation as the supreme or “divine” form of sexual self-realization. “Self-denial,” as Carlin A. Barton observes with reference to Roman culture, “becomes the culmination of the spiral of desire. … As a result, self-castration, what we would think of as an extreme act of asceticism or self-sacrifice, is often categorized as a form of self-indulgence by the Romans, and the castrated as extreme libertines.”

Terence’s eunuch play is thus an ambiguous homage to Cybele, and the kinds of transcendence celebrated in the comedy have less to do with religious rebirth than with the more worldly representation or realization of (masculine) desire. The extraordinary influence of Terence’s play seems to lie largely in the vertiginous reversal at the center of the main plot, whereby what looks like the neutralizing of male sexuality turns out instead to be a triumphant assertion of virility. It is only by transcending his male identity through self-“castration” that Chaerea is able to realize his desire for the slave-girl. In narrating his offstage triumph, Chaerea relishes the ironic contrast between his assumed role and his actual performance:

CHAEREA

... I boult the dore.

ANTIPHO

What then? ...
Admitted into Pamphila's bedroom as eunuch-guard, Chaerea “boult[s] the dore” (“pessulum ostium obdo”), a metonymy for the act that he is employed not to (be able to) perform.

Here lies the central dramaturgic tension within Eunuchus and an important legacy for later crossdressing comedies such as Twelfth Night. What Chaerea's account enthusiastically underlines is the irresistible theatrical competence of his performance, transforming his secret transgression into public display. Eunuchus sets up two antithetical performatve modes in presenting the same scene: one enacted but hidden in the offstage bed chamber, the other narrated and publicized in Chaerea's onstage account. Chaerea's fictitious sexlessness thereby becomes not only a means to the fulfillment of personal desire but also an allegory for the boastful professional self-transcendence of the actor in playing his part, his capacity to become at will a man without qualities, able to conquer helpless and perhaps—like Pamphila—sleepy audiences by sacrificing his personal and physical attributes. It is in part this histrionic force of the eunuch device—neutered sign of an “empty” signifier (compare Viola's “blank”), namely the actor and his body—that contributed to its longevity as theatrical topos.

As he carries out his plan, Chaerea's performance takes on further theatrical implications, involving the role of the audience as witness. His main activity as eunuch, namely that of guarding or ogling his beloved in her toilette, becomes an unflattering icon of the male gaze and thus of the (masculine) spectator as pornophilic voyeur.

As Paul Veyne notes in the first volume of A History of Private Life, voyeurism is the social condition not only of the eunuch-slave but of the slave tout court in ancient Rome: “With nothing else to guide them, slaves shared the values of their master, admired him, and served him jealously. Like voyeurs they watched him live his life with a mixture of admiration and scorn.” There is more than a suggestion in the play that Terence's own audience is complicit in a scopophilic “enslavement” to vicarious sexual pleasure, ogling in turn the antics of Chaerea.

Eunuchus enacts, therefore, a movement from the bed chamber to the platea and simultaneously from individual sexuality to collective sociality. In addition to the doubling or splitting of the eunuch figure into the “real” castrate and his “fictional” other, nearly all the play's characters participate in the “as an eunuch” condition in its figurative sense: the miles gloriosus Thraso, presented as the reverse of Chaerea, a braggart about sex but lacking in actual sexuality; the somewhat androgynous parasite Gnatho; the raped Pamphila, “castrated” of her freedom, her subjectivity, and her virginity, not to mention her social status; even the prostitute Thais, deprived of citizenship and of political rights. Eunuchhood constitutes the play's “controlling metaphor,” whereby the condition of sexual mutilation comes to stand for quite different forms of social and psychological dispossession. Castration thus becomes a kind of internal epidemic or contaminatio, spreading out from the play's neutered center. As the Pseudo-Servius observed in the ninth century, “This one as a eunuch who deflowered that virgin is the principal subject-matter in this comedy. If other persons are brought in, they are subordinated to the eunuch, and all parts of the fable in some way have reference to the eunuch.”

This contagion principle constitutes, as we will see, an important model for later “castration” plays.

Thus Terence's ambiguous eunuch is a figure for social as well as sexual and theatrical intercourse, the more so since Chaerea knowingly exploits a particular form of symbolic interchange (particularly prominent, as we
have seen, in *Twelfth Night*), namely the giving of presents. In offering himself as a devirilized body, Chaerea becomes a literal exchange-object within the master-slave economy that governed second-century Republican Rome and that regulates the somewhat sordid world of the play. In an act of precipitous social self-relegation or -castration, Chaerea, at the suggestion of his own servant Parmeno, doubly depersonalizes himself as eunuch and slave, offering himself as one in a whole series of presents—jewels, money, as well as other servants such as Pamphila herself—that the *bona meretrix* Thais receives in exchange for her desired favors.

Gift-exchange becomes the play's central economic and semiotic paradigm. The governing social framework here would seem to be the one outlined in Marcel Mauss's classic 1925 essay on the gift, in which the French anthropologist states “that the spirit of gift-exchange is characteristic of societies which have passed the [archaic] phase of ‘total prestation’ … but have not yet reached the stage of pure individual contract, the money market.” In such postarchaic societies the gift is the primary symbolic token of a reciprocal system that includes the exchange of “courtesies, entertainments, ritual military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts; and [participation] in fairs, in which the market is but one element.”

Here lies the dazzling success of Chaerea's self-election to the status of gift. In a “natural” exchange economy suspended between archaic rites and modern market negotiation (an economy that levels the distinction between subjects, physical objects, and symbolic objects), Chaerea-the-gift-item is able to exploit his zero subjectivity, his invisibility as *persona*, in order to fool the courtesan and her court. Terence figures the brutality of this economy in the violence of Chaerea's return to malehood, as he possesses the sleeping Pamphila, herself deprived of rights, personality, and volition:

**PITHYAS**

O what stirre hath the Eunuch made which thou gauest us! he hath deflowered the damsell which the Captaine bestowed on my mistres.

**PHAEDRIA**

Thou art out of thy witts. How could an Eunuch doe this thing?

**PITHYAS**

I know not who he was, this which he hath done, the thing it selfe will shewe.

Chaerea, in turn, is rewarded for his pains by a social as well as sexual gift, since he nobly agrees to take Pamphila's hand, but only once her “good” blood has been proven.

Terence's “eunuch” is in all senses at the middle, albeit a surgically mutilated middle, of a paradoxical system of signification through opposition—minus for plus, loss for gain, private for public—and establishes himself as a successful dramatic topos precisely because he is already a disfigured figure for social and theatrical exchange as such, a metasemiotic vehicle that can be resemanticized and rehistoricized in later contexts. All of the personal, erotic, social, and theatrical implications of castration become part of the history of comedy. And the transmission of the topos from Roman New Comedy to Elizabethan comedy, via—as we will see—the Italian *commedia*, is itself a passing on of a model of mediation and exchange that is progressively modified within the different historical and theatrical conditions to which it is subjected. Each recontextualization of the topos in its various sexual, social, and theatrical aspects will bear the indelible traces of the eunuch's own stage history.

**IV. “BEN SI CASTRA”: SIENESE RAPTURES AND MANTUAN RUPTURES**

As a result of his versatility and indeterminacy, Terence's castrate turns out to be not only unexpectedly virile but also hyperbolically fertile, disseminating an almost interminable series of sixteenth-
seventeenth-century progeny. … Indeed, it is fair to say that comedy as dramatic genre is “reborn” in early modern Europe through the good offices of the castrate. When reworked within the Italian Renaissance *commedia*, however, the eunuch topos is drastically modified—or, in Freudian terms, further castrated—in that Terence's disguised male is more often than not transformed into a crossdressed female, the mimesis of the unmanned into the imitation of a (non)man. This change is in part due to altered theatrical circumstances, since in certain performances of erudite comedy in the Italian courts and academies, female roles were performed by actresses rather than boy-actors. But it is also a measure of a radically changed social context: just as the performative situation of Italian disguise plays is no longer that of religious ritual, so the exchange system within which the disguise operates is no longer the master-slave economy of Republican Rome but the mercantile economy of early modern Italy, with its burgeoning individualism, its power struggles between rival city-states, and its new codification of civility and courtesy, including, as we have seen, the rules of female decorum.

The Renaissance legacy of Terence's *Eunuchus* is twofold. It serves as a model for any number of disguise plots from which the real and/or feigned eunuch as such has disappeared. At the same time, the *eunuchus* survives as a powerful verbal and stage trope, or “theatergram,” within disguise comedy itself. This double legacy corresponds to Louise George Clubb's definition of Renaissance dramatic *contaminatio* as a mixture of borrowed plots and figures or topoi. As Clubb notes, the first Italian dramatist to make use of this mixed *contaminatio* is Ariosto, who proudly declares in the prologue to *I suppositi* (1509) his debt to *Eunuchus*, although it is mainly the secondary Thraso plot that Ariosto borrows and adapts. The castration topos is itself disguised and displaced to other parts of the play, notably Filogono's story of being robbed during his sea voyage from Catania to Ferrara. Here is George Gascoigne's 1566 version of Filogono's maritime mishap: “Jesus! How often they untrussed my male, and ransacked a little capcase that I had, tossed and turned all that was within it, searched my bosom, yea, my breeches, that I assure you I thought they would have flayed me to search between the fell and the flesh for farthings.” Filogono's untrussed male and little ransacked capcase figure the robbery as a mode of rape (“searched … my breeches”) but also as a form of physical disfigurement (“flayed me alive”), which suggests the main metaphorical force that castration will assume in the Italian *commedia*, namely material deprivation. These details also suggest a significant shift in the primary icon of castration itself in Renaissance comedy: no longer the surgically removed testicles of the ancient eunuch-slave but the absent or truncated phallus of modern psychosexual fantasy. Perhaps for this reason Ariosto's emasculating sea voyage becomes a recurrent subtopos in comedy.

A key text in the transmission of the castration topic in its phallic guise—and indeed in the development of Renaissance comedy in general—is the first modern crossdressing play, *La calandria*. First performed at Urbino in February 1513 during a municipal festival, the comedy stands in a dialectical relationship with the development of the humanistic ideology of *corteziania*. Indeed its author, Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, is one of the main speakers in Castiglione's *The Courtier*, set in the Urbino ducal palace where *La calandria* probably had its first performance. Castiglione is also credited with writing the prologue to the comedy.

The Urbino connection between the new Renaissance *civiltà* and the new Renaissance *commedia* is quite explicit. In the second book of *The Courtier*, Bibbiena offers a long defense of laughter as the distinctive feature of human nature and identifies theatrical performance as a legitimate source of mirth. Bibbiena's speech makes explicit what Wayne A. Rebhorn describes as “the theatre metaphors structuring Castiglione's view of the world and of his ideal courtier,” who “produces an endless series of brilliant performances, pausing only long enough to exchange one mask for another.” The relationship between court and theater is thus bilateral: if the ideal courtier is a performer, the performance of comedy becomes the court's public double.

In reality *La calandria* is far removed dramaturgically and discursively from Urbino's courtly civility. Derived from a *contaminatio* of Terence, Plautus, and Boccaccio, the comedy's plot centers on different-sex twins and
two-way transvestism. The twins, Lidio and Santilla, separated at birth, grow up apart; and while Lidio spends his time searching for his sister, the latter, by way of self-defense, disguises herself as her brother, whom she believes dead. Crossdressing here combines with cross-desire: Lidio falls in love with Fulvia, wife of the foolish Calandro, and in order to gain entry into Fulvia’s house dresses as a woman. This constitutes Bibbiena’s most immediate debt to Eunuchus. Calandro, meanwhile, falls in love with the crossdressed Lidio. Fulvia likewise crossdresses in order to go to Lidio. Inevitably, Santilla is mistaken for her transvestite twin and is taken to the appointment with Fulvia. Thus a transvestite woman has an amorous encounter with another woman whom she takes to be the crossdressed man who at the same time is the object of her husband’s desire.

It is Fulvia’s erotic (dis)appointment with Santilla that brings the castration theme to the surface. Stunned at her discovery of Lidio’s missing link, Fulvia blames the go-between necromancer, Ruffo: “Alas! you have transformed my Lidio from male to female. I’ve handled and touched everything; but cannot find any of the usual things except his external appearance [presentia] … restore to him the knife of my sheath, you understand?”

Fulvia registers the shock of the absent phallus, perceiving female sexuality, in classic Freudian terms, as a lack (her being dressed as a boy underlines the point). Here lies the comedy’s main ideological link with The Courtier. The play dramatizes relations not only between the sexes but between genders, defining the female primarily in terms of missing or lost masculinity. It also offers opposing models of female behavior in relation to this lack. The crossdressed Fulvia’s frenetic search for the phallus is a perfect anticipation of Pallavicino’s thesis regarding women’s erotic overcompensation for their “imperfection.” Santilla, on the contrary, expresses her femininity through the self-abnegation that will be championed by Castiglione’s Gonzaga, using her masculine disguise as a mode of self-protection and as a reinvocation of her lost brother.

Between the opposed extremes of gender lies an indeterminate middle ground, that of the eunuch (Santilla as unmanned Lidio) or, alternatively, of the hermaphrodite. Santilla’s servant Fannio leads the necromancer Ruffo to believe his mistress is double-sexed, able to adopt whichever organ proves appropriate to the occasion:

FANNIO

You should know that my master Lidio is a hermaphrodite [hermafrodite].

RUFFO

And what does this flowering shit [merdafiorito] mean?

FANNIO

Hermaphrodite, I say. … Hermaphrodites are those that have both sexes … with Fulvia he will use only the female sex for ...

So, in a sense, it turns out: the revirilized Lidio takes the place of Santilla in Fulvia’s bed; but when they are caught in flagrante by Calandro, Santilla saves her brother by re-substituting for (re-castrating) him. Like Aristophanes’s hermaphroditic halves, the twins finally come together and recognize each other.

The threat or promise of castration is disseminated throughout the play. The gulling of Calandro is figured in the vivid “theatergram” of a trunk in which he is to hide in order, so he believes, to be conducted to his beloved Lidio-Santilla. In a surreal apocalyptic fantasy Calandro’s servant Fessenio warns him that to fit a man into a trunk, certain bodily parts must be amputated. Fessenio’s sadistic surgical delirium imagines cuckoldry as eviration: Calandro’s amputated organ will be replaced by “a member which is bigger than his own.” The servant underlines the point later when he takes his master to an appointment with a prostitute: “I’ll
go and unite the castrated sheep \textit{[castron = fool]} with the sow \textit{[troia = whore].}” And the gull himself is later forced to admit, “Oh what a simpleton/castrated sheep \textit{[castron]} am I!”

\textit{La calandria} is at all its levels a comedy of the disappearing member. The question naturally arises as to why a cardinal and leading courtier should engage with such dubious material. One answer might be that it is precisely through the Terentian castration topic that Bibbiena attempts to mediate between the enclosed world of the court and the wider world of public intercourse, especially theatrical intercourse. The play's vigorous variations on the missing phallus stage a ritual subtraction of sexuality that enables the frank public representation of eros without, at least in theory, betraying the strict codes of the new civility. It also enables the new comic drama to negotiate its own representational rights within that new civility. But in (theatrical) practice the erotic verve of the play far exceeds any notional decorum or courtesy. In fact the comedy, in dramatizing and publicizing private sexual congress, takes on its own joyfully generative and liberatory life, independent of, and perhaps even in opposition to, courtly decorousness. Its life empowers later plays, such as \textit{Twelfth Night}, to reap the fruits of castration.

It is evident that the \textit{Calandria} story, with its separated twins (and the presumed death of the male twin), crossdressed heroines, and erotic confusions, contains the \textit{Twelfth Night} story. It also contains the plots of the majority of Renaissance disguise comedies, such as Machiavelli's \textit{Clizia} (1525), with its substitution of a crossdressed servant for the heroine in the bed of the lecherous old Nicomaco, and Pietro Aretino's transvestite plays, including what at first sight appears to be an “anti-Bibbienian” burlesque, \textit{La cortigiana} (also 1525), in which the ingenuous Venetian Maco arrives in a corrupt and whore-ridden Rome, determined to become a courtier and cardinal (à la Bibbiena), and ends up being punished by symbolic castration and sodomization.

In Aretino's later \textit{Il marescalco} (The Stablemaster [1533]), set at the ducal court of Mantua, the duke himself puts in motion a plot—contaminated from \textit{Eunuchus}, Plautus's \textit{Casina}, and Machiavelli's \textit{Clizia}—in which his misogynistic, misogynamic (and probably pederastic) stablemaster is punished by being “married” to a crossdressed boy. The play is thus on one level an aristocratic entertainment at the expense of a lower-class figure and an assertion of the duke's absolute power as both director and principal spectator of the practical joke, forcing the stablemaster to make a public spectacle of his “deviant” private life. At the same time, the beffa against the stablemaster expresses anxieties concerning female sexuality and the assimilation of women within what is presented as a primarily homosocial community. The stablemaster's sense of relief and release at discovering he is a castrone and not a husband underlines the fact that, unlike \textit{Eunuchus}, the play's dominant force is not desire but its specular image, namely revulsion. In this homosocial context women are perceived as a repugnant Other, heterosexual relations as perilous, and marriage as a perverse mode of self-punishment. The stablemaster, the most virile character in the play because un-effeminized by contact with the opposite sex, represents matrimony as a form of financial as well as sexual loss and women as repulsive, leaky vessels (their sexual organs good only for devouring and urinating).

\textit{Il marescalco} offers two further social variations on the castration topos: heterosexual bonding is represented as material deprivation and as political and military rape. While the stablemaster fears the complete erosion of his money, identified with his phallus, Ambrogio's comparison of marriage with “the devastation of Rome and Florence” reminds the audience of the most violent events in recent Italian political history: the Sack of Rome (1527) and the siege of Florence (1530), both perpetrated by the penetrative troops of Emperor Charles V. Aretino's violent publicization of private sexuality, taking the castration topos into the contemporary political and economic sphere, can be understood only in terms of two crucial structural characteristics of early Renaissance Italy: the dominance of a monetary economy and the prevalence of rival city-states. Renaissance Italy was a society of mercatores in which the circulation and accumulation of money created the first approximation of a modern consumer culture. What distinguished Italy from the rest of early modern Europe was, as Richard A. Goldthwaite has shown, the precocious rise of conspicuous consumption. The distinctive
objects of this newly fashioned consumption were luxury items, especially works of art and forms of entertainment, such as theater itself. The development of Italian Renaissance art, literature, and drama was directly related to the development of conspicuous consumption, which produced new sources of patronage. This was especially true in those city-states in which the mercantile economy and the circulation of money were most dynamic—Milan, Venice, Florence, and Genoa—and in the great centers of banking, above all Siena. Associated with this twin cultural flowering—the monetary and the artistic—was the rise of the academies which, in a sense, mediated between the two.

Siena, the birthplace of modern banking and thus one of the first great junctions of the circulation of capital, rivaled Florence as a venue for artistic endeavor, including drama, and as home to the new cultural academies, notably the Accademia degli Intronati, created around 1525. Among the Academy's activities, in addition to the cultivation of humanistic arts and civil conversation, was the writing and performing of plays. The first of these was the unfortunate allegory Il sacrificio, performed as a dubious Twelfth Night offering to the ladies in 1531 and consisting in the male performers' ritual burning onstage of the Epiphany gifts received from their female audience. Such was the outrage among the spurned ladies that the academicians were obliged to present, two years later, a reparative offering, Gl'ingannati, a comedy with a winning female protagonist.

The Intronati's Gl'ingannati, prototype of the Viola story and source of Twelfth Night, is thus the product of the cultural mediation between money and art, between the warring sexes, and likewise between rival city-states. Set in Rome immediately after the Sack of 1527, Gl'ingannati probably marks the decisive shift in Renaissance comedy towards female transvestism as the dominant mode of dramatic crossdressing. The reasons for this shift, apart from the reparative circumstances of the original performance and the play's consequent dramatization of a putative female revenge on men, may also have to do with the make-up of the company itself. A retrospective 1572 account of the Academy's recruitment of actors suggests that female roles were assigned to women. If this is the case, then the appearance of actresses in place of the more familiar boy-actors employed in the performance of early erudite comedy may have created the irresistible temptation to center a comedy on the plight of a crossdressed girl.

Gl'ingannati is a contamination of Terence's Eunuchus, Plautus's Menaechmi and Casina, and Bibbiena's Calandria, with a little help from Boccaccio. While borrowing the female-to-male-disguise device from Calandria, the play, unlike Bibbiena's comedy, places it at the center of the main plot, which is closer to Eunuchus. Indeed, Lelia, the Viola figure, might be said to merge the roles of Terence's lover, Chaerea, and his slave-girl, Pamphila, becoming simultaneously principal subject and principal object of desire and thus of the play's intricate series of physical and symbolic exchanges. Lelia, separated from her twin brother, Fabrizio—“lost” in the Sack of Rome—is desired by the old merchant Gherardo, to whom her merchant father, Virginio, has promised her in marriage. Lelia in turn loves young Flaminio, who, however, is enamored of Gherardo's daughter, Isabella. Lelia crossdresses—from her first appearance in the comedy—in order to enter Flaminio's service. Here, the new protagonist of the transvestite woman, who pursues her desires while she is herself the target of aggressive heterosexual and homoerotic attention: the amorous quadrangle is completed when Isabella (the Olivia figure) falls in love with the crossdressed Lelia.

As in La calandria, the emphasis of Gl'ingannati remains on the phallus, here as instrument of financial as well as erotic transactions, which become more or less synonymous. The sexual potency of Lelia's twin is represented by his hyperbolic member: “he's male enough to make two men” says Isabella's envious and voyeuristic merchant father (and indeed in a sense it must make two men, Fabrizio himself and his transvestite twin sister). This potency translates directly into the financial reward of Isabella's conquered dowry. Fabrizio, substituting for his “eunuch” sister, reaps Chaerea's sexual and social (which here means pecuniary) reward. In this hyperphallic and monetary context, the eunuchus topos marks a castration anxiety that is above all an economic-dispossession anxiety.
The society represented in the post-Sack Rome of *Gl’ingannati* is a fierce merchandise system, populated by avid old *mercatores* who dispose of their children as goods, and in which intercourse of all kinds has a primarily financial goal. The *castrato* is no longer a gift but a deprivation, no longer the signifier of its opposite but a direct omen of material loss: loss of the kind that the merchant Virginio has suffered in the play's opening and that the merchant Gherardo, Isabella's pantaloon father, finally suffers at the hands (or other bodily parts) of the well-endowed Fabrizio. It is the same kind of loss that Rome suffers in the play's contemporary historical setting at the hands of the all-penetrating Emperor Charles V. Siena smirks while Rome loses its manhood.\(^6^0\)

The model of exchange embodied in *Gl’ingannati* is one of sexual, financial, and military assault *disguised* as conversational courtesy and gentility. This, perhaps, is the real *inganno* or deceit of *Gl’ingannati*: namely the (successful) attempt by the Intronati academicians to pass it off as an exercise in Sienese cultural refinement, offered, so they claim in the prologue, as a gift to the ladies in the audience, as if the exchanges it dramatizes were all part of that humanistic *civile conversazione* to which the academy was officially dedicated. But its tribute to feminine protagonism and subjectivity turns out to be questionable at best. Lelia's one “private” soliloquy, in which she confesses unease at playing her male role, seems to be an early instance of feminine interiority in the Italian drama.

Oh, how I would deserve it [*come mi starebbe bene*] if one of these young rakes took me by force and, dragging me into some house, tried to find out whether I am male or female! That would teach me to go outdoors at this hour. … Oh what a cruel destiny is mine!\(^6^1\)

On closer inspection, Lelia's fantasy of having her gender verified through rape proves to be the projected desire of the salacious voyeurs in the play and the audience. In her one moment of apparent subjectivity, Lelia can define herself only as object of potential sexual violence.

Lelia's fantasy revisits from a supposedly female perspective Terence's dramatization of the pornographic gaze. The comedy likewise takes up the Terentian legacy of the slave as voyeur, although the servant role has been split from that of the lover and moved definitively to the margins, no longer central counter but envious spectator of these blatantly corporeal exchanges. The key episode—equivalent both to Chaerea's rape of Pamphila (with Lelia in the “passive” position) and to Viola's encounter with Olivia—is the frankly physical seduction scene between the passionate Isabella and the reluctant Lelia, which climaxes in a prolonged, passionate kiss between the two girls. The whole scene is framed by a grotesque *mise-en-scène* of the male gaze, as the couple is watched by two gaping servants who provide a running commentary on their own uncontrollable sexual response to the spectacle:

SCATIZZA

[Referring to Lelia] Kiss her, or may you get a cancer! …

CRIVELLO

[Seeing the girls kiss] Oh, oh, damn it, do the same to me. …

SCATIZZA

God's body, my leg is so swollen [*m’è infiata una gamba* = I have such an erection], I'm about to …

The servants' pornographic pleasure reworks Chaerea's slavish ogling of Pamphila's toilette and represents in turn a metonymy for the impossible phallic role Lelia has to perform: Scatizza's swollen “leg” acts out what Isabella supposedly desires but what Lelia cannot deliver until replaced by her twin brother. The dominant theatrical activity in *Gl’ingannati* is not performing but watching: it is male spectatorship as vicarious pleasure.
that determines the apparent freedom of the new female-to-male role-playing.

In later Italian versions of the story, the mercantile and mercenary nature of social *conversazione* is further accentuated by the restoration of Terence's courtesan figure and the consequent upscale bordello setting. The agents of exchange are no longer the lovers themselves but bawds and pimps, who manage a flourishing economy of present-giving and favor-selling in an open (street) market which travesties private amorous transactions. As Paul Larivaille has shown, the bawd was an indispensable figure of mediation, especially in Rome with its sixty-percent male population and its correspondingly vast numbers of prostitutes.\textsuperscript{63} In the *commedia* the bawd's mediation becomes a degraded version of courtly politeness, allowing the lovers and clients to reach their sexual goals without having to discuss the subject directly.

Thus Niccolò Secchi's *Gl'inganni* (1547), first performed in Milan before the duke but set in a colorfully vice-ridden Naples, adopts “conversation” as a euphemism for bartered sex, as in the plea of young Gostanzo, in love with the upper-class whore Dorotea: “I’ll do my best to find you sixty *scudi*, but on express condition that no one else be allowed to converse with Dorotea.” The obliging bawd responds: “And if that isn't enough, I'll have your rival castrated [io farò castrone] so you can be doubly sure.”\textsuperscript{64} The bawd's threat to castrate Gostanzo's rival, a rich old *dottore*, is a reminder of the extreme penalties for unpaid *conversazione* in a world where verbal intercourse is a simulacrum of real sex and its dangers. For the play's libidinous *signori* there is really no way out of their dire destiny, given that the longed-for and bartered-for sexual engagement turns out to be nothing other than a means of removing male possessions. Despite her promise to Gonzago, the bawd encourages Dorotea to milk the rich *dottore* both sexually and financially, freeing him of all his worldly attributes:

\begin{quote}
Well castrated [ben si castra], well milked,
Old man, mad man, who pricks [*pugne*] for love,
It's time for the nails to strike
And cut off his lard [*tagliarli giu le sugne*].\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Here the connotations of castration change again: it is no longer an omen of financial loss but, on the contrary, a metonymy (effect for cause) for sex itself as a mode of scrotum(= pocket)-emptying and perhaps also for syphilis, one effect of which is the erosion of the genitals.\textsuperscript{66}

Similarly, in *Gl'inganni* (1592), the version by the Mantuan Curzio Gonzaga, the courtesan Doralice, referring to the old merchant who brings her gifts, brags of her castrating ability as a professional skill: “The castrated beef [*il buò castronaccio*] drinks it all.”\textsuperscript{67} In Gonzaga's comedy castration is a risk that males run from birth. He doubles the story's doubles by having two sets of twins and by having one of each couple—one male and one female—crossdressed. The male twin's transvestism has been enforced since birth because of a bet between his father and a friend: whichever of them fathered a male child was to pay two thousand florins to the other if he in turn fathered a female. One of the friends fathered a boy, Leandro, while the other fathered different-sex twins, Scipione and Lucrezia; in order to win the bet, the twins' father cheated by disguising the male twin as a girl. Here the monetary implications of eviration are explicit: girls—luxury commodities—mean money, while boys risk surgery in the name of the father's wallet. The “losing” male child, Leandro, failing to distinguish between the real and the false Lucrezia, eventually falls in love with them both. The female twin in turn falls in love with Cesare, a refugee from Siena who is himself a crossdressed girl, Ginevra (the Viola figure).

The father figures in the comedy are also multiplied, there being three *vecchi*, all rich merchants, to be overcome by the young lovers. As a result, in Gonzaga's Rome there is among the younger males an understandable epidemic of castration anxiety, which begins to take on some Lacanian implications. The danger faced by Leandro is the knife-wielding wrath of Lucrezia's vengeful *papà* when he finds the young man “coupled” (*a coppiati*) with the biologically female twin: “Oh, poor Leandro,” exclaims Lucrezia's maid...
Filippa, “I think that old traitor, arriving at the wrong moment, will make a capon of him.”

Within this disconcertingly misandristic patriarchy, in which fathers mutilate boys and valorize girls, but only in terms of their cash value, it is not surprising that the crossed dressed Viola figure has some difficulty in acting the part of either sex. Ginevra makes a hash of playing Cesare because she is constantly fearful of getting caught out on one side or the other, her choice of destinies being either unappealing prostitution or a biologically redundant emasculation. Finally she is caught in the middle, perceived by the go-between maid as either hermaphroditic or already castrated:

CESARE

Maybe you thought I was a woman?

FILIPPA

Look, Cesare, if I didn't believe you to be a girl, I judged at least from your behavior that you were facesti del doppio, or that you were a eunuch.

CESARE

A eunuch? Ha, ha, you were really crazy, don't you think so now?

FILIPPA

I don't know what to think; if you let me touch it with my hand, I'll know I'm not talking nonsense.

In a sense this is Ginevra's salvation, since as a eunuc she avoids the dangers that await each sex. At the same time, however, the castrato topos, in contrast to its function in Terence, becomes a sign of the actor's failure, her inability to embody her chosen (phallic) role in a phallus-threatening community.

Ginevra's difficulties create the occasion, at least, for a more persuasive interiorization of the castration theme than Lelia's rape fantasy and thus for a more convincing mimesis of private passion. In the play's one ironically subjective moment Ginevra laments to herself that her financially ruined father, having forced her to play a masculine role, failed to provide her with the sexuality that would allow her to reciprocate Lucrezia's (homoerotic) desire: “[your father] made you dress as a man, without inducing you also to ardently love a female [una femina] such as this Lucrezia, victim of this wretched disguise [questo maledetto habito], while she, taking me to be a male, seems to pine for love of me.” Ginevra defines both her gender and her sexuality in terms of the lack of masculinity and thus herself as ineluctably Other in the brutally penetrative world into which she has intruded.

For all its subterranean violence, Gonzaga's play does display psychological insight and a dialogic agility that bring it close to Bibbiena's Calandria and also to Twelfth Night: among all the Italian analogues it is the play that most resembles Shakespeare's comedy in its discursive verve. If Bibbiena's play, and indeed Shakespeare's play, are dialectically related to The Courtier, Gonzaga's has genetic links both with Castiglione (who was himself related to the Gonzaga family and three of whose speakers, Cesare, Elisabetta, and Margherita, are Gonzagas) and with the later classic of Renaissance courtesy literature, Stefano Guazzo's La civile conversazione, published in 1574 and dedicated to Guazzo's patrons, the Gonzagas.

Like Castiglione, Guazzo posits as his discursive ideal the combination of courtesy and witty affability: “curteous language multiplieth friendes, and mitigateth enemies. … And as that is a signe of curtesie, so this is a token of wit”. And like Castiglione, he represents courtly conversazione in terms of the performance of comedy and, vice versa, defends comedy as one of the possible manifestations of “civility.” Thus La civile conversazione seems to take up all the courtly behavioral ideals of The Courtier, cast once more in a
dialectical relationship with comedy as their cultural double. Gonzaga's play, both culturally and geographically, seems to be the closest theatrical alter ego of Guazzo's Mantuan conversazione.

In reality, Guazzo's late-sixteenth-century Mantua was quite different from Castiglione's nostalgically reconstructed Urbino. Guazzo had to mediate between the court and the powerful mercantile middle classes, and his behavioral rules were directed less towards the cortegiano than towards the gentiluomo. Gonzaga's play similarly mediated between the aristocracy—written for a courtly elite and dedicated to the Mantuan Donna Marfisa da Este—and the wider society of mercatores represented in the comedy itself. Gonzaga's "conversational" reworking of the eunuchus topos seems to have allowed this social mediation to take place. But as in the case of La calandria and—as we will see—Twelfth Night, the play took on a frank erotic vitality of its own that far exceeded any merely decorous or conciliatory "diplomatic" function.

V. "I LACK YET AN HEADPIECE": NO SEX, WE'RE ENGLISH

The intimate, if conflictual, Italian dialogue between courtesy books and comedy about the representation of a new "civilized" culture was transmitted to Renaissance England, and the link between the two discursive genres remained the eunuch. The first and most important English courtesy book, Thomas Elyot's The Boke named the Gouernour (1531), in keeping with its recommendations of sexual abstinence and constancy, cites Terence's Eunuchus as a prime example of the educative and civilizing value of comedy:

First, comedies, which they suppose to be a doctrinal of ribaldry, they be undoubtedly a picture or as it were a mirror of man's life, wherein evil is not taught but discovered; to the intent that men beholding the promptness of youth unto vice, the snares of harlots & bawds laid for young minds, the deceit of servants. … And that by comedies good counsel is ministered, it appeareth by the sentence of Parmeno, in the second comedy of Terence. …

Between Elyot and Castiglione lie the effects of the Reformation. Elyot here follows Melanchthon's moralistic defense of Terence's comedy, whereby the vicious behavior represented in the play becomes an antidote to similar temptations in life. This homeopathic theory of comedy in a sense restores Terence's system of signification by opposition but reverses its terms: not eviration for lust but lust for the repudiation of desire. It also reverses responsibilities for the events: it is not Chaerea's rapist libido that is to blame but the snares of harlots and bawds.

This moral rehabilitation of the play as neutered source of the dulce et utile prepared the way for imitations in the vernacular. It may not be an exaggeration to claim that whenever comedy emerges as a genre within a given Western culture, it does so courtesy of castration. Not incidentally, the first "regular" comedies in English are all directly or indirectly derived from Terence's play: Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister (c. 1553) is based on Terence's secondary plot (Thraso's wooing of Thais); Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister (c. 1553) is based on Terence's secondary plot (Thraso's wooing of Thais); John Jeffere's The Bugbears (c. 1566) derives partly from Gl'ingannati and thus indirectly from Terence; and George Gascoigne's Supposes (1566) adapts Ariosto's Terentian commedia.

But where Italian comedy fully exploits, albeit with sprezzatura, the sexual energy of the Terentian model, post-Reformation English comedy allegorizes and domesticates it. Udall's prologue promises "under merry comedies secrets" the disclosure of "very virtuous lore" of a kind that "neither Plautus nor Terence did spare." Symptomatically, the object of Ralph Roister Doister's desires is not Thais or her Italian cortigiane equivalents but the English morality-play widow Dame Christian Custance. The traces of Eunuchus, apart from the braggart wooer himself, are the rituals of present-giving (Doister's rejected ring), the activities of go-between servants, a possible isolated and futile threat of rape, and the mild questioning of Roister Doister's capacity to "play the man's part." Playing the man's part is what Roister Doister is constitutionally unable to do. "I lack yet an headpiece," he confesses prior to the "women's war" in which he is definitively routed.
Ralph Roister Doister rewrites Eunuchus as a moral allegory on the vanity of male desire and the Elyotian value of female “custance,” or chastity. But not all sixteenth-century English readings of Terence's play were so benevolent. The Oxford moralist and antitheatrical polemicist John Rainolds, in one of the most incisive critical commentaries ever written on the play, takes the opposite view, namely that The Eunuch represents the dangerous sexual potency or potentiality of transvestism; and that, far from encouraging private virtue, it is an exhibition of, and incitement to, public vice:

If you can; then ought you beware of beautifull boyes transformed into wom putting on their raiment, their feature, lookes and facions. For men may be ravished with the louse of stones, of dead stuffe, framed by cunning grauers to beautifull womens likenes; as … Chaerea, arrayed like an Eunuch onely, did move the beastlie lust of him who was lasciviouslie giuen in the Comedie.81

Rainolds, writing in 1599 with the professional all-male theater companies in mind, makes the valid point that it is Chaerea's very disguise that releases his “beastlie lust,” a metatheatrical interpretation Rainolds develops in his acute analysis of the rape scene:

For let malefactours bee never so ready to practise any wickednes of their owne corrupt and lewde inclination: the circumstances of maner, season, place, and so foorth, commodious to performe it doe more entise them therevnto. Weapons them selves (saith Homer) doe draw men to fight: and opportunitie maketh theeves. … as Chaerea could not haue defiled Pamphila, no not in Thais house, without his Eunuches raiment.82

Chaerea's supposed lack of “weapon” becomes his tool: the actor's crossdressed performance creates the occasion for the representation and transmission of desire, the moving of beastly lust in performer and spectator alike.

Here, then, are two opposing views of the Terentian castration legacy: as private moral purification or as public erotic provocation. However unpleasant Rainolds's conclusion to avoid the theater, there is little doubt that he has understood better than Renaissance apologists for Terence the potentially transgressive force of the castrate ploy, which he rightly identifies as a trope for performance in general. Rainolds's Th'overthrow of stageplays appeared the year after Bernard's English translation of Eunuchus and two years or so before the first performance of Twelfth Night, a comedy that did not, perhaps, altogether assuage his qualms regarding the perilous ambiguities of the “Eunuches raiment.”

VI. SMALL PIPE, BIG VOICE

Viola's fleeting “as an eunuch” allusion thus bears the unsuspected weight of a cultural history in which, according to the social context and ideological values of the drama, castration comes to figure by turns the threat or exorcism of infertility; the crossing of gender boundaries; the transcendence or realization of sexual desire; the condition of slavery; the “archaic” economy of total prestation; the modern economy of symbolic exchange; financial, political, or military dispossession; the practices of sodomy or prostitution; the effects of venereal disease; the perils of matrimony and the humiliation of cuckoldry; the virtues of female chastity; the socioeconomic development of the adolescent; and the hierarchical separation or vertical mobility between the social classes. At the same time, the stage castrate takes on more strictly theatrical or performative values within the history of comedy itself: the performance of a fictional role; the professional skills of the actor; the voyeuristic gaze of the audience; and the seductive eroticism of histrionic crossdressing. Above all, the eunuchus is a point of tension or mediation between these two competing and sometimes conflicting histories, the social and the dramatic.
The final mediation of the castration topos on its journey towards Twelfth Night comes about through the narrative versions of the Viola story, particularly Barnaby Riche's romance “Of Apolonius and Silla” in Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession (1581), perhaps the play's most immediate source. Riche, via Bandello and Belleforest, provides two variations on the castration topos. The first revisits the Ariostan scenario of dismemberment during a maritime voyage by narrating the failed rape of Silla by the Sea Captain. The Captain's unfulfilled infatuation with Silla is first figured in the familiar trope of disarmament: “My captaine … was like to bee taken prisoner aboard his owne shippe, and forced to yeeld hymself a captive without any cannon shot.” The planned rape is then thwarted through the deus ex machina intervention of a storm, in which Silla is saved from drowning by a floating “cheste that was the captains.”

Riche's second, more explicit re-elaboration of the eviration topos takes the opposite form—the attribution of improbable powers of penetration and impregnation to Silla herself. Charged with impregnating Julina (the act of her twin brother, Silvio), Silla reflects bitterly on the “impediment” that disables her from doing so in fact: “was not this a foule oversight of Julina, that would so precisely sweare so greate an othe that she was gotten with childe by one that was altogether unfurnishte with implements for suche a tourne?” Silla, accused of being a fertile eunuch, seems to regret being “unfurnishte with implements” as much as she does Julina's accusation. Ironically, by way of revenge against her accuser, it is she—or rather “he,” the false “Silvio”—who delivers the narrative's equivalent of the misogynistic Pallavicino-Orsino speech on female sexual incontinence: “… halfe in a chafe he [sic] saied. What lawe is able to restraine the foolishe indiscretion of a woman that yeeldeth herself to her owne desires? … with what snaffell is it possible to holde her backe from the execution of her filthinesse?”

Revelation of the phallus's absence is comically explicit in Riche, whose Silla-Silvio performs a striptease for Julina to show her what he both possesses (“his breasts”) and lacks (the guilty “partie”): “And here with all loosing his garmente doune to the stomacke, and shewed Julina his breasts and pretie teates … saiyng: Loe, Madame! behold here the partie whom you have chalenged to bee the father of your childe.” For Julina this display is disconcerting; if Silla perceives herself/himself as merely “unfurnishte,” or furnished only with pretty teats, Julina, who has already verified Silvio's virility, finds herself in the embarrassing position of Bibbiena's Fulvia, convinced that her lover is a hermaphrodite: “Julina did now thinke her self to be in a worse case then ever she was before.”

In Twelfth Night, by contrast, there is no striptease, since Viola remains dressed as a “boy” until the play's end; no dismembered predatory sea captain (transformed into the chivalric Captain of the “as an eunuch” exchange); no Ariostan trunk; and no imprisoning of the fertile eunuch (this fate is reserved for Malvolio). Twelfth Night similarly does away with sodomitic fireworks, vengeful voyeuristic merchant fathers, erectile scopophilic servants, devouring whores, busybody bawds, and the whole commedia apparatus of more or less brutal physical engagement and crude sexual bartering.

So what remains of this cultural history beyond Viola's single cryptic allusion? What appears to remain is discourse. Twelfth Night seems to enact a discursivizing—one is tempted to say a “civilizing”—of the often violent sexual and social intercourse of its antecedents. Indeed, from this point of view, Twelfth Night might be said to be more Italian than its Italian models, closer to the ideal of “civil conversation” as the interplay of ironical and persuasive wit. The relation of the play's discourse to the conversational and ideological texture of The Courtier is in many ways more direct than that of La calandria or its commedia offspring.
As a result the comedy's mimesis of intimacy is more persuasive than that of its Italian analogues, especially because it greatly extends the interiorization or privatisation of desire sketched out in Gl'ingannati and developed in Gl'inganni. Viola's dismay at the erotic effects of her disguise in 2.2 echoes the moments of confessional solitude in which her predecessors reveal their unease at playing their disguise role (Lelia's rape fantasy and, more closely, Ginevra's complaint at her maledetto habito):

I am the man: if it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.

(2.2.24-27)

But in fact her reflection on the incongruity of her role goes much further than Lelia's ambivalent wish to be found out or Ginevra's lamented deficiency of male desire. As her “male” performance begins to vacillate—appropriately enough, when she is faced with the phallic task of fighting a duel (albeit with the scarcely macho Sir Andrew)—Viola wittily signals her inadequacy in terms of the absent phallus: “Pray god defend me! A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man” (3.4.307-9). Viola's gentle allusion (“little thing”) suggests the sophisticated self-awareness of her discourse compared to the heavy sexual allusions of the play's forebears, just as her symbolic substitution by her twin (who takes her place as sword-wielding duellist) is far subtler than the appearance, say, of the literally hyperphallic Fabrizio in Gl'ingannati.

Twelfth Night may therefore be said to effect the definitive Lacanian passage from the “natural” law of coupling to the law of symbolic interchange. And yet this may not be the whole story of Viola and her eunuch, whose impressively Castiglionic credentials may themselves disguise more public, less polite aspects of her role and its cultural history. First, the social and ideological implications of Viola's performance extend far beyond the restricted confines of courtly civility. Indeed, the very closeness of the play's relations with The Courtier and later courtesy books such as La civile conversatione has a negative social fallout regarding Viola's own social position. Castiglione's concept of feminine corteziania is strictly limited to the class of people present at the Urbino conversations, namely the aristocracy or, at the least, the highest of the landed or clerical classes, just as Guazzo's “civility” is restricted to the gentry. Viola, instead, enters Orsino's court not as his social peer—not as an Elisabetta Gonzaga or indeed as an Olivia—but as a servant (“I'll serve this duke”). Although her own social origins are somewhat fuzzy, there are clear indications that she and Sebastian, as Olivia suspects, are of “gentle” blood, and that her disguise is thus a dressing-down rather than a dressing-up, a form of cross-class as well as cross-gender transvestism; as Barber puts it, “gentility shows through her disguise.”

In a play dominated by the compulsive drive towards upward social mobility (the efforts of Malvolio, Sir Andrew, Maria), Viola knowingly, if necessarily, steps down on the social scale at the very moment in which she approaches its apex, the court of Illyria. It is this act of social self-disguising that most immediately realizes her “as an eunuch” plan, the eunuch being by tradition a (usually low) servant within a (usually high) household. It is also Viola's closest “political” link with Terence's Chaerea, who makes the same temporary move down the social scale.

The implications of Viola's downward mobility are accentuated by the dramatic history of her inherited story. For all its “Italian” discursive wit, the play, unlike many other Shakespearean comedies, is not set in Italy. As has often been noted, and frequently translated into stage practice, the mythical Illyria unmistakably resembles the rural England of landed gentry and country mansions far more than it does any Mediterranean court society. We are even further removed from the mercantile society of the city-states that in the Italian analogues gives the castrato trope its energy and its peculiar monetary coloring. Shakespeare eliminates the
commedia merchants and their frenetic sexual-financial transactions: in Cristina Malcolmson's words, “the play relentlessly excludes the figure of the merchant, although in the sources, the father of Viola and Sebastian is almost always a merchant, and frequently the father of Olivia is so as well. … The play cannot afford the figure of the merchant because such a social role does not fit clearly enough into the traditional hierarchical order of servant and master.”

The world of Twelfth Night is a society not of Italian mercatores but of thinly disguised English possessores, a rigidly hierarchical order dominated by landowners (specifically, Orsino and Olivia) that reflects the far more static socioeconomic reality of early modern England compared with that of early modern Italy. As Richard A. Goldthwaite comments, “Italian society was subject to a dynamic of change unlike that of any other in Europe. Elsewhere, wealth was predominantly in land and therefore less subject to instability; it was largely in the hands of a closed caste that experienced less mobility.” “Elsewhere” means England above all. Thus Viola's self-enrollment in the ranks of the “English” servant classes is more restricting and more dangerous—because potentially more permanent—than the interclass comings and goings of Lelia and Ginevra within their more mobile social contexts. If the stakes of the disguise game are higher, so are the rewards: as in Eunuchus, self-relegation translates, finally, into self-promotion, since Viola is presumably destined to become “duchess” or “countess” of Orsino's Illyria.

Within this relatively static hierarchy of actual and would-be possessores, however, Viola is not alone in her dispossession. In addition to the focusing of the eunuch topos on Viola, there is in Twelfth Night, as in Eunuchus, a dissemination or contaminatio of the castration topic outward from the center, involving particularly the comedy's gulls. Thus the financial milking and fall from illusory social grace of Sir Andrew Aguecheek—a specular image of Viola's movement from self-relegation to social promotion—is figured in a series of insinuations regarding his impotence and effeminization, from Maria's “dry jest” and “now I let go your hand, I am barren” (1.3.75, 78) to Sir Toby's ambiguous description of Sir Andrew's lank hair (1.3.99-101), which seems to evoke an erotic encounter but in fact equates the flaccid Aguecheek with the distaff, symbol of the female. Sir Andrew confirms these innuendoes in his “thrasonical” reluctance to use his masculine weapon in the duel with Viola-Sebastian.

As for Malvolio, the clues to his “castrate” status are more cryptic, like the letter in which they are hidden. As John Astington has recently pointed out, the “some are born great” passage in the false billet doux from Olivia (2.5.145-46) seems to be modeled on Christ's speech to his disciples on marriage, with its distinction between three kinds of “eunuch,” that is, three kinds of impotence or celibacy. The implicit suggestion is that Malvolio himself—who, like Sir Andrew, will fail to marry Olivia and thus to achieve social promotion—belongs to this category, and indeed his public humiliation can be read, in Astington's words, as “a displaced gelding.”

Castration therefore takes on in Twelfth Night some of the broader significance that marks its dramatic career and that establishes it as a point of contact and attrition between opposing social forces. But the comedy also bears traces of that other, more strictly theatrical or metatheatrical history of the eunuchus as triumphant self-transcending performer, as shameless seducer of audiences, as ambiguous object of the desiring gaze. And these traces are present from Viola's first appearance in her male disguise. Viola's second scene, 1.4, in which she has already successfully established her place in Orsino's court and Orsino's affections, is usually taken to indicate her immediate abandonment of her “eunuch” role, since Orsino addresses her as “good youth” (l. 15) and “dear lad” (l. 29), just as he later calls her “boy” (2.4.14 and passim) and treats her as a young male servant: “The Duke's attitude to Cesario … shows that Viola has not entered his service in this [eunuch] character but as a page.” This raises the question, however, as to how Orsino, or for that matter the audience, is to distinguish between a young woman dressed as a young boy (or, on the Elizabethan stage, a boy dressed as a woman dressed as a boy) and a young woman dressed as a young castrated boy. What signs might mark out one from the other? And why, in any case, should Orsino not treat Cesario as a male servant, which—whether as page or as eunuch—is what he is? Should he address Viola as “good castrate” or “dear
eunuch”?

But Orsino's, and our own, perception of Cesario as fully “male” is open to question on more than negative grounds (lack of contrary evidence); in fact Orsino does refer quite overtly to Cesario's dubious manhood, calling our attention to the very ambivalence of the “good youth's” appearance:

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man; Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious: thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

(1.4.30-34)

Orsino's description of Viola's corporeal and vocal ambiguity is itself strikingly ambiguous. His questioning of her manhood is stated initially in terms not of gender but of age (“belie thy happy years”): it is Cesario's transitional adolescent state that belies his manhood: “Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy,” as Malvolio puts it in the following scene (1.5.158-59). A great deal of recent critical commentary, however, has stressed Orsino's barely disguised interest in the androgyny of Viola-Cesario's body as object of his charmed gaze.99 And yet what is most prominent in Orsino's depiction of his servant is not so much the object of his fascinated gaze, Cesario's body, as the object of his enchanted audition, Cesario's voice: “Thy small pipe … shrill and sound.” This brings us back once more to Viola's earlier speech.

Although, as we are constantly being told, it is never put literally to the test, Viola's claim “for I can sing” associates her eunuch role with a specific early modern performative (not to mention surgical) practice. Viola's musical concept of her disguise suggests that what she has in mind is not, as is sometimes supposed, an eastern slave but rather a contemporary Western evirato, a category of soprano singer much in vogue in turn-of-the-century Europe,100 as, for example, in the Sistine Chapel, where the castrati singers had by 1600 virtually replaced all the old falsettisti or male sopranos. The “sacred capons” had arrived in church choirs in Spain, Portugal, Germany (at the Munich chapel), and possibly in England, although officially banned.101

Castrato singers were operated on before puberty, thereby preventing both the thickening of the vocal cords and the development of the primary sexual organ. This cultural and medical phenomenon was due originally to the fact that women—following a restrictive interpretation of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians enjoining women to be “silent” in church—were prohibited from singing in places of worship and later, by extension, on the early operatic stage. It then rapidly became a fashion, thanks in part to the castrato's unique combination of wide vocal range with greater volume and agility than women or boy sopranos could rival; and thanks especially to the undoubted fascination that the androgynous singer, endowed with male/female body and voice, exercised over auditors of both sexes. Given the spectacular success of the castrati, it is fair to suppose that Viola's goal of self-elected unsexed “singer” is not a form of impotence but a mode of power, an irresistible appeal for her dramatic and theatrical audiences.

It is at this point that Viola's disguise as a metaphor for the privé becomes, on the contrary, a mode of public exhibition. As well as focusing attention on her voice and offering a plausible explanation for its unmusical highness,102 Viola's self-unfashioning as castrato foregrounds her role as a particular and novel form of theatrical performance. The evirato was practically synonymous with operatic theater, which arose partly in order to put the new professional castrato singers on public display. Iacopo Peri's Euridice, for example—first performed at the Pitti Palace in Florence on 6 October 1600 to celebrate the marriage of Maria de' Medici to Henri IV of France—was composed for and around two castrati, pupils of the opera's music director, Emilio del Cavalieri: one (probably “Fabio”) in the roles of Venus and Persephone, the other (“Giovannino”) in the role of Tragedy.103 What Viola seems to be laying claim to, in any case, is a similarly important role in what is, in effect, an intensely musical piece of entertainment.104
Orsino, duly captivated by Viola's discursive music, comments on her body and voice in appropriately musical terms, playing, in a series of stunning multilayered puns, on Viola/Cesario's state of suspension between the conditions of prepubescent male (as actor), fully grown female (as dramatis persona), and castrato singer (her disguise role): Cesario’s “small pipe” is at once the treble voice and undeveloped member of the boy actor, which is simultaneously “as a maiden's organ,” female vocality and genitality together; and the overall effect (“all”) is that of a woman’s “part,” that is, sex, voice, and dramatic role. But at the same time, the peculiar combination of small pipe (Viola’s “little thing” revisited from an anatomical rather than psychological viewpoint105), shrill voice, and “semblative” a woman's part or maiden's organ—an absence of other visible male appendages—is precisely the somatic and professional privilege of the evirato singer.

Orsino’s punning infatuation with Viola's small pipe recalls, or perhaps anticipates, the many sexual legends that grew up around the castrati as much sought-after heterosexual and, still more, homosexual fetish objects.106 The fact that Olivia is equally captivated by Cesario's corporeal and vocal charms (“Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs …” [1.5.296]) doubles the stakes of the game and confirms the spectacular triumph of Viola’s “musical” seduction. The very scenes in which Viola puts into effect her abnegation and self-mortification—concealing her desire for Orsino or acting as go-between for Orsino's desire towards Olivia—are the scenes in which she achieves erotic dominion over both as captivating castrato. Her eviration is simultaneously an act of sexual self-denial and an exercise in irresistible sexual allure.

The evirato allusion not only rehistoricizes the emasculation topos in terms of early modern performance but restores something of its Terentian force, shifting our perspective from the figurative to the literal, from the imaginary missing phallus of the castration complex to the surgically removed testicles of the unmanned servant. Moreover, it recuperates the full theatricality and centrality of the eunuch role itself with all its paradoxical erotic force. Viola, like Chaerea, becomes an exchange or gift-object, expression of another's desire—Chaerea's eunuch-gift is the expression of Thraso's supposed desire for Thais—but she is able to use her “sexless” servant role to realize her own desire towards her master. Not by chance, Twelfth Night is the first comedy after Eunuchus whose protagonist declares explicitly and voluntarily at the outset her intention to adopt this challenging and dangerous “part.”

Thus Shakespeare presents two apparently opposed behavioral and performative models in Twelfth Night—one private, polite, disembodied, the other public, theatrical, and erotically corporeal—which come together, courtesy of Viola's castrato, to form a single, extraordinarily dense piece of role-playing. The two kinds of historicity mediated by Viola's “eunuch,” the social-synchronic and the dramatic-diachronic, prove to be reciprocally enriching dimensions of symbolic exchange. To collapse one into the other, and thereby reduce the problematic complexity of the comedy's intercourse, would surely be an act of critical castration.

Notes

2. Lothian and Craik, eds., 1.2.56n; Twelfth Night, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 1.2.56n.
3. Lothian and Craik, eds., xxiii.
4. Donno, ed., 1.2.56n.


10. Orest Ranum's comments on the exchange of coded love letters have some bearing on Malvolio's attempts to decipher “Olivia's” epistle: “Such letters might be written in secret ciphers or in readily comprehensible signs such as ‘S,’ an enigmatic symbol of fidelity and love known since the fourteenth century but increasingly common after 1550” (“The Refuges of Intimacy” in Ariès and Duby, gen. eds., 3:207-63, esp. 246).


19. Castiglione, 221.


27. As Barbara Freedman says, “What Lacan refers to as ‘castration’ is the loss in sexuality resulting from the inevitable mediation of desire by signification” (“Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis,
30. See, for example, Aristophanes's literary burlesque Thesmophoriazousae (411 bc), which includes what is in effect a farcical symbolic castration rite: the protagonist Euripides has his own kinsman Mnēsiloχus ritualistically depilated so that he may impersonate a woman at the thēsmophoria (festival of women) and thus rescue the playwright from a death sentence imposed for his misogynistic treatment of women in his tragedies. The Thesmophoriazousae sets up a conflict between the phallophoria, dedicated to Dionysus, and the thēsmophoria, dedicated to Demeter and Persephone, who preside over a “carnival” parenthesis of female power. And indeed the women gathered for the religious festival take up the castration theme in a mocking assertion of their superiority: while they have kept their distaff (κανόν), the men have lost their spear shaft (κανόν) and shield (σκιαδέιον). Here the “castrate” becomes an object of political mediation and of cultural exchange. What the comedy, and in particular its unmanning trope, seems to enact is a mode of social transformation that foreshadows the early modern process of Zivilisation or privatisation. At the same time, the castration topos takes on clear theatrical implications, representing the actor's surrender of his subjectivity in taking on a role, especially a female role in an all-male mode of performance such as that of the Greek stage: “The play with castration,” as Froma I. Zeitlin puts it, “is appropriate enough to the inversion of roles, but the ambiguities of role-playing involve both this and that, even for Mnēsiloχus, who plays so ill and, by his misplaying, exposes, when the women expose him, the limits of mimesis” (“Travesties of gender and genre in Aristophanes' Thesmophoriazousae” in Reflections of Women in Antiquity, Helene P. Foley, ed. [New York and London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981], 169-217, esp. 179).
33. Carlin A. Barton, The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 72-73. Compare Quintilian's proverb “Libidinosior es quam ullus spado”: “You are more libidinous than any eunuch” (quoted in Barton, 72). Basil of Ancyra in the fourth-century De virginitate warns virgins not to trust eunuchs, saying that those castrated in adulthood “burn with greater and less restrained desire for sexual union, and … not only do they feel this ardour, but they think they can defile any woman they meet without risk” (quoted in Rousselle, 123).
34. Quotations of Terence follow Richard Bernard, Terence in English. Fabvlae comici facetissimi et elegantissimi poetae Terentii (Cambridge, 1607), 152, hereafter cited as “Bernard.”
35. On the male gaze, see Laura Mulvey's classic essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Screen 16 (1975): 6-18; and for an excellent discussion of the Lacanian gaze in relation to theater and feminism, see Freedman, passim.
36. Bernard, 152.
38. Cynthia Dessen, “The Figure of the Eunuch in Terence's Eunuchus,” forthcoming in Helios. I am very grateful to Professor Dessen for the opportunity to read her important article in manuscript and to exchange ideas with her about the play and its heritage.
41. Bernard, 156.
44. Giorgio Padoan has suggested that “Castiglione's” prologue is really by Bibbiena himself; see Clubb, “Castiglione's Humanistic Art and Renaissance Drama” in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand, eds. (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1983), 191-208.
45. Castiglione, 154ff.
48. See Freud's account of the little boy who discovers his mother's or sister's lack of a phallus: “It is self-evident to a male child that a genital like his own is to be attributed to everyone he knows, and he cannot make its absence tally with his picture of other people” (*Three Essays on Sexuality: II. Infantile Sexuality*, trans. and ed. James Strachey [New York: Basic Books, 1979], 60).
49. Bibbiena, k1v-k2v.
50. “Fessenio: … they don't fit if you don't cut off their hands, arms, and legs according to need. … Then once you get into the port, anyone who wants to takes back his member and screws it back on. It often happens that, inadvertently or maliciously, someone takes another's member and puts it where he likes best; and sometimes it doesn't work out because he takes a member which is bigger than his own” (Bibbiena, e4r).
51. Bibbiena, g2v and k4v.
52. “Maco: I'm dead. Escape, escape, the Spaniards have made a hole in my behind with their sword: where shall I go? where shall I flee? where shall I hide? … The Spaniards have cut me to pieces” (*La cortigiana* in *Tutte le commedie*, ed. G. B. De Sanctis [Milan: Mursia, 1968], 113-223, esp. 207 and 219, my translation). Aretino's closest adaptation of *Eunuchus* is *La Talanta* (1537), in which the courtesan Talanta—directly modeled on Terence's Thais—is courted by three *innamorati*: the earnest young Orfinio (the Phaedria role), the *miles gloriosus* Captain Tinca (Thraso), and the old Venetian miser Vergolo (Aretino's addition), receiving gifts from each suitor. The play's derivation and departures from Terence are raised explicitly by Orfinio's disclaimer to Talanta: “I who am not Thais's Phaedria …” (*La Talanta* in De Sanctis, ed., 335-462, esp. 365, my translation).
53. Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609) revisits *Eunuchus* via *The Stablesmaster*, reworking the duke of Mantua's prank against his stablemaster in the form of the marrying-a-boy trick played by Dauphine on his uncle, Morose. From Terence, via Aretino, Jonson inherits the trope of castration as social epidemic: not the political corruption of Rome or the universal sodomy of Mantua but the generalized gender reversal that afflicts contemporary London. The play's transvestite plot, presided over by the ominously named Cutbeard, who finds Morose a silent “wife,” enacts such reversals through the exchange of the play's floating signifier, the phallus. Like the stablemaster, Morose is obliged, in order to be free of his wife, to make a public confession before the “Ladies” of his congenital (or perhaps nongenital) lack of attributes (*Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52], 5:141-271, esp. 264-65). Jonson might be said to extend the castration trope to the audience, keeping his spectators in the dark regarding Dauphine's trick until
the very end and thereby leaving them as disarmed as Morose himself; see Laura Levine, *Men in women's clothing: Anti-theatricality and effeminization, 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 76-77.

54. The Sack of Rome, in which German soldiers besieged the Papal stronghold of Castel Sant'Angelo before being forced to withdraw due to the plague, was perhaps the most traumatic event in early modern Italian history and is described by Aretino himself in the *Sei giorni* (1534) precisely as the mass rape of nuns by invading soldiers, caused by the pope's sodomistic predilections. As James Grantham Turner has commented with reference to the *Sei giorni*, “The ‘public’ realm of the Sack and the ‘private’ realm of sexuality encode one another. The violated woman became a figure for the devastation of the city, while the Sack itself was conceived in sexual terms; before and after the event, Rome was represented as a new Sodom destroyed on account of the pope's affairs with men” (“Introduction: A history of sexuality in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, texts, images*, James Grantham Turner, ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993], 1-9, esp. 2).


58. The Academy was devoted to “exercises in vulgar as well as Greek and Latin letters, reading, disputing, composing, interpreting, writing, and doing everything one usually does in order to learn. … And with the firm resolution to pretend not to understand or care about anything else in the world, they were pleased to take the name *Intronati*” (Prologue to the constitution of the Academy, quoted in *Teatro del Cinquecento*, Vol. 2 of *Il teatro italiano*, Guido Davico Bonino, ed., 19 vols. [Turin: Einaudi, 1977-91], 444, my translation).

59. “[The academicians] said that this woman would have imitated well the part of a servant, this other a matron, that young man a parasite, that other a lover, and so went around distributing all the parts that are required in a comedy” (G. Bargagli, *Dialogo dei Giuochi che nelle vegghie senesi si usano di fare* [Siena, 1572], 84-85, quoted in Bonino, ed., 445).

60. It might be noted that the Intronati performed Piccolomini's comedy *L'amor costante* for the “invader” Charles V on his visit to Siena in 1536.


65. Secchi, 29.
68. Gonzaga, 56v.
69. Gonzaga, 20v.
70. Gonzaga, 21v.
72. Guazzo, 1:158.
73. “Another used likewyse to say, that this world was a stage, wee the players whiche present the Comedie, and the gods, the lookers on. … I will propose unto you a kinde of conversation, not to stande us chiefly in steede in markets, Comedies, and other outwarde things subject to fortune, but to the ende wee may thereby learne good manners and conditions, by meanes whereof, the giftes of fortune are distributed and conservd, and the favour and good will of others obtained” (Guazzo, 1:118-19). On this passage and the “performance” of civility, see Maureen Quilligan, “Staging gender: William Shakespeare and Elizabeth Cary” in Turner, ed., 208-32, esp. 210.
76. See Baldwin, 386-93.
77. On Udall's use of Terence, see Baldwin, 380-401.
79. Udall in Boas, ed., 4.3.83; 3.3.46-48; and 3.4.16 and 87-90.
80. Udall in Boas, ed., 4.7.60 and 4.3.41-43.
81. John Rainolds, Th'overthrow of stage-playes (Middleburg, 1599), 34. Compare William Camden: “An Eunuch, for whom wee haue no name, but from the Greekes, they could aptly name Vnstana, that is, without stones” (Remaines concerning Britaine [1605; London, 1614], 27). Rainolds may deliberately pun on stones in the Elizabethan meaning of testicles.
82. Rainolds, 87.
86. Compare Rosalind's equivocation in her/his epilogue: “I am not furnished like a beggar” (As You Like It, ed. Agnes Latham [London: Methuen, 1975], 5.4.206-7).
89. Riche in Bullough, ed., 361.
91. The trunk is discursivized in Viola's implicit reference at the end of the play: “The captain that did bring me first on shore / Hath my maid's garments” (5.1.272-73). Kemble introduced the trunk as
stage property, adding the lines “That trunk, the reliques of my sea-drown'd brother, / Will furnish man's apparel to my need” —which Kemble changed to “as a page”—speech (John Philip Kemble Promptbooks, ed. Charles H. Shattuck, 11 vols. [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1974], 9:6).

92. According to Barbara Freedman, Sebastian “replaces her as the ultimate possessor of the maternal object” (“Separation and Fusion in Twelfth Night” in Psychoanalytic Approaches to Literature and Film, Maurice Charney and Joseph Reppen, eds. [Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1987], 96-119, esp. 115).


94. See Jones in Romano and Vivanti, eds., 200-229.

95. Goldthwaite, 671.

96. “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake” (The Holy Bible [Oxford: University Press, 1970], Matthew 19:12). See John Astington, “Malvolio and the Eunuchs: Texts and Revels in Twelfth Night,” Shakespeare Survey 46 (1994): 23-34.

97. Astington, 26. Compare Laurie E. Osborne's Lacanian reading of the letter, which arrives at a similar conclusion from a quite different perspective: “In possessing the letter, Malvolio is feminized, losing his masculine attributes without knowing it while taking on himself the mystery of the signifier” (74).

98. Lothian and Craik, eds., 1.2.56n.


100. Among other explicit Shakespearean references to eunuchs, there are two allusions to the castrated singer, one in A Midsummer Night's Dream (ed. Harold F. Brooks [London: Methuen, 1979], 5.1.44-46): “Theseus: [Reads.] ‘The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung / By an Athenian eunuch to the harp’? / We'll none of that”; and the other in Cymbeline (ed. J. M. Nosworthy [London: Methuen, 1955], 2.3.27-31): “Cloten: So get you gone: if this penetrate, I will consider your music the better: if it do not, it is a vice in her ears, which horse-hairs, and calves'-guts, nor the voice of unpaved eunuch to boot, can never amend.” Note, in this context, the probable pun on penetrate.

101. On the evirati singers, see in particular Angus Heriot, The Castrati in Opera (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956), and Patrick Barbier, Histoire des castrats (Paris: Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1989); other relevant studies include E. Celani, I cantori della Cappella Pontificia nei secoli XVI-XVIII (Turin: Bocca, 1909); G. Monaldi, Cantanti evirati celebri del teatro italiano, secoli ...


104. It may be merely historical coincidence that among the aristocratic auditors present at this performance was Orsino, Duke of Bracciano, who shortly thereafter set out for the court of Elizabeth I, and whose relationship to the Orsino of Twelfth Night has long been the subject of controversy; see Leslie Hotson, The First Night of Twelfth Night (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 47-49. Hotson's suggestion that Twelfth Night was performed on the occasion of Orsino's visit to Elizabeth has not been widely accepted.

105. Compare Sonnet 20, in which the poet blazons the fair youth as a woman—“And for a woman wert thou first created”—to whom Nature has added “one thing to my purpose nothing.” Stephen Booth glosses “thing” as “(2) generative organ” and “nothing” as “vulva” (Shakespeare's Sonnets [New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1977], 21 and 164). There may also be a pun on “Gilding/gelding” (l. 6). The poet, as it were, mentally “castrates” the youth, whose situation—as simultaneous object of the desiring male gaze and of female passion (“Which steales mens eyes and womens soules amazeth”)—recalls Viola's two-way “seduction.”

106. See Barbier, 125-44. The (continuing) sexual as well as musical fascination exercised by the evirati is attested to by Gerard Corbiau's recent film Farinelli (1995).

Criticism: Themes: John Kerrigan (essay date 1997)


[In the following essay, Kerrigan studies Twelfth Night within the context of the Renaissance conventions regarding secrecy and gossip, finding that gossip is a means—both in early modern society and in the play—of maintaining social bonds. Kerrigan also discusses the affinity between Cesario and Malvolio, noting that as servants both characters are expected to be discreet.]

Renaissance secrecy is no longer quite as secret as it was. Art historians and iconologists have returned to the myths and emblems explored by Panofsky and Edgar Wind, and reassessed (often sceptically) their claims to hermetic wisdom. Thanks to Jonathan Goldberg and Richard Rambuss, we now have a better understanding of the early modern English secretary,¹ and of how his pen could produce, in Lois Potter's phrase, Secret Rites and Secret Writing.² Not just in popular biographies of Marlowe and Shakespeare,³ but in such Foucauldian accounts of high culture as John Michael Archer's Sovereignty and Intelligence,⁴ the world of Renaissance espionage is being analysed afresh. William W. E. Slichts has written at useful length about conspiracy, fraud and censorship in middle-period Jonson.⁵ And, though the tide of Puttenham studies has now begun to ebb, students of Elizabethan England are still profiting from the work done by Daniel Javitch and Frank Whigham⁶ on what The Arte of English Poesie calls ‘false semblant’ or ‘the Courtly figure Allegoria’⁷—a line of enquiry
which leads back to the civilized dissimulation advocated by Castiglione, but also to the politic ruthlessness of
‘l’art machiavélien d’être secret’.\(^8\)

These investigations have not advanced in a state of mutual ignorance, but they have, inevitably, suffered
from a degree of exclusive specialism. What interests me, on the other hand, is how different modes of
concealment operated together. Certainly, I have found it impossible, in thinking about *Twelfth Night*, to
separate iconography from secretarial inscription (as when Malvolio unpicks the Lucrece seal of silence on
Maria's riddling letter), or to divorce Sebastian's intelligence-gathering, among ‘the memorials and the things
of fame’ in Illyria,\(^9\) from that rhetorical discretion in him which is equally recommended in courtesy
literature.\(^10\) At the same time, *Twelfth Night* pushes one's perception of Renaissance secrecy beyond the usual
categories. It makes one return, for instance, to courtesy literature to notice what it says about that irregular
but ubiquitous practice, the circulation of secrets as gossip, and to wonder how the gendered speech-patterns
which Castiglione and his successors discuss might bear on the reticences and self-concealments involved in
the construction of sexual identity.

By gesturing towards social practice, I am, of course, begging questions, and it is worth saying, at once, that
Elizabethan London was not, in my view, full of cross-dressed maidens in love with Dukes. There is plainly
much to be said against the current historicist tendency to discount the made uniqueness of particular
Shakespearian play-scripts for the sake of readily meshing them with circumstantial contexts. Formalist
criticism had its drawbacks, but its respect for the artful integrity—for the shifting, secret coherence—of such
elusive works as *Twelfth Night* remains, in my view, admirable. On the other hand, there is no doubt that, as
Richard Wilson (among others) has shown with *As You Like It*,\(^11\) mature Shakespearian comedy goes much
further in internalizing and articulating political conflict than traditional criticism realized. Good productions
of *Twelfth Night*—such as John Barton's in 1969—have always been alert to the tensions which arise between
kin-status and the dignity of office (Sir Toby vs. Malvolio), to the insecurity of a figure like Maria, whose
social rank is ambiguous, and to the importance, in Illyria, of jewels and cash changing hands. Above all, in
this connection, *Twelfth Night* is interested in service. It explores the fraught relations which often held, in
early modern households, between employment and eroticism. This dialectic is most active in the
Viola-Orsino plot,\(^12\) but it also significantly contributes to the misfortunes of Malvolio. Too often, critics view
his gulling as an incidental intrigue. When he asks his mistress, however, in Act 5, ‘tell me, in the modesty of
honour, / Why you have given me such clear lights of favour’ (5.1.334-5), he lands on a complex word which
catches his outraged feeling that his preferment (both real and imaginary) cannot have stemmed from nothing
in Olivia's heart. The play punishes the steward for believing that the more precisely he obeys his mistress's
wishes the more he will deserve her favour (in every sense), even while it allows, in Cesario/Viola's relations
with Orsino, a ripening into love of what is erotically problematic in Elizabethan ideas of service.

One way of developing these claims is to make an oblique approach to *Twelfth Night* through the
autobiography of Thomas Whythorne: the Tudor poet and musician who was employed in a series of noble
households before his death in 1596. Though the memoir which he compiled in the late 1570s lacks great
events, it is altogether enthralling because of its attentiveness to social detail, its intricacy of self-criticism and
rationalization, and its almost neurotic sensitivity to the role of flirtation, deceit and gossip in the politics of
favour. Like Gascoigne's *Adventures of Master F. J.*—a work which probably suggested to Whythorne how
his occasional poems could be linked by commentary and narrative—the *book of songs and sonnets, with long
discourses set with them* is particularly alive to the use and abuse of secrecy. Thus, as autobiographical
writing starts to emerge from the commonplaces which begin the memoir, Whythorne describes a friend who
once told a woman ‘the very secrets that were hidden in his heart’, only for her to ‘blaz[e] abroad that which
he had told her to keep in secret’.\(^13\) Similarly, the first of many love intrigues in which he played a part
involves a girl who wooed him by leaving a note threaded through the strings of his gittern. His typically wary
reply praised her for proceeding 'secretly', but gossip made the affair ‘known all about the house’ and the girl
was promptly discharged (pp. 22-3). Throughout his memoir, Whythorne describes situations in which
secrecy and dissimulation shadow-box with each other and attempt to evade the tattling which his epigram,
‘Of secret things’, calls ‘blab’ (p. 224).

The episode which bears most interestingly on *Twelfth Night*—though it can only be loosely contextual—comes shortly after the dismissal of the gittern girl, while Whythorne was still at the age which he calls ‘adolescency’ (p. 11). Like the young Cesario waiting upon Olivia, Whythorne found his way to the household of a beautiful young widow. Even before he accepted a position as her tutor and ‘servingman’, he was wary of enduring ‘the life of a water-spaniel, that must be at commandment to fetch or bring here, or carry there’ (p. 28). His resentment mounted when he discovered how manipulative his mistress could be. Whythorne vividly describes the sort of emotional pressure which could be brought to bear on a man whose position as a servant resembled that of a biddable suitor:

Many times when I was not nigh unto her, although she had appointed me to wait on her cup when she sat at meat, she would bid me come nigher unto her. And therewithal scoffingly she would say to those that were with her, ‘I would fain have my man to be in love with me, for then he would not be thus far from me, but would be always at mine elbow.’ And then would she sometimes put a piece of good meat and bread on her trencher, and forthwith bid me give her a clean trencher, for the which I should have that of hers with the bread and meat on it.

(p. 29)

The problem for Whythorne, however—as he chooses to remember the situation—was that, while he disliked these coercive games, he had to flirt with a mistress towards whom he was clearly attracted (not least in her exercise of power) because ‘open contempt might breed such secret hate in her toward me’ (p. 30). Innured, like F. J., to duplicity, and hoping for advancement, he recalls deciding that, ‘if she did dissemble, I, to requite her, thought that to dissemble with a dissembler was no dissimulation … But and if she meant good will indeed, then I was not willing to lose it, because of the commodities that might be gotten by such a one as she, either by marriage or otherwise’ (pp. 30-1). As a result, when the widow told him ‘how she would have me to apparel myself, as of what stuff, and how she would have it made’ (though cross-gartering is not specified), he ‘feathered his nest’ by accepting money from her to buy clothes and other finery (p. 32). He also wrote to her in secret, and was, like Malvolio, deceived by an encouraging letter which, he later discovered, had been written by her ‘waiting gentlewoman’ (p. 34). By now, of course, gossip was rife (the attempt at secrecy assured that)—‘our affairs were not so closely handled but they were espied and much talked of in the house’ (p. 36)—and the problem of his mistress having to disguise any signs of love which might, in themselves, be dissimulated, added to Whythorne's difficulty in deciding whether she could be won. The ‘comical’ affair (as he calls it) reached its climax when he appeared before her, not exactly in yellow stockings, but in ‘garments of russet colour (the which colour signifieth the wearer thereof to have hope). And one time I did wear hops in my hat also; the which when my mistress had espied, she in a few scoffing words told me that the wearing of hops did but show that I should hope without that which I hoped for’ (pp. 40-1). Thanks to his quibbling wit, Whythorne was able to deflect this rebuff, but his suit thereafter cooled.

If one moves too hastily from this material across to Viola and Malvolio, the contrasts are overwhelming. Where Whythorne describes his affair in such calculating and duplicitous terms that even an impression of mutual vulnerability cannot offset his cynicism, *Twelfth Night* shows Viola concealing what she is to persist in faithful service. Unlike Rosalind, who seems, at least initially, pleased by the experimental scope which men's attire affords, she speaks of frustration and self-division, and the dissembling which her disguise entails is not embraced with relish. Malvolio, rather similarly, is constrained by the habit he adopts. His alacrity in putting on yellow stockings may smack of the self-promotion which infuriates Sir Toby, but his inability to see (as Whythorne instantly would) that he is being made a fool of stems as much from his eagerness to obey Olivia as from ingrown pride. Yet these differences between the memoir and *Twelfth Night* should not distract attention from their shared early modern fascination with the ambiguities of service, and their interest in how secrecy relates to what Cesario calls ‘babbling gossip’ (1.5.277).
Certainly these issues are prominent in Viola's opening scene. When she questions the Captain about Illyria, he can tell her of the Duke's love for Olivia—that obsession of his 'secret soul' (below, p. 72)—because 'murmur' has put it about. 'What great ones do,' he observes, 'the less will prattle of' (1.2.32-3). Gossip is equally active around the countess's reclusive life. The Captain knows of her resistance to Orsino because, again, of report: '(They say) she hath abjur'd the company / And sight of men' (40-1). Olivia's withdrawal into mourning for the death of her father and brother naturally attracts Viola, because she fears herself equally bereft, and she cries out for a position in her household which she imagines will bring emotional consonance: 'O that I serv'd that lady' (41). Though the motif is merely incipient, the play is beginning its exploration of the knot which ties employment to love. Hence the Captain's reply, 'That were hard to compass, / Because she will admit no kind of suit, / No, not the Duke's' (44-6), where the idea of suing to serve is inextricable from a lover's suit.

In Shakespeare's chief source, Barnabe Riche's novella 'Of Apolonius and Silla', the Captain is a villain whose designs on Silla's virtue are only foiled by tempest and shipwreck. Early audiences of Twelfth Night may or may not have recalled this when they saw Viola come on stage with the Captain, but Shakespeare alludes, through the heroine, to the possibility that he might be as he is in Riche:

There is a fair behaviour in thee, Captain;  
And though that nature with a beauteous wall  
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee  
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits  
With this thy fair and outward character.  
I prithee (and I'll pay thee bounteously)  
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid  
For such disguise as haply shall become  
The form of my intent.

(47-55)

This is touchingly complex because Viola's youthful moralism about appearances slips into an equally youthful trust, while she raises doubts about dissimulation in the same breath as she proposes concealment. But their deeper interest lies in their showing us how secrets are made: produced through interaction with possible or actual disclosure. For what is only known to yourself cannot be a secret, except in so far as its potential for disclosure anticipates that disclosure, or in so far as you might feel (as Viola/Cesario will later feel) that you are sharing the secret with your self as with another person.

Unlike Silla, Viola does not explicitly disguise herself in men's clothes to avoid sexual predators. While she may share this motive, the scene points towards a practical desire to secure a court position and an impulse to escape from herself. It is as though, by becoming Cesario, she hoped to leave Viola to grieve in secret. That is, paradoxically, why her suit to serve the Duke can resemble Olivia's immurement. Just as the countess resolves to withdraw into a nun's asexuality, and thus becomes a 'cloistress' (1.1.28), so Viola proposes to be a eunuch—if not for the kingdom of heaven, then at least to sing at court. 'I'll serve this duke', she says:

Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.  
It may be worth thy pains; for I can sing,  
And speak to him in many sorts of music,  
That will allow me very worth his service.

(55-9)

These lines have baffled editors not least because they seem to go from singing to speech but then return to music. What Viola is saying, however, in a play which is much concerned with that branch of rhetoric which Feste calls vox (5.1.295), is that she is not only musically competent but has the flexible promunicatio of a
courtier. ‘The pleasure of speech,’ writes Stefan Guazzo, in Pettie's 1581 translation of The Civile Conversation, ‘so wel as of Musicke, proceedeth of the chaunge of the voyce, yea … the change of the voice, like an instrument of divers strings, is verie acceptable, and easeth both the hearer and the speaker’.14 ‘If Nature haue denied you a tunable accent,’ James Cleland urges in Hb.pi ![b.alpha! elta! alpha!], or The Institution of a Young Noble Man (1607), ‘studie to amend it by art the best yee maie’ (p. 186). Interestingly, when Viola concludes the scene by urging ‘silence’ on the Captain (61), he sustains her rhetorical concerns by promising to avoid the speech-style which Thomas Whythorne calls ‘blab’: ‘Be you his eunuch, and your mute I'll be: / When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes not see’ (62-3).

At once the blabbers enter, as Maria, Sir Toby and, a few lines later, Sir Andrew come on stage. Maria is eager for Toby to avoid expulsion from Olivia's household by moderating his behaviour, but when she urges, ‘confine yourself within the modest limits of order’, he replies: ‘I'll confine myself no finer than I am’ (I.3.8-10). We have by this point become so accustomed to characters seeking confinement—Orsino lying ‘canoped with bowers’ (I.1.41), the countess's enclosure in mourning—that Toby's quibbling excess, as he sprawls through the play's first prose dialogue, is bound to appeal. As the scene goes on, however, the superb inconsequentiality of Maria's wit, when she toys with Sir Andrew, and his stupefying inability to get a grip on language, test the audience's patience. We feel assailed as well as amused by the prattle and networking chat which conduct books typically chastise by citing Plutarch's De Garrulitate. This challenge to the audience mounts. As the RSC director John Caird has noted, it creates problems in production that Sir Toby ‘goes on and on and on’ during Acts 2 and 3.15 Even in I.3, Shakespeare points up the garrulity of networking. Sir Andrew's reputation has reached Maria, for instance, from those she refers to as ‘the prudent’ and Toby calls ‘scoundrels and subtractors’ (32-5). Where report is offered sceptically by the Captain, gossip is here the stuff of life.

Anthropological work on gossip has stressed the importance of verbal trivia in maintaining social bonds. Max Gluckman, for instance, argues that scandalous chat draws participants together while serving to exclude others because access to conversation depends on inside knowledge. ‘The right to gossip about certain people is’, he says, ‘a privilege which is only extended to a person when he or she is accepted as a member of a group.’16 This account can be squared with the way the lighter people network in Twelfth Night in opposition to the aloof Malvolio. But Gluckman's critics are right to insist that gossiping is by no means always collective, and that a group can turn out, once inspected, to be full of conversational partitions.17 In that sense, the garrulous in Twelfth Night form an interestingly fractious set, with Fabian and Feste as satellites, and Sir Toby prepared to bamboozle Andrew with what sounds like friendly chat, in ways which make it easier for him to scorn and reject him in Act 5. But Sir Andrew is not the only one left behind in the conversational flow. Everyone who works on gossip would agree that the morsels of information and rumour which it retails must have some element of obscurity, some secret component worth disclosing, since they would otherwise not be passed on. Twelfth Night respects this principle to the point, almost, of defiance, by including material which may well have been written to exclude early audiences from what the play's in-crowd knows, and which certainly excludes us now. Who, for instance, is Mistress Mall, and why should we care about her picture?

In the drinking scene of Act 2, the obscurities of prattling accumulate. What is Sir Toby on about when he says, ‘My lady's a Cataian, we are politicians, Malvolio's a Peg-a-Ramsey’ (2.3.76-7)? The clown calls this ‘admirable fooling’ (81), and it does, indeed, resemble the patter of Feste, which rings in Andrew's empty head, and which he now babbles out: ‘thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spok'st of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus’ (22-4). This replication of proliferating nonsense recalls Plutarch's comparison of gossip to the porch or gallery at Olympia which ‘from one voice by sundry reflections and reverberations … rendered seven ecchoes’. When speech comes ‘to the eares of a babbler,’ he says, ‘it resoundeth again on every side … insomuch, as a man may well say: That the conducts and passages of their hearing reach not to the braine … but onely to their tongue.’18 Babbling of this sort climaxes in the drinking scene for obvious reasons. It hardly needs Plutarch to tell us (though he does so more
than once) that drunkenness provokes ‘much babbling and foolish prattle’ (p. 194). What we can misunderstand, historically, is that the folly of babbling was—partly because of Plutarch—so routinely associated with drink that when a commentator such as Thomas Wright seeks to explain garrulity, he gravitates to talk of ‘foolery’ and ale-house metaphors: ‘he that wil pourre forth all he conceiueth, deliuereth dregges with drinke, and as for the most part, presently men apprehend more folly than wisdom, so he that sodainely uttereth all he vnderstandeth, blabeth forth more froath than good liquor’. This is the mixture of assumptions which Malvolio provocatively ignites when he stalks in and rebukes the drinkers for choosing ‘to gable like tinkers’ (88-9).

It should now be clear why the Captain's word ‘blab’ refers as much to a style of speech as to the betrayal of secrets. Early modern accounts of the psychology and practice of gossip start, as it were, from rhetoric. The blabber was a verbal incontinent, whose itch to gable whatever was in his mind would lead (as Plutarch warned) to rash disclosure. Avoid making friends, advises Wright, with the ‘blabbish, and … indiscreet’ because they will not ‘keep secret, or conserue thy credit, and so with one breath they blow all away’ (pp. 119-20). The corresponding virtue to this vice was called ‘discretion’—a word which, symptomatically, has etymological and semantic links with ‘secrecy’. Time and again, in conduct books, gentlemen are advised to be discreet. The courtier, Castiglione says, ‘shall be no carier about of trifling newes … He shall be no babbler [but keep] alwayes within his boundes.’ In Guazzo, who is almost anticourtly, at moments, in his mistrust of easy eloquence, there is an equally firm resistance to what Cleland calls ‘pratling’ and ‘Babling’ (p. 189). ‘Blaze neuer anie mans secret,’ Cleland says, ‘nor speake of that which discretion commandeth you to conceale, albeit it was not commended to your silence’ (p. 190).

This has a gendered aspect, in that, while gentlemen are encouraged discreetly to converse, women are incited to a discretion which can be absolute. It is the anti-feminist Lord Gaspar who maintains, in Castiglione, ‘that the verye same rules that are given for the Courtier, serve also for the woman’, and the sympathetic Julian, who argues that ‘in her factions, maners, woordes, gestures and conversation (me thinke) the woman ought to be muche unlike the man’ (pp. 215-16). Like the courtier, he argues, women should be ‘discreete’ and avoid ‘babblinge’, but they should concentrate, further, on cultivating ‘sweetnesse’ and reticence (pp. 216-18). English writers were as confident as Guazzo that ‘a young man is to be blamed, which will talke like an olde man, and a woman which will speake like a man’ (1, p. 169). Nor was it just the fools, including Sir John Daw in Epicoene, who believed that ‘Silence in woman is like speech in man.’ In The English Gentlewoman (1631), Richard Brathwait pushes his praise of ‘Discretion’ to the point of insisting that ‘bashfull silence is an ornament’ in women (p. 89). Against the background of a prejudice which assumed (as it still does) that women are more garrulous than men, he writes: ‘It suites not with her honour, for a young woman to be prolocutor. But especially, when either men are in presence, or ancient Matrons, to whom shee owes a ciuill reuerence, it will become her to tip her tongue with silence’ (ibid.).

In ‘The Table’ to The English Gentlewoman, Brathwait cites the apothegm, ““Violets, though they grow low and neare the earth, smell sweetest: and Honour appeares the fallest of beauty, when she is humblest”” (††2). As Gerard's Herball confirms, the Latin word ‘Viola’ was used in Elizabethan England as another name for the violet, a flower which, in general, was associated with modesty. What Cesario inherits from Viola is the discretion which a female upbringing made second nature to gentlewomen. What he gains, as it were, over Viola is permission to speak out—even when men are present. These claims are not in conflict with traditional accounts of the role, but they do, I think, point up the hybridity of Viola's performance. To think about her in relation to courtesy literature is to notice those comical moments when she overplays the courtly rhetoric—as when Cesario impresses Sir Andrew (always a bad sign) by praying for the heavens to ‘rain odours’ on Olivia, or, more oddly, when Andrew surprises us by speaking French, and exchanges such exquisite salutations with Cesario that both are satirically construed. As strikingly, to look at Viola in the light of Guazzo, Cleland and other conduct writers is to recognize the acute importance of discretion in the play.
While describing his affair with the widow, Whythorne glumly notes: 'It is a common matter among servants, … if any one of them be in favour with their masters or mistresses above the rest, by and by all the rest of the servants will envy him or her, and seek all the means and ways that they can imagine to bring them out of credit' (p. 36). Again, it would be wrong to read too directly from this into Twelfth Night. Because critics have neglected the politics of favour, however, they have missed the edginess of Viola's first exchange as Cesario, when s/he comes on stage with Valentine, who was trusted, in I.1, with the task of visiting Olivia, but who is now losing his influence. ‘If the Duke continue these favours towards you,’ Valentine says, ‘you are like to be much advanced: he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.’ This could be spoken neutrally, but Cesario's reply indicates that the actor playing Valentine should give his words some salt: ‘You either fear his humour, or my negligence, that you call in question the continuance of his love. Is he inconstant, sir, in his favours?’ (I.4.1-7). The question is fascinatingly pitched, given the erotic range of ‘favour’, since the constancy which Cesario hopes for in his master is not one which Viola, who now loves the Duke, would unambiguously welcome—at least in Orsino's relations with Olivia.

One thing is clear immediately, though: Valentine is right to envy Cesario's progress with Orsino. As soon as the Duke appears, his cry is for Cesario, and for the rest to stand ‘aloof’ (12). Drawing his servant down-stage, no doubt, into the theatre-space which signifies and facilitates intimate conversation, he says:

Thou know'st no less but all: I have unclasp'd
To thee the book even of my secret soul.
Therefore, good youth, address thy gait unto her,
Be not denied access …

(12-16)

In the Italian comedy Gl’Ingannati—a probable source for Twelfth Night—the Viola-figure says to Clemenzia, when asked why she attends her lover in disguise, 'Do you think a woman in love is unhappy to see her beloved continually, to speak to him, touch him, hear his secrets … ?' Shakespeare's emphasis is more on the intimacies of disclosure than on the content of those ‘secrets’ which are, in any case, the stuff of Illyrian gossip. This is not a process which can be represented, entirely, through dialogue. It depends on proximity and touch between actors, and on the boy or woman playing Cesario having a demeanour which promises that discretion described in Bacon's ‘Of Simulation and Dissimulation’: ‘the Secret Man, heareth many Confessions; For who will open himselfe, to a Blab or a Babler? But if a man be thought Secret, it inviteth Discoverie.’

Cesario gains access to Olivia by means of stubborn pertness, but his suit is then advanced because he is a ‘Secret Man’. As Bacon adds, with worldly acumen: ‘Mysteries are due to Secrecy. Besides (to say Truth) Nakednesse is uncomely, as well in Minde, as Body; and it addeth no small Reverence, to Mens Manners, and Actions, if they be not altogether Open’ (ibid.). If there is a technology of mystery, Cesario exemplifies it. Olivia's veil of mourning cannot but advertise the celebrated beauty it conceals, and she is right (though her modesty is false) to worry about prosaic nakedness when the lacy screen is lifted to reveal ‘two lips indifferent red … two grey eyes, with lids to them’ (I.5.250-1). Cesario, whose ‘smooth and rubious’ lips are so meshed into gender ambiguity that their very nakedness tantalises (I.4.32), has a nature more covert and estranged, which, because of Viola's recessive psychology, is not just disguised by clothes. His embassy goes in stages. At first, he attracts attention by presenting himself as a forward page-boy, seeking to recite a script of compliments, but he intrigues Olivia by modulating into a more inwardly performative role which plays on the comeliness of secrecy while expressing, with a twist of pathos, Viola's sense of being mysterious to herself as she comes to terms with loving the Duke: ‘and yet, by the very fangs of malice I swear, I am not that I play’ (184-5). Orsino has told his servant to ‘unfold the passion of my love’ (I.4.24), but, as Cesario quickly discovers, that secret is too open to entice. It is almost an objection to the Duke, for Olivia, that his qualities are manifest and talked of: ‘Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth; / In voices well divulg'd’ (I.5.263-4).
Cesario, by contrast, has a secret allure—the allure of secrecy; and he uses it to secure a private audience by promising revelation: ‘What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead: to your ears, divinity; to any other’s, profanation’ (218-20).

These lines are alive with risk. As Georg Simmel has noted, in his classic account of secrecy: ‘the secret is surrounded by the possibility and temptation of betrayal; and the external danger of being discovered is interwoven with the internal danger, which is like the fascination of an abyss, of giving oneself away.’ Cesario's mention of a ‘maidenhead’ produces secrecy from what is hidden by anticipating disclosure. He alludes to the ‘she’ in Cesario, and ‘she’ alludes to something so essentially intimate that her feelings for Orsino come to mind. Yet the process of tempting Olivia into private conference, of enticing her (and the audience) with intimations of a sexual secret more real than maidenheads merely talked of, goes along with an urge on Viola's part to be done with her intolerable disguise and give herself away by blabbing. For as Simmel adds: 'The secret puts a barrier between men but, at the same time, it creates the tempting challenge to break through it, by gossip or confession—and this challenge accompanies its psychology like a constant overtone' (ibid.).

The overtone is most audible, a few lines later, in the willow cabin speech. If I loved you, Cesario tells Olivia, I should

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me.

(272-80)

The speech is emotionally electric because, by positing herself as Orsino wooing Olivia, Viola is imagining what it would be like to woo the Duke, while seducing Olivia into imagining what it would be like to be wooed by Cesario. But the energy of the utterance, as it moves through double, endstopped lines to the suddenly freed enjambment and exclamatory caesura after ‘gossip of the air’, also stems from her frustrated impulse to babble out what she is. Given the fact that Shakespeare varied his characters' names from those in the sources, it can hardly be accidental that, if ‘the babbling gossip of the air’ did cry out ‘O-liv-ia’, the rebounding echoes would reverberate into something very like ‘Vi-o-la’—a word which is, for innocent audiences, a secret within the secret until, near the end of the play, Sebastian greets Cesario by saying “Thrice welcome, drowned Viola” (5.1.239).

Characterization in mature Shakespeare is angled into complexity by what holds between roles as well as by what is written into them. The lucid symmetries and parallels which shape such early comedies as Errors and Love’s Labour’s Lost give way, from Much Ado onwards, to a recognizably more mannerist procedure in which analogies are elliptical and overdetermined, and characters who seem unlike can be, in fluctuating ways, related. No case is more extreme, perhaps, than the coupling of Cesario and Malvolio. Yet the resemblances are there. Both gentlemen are upwardly mobile suitors (respectively unwelcome and coerced) of Olivia. In the echoing cluster of names which lies at the heart of the play, ‘Malvolio’ is more involved with ‘Olivia’ and ‘Viola’ than is, for instance, ‘Orsino’. And this reflects, perhaps, a similarity rooted in source-material, given that, in ‘Of Apolonius and Silla’, the Viola-figure is thrown into the dark house reserved, in Twelfth Night, for Malvolio, when the Duke gathers, from gossip among servants, that the countess has fallen in love with his man.
It is in their role as servants, however, that the two are most closely aligned. As I noted in relation to Whythorne, both are equally subject to the politics of favour. At first, Malvolio is as successful as Cesario. If Orsino finds it natural to turn to his discreet young servant when thoughts about Olivia well up, Olivia calls for that ‘known discreet man’, her steward (I.5.95), both in sending Cesario her ring, and, later, in 3.4, when she comes on stage with Maria, but talks, rather, to herself about how to win the Duke’s handsome ambassador. ‘I speak too loud’, she says, checking her own indiscretion: ‘Where’s Malvolio? He is sad and civil, / And suits well for a servant with my fortunes: / Where is Malvolio?’ (4–7). The word ‘sad’ here does not mean ‘gloomy’, as in modern English. The steward is grave and close. He can observe the decorum which Puttenham praises when he says that a man should be ‘secret and sad’ in counsel (p. 292). This quality is defined, of course, against the babbling indiscretion of Sir Toby and his friends. Towards the end of 3.4, Cesario will say that he hates ‘babbling drunkenness’ (364). It is a trait which Malvolio shares, as we know from his denunciation, in the drinking scene, of those who ‘gabble like tinkers’ and keep ‘uncivil rule’ (2.3.89, 122).

To insist that Malvolio feels the same urge as Viola/Cesario to disclose a hidden nature through babbling would be false to the glancing way in which parallels work in Twelfth Night. His yellow stockings and forced smile do involve an element of disguise, since they belie his ‘sad and civil’ self; but they owe more (I shall argue) to adornment, and they cannot be patly compared to the costume which stirs up in Cesario a desire to reveal the Viola in him. Yet the steward is not as indifferent to ‘babbling gossip’ as he would like the world to suppose. Even before he reads the forged letter, he is fantasizing about Olivia by recalling, ‘There is example for’t. The Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe’ (2.5.39-40). This snippet from Illyrian gossip columns is every bit as trivially topical, or, more likely, pseudo-topical, as Sir Toby's allusion to Mistress Mall. Indeed the plot against Malvolio can be understood, in early modern terms, as designed to bring out the babbler in the discreet man, by emptying his language. ‘My masters, are you mad?’, the steward asks the drinkers (2.3.87). When denounced as a madman and locked up, he is not just confined as finely as Sir Toby Belch could wish: his words—once so commanding in the household—are discredited and trivialized, then mocked as empty verbiage. ‘Malvolio,’ Sir Topas cries, ‘thy wits the heavens restore: endeavour thyself to sleep, and leave thy vain bibble babble.’

It is easy to see how the courtesy literature which sheds light on Cesario can also illuminate his double, Sebastian. In the elaborate, even stilted idiom of his first exchanges with Antonio, in the reserve and sturdy valour with which he engages Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, and in his discreet handling of the secret betrothal to Olivia, he conforms with the ideals laid out in such texts as Henry Peacham's Compleat Gentleman (1622). The plot against Cesario's more eccentric co-rival, Malvolio, might seem harder to relate to conduct books. In practice, though, even the courtly Castiglione is more tolerant of what Fabian calls 'sportful malice’ (5.1.364) than a modern reader might expect. The Book of the Courtier describes, indeed, a series of 'Meerie Pranckes' which bear comparison with Twelfth Night. In one of them, an unfortunate man is persuaded by his companions that the dark room in which he has been sleeping is illuminated by the—actually, unlit—candles which they carry. Like Sir Topas visiting Malvolio, they cry, with incredulity, ‘Say'st thou that house is dark?’ (4.2.35) until—lacking the steward's resilience—the poor man is convinced of his blindness, repents his sins and prays to Our Lady of Loreto, whereupon his friends undeceive him (pp. 193-5). Almost as cruel is the tale told by Monsieur Bernarde about the occasion when he fell a-wrestling, in sport, with Cesar Boccadello on the Bridge of Leo. When passers-by made to separate them, Bernarde cried ‘Helpe sirs, for this poore gentilman at certein times of the moone is frantike, and see now how he striveth to cast himselfe of the bridge into the river’ (p. 197). Cesar was instantly set upon, and the more he struggled and protested, the more apparently justified and inevitable his confinement (like Malvolio's) became.

There are, Castiglione says, ‘two kyndes of Meerie Pranckes … The one is, whan any man whoever he be, is deceyved wittilie … The other, whan a manne layeth (as it were) a nett, and showeth a piece of a bayte so, that a man renneth to be deceyved of himself’ (p. 191). The plot against Malvolio is a fine example of this latter, more sophisticated form of joke. It is always surprising, when one returns to the play, to discover just
how deeply the steward is mired in fantasies about Olivia before he finds the letter. Yet Malvolio does need some enticement to run himself into the net, and Maria's letter is well-judged to appeal not only to his ambitions but to his pride in managing secrets. It is relevant, in this regard, that her writing parodies secretaryship—or, as likely, abuses a secretarial office which she has discharged on other occasions—by conducting the sort of covert correspondence with a suitor which such a servant might expect to handle for her lady (as when the devious secretary in Gascoigne writes to F. J. on Elinor's behalf). In a secretary, discretion was essential. Indeed, as Angel Day notes, in The English Secretary, ‘in respect of such Secrecie … the name was first giuen to be called a Secretorie’. Equally integral, however, was the idea of imitative substitution. The secretary, Day reports, will be ‘a zealous imitator’ of his master, down to the ‘forme and maner’ of his penmanship. This is the context of Maria's announcement, ‘I can write very like my lady your niece; on a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands’ (2.3.160-2). She is indicating that her letter will not be a forgery so much as a duplicitous secret.

The hermeticism of the missive is compounded, for it is wrapped in mysteries—ornamented by secrets—from the tantalizing address on its outside (‘To the unknown beloved …’ (2.5.92)), through the seal which closes it up (but which also dis-closes its matter, by hinting that Olivia is the author), into the enigmas of its message:

I may command where I adore;
But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore;
M.O.A.I. doth sway my life.

(106-9)

This ‘secrete conceit’—to use Puttenham's phrase for the posies and anagrams of amorous courtiers (p. 102)—is a sub-plot version of those riddles which elsewhere in the play (and especially in Cesario/Viola's lines) have an ontological aspect. And it does, more locally, raise the thought that Malvolio's cultivated discretion (his chosen mode of being) is a form of self-advertisement. For the ornate secrecy of the letter is calculated to command attention: it engages in a covert exhibitionism which the steward finds congenial. To that extent it recalls Simmel's insight, that ‘although apparently the sociological counter-pole of secrecy, adornment has, in fact, a societal significance with a structure analogous to that of secrecy itself’ (p. 338). In other words, the secrecy of the letter has much in common with the yellow stockings, cross-gartering and fixed smile which it encourages its recipient to adopt.

This claim may sound unlikely, but I am encouraged to advance it by the cogency of Simmel's observation that, while man's desire to please may include outward-going kindness, there is also a

wish for this joy and these ‘favors’ to flow back to him, in the form of recognition and esteem, … [B]y means of this pleasing, the individual desires to distinguish himself before others, and to be the object of an attention that others do not receive. This may even lead him to the point of wanting to be envied. Pleasing may thus become a means of the will to power: some individuals exhibit a strange contradiction that they need those above whom they elevate themselves by life and deed, for they build their own self-feeling upon the subordinates' realization that they are subordinate.

(ibid.)

Even before he finds the letter, Malvolio's attentiveness to Olivia and his contempt for those like Sir Toby exemplifies a powerseeking desire for ‘favors’. His attraction to the countess has less to do with eroticism than with a longing for the unruly, over whom he elevates himself, to become his subordinates: his day-dream about Toby curtsying to him, and being required to amend his drunkenness, shows that he cannot imagine life
in the household (certainly not an agreeable life) without having the lighter people to condescend to. In preparation for the happy day when he will be made Count Malvolio, he distinguishes himself before others by means of a singular discretion (so unlike their collective gabbling) which is actually a form of ostentation. We are not surprised when Maria reports that Malvolio ‘has been yonder i’ the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half hour’ (2.5.16-18) because he is that recognizable type: a secret exhibitionist. The invitation to put on yellow stockings, cross-gartered, is, in one sense, ludicrous and improbable, because it contradicts those ‘sad and civil’ qualities which attract Olivia's praise. But it is hardly surprising that Malvolio takes the bait, because, as Simmel says, ‘Adornment is the egoistic element as such’ (p. 339), and the strange garb—which the steward claims he already owns, and which he may indeed have worn, at least in fantasy (2.5.166-8)—amplifies and gives expression to his desire for singularity without compromising his attentiveness to Olivia: on the contrary, it is a way of ‘pleasing’ her.

Simmel goes on to notice that adornment does not express the organic nature of the person adorned, but depends on superfluousness and impersonality. Jewels and precious stones are typical of its highly external relationship with the person, but yellow stockings and cross-garters work to similar effect because they divide up and cut into the wholeness and ease of the body (they obstruct, indeed, Malvolio's circulation (3.4.19-20)). One might compare Simmel's example of new clothes as against old: the former ‘are particularly elegant’, he says, ‘due to their being still “stiff”; they have not yet adjusted to the modifications of the individual body as fully as older clothes have’ (p. 341). There is a vein of comedy here, of course, because, as Bergson points out in Le rire, laughter is provoked by superimpositions of mechanical rigidity on the organic flow of the body. The ornaments seemingly requested by Olivia, the clothes which Malvolio puts on to mark his new status, are laughable even as—and for precisely the same reason that—they signify advancement. For adornment is a mark of status regardless of the materials used, and Malvolio's attire shares the usual property of adornment in bringing together, or parodying (since Olivia cannot bear yellow), what Simmel calls ‘Aesthetic excellence’ and the ‘sociological charm of being, by virtue of adornment, a representative of one's group’ (p. 343)—with the added delight, in this case, for Malvolio, that, by becoming a count, he will represent the dignity of Olivia's house to the consternation of Sir Toby and his ilk. Beyond that, and underwriting it, is secrecy: the ultimate bait. To assume yellow stockings and be cross-gartered puts Malvolio's discretion on display, without abolishing it, because the new garb allows him, as he thinks, to share a secret with Olivia, to signal an ambition and grasp of courtly intrigue (hence ‘I will read politic authors’ (2.5.161-2)) which she will understand and appreciate while the drinkers and babblers will not.

That this exhibitionistic secrecy is designed to please Olivia only with the intention of gratifying Malvolio is compatible with the sickness of self-love which she diagnoses when he first comes on stage (1.5.89). From a psychoanalytical perspective, indeed, the yellow stockings are narcissistic fetishes while the cross-gartering looks auto-erotic. This line of enquiry could bear a Lacanian twist, given that the anagrammatic relations which hold between ‘Olivia’ and ‘Malvolio’—pointed up by the disjunction of those names (‘M.O.A.I.’) in the letter—register, at the level of the sign, her role in reflecting Malvolio's constitutive desire back on himself.

Freudian speculation aside, there is certainly something masturbatory about the steward's complacent cry, as Sir Toby and the rest move in to take the yellow-stockinged madman away: ‘Let me enjoy my private’ (3.4.90). This recoil into self-pleasuring is not restricted, of course, to the steward. Critics often call Orsino (rather loosely) a narcissist, and his early remark—before Cesario's charms get to work—‘for I myself am best / When least in company’ (1.4.37-8) would have suggested to an Elizabethan audience, with its inherited disapproval (to simplify somewhat) of solitariness, a similarly troubling mind-set. The conduct literature is emphatic in its insistence on affective sociality. ‘Self-Loue is the greatest disease of the minde,’ according to James Cleland, and it has ‘beene the cause of manie Narcissus his changing among you Nobles’ (p. 241). There is, in other words, an important Renaissance distinction between the socially produced (and socially productive) quality called secrecy and suspect, anti-social solitude.

It is entirely in line with this that Stefan Guazzo celebrates discretion but bends his dialogue towards showing how arguments for civil conversation can persuade his brother, William Guazzo, from abandoning society:
'And now my joye is the greater', William's interlocutor, Anniball Magnocavalli, says at the end, 'that I understande how readie and willinge you are to caste of the obscure and blacke Robe of Solitarinesse, and in liew of that to revest and adorne your selfe with the white and shininge garment of Conversation' (ii, p. 215). The danger was, inevitably, that discretion could become exaggerated into self-absorption. Malvolio's anti-social vanity bears out Nashe's observation in Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell (1592): ‘Some thineke to be counted rare Politicans and Statesmen, by being solitary: as who would say, I am a wise man, a braue man, Secreta mea mihi: Frustra sapit, qui sibi non sapit [My secrets are my own; he is wise in vain who does not know his own business], and there is no man worthy of my companie or friendship.’

Much is now being written about the way Renaissance culture developed modern ideas about privacy by building and exploring the uses of secluded chambers and closets. This emergent mentality is reflected in the appeal which Twelfth Night makes to varieties of privy space. Somewhere off-stage Andrew has his ‘cubiculo’ and Toby his own retreat. But it matters that we should learn of the former by Toby saying, ‘We'll call thee at thy cubiculo’ and of the latter by his remark (to Feste or Maria) ‘Come by and by to my chamber’ (3.2.50, 4.2.73-4). The babblers are social in their privacy, where Malvolio seeks to be private even in the open spaces of Olivia's great house. That is why the ‘dark room’ (3.4.136)—that dramatically overdetermined locale—is such an apt punishment for his pretensions: locked up there he is both cast out of society and thrown in upon himself. He is forced into a solitude which represents, but which is also maliciously designed to induce, asocial derangement. But he is also given a chance—I shall end by suggesting—to reassess the value of what Nashe calls ‘companie or friendship’.

I referred, a little earlier, to ontological riddling. What I mean by that is the presence of, and counterpoint between, such claims, in Cesario/Viola's part, as ‘I am not that I play’ and ‘I am not what I am’ (1.5.185, 3.1.143). As disguise and confusion mount, even simple indicative statements such as ‘I am the man’ (when Viola deduces that Olivia has fallen for Cesario) are deceptive, twisting into dubiety and delusion: ‘if it be so, as ’tis, / Poor lady, she were better love a dream’ (2.2.24-5). ‘Nothing that is so, is so’, the clown will later quip (4.1.8-9). Sebastian calls this ‘folly’, but Olivia is alert to the instability of so-ness when, a few lines later, she thanks him for agreeing to be ruled by her by saying, quite simply, but, by now, with some perplexity, ‘O, say so, and so be’ (64). This line of enigmatic quibbling, of instability in the indicative of being, runs all the way through the play to its perhaps redemptive reformulation when Cesario meets Sebastian: ‘A natural perspective, that is, and is not!’ (5.1.215). It matters to the Malvolio plot because, in his attempt to subvert the steward's sanity, Feste turns such riddling against him. ‘“That that is, is”’, he tells Sir Toby (with the assurance that, by this point, what is is not): ‘so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is “that” but “that”? and “is” but “is”?’ (4.2.15-17).

Malvolio does not doubt that Master Parson is Master Parson, even when Feste presents himself in that guise without disguise—just in a different voice. By the same token, however, he persists in a stubborn belief that ‘that’ is ‘that’ and ‘is’ ‘is’. He has a self-centred clarity about what he credits which carries him with some dignity through Feste's peculiar questions about Pythagoras' metempsychosis, and whether the soul of one's grandam might haply inhabit a bird. No audience can entirely warm to Malvolio's self-assurance, unchanged since the letter scene, but his persistent protestations of sanity seem the more admirable as his opponents' pranks become redundantly sadistic. Their cruelty is particularly marked in respect of the motif of ‘companie or friendship’, because, if the plot to incarcerate Malvolio is justified in so far as it obliges him to confront what it means for a man to be truly solitary, it abandons any claim to the moral high ground when Feste assists the steward by bringing him writing materials and agreeing to take a letter to Olivia, but then suppresses the missive—an event of such moment that Shakespeare underscores it in that otherwise null episode where the clown refuses to divulge the letter's contents to Fabian (5.1.1-6).

I have touched, several times, in this paper, on the social dimension of secrecy, and stressed how it is produced, in the early modern period, out of civil intercourse. It should be clear, in consequence, at this late stage, why ‘companie or friendship’ is so important in Twelfth Night. Obviously, in this play of cross-dressing
and variant sexuality, there is an interest in the mergings of heterosexual love with same-sex friendship, and with the friendship in heterosexual love as well as the eroticism of same-sex amity. But secrecy impinges on, and gives rise to, friendship (as in the shaping confidences shared between Sebastian and Antonio) because, although the period knew that—as the cynical commonplace put it—three can keep a secret when two of them are away, it was also aware that not to confide a hidden thing was to go the readiest way to public exposure or self-destruction. In trying to ‘keepe love secrete’, says Lord Julian in The Book of the Courtier, it is bad to be ‘over secrete’ and better to trust a friend with your feelings so that he can help you conceal what you will otherwise, certainly, betray (pp. 284-5). Recall Duke Charles the Hardy, Bacon advises, in his essay ‘Of Friendship’, who, because he ‘would communicate his Secrets with none’, damaged his wits. ‘The Parable of Pythagoras is darke, but true; Cor ne edito; Eat not the Heart. Certainly, if a Man would give it a hard Phrase, Those that want Frends to open themselves unto, are Canniballs of their owne Hearts.’

Bacon's fable from Pythagoras is not the same as Feste's, but something close to what the clown says can be found in Cleland's Institution, where, immediately after explaining why a man's friend should not be ‘a great pratler’, he enthuses:

O how much am I bound to Gods bounty amongst al the rest of his benefits towards me, in sending me such a friend! … In the very first daie of our meeting … I found my minde so changed and remooued into the place of his, which before that time was in me. Hitherto I could neuer excogitate anie reason why I shoulde loue him, but Pythagoras his , and that hee is another my selfe.

(p. 197)

Why is a friend so valuable? Cleland's answer is typical of the period: because he is a person ‘in whom I dare better trust, and vnto whom I dare discover the most secret thoughtes of my minde with greater confidence then I am able to keepe them my selfe’ (ibid.). So the dialogue between Feste and Malvolio about the steward's grandmother and a woodcock is not just random nonsense, and more than an insult to the old lady's intelligence. It contributes to the close texture of Twelfth Night a riddling reminder that, notwithstanding the resistance of the self-centred steward, the soul can be said, at least in amity, to migrate from one body to another. This is what Viola/Cesario means when s/he speaks of calling ‘upon my soul within the house’ (above, p. 73), and what Orsino invokes when he promises the assembled lovers that ‘A solemn combination shall be made / Of our dear souls’ (5.1.382-3).

Malvolio is often seen as excluded from this finale. In one of the best essays on Twelfth Night, Anne Barton stresses the fragmentariness of its ending by pointing out that, like Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, the steward ‘comes as a figure of violence and leaves unreconciled’. At the end of As You Like It, ‘Jaques had walked with dignity out of the new society; Malvolio in effect is flung.’ This is largely true. Yet the charmed circle of amity does not actively dismiss Malvolio: if anything, Olivia and Orsino do the opposite, acknowledging, in an echo of his own words, that ‘He hath been most notoriously abused’ and commanding, ‘Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace: / He hath not told us of the captain yet’ (5.1.378-80). What Orsino reminds the audience of here is that Malvolio is holding ‘in durance’, at his own suit, the Captain who arrived with Viola in the third scene of the play. This character, almost forgotten, is now freshly important, because he holds Viola's 'maiden weeds' (272ff., 251ff.). I am not myself persuaded that clothes were so constitutive of identity for Shakespeare's original audience that Cesario cannot become Viola until those very clothes are recovered from the Captain. Even Orsino, piquantly intrigued at being affianced to a boy, only says that ‘Cesario’ will keep his masculine name until ‘in other [unspecified] habits you are seen’ (386). Yet the gesture of deferral—as against fragmentation—is unmistakable, and compatible with a denouement which straggles its endings out, from the pre-emptive coupling of Maria and Toby, through the betrothal but delayed marriage of Olivia and Sebastian, to the as-yet-unrealized resolution of the Cesario/Viola-Orsino romance. In that delayed conclusion, space is made for Malvolio, his hold over Viola's weeds confirming what his anagrammatic link
with her name implies. These characters belong together. Until the steward is reconciled, comedy will not be consummated. Just how he will be persuaded remains one of the secrets of the play.

Notes

5. *Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994); for his comments on Shakespeare see pp. 25-30.
11. ‘Like the Old Robin Hood: *As You Like It* and the Enclosure Riots’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43 (1992), 1-19; rpt. as Ch. 3 of his *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatshead, 1993).
24. See, e.g., Gaspar's remarkable anticipation, out of Aristotle, of Freud on the castration complex in women, and Julian's reply: ‘The seele poore creatures wish not to be a man to make them more perfect, but to have libertye, and to be ridd of the rule that men have of their owne authoritie chalenged over them’ (pp. 226-7).
28. 3.1.86-7, 72-3. On courtly excess in ‘Salutation … complements, false offers, & promises of seruice’ see, e.g., Cleland, Institution, pp. 176ff.
31. Compare (but also contrast) lines 169-96 with Mote at Love's Labour's Lost 5.2.158-74, addressing the Princess and her ladies.
34. To woo, that is, as Viola (if a woman might be so assertive), rather than compoundingly, as in 2.4, where the attraction of Cesario/Viola's eye to 'some favour that it loves' (which riddlingly means the Duke's 'favour' (24-5)), prompts him/her to utter the half-betraying speech about 'concealment', ‘My father had a daughter lov’d a man …’ (108-19). Symptomatically, in the exchange which follows, Bacon's observation, 'he that will be Secret, must be a Dissembler, in some degree. For Men are too cunning, to suffer a Man, to keepe an indifferent carriage … They will so beset a man with Questions, and draw him on, and picke it out of him’ (p. 21) is ratified both by Orsino's leading interrogation ('But died thy sister of her love, my boy?' (120)) and by Cesario/Viola's dissimulation (‘I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too’ (121-2)), which slurs into poignant honesty, as s/he hopes for Sebastian's survival (‘… and yet I know not’ (122)), but which remains sufficiently in touch with the deviousness of his/her opening ploy to recall (for instance) the explicitly seductive discretion of F. J. when he woos Dame Elinor with a lute song composed by ‘My father's sister's brother's son' (Gascoigne, The Adventures of Master F. J., in Paul Salzman (ed.), An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 3-81 (p. 28)).
36. Folio punctuation mostly conforms to the rhetorical shape of the passage, though, as routinely, it divides the run-on 'air / Cry' with a comma.
37. 4.2.98-100; cf., e.g., the 'jangling bibble babble' of 'praters' in Plutarch's 'Of Intemperate Speech' (p. 193).
38. The English Secretary, rev. edn (1599), pt 2, p. 102.
39. English Secretary, pt 2, p. 130; cf. Rambuss, Spenser's Secret Career, p. 43.
40. For examples beyond Puttenham (esp. pp. 108-12), see, e.g., [Sir John Mennis], Recreation for Ingenious Headpeece (1654), p5r-q4r r3r-4r. On verse composition, more broadly, as ‘secret
intercommoning’—a compromise formation between self-consuming inwardness and full disclosure (below, p. 79)—see Gascoigne, Adventures of Master F. J., pp. 40-1.


44. Essays, ed. Kiernan, pp. 80-7 (p. 83).


**Criticism: Themes: Angela Hurworth (essay date 1999)**


In the following essay, Hurworth explores the representation of deception, or gulling, in Twelfth Night. Hurworth highlights the links between criminal deception as it is described in Elizabethan narratives of the “underworld” and the deception found in the play.

The age-old ploy of practising deception upon one’s fellow for material profit and/or vindictive amusement, known as gulling, cozenage or cony-catching in the rogue literature of the Elizabethan period, figures prominently in the contemporary drama where its principal exponent is, of course, Ben Jonson. In Volpone and The Alchemist deception is treated as an art-form in itself. This is gulling on a grand scale, where the theatricality of deceiving and the deception inherent in the theatrical illusion find their finest expression. In Shakespeare’s plays, gulling rarely occupies centre-stage as in Jonson (Othello may be the one exception to this), although it frequently surfaces as an incident in the main plot, for example, the double gulling of Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, or the cozening of Falstaff by Hal after the Gadshill episode in 1 Henry IV. The term itself, however, occurs infrequently in Shakespeare’s plays. Unusually, in Twelfth Night the text designates two characters, Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, as ‘gulls’, the instigator of the trap set for the steward, Maria, is addressed as ‘my noble gull-catcher’ by Fabian (2. 5. 180), and there may be an implicit reference to ‘gulling’ in the title of the play, since the prologue of Gl’Ingannati, a likely source, has a reference to la notte di beffana, a phrase usually rendered as ‘Epiphany’ or ‘Twelfth Night’ in English but which, literally translated, may be understood as The Night of Gullings.

The gulling of Malvolio which results in his transformation from dour Puritan to ridiculous suitor is the comic highlight, if not the centre, of the play. In fact Malvolio’s comment that he is the ‘most notorious geck and gull / That e’er in vention played on’ (5. 1. 340-1) may be read as a meta-theatrical prophecy of his box-office popularity, initially commented upon by Digges:

The Cockpit Galleries, Boxes, all are full
To hear Malvoglio, the cross-garter’d gull.(4)

And the propensity of the comic sub-plot to upstage the main plot has characterized the play ever since Charles I wrote ‘Malvolio’ against the title in his copy of the Second Folio. Indeed we may note that the term
'gull' in its ornithological sense is interchangeable with 'cuckoo' in Shakespeare's usage: 'As that ungentle gull, the cuckoo's bird, / Useth the sparrow' (I Henry IV, 5. 1. 60-1), so that there is a semantic association between the cuckoo-like sub-plot in Twelfth Night and gulling. The secondary intrigue's appropriation of the place normally accorded to the main plot functions as a metatextual paradigm of the patterns of deception, substitution and metamorphosis in the play.

I wish to compare the representation of gulling in Twelfth Night with the narratives of underworld literature where such deception, known as cony-catching, cozenage or gulling, receives its fullest treatment. In his study of the Elizabethan underworld, G. Salgado noted the affinities between the deception practised in the narratives of rogue literature and the Elizabethan stage:

The paraphernalia used in this form of cheating had all the imagination, energy, sense of timing and understanding of character that we find in the Elizabethan drama itself …

However it should be remembered that these narratives are every bit as fictive as their onstage representation and should not be read as documentary evidence of criminal activity in Elizabethan London. My aim therefore is not to establish a relationship between Shakespeare's play and criminality in Elizabethan London but to draw attention to the contact between the two different representational modes. Firstly I shall relate the dramatic syntax and lexis of gulling in Shakespeare's play to the lexis and syntax of gulling in the underworld literature; I shall then show how the definition of gulling as a game with rules influences the configuration of the gulling in Twelfth Night, and note the theatricality of gulling, as presented in these pamphlets.

Malvolio may be the play's most 'notorious geck and gull', but he is certainly not alone in the part. Twelfth Night is replete with gullings, albeit of different degrees and durations. Andrew Aguecheek is by nature a gull (as he virtually admits), and he is gulled from first to last. It is no secret that he is fleeced financially throughout, that he is deceived into 'supposing that Toby's dry gullet is the way to Olivia's heart', and then cozened into challenging Viola/Cesario by Sir Toby, as the latter's boast, 'Marry, I'll ride your horse as well as I ride you' (3. 4. 281), proclaims for all to hear.

But gulling is not merely exemplified by those designated as 'gulls' nor is its functioning simple. The dynamics of gulling is centripetal and draws many of the characters into its force field. For instance, we observe a spiral of gulling in the activities of Sir Toby Belch. He gulls Andrew into providing him with money, and inveigles Viola/Cesario into a farcial duel, but his control of its energy falters when Sebastian appears, and his duping backfires on him. Indeed, gulling shows itself to be a reversible game since Toby himself is gulled most effectively by Maria. Such is the implication of Fabian's comment when Sir Toby, carried away by his delight in the spectacle of Malvolio's humiliation, says:

SIR Toby

I could marry the wench for this device

[...] Enter Maria ...

FABIAN

Here comes my noble gull-catcher.

SIR Toby

(to Maria) Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?

(2. 5. 175-81)
This moment is an example of the intersection of two trajectories of gulling: that of Malvolio by Maria and of Toby by Maria. This mistress of the game is also expert enough to synchronize two moments of gulling when, immediately prior to Malvolio's appearance before his mistress in yellow stockings, she represents him to Olivia as unhinged: ‘Your ladyship were best to have some guard about you if he come, for sure the man is tainted in's wits.’ (3. 4. 11-13), thereby tricking Olivia, just as she has duped her steward. It should be noted however that there are different varieties of gulling. The trick played on Malvolio is of the savage, vengeful kind (known in the commedia dell'arte as a beffa) whereas Maria's gulling of Olivia and Sir Toby is essentially harmless (thus, in Italian terms, a burla).11

Although as a ‘waiting gentlewoman’ Maria is socially and dramatically marginal to the play, her part in concocting the plot and stage-managing the gulling game in its opening stages reveals her to be at the centre of the secondary intrigue, the mainspring of the action. She is responsible for unleashing forces which bring about hugely comic situations before spinning out of control. In spite of J. W. Draper's exhaustive and perceptive character sketch of Mistress Mary, she nevertheless remains something of an enigma.12 She never makes any comment on her role as a gull-catcher: all we are shown is her evident enjoyment in devising and executing her own schemes, and her apparent desire to please Sir Toby. Draper's conjectures regarding Maria's reasons for wanting to marry Sir Toby are plausible enough in terms of the social ambitions of Elizabethan waiting-women, for him the play's main theme is ‘the Elizabethan pursuit of social security’,13 but Maria is as much a dramatic construct as a representative of Elizabethan society. Her role is steeped in comic tradition: adept at the classic techniques of duping associated with the commedia dell'arte, she is also the trickster figure of classical comedy, the clever slave figure found in Plautus.14

Early in the play, the object of her desire, Sir Toby, apparently sees her in terms of sexual opportunity rather than wedlock. Feste comments on Sir Toby's failure to appreciate Maria: ‘If Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria’ (1. 5. 24-6). This reveals to her the need to curb Sir Toby's carousing if she is to succeed in capturing his attention, hence her readiness to devise a scheme to be revenged on Malvolio for his disapproval of their drunken antics. The knight has to be brought to a realization of her worth as a wife. To use Leo Salingar's phrase, it is the experience of ‘the pleasure of contrivance’ that awakens Sir Toby to Maria's eligibility: ‘She's a beagle true bred and one that adores me’ (2. 4. 173-4). This appreciation of the pleasure of intrigue leads Sir Toby to want to emulate his better half, to become a master of the game himself, but forces beyond his control make his gulling misfire, whereas Maria not only emerges unharmed, but is rewarded, as Fabian reminds us: ‘Maria writ / The letter, at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her’ (5. 1. 359-61).

The case of Malvolio demonstrates how a gulling trajectory may be subject to inversion, for not only is the steward gulled by the plotters, but he is also in the grip of ‘self-gulling’. In his egoism, Malvolio unwittingly appropriates the discourse of gulling. After reading the forged letter, he believes that he has in fact become a gull-catcher, having snared Olivia like a bird on a branch:15 ‘I have limed her’ (3. 4. 75). This reveals the steward at the centre of a web of real and imagined gullings: ‘self-gulled’, about to be gulled, he believes himself to be the gull-catcher. To complicate matters, Olivia is, of course, ironically enough, the victim of a gulling, but not by Malvolio, by Viola/Cesario instead (an unwilling and unwitting gull-catcher). Thus various instances of gulling may coincide or intersect, spiral or reverse one another.16

But gulling may also be linear and sporadic, in contrast to the density of gulling trajectories enmeshing Malvolio. Thus in the course of the gulling of Malvolio, the cozening of Sir Andrew surfaces from time to time in the text, as when Toby tells Andrew baldly:

SIR Toby

Thou hadst need send for more money.
SIR Andrew

If I cannot recover your niece, I am a foul way out.

SIR Toby

Send for money, knight. If thou hast not her i' th' end, call me cut.

(2. 3. 176-81)

Likewise, later, Sir Toby refers unabashedly to his fleecing of Sir Andrew:

FABIAN

This is a dear manikin to you, Sir Toby.

SIR Toby

I have been dear to him, lad, some two thousand strong or so.

(3. 2. 51-3)

This follows the broad outlines of the typical relationship between the would-be gallant and his gull described in Dekker's *The Guls Horne-book* (1609). The author claims to write as the arbiter of advice to the man-about-town—as opposed to his opposite, a gull—but the syntax of the title *The Guls Horne-book* is ambiguous, since 'gulls' may function as either a possessive plural or a genitive plural here. The choice of construction determines the meaning. Is it a manual of instruction for the gull-catcher or the gull? If the title has the sense of the possessive plural, then it is a manual destined for use by gulls, in order to avoid being gulled. Conversely, if the genitive plural construction is intended, then it is a work describing gulls, a manual for the would-be gallant whereby he may identify a gull (and take advantage of him). Furthermore, the grammatical ambiguity of the title is never elucidated by the hornbook's content, which implicitly ridicules the activities of the would-be gallant, so that there is only a difference of degree between his foolishness and that of his victim, the gull.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew fit the categories of the would-be gallant and his gull to a nicety. Sir Toby is a 'kinsman' of Olivia's, apparently dependent on her hospitality. Salgado suggests that part of the underworld society was composed of precisely this kind of rootless person, probably knighted in the wars and discharged from the army after some expedition against Spain (the gallants in *The Guls Horne-book* are frequently posited as soldiers). Demographically the lesser gentry were increasing in numbers in the second half of the sixteenth century, but decreasing in wealth; enclosures, the abolition of the monasteries had swollen the ranks of vagrants; court faction also meant that today's great man (and his retinue) could be down on their luck tomorrow. If Sir Toby Belch conforms to the portrait of the gallant in Dekker's manual, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek is a perfect example of a gull, then their association may be no accident, for Dekker recommends that every gallant should find a foil to accompany him:

Select some friend … to walk up and down the room with you. Let him be suited if you can worse by far than yourself: he will be a foil to you, and this will be a means to publish your clothes better than Paul's, a tennis-court or a playhouse.

To be a successful gallant, it is desirable to practise a perfectly hedonist life-style, adopting revelling and drinking as primary occupations: 'your noblest gallants consecrate their hours to their mistresses and to revelling'. And as in *Twelfth Night*, life consists not of the four elements but of eating and drinking, so
Dekker advocates joining forces with a fellow roisterer and getting drunk in public:

And if any of your endeared friends be in the house and beat the same ivy-bush that yourself does, you may join companies, and be drunk together most publicly.\textsuperscript{24}

Moreover the gallant lives by his wits, never paying for his drink if he can avoid it,\textsuperscript{25} and the advice given by the hornbook is that gallants with empty purses should have recourse to gulling:

and, no question, if he be poor he shall now and then light upon some gull or other whom, he may skedler, after the genteel fashion, of money.\textsuperscript{26}

Even though \textit{The Guls Horne-book} was written in the decade following Shakespeare's play, it is possible to see it as an intertext to \textit{Twelfth Night}, for it describes a category of person well known in Elizabethan London (or at least, in its fiction). Dekker's syntax of gulling has much in common with Shakespeare's: we see Sir Toby's strategies mimic the behaviour of the would-be gallant in the \textit{Horne-book}. The reversibility of gulling is also suggested by Dekker, both in the title and in his advice to impecunious gulls that they should ‘skedler’ other gulls of money. In \textit{Twelfth Night} the gulling game is reversed in the case of Sir Toby Belch, as we have noted. Equally, the term denoting his relationship to Olivia contains a certain semantic ambivalence, an inversion of its apparent meaning. At first Sir Toby is known as ‘kinsman’ to Olivia, but she later calls him ‘Cousin’ (1.5.113, 119) and subsequently ‘my coz’ (1.5.130), terms which may indicate a closer degree of relationship as well as suggesting that she is aware of his taking advantage of her hospitality, since the terms ‘cousin’ and ‘cozen’ were considered cognate by Cotgrave (1611): ‘to clayme kindred for advantage, or particular ends; as he, who to save charges in travelling, goes from house to house, as cosin to the owner of every one’.\textsuperscript{27} Toby is therefore acknowledged by Olivia as the swindler in their midst, but as we have already seen the word ‘cousin’ can equally well designate the victim of a cozenage, the ‘practice or habit of […] cheating, deception’,\textsuperscript{28} and this reversibility is replicated in his portrayal as both guller and gull.

Gulling, as represented in the literature of the underworld, is an essentially ludic activity, and, as such, rule-bound. A survey of early rogue pamphlets reveals its division into two main sub-genres: beggar-books such as the anonymous \textit{Fraternity of Vagabonds} (1561) or Thomas Harman's \textit{A Caveat or warning for Common Cursitors} (1566), and cony-catching tracts which were ostensibly written to expose underworld activities whereby the unwary were deprived of their worldly goods. One of the earliest exponents of this sub-genre was Robert Greene. His pamphlets span the early 1590s, and the first, \textit{A Notable Discovery of Cozenage} (1591), contains narratives describing elaborate methods of cheating at cards. This is based on \textit{A Manifest Detection of Dice Play} (1552), a tract attributed to Gilbert Walker. This narrative sets out a paradigm for cheating at cards which is subsequently expanded by Greene to provide formulaic accounts of other forms of cozening in \textit{The Second Part of Cony-Catching} (1591), and \textit{The Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching} (1592). There are also plays directly drawn from the rogue narratives of the pamphlets, such as the anonymous \textit{A Knack to Know a Knave} (1592) where the protagonist is the arch cony-catcher Cutbert Cutpurse.

\textit{A Manifest Detection} demonstrates the organization and codification of card-sharping crime, which functions according to specific rules just like an inverse form of law:

And thereof it riseth that, like as law, when the term is truly considered, signifieth an ordinance of good men established for the commonwealth to repress all vicious living, so these cheaters turned the cat in the pan, giving to divers vile patching shifts an honest and godly title, calling it by the name of a law; because by a multitude of hateful rules, a multitude of dregs and draff (as it were good learning) govern and rules their idle bodies, to the destruction of good labouring people.\textsuperscript{29}
There are many kinds of the ‘art’, but cheating is the common ground of them all and this is based on the cozeners's capacity to dissemble effectively:

the first and original ground of cheating is a counterfeit countenance in all things, a study to seem to be, and not to be indeed.\textsuperscript{30}

—a phrase which evidently evokes Viola's 'I am not what I am' (3. 1. 139). The rules for cheating with dice are set out in detail, and a frequent configuration described by Walker is that four accomplices lure a victim to participate in an elaborate game:

a jolly shift, and for the subtle invention and fineness of wit exceedeth all the rest, is the barnard's law which … asketh four persons at the least, each of them to play a long several part by himself.\textsuperscript{31}

Greene takes up the same distribution of roles:

There be requisite effectually to act the art of cony-catching three several parties, the setter, the verser, and the barnacle [the fourth element being the cony himself].\textsuperscript{32}

The narrative describes the complex interaction of the three rogues in extracting money from their prey: the plot is set in motion as soon as a suitable prey comes into view, typically:

a plain country fellow, well and cleanly apparetled, either in a coat of homespun russet or of a frieze, and a side-pouch at his side.\textsuperscript{33}

and then the victim is duped into taking wine with the rogues:

then ere they part, they make a cony and so ferret-claw him at cards, that they leave him as bare of money as an ape of a tail.\textsuperscript{34}

The ingenuity of such rogues is stressed: 'they do employ all their wits to overthrow such as with their handy thrift satisfy their hearty thirst'.\textsuperscript{35} This same configuration surfaces in the gulling of Malvolio; there are three main gullers: Maria, Toby and Feste or Fabian (this may explain the mutual exclusivity of the last two in the gulling scenes), but Maria plays the most elaborate role, like the ‘barnard’ or the ‘barnacle’,\textsuperscript{36} and she is careful to observe the tripartite pattern of the game:

I will plant you two—and let the fool make a third—where he shall find the letter.

(2. 3. 167-68)

Indeed the ludic dimension of the tricking of Malvolio is underlined by its designation as 'Sport royal' (2. 3. 166), and it is alluded to as ‘sport’ several times (2. 5. 173; 2. 5. 191). In the last scene, when the Duke is about to pass judgement on the affair, Fabian pleads for this view of gulling as essentially ludic to be upheld:

How with a sportful malice it was followed
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge
If that the injuries be justly weighed
That have on both sides passed.

(5. 1. 362-65).
We may equally question whether the inversion of values in the underplot of *Twelfth Night* where Sir Toby Belch functions as the Lord of Misrule, and honest everyday activity is absent, does not replicate the inversion of the rules of honest society demonstrated by the description of the cheating ‘laws’ in the underworld pamphlets.\(^{37}\)

Nevertheless ‘justice’ is not always done, for as the authors of rogue literature recognize, the game can sometimes turn against its instigator, and biters can also be bit:

> Thus we may see, *fallere fallentem non est fraus*: every deceit hath his due: he that maketh a trap falleth into the snare himself, and such as covet to cozen all are crossed themselves oftentimes almost to the cross, and that is the next neighbour to the gallows.\(^{38}\)

This mutability of fortune can be seen to apply to Sir Toby: his gulling Sir Andrew into a duel results in a bleeding head, and, as already demonstrated, he is comically ‘caught’ by Maria as a consequence of her success with Malvolio.

If gulling is a game, this implies performance, and, as such, it constitutes a spectacle. For example, the metamorphosis is verbally and visually an essential characteristic of the gulling process. In the table of words published in the *Notable Discovery of Cozenage* (1591), Greene informs us that in highway robbery the victim is called ‘a martin’; in cony-catching law, the victim received the designation of ‘cony’. In *The Black Book’s Messenger* (1591), the same Greene lists the terminology used by Ned Browne, ‘one of the most notable Cutpurses, Crossbiters and Cony-catchers that ever lived in England’, which emphasizes the cynegetic transformation of all involved in the gulling process:

> He that draws the fish to the bait, the beater.
> The tavern where they go, the bush.
> The fool that is caught, the bird.\(^{39}\)

Dekker, in *Lantern and Candlelight* (1608) appends a list of those necessary to execute a swindle in a game of cards where all the participants are designated as varieties of birds:

> In this battle of cards and dice are several regiments and several officers: …

> He that wins all is the ‘Eagle’.
> He that stands by and ventures is the ‘Woodpecker’.
> The fresh gallant that is fetched in is the ‘Gull’.
> He that stands by and lends is the ‘Gull Groper’.\(^{40}\)

The *OED* records ‘to grope a gull’ as being synonymous in 1536 with the expression ‘to pluck a pigeon’.\(^{41}\) Thus the lexis of rogue literature represents gulling as the transformation of a human victim into an animal species, often into birds.

Similarly the representation of gulling in *Twelfth Night* recognizes that transformation is, by definition, inherent in cozening: Maria expresses her intention to transform Malvolio into his very opposite: to ‘gull him into a nayword’ (2. 3. 130); later she notes the success of her ambition, saying ‘Yon gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado’ (3. 2. 65-6). To be revenged on the steward for his reproval of their revelry, the plotters seek to change Malvolio into a creature of farce; like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, he is to be transformed into an ass, as indicated by Maria's comment ‘Go shake your ears’ (2. 3. 121). Sir Andrew, for once, manages a real witticism in this respect, for when Maria says: ‘My purpose is indeed a horse of that colour’, he replies: ‘And your horse now would make him an ass’ (2. 3. 161-3).
When Malvolio takes up the forged letter, this process of transformation is marked by his metamorphosis into a whole range of native woodland animals. Already, in anticipation he has been designated ‘the niggardly rascally sheep-biter’ (2. 5. 4-5), ‘the trout that must be caught with tickling’ (2. 5. 20-1), and, as the extent of his self-delusions is revealed, the tricksters turn him into ‘a rare turkeycock’ (2. 5. 29). Then, just as he approaches the letter he is seen as a game bird (of a proverbially stupid nature): ‘Now is the woodcock near the gin’ (2. 5. 81); immediately after opening the letter he becomes a badger—‘Marry, hang thee, brock’ (2. 5. 102)—then a bird of prey—‘And with what a wing the staniel checks at it!’ (2. 5. 112)—then a hound sniffing at a scent while he wrestles with the conundrum of MOAI:

SIR Toby

... he is now at a cold scent.

FABIAN

Sowter will cry upon't for all this, though it be as rank as a fox.

(2. 5. 119-21).

This process of metamorphosis (of the *basse-cour*) echoes that of the real court (i.e. the *haute-cour*) where Orsino is changed into Actæon, the stag devoured by his own hounds, and Olivia compares herself to a bear chained to the stake, attacked by her own desires (3. 1. 117-19). Malvolio too is transformed into a bear, as Sir Toby says:

To anger him we'll have the bear again, and we'll fool him black and blue, shall we not, Sir Andrew?

(2. 5. 8-10).

What is more, in his comic transformation, Malvolio may well change himself into a grotesque bird before our very eyes, when he says to Olivia: ‘Not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs’ (3. 4. 24-5). This kind of grotesque transformation intersects with the disguises adopted as part of Carnival, where the sober black and white garb of the Puritan is transformed into motley, the garb of the Fool, by the garish addition of yellow; his identity is inverted and subverted by the force of comedy. The imposition of a symbolic animal identity on an individual, as E. Le Roy Ladurie notes, was characteristic of late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Carnival and the person thus disguised was king of his *reynage* or faction: thus in Romans in 1580, the representative of the upper classes adopted the identity of an Eagle, that of the lower classes, a capon, a castrated cock. There are references to Malvolio’s provisional castration in the constriction imposed by cross-gartering; and by exposing him to the force of satire, *via* visual and mental metaporphosis into a gull, we recognize one of the typical forces unleashed by Carnival, that of seeking to purge society of evil—indeed Maria refers to her gulling as *physic* (2. 3. 166). Such evil is formulated in *Twelfth Night* as self-love, hypocrisy, social ambition, elements united, for the gullers and for the play-goers too, in the guise of Puritanism. Indeed in this play deliberate trickery exposes hidden truth, evidence of a dialectic between truth and untruth noted elsewhere by Shakespeare, for instance when Polonius says: ‘Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth’ (*Hamlet*, 2. 1. 62).

It is possible that this visual transformation of Malvolio also contains a reference to the iconography of melancholy since the *OED* records as late as 1600 the adjective ‘gull’, meaning yellow: ‘Thou was full blyth and light of late ... / And art now both gool and green’: thus yellow stockings may also be the symbolic markings of a melancholic. Malvolio has therefore been metamorphosed into the comic double of Orsino, whose narcissism he reflects and comically amplifies.
Nevertheless metamorphosis is not the only element borrowed from the performance aspect of gulling as presented in the narratives of underworld literature. Other characteristics include putting on an entertainment for the sake of others—this is what Maria achieves by making Malvolio into ‘a common recreation’. A typical cony-catching story demonstrates how the enjoyment of the spectacle of a victim's discomfiture constitutes an integral part of the action:

A kind of foist performed in St Paul's:

There walked in the middle walk a plain country farmer, a man of good wealth, who had a well-lined purse, which a crew of foists having perceived, their hearts were set on fire to have it, and every one had a fling at him, but all in vain, for he kept his hand close in his pocket, and his purse fast in his fist like a subtle churl. Well, however, it was impossible to do any good with him he was so wary. … At last one of the crew … spoke to fellows … went to the farmer and walked directly before him … swooned … the poor farmer, seeing a proper young gentleman, as he thought, fall dead afore him, held him in his arms … the foist drew the farmer's purse and away … coming to himself, staggered out of St Paul's to join his crew and there boasted of his wit and experience.47

The ingenuity required to devise a plan to rob this particular farmer of his money commands the admiration of the co-plotters: a similar concern for and delight in plotting is evident in the play, as Sir Toby says, gleefully: ‘Excellent, I smell a device …’ (2. 3. 156)

The ‘play-acting’ in St Paul's with the elaborate charade of the mock fainting emphasizes the incident's status as a dramatic interlude, and in The Guls Horne-book, Dekker describes how ‘plotting’ is one of the activities which occupy the gallant's leisure hours:

The Duke's Tomb is a sanctuary … There you may spend your legs in winter a whole afternoon: converse, plot, laugh and talk any thing.48

In Twelfth Night the plot to gull Malvolio introduces a theatrical mise en abyme, the intradramatic doubling of all the aspects of performance. It is an additional layer of reflexivity in a play whose plot turns upon the confusion engendered by the existence of twins, where narcissism creates its own double(s), and where disguise inverts notions of sameness and difference.

In the sub-plot of Shakespeare's comedy, energy and appetite—characteristics of gulling49—are meshed with farce. Although the origins of farce are ancient, it was an essential component of Mystery and Morality plays and flourished in medieval France as a dramatic genre in its own right. In La Farce ou la Machine à rire, Bernadette Rey-Flaud argues that medieval farce was not an intrigue following a linear scheme but a tripartite mechanism, comparable to a syntactic group centred on a verb.50 In her view, whatever the specificity of the verb according to the individual farce, its essential significance must be ‘to dupe’. One of the expressions for ‘to dupe’ in Middle French farces, especially La Farce de Maistre Pathelin, was ‘manger de l'oie’.51 It is striking that the paradigmatic image of the goose contains the same elements as we have seen in ‘gull’, i.e. a bird and the victim of a stratagem. Moreover, ‘gull’ in the dialect of Warwickshire and Worcestershire could, until relatively recently, have the meaning of ‘an unfledged bird, especially a gosling’: a sense found in Shakespeare: ‘for I do fear / When every feather sticks in his own wing / Lord Timon will be left a naked gull, / Which flashes now a phoenix.’ (Timon, 2. 1. 29-32); the word ‘gull’ here is cognate with ‘goose’. In medieval fabliaux, the goose is an object of desire, thus an object of theft, an easy prey and a silly victim. These characteristics are codified in 1597 in a game entered by John Wolfe in the Stationers' Register as A new and most pleasant Game of the Goose (sometimes also known as Fox and Geese).
The association of duping with the image of a bird is therefore common to both gulling literature and farce. If we examine the lexical ramifications of the term ‘gull’ in detail, a further clue to the dramatic syntax of the subplot may emerge. There are earlier attestations of the word where the seabird—a prominent meaning of the term here—figures allusively as an image of appetite. Crowley in *A Way to Wealth* in 1550 has it that: ‘Men that would have all in their own handes … Comerauntes, gredye gulls, yea men that would eate up mene, women and children’. This meaning can be extrapolated to include the other sense of ‘gull’, i.e. throat or mouth, and which occurs as a verb, from the French *engouler*. Palsgrave (1530) glosses ‘I gulle in drinke as great drinkers do’, as ‘je engoule’. There exists a further attestation (1607): ‘O you that gull up the poysioned cup of pleasure’. In the seventeenth century, this sense is apparently always associated with revelry and indulgence in drink: ‘They are roystering and gulling in wine with a dear felicity’ (a phrase which admirably describes the knights' activities in this play). On a semantic level Sir Toby and Sir Andrew inscribe themselves as ‘gulls’, so that the dramatic and linguistic ramifications of ‘gulling’ reinforce one another in the play.

In the last Act, the limit of comedy is attained with the denunciation of gulling. Of the tricking of Malvolio, Orsino remarks: ‘This savours not much of distraction’ (5. 1. 311), the pun on *distraction* indicating that he finds not only that the steward is sane but that as Duke and ultimate authority, he fails to appreciate the humour of gulling. Here the designation of the various victims as ‘gulls’ can be seen as the final stage in the dramatic syntax, since for Malvolio and Sir Andrew the term ‘gull’ is the culmination of previous insults: Malvolio refers to himself as the ‘most notorious geck and gull’; and Sir Toby turns on Sir Andrew, stripping away any pretence of friendship, calling him ‘an ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave; a thin-faced knave, a gull’ (5. 1. 203-4). The ultimate metamorphosis bears no face, and as such it is the *ne plus ultra* of grotesque metamorphosis which marks the limit of carnivalesque transformation.

Examination of the context, or of the intertexts, of gulling in *Twelfth Night* might reveal an instance of what Stephen Greenblatt calls ‘the circulation of social energy’, when he argues that the theatre appropriates the energy of other kinds of discourse and adapts them for dramatic purposes. I would argue instead that the gulling game has affinities with theatrical representation since the simple narratives of the pamphlet literature enact fictive deceptions, in which comedy is often latent. To use Feste's expression (5. 1. 292) we observe how drama allows *vox* to the potential of these narratives, the result being an amplification of the dramatic dimension of gulling and a release of comic energy, as palpable on the twentieth-century stage as in the seventeenth-century playhouse.

But this is not to say that the loss of the Elizabethan context does not, in some sense, weaken the impact of the gulling on the spectator. The playhouse itself was the site of much nefarious activity: cut-purses, pickpockets and prostitutes thrived in the vicinity, if not on the premises themselves. Leah Scragg goes as far as reading into *Twelfth Night* a meta-textual warning against pickpockets: she argues that Malvolio's reference to Olivia's Cs, Us, Ts and her great Ps spells out the beginning of the word *CUTP*—, that is, cutpurse. The bear-baiting imagery associated with the treatment meted out to Malvolio may also allude to the proximity of the Elizabethan playhouse to the Bear Garden. ‘Yon gull Malvolio’ may then be designated as the most notorious of gulls, but certain of those looking on are gulled too, so the text reflexively implies that being a spectator to a gulling is to run the risk of becoming a gull oneself. Indeed the onstage gulling may have held a mirror up to cozenings in progress within the confines of the playhouse. Moreover, if the spectator has been led to believe in the innocuousness of gulling on account of its place in the comic underplot, the final moments of the play when Malvolio departs vowing ‘I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you’ (5. 1. 374) demonstrate that gulling takes comedy to its limit, and that in fact the playgoer may have been gulled into an assumption of its inoffensiveness.

In *Twelfth Night* gulling is allied with farce, but is also a means of exposing the truth. Malvolio, the pious Puritan, is revealed as an abominable hypocrite and a libidinous *arriviste*. But Maria is replaced by Feste as the master of the game, and the ‘sportful malice’ turns its perpetrators into sadistic persecutors in its latter
stages, and demonstrates that gulling may unleash evil impulses in apparently good-natured characters. Malvolio has committed no crime, he is appreciated by Olivia for the quality of his stewardship and, if his humiliation may appear as poetic justice, his imprisonment and virtual torture cannot be justified; as Hazlitt remarks, ‘poor Malvolio’s treatment is a little hard’. It has often been observed that Malvolio's refusal to participate in the festivity ends points to the tragic potential of gulling, but the corrupting influence of the ‘sport’ on its agents passes without comment.

The darker implications of this ostensibly ludic activity may anticipate the Machiavellian appropriation of the sport by Iago in *Othello* (1604). Here there is but a single player, an infinitely more sinister master of the game than Maria, who nevertheless acquires diabolic associations by setting events in motion, being apostrophized as ‘thou most excellent devil of wit’ (2. 5. 199-200). But in *Othello*, the pleasure of contrivance is a private, perverted pleasure experienced only by Iago, whose gullings exceed the force of the *beffa* in their savagery. Like his counterparts, Iago takes delight in gulling, but unlike them, he revels in evil for its own sake; there is no satisfactory explanation for his obsessive desire to destroy, whereas we understand, and even sympathize with, the plotters' desire for revenge on Malvolio. Iago's prey, Othello, although not without failings, does not deserve to be cozened into murdering his wife, forfeiting his self-respect and taking his own life; thus the balance of sympathy is wholly on the side of the victims in this play, and the consequences of cozening result in the deaths of most protagonists. In *Twelfth Night* Malvolio's predicament awakens only tardy and partial sympathy and his refusal to join in the general celebration does not have any incidence on the comic dénouement; he emerges unscathed and unchanged from the gulling game. But the gulling of Malvolio (and even of Sir Andrew Aguecheek) has revealed that this is potentially, if not necessarily, a cruel game. Othello undergoes tragic metamorphosis, the efficient soldier being transformed into a jealous monster, and the moment of anagnorisis is reached when (as in *Twelfth Night*) the victim is called a ‘gull’ to his face. Emilia says to Othello:

*O gull, O dolt,*

As ignorant as dirt! ...

(*Othello, 5. 2. 170-1*)

The depiction of gulling in *Twelfth Night* progressively reveals its latent forces, for the game's centripetal energy corrupts the players: Feste's sadistic treatment of Malvolio in the dark contrasts with Maria's innocent enjoyment of a ridiculous spectacle. In *Othello*, the latent energy of gulling is unleashed and we witness the extent of its capacity for destruction. But the game's forces, multiple trajectories and dramatic syntax are identifiably the same in both plays. Hence the difference between ‘comic’ and ‘tragic’ gulling as exemplified by *Twelfth Night* and *Othello* is one of emphasis and not of essence.

**Notes**

1. G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (1958), p. 287, says: ‘If we believe that Shakespeare used *Gl’Ingannati* as a source we may also believe that he took his title from a phrase in its prologue.’ However, he fails to make the connection between the sense of *beffana* and the comic gullings which figure in *Twelfth Night*: ‘Yet even if Shakespeare had read the passage and had recognized “la notte di beffana” as meaning “Twelfth Night”, there is nothing in the context of that prologue to lead him towards choosing this title for his comedy.’

2. In 1602 John Manningham’s comments record his impression of the gulling of Malvolio being the play’s most memorable feature; see *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple (1602-3)*, edited by Robert Parker Sorlien (1976), p. 48. Many modern critics have concurred with the view that Malvolio is the play’s central attraction, for example, Mark Van Doren, ‘The center is Malvolio’, *Shakespeare* (1939), p. 169 and Milton Crane, ‘*Twelfth Night* and Shakespearean Comedy’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 6 (1955). For a counter-view, see Harold Jenkins, *Shakespeare’s *Twelfth


5. Quoted by E. Story Donno, Twelfth Night, p. 8. The play was performed before Charles I at Whitehall on 2 February, 1631.


8. Bertrand Evans, ‘The Fruits of the Sport’ in Shakespeare's Comedies (Oxford, 1960), p. 130: ‘Of the race of Bottom, Sir Andrew would be at a disadvantage if he were not being gullied; being gullied, he is doubly “out”.’

9. Nashe, in The Terrors of the Night (1594), qualifies the gull in the following terms: ‘Lives there anie such slowe yce-brained, beefe-witted gull’ (OED, sb. 3, 1., quoted from Grosart, 111, 257) and we note that Andrew Aguecheek inadvertently advertises his own gullibility by applying the epithet ‘beef-witted’ to himself: ‘I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit’; to which Sir Toby replies: ‘No question’ (1. 3. 80-1).


11. According to B. Rey-Fland, La Farce ou la Machine à rire. Théorie d'un genre dramatique 1450-1550. Droz (Geneva, 1984), the former is ‘un bon tour pour rire’ (a good-natured trick to arouse laughter), and the latter ‘un mauvais tour’ … ‘pièce au déroulement complexe, articulée sur une tromperie fondée sur le jeu d'un mécanisme déterminant strictement les rapports entre les personnages’ (a nasty trick … whose progression is complex, involving a deception based on the action of a mechanism determining the relations between characters); p. 218, n. 50. The beffa is typically used to obtain reparation for insult or injury, as D. Boilet notes in ‘L'usage circonspect de la beffa dans le Novelino de Masuccio Salernitano’, Formes et significations de la ‘Beffa’ dans la littérature italienne de la Renaissance, 2 vols. (Paris, 1972-5) vol. 2, p. 101. See also K. M. Lea, Italian Popular Comedy. A Study in the Commedia dell'arte 1560-1620 with special reference to the English Stage, 2 vols. (New York, 1962).


13. Draper, The ‘Twelfth Night’ of Shakespeare's Audience: ‘Twelfth Night is rather the comedy of the social struggles of the time. Orsino wishes to fulfill his duty as head of the house and prolong his family line by a suitable marriage; Maria wants the security and dignity of marriage to a gentleman—a difficult accomplishment in view of her lack of dowry. Feste and Sir Toby want the security of future food and lodging; Viola and Sebastian hope to reassume their doffed coronets; and Sir Andrew and Malvolio are arrant social climbers … In short, this is Shakespeare's play of social security’, pp. 249-50.

14. Leo Salingar, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (Cambridge, 1974), p. 84: ‘The lesson of classical “art” for the comic playwright was the pleasure of contrivance. And the other leading motif Roman comedy, readopted and constantly diversified by Shakespeare and his renaissance predecessors, was deception—the irony of the trickster.’


16. This may be another example of what L. G. Salingar calls ‘points of contact between characters’ which is a constant theme in the play; ‘The Design of Twelfth Night’, Shakespeare Quarterly, 9 (1958), 117-39.


21. Draper in *The 'Twelfth Night' of Shakespeare's Audience*, chapter on ‘Sir Andrew Aguecheek’, comments on the ‘fellowship between Sir Toby and this foolish knight, the archetype of the contemporary dupe’: ‘Such gulls as Sir Andrew feathered the nests of many a rare bird in Elizabethan London’, p. 61.


23. Ibid., p. 86.

24. Ibid., p. 105.

25. Ibid., p. 105-6.

26. Ibid., p. 97.

27. *OED*, v.

28. Ibid., 1.


31. Ibid., p. 47.


33. Ibid., p. 124.

34. Ibid., p. 125.

35. Ibid., p. 125.

36. *A Manifest Detection*: ‘the barnard go so far beyond him in cunning (i.e the take-up), as doth the sun's summer brightness exceed the glimmering light of the winter stars’ (in Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, p. 47). This is an apt description of Maria's mastery of the game. A barnacle is, of course, a species of wild goose, but it seems probable that both expressions for this virtuoso role in the game are derived from the French verb, *berner*, to dupe.

37. Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Cosenage*: ‘High law is robbing by the highway side; sacking law is lechery; cheating law is play at false dice, cross-biting law is cozenage by whores; cony-catching law is cozenage by cards; figging law is cutting of purses and picking of pockets, etc.’ in Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, p. 135.


41. *OED*: 3. fig. b. slang: ‘one who lets himself be swindled’.


43. See the analogy with the Carnival of Romans where social rank was replicated by the variety of birds adopted as disguises: the bourgeois assumes the identity of birds capable of flight, whereas the vulgar elements are earth-bound animals: Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans*: De la
45. See Le Roy Ladurie, Le Carnaval de Romans, p. 345.
47. The Second Part of Cony-Catching, in Judges, The Elizabethan Underworld, pp. 167-8. This is a condensed quotation of the incident as indicated.
49. In Figures théâtrales: spectacle et société, edited by F. Decroisette and Elie Konigson (Paris, 1970), B. Faure considers that the dynamic of farce is determined by the will for money, food and sex.
50. B. Rey-Flaud, La Farce ou la Machine à rire: ‘on voit que le seul moment dynamique, celui qui engendre l'action, est constitué par la farce, qui fonctionne comme un verbe, porteur de l'action’ (one notes that the only dynamic moment, which starts up the action, is constituted by farce, which functions like a verb, the part of speech which signifies action), p. 231.
51. Mario Roques, ‘Notes sur Maistre Pathelin’, Romania, 57 (1931) 548-60, sees the meaning of manger de l'oie to be de faire moquer de soi (to be an object of derision), p. 554.
52. OED ‘gull’ n. 1 b.
53. OED ‘gull’ v. 1 Obs. 1. trans.
55. In the Arden edition of Twelfth Night, ‘allow vox’ is glossed by J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik as ‘permit me to use the appropriate voice’ (London), 1975.

Criticism: Themes: Paul Dean (essay date 2001)


[In the following essay, Dean analyzes Twelfth Night as the union of Renaissance Platonism and Augustinian theology, contending that Shakespeare employed the device of twins in order to explore the notion that two individuals are united as one through love, a concept that was understood by Neoplatonists to be analogous to the doctrine of the Trinity.]

One cannot read far into Twelfth Night without noticing the extent to which Shakespeare is fascinated, in this play, by triads and their possible resolution into monads. Olivia’s ‘liver, brain and heart’ are to be supplied, in Orsino’s imagination, with ‘one self king’ (I. i. 36-8); the Captain was ‘bred and born t three hours’ travel from this very place’ (I. ii. 20-1); Sir Toby tells Maria that Sir Andrew ‘has three thousand ducats a year’, to which she replies, ‘Ay, but he'll have but a year in all these ducats’ (I. iii. 20-1); Sir Andrew wishes he had ‘bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting’ (I. iii. 88-9); Olivia will ‘not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit’ (I. iii. 102-3); Orsino has known Cesario ‘but three days’ (I. iv. 3); a drunkard is like ‘a drowned man, a fool, and a madman’ and Sir Toby is ‘in the third degree of drink’ (I. v. 125-30); Olivia possesses a ‘most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty’ yet remains a ‘good gentle one’ (I. v. 162, 171); Olivia’s ‘schedules’ of her beauty proceed in three stages, ‘item, two lips … item, two grey eyes … item, one neck, one chin, and so forth’ (fourth?) (I. v. 236-7); Viola sets
out the infernal triangle in which she, Olivia, and Orsino are trapped (II. ii. 33-5); Feste asks Sir Toby and Sir Andrew ‘Did you never seee the picture of “we three”? ’ (II. iii. 15-16); Sir Toby proposes to sing ‘a catch that will draw three souls out of one weaver’ (II. iii. 56-7), and the catch when sung is for three voices; Sir Toby also sings ‘Three merry men be we’ (II. iii. 72); Malvolio asks the roisterers whether they have ‘no wit, manners, nor honesty’ (II. iii. 83); Maria schemes to ‘plant you two—and let the fool make a third’ in the box-tree (II. iii. 161-2, cf. II. v. 83); Orsino charges women’s affections with suffering ‘surfeit, cloyment, and revolt’ (II. iv. 98); Sir Toby dallyies with the idea of marrying Maria with ‘Shall I play my freedom at tray-trip? ’, a dice game in which the winner was the one who threw a three (II. v. 179); Sir Toby, impressed by Cesario's courtly vocabulary, recapitulates “Odours”, “pregnant” and “vouchsafed”—I'll get 'em all three all ready’ (III. i. 88-9); Viola insists ‘I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth’ (III. i. 156); Sir Toby says of Sir Andrew's challenge, ‘If thou “thou'st” him some thrice, it shall not be amiss’ (a miss?) (III. ii. 41-2); Malvolio declares, ‘Please one, and please all’ (III. iv. 22); Sir Toby warns Cesario of Sir Andrew that ‘souls and bodies hath he divorced three’ (III. iv. 229); Feste attempts to beg a third coin from Orsino with a set of variations on triplets (V. i. 32-5); Antonio is as certain that he has been with Cesario/Sebastian for ‘three months’ as Orsino is that ‘three months this youth hath tended upon me’ (V. i. 89, 94); Sebastian says that if only Cesario were a woman he would say, ‘Thrice welcome, drowned Viola’ (V. i. 235).

There are of course other numbers in the play, and nobody would want to hang an argument on such evidence alone, but it seems indisputable that Shakespeare, like other writers of the period such as Spenser or Donne, was prepared to play teasing Neoplatonic, numerological games with ones and threes. A triad in Neoplatonism is not the same concept as the three-in-oneness of the Christian Trinity, but Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry offers firm evidence that he was interested in the paradoxes of the latter doctrine. Commenting on Sonnet 105 (‘Let not my love be called idolatry’) in her recent study of the Sonnets, Helen Vendler notes that it depends first of all on the reader's recognizing the speaker's inventive transmutation of Christian Trinitarian theology and of the doxology. But this substantial piece of cleverness is accompanied by others. First of all, by identifying his beloved's qualities (fair, kind, and true) as those of the Platonic Triad (the Beautiful, the Good, the True), the poet opposes to his accuser's Christian Trinity an equally powerful, but classical, cultural totem as an emblem of the divine. The early Christianizing of the Platonic Triad had somewhat muted the contrast between classical and Christian values, but Shakespeare here restores them to full opposition.¹

She goes on to note the structuring of the poem in Trinitarian terms, the octave concentrating on oneness, the first three lines of the sestet on threeness, and the last three on three-in-oneness, so that the sonnet ‘is what it describes: a combination of one and three to make up three-in-one’.² I agree with Vendler that Shakespeare is juxtaposing Neoplatonism and Christianity in this sonnet, although I am not as sure as she is that he is concerned only with the opposition between them, and I certainly do not believe that to be the case in Twelfth Night.

A further key piece of evidence from the poetry, The Phoenix and the Turtle, was written about the same time as Twelfth Night and published in 1601 in the collection Loves Martyr, edited by Robert Chester. It is, in the words of its recent editor John Roe, a poem about ‘the paradox of pure eros’³ which equally expresses itself in terms of the monad-triad relationship:

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one:
Two distincts, division none;
Number there in love was slain.

(II. 25-8)
The love engendered between the two birds becomes a third term in the equation: ‘Either was the other’s mine’ (l. 35), a word which I would see as an extraordinarily bold use of the pronoun requiring mental inverted commas (‘Either was the other’s “mine”’). J. V. Cunningham has argued that the doctrine of love put forward in this stanza is Trinitarian, a position to which Roe is sympathetic. The stanza which has received most recent attention runs:

Property was thus appalled  
That the self was not the same;  
Single nature's double name  
Neither two nor one was called.

(ll. 37-40)

An exchange between Christianne Gillham, Peter Milward, and James H. Sims has sought to relate this stanza to Plato's Symposium and to Aquinas and Augustine on the Trinity, works which I shall also cite as important for our understanding of Twelfth Night. In passing from the anthem to the threnos, as Roe observes, ‘two-in-one becomes three-in-one’, as in Sonnet 105; and when he praises the poem for ‘The curious effect of producing a mood of triumph and exhaleration in treating of loss and disillusionment’ I am irresistibly reminded of the peculiarly precarious comic mood of Twelfth Night, steeped as it is in a melancholy which could have turned to something more painful. Indeed, perhaps it shortly afterwards did so; Stephen Medcalf has drawn attention to the strain of Platonic argument, which he derives from The Phoenix and the Turtle, in Troilus and Cressida, while if E. A. J. Honigmann is right, as I believe he is, in his suggestion that Twelfth Night and Othello were acted by the same cast, the remarkable ‘infernal trigonometry: a perfect, highly complex pattern of incongruent triangles’ which A. P. Rossiter discerned in the later play could be seen as a kind of diabolical inversion of Trinitarianism.

Twelfth Night itself has been linked to Plato, although its Trinitarianism has scarcely been remarked. That unprecedentedly audacious Shakespearian coup de théâtre, the reunion of Viola and Sebastian, offers a moment of stasis, of contemplative wonder, in a play full of comings and goings; a moment, too, which challenges the other characters', and our own, faith in the evidence of the senses, as Orsino remarks, ‘One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, natural perspective, that is and is not’ (V. i. 209-10), and Antonio's question to Sebastian—‘How have you made division of yourself? apple cleft in two is not more twin an these two creatures’—is echoed by Sebastian himself: ‘Do I stand there?’ (V. i. 216, 220). Barbara Everett, in her fine essay on Twelfth Night, remarks that at this point ‘the language deliberately but signally takes on what can only be called metaphysical dimensions’, so that Shakespeare ‘is asking questions almost too profound and philosophical for a romantic comedy’, and she cites by way of analogy the discussion of the origins of gender in Plato's Symposium. At the same time, the echoic closeness of ‘twin’ to ‘twain’ was likely to raise biblical and liturgical echoes for Shakespeare and his audience: when the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce,

he answered and said vnto them, Haue ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning,  
made them male and female. And said, For this cause, shall a man leaue father and mother,  
and cleeve vnto his wife, and they which were two, shalbe one flesh? Wherefore they are no  
more twaine, but one flesh.

(Matthew 19: 4-6)

In this passage Jesus alludes to Genesis 1: 26-7: ‘Furthermore God said, Let vs make man in our image  
according to our likenesse … Thus God created man in his image: in the image of God created he him: he  
created them male and female.' Shakespeare and his audience also knew these passages from the marriage  
service (which probably underlies the opening of Sonnet 36, ‘Let me confess that we two must be twain,
though our undivided loves are one’), and Augustine several times quotes the words ‘Let us make man in our image’, in his treatise on the Trinity, as evidence that the doctrine was already latent in the Old Testament. 

If Shakespeare read Plato it was almost certainly in Latin; Stephen Medcalf speculates that he might have had access to Jonson’s copy of Serranus’s edition and translation. However that may be, Shakespeare had a close knowledge of the Platonic tradition as it had been transmitted by the Renaissance, and, I think, was also well acquainted with Augustinian theology, if not specifically with the treatise on the Trinity. *Twelfth Night* is a characteristic fusion (rather than a Vendlerian opposition) of these ideas. My argument in what follows will be that Shakespeare uses the device of the twins, two individuals with, as it were, one flesh in Cesario, to explore the mystery of human love whereby twain become one, understood Neoplatonically as an analogy of the doctrine of the Trinity.

II

In the *Symposium* Plato puts into the mouth of Aristophanes the myth that originally human beings were spherical in shape: ‘each human being was a rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle’, with each bodily organ and feature doubled; there were three sexes, male, female, and hermaphrodite which was a compound of the other two. The male sprang from the sun, the female from the earth, and the hermaphrodite from the moon, ‘which partakes of the nature of both sun and earth’. Fearing that the power of the human race posed a threat to the gods, Zeus bisected each person in order to dissipate its energies. Love, and its physical expression in sex, are thus explained as ‘the desire and pursuit of the whole’, the longing of human beings to recover their original spherical shape (we remember Othello and Desdemona ‘making the beast with two backs’). Halves derived from hermaphrodites, Aristophanes adds, are heterosexual in orientation, halves derived from male spheres homosexual, and halves derived from female spheres lesbian. The relevance of this to the biologically impossible existence of identical twins of opposite sexes, Viola and Sebastian, and of the composite Cesario for whom each is at various times mistaken, seems clear. When Viola defines the incongruous and incongruent triangles which she finds so frustrating, she recognizes the dilemma of hermaphroditism in which she has unwittingly placed herself by her disguise—which, we may remember, she expected, in a strikingly Neoplatonic phrase, to ‘become e form of my intent’ (I. ii. 51-2):

> How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,  
> And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,  
> And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.  
> What will become of this? As I am man,  
> My state is desperate for my master's love.  
> As I am woman, now alas the day,  
> What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!  
>  
> (II. ii. 33-9)

The ‘as’ in ‘As I am man … As I am woman …’ means both ‘in so far as’ and ‘since’. Her plight is made worse if she has, as she requested, been presented to Orsino by the Captain ‘as an eunuch’ (I. ii. 53). Shakespeare does not follow out this idea, perhaps wisely; at any rate the word suggests the frustrating denaturing which Viola must undergo in her disguise.

At the rediscovery of the Platonic corpus during the Italian Renaissance, the *Symposium* was frequently condemned as immoral, for instance by Antonio Panormita in his book *Hermaphroditus* (1425), although it found powerful defenders such as Leonardo Bruni and Cosimo de’ Medici. In 1469 Cardinal Bessarion's treatise *In calumniatorem Platonis* rehabilitated the dialogue by placing it in what James Hankins calls ‘a tradition of metaphysical eros’, setting out the doctrines of Platonic love. Bessarion was buttressed by Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium*, also published in 1469, which, like Bessarion, leaned on
Augustine and recognized that Plato had evolved his own kind of Trinitarian thinking.\textsuperscript{17}

Ficino's \textit{Convivium} is undoubtedly the most important of these works,\textsuperscript{18} since it was widely known in England through its restatement by Castiglione in \textit{Il Cortegiano}, translated into English in 1561 by Sir Thomas Hoby as \textit{The Book of the Courtier}, a work Shakespeare knew. The \textit{Convivium} is itself cast in the form of a symposium, whose participants take turns to comment on the speeches in Plato. There are numerous points of interest for a reader of \textit{Twelfth Night}; for example, the remark that Platonists are supposed to think in triplets (p. 43 n. 7), or the belief of the Pythagoreans that ‘the Trinity was the measure of all things’ (p. 45)—Malvolio, we recall, was to ‘hold th'opinion of Pythagoras’ concerning transmigration before Feste would believe him sane (IV. ii. 57-9); or the statement that the soul dwells in the body as in the Lethe (p. 76), just as Sebastian prays, ‘Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep’ (IV. i. 60—the preceding line, quoted earlier, was ‘Or I am mad, or else this is a dream’). On a broader canvas, the speeches of the commentators frequently offer illuminating glosses on the relationships in \textit{Twelfth Night}. Here, for example, is Cavalcanti commenting on Pausanias:

\begin{quote}
O wondrous contact in which he who gives himself up for another has the other, and does not cease to be himself! O inestimable gain, when two become one in such a way that each of the two, instead of being only one, becomes two, and, as if he were doubled, he who had one life, with only one death intervening, now has two lives. For a man who dies once and revives twice has acquired for a single life a double, for a single self two selves. … The soul of the love becomes a mirror in which the image of the beloved is reflected. For that reason, when the beloved recognises himself in the lover, he is forced to love him.
\end{quote}

(pp. 56-7)

Or here is Cristoforo Landini commenting on that very speech of Aristophanes to which I referred at the outset. He allegorizes it, equating the male hemispheres with courage, the female with temperance, and the hermaphrodite, because of its impartial nature, with justice. Souls were created originally with two lights, one innate, whereby they perceived inferiors and equals, and one infused, whereby they acknowledged superiors. Division came when they turned to innate light alone:

\begin{quote}
When souls, already divided and immersed in bodies, first have come to the years of adolescence, they are aroused by the natural and innate light which they retained (as if by a certain half of themselves) to recover, through the study of truth, that infused and divine light, once half of themselves, which they lost in falling.
\end{quote}

(p. 73)

If you are the lover, another speaker adds, you must be near the beloved in order to be near yourself, since all your striving is to ‘ransom your captive self’ (p. 129).

The trap of narcissism is also considered by Ficino. The inexperienced soul achieves in the body a beauty which is really its own shadow, so its desire is directed upon itself, but not realizing this it remains eternally unsatisfied (pp. 140-1). One thinks of Malvolio ‘practising behaviour to his own shadow’ (II. iii. 14-15), although the Echo and Narcissus myth has far wider applicability to the play.\textsuperscript{20} Medieval interpretation of Ovid had thrown up one detail which, as far as I know, is not paralleled elsewhere outside Shakespeare: Pausanias speculated that Narcissus might have had a twin sister who died, and that he drowned himself believing it was she whom he saw in the pool. It would follow from this, of course, that they were identical twins.\textsuperscript{21}
Castiglione refers to the Symposium explicitly and allusively, as when he gives the following comments to Lord Julian de Medicis:

Truth it is, that Nature entendeth alwaies to bring forth matters most perfect, and therefore meaneth to bring forth the man in his kind, but not more male than female. Yea were it so that she alwaies brought forth male, then should it without peradventure bee an unperfectnesse: for like as of the bodie and of the soule there ariseth a compound more nobler than his partes, which is man: Even so of the felowship of male and female there ariseth a compound preserving mankinde, without which the partes were in decay, and therefore male and female by nature are alwaies together, neither can the one be without the other: right so he ought not to bee called the male, that hath not a female (according to the definition of both the one and the other) nor she the female that hath not a male.

And so for much as one kinde alone betokeneth an imperfection, the Divines of olde time referre both the one and the other to God: Wherefore Orpheus saide that Jupiter was both male and female: And it is read in scripture that God fashioned male and female to his likenes. And the Poets many times speaking of the Gods, meddle the kindes together.22

Lord Julian then becomes embroiled in a complicated discussion with Lord Gaspar Pallavicin about the similarity of male and female to Platonic Form and Matter respectively, until they are both rebuked by the umpire of the discussion, Lady Emilia Pia: ‘for love of God (quoth she) come once out of these your Matters and Formes and males and females, and speake so that you may bee understood’.23 The case is, however, even more complicated than Lady Emilia supposes.

Ovid's treatments of the myths of Echo and Narcissus in Book III, and of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in Book IV, of the Metamorphoses lodged in the minds of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As Leonard Barkan observes, the stories are thematically paired, that of ‘one being who becomes two lovers’ with that of ‘two lovers who are fused into one being’.24 Both, too, are narratives about the process of psychological and sexual maturation, showing that the discovery of the self is also the discovery of its limitations. Narcissus will live to old age, Tieresias predicts in Golding's translation, only provided that ‘him selfe he doe not know’.25 Cold and disdainful, he scorns women and men alike, one of the latter praying that he may know the agony of unrequited love, as Viola prays for Olivia (I. v. 276). The plight of Echo, ‘trapped’, in Barkan's phrase, ‘in imitation and reflection’,26 strongly anticipates that of Viola, who must ‘act’ Orsino's ‘woes’ and reduces herself to a voice in the ‘willow cabin’ speech. Narcissus, both ‘the party whom he woos, and suitor that doth woo’, states his dilemma in words which Shakespeare must have recalled when he gave Viola the ‘How will this fadge?’ speech I quoted earlier: ‘What shall I doe? Be wood or wo? whom shall I wo therefore? e thing I seek is in my selfe’.27 As for the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, that evokes the Symposium myth, and supplies a source for the denouement of Twelfth Night, when the lovers are fused into a single creature so that

The bodies of them twaine
Were mixt and joyned in one. To both them did remaine
One countenance. 
......They were not any lenger two; but (as it were) a toy
Of double shape: Ye could not say it was a perfect boy,
Nor perfect wench: it seemed both and none of both to beene.(28)

‘A toy double shape’ must be ‘A natural perspective, that is and is not’. Shakespeare would also have known Marlowe's use of the story in Hero and Leander (registered 1593), which credits Leander's lips with a beauty 'exceeding his at leapt into the water for a kiss his own shadow' (I. 73-5),29 so that 'some swore he was a maid in mans attire' (I. 83), just as Orsino will say of Cesario (I. iv. 30-4), while Leander's argument that Hero's refusal to propagate is a selfish waste (I. 234-48) is also urged by Viola to Olivia (I. v. 230-2). Hero is ‘Venus nun’ (I. 45), a cloistered solitary like Olivia; she is compared to Salmacis (II. 46) and Leander's flirting
with her is said to be ‘as a brother with his sister toyed’ (II. 52), perhaps picking up ‘toy’ from Golding. Chapman accepted these ambiguities in his continuation of Marlowe's poem (1598); Hero deflowered is ‘even to her selfe a stranger’ (III. 203), and feels ‘As if she had two soules: one for the face, e for the hart’ (III. 271-2). She addresses Leander as ‘my selfe’ (III. 412) and the narrator summarizes, ‘Hero Leander is, Leander Hero: ch vertue love hath to make one of two’ (III. 357-8). Chapman's treatment is more elevated and Neoplatonic than Marlowe's, and Shakespeare would surely have found congenial the conclusion that ‘Where Loves forme is, love is, love is forme’ (V. 227).

III

It was at the Council of Nicea in 325 that the credal statements that Jesus was ‘begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father’ and that the Holy Ghost ‘proceedeth from the Father and the Son’ were framed. These formulas were the Church's response to the questions of the relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity, and of his relationship to those he called the Father and the Comforter. In his treatise On the Trinity, completed around the year 420, St Augustine, as Henry Chadwick engagingly puts it, ‘showed effortlessly that the concept of being both one and three is so far from being gobbledygook that simple reflection on the nature of human personality offers an immediate example’. Augustine defended the doctrine both in mathematical terms, with a sequence of arguments based on the ratio 1:2, and in relational terms, giving a whole series of analogies from our own experience, of which the most relevant one here is the triad amans, quod amat, and amor: the lover, the beloved, and the love which each has for the other. I shall say a little more about each of these positions in turn.

First, the mathematical arguments. The number 3 consists, Augustine observes, of itself and also of the sum of the two preceding numbers. The number 6 is a perfect number

because it is made up of its parts, of which it has three, a sixth, a third, and a half; nor has it any other part which is a simple fraction of it. Its sixth part then is 1, its third part 2, and its half part 3. But 1, 2, and 3 added together make the same number 6.

(On the Trinity, IV. 2. 158)

I cannot help wondering about the relevance of this to Twelfth Night, which in the Christian liturgy commemorates the visit of wise men who early in tradition, although not in Scripture, numbered three, to adore the baby who was both a single child with two human parents, and a Person of the Trinity. (Furthermore, the sum of the two digits in the number 12 is itself 3—which may be seen as too neat but is no more so than much in Augustine's treatise.) The title of Shakespeare's play has often been dismissed as arbitrary; ‘a silly play, and not at all relating to the name or day’, Samuel Pepys thought. He could not have been more wrong. Although Leslie Hotson's argument that the play was originally staged on Twelfth Night 1601 ‘has not won general acceptance’—the only recorded performance of it in Shakespeare's lifetime was on Candlemas, 2 February 1602—this does not mean that the Feast of the Epiphany is irrelevant to the play, as a glance at the passages appointed to be read for that feast and its season in the 1559 Prayer Book indicates. Augustine allegorizes the story of the Magi into a narrative of the human condition: just as they, ‘after they were warned of God in sleep that they should not go again to Herod … returned into their own country another way’, so we journey towards our homeland in Paradise, not by the way of death but by the way of life (IV. 3. 163). So, too, Viola and Sebastian journey to their reconciliation by an indirect and apparently circuituous path. The paradigm statement of this Christian romance is Gonzalo's in The Tempest: that each of the travellers found ‘ourselves, en no man was his own’ (V. i. 215-16).

The second great plank in Augustine's argument, the analogies with human personality, considers the nature of sexual love in markedly Platonic terms:
Now bodies of course grow by being joined together. Although it is true that whoever cleaves to his wife is one body, nevertheless it becomes a bigger body than the man's alone or the woman's alone.

(VI. 2. 211)

Yet even this does not approach the unity of the Persons of the Trinity, which Augustine states in what the translation renders as a staggeringly powerful series of monosyllables: ‘They are each in each and all in each, and each in all and all in all, and all are one’ (VI. 2. 214). In Book VIII he considers the triad referred to earlier, _amans, quod amatur, amor_: ‘What does spirit love in a friend but spirit? So here again there are three, lover and what is being loved, and love’ (VIII. 5. 255). This would fit the friendship of Sebastian and Antonio just as much as the more obviously sexual relationships in _Twelfth Night_. Meeting the objection that if I love myself there will be only two terms in the equation, Augustine asserts that ‘it is not the case that anyone who loves himself is love except when love loves itself’ (IX. 1. 272), a remark which conjures up the different narcissisms of Orsino, Olivia, and Malvolio. But if the mind knows and loves itself, there is the triad mind, love, and knowledge, ‘and so you have a certain image of the Trinity, the mind itself and its knowledge, which is its offspring and its word about itself, and love as the third element, and these three are one’ (1 Jn 5: 8) (IX. 3. 282).

Attacking what he calls academic philosophy, which adopts a proto-Cartesian scepticism, insisting that we can know nothing for certain, Augustine maintains that the most fundamental knowledge we have is of our own existence. If an academic philosopher objects that our belief that we exist is caused by the fact that we are dreaming, or insane, we can retort that dreaming or insanity can be predicated only of existing beings: ‘So someone who says he knows he is alive can never be lying or be deceived’ (XV. 4. 412). These matters are reflected in _Twelfth Night_ in both serious and light-hearted ways. Malvolio, whose love for Olivia is an illusion, really only love of self, is driven nearly mad by Feste in the prison scene (IV. ii), Viola realizes that, if Olivia has really fallen in love with Cesario, ‘she were better love a dream’ (II. ii. 27), while Sebastian, in his bewilderment following his meeting with Olivia, declares ‘Or I am mad, or else this is a dream’ (IV. i. 59), although he later becomes certain that ‘though ’tis wonder that enwraps me thus, t ’tis not madness’ (IV. iii. 3-4). The wonder is that Olivia did love a dream, whose name was Cesario, but that the dream had a correspondent reality; in Platonic terms Cesario is the Form of which Viola and Sebastian are the material embodiments, just as in Christian terms Viola, Sebastian, and their relationship, which is so strong that it has its own separate existence as Cesario, are the Trinity of this play of love. And if we agree with Linda Woodbridge that ‘the central mystery of _Twelfth Night_’ is that ‘Cesario is a being made up of both Viola and Sebastian—a hermaphroditic symbol of wholeness that calls forth love from Olivia and Orsino alike’, we can add that such a procedure is a characteristic Shakespearian fusion of Augustinian Trinitarian theology and the parallel Neoplatonic tradition of number symbolism which constructs a triangle of the two lovers and the third self which they become through their love.

**IV**

Finally I should like to consider what light may be thrown on these issues by contemporary theological thinking about the Trinity. I shall focus on a recent stimulating book, Colin Gunton's 1992 Bampton Lectures. He regrets the fact that

The _Symposium_, with its systematic downgrading of bodily sexuality and of sexual distinctions—with some of which Augustine and other Christian thinkers unfortunately colluded—reveals an evasion of what I believe to be the fact that the whole person, body, mind and spirit, and not merely a part, is definitive of human being.
Professor Gunton offers his lectures as an extended commentary on the first chapter of Genesis in opposition to those, among whom he names Augustine, whose interpretation of it was Platonic, seeing Adam and Eve as universal archetypes. Against this Gunton argues that the creation was of particulars, and that the neglect of this truth, paradoxically, lies at the heart of postmodernist relativism and subjectivity: for while ‘everything may be what it is and not another thing … it is also what it uniquely is by virtue of its relation to everything else’. In their uniqueness and diversity, human beings are images of the creative Trinity whose ‘persons do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in their relations’.

I see this as a profound and timely application of Augustinian thought rather than as antagonistic to it, and it certainly accords with what Shakespeare gives us. The first leader in The Times for 24 May 1997, which was the day before Trinity Sunday, well states that ‘At the heart of the doctrine of God as Trinity, is the conviction that God is a communion of persons’, a communion for which the writer, like Professor Gunton, reminds us that the ancient name is perichoresis, beautifully glossed as ‘a divine round-dance of mutually indwelling love’. All Shakespeare's comedies are like this, even if, as with Malvolio, Shylock, Jacques or Don John, there are always those who are ‘for other than for dancing measures’. One of the greatest representations of the perichoresis, the fifteenth-century icon ‘The Hospitality of Abraham’ by Andrei Rublev, is based, like much Trinitarian thinking in the Eastern tradition, on the interpretation of the visit of the three angels to Abraham in Genesis 18 as a figura of the Trinity. Augustine explains the passage in this sense (On the Trinity, II. 4. 111, II. 7. 121, III. 4. 142), so resolving the apparent contradiction that the angels are sometimes spoken of as though there were only one of them.

I do not claim that Shakespeare knew the Rublev icon, but I am sure he knew its tradition, and I regret the refusal of editors of Twelfth Night to take that tradition seriously as an explanation of ‘the picture of “we three”’ (II. iii. 15-16). For instance, Warren and Wells simply note on that phrase, ‘A caption to a trick picture showing two fools' or asses' heads; the third was the viewer.’ However, in the Rublev icon, as in some medieval and Renaissance depictions of the Trinity or Holy Family, there is a vacant space at the table as though to be filled by the viewer, who is then a participant in as well as an interpreter of the picture. Similarly, Orsino and Olivia are both in love with images rather than substances; Viola's vocation is to be their therapist, to bring them from illusion to reality. Orsino's images of love as the amorphous and devouring sea (I. i. 10-11, II. iv. 99-100) are at odds with his claim that he is the archetypal lover, ‘unstaid and skittish in all motions else ve in the constant image of the creature at is beloved’ (II. iv. 17-19). Orsino sends Cesario to Olivia not only as his ambassador but as his substitute, who is to ‘act [his] woes’ (I. iv. 26), and his reason is not Cesario's asexuality but ‘his’ femininity: ‘all is semblative a woman's part’ (I. iv. 34), so that Olivia may listen as though to another woman. Olivia cannot love Orsino simply because she cannot (and, after all, what better reason could there be?), yet she falls in love with the image of Orsino embodied in ‘this youth's perfections’ (I. v. 286). Similarly, Cesario confesses that he has loved a woman who resembles Orsino (II. iv. 24-7), and plays a masochistic game of ‘Let's pretend’:

Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,
Hath for your love as great a pang of heart
As you have for Olivia
.....My father had a daughter loved a man
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman
I should your lordship ...

(II. iv. 88-90, 107-9)

In the neutral space created by Viola's disguise, that may be spoken which must otherwise be stifled, yet only by analogy; hypotheses multiply, triangles become blocked off, emotional frustration results. Viola declares that ‘I am all the daughters of my father's house, d all the brothers too’—adding, more truly than she intends, ‘and yet I know not’ (II. v. 120-1). If she is all the daughters and all the brothers she is a hermaphrodite, yet her circular perfection is barren: what will release her lies beyond her control; she has already committed it to
Time (II. ii. 40), and Time, directed by a benevolent Providence, casts her twin upon the Illyrian shore. She is never called Viola until Sebastian so calls her (V. i. 123); for us she has always been Cesario, and only Sebastian can restore to her her rightful name and the freedom to be herself. She at first assumes he is a ghost, ‘If spirits can assume both form and suit’, and has to be reassured: ‘A spirit I am indeed, t am in that dimension grossly clad ich from the womb I did participate’ (V. i. 229-31). Sebastian is no Neoplatonic Form, unlike Cesario; he is Form embodied in Matter.

In the parallel dialogue with Olivia in II. i, Viola speaks more openly, if more bafflingly. She has earlier stated that ‘I am not that I play’ (I. v. 176). Now she goes further: ‘I am not what I am’ (II. i. 139)—a line, incidentally, which she shares with Iago. Warren and Wells explain this by ‘I am not what I seem’, but it means what it says, and its wording must recall the self-naming of God in Exodus 3: 14, ‘And God answered Moses, I am that I am’, a verse cited by Augustine as an affirmation of God's eternal being and his defiance of further definition (On the Trinity, V. 1. 190, VII. 3. 228). Viola-as-Cesario brings no epiphany for Olivia, but rather a dangerous delusion; Viola's own true being is in suspension, awaiting its awakening, while she is forced to play Echo to everyone else's Narcissus—not only Orsino's and Olivia's, but Antonio's, who, mistaking her for Sebastian in the moment of his arrest, admits that he felt ‘sanctity of love’ and offered ‘devotion’ to Sebastian's ‘image’ (III. iv. 352-4), and exclaims:

But O, how vile an idol proves this god!  
Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.  
In nature there's no blemish but the mind.  
None can be called deformed but the unkind.  
Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil  
Are empty trunks o'er-flourished by the devil.

(III. iv. 356-61)

These lines do not often receive much comment, but Antonio's recognition that he has been performing a kind of idolatry in his attachment to Sebastian is couched in Neoplatonic terms (cf. Viola's words to the Captain in I. ii. 44-8). Sebastian, after all, had entrusted Antonio with his true name (II. i. 13-15); Antonio is the only other person who knows that Sebastian is still alive, and his addressing Viola by her brother's name here reveals that fact to her (III. iv. 370). Antonio begs to be Sebastian's ‘servant’ and declares, though not to his face, that he ‘ador[es]’ him (II. i. 31, 42). To call Sebastian and Antonio ‘an overtly homosexual couple’, as Stephen Orgel has done is to commit a peculiarly naive piece of political correctness. To repeat Colin Gunton's point, personal relationships are constitutive of the persons related, so that it is only through our relationships that we come to understand ourselves. Not only theologians but philosophers such as John MacMurray and Michael Polanyi have stressed this anti-Cartesian point, which Olivia states when she acknowledges that ‘ourselves we do not owe’ (I. v. 300).

The movement from image to reality is a commonplace in discussion of Shakespeare, but we need, in this context especially, to give to the word ‘image’ an unusually strong meaning. The verse in Genesis 1: 26, ‘Furthermore God said, Let vs make man in our image according to our likenesse’, with its plural pronouns, had traditionally been taken, as I mentioned earlier, as evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity was latent in the Old Testament. Augustine had so taken it (On the Trinity, I. 3. 75, VII. 4. 231, XII. 2. 325, XIV. 5. 390), while cautioning that each human being is made in the image of the Trinity as such, not of any one of the Persons. The marriages which close Twelfth Night are evidence of the attainment of such a reality by the partners, summed up in the words of the Priest:

A contract of eternal bond of love,  
Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands,  
Attested by the holy close of lips,  
Strengthened by interchangegement of your rings,  
And all the ceremony of this compact

949
Sealed in my function, by my testimony;
Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave
I have travelled but two hours.

(V. i. 152-9)

The great surprise is that he does not say ‘three hours’, but that would be inappropriate; Shakespeare wants to emphasize two persons becoming one here, rather than one person reflecting three. Sebastian remarks to Olivia:

You would have been contracted to a maid,
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived.
You are betrothed both to a maid and man.

(V. i. 255-7)

—a line of thought echoed by Orsino when he calls Viola ‘your master's mistress’ (V. i. 317, cf. Sonnet 20, 1. 2) and insists on retaining the name Cesario for her ‘while you are a man’ (V. i. 376). The notes in the current editions are less than helpful here. The lines, I take it, have to be understood as referring to the hermaphroditic wholeness of Cesario and to the completeness of the creation: ‘Thus God created the man in his image: in the image of God created he him: he created them male and female’ (Genesis 1: 27), quoted by Jesus in Matthew, as I mentioned earlier, just before he says, ‘For this cause, shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they which were two, shall be one flesh’ (Matt. 19: 5)—‘as though’, the Geneva Bible wonderfully adds in the margin, ‘they were glued together’.

If we are created in the image of the Trinity, and the mutual love of the marriage partners is the highest analogy for the communion of the Persons of the Trinity, then reality is Trinitarian, human life a perichoresis. The natural perspective ‘is, and is not’, because, like God, it simply is what it is. When Sebastian says ‘Nor can there be that deity in my nature here and everywhere’ (V. i. 221-2) he is in a sense right, but in another sense Shakespeare, I have tried to show, wants to say emphatically that that is just what there can be.

Notes

2. Ibid. 446. Not that this Neoplatonic view of friendship was Shakespeare’s alone. In the refrain of a poem first printed in 1602, for example, Sidney celebrated his friendship with Dyer and Greville in Trinitarian terms, as attesting the existence of ‘one Minde in Bodies three’: The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. W. A. Ringler Jr. (Oxford, 1962), 260-1.
7. Ibid. 54.

14. Medcalf, ‘Shakespeare on Beauty, Truth and Transcendence’, 118. As he reminds us, Jonson was one of Shakespeare's fellow-contributors to *Loves Martyr*.
18. I quote from Sears Jayne's translation of Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's 'Symposium on Love'* (Dallas, 1985); subsequent references are given in the text.
23. Ibid. 200.
28. Ibid. iv. 462-4, 468-70. ‘Toy’ here must mean a perspective (not cited in *OED*), providing a further link with Orsino's words in Act V. Shakespeare takes this idea from Golding, not from Ovid, who compares the couple's closeness to that of a twig grafted on to a tree.
30. Chapman has numerological digressions in his continuation (e.g. V. 323-40). Marlowe had commented on the paradox that ‘one is no number’ (I. 255), which Shakespeare pursues in Sonnets
34. For details see B. K. Lewalski, ‘Thematic Patterns in Twelfth Night’, Shakespeare Studies, 1 (1965), 168-81; M. B. Smith, Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto, 1966); R. C. Hassel Jr., Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year (Lincoln, Nebr., 1979), 82-5. I have followed out some of the implications in ‘The Harrowing of Malvolio: The Theological Background of Twelfth Night, Act 4, Scene 2’, Connotations, 7/2 (1997/8), 203-14. Steve Sohmer has recently taken a different view of the evidence in Shakespeare’s Mystery Play: the Opening of the Globe Theatre 1599 (Manchester, 1999), pp. 199-216. Setting Shakespeare’s work in the context of the refusal of Protestant England to adopt the Gregorian calendar in place of the old Julian one, he suggests that the play’s title in fact refers to 12 December (mentioned by Sir Toby at II. iii. 79), which would have been Christmas Day under the reformed calendar.
36. L. Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620 (Brighton, 1984), 141. My approach offers a different perspective on the role-playing to that which sees it mainly in terms of cross-dressing and gender ambiguity. The question whether a boy actor dressed as a girl had pederastic or homosexual appeal for some men in an Elizabethan audience is of course impossible to settle. In her pioneering Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975) Juliet Dusinberre argued against this supposition, and was challenged by Lisa Jardine in Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Brighton, 1983). A recent contribution to the debate is M. Shapiro, Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages (Ann Arbor, 1994).
38. Ibid. 173.
39. Ibid. 214.
40. Contrast the interpretation given by the marginal gloss on Genesis 18: 3 in the Geneva Bible, which comments that Moses is ‘speaking to one of them in whom appeared to be most majestie, for he thought they had bin men’.
41. Othello, ed. Honigmann, i. i. 64.
42. Quoted by Warren and Wells, p. 42 n. 2.

An earlier version of this article was presented to the Renaissance Graduate Seminar at the University of York in February 1998 at the kind invitation of Dr John Roe. I am grateful to him for his comments, and especially to my colleague Martin Cawte for many hours of discussion. Work on the article was greatly helped by the resources of the Folger Shakespeare Library and of the John K. Mullen Memorial Library at the Catholic University of America.

All references to Twelfth Night are to the edition by Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford, 1994).

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 74): Further Reading

CRITICISM

Reviews the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Twelfth Night at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The critic finds the production, directed by Adrian Noble, to be unmoving and palatable at best.


Examines the dramatic style Shakespeare used in Twelfth Night, demonstrating the ways in which Shakespeare employed simple lyricism as well as artistic prose dialogue.


Explores the ways in which productions of Twelfth Night can fully explore the play's potential, and asserts that the entire text, complete and in the order in which Shakespeare composed it, must be utilized by a production's director.


Studies Feste's song, delivered at the end of Twelfth Night, and comments on its obscene implications.


Reviews the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival's production of Twelfth Night, directed by Joseph Discher. In Klein's appraisal, the production failed at both comedic and romantic interpretations of the play.


Reviews in detail the stage design of the production of Twelfth Night directed by Nicholas Hytner and designed by Bob Crowley.


Analyzes a passage of Twelfth Night (I.v.1-30) between Maria and Feste and offers an interpretation of the text that reveals Feste's nature and the dangerous potential of his wit.


Attempts to answer the riddle concerning the initials “M.O.A.I.” presented in Act II, scene v. of Twelfth Night. Smith surveys solutions suggested by other critics and employs Renaissance semantics in order to propose his own reading of the scene.

Examines the mistakes made by the protagonists of Twelfth Night, maintaining that the errors these characters make are not only part of the overt mechanisms of the plot, but also serve to reveal aspects of the characters' psychological motivations as well as the play's underlying themes of deception and love.

Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 85): Introduction

Twelfth Night

Viewed as one of Shakespeare's finest romantic comedies, Twelfth Night (c. 1600-01) continues to be praised by scholars as a fascinating and evocative study of love, sexual desire, and personal discovery. Its central plot concerns a love triangle between the Illyrian nobleman Orsino, his beloved but unattainable Olivia, and the shipwrecked Viola. After disguising herself as the male page Cesario, Viola takes a position in Orsino's court and swiftly becomes enamored of her patron even as he sends her to woo Olivia on his behalf. Olivia, in turn, falls in love with Viola, whom she believes to be a man. The play also features a subplot centered on the priggish Malvolio, steward to Olivia, and the punishment he endures at the hands of his fellow servants.

Modern critical assessments of Twelfth Night have tended to focus on the drama's captivating characters as well as on its themes of love, gender, and sexuality. Regarding Twelfth Night's place within the Shakespearean canon, S. Musgrove (see Further Reading) describes the work as the last in a series of harmoniously resolved festive comedies that includes the plays As You Like It and Much Ado about Nothing. J. M. Gregson (see Further Reading) distinguishes Twelfth Night as the epitome of Elizabethan romantic comedy, and finds in its skilled blending of disparate and contradictory elements “an almost perfect play.”

Critics have long acknowledged the appeal of Twelfth Night's principal characters, particularly the play's protagonist Viola and the abused Malvolio, who are both considered to be among Shakespeare's most outstanding comic characterizations. Lydia Forbes (1962) examines Shakespeare's vivid portraits of the self-assured and charming Viola, the courageous and forthright Sebastian, the narcissistic and self-serving Malvolio, and the bawdy, witty, and wise Feste. In Forbes's estimation, these and the remaining personalities in Twelfth Night intricately combine to produce a highly satisfying symphony of language and character. Larry S. Champion (1968) also examines the complexity of character in Twelfth Night. According to the critic, the characters' true but hidden identities are revealed over the course of the play as they experience a deepening sense of their own self-knowledge. Cynthia Lewis (1986) questions the traditional assumption that Viola is the moral center of Twelfth Night. Instead, she maintains that Antonio, rather than Viola, is consistently portrayed as the ideal moral figure in the drama, but acknowledges that the play is principally concerned with Viola's moral development. Edward Cahill (1996) concentrates on the figure of Malvolio in Twelfth Night. Much-maligned by his compatriots, Malvolio has generally been a favorite of audiences and critics precisely because of his combined tragic and comic potentiality. Cahill examines this intriguing mix by delving into the psychology of this character, noting his narcissism and painful identity crisis as well as his thwarted and obsessive desires for sexual, social, and personal fulfillment.

Twelfth Night remains among the most popular of Shakespearean comedies on the stage. While some directors stress the comic aspects of the drama, others have emphasized the play's more troubling undertones. Robert Brustein (2002) reviews Brian Kulick's 2002 production of Twelfth Night at the open-air Delacorte Theatre in New York City's Central Park, starring Julia Stiles as Viola and Christopher Lloyd as Malvolio. The critic observes that the production relied too heavily on facile visual conceits and contends that Kulick and his star-studded cast barely explored the depths of character and theme offered by Shakespeare's text. While light comedy was the focus of Kulick's staging, director Sam Mendes's 2002 Donmar Warehouse Theatre production stressed the play's darker elements. Appraising Mendes's work, critic John Mullan (2002) contends that an overemphasis on the erotic and sensual aspects of the drama, as well as on the suffering of Malvolio,
obscured its comic elements and proved detrimental to the production. Reviewing the 2002 Holderness Theater Company production of *Twelfth Night* directed by Rebecca Holderness, Kenneth Gross (2002) praises the minimalist staging of the play and calls attention to its fine dramaturgical effects, including the setting, lighting, dance, and music. In his appraisal of the 2001 to 2002 Royal Shakespeare Company season, Russell Jackson (2002) comments on director Lindsay Posner's *Twelfth Night*, which was set in the artistic milieu of fin-de-siècle aestheticism. The critic observes the erotic and decadent qualities of the production and highlights several individual performances, including Guy Henry's strangely empathetic Malvolio and Mark Hadfield's touching Feste.

Contemporary scholars continue to be interested in *Twelfth Night*'s themes concerning love, gender, sexuality, and self-discovery. A. Fred Sochatoff (see Further Reading) concentrates on the play's presentation of love in its many manifestations, including obsessive, fickle, self-pitying, narcissistic, buffoonish, and true. The critic also provides a survey of character in relation to the drama's theme of love, noting in particular how Feste frames the various love and pseudo-love relationships of the play through his witty observations on the events that unfold before him. Camille Slichts (1982) maintains that *Twelfth Night* illustrates the thematic principal of reciprocity as the foundation of successful human relationships. The critic notes that the characters in the play achieve personal fulfillment and social accord through generosity, compassion, service, alliance, and awareness of the restrictions imposed by personal ambition and self-absorption. F. B. Tromly (1974) suggests that Shakespeare combined a comic and moral purpose in *Twelfth Night* by allowing his characters to learn of the hardships and dangers of the world through the spirit of folly. According to Tromly, folly is a positive force in the play, one that allows the characters to come to terms with life by learning to accept “delusion, vulnerability, and mortality.” In his 1982 essay, Thad Jenkins Logan claims that *Twelfth Night*—despite its ostensible depiction of a festive and happy resolution—contains glimpses of the darker side of human desire. Lastly, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan (2001) discusses the relationship of music to the play's theme of sexual ambivalence, focusing in particular on the character of Viola/Cesario and the motifs of cross-dressing, bisexuality, and androgyny.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 85): Criticism: Overviews And General Studies**


*[In the following essay, Hartman examines Shakespeare's use of poetic language, punning, and wordplay in Twelfth Night.]*

1

Writing about Shakespeare promotes a sympathy with extremes. One such extreme is the impressionism of a critic like A. C. Bradley, when he tries to hold together, synoptically, Feste the fool and Shakespeare himself, both as actor and magical author. Bradley notes that the Fool in *Lear* has a song not dissimilar to the one that concludes *Twelfth Night* and leaves Feste at the finish-line. “But that's all one, our play is done …” After everything has been sorted out, and the proper pairings are arranged, verbal and structural rhythms converge to frame a sort of closure—though playing is never done, as the next and final verse suggests: “And we'll strive to please you every day.” Bradley, having come to the end of an essay on Feste, extends *Twelfth Night* speculatively beyond the fool's song, and imagines Shakespeare leaving the theater:

the same Shakespeare who perhaps had hummed the old song, half-ruefully and half-cheerfully, to its accordant air, as he walked home alone to his lodging from the theatre or even from some noble's mansion; he who, looking down from an immeasurable height on
the mind of the public and the noble, had yet to be their servant and jester, and to depend upon their favour; not wholly uncorrupted by this dependence, but yet superior to it and, also determined, like Feste, to lay by the sixpences it brought him, until at least he could say the word, “Our revels now are ended,” and could break—was it a magician's staff or a Fool's bauble?2

The rhetoric of this has its own decorum. It aims to convey a general, unified impression of a myriad-minded artist. Shakespearean interpreters have a problem with summing up. Leaning on a repeated verse (“For the rain it raineth every day”), and more quietly on the iteration of the word “one” (Lear: “Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee”; Feste: “I was one, sir, in this interlude; one Sir Topas, sir, but that's all one”), Bradley integrates Shakespeare by the deft pathos of an imaginary portrait. Today's ideological critics would probably purge this portrait of everything but Shakespeare's representation of power-relations and hierarchy. Such critics might note that the portrait's final question serves only to emphasize the artist's marginality, his loneliness or apartness, as if by a secret law of fate being an artist excluded Shakespeare from social power in the very world he addresses.

The relation of “character” in the world (domestic or political) to “poetical character” (the imaginary relations to that same world which make up our image of a particular artist) is always elusive. Especially so in the case of Shakespeare, of whose life we know so little. A myth evolves, given classic expression by Keats, that the mystery or obscurity enveloping Shakespeare's life is due to the fact that a great poet has no “identity,” that he is “everything and nothing”—as Bradley's evocation also suggests. John Middleton Murry's book on Shakespeare begins with a chapter entitled “Everything and Nothing” in which Murry explores his reluctant conclusion that “In the end there is nothing to do but to surrender to Shakespeare.” “The moment comes in our experience of Shakespeare when we are dimly conscious of a choice to be made: either we must turn away (whether by leaving him in silence, or by substituting for his reality some comfortable intellectual fiction of our own), or we must suffer ourselves to be drawn into the vortex.”3

The focus moves, in short, to the character of the critic, determined by this choice. Can we abide Shakespeare's question? Does the critic have a “character” of his own, or is he simply a bundle of responses accommodated to a special institution or audience: university students and dons, or other drama buffs, or the general public? Unlike Eliot, say, or Tolstoy, Murry has no body of creative writing to back up the importance of his interpretive engagements. There is, nevertheless, a sense that the critic's identity is formed by his selfless encounters with artists of Shakespeare's stature.

The “vortex” that threatens readers, according to Murry, includes the fact that Shakespeare delights as much in Iago as Imogen (Keats's words); and to shuffle off our ordinary conceptions of character—in Murry's phrase, the “mortal coil of moral judgment”—is both painful and necessary. Always, Murry claims, “when Shakespeare has been allowed to make his impression, we find the critic groping after the paradox of the poetical character itself as described by Keats.” In an earlier essay, closer to Bradley's era, Murry had already put the problem of Shakespeare criticism in terms that showed how aware he was of reactions to the “vortex.” He rejects the “idea'-bacillus” that reduces Shakespeare to universal themes or the creation of character-types, yet he refuses to relinquish his rigorous quest for “the center of comprehension from which he [Shakespeare] worked.” Programmatic as it is, Murry's statement of 1920 remains relevant:

Let us away then with ‘logic' and away with ‘ideas’ from the art of literary criticism; but not, in a foolish and impercipient reaction, to revive the impressionistic criticism which has sapped the English brain for a generation past. The art of criticism is rigorous; impressions are merely its raw material; the life-blood of its activity is in the process of ordonnance of aesthetic impressions.4
The rejection of impressionism leads, if we think of Eliot, and of Murry himself, simply to a more rigorous formulation of the paradox of the impersonal artist. For Murry it meant comparing Christian and post-Shakespearian (especially romantic) ways of annihilating selfhood. Blake becomes even more crucial for such a formulation than Keats. G. W. Knight also joins this quest. Other rigorous escape routes, that lead through impressionism beyond it, make Shakespeare's language the main character of his plays, the everything and nothing. Empson's colloquial fracturing of Shakespeare's text, from Seven Types through Complex Words, as well as Leavis's emphasis on the “heuristic-economic quality of the diction” avoid, on the whole, totalizing structures. Rigor consists in having the local reading undo an established symmetry.

Another form of rigor, historical scholarship, can be outrageously speculative. (The trend was always there in the work of editors who unscrambled perplexing expressions or normalized daring ones.) One might escape the Shakespearean vortex by discovering a firm historical emplacement for the plays, by clarifying their occasion as well as the characters in them. The work of referring the plays back to sources mysteriously transformed by Shakespeare (minor Italian novelas, or poetics derived from Donatus and Terence, such as the “forward progress of the turmoils”) gives way to an ambitious reconstruction of a particular, sponsoring event. The quest for the identity of W.H. or the Dark Lady or the exact festive occasion of Twelfth Night exerts a prosecutory charm that attests to the presence of character in the critic-investigator (that stubborn, scholarly sleuth) as well as in Shakespeare the historical personage. Consider what the ingenious Leslie Hotson does with the “jest nominal,” or play on names. It is as intriguing as anything ventured by newfangled intertextualists.

Hotson claims in The First Night of Twelfth Night that the figure of Malvolio is a daring take-off of a high official in Elizabeth's court: Sir William Knollys, Earl of Banbury and Controller of her Majesty's household. This aging dignitary, we are told, had become infatuated with a young Maid of Honor at Court, Mall (Mary) Fitton. In the “allowed fooling” of Twelfth Night festivities, “old Beard Knollys,” suggests Hotson, “is slaughtered in gross and detail.” Here is his description of how it was done:

while exposing both the Controller's ill-will—towards hilarity and misrule—and his amorousness in the name Mala-voglia (Ill Will or Evil concupiscence) Shakespeare also deftly fetches up Knollys' ridiculous love-chase of Mistress Mall by a sly modulation of Mala-Voglia into “Mal”-voglio—which means ‘I want Mall,’ “I wish for Mall,” “I will have Mall.” It is a masterpiece of mockery heightened by merciless repetition, with the players ringing the changes of expression on “Mal”-voglio … it will bring down the house.6

The play becomes a roman à clef, and so delivers us from a verbal vertigo it exposes. Shakespeare's improvisational genius, moreover, his extreme wit and opportunism, may recall the methodical bricolage by which earlier mythmakers, according to Lévi-Strauss, sustained their tale. Here it explicitly pleases or shames the ears of a court-centered audience. Yet this shaming or delighting is not necessarily in the service of good sense or the status quo, for it can subvert as well as mock and purge. The one thing it does, as in the case of the Controller, is to acknowledge the law of gender—of generation and succession—which, as Erasmus saw, compels us to play the fool. Such allowed slander, whether or not reinforced by Elizabethan festivities, by periods of compulsory license, also penetrates Shakespearean tragedy:

Even he, the father of gods and king of men, who shakes all heaven by a nod, is obliged to lay aside his three-pronged thunder and that Titanic aspect by which, when he pleases, he scares all the gods, and assume another character in the slavish manner of an actor, if he wishes to do what he never refrains from doing, that is to say, to beget children. … He will certainly lay by his gravity, smooth his brow, renounce his rock-bound principles, and for a few minutes toy and talk nonsense. … Venus herself would not deny that without the addition of my presence her strength would be enfeebled and ineffectual. So it is that from this brisk and silly little game of mine come forth the haughty philosophers.7
Generation and Succession are so fundamental to almost all classes and types of humanity that to reduce them to their verbal effects might seem trivializing. Yet, as Erasmus's Folly hints, the very category of the trivial is overturned by these forces. The “striving to please every day,” which is the fate of the player, is equally that of lover and courtier. It quickens even as it exhausts our wit. It points to a relentless need for devices—words, stratagems. More is required than a “tiny little wit” to sustain what every day demands.\footnote{8}

There exist eloquent characterizations of Shakespeare's understanding of the common nature of mankind. As Bakhtin remarks of another great writer, Rabelais, there are crownings and uncrownings at every level.\footnote{9} No one is exempt, at any time, from that rise and fall, whether it is brought on by actual political events or social and sexual rivalry, or internalized pressures leading to self-destructive illusions and acts. The vicissitudes of Folly and Fortuna go hand in hand. Yet no conclusions are drawn; and it does not matter what class of person is involved—a Falstaff, a Harry, a King Henry; a clown, a count, a lady; a usurper, a porter. What happens happens across the board, and can therefore settle expressively in a language with a character of its own—apart from the decorum that fits it to the character of the person represented. The pun or quibble, Shakespeare's “fatal Cleopatra,” is a quaint and powerful sign of that deceiving variety of life. Hazlitt, following Charles Lamb, remarks that Elizabethan “distinctions of dress, the badges of different professions, the very signs of the shops” were a sort of visible language for the imagination. “The surface of society was embossed with hieroglyphs.”\footnote{10} Yet the showiest and most self-betraying thing in Shakespeare is the flow of language itself, which carries traces of an eruption from some incandescent and molten core, even when hard as basalt, that is, patently rhetorical.

Structurally too, the repetitions by which we discover an intent—a purposiveness—do not resolve themselves into a unity, a “one” free of sexual, hierarchical or personal differentiation. Feste's “one” is an Empsonian complex word, which seeks to distract us, by its very iteration, into a sense of closure. Yet there is never an objective correlative that sops up the action or organizes all the excrecent motives and verbal implications. Feste's phrase is found, for example, in the mouth of another clown figure, Fluellen, in a scene one could characterize as “Porn at Monmouth” (Henry V, IV.vii). The scene, through the solecisms and mispronunciations of Fluellen, his butchery of English, makes us aware of what is involved in the larger world of combat, to which he is marginal. The catachresis of “Kill the Poyes and the luggage!” expresses the cut-throat speed with which matters are moving toward indiscriminate slaughter. An end penetrates the middle of the drama; the grimace (if only linguistic) of death begins to show through.

Yet even here, as the action hits a dangerous juncture, as decisions become hasty and bloody, this verbally excessive interlude slows things down to a moment of humorous discrimination. Fluellen draws a comparison between Harry of Monmouth and “Alexander the Pig” of Macedon (Henry V, IV.vii). That “big” should issue as “pig” is a fertile and leveling pun, which the macabre turn of this near-graveyard scene could have exploited even more; but the uncrowning of Alexander in Fluellen's mouth leads to a series of images (mouth, fingers, figures) that suggest a “body” less mortal than its parts. Harry's transformation into King Henry, and Fluellen's comparison in his favor—that Harry's bloodthirsty anger is more justified than Alexander's—appear like a jesting in the throat of death, a vain distinction already undone by the battlefield context that levels all things, as by an earthy vernacular, or quasi-vernacular, that can slander all things in perfect good humor.

It seems impossible, then, to describe the poetical character of Shakespeare without raising certain questions. One concerns the character of the critic (choices to be made in reading so strong and productive a writer); another what happens to language as it nurtures a vernacular ideal that still dominates English literature. A third, related question is whether what that language does to character and to us can be summed up or unified by methodical inquiry. Does an “intellectual tradition” exist, as Richards thought, to guide us in reading that plentiful “Elizabethan” mixture? “The hierarchy of these modes is elaborate and variable,” he writes about sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. To “read aright,” Richards continues, “we need to shift with an
at present indescribable adroitness and celerity from one mode to another."

By “modes” Richards means different types of indirect statement, which he also characterizes as “metaphorical, allegorical, symbolical,” yet does not define further. In some way they are all nonliteral; at least not directly literal. Like Coleridge, whom he quotes, Richards is impressed by the role that “wit” plays in Shakespeare’s time, although he does not discuss the complicit or antagonistic and always showy relation between wit and will. He simply accepts Coleridge’s thesis on wit and Shakespeare’s time:

when the English Court was still foster-mother of the State and the Muses; and when, in consequence, the courtiers and men of rank and fashion affected a display of wit, point, and sententious observation, that would be deemed intolerable at present—but in which a hundred years of controversy, involving every great political, and every dear domestic interest, had trained all but the lowest classes to participate. Add to this the very style of the sermons of the time, and the eagerness of the Protestants to distinguish themselves by long and frequent preaching, and it will be found that, from the reign of Henry VIII to the abdication of James II, no country ever received such a national education as England.

Yet Coleridge’s notion of “national education” may be too idealistic—Arnoldian before the letter. It downplays the subverting character of Shakespeare’s wit, one that is not put so easily in the service of the nation-state and its movement toward a common language. The “prosperity of a pun,” as M. M. Mahood calls it, in what is still the most sensitive exploration of the subject, offended rather than pleased most refiners of English up to modern times. “Prosperity” may itself covertly play on “propriety,” which is precisely what a pun questions. The speed and stenography, in any case, of Shakespeare’s wordplay in the comic scenes undoes the hegemony of any single order of discourse, and compels us to realize the radically social and mobile nature of the language exchange. And, unlike the novel (which allows Bakhtin his most persuasive theorizing), these scenes display less a narrative or a pseudonarrative than oral graffiti. Verbally Shakespeare is a graffiti artist, using bold, often licentious strokes, that make sense because of the living context of stereotypes, the commedia dell’arte, and other vernacular or popular traditions.

Is it possible, then, to see Shakespeare sub specie unitatis, as the younger Murry thought? “There never has been and never will be a human mind which can resist such an inquiry if it is pursued with sufficient perseverance and understanding.” Yet in this very sentence “human mind” is fleetingly equivocal: does it refer only to the object of inquiry, Shakespeare’s mind, or also to the interpreter’s intellect, tempted by the riddle of Shakespeare? The later Murry too does not give up; but now the unity, the “all that’s one,” is frightening as well, and associated with omnia abeunt in mysterium: all things exit into mystery.

It seems to me there is no mystery, no Abgrund, except language itself, whose revelatory revels are being staged, as if character were a function of language, rather than vice versa. More precisely, as if the locus of the dramatic action were the effect of language on character. Twelfth Night will allow us to examine how this language test is applied. If we admire, however ambivalently, the way lago works on Othello by “dannable iteration” (cf. Falstaff: “O, thou hast dannable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint” (I Henry IV, I.ii.90), or the way Falstaff shamelessly converts abuse into flattery, we are already caught up in a rhetoric whose subversive motility, moment to moment, can bless or curse, praise or blame, corrupt words or (like Aristotle’s eulogist) substitute collateral terms that “lean toward the best.” It is this instant possibility of moving either way, or simultaneously both ways, which defines the Shakespearean dramatic and poetical character. In Twelfth Night, with Feste a self-pronounced “corrupter of words” (III.i.37), and Malvolio’s censorious presence, the verbal action challenges all parties to find “comic remedies,” or to extract sweets from weeds and poisons.
“Excellent,” says Sir Toby Belch, “I smell a device.” “I have't in my nose too,” Sir Andrew Aguecheek echoes him (II.iii.162). Toby is referring to the plan concocted by Maria, Olivia's maid, of how to get even with the strutting and carping Malvolio, steward of the household. The device is a letter to be written by Maria in her lady's hand, which will entice Malvolio into believing Olivia is consumed with a secret passion for him, his yellow stockings, cross-garters and smile. The device (not the only one in the play—Bertrand Evans has counted seven persons who are active practisers operating six devices) succeeds; and Malvolio, smiling hard, and wearing the colors he thinks are the sign commanded by his lady, but which she happens to detest, is taken for mad and put away.

The very words “I smell a device” contain a device. Toby, mostly drunk, knows how to choose his metaphors; and Andrew, not much of a wit (“I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit”), merely echoes him, which makes the metaphor more literal and so more absurd. A device is also a figure, or flower of speech; both meanings may be present here, since the content of the device is literary, that is, a deceivingly flowery letter. Flowers smell, good or bad as the occasion may be. “Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds” (Sonnet 94). Sometimes figures or metaphors fly by so thick and fast that we all are as perplexed as Sir Andrew:

ANDREW:

Bless you, fair shrew.

MARIA:

And you too, sir.

TOBY:

Accost, Sir Andrew, accost. (…)

ANDREW:

Good Mistress Accost, I desire better acquaintance.

MARIA:

My name is Mary, sir.

ANDREW:

Good Mistress Mary Accost—

TOBY:

You mistake, knight. "Accost" is front her, board her, woo her, assail her.

ANDREW:

By my troth, I would not undertake her in this company. Is that the meaning of “accost”?

MARIA:

Fare you well, gentlemen.

TOBY:
And thou let part so, Sir Andrew, would thou might'st never draw sword again!

ANDREW:

And you part so, mistress, I would I might never draw sword again. Fair lady, do you think you have fools in hand?

MARIA:

Sir, I have not you by th' hand.

ANDREW:

Marry, but you shall have, and here's my hand.

MARIA:

Now, sir, thought is free. I pray you bring your hand to th' buttery bar and let it drink.

ANDREW:

Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?

MARIA:

It's dry, sir.

(I. iii. 46-72)

Awkward Andrew starts with a mild oxymoron and compounds the error of his address to Mary by a further innocent mistake—the transposition of a common verb into a proper noun, which not only unsettles parts of speech but creates a parallel euphemism to “fair shrew” through the idea of “good Accost.” The entire scene is constructed out of such pleasant errors—failed connections or directions that hint at larger, decisive acts (accosting, undertaking, marrying). At line 62 the verbal plot becomes even more intricate, as Andrew strives to “address” Mary a second time. “Marry” (66) is an oath, a corruption of the Virgin’s name; but here, in addition to echoing “Mary,” it may be the common verb, as Andrew tries to be witty or gallant by saying in a slurred way (hey, I too can fling metaphors around!), “If you marry you'll have me by the hand, and here it is.” (He forgets that that would make him a fool, like all married men.) Maria bests him, though, suggesting a freer kind of handling, with a new metaphor that—I think—may be licentious. What is that “buttery bar”? Probably, in function, a bar as today, for serving drinks; but could it be her breasts or … butt? That same “bar,” by a further twist or trope, echoes in Maria’s “marry, now I let go your hand, I am barren” (77). No wonder Andrew, out of his range, stutters, “Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?”

Somewhere there is always a device, or a “hand” that could fool just about anyone. Nobody is spared, nobody escapes witting. Yet it remains harmless because all, except Malvolio, play along. There is rhetoric and repartee, puns and paranomasia, metaphor upon metaphor, as if these characters were signifying monkeys: the play expects every person to pass the test of wit, to stand at that bar of language. Yet “wherefore?” we ask, like simple Andrew.

That question returns us to the poetical character. It “is not itself,” Keats wrote, “it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character.” He says other things, too, which make it clear he is thinking mainly of Shakespeare. “It lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher [a Malvolio in this respect] delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than
for its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation” (letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818).

Much depends on that word “speculation” in Keats; a “widening speculation,” he also writes, eases the burden of life's mystery, takes away the heat and fever (letter to J. H. Reynolds, May 3, 1818). You have to have something to speculate with or on; some luxury, like a delicious voice, whose first impact you remember. Speculation is making the thing count again, as with money, yet without fearing its loss.19 The Shakespearean language of wit is like that. Though penetrated by knowledge of loss, aware that the most loved or fancied thing can fall “into abatement fnd low price, / Even in a minute!” (I. i. 13-14), it still spends itself in an incredibly generous manner, as if the treasury of words were always full. However strange it may seem, while everything in this play is, emotionally, up or down—each twin, for example, thinks the other dead; Olivia, in constant mourning and rejecting Orsino, is smitten by Viola/Cesario in the space of one interview—while everything vacillates, the language itself coins its metaphors and fertile exchanges beyond any calculus of loss and gain. When I hear the word “fool” repeated so many times, I also hear the word “full” emptied out or into it; so “Marry” and “Mary” and “madam” (“mad-dame”) and “madman” collapse distinctions of character (personality) in favor of some prodigious receptacle that “receiveth as the sea” (I. i. 11). No wonder modern critics have felt a Dionysian drift in the play, a doubling and effacing of persons as well as a riot of metaphors working against distinctions, until, to quote the ballad at the end, “that's all one.”

I think, therefore I am. What does one do about “I act” or “I write”? What identity for that “I”? For the poet who shows himself in the inventive wit of all these personae? Twelfth Night gives an extraordinary amount of theatrical time to Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and to clowning generally. These scenes threaten to erupt into the main plot, which is absurd enough, where love is sudden and gratuitous, as in Orsino's infatuation for Olivia (two O's) or Viola's for Orsino, or Olivia's for Cesario. Everything goes o-a in this play, as if a character's destiny depended on vocalizing. “M.O.A.I. doth sway my life” (II. v. 109). Whose hand directs this comic tumult of mistaken identities, disguises, devices, and names, that even when they are not Rabelaisian or musical scrabble (Olivia: Viola) or transparent like Malvolio (the evil eye, or evil wish) are silly attempts at self-assertion? So it doesn't really help when Sebastian in II. i. 14-18 identifies himself. “You must know of me then, Antonio, my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo; my father was that Sebastian of Messaline whom I know you have heard of.” We have two Sebastians, and one Sebastian is Roderigo. In addition, as we know by this point in the drama, Sebastian and Viola (that is, Cesario) are identical twins, born in the same hour, both saved from the “breach” a second time when they escape shipwreck and find themselves in a land with the suggestive name of Illyria—compounded, to the sensitive ear, out of Ill and liar/lyre. So also Viola enters the play punning, or off-rhyming. “And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium” (I. ii. 3-4).

The question, then, relates to identity and destiny, or who has what in hand; it is also related to the question of questioning itself, that kind of speech-act, so close to trial and testing, and the legalese or academic lingo in a play perhaps performed at an inn-of-court. In late medieval times, from the twelfth century on, there was a shift in “pedagogical technique (and corresponding literary forms) from the lectio to the disputatio and questio … from primary concern for the exegeis of authoritative texts and the laying of doctrinal foundations toward the resolution of particular (and sometimes minor) difficulties and even the questioning of matters no longer seriously doubted, for the sake of exploring the implications of a doctrine, revealing the limits of necessity and contingency, or demonstrating one's dialectical skills.”20 Another authority writes that “Even the points accepted by everybody and set forth in the most certain of terms were brought under scrutiny and subjected, by deliberate artifice, to the now usual processes of research. In brief, they were, literally speaking, ‘called into question,’ no longer because there was any real doubt about their truth, but because a deeper understanding of them was sought after.”21 From contemporary reports of the “Acts” at Oxford when Elizabeth visited, we know that these questions and quodlibets maintained themselves at least ceremonially.22
Is *Twelfth Night*'s subtitle, “What You Will,” a jocular translation of *quodlibet*? What significance may there be in the fact that in I. iii. 86-96 Toby passes from “No question” to “Pourquoi” to “Past question?” My own question is: *Pourquoi* these “kikshawses” (“quelques choses”)? Wherefore, Shakespeare? What’s your metaphor for?

Testing and questing seem connected immemorially: it is hard to think of the one without the other, especially in the realm of “Acts” which assert authority or identity by playful display. Even the Academy participates that much in the realm of romance. But my comments are meant to lead somewhat deeper into a drama that relishes the night-side of things with such good humor. If there are low-class mistakes, as when Andrew thinks Toby's “Accost” refers to Mary's name, there are also the high-class mistakes, Orsino's love, principally, that starts the play with a fine call for music in verses intimating that nothing can fill desire, fancy, love. Its appetite is like the sea, so capacious, so swallowing and changeable. “If music be the food of love, play on.” Play on is what we do, as “Misprision in the highest degree” (I. v. 53) extends itself. Everything changes place or is mis-taken, so that Orsino believes himself in love with Olivia but settles “dexteriously,” as the Clown might say, for Viola; while poor Malvolio is taken for mad and confined in a place as gloomy as his temperament. We tumble through the doubling, reversing, mistaking, clowning, even cloning; we never get away from the tumult of the words themselves, from the “gratillity” (another clown-word, that is, gratuitousness or greed for tips, tipsiness) of Feste's “gracious fooling,” as when Andrew, probably tipsy himself, and stupidly good at mixing metaphors, mentions some of the clown's other coinages: “Pigrogromitus” and the “Vapians passing the equinoctical of Queubus” (II. iii. 23-4).

It is not that these funny, made-up words don't make sense: they make a kind of instant sense, as Shakespeare always does. Yet a sense that can't be proved, that remains to be guessed at and demands something from us. Does “equinoctial” hint at solstice or equinox festivals, if *Twelfth Night* was performed on the day the title suggests;23 is “Queubus” mock Latin for the tail or male, or a corruption of “quibus,” “a word of frequent occurrence in legal documents and so associated with verbal niceties or subtle distinctions” (C. T. Onions)? Did the audience know it was slang for fool in Dutch (“Kwibus”)?

The text requires a certain tolerance or liberality of interpretation: yellow cross-garters in the realm of construing, “motley in the brain” (I. v. 55). To quote Andrew—and it should be inscribed on the doors of all literature departments: “I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O, had I but followed the arts!” (I. iii. 90-3).

There exists a modern version of another “antic” song about the twelve days of Christmas (cf. II. iii. 85). If *Twelfth Night*, the climax of Christmastide rejoicing, asks that we fill up the daystar's ebb, then the emphasis falls on giving, on true-love giving. *Twelfth Night*, formally the feast of Epiphany, is when divinity appeared, when Christ was manifested to the Gentiles (the Magi or three kings). Presence rather than absence is the theme. *Twelfth Night* is not a religious play, and yet its “gracious fooling” may be full of grace. The great O of Shakespeare's stage draws into it the gift of tongues; and in addition to the legal or academic metaphors, the food and sexual metaphors, and other heterogeneous language strains, occasionally a religious pathos, impatient of all these indirections, maskings, devices, makes itself heard. “Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em?” (I. iii. 122-3) To the question, what filling (fulfilling) is in this fooling, the best reply might be that, in literature, everything aspires to the condition of language, to the gift of tongues; that the spirit—wanton as it may be—of language overrides such questions, including those of character and identity.

Does Orsino, the Duke, have an identity, or is he not a plaything of fancy; and is love not represented by him as both arbitrary in what it fixes on and as “full of shapes” and “fantastical” as the entire play? These people seem in love with words rather than with each other. More exactly, the embassy of words and the play of rhetoric are essential tests for both lover and object of love. When Curio tries to distract the Duke from his musical and effete reflections by “Will you go hunt, my lord?” (I. i. 16), Orsino answers, startled, “What,
Curio?” meaning “What d’you say?”, which is misunderstood when Curio replies, “The hart,” after which the Duke can’t restrain himself from an old quibble equating hart, the animal, and heart, the seat of love:

Why, so I do [hunt], the noblest that I have.
O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

(I. i. 18-23)

The hunter becomes the hunted; but it is also suggested (though we may not be convinced) that the Duke finds a heart in himself—a sensitivity where previously there was nothing but a sense of privilege.

We see how thorough this full fooling is. In Shakespeare the poetry—the prose too—is larger than the characters, enlarging them but also making their identities or egos devices in an overwhelming revel. The revels of language are never ended. This does not mean that language is discontinuous with the search for identity or a “heart.” Orsino's first speech already introduces the gracious theme of giving and receiving, of feeding, surfeiting, dying, reviving, playing on. Love and music are identified through the metaphor of the “dying fall” (I. i. 4), also alluding, possibly, to the end of the year; and, ironically enough, the Duke's moody speech suggests a desire to get beyond desire—to have done with such perturbations, with wooing and risking rejection, and trying to win through by gifts and maneuvers. “Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, / The appetite [for love, not just for music] may sicken, and so die” (I. i. 2-3). At the very end of the play, with the Clown's final song, this melancholy desire to be beyond desire returns in the refrain “The rain it raineth every day,” and the internal chiming of “that's all one, our play is done.” Even in this generous and least cynical of Shakespeare's comedies, love is an appetite that wants to be routinized or exhausted, and so borders on tragic sentiments.

In drama, giving and receiving take the form of dialogic repartee. Shakespeare makes of dialogue a charged occasion, two masked affections testing each other, always on guard. Usually, then, there is a healthy fear or respect for the other; or there is a subversive sense that what goes on in human relations is not dialogue at all but seduction and domination. To have real giving and receiving—in terms of speech and understanding—may be so strenuous that the mind seeks other ways to achieve a simulacrum of harmony: maybe an “equinoctial of Queubus” brings us into equilibrium, or maybe festivals, like Christmas, when there is at-one-ment, through licensed license, through the principle of “what you will,” of freely doing or not doing. (Twelve, after all, is the sign of the temporal clock turning over into One.) But the turn is felt primarily at the level of “gracious fooling” in this Christmas play. Hazlitt goes so far as to say “It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy. It has little satire and no spleen.” And he continues with an even more significant remark, which I now want to explore: “In a word, the best turn is given to everything, instead of the worst.”

5

The poetical genius of Shakespeare is inseparable from an ability to trope anything and turn dialogue, like a fluctuating battle, to the worst or best surprise. I see the dramatic and linguistic action of Twelfth Night as a turning away of the evil eye. It averts a malevolent interpretation of life, basically Malvolio's. Though Malvolio is unjustly—by a mere “device”—put into a dark place, this too is for the good, for he must learn how to plead. That is, by a quasilegal, heartfelt rhetoric, he must now turn the evidence, from bad to good. In IV. ii. 12ff. a masquerade is acted out which not only compels us to sympathize with Malvolio, making him a figure of pathos, but which repeats, as a play within the play, the action of the whole. Malvolio is gulled once more, baited like a bear—the sport he objected to. Yet the spirit of this comedy is not that of revenge, malice or ritual expulsion. All these motives may participate, yet what rouses our pity and fear is the way language
enters and preordains the outcome. Shakespeare brings out the schizoid nature of discourse by juxtaposing soft or good words, ordinary euphemisms (“Jove bless thee, Master Parson,” “Bonos dies, Sir Toby,” “Peace in this prison”) with abusive imprecations (“Out, hyperbolical fiend,” “Fie, thou dishonest Satan,” “Madman, thou errest”). Malvolio is subjected to a ridiculous legal or religious quizzing: a “trial” by “constant question.” As in so many infamous state proceedings, he can get nowhere. He has to cast himself, against his temperament, on the mercy of the clown he condemned, though never actually harmed: “Fool, I say,” “Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand,” “Ay, good fool,” “Fool, fool, fool, I say!”, “Good fool, help me to some light and some paper: I tell thee I am as well in my wits as any man in Illyria” (“Feste: Well-a-day that you were, sir!”), “By this hand, I am! Good fool, some ink, paper, and light.”

Every word suddenly receives its full value. A man's life or freedom depends on it. It is not quibbled away. Yet words remain words; they have to be received; the imploration is all. “By this hand” is more than a tender of good faith, the visible sign of imploration. It is the handwriting that could save Malvolio, as that other “hand,” Maria's letter-device, fooled and trapped him. Ink, paper, and light, as for Shakespeare himself perhaps, are the necessities. They must dispel or counter-fool whatever plot has been, is being, woven.

The spectator sits safely, like a judge, on the bench; yet the reversal which obliges Malvolio to plead with the fool reminds us what it means to be dependent on what we say and how (generously or meanly) it is received. To please every day, like a courtier, lover or actor, leads us into improvisations beyond the ordinary scope of wit. It puts us all in the fool's place. It is everyone, not Feste alone, who is involved, when after a sally of nonsense Maria challenges him with “Make that good” (I. v. 7). That is, give it meaning, in a world where “hanging” and “colours” (collars, cholers, flags, figures of speech, I. v. 1-6) are realities. But also, to return to Hazlitt's insight, give what you've said the best turn, justify the metaphor at whatever bar (legal) or buttery (the milk of mercy) is the least “dry” (I. iii. 72). “The rain it raineth every day.”

Bakhtin's view, inspired by the development of literary vernaculars in the Renaissance, that each national language is composed of many kinds of discourse, dialogic even when not formally so, and polyphonic in effect, can be extended to the question of Shakespeare's poetical character. There is no one heart or one will (“Will”). Andrew's querulous “What's your metaphor?” or Maria's testing “Make it good” or the Clown's patter (“‘That that is, is’; so I, being Master Parson, am Master Parson; for what is ‘that’ but ‘that’? and ‘is’ but ‘is’?” (IV. ii. 15-17)) impinge also on the spectator/reader. Yet in this world of figures, catches, errors, reversals, songs, devices, plays within plays, where motley distinguishes more than the jester, and even Malvolio is gulled into a species of it, moments arise that suggest a more than formal resolution—more than the fatigue or resignation of “that's all one” or the proverbial “all's well that ends well.” So when Viola, as the Duke's go-between, asks Olivia, “Good madam, let me see your face” (where the “good,” as in all such appeals, is more than an adjective, approaching the status of an absolute construction: “Good, madam,” similar in force to Maria's “Make it good”), there is the hint of a possible revelatory moment, of clarification. The challenge, moreover, is met by a facing up to it. Yet the metaphor of expositing a text, which had preceded, is continued, so that we remain in the text even when we are out of it.

OLIVIA:

Now, sir, what is your text?

VIOLA:

Most sweet lady—

OLIVIA:

A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it. Where lies your text?
VIOLA:
In Orsino's bosom.

OLIVIA:
In his bosom? In what chapter of his bosom?

VIOLA:
To answer by the method, in the first of his heart.

OLIVIA:
O, I have read it: it is heresy. Have you no more to say?

VIOLA:
Good madam, let me see your face.

OLIVIA:
Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text: but we will draw the curtain and show you the picture. [Unveiling] Look you, sir, such a one I was this present. Is't not well done?

VIOLA:
Excellently done, if God did all.

(I. v. 223-39)

I was, not I am; by pretending she is a painting, just unveiled, the original I is no longer there, or only as this picture which points to a present in the way names or texts point to a meaning. The text, however, keeps turning. There is no “present”: no absolute gift, or moment of pure being. Yet a sense of epiphany, however fleeting, is felt; a sense of mortality too and of artifice, as the text is sustained by the force of Olivia's wit. “Is't not well done?” Olivia, like Feste, must “make it good.” The mocking elaboration of her own metaphor allows speech rather than embarrassed or astonished silence at this point. The play (including Olivia's “interlude”) continues. There is always more to say.

Notes

4. “Shakespeare criticism”, in Aspects of Literature (New York, 1920), 200. Eliot's epigraph to The Sacred Wood (1921) from Rémy de Gourmont (“Eriger ses impressions en lois …”) discloses the common problem of going beyond impressionism without becoming unduly scientific (i.e. following the Taine-Brunetière tradition).
5. Consult, for example, J. V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy (1951), especially “The Donatan tradition”; and Ruth Nevo, Comic Transformations in Shakespeare (London and New York, 1980).

8. Consider, in this light, the vogue of courtesy books in the sixteenth century, of which the most famous, Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, was done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561, and reprinted 1577, 1588 and 1603. Book 2 of *The Courtier* treats exhaustively the decorum of jesting.

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, tr. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). See especially ch. 3, “Popular-festive forms.” Bakhtin mentions the feast of Epiphany, and claims that the common element of both official and unofficial carnivals was that “they are all related to time, which is the true hero of every feast, uncrowning the old and crowning the new.” A significant footnote adds that, actually, “every feast day crowns and uncrows.” See also Bakhtin's second chapter on “The language of the marketplace in Rabelais.” (For some amusing remarks on Shakespeare and Rabelais, cf. Hotson, op. cit., 155ff.) C. L. Barber in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (1959) explores the same area.


16. See Hudson, op. cit., xxiii. Also, on the related matter of “praise-abuse,” Bakhtin, op. cit., 458: “The virginal words of the oral vernacular which entered literary language for the first time are close, in a certain sense, to proper nouns. They are individualized and still contain a strong element of praise-abuse, which makes them suitable to nicknames.” On word-formation in Rabelais (often suggestive for Feste's “gracious fooling”), see Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History* (Princeton, 1948).


19. Just as in comedy, according to Donatan principles, turns of fortune should not include the danger of death (*sine periculo vitae*, cf. Cunningham, op. cit.). Since Leibniz defined music as a species of unconscious counting or arithmetic, and music enters so prominently into *Twelfth Night* (as *musica speculativa* as well as *musica practica*—see John Hollander, “Musica mundana and Twelfth Night” (English Institute Essays: Sound and Poetry, ed. Northrop Frye (New York, 1957)), an interesting analogy begins to form between comedy, music, and the Shakespearean language of wit. In this respect, the issues of gender difference and succession return, for the action of *Twelfth Night* is simply the release of Orsino and Olivia from their single state, which cannot occur without the separating out of Viola/Cesario and Viola/Sebastian (“One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons! / A natural perspective, that is, and is not!” (V.i. 214-15)). That “one” is redeemed from both singleness and duplicity: the confounding in singleness, as Sonnet 8, with its explicit music metaphor, suggests, should turn into a harmony of “parts that thou shouldst bear,” a concord of “all in one.” Cf. however Marilyn French's surprising conclusion in *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York, 1981) that the one not in harmony, Malvolio, wins out in the end as the embodiment of society's repressive stewardship. “Constancy is required; love must lead to marriage; and marriage must lead to procreation” (123).


Ludens (1944), ch. 9, the “whole functioning of the medieval university was profoundly agonistic and ludic.” The word “Act” was formally applied to the degree exercises which conferred the Bachelor and Master of Arts. The use of “act” in Shakespeare (as in Hamlet V.ii. 346 and Winter's Tale V.ii. 86ff.) includes that sense of the presence of a conferring authority.

23. Cf. T. H. Gaster, Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East (New York, 1950). Chapter 2, especially, discerns in ritual dramas a uniform pattern of kenosis, or emptying, and plerosis, or filling. The twelve nights after which Shakespeare's play is named could reflect the agon or combat of those two tendencies: a combat to determine the character of such days, whether they are fasts or feasts, lenten (under the aegis of Malvolio) or copious. The twelve days between December 25 and January 6 have, moreover, a special relation to calendar time: they may be epagomenal or intercalary (Gaster, op. cit., 10, and cf. 369) and as such linked to an “occlusion of personality.” Yet is not all fictional time intercalary? “Twelfth Night” in Shakespeare may stand for every such day or night which requires a release of that “lease” on life which has to be annually renewed, yet which here is a human and ever-present rather than ritually determined necessity.

**Criticism: Character Studies: Lydia Forbes (essay date autumn 1962)**


[In the following essay, Forbes examines Shakespeare's vivid character portraits in Twelfth Night, including the self-assured and charming Viola, the courageous and forthright Sebastian, the narcissistic and self-serving Malvolio, and the bawdy, witty, and wise Feste.]

A play is not necessarily spoiled by study. If you think that its theatricality is shackled when the author's theme or meaning is taken into account, that restraint is gentle compared to the chains hung on the author by opinionated thespians.

The interpreted arts suffer as often as they are exalted by the actions of interpreters. A play, the very raw material of which is the human image, is especially vulnerable to human interference. “How do you think we ought to do this play?” Ask this over-worked question of the author first, of the author as playwright. It is not his psyche, his literary life or contemporary social scene that is primarily involved, but his play. When the effect that the author wants is clear to the director and the players—so clear that they have some notion of how to approach their tasks—then it is time to look for useful help from other sources. And only then, after this much study, may a play be judged bad or frail enough to receive support from irrelevant theatricality.

I propose to show that Twelfth Night does not deserve such trimmings, and that Shakespeare did not attach his only subtitle to give his producers licence. This pungent and apt predecessor to Shakespeare's most serious plays can be liberated, by study, from smothering bonds of fantastical romance and rich vinous fumes. This study, of course, must take place in thoughtful rehearsals as well as in the closet or the classroom.

Superficial academic study can alleviate the players' ignorance of outmoded social customs and archaic words. By enlightened acting, their meaning becomes clear to the audience. Similarly, the whole play is not likely to get across to an audience unless the producers know what it is all about. Only the text, entire and in order on the stage, can guide a director to the theatricality that this particular play requires.

Reading Twelfth Night for the first time, a prospective director is introduced to a set of poetical and funny people involved in different kinds and stages of love. If he stops without finding out why these people have been assembled, if he makes the variousness of the forms of love—or the jollity of the characters—the basis of his theatrical presentation of Twelfth Night, he will present a series of sketches agreeably set off against
each other—not a play. This elementary view lets directors and actors add to the play as they will, supplying
the kind of laughs and sentiment which they feel it lacks. To load *Twelfth Night* with romping and by-play
(Shakespearewrights, 1957), to embellish it with a pitfall for Sir Andrew (Stratford Shakespearean Festival of
Canada, 1957), or crossoverters that become dexterously entwined to hobble Malvolio (The Old Vic, 1958) is
to miss the point of the play as much as those who mistake its romance for sentimentality, exploiting pretty
scenery and parasols (American Shakespeare Festival, 1960), introducing a non-existent love affair (The Old
Vic, 1949) or drowning the production in golden light and drifting rose leaves (Ngaio Marsh, director, in
Australia—and many another production). Would you keep a Breughel painting under an amber light? Play
Mozart like Strauss? The primary job facing the director and the actors of a play is to show the audience all
that study and technique can reveal of the effect intended by the playwright himself.

The director must find out what Shakespeare intended *Twelfth Night* to be like. How can he tell? To begin
with, he can look at the plot, as Shakespeare set it up and made his characters act it out. The plot is a vital part
of a good play. This we would more readily acknowledge were we not constantly assaulted by plots that are
overworked for their own exciting sakes. From Aristotle, who called the plot the “soul” of a drama, to the
Existentialists, who call the essence the product of all the actions, the behavior of the characters in a play has
been considered inseparable from the intrinsic life or movement of the play itself as a work of art.

The two stories that Shakespeare uses in *Twelfth Night* can be summarized in the same words: A clear-sighted,
purposeful woman, in dealing with self-deluded men, makes use of trickery to achieve her purpose. The
incidents, as Shakespeare has chosen and arranged them, say two things: First, this play is about deceptions.
Second, those who know themselves have an advantage over those who do not. Olivia says it tersely in lines
whose choppy beat and alliterations force an actress to speak slowly and impressively even in the “whirlwind”
of her passion.

Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art
As great as that thou fear'st.

(V. i. 152)

Some of the characters act rationally, some intuitively, some emotionally, but it is their shifts between the
strength and weakness of honesty and dishonesty, and the action of self-knowledge on self-deception that
make the basic movement of the play. “Main plot” and “sub-plot” are useful terms, but misleading when the
weight of interest is as evenly balanced as it is here. The use of a story told concurrently in two ways allows
great variation on the single theme and a wide opportunity for contrasts. It also gives a chance to demonstrate
theatrically one important source of this vital self-knowledge that is explained by Feste:

Truly, sir, [I am] the better for my foes and the worse for my friends. … [My friends] praise
me and make an ass of me; now my foes tell me plainly that I am an ass: so that by my foes,
sir I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused.

(V. i. 19)

In order to lay bare the “worm” of “concealment”, to distinguish between “seems” and “is”, Shakespeare uses
several comic devices. First, he develops to their logical end types of behavior which seem reasonable, or at
least harmless. The disproportionate, and even inverted results are often more satiric than comic. For
examples of this, consider Sir Toby’s last bitter jibes at Sir Andrew, or the transformation of Orsino’s pretty
flowery love for Olivia into a hunger like that, says Orsino, of the all-digesting sea. Second, the author uses
abrupt juxtaposition of characters or incidents to reveal poignantly the real nature under their dissembling
masks. If the play is shown fluently, without breaks between scenes, these sometimes bring about what seems
like the pratfall of a pretense. Look at the sea-captain’s terse announcement “This is Illyria, Lady”, following
immediately the extended periods and conceits of the opening scene. Or Maria's trap for the "trout that must be caught with tickling" which succeeds Viola's "patience on a monument" speech, so carefully attuned to Orsino's mood. Third, the outright mistakes made by the dissembling characters taking each other at face value are funny. This is most obvious in the duel scenes. But mistakes made by characters in the play, as part of the story, cannot be demonstrated to the audience by actors who have themselves failed to distinguish between what is supposed to be real and what is supposed to be mistaken. How many aging, failing Festes have we seen because Olivia's and Malvolio's lines are taken as the key to the Clown's own nature? Should Olivia be enacted as Orsino sees her? Malvolio as Sir Toby sees him? Or Orsino as he imagines himself to be?

These comic devices in *Twelfth Night* are not used to make the play seem realistic. Shakespeare works out the various aspects and consequences of dissembling with variations and permutations like those of a fugue. Here are the false-faces of the Elizabethan Twelfth Night masquerade, as well as the topsy-turvydom of the feast of Misrule, and, above all at Epiphany, the showing forth of man. The formal arrangement of *Twelfth Night* includes the title, and the humor loses its bite outside of the context the author made for it. This play has more of the critical comic spirit of Jonson and Molière, carefully expressed in artifice, than Shakespeare's other comedies.

Much of the perspective that the audience has on the action of the play is afforded by the comments of a character who has a thoroughly artificial place in his society—the official Clown or Fool. The whole play is carefully limited in three very special ways. Socially: The principal characters are all "gentlefolk", with the exception of the sea-captains and the Fool, who serve the exposition and the commentary more than they do the plot. Geographically: No one arrives in Illyria except by shipwreck, and there is no attempt to create a microcosm or any sense of the wide world beyond. Verbally: The poetry and prose in which the play is expressed are graceful and perfectly suited to its restrictions. Rarely is there intense emotional pressure or elaborate imagery. It seems, rather, that the characters are themselves symbols of the various facets of the underlying idea.

The story of the nobly born Viola, disguised as the page boy, "Cesario", is usually considered the principal plot of *Twelfth Night*. She sets her heart on the Duke Orsino of Illyria, and finally weds him. He is a good man and worthy of her, but temporarily so confused by a romantically far-fetched notion of love that he would not be able to appreciate her in her own feminine dress.

Beside this story we have a series of events engineered by a gentlewoman, Maria, attendant on the Countess Olivia. Maria's aim is to marry Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch. By pretending to gratify Sir Toby's desire to be revenged on the officious steward, Malvolio, Maria succeeds in getting Sir Toby so far out of favor with his niece that he marries Maria in order to remain a member of the household.

Linking these two patterns, the Lady Olivia, as the unresponsive object of Orsino's attentions, moves briskly but with dignity, and an outstanding appreciation of honesty in respect to both the good and the bad.

In the opening scene of the play the audience is regaled with the full exuberance and verbal confusion that deception and self-delusion bring about. It is like a musical opening by Brahms, in which the themes are developed before they are stated. With the second scene, austere and isolated on the seacoast, the premises and the thesis of the play are demonstrated. The sea-captain, who rescues Viola from the shipwreck and brings her ashore in Illyria, describes the country and what he knows of its people. Viola gives us her own measure and his in her famous lines:

```
There is a fair behavior in thee captain;
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.
```
While an ironic contrast exists between Viola's speech and her intention to disguise herself, her recognition of her own limitations and her own “fair behavior” after real peril clear the unreal atmosphere of the opening scene, and also put the following extravagances of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in their place.

Viola's charm and wit and continual self-consciousness about her own disguise help us understand the people she is dealing with. She is so reasonable and patient that when she trusts someone we are persuaded that her faith is justified. Only the unreasonable in human nature forces her to disguise herself. As a woman of her position, and in such a situation, she could not be a free agent; so she dresses like her brother and calls herself “Cesario”. She, like Olivia, needs time to get her bearings after a calamity in her family. She and Olivia dissemble in various ways to gain time.

Viola's first thought after being rescued is the hopeful one that her brother may also have survived. Her second thought is that she must now act on her own account. She has no family here. Since she has apparently heard of Orsino as a possible husband, she becomes a page in his household, to see for herself whether he might fill the bill. Though her deception serves her well, before the play is done Viola admits that disguise is, in fact, a “wickedness” wherein “the pregnant enemy [i.e. the Devil] does much.”

The portrait of Viola shows that Shakespeare, in writing a stylized play, does not prevent his characters from coming alive. Their energy does not seem confined by any pattern, but occasionally the pattern becomes so clear that characterization takes second place. The two sea-captains who rescue Viola and Sebastian are a case in point. Shakespeare makes them both men of profound integrity. Antonio, who rescues Sebastian, scorns any disguise even though he knows his life is in danger here, and he is arrested by Orsino's men. Viola's nameless rescuer goes so far as to help her to disguise herself, and keeps her secret even when he is “in durance at Malvolio's suit”. Both honest, both imprisoned in this odd land, these two men of the sea make a strong and arbitrary contrast to the prevailing distortions of life on shore in Illyria.

The first sight of Orsino, the Duke, should be as different from the first sound, as Viola's swaggering costume is from her very feminine nature. The reader of the play sees only the Duke's fantastic words, the actor will show the outward form of Orsino, who, in the last act, says to the sea-captain Antonio:

That face of his I do remember well,
Yet, when I saw it last, it was besmear'd
As black as Vulcan in the smoke of war:
A bawbling vessel was he captain of,
For shallow draught and bulk unprizable;
With which most scathful grapple did he make
With the most noble bottom of our fleet,
That very envy and the tongue of loss
Cried fame and honor on him.

(V. i. 55)

This Duke, who can recognize so well the quality of Antonio, is “noble in nature as in name”. Yet for the greater part of the play he is baffled and deluded. Imagining that he is in love with Olivia, he feels both exalted and harassed by his “desires”. He grants that he does not prize her riches, but he cannot see that he does not even prize her. Her beauty and her sex arouse in him a kind of emotion, conceit and mixed metaphor which he enjoys and thinks he needs so desperately that, at the end, he cries out for the heart to kill Olivia rather than lose her. So strong can the shape of fancy become!

By the fourth scene, Orsino has actually fallen in love with Viola. She wins him “liver and all” in the second
act by talking to him in his own “fantastical” way. Her disguise lets him become devoted, without being confused by the erratic passions he associates with love of woman. That devotion is clear in one of the most comic moments in the last act, when his greeting to Olivia: “Now heaven walks on earth” is followed abruptly by a return to the puzzle of Antonio's identification of Cesario. The only sudden change in Orsino at the end of the play is his loss of the delusion that he loves Olivia.

Olivia's message to Orsino in the opening scene, refusing his suit, should seem like too much protestation, even without the benefit of hindsight. Here is a girl who is suddenly left all alone to manage the affairs of a great estate. She is saddled with her father's younger brother—a liability—and with an importunate neighbor who insists that she wed. She cannot accept him; so she publicly exaggerates out of all reason her natural grief at the death of her brother, so as to keep the unwelcome suitor at arm's length.

Viola, as Orsino's ambassador to Olivia, cannot help judging Olivia by what she has heard, and by the rebuffs encountered at the Countess's gate. To Viola, Olivia is like the subject of Shakespeare's 94th sonnet, one of those who “moving others, are themselves as stone”, who take care to be “the lords and owners of their faces”. Viola calls her “too proud” when Olivia's unveiling and itemizing of her face emphasize this attitude. There is certainly further deception, conscious or unconscious, by Viola in this first dialogue between these ladies. Viola carries out her master's orders to woo Olivia in a way that cannot succeed.

Viola's wit and aplomb, her independence and scorn for her own well-conned flowery speech are at once congenial to Olivia. When Viola, in exasperation, pulls out all the stops on her own natural poetry, Olivia dives into her bag of tricks to win “him”. She tries to give “him” money, she sends “him” a ring, she wonders, when all her pleading seems to no avail: “How shall I feast him—what bestow of him—For youth is bought more oft than begged or borrowed.”

Olivia is very young, then, and probably slight of figure to be suitably matched to “Cesario”. Anyone as competent as she shows herself to be, as Sebastian notes that she is, and as a mistress would have to be to suit Malvolio, would not mismatch herself. She has been forced to grow up quickly in the last months, and her discovery of her own capabilities has gone to her head. But, since she is reasonable as well as practical, she can see that she is being swept off her feet and put suddenly into the position she has always objected to in Orsino (that of unrequited lover). This forces her to conceal her own nature from herself, to speak of “enchantment”, and say in most un-Olivia-like tones these lines, which are noticeably difficult to say naturally:

Fate, show thy force: ourselves we do not owe; What is decreed must be, and be this so.

(I. v. 331)

However this may comfort her, she does not actually leave to Fate anything which she can manage.

At her second visit as Cesario, careful to seem more courtly, formal and remote than the first time, Viola is met by the full storm of Olivia's recklessness. This is not only caused by passion, but by intuitive uneasiness:

OLIVIA.

Stay:

I prithee, tell me what thou think'st of me.

VIOLA.
That you do think you are not what you are.

OLIVIA.

If I think so, I think the same of you.

VIOLA.

Then think you right: I am not what I am.

OLIVIA.

I would you were as I would have you be.

(III. i. 151)

Sebastian, Viola’s twin, is exactly what Olivia would have him be.

The most fundamental consideration in the relationship between “seems” and “is” arises with the confusion of Sebastian and Viola. When Olivia mistakes Sebastian for “Cesario”, she is seeing the same spirit in both. Her eye is not stopped at the surface by any probable difference of height and voice. She did not fall in love with a physique. This is a difficult theatrical problem, certainly, but one to be tackled with bravado rather than coyness, because it is more than a casual assumption of the plot—it is a considered criticism of what we are accustomed to call “real”, the façade. Olivia must be consistently shown as a person who is wary of letting her eye be “too great a flatterer for [her] mind”. Her intuitive summing up of people is always made at a deeper level than this. As for the confusion of Antonio in mistaking Cesario for Sebastian, I believe that the only assumption the actor can make is that that honest stalwart could never entertain the suspicion of a disguise. He is far too much upset by the overwhelming sin of ingratitude to notice any surface changes in his erstwhile idol.

Sebastian has as much romantic venturesomeness, courage, charm and—all important to this play—integrity as Viola. But in his astonishing impetuosity he is a mirror image, rather than a copy, of his twin’s equally astonishing patience. Their intentions are the same, their ways of carrying them out are very different.

Two such spirits as Viola and Sebastian are required as “fitting climax to the swelling act” which in the end unmasks all the characters of this play. They are needed by Olivia and Orsino as mates of the appropriate sex. They are used by Shakespeare to emphasize “what a piece of work is man”.

The same theme as that of the story of Viola is also developed on another set of instruments. The story of the winning of Sir Toby Belch by Maria shows her determination and successful ruse prevailing over the weakness of his self-deception.

In Maria, to use the language of her intended husband, the spirit of the queen of the Amazons is incarnate in the body of a “wren”. Maria knows herself, her wit and abilities, her place in the household and her exact intentions, or perhaps ambitions would be the better word. The first time we meet her there is a conjugal ring to her nagging of Sir Toby that is different from the way she teases Sir Andrew and the camaraderie with which she jokes with the fool. (She is as adept as Viola in observing the “quality of persons” with whom she jests.) Her treatment of Sir Toby not only gives the lie to his masterful air, but makes it seem likely that his wedding her is only a matter of time. The problem, as the Fool states it at first, is to get Sir Toby sober. At the end he is not only still drunk, but beaten up—yet Maria has marshalled her forces successfully. She alone proposes the writing of a love letter to Malvolio purporting to come from the Lady Olivia, asking the steward to behave in a rude and ridiculous way. She is careful not to be watching with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew when
Malvolio is taken in by the trick, nor ever to say anything impertinent in front of Malvolio. Malvolio realizes, however, that Maria is not stopping Sir Toby's noisy revels, which have so annoyed Olivia that she asks him to leave the house if he cannot behave himself. After Malvolio is imprisoned for lunacy, Sir Toby confesses that he is “now so far in offense with [his] niece, that [he] cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot.” We hear no more of Maria until the end of the play, after Sir Toby's disastrous encounter with Sebastian, when Fabian solemnly states, as if he believes it, that Sir Toby made Maria forge the letter to Malvolio—and married her in “recompense”!

This is as superficially sudden as Orsino's capitulation to Viola, and Sir Toby will never be any more aware than Orsino that this result has been in the making since Act I. In many ways the figures in the “sub-plot” seem like the figures in the “main plot” reflected in a carnival mirror, distorted by their greater selfishness and lesser grace.

Sir Toby is no more stupid than Orsino, and can be really forceful on occasion. Viola's remark that “wise men, folly fall'n, quite taint their wit” is immediately followed by the appearance of Sir Toby's paunch upon the stage. But his follies are of a variety which we are accustomed to stereotype as a vague and pleasant muddle of the “Falstaff” image and Old King Cole. (We are too lenient with Sir Toby, as we are inclined to be too stern with Orsino.) Sir Toby has always presented a bold front, by means of drink and bullying, but, within the play, he deceives only Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the “little-wit”. Sir Andrew is very easily fooled by anyone who cares to try, including himself. Sir Toby preens himself before this insubstantial figure, and seems to profit as much from this self-aggrandizement as from the Aguecheek purse, which he is milking with false promises of marriage to his niece.

Sir Andrew is amiable and ingenuous in regard to his foolishness as well as to his pretense of robustness and valor. But, unless Twelfth Night is considered only as a revel, there would seem to be little in this gullible little playboy to attract the attention of leading actors, as the part undoubtedly does. All the shallowness of Sir Toby is in his sycophant, without any of the intelligence and vigor that Sir Toby is misusing. Sir Toby is a strong man, weakened by aimlessness, covering himself boisterously with false strength. Sir Andrew makes a more clearly defined impression by being uncomplicatedly weak. But Sir Andrew is definitely the straight man for Sir Toby, not Sir Toby for Sir Andrew. The director who helps Sir Andrew to steal scenes with overdone clothes and builds him up with extra stage business is helping a natural difficulty of the situation to become a calamity to the play.

And then there is Malvolio—who has probably fascinated more Twelfth Night audiences than any of these other characters. Although his place in the story is only that of a butt for Maria's joke, his monumental simplicity gives him great strength in the play. Like Antonio, he “looks on tempests and is never shaken”. In his self-love, ambition, and lack of imagination, he is the focus of very real wishes that he may come to grief through overpresumption. But his masquerade is an involuntary mistake, and Olivia sympathizes with this “poor fool” because he is honest, he cannot be other than he is. Olivia “would not have him miscarry for the half of [her] dowry”, and, for his part, Malvolio has a profound respect for his Lady, and believes her household and family should befit her. There is no fun or revelry in this naive man, and that is why he cannot understand the fun of others. They call this attitude malice.

Malvolio's first entrance obviously follows his disparaging report to Olivia that the Clown has grown “dishonest” (in the Elizabethan sense). The repercussions of this piece of undoubtedly accurate reporting he lives to regret, though never understand, in prison when “Sir Topas” comes to call. Between the rather austere satisfaction Malvolio has learned to make for himself by “practising behavior to his own shadow”, and the straightforward anger and determination to have revenge that he feels in the last act, his mistaken efforts to please and woo his Lady should bloom earnest and vivid and unbecoming. His imprisonment cannot make him more or less understanding—he is only hurt and wants to get out. It is Sir Toby who is penalized for something he only wished for and watched, and Malvolio who is to judge him—Malvolio, who thought he
had his heart's desire and did not. To play Malvolio “straight”, as Howard Hewes is startled to admit after seeing the production of the Canadian Stratford Festival, does help the balance of the play, much as he seems to prefer the simultaneous view of the twins so deftly managed to confuse the poor steward.

Olivia's professional Fool, Feste, is silently present when Maria tells Sir Toby and Sir Andrew her plan to trick Malvolio into thinking Olivia loves him. He is not there to see the trick played out. Fabian, a straightforward sporting individual, may be left over from some casting change early in the life of Twelfth Night, but he serves well as a buffer between the Clown and the plot. Except for his masquerade as “Sir Topas, the curate” visiting “Malvolio, the lunatic”, Feste takes no part in other people's schemes, and this bit of personal revenge is quickly balanced by his promise to help Malvolio. It is quite in character for him to bring light and the means of freedom, and his superlative discourse on dissembling is also germane to the whole play. But his roles would not be well served by any participation in the trick of the letter or in its defense at the end. Hence Fabian.

That Olivia delights in Feste—the Clown, the Jester, the Fool—is a strong recommendation of them both. Olivia's ability to recognize and like an honest soul intuitively shows itself in her attachment to Feste, as well as to Viola, Sebastian, and Malvolio. She is willing to consider Malvolio's charge against Feste, but she is equally willing to see that on the Fool's own terms—“there's no true cuckold but calamity”—Feste is not “dishonest”. If she really wanted to discharge him, he would be gone.

An undue penchant for women and bawdry was, of course, the Fool's prerogative, and Feste takes advantage of this. When he will not say where he has been for “so long”, Maria calls his pun on being “well-hanged” by retorting that he has learned his courage “in the wars”. Mentioned only in passing, this provides a needed glint of contrast to Orsino's kind of love making, as the Clown's forthright begging contrasts with Sir Toby's confidence tricks.

In giving us perspective on these people and events, the Fool has two roles to play. First, in being all things to all men, he holds up to them a mocking mirror where they may not see themselves, though we, the audience, do. In singing “Come Away Death”, he out-Orsinos Orsino (and—possibly—exploits an Elizabethan synonym for “dying”); in witless joking he surpasses Sir Andrew to his face. He also comments directly on the characters and progress of the interwoven stories. In his first scene, after he has been “so long absent”, he absolves Olivia of mourning, which frees her to become infatuated with Cesario. In Viola, Feste meets his match. “I do not care for you, Sir”, says he. Can he not penetrate Cesario's mask? Though the Clown's wish does not make Cesario invisible then, by the end of the play that “gentleman” is certainly on his way out.

Feste, naturally, has the last words of the play. Why is it that theatrical and literary appraisal of his final song agree on a relaxed tone and kindly purpose for this ditty that are completely out of character for Feste? Even if he were “dissolving the ‘present laughter’” and “returning us to the ‘real’ world”, his apparent gentleness would be far from kind. But have we been so separated from reality all evening that we must be returned? We all recognize the catalogue of childish follies listed in his song which are no longer toys in the grown-up world: knavery, swaggering, drunkenness. In vehement anger at Antonio's accusation, Viola lists “lying, vainness, babbling drunkenness” as only less hateful than ingratitude. Now, Feste is holding his mocking mirror up to us, and we join the characters of the play in being unable to recognize ourselves and what the jester is really doing. He is parodying our ability to slough off Viola's anger and the anger of her creator, to enjoy the music and laugh at the characters in this play, to shield ourselves from the wind and the rain and go away untouched. This play, to Feste (and he seems to include even the author in his wry commentary), is too “bawbling” a vessel to grapple with the course and nature of the world. The audience will be “pleased” and, if they think of anything less gay will only say: “Oh, well, ‘the rain it raineth every day.’”

In addition to the plot and characters of Twelfth Night, Shakespeare uses the very forms of speech in this play to exhibit the deceptions he is talking about. In this comparatively inarticulate age, we revel in Shakespeare's
mastery of language. Listening to Feste, we understand what aversion Shakespeare felt when he came to make his way with words, only to find that these tools of his trade had been degraded and made “wanton”, made to lie with many meanings, here in this capital of wit and poetry. Much has been said about the contrast between the love of delicacy and beauty which Shakespeare shared with his audience, and the stench and cruelty of their city. The Globe could be separated from the bear pits by the force of Shakespeare’s power to invoke Illyria or Elsinore and the audience’s willingness to concentrate its attention on this kind of poetry. Was it also willing to pay attention to the poet’s exasperated cry: “To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit: how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!” The twisting “rascal” words that weave through Twelfth Night are essential ingredients in the careful pattern of deceptions.

SIR Andrew.

... I know that to be up late is to be up late.

SIR Toby.

A false conclusion; I hate it as an unfilled can. To be up after midnight and to go to bed then is to go to bed betimes.

(II.iii.5)

VIOLA.

My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

.....

I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too and yet I know not.

(II.iv.109)

Feste claims that his jesting is corruption of words, and in his dialectic he demonstrates what he is doing. He wears no motley in his brain—but he can show you Orsino’s “doublet of changeable taffeta”.

When the difference between what is seen and what is understood is too great, the people who are involved, and far from objective, cry “madman!” By the nature of its theme, this cry is often heard in Twelfth Night. Toby in drink is “mad”. Malvolio, of course, is “mad” to Olivia, and is teased about being possessed of the Devil. All the people are “mad” to poor Sebastian, who is so effectively disguised by looking like “Cesario”. And the climax comes when Antonio confronts Cesario with:

Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.

In nature there's no blemish but the mind;

None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind:

Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil

Are empty trunks o'er flourish'd by the devil.
FIRST Officer:

The man grows mad: away with him!

(III.iv.402)

The Illyrian officer calls Antonio mad when Antonio, with the authority of demonstrated honesty, blazons the real nature of madness. He can say that the devil possesses the “beauteous evil”, that the “deformed” mind, masquerading under “good feature”, is the only blemish in nature. Sir Toby naturally dismisses Antonio's words immediately as “most sage saws”, going on to decry Viola's dishonesty and topping that with her cowardice. “A coward, a most devout coward; religious in it”.

Where Toby sees platitudes and weakness, there is the courage that takes Antonio undisguised into the hostile city and makes him, flanked by guards, such a powerful figure on the stage when he is a captive. There is the courage that sustains Viola throughout the play and makes her willing to die at Orsino's whim. Here is the upshot of this exposition of pretenses.

Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art
As great as that thou fear'st.

Shakespeare, with faith in his “powerful rhyme”, meant this play to be a lasting, stageable product, not too intricate to be acted out well. It certainly stood the test of production under his eye. Will the audience meet his effort, and that of the director and actors, halfway? A play needs as much consideration as painting or sculpture or music. “I've seen it” is not a permit to say “I know that play”. How soon does one admit to “knowing” a symphony? However, good plays are not so readily available in this country as other forms of art. So we have not yet been made to learn our jobs as play-goers, our responsibility to look beyond plots and characters to the whole play. Nevertheless, a play's director does not owe us, for our ignorance, ingratiating decorations. He owes us a simple, unified production.

Nevertheless, Twelfth Night cannot fairly be presented as merely an entertainment, a revel, a festival or as Saturnalia. Critics like Mr. Clurman and Mr. Tynan should be moved to do more than call it a “nice”, “sweet”, “dewy”, “mellow”, or “cool” theatrical pastime, begging your indulgence for its “transvestite situations” which are “hard to bring off with any conviction”. It should not, moreover, be staged as if it were by A Comedy of Errors out of Much Ado About Nothing. It has a sinewy, wiry fabric of its own, with its own brilliance and beauty. And a player who asks, like Orsino, “What shall I do?” should attend to Olivia's answer: “Even what it please my lord, that shall become him.” To stage Twelfth Night, learn its own lesson: “What You Will” must be disciplined by what is honestly becoming to the proper nature of this individual play.

Criticism: Character Studies: Larry S. Champion (essay date October 1968)


[In the following essay, Champion argues that Twelfth Night features some of Shakespeare's most well-developed comic characters whose true but hidden identities are revealed over the course of the drama.]

It is commonplace to speak of the different kinds of Shakespearean comedy. The “happy” or “joyous” comedies, for instance, are contrasted with the “enigmatic” or “problem” comedies on the one hand and the “philosophic” or “divine” comedies on the other. And, among the first group, we are sometimes told that The
Two Gentlemen of Verona is a less successful “romantic” comedy than Much Ado About Nothing or that Twelfth Night is pure comedy whereas As You Like It incorporates potentially tragic motifs. In a broad sense, of course, the attitudes toward life expressed by comedy can range from the satiric to the sentimental, the farcical to the melodramatic—distinctions invariably based upon the nature of the plot. With Shakespeare's comedy, an equally valuable insight is gained through an investigation of the characterizations and the devices by which they are rendered humorous, a perspective which suggests that Shakespeare's concern was not with different kinds of comedy but rather with plots involving an increasingly complex depth of characterization. Obviously Shakespeare began with plot—not character, but the kind of characterization demanded by these plots reveals both his changing interests and his increasing abilities.

More precisely, comedy can avoid individual characterization by focusing entirely on the humor of physical action; or it can stress the disparity between appearance and reality—what in his society a character sets himself out to be as opposed to what he is in reality behind the social mask; or it can portray an experience involving a spiritual catharsis which transforms a personality or reconstitutes an entire society. In other words, a comic dramatist can depict character to any depth which is appropriate to his narrative. The character who inhabits a stage-world in which evil is a reality and who is involved in ethical and moral decisions through which the spectators see into the foundations of his personality is completely human; portrayed on the level of “faith,” he undergoes an experience—like those of the great tragic figures—which effects a basic transformation of values. The character who inhabits a stage-world in which there is no fundamental evil to force decisions revealing his spiritual or philosophic values is, of course, removed from reality. Yet, when—he pretends to be something which he is not, the gap between appearance and reality becomes material for comedy. In this situation the comic experience for the character is one of self-revelation; portrayed on the level of “identity,” he is humorously forced to recognize or to acknowledge his true nature. It is primarily of such drama that Northrop Frye is speaking when he remarks that comedy "is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge."  

The character who is delineated only on the level of "physical action" never invites our response to him as an individual. Our detachment complete, the comedy is that of manipulation, and the humor is drawn not from character involvement or character incongruity but rather from our observation of puppet-like characters maneuvered into ludicrous situations. Shakespeare, whose development as a comic playwright is consistently in the direction of complexity or depth of characterization, deals with each of these levels of characterization. His earliest works are essentially situation comedies; the humor arises from action rather than character. There is no significant development of the main characters; instead, they are manipulated into situations which are humorous as a result, for example, of mistaken identity and slapstick confusion. Thus, the characters are revealed only in terms of what they do, outer action. The Antipholuses and the Dromios of The Comedy of Errors are cases in point, manipulated as they are amidst a confused wife, courtesan, kitchen wench, sea captain, and goldsmith. So also the princess with her ladies in Love's Labor's Lost are played puppet-like against Ferdinand and his lords who have renounced sex for Academe. In A Midsummer Night's Dream the Athenian lovers—Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius—are puppets manipulated into ridiculous self-contradiction by Oberon and Puck. The ensuing phase of Shakespeare's comedy sets forth plots in which the emphasis is on identity—character revelation—rather than physical action. This revelation occurs in one of two forms; either a hypocrite is exposed for what he actually is or a character who has assumed an unnatural or abnormal pose is forced to realize and admit the ridiculousness of his position. Of the first type Malvolio and Don John are prime illustrations, their true nature hidden from the other characters for much of the play by their moral hypocrisy. Of the second type, Benedick, Beatrice, and Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing and Orsino and Olivia in Twelfth Night are characters, for example, whose experiences reveal to themselves as well as to others their true personalities. With individuals of either type, actions are a facade to conceal true identity; and, to the extent that the spectator is aware of this incongruency, the hypocrisy on the one hand and the lack of self-knowledge on the other are ridiculous and the ultimate exposure humorous. Admittedly there is no fundamental transformation of character; yet the false pride which blinds one to fully knowing himself is purged. In any case, the emphasis in these comedies is on the ridiculousness of the character, not his danger to
society; he is funny, not evil, because in these stage-worlds we assume that normality will ultimately prevail and that he will never be allowed to engage in activities of permanent consequence either to himself or to others. In the final comedies, however, involving sin and sacrificial forgiveness, character development is concerned with a revelation of faith. In these stage-worlds the power of evil is not harmlessly contained within a circle of wit; and the characters, struggling on the fringe of comedy, must cope with the actual consequences of sin moral and political. The “comic” transformation of, for instance, Leontes in The Winter’s Tale or of Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian in The Tempest is the result of a character's conversion to belief in a universe controlled by a principle of love most fully realized in its redemptive powers.

The fully developed character obviously creates problems for the dramatist who must maintain a comic perspective for the spectator or see his narrative turn to melodrama or tragicomedy. Since the spectator's involvement with physical action does not extend beyond the superficial laughter that a humorous situation arouses, the playwright—to the extent that he can maintain such a perspective—has no difficulty in achieving a comic tone for “flat” characters who make no ethical decisions. On the other hand, with greater character complexity, the spectator is provoked into emotional identification with character and situation, and his comic perspective is blurred. Whether the Renaissance comic form took shape primarily from “Saturnalian release” or from “Terentian intrigue,” the dramatic experience which is to divert rather than distress is possible only so long as the spectator is either emotionally detached from the characters or, if emotionally involved with them, in possession of such knowledge or provoked into such a mood as to be assured of a happy end accomplished by means which only temporarily appear unpleasant. Consequently, as Shakespeare's conception of character expanded, so also did his problem of maintaining a proper perspective for the spectator. His success is the result of experimentation with a kind of comic pointer or comic controller who is himself involved in the action and yet whose relationships with the other characters or whose actions and comments provide us a sufficiently omniscient view—whether he himself possesses this view or not—for us to rest secure that an impenetrable circle of wit has exorcised any dangers of permanent consequence.

An investigation of the level of characterization and the method of comic control in Twelfth Night underscores the significance of the play in the evolution of Shakespeare's comedy. In his richest comic creation to this point, with character developed on the level of identity as well as on the level of action, Shakespeare has moved far beyond the one-dimensional character of farce. At the same time, he has achieved one of his most successful integrations of comic device and character revelation. Through association with Viola, Sebastian, Feste, and Maria, each of the other characters reveals his abnormal or hypocritical posture, comes to understand his true nature, and is absorbed into a normal society. The twins Viola and Sebastian, separated in a storm antecedent to the action of the play and reunited in the fifth act, are the primary comic pointers in that they establish the proper comic perspective for the spectator by providing the information necessary to create the dramatic irony. Their apparent shifts in personality—Viola's disguise and the subsequent mistaken identity—produce actual exposures in the surrounding characters. Feste and Maria, a second pair of comic pointers outside the primary action, serve a similar function for the low characters. These four characters, in no way self-deceived, create a rapport with the spectator; and their comments function to provide information about others necessary to guide the laughter.

Concerning the level of characterization in Twelfth Night, the basis for comedy, more specifically, is the incongruity between action and identity. Major characters at the outset attempt to hide their real nature behind a facade of physical action which is eventually revealed as a mere pose—Olivia as a victim of fashionable melancholia, Orsino as the disconsolate and unrequited lover, Malvolio as the puritanical jack-in-office.

The duke, like Romeo in love with the idea of love, strikes an immediate tone of hyperbolic sentimentalizing as he revels in the music which feeds his passion. In love with Olivia at first sight, he delights in the fancy of puns to describe his languishment:
That instant was I turn'd into a hart;
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

(I, i, 21-23)

Informed in no uncertain terms that Olivia is unreceptive to his suit, he is nonetheless determined to pursue his love when we see him three scenes later unclasping to Viola (Cesario) “the book even of [his] secret soul.” Now, however, he is to woo by deputy both because he assumes Olivia “will attend it better in thy [the page's] youth” (I, iv, 27) and because, as he himself admits, he is “best / When least in company” (I, iv, 37-38). Thus far, then, the spectator is confronted with a melodramatic duke who, while avowing an overwhelming love, admits to a preference for solitude at the same time he commands another to continue his suit.

In the duke's next appearance (II, iv), two remarks, in the midst of his continued pose, signal his true identity as a prideful man infatuated with the social pose of the romantic lover. First, his description to Cesario of feminine beauty simply does not correspond with his Petrarchan posture. While he mouths praise to Olivia's immortal beauty, he advises Cesario rather cynically to find a lover younger than he, “For women are as roses, whose fair flower / Being once display'd doth fall that very hour” (II, iv, 39-40). Secondly, in the course of his conversation he flatly contradicts himself in comparing the quality of a man's love with that of a woman's. At one point he says:

Our [men's] fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.

(II, iv, 34-36)

Yet, a few lines later he avers:

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.

Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

(II, iv, 96-99, 104-106)

Even though the duke again calls for music to feed his passion and listens to Feste's song describing the melancholy death of a distraught lover, his contradiction in advising one concept of love for Cesario and claiming another for his personal commitment reflects intellectual toying with the idea of love rather than a direct emotional involvement in it.

When Orsino appears again in the final act, his actions render his character revelation complete. Both the rapidity with which he can turn angrily on Olivia and the poised alacrity with which he can accept Cesario (now Viola) as his heart's substitute reveal how deeply indeed he has been committed to the stakes of love! When the countess first enters, Orsino speaks metaphorically of heaven walking on earth. But, his suit again rejected as “fat and fulsome,” he suddenly alters his metaphor to “perverseness,” “uncivil lady,” and, instead of heaven and its shrines, speaks of her “ingrate and unauspicious altars” (V, i, 115-16). The “marble-breasted tyrant” has made his thoughts “ripe in mischief” as he threatens to tear her minion (Cesario) out of her cruel eye as a sacrifice to her disdain. In effect, within the space of a few short lines his unbounded love has been exploded by an equally unbounded temper. The second shift is even more revelatory of the true quality of his
love. When Olivia's husband is produced, Orsino, at the point of being outfaced altogether, determines to "share in this happy wreck." He agrees to take Viola to wife asking to see her in woman's weeds, later even foregoing that precaution.

The development of Orsino's character, then, takes the form of revelation to himself and to others. His Petrarchan pose for Olivia is revealed as merely the cover for a man enjoying the fascination of his romantic adventure and too proud to accept rejection.11

The incongruities in Olivia's character are developed even more extensively throughout the drama. Her true identity is that of a normal young lady capable both of loving and being loved and possessing a sense of humor which enables her to understand and appreciate the good fun in a practical joke. This personality she attempts to conceal, however, through her actions. And, as a result of this melancholy pose, her reputation for morbid solemnity has grown throughout the land.

Although the countess does not appear on stage until the final scene of the first act, her haughty posture is established through prior conversation. For instance, in Scene ii the spectator is told that, because of the recent deaths of her father and brother, Olivia "hath abjured the company / And sight of men" and "will admit no kind of suit" (ll. 40-41, 45). More specifically, we learn in Scene i that she intends to wear the veil of mourning for full seven years and to "water once a day her chamber round / With eye-offending brine" (ll. 29-30). When the jocularity of her household in Scene iii appears inappropriate to her pose, she remains in character through a mild reprimand to Sir Toby Belch delivered by Maria:

"Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions to your ill hours. … That quaffing and drinking will undo you. I heard my lady talk of it yesterday, and of a foolish knight that you brought in one night to be her wooer."

(I, iii, 5-6, 14-17)

Olivia's posture, then, is clear before she appears on stage. Determined to mourn her relatives beyond normal bounds, she will reject all suitors and will soberly hold herself aloof from the slightest household merriment. Interestingly, Sir Toby's best comment on her pose is the suitor (Sir Andrew Aguecheek) whom he has cast in the face of her resolution to abjure the society of men.

This facade of character dissolves, at least for the spectator, at her first appearance on stage. For in the lengthy final scene of Act I, Feste flatly proclaims the absurdity of her attitude, and, later, with Cesario she is unable to maintain the posture she has so carefully cultivated. At our first glimpse, she is testily chastizing Feste for his having been so long absent from the house and for his continued foolishness. The clown, however, as Cesario is to do later, confronts her with polite but firm rebuttal, mockingly proving her a fool for her protracted melancholy:

CLO.

Good madonna, why mournest thou?

OLI.

Good fool, for my brother's death.

CLO.

I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
OLI.

I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLO.

The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen.

(I, v, 72-78)

Her genuine nature is further revealed as she, not altogether displeased with Feste's wit, defends his catechism against Malvolio's charges. Even so, she is in no way ready to drop her demeanor. When a messenger arrives to plead Orsino's case, she orders Malvolio to report that she is sick or not at home. And, when Cesario's persistence prevails, she calls for her veil—the physical symbol of her artificial pose. Not awed by Olivia's cold and haughty disdain, Cesario frankly accuses her of being “the cruellest she alive” and “too proud.” The countess, though supposedly abjuring the sight of men for the sake of her brother's memory, listens with obvious delight—but her interest is in the messenger, not the message. The result is a flagrant revelation of the insincerity of her earlier posture as she not only displays a normal and healthy interest in what she assumes to be the opposite sex but is willing to act the aggressor's role in her affair of the heart. To that end she encourages Cesario to come again for further consultation and sends him a ring on the pretense that she is returning what he had earlier forced upon her. In the final moments of the act, she voices her dilemma in soliloquy:

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit
Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast! Soft, soft!
Unless the master were the man. How now!
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes.

(I, v, 311-317)

Her two appearances in Act III develop further the contrast between her true nature and her assumed posture. Her pursuit of Cesario more pronounced, she is not without moments of remorse as she realizes the indignity of her actions. For instance, in Scene i she tells Cesario not to be afraid, that she will pursue no further (Il. 141, 143), and in Scene iv she laments:

I have said too much unto a heart of stone,
And laid mine honour too unchary on't.
There's something in me that reproves my fault.

(Il. 221-223)

She is unable to contain her love, however, and at this point openly declares her affection:

Cesario, by the roses of spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,
I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

(III, i, 161-164)

Moreover, a short time later she becomes ridiculously flustered at Cesario's very approach:
I have sent after him; he says he'll come.
How shall I feast him? What bestow of him?
For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd.
I speak too loud.—

(III, iv, 1-4)

In truth, her love for Cesario is no less outrageous than Malvolio's for her, once the steward has become convinced that he is the secret object of her attention.

By the end of the third act Olivia's true identity has been fully revealed to the spectators. Her remaining actions leading to marriage will complete the revelation to the other characters as well. For, in the following scenes Sebastian, who has replaced Viola and who admittedly is bewildered by the advances of the beautiful countess, is nevertheless willing to receive them and to tell her that he, “having sworn truth, ever will be true.”

Malvolio is perhaps the most obvious illustration of comic character incongruity. As Olivia's steward he pulls moral rank on everyone in her household and delights in contrasting his grave prudence with their apparent hedonism. Even Olivia, herself engrossed in sombre lamentation for her deceased brother, perceives the excess prudishness in his manner:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets.

(I, v, 97-101)

Similarly, Maria in a later scene expresses concern that Toby's late carousals have awakened Malvolio, who—as anticipated—rushes in and exclaims against the “caterwauling” and the “gabbl[ing] like tinkers at this time of night.” He in effect orders them out of the house unless greater self-discipline is exercised, singling out Maria for especial chastisement. Because of his grave disposition Olivia later summons him to entertain Cesario: “He [Malvolio] is sad and civil, / And suits well for a servant with my fortunes” (III, iv, 5-6).

When Malvolio appears before the countess, however, his true nature is showing as a result of his avarice. His puritanical facade, labeled time-serving by Maria, has been profitable only so long as he was convinced such posture was desired by his employer. Since he is motivated by ambition rather than principle, he now hesitates not a moment to accept a diametrically opposite pattern of action. His erstwhile grave face is lined with the wrinkles of a plastered smile; his conservative attire is replaced with cross-gartered yellow stockings. As commanded in the note which he assumes to be Olivia's, he is “opposite with kinsmen, surly with servants,” and his “tongue tang[s] arguments of state.” Olivia, amazed at Malvolio's antics and shocked at the effrontery of his remark that he will come to her bed, declares “this is very midsummer madness.” Later, Feste (Sir Topas) exorcises the evil spirit from the steward, who refuses to pray in his new role as a festive gallant. And, as from the dark room Malvolio accurately parrots the orthodox answers to the theological questions posed by Sir Topas, the spectator observes how distant indeed is this religion of action from his religion of words. The action, then, has flayed the pious cover and revealed the obsession of ego and ambition from which his personality suffers.

Revelation of the disparity between action and identity in Twelfth Night involves several of the minor characters as well. Aguecheek, for instance, masks his cowardice behind a volley of words and fatuously challenges the reluctant Cesario to a duel, but his courage persists only so long as his agressor's timidity. So also, Sir Toby stakes his pursuit of the jolly life on his ability to control any situation which he creates—and
here he fails physically in his inability to manipulate Sebastian (whom Aguecheek has unwittingly provoked) and emotionally in his inability to control his fascination for Maria (to whom he loses the freedom of his bachelorhood). Even Antonio and the theme of friendship are not exempt from Shakespeare's pattern. When Sebastian reveals his identity to his rescuer and describes his destination, the sea captain hyperbolically pledges his affection: “If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant. … [C]ome what may, I do adore thee so, / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go” (II, i, 36-37, 48-49). Similarly, his love and “jealousy what might befal your travel, / Being skillless in these parts” motivate Antonio to accompany Sebastian despite his own physical danger resulting from his previous banishment from Illyria for engaging in a sea-fight. With magnanimous affection he forces his purse upon Sebastian, and without hesitation he later intervenes in the duel between Aguecheek and Viola (whom he assumes to be Sebastian), swearing that he “for his love dares yet do more / Than you have heard him brag to you he will” (III, iv, 347-348). But the hyperbole proves bitter when Sebastian appears to deny knowledge of him or his money:

... O, how vile an idol proves this god!
Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.
In nature there's no blemish but the mind;
None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind.
Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil
Are empty trunks o'erflourish'd by the devil.

(ll. 399-404)

When next on stage (V, i), he speaks of the “false cunning” of the cold and deceitful thief. And his wrath abates only when the twins are onstage in the final scene. Antonio's friendship, then, has faced the human problems of confusion and misunderstanding, and his reactions have reflected the variable effects of such problems on the personality. Aguecheek, Toby, and Antonio, in short, provide an appropriate background for Shakespeare's portrayal of character revelation.

Incongruity between a character's surface action and his true identity is, of course, only the basis for comedy. The realization, as previously described, depends upon the success with which the dramatist uses comic devices to achieve a perspective from which the spectator will enjoy the situations which dislodge the characters from their abnormal posture. In *Twelfth Night*, the comedy of the first three acts results from the spectator's awareness, through the comic pointer, of the role that each character is playing and of the fact that the role is a pose; the humor of Act IV arises from the pointer's forcing each character into action contradictory to his pose which reveals his true nature to the other characters. And, in Act V with both twins on stage and with each character forced to eat the humble pie of exposure, the comic catharsis is achieved and each character restored to normality.

Shakespeare carefully sets up his pointers early in Act I. In Scene ii Viola describes the shipwreck which she has survived, a twin brother of whose life she is uncertain, and the disguise of eunuch which she will assume for reasons of safety as she travels to Orsino's court. Her ability to moderate her grief for Sebastian provides a foil for the excessive nature of Olivia's mourning. The following scene introduces Olivia and her household, with Maria tolerantly chiding Toby for his late hours and openly flouting the fatuousness of Sir Andrew. In Scene iv Viola assumes her disguise as Cesario and quickly gains favor with her new master. At this point the dramatic irony becomes significant for the function of the comic pointer as Orsino unwittingly sends female to woo female and thus subconsciously reflects the artificiality of his passion. The final scene of the act introduces Feste as a clown who travels in the households of both Orsino and Olivia. He immediately establishes himself as one who dispassionately observes this circle from the outside, with remarks such as: “Those wits, that think they have thee, do very oft prove fools; and I, that am sure I lack thee, may pass for a wise man” and “Better a witty fool than a foolish wit” (I, v, 36-40). And his first action is mockingly to reveal to the countess and to the audience the foolishness of her inordinate mourning. In the ensuing scene Shakespeare inserts a brief moment to reveal that Sebastian is indeed alive. Since he too is moving toward
Orsino's court and since Viola's disguise is masculine, the comic trap of mistaken identity is constructed, and the middle acts will bait virtually every aspect of the trap in order that the catastrophe or resolution of the final act will be more effective.

The comic pointers introduced, the major portion of the plot now utilizes the rapport created between Viola (and later Sebastian) and the spectator to effect the comic exposure of Olivia, Orsino, Aguecheek, Belch, and Antonio. Feste and Maria will successfully exploit Malvolio's presumptuous nature. The steward—whether patterned after William Ffarrington, Sir Ambrose Willoughby, Sir William Knollys, or none of these—functions in the context to heighten the absurdity of Olivia's romantic liaison with Cesario in Act III by himself becoming her lover. To carry out Malvolio's duping and derision, Shakespeare prepares these servant figures who move in his circle and have the best opportunity to know his true nature.

Viola, far from being a totally disinterested person, is enamored of Orsino though her masculine disguise renders any such relationship ludicrous—just as ludicrous as Olivia's passion for Cesario. But her primary function in the play is to reveal Olivia's hypocrisy to the spectator so that he might fully appreciate the process of comic deflation which will restore the countess to normality. To this end, once the touchstone relationship is established, Viola in soliloquy carefully identifies Olivia's infatuation for the spectator:

Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her! 
.....She loves me, sure. The cunning of her passion 
Invites me in this churlish messenger. 
.....Poor lady, she were better love a dream. 
.....How will this fadge? My master loves thee dearly; 
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him; 
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me. 

(II, ii, 19, 23-24, 27, 34-36)

In two later scenes (II, i; III, iv) as Olivia becomes increasingly the aggressor, Cesario warns her that “I am not what I am” and that, in light of her haughty pose of immunity to romance, she is pitifully deceiving herself: “You do think you are not what you are” (III, i, 151).

Once Shakespeare has set in motion Olivia's passion, which is to result in her ultimate exposure and which will be all the funnier for the delay, he diverts the focus by manipulating the comic pointer into a series of intriguies by which to expose the surrounding characters. Throughout the third act, for each of these characters the trap is set which is to be sprung in Act IV as Sebastian replaces Viola upon the scene. In Scene ii, for instance, Aguecheek is goaded into challenging Cesario to a duel. Toby and Fabian persuade the fop that Olivia really loves him and that she is feigning interest in Cesario to test the mettle of his manliness. The ridiculous challenge is subsequently forced upon the distraught Viola, who declares she “will return again into the house and desire some conduct of the lady. I am no fighter. … I am one that had rather go with sir priest than sir knight” (III, iv, 264-265, 298-299). Viola, of course, realizes the danger of her disguise—which Shakespeare has no intention of destroying before the full range of exposure is effected. Aguecheek, on the other hand, senses in her reaction an even greater coward than himself, and in Act IV flagrantly pursues the challenge. Andrew, too, Shakespeare has prepared for the appearance of Sebastian! In Scene iii, the dramatist also primes Antonio for his moment of self-knowledge. Pouring forth his friendship in hyperbolic terms and risking his life through his presence in the city, Antonio insists that his friend accept his purse for what needs might arise and meet him an hour later at the Elephant.

Thus, at the end of Act III, each character has exploited his character facade to its height. And, even though the twins are meaningfully integrated into the plot in their own right, their sudden reversal in Act IV presents the comic shock which will transform each of the characters and will reveal their true identity. Aguecheek, for instance, rushes upon “Cesario” to “cuff him soundly,” but the tables are turned as Sir Andrew moans, “We
took him for a coward, but he's the very devil incarnate” (V, i, 183). Similarly, Sir Toby, intent upon fostering the mock combat but equally intent upon preventing either party from actually drawing a sword, now finds “Cesario’s” wrath quite unmalleable and consequently gets his head bloodied for his mischievous connivances. So also, Olivia suddenly finds “Cesario” amazingly susceptible to her charms and rushes the docile youth off to a priest. Meanwhile, lest any spectator be confused and the ironic humor lessened, Sebastian—clearly functioning as Shakespeare’s comic pointer—explains in soliloquy his confusion at Olivia’s behavior and his inability to locate his friend Antonio at the Elephant:

Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason. ...

(IV, iii, 11-14)

And, in turn, Olivia's hypocrisy in coveting the affection of Cesario despite her original pose provokes the sudden transformation of Orsino in which he denounces her haughty disdain and snatches Viola to his heart, a heart which only a few moments earlier was abjectly prostrated before his self-constructed altar of undying love for the countess.

Shakespeare's comic device, apparent to the spectators since the second scene in the play, is fully revealed to the characters of the plot in the final scene as a capstone to the character revelations:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not!
.....An apple, cleft in two, is not more twin
Than these two creatures.

(V, i, 223-224, 230-231)

The close integration of the subplot reveals further the careful construction of the plot of Twelfth Night. Malvolio's puritanical posture as the zealous moralist and the flagrant exposure of his hypocrisy by Feste and Maria reinforce both the theme of character revelation and the tone of tolerant mockery. The group of Maria, Feste, Toby, and Fabian, planting deceptive information and observing from the side as Malvolio is duped into rejecting his original pose, suggest the group of spectators as they too—cognizant of the deceptive twins which the author has planted in the main plot—look on as the major characters are run through similar paces. Thematically, Malvolio is a third suitor for Olivia in Acts II and III, his presumptuous wooing occurring as a corollary to Olivia's ridiculous pursuit of Viola-Cesario. Structurally, Shakespeare utilizes the gulling and exposure of Malvolio (II, iv; III, iv) as a prelude to the major character revelations in Act IV.

Malvolio sets himself in enmity with Feste in his first appearance on stage. As he gripes about the clown's foolishness, Feste quips:

God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly! Sir Toby will be sworn that I am no fox, but he will not pass his word for twopence that you are no fool.

(I, v, 83-86)

More specifically, Maria brands Malvolio “a kind of Puritan”:

… [A] time-pleaser; an affection'd ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself, so cram'd, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is
his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my
revenge find notable cause to work.

(II, iii, 160-166)

She then carefully describes, both to inform her cohorts and to establish the comic irony for the spectators, the
device by which she will drop a forged love-note in his way. And two scenes later she directs Toby, Andrew,
and Fabian to get “into the box-tree: Malvolio's coming down this wall” (II, iv, 18-19). Throughout the scene
the pompous and gullible Malvolio is taken in completely—while his prepared audiences in the galleries and
on the stage delight in watching his vaunted sobriety and conservative manner sacrificed for the opportunity
of social and financial gain. Similarly, as he parades himself before Olivia in ridiculous attire and later as he is
accused by Feste-Sir Topas of being a puritan possessed of the devil, Feste and Maria deliver a steady volley
of comments designed to focus the spectator's attention on the humor arising from Malvolio's hypocrisy, an
inversion of values so drastic that, as Fabian remarks, “If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn
it as an improbable fiction” (III, iv, 140-141).

Malvolio's role, then, forms the subplot of the play; it has no direct narrative connection with the primary
comic device of Viola-Sebastian. Once Maria and Feste have goaded him into exposure through his wooing
Olivia, he is conveniently removed to the dark room as the action of the major plot resumes. And he returns to
the stage only after the full range of character revelations has occurred. His presence in Act V is not
insignificant, however, because it enables Shakespeare to maintain a comic tone. It may be true that
Malvolio's refusal to take his ignominy in the spirit of a joke and his determination to “be revenged on the
whole pack” forfeits any opportunity for our ultimate sympathy, but his action also maintains the comic
perspective of the play. Through restoring a character to his true nature, the comic catharsis achieves a
harmonious social relationship: Orsino weds Viola, Olivia weds Sebastian, Toby weds Maria, Sebastian's
friendship with Antonio is restored, Sir Andrew accepts his cowardice. Malvolio's singular unwillingness to
learn through laughter provides the spectator a final chuckle at one who remains a comic butt. And, for that
matter, his action is not exceptional to the theme of the play. He has, like the others, been forced to face the
revelation of his true personality, and in his case the revelation is not an idyllic one.

As described at the outset, character revelation does not involve actual transformation. While the
characterization is indeed more complex than the mere manipulation of the Antipholuses and the Dromios of
The Comedy of Errors, there is no innate alteration of personality such as is to be depicted in Leontes of The
Winter's Tale and in Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso of The Tempest. In Twelfth Night the character is
identical at the beginning and at the conclusion. In Illyria no crimes have been committed; nothing needs to
be forgiven. The characters, motivated at best by a cultivated social dilettantism and at worst by an obsession
for social status and wealth, make asses of themselves as a result of their failure to use common—not
moral—sense. But the characters know themselves more fully at the end of their experiences. They have faced
the therapy of exposure, have been laughed from their abnormal postures, and, we assume, have every reason
to expect a richer and more productive life as a consequence of their self-knowledge. With Feste, they might
all say: “By my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself” (V, i, 21-22).

Shakespeare in his subsequent plays will move toward a deeper comic vision involving a society in which evil
is a reality and in which characters are spiritually transformed through the quality of love's forgiveness. His
continued efforts in these comedies to establish an effective perspective—with varying degrees of
success—will reveal his persistent concern for comic control over a narrative replete with potential tragedy.
But Twelfth Night has no potential tragedy; it is among Shakespeare's most successful realizations of
“romantic” comedy based on character revelation. And clearly this success results in a large measure from the
effective comic perspective—the creation of characters who, while playing a significant narrative role, also
serve as comic pointers by providing vital information for the spectator and by functioning as the primary
device for character exposure.
Northrop Frye, in “Characterization in Shakespeare's Comedy,” *SQ* [*Shakespeare Quarterly*], IV (1953), 271-77, points out that character depends upon function, function in turn upon structure, and structure in turn upon the category of the play. See also his *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York, 1965), p. 14.

2. “The Argument of Comedy,” *English Institute Essays*, 1948 (New York, 1949), p. 70. Such characters are “people who are in some kind of mental bondage, who are helplessly driven by ruling passions, neurotic compulsions, social rituals and selfishness. The miser, the hypochondriac, the hypocrite, the pedant, the snob: these are humours; people who do not fully know what they are doing, who are slaves to a predictable self-imposed pattern of behavior.”

3. Robert G. Hunter, in a recent study (*Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* [New York, 1965]), has described the form of these comedies as a secularized pattern of the medieval morality involving sin, contrition, and forgiveness.

4. Concerning the late comedies, Joseph Summers expressed something of this general idea in his comment that “after *Twelfth Night* the so-called comedies require for their happy resolution more radical characters and devices—omniscient and omnipresent dukes, magic, and resurrection. More obvious miracles are needed for comedy to exist in a world in which evil also exists, not merely incipiently but with power” (“The Masks of *Twelfth Night*,” *The University of Kansas City Review*, XXII [1955], 32).

5. *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, currently described as “dark” or “problem comedies,” have always frustrated the critic. In them Shakespeare is searching for a method of comic control sufficient to contain characters developed on the level of faith. In *Measure for Measure*, for example, Duke Vincentio, as a *deus ex machina* figure of ambiguous motivation and limited control, fails to provide a satisfactory comic perspective for a stage-world in which evil is so pervasive.

6. “With the writing of *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare reached perhaps his highest achievement in sheer comedy” (Louis B. Wright, ed., *Twelfth Night* [New York, 1960], p. vii). Such statements concerning this play are commonplace in Shakespearean criticism. Both the dramatist and his characters appear at ease (C. Bathurst, *Differences of Shakespeare's Versification* [London, 1857], p. 89) in this “most perfect of his comedies” in which Shakespeare has “set himself the task to show, within the limit of one treatment, like a recapitulation, every combination of comedies in one single comedy” (F. Kreyssig, *Vorlesungen über Shakespeare* [Berlin, 1862], III, 268). J. O. Halliwell-Phillips describes the work as “the most perfect composition of the kind in the English or in any other language” (*Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* [Brighton, 1882], p. 247).

7. Viola's importance in the plot has been frequently described. Bertrand Evans, for instance, comments that in *Twelfth Night* “the spirit of the practiser prevails. Seven of the principal persons are active practisers, and they operate six devices. All action turns on these, and the effects of the play arise from exploitation of the gaps they open.” Of these devices, “Viola's is truly a practice on the whole world of Illyria” (*Shakespeare's Comedies* [Oxford, 1960], pp. 118, 120). John Russell Brown, who explains the theme of the play as “love's truth,” sees Viola and her disguise as central to the development of the action (*Shakespeare and His Comedies* [London, 1957], p. 168). H. B. Charlton calls her “the peculiar embodiment in personality of those traits of human nature which render human beings most loveable, most loving, and most serviceable to the general good” (*Shakespearian Comedy* [London, 1938], p. 288). Viola “represents a genuineness of feeling against which the illusory can be measured” (Harold Jenkins, “Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*,” *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, XLV [1959], 30). In effect, she “teaches others the true meaning of love” (Porter Williams, “Mistakes in *Twelfth Night* and Their Resolution,” *PMLA*, LXXVI [1961], 197). She, since Orsino will marry her and Olivia will marry Sebastian, is allegorically the spirit of love, which functions to redeem the disordered society (William B. Bache, “Levels of Perception in *Twelfth Night*,” *Ball State Teachers College Forum*, V [1964], 56). To the contrary, Clifford Leech recently described her importance to
the plot “exaggerated by the critic”; she is by no means “a reformer of the Illyrian emotional condition” (“Twelfth Night” and Shakespearean Comedy [Toronto, 1965], p. 36).

8. “In Twelfth Night, affectionation is everywhere—among the heroic as among the foolish, among the central characters as among the marginal. ... Olivia cannot bear to be known for what she is—a healthy and nubile woman; Viola cannot permit herself to be known for what she is, a girl; Orsino cannot bear to be known for what he is—a lover in love with the idea of love; Sir Toby cannot bear to be known for a parasite, Sir Andrew for a fool, Malvolio for a steward” (G. K. Hunter, Shakespeare: The Late Comedies [London, 1962], p. 36). Jenkins (p. 21) describes the action as “the education of a man or woman,” a plot fundamental to comedy. The characters, wearing psychological masks (Williams, p. 193), are “caught up by delusions or misapprehensions which take them out of themselves, bringing out what they would keep hidden or did not know was there” (C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy [Princeton, 1959], p. 242).


10. We are later told by Sir Toby that Olivia will not “match above her ... years” (I, iii, 115-16).

11. Irving Ribner has suggested that Shakespeare's critical attitude toward the affectations of Petrarchan love was influenced by Barnabe Riche's puritanical attack on the convention in “Apolonius and Silla.” Ed., Twelfth Night, The Kittredge Shakespeares (Waltham, Mass., 1966), pp. xv-xvi.

12. If Aguecheek is intelligent enough to boast of his prowess in pressing a duel with one whom he assumes to be a coward and then to recoil in terror when his adversary appears to have a backbone, he is intelligent enough to be the object of satiric humor since he can learn something from his comic experience. Any assumption that, in this aspect of his character, he is not the proper prey of a satirist—and the charge is as old as the editorial commentary of Samuel Johnson—is surely missing the point.


17. Francis Fergusson says that Feste, “keep[ing] his sanity better than any of the other characters” and “mov[ing] through the play like a modern master of ceremonies, commenting on the characters with elaborate mockery,” seems to represent Shakespeare himself (“Introduction to Twelfth Night,” Shakespeare’s Comedies of Romance [New York, 1963], p. 304). As a ringleader (Enid Welsford, The
Fool [London, 1935], p. 253) who remains outside the action with telling remarks (John Hollander, “Twelfth Night and the Morality of Indulgence,” The Sewanee Review, LXVII [1959], 226). Feste plays a “role as observer [which] is analogous to Viola's role as ‘actor’” (Summers, p. 27). “If the Fool be cleverly played, it can be a guide through the most important points of this comedy” (G. G. Gervinus, Shakespeare [Leipzig, 1862], p. 438). “Twelfth Night is Feste's night. … It is [his] function in both parts of the action to make plain to the audience the artificial, foolish attitudes of the principal figures” (Alan S. Downer, “Feste's Night,” College English, XIII [1951-52], 261, 264).

18. Certainly the role of Malvolio is a dramatic highlight of the play. In fact, a court performance of February 2, 1623, is recorded as Malvolio. Nevertheless, I cannot agree with those critics who would make him the central figure in the play. See, for example, Milton Crane, “Twelfth Night and Shakespearean Comedy,” Shakespeare Quarterly, VI (1955), 4. Cf. also Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (New York, 1939), p. 169: “The center is Malvolio. The drama is between his mind and the music of old manners.” Morris P. Tilley (“The Organic Unity of Twelfth Night,” PMLA, XXIX [1914], 554-556) sees Malvolio and the forces to whom he is opposed as reflective of the parting of the ways of the Renaissance and the Reformation in England. “Shakespeare composed Twelfth Night in praise of the much-needed, well-balanced nature, to extoll that happy union of judgment and of feeling which is the basis of a higher sanity.” With greater restraint, H. C. Goddard speaks of Twelfth Night as—in retrospect—Shakespeare's “farewell to comedy. … It marks the end of Merry England, of the day of the great Tudor houses where hospitality and entertainment were so long dispersed. … It seems like an imitation of the Puritan revolution with its rebuke to revelry” (The Meaning of Shakespeare [Chicago, 1951], I, 295).

19. It is impossible to conclude within the context of the drama, for instance, that Viola is “Shakespeare's ideal of the patient idolatry and devoted, silent self-sacrifice of perfect love” (W. Winter, Shadows of the Stage [New York, 1895], III, 24) or that Orsino is a man of “deep sentiments of the most sacred tenderness and truth” displaying a “firm constancy in his love” (Gervinus, p. 429). And it borders on the ridiculous to describe Orsino as one doting on Olivia as a mother substitute because he suffers from a mother fixation and Olivia as frigid, sexually terrified of men in positions of power (W. I. D. Scott, Shakespeare's Melancholics [London, 1962], pp. 57-60; Holland, pp. 278-79).

Criticism: Character Studies: Cynthia Lewis (essay date fall 1986)


[In the following essay, Lewis contends that Antonio, rather than Viola, is the moral center of Twelfth Night, but acknowledges that the play is principally concerned with Viola's moral development.]

Disguise in Twelfth Night is sheer, a thin veil like the “cypress” that “hides” Olivia's “heart” in III.i. Viola, although dressed in sturdier male clothing, almost reveals herself inadvertently at several points, as during the duel with Sir Andrew and the interviews with Olivia. Other of Shakespeare's strong, disguised women do not hover quite so closely on the brink of losing control: Portia commands her identity as judge, and Rosalind manipulates her boyish exterior to teach her future husband about love, only once verging on disclosing her true identity before she is ready to. Viola’s contrasting lack of sure control over her disguise points to a major theme unique to Twelfth Night: that of Epiphany, or the manifestation of truth. Such revelation is continually suggested in this comedy by the characters' ultimate inability to hide their true feelings and natures. This persistence of truth in coming to light parallels the manifestation of Christ to the Magi. But before any such revelation can occur in Twelfth Night, most of the characters must be transformed by the Christian folly which Saint Paul discusses and which Erasmus further develops.
Understanding how this transformation occurs depends, first, on demonstrating the presence of Christian allusions in the play's title, structure, and language. Only a handful of critics to date have begun to do so. But even these commentators have misperceived Viola's role by proclaiming her to be the play's moral center, though for most of the play she is not. That distinction falls on the sea captain Antonio, who has consistently been overlooked as a mere plot device: Antonio, at first glance, appears to do no more than help Viola to re-discover Sebastian and, later, to reveal her true identity. But Antonio actually serves a far deeper dramatic purpose. His behavior, language, and history mirror Christ's in ways suggesting Christian folly. He embodies and acts out the play's highest standard of Christian love, morally eclipsing Viola at first and yet finally linking Viola to the play's central moral. Viola eventually grows to imitate Antonio, displaying a sacrificial love appropriate to the celebration of holy Epiphany.

I

Most critics of Twelfth Night, having been reluctant to acknowledge its allusions to Christianity, apparently agree with Pepys' comment that Twelfth Night is “but a silly play, and not related at all to the name or day.” One modern example is Anne Barton, who in the introduction to Twelfth Night in The Riverside Shakespeare maintains that the title refers not to holy Epiphany, but to “images of Epiphany as it was kept in Shakespeare's own time: a period of holiday abandon in which the normal rules and order of life were suspended or else deliberately inverted, in which serious issues and events mingled perplexingly with revelry and apparent madness.” Barton rejects the existence of any “specific references to the Feast of the Epiphany” in the play, as do even the critics who see Twelfth Night in clearly Christian terms.

Yet a few critics have treated the work as an allusion to Christian Epiphany. Barbara Lewalski, for instance, argues that “… Shakespeare's method resembles, and was probably formed by, … the tradition of Christian typology, whereby certain real historical events and personages from the Old Testament and (more significantly for the present purposes) from certain classical fictions such as the Metamorphoses or the Aeneid were seen to point to aspects of Christ and of the Gospel story without losing their own historical or fictional reality.” John Hollander pursues the sort of “allegory” that Lewalski explains here when he notices the connection in Twelfth Night between revelation in general and the spirit of holy Epiphany:

Twelfth Night itself, the feast of the Epiphany, celebrates the discovery of the “True King” in the manger by the Wise Men. … The whole of Act V might be taken, in connection with “the plot” in a trivial sense, to be the other epiphany, the perception that follows the anagnorisis or discovery of classic dramaturgy. … The long final scene … serves to show forth the Caesario-King, and to unmask, discover, and reveal the fulfilled selves in the major characters.

Hollander's reference to “the other epiphany” summons not only Aristotle, but James Joyce. Of course, Joyce's more general, yet still Christian use of the word postdates Shakespeare by centuries. But long before Joyce redefined it, churchmen appear to have used epiphany in the slightly more general sense of “a manifestation or appearance of some divine or superhuman being.” As early as 1667, Jeremy Taylor mentions in a sermon Christ's “glorious epiphany on the mount.” Thus, in the later seventeenth century, the term did not pertain strictly to the manifestation of Christ to the Magi; that Taylor used the more general meaning of epiphany in a sermon implies his congregation's familiarity with—or at least their easy adaptability to—that meaning. Although Twelfth Night predates Taylor's sermon by over sixty years, I do not think it improbable that Shakespeare's audience was equally capable of imaginatively relating the Biblical Epiphany to other kinds of divine revelation, or even to revelation of truth in general. Certainly Shakespeare's extraordinary imagination was up to such obvious leaps. His original audience—possibly members of court or possibly lawyers—could surely follow him. To think that this audience was too steeped in knowledge of Twelfth Night revelry to see more serious, far-reaching implications in the title appears preposterous. The revealing of Christ to the Magi and the disclosure of true identity in Twelfth Night are too easily associated to dismiss the
connection.

Hence, views of critics like Lewalski and Hollander, although in a minority, are finally more satisfying than a purely secular reading of *Twelfth Night* because a Christian approach can include the secular while also going beyond it.9 Such is the case in R. Chris Hassel's more recent discussion of Christian elements in *Twelfth Night*. Hassel does not so much as question the pervasiveness of Christian allusions in the play. He argues that Feste and Viola, agents of Pauline/ErasmiAn folly, free the romantic characters from childish emotional frigidity and self-love. Hence, Orsino and Olivia become prepared to enter marital relationships as adults, capable of loving others. For Hassel, then, as for Lewalski and Hollander, religious and secular concerns are closely united within a single work.

Yet all of the critics I have mentioned leave major gaps unfilled in discussing the Christianity of *Twelfth Night*. Like Lewalski and nearly every other critic of the play, for instance, Hassel assumes that Viola can do no wrong and that she has already reached moral maturity when we first see her. Lewalski even goes the extent of linking Viola and Sebastian to the “dual nature of Christ as human and divine”: Viola silently endures her suffering, and Sebastian triumphs by punishing.11 But that reading is strained at best, even in light of Viola's generosity and patience. In fact, Viola has as much to learn about love, both romantic and Christian, as do, in Hassel's view, Orsino and Olivia. For most of the play, Viola remains far from Christlike.

II

If there is a figure throughout *Twelfth Night* who calls Christ to mind, it must surely be Antonio, whom Viola, however innocently, “denies” (III.iv.347). The language which Antonio speaks, as well as that which surrounds him, continually implies Christianity. He expresses his love for Sebastian in extravagant, almost unearthly terms: “If you will not murther me for my love, let me be your servant” (II.i.35-36). Later, he uses the language of religious devotion:

```
I snatch'd one half out of the jaws of death,
Reliev'd him with such sanctity of love,
And to his image, which methought did promise
Most venerable worth, did I devotion.
```

(III.iv.359-63)

Lest we mistake this language for the overstatement of courtly love, we should look into it further. In the act of rescuing Viola/Cesario, Antonio substitutes himself for the alleged criminal: “If this young gentleman / Have done offense, I take the fault on me; / If you offend him, I for him defy you” (III.iv.312-14). He soothes Viola/Cesario in the thick of his own misfortune: “be of comfort” (III.iv.338). He has “redeemed” Sebastian from the tempest: “His life I gave him, and did thereto add / My love, without retention or restraint, / All his in dedication” (V.i.79, 80-82). No, Antonio's use of religious language strongly suggests that he is returning these much-abused terms to their original meaning: his actions actually bear out his description of his love. His is total sacrifice, which prompts him, completely irrationally, to give Sebastian his entire purse in case Sebastian fancies “some toy” (III.iii.44). Moreover, Antonio is even more endangered than Viola by walking the streets, yet his great love induces him to expose himself boldly, undisguised and vulnerable (V.i.82-85).

Shakespeare seems to have taken great pains to develop and set off this character who in the main source of the play is hardly attractive or essential to the plot. Barnaby Riche's captain forces himself on Silla, thus compelling her to assume a disguise for her safety.12 Shakespeare's departures here are considerable. Antonio seems the antithesis of Riche's captain, and Viola chooses to disguise herself for vaguer reasons than Silla's, reasons that are more psychologically than physically threatening. Furthermore, Riche's story has only one captain, while Shakespeare's includes two. Shakespeare's replacement of the second captain for Silla's faithful
servant Pedro suggests his desire to thrust attention on Antonio: the unnamed captain who initially helps Viola and who finally must be released from prison does nothing but echo, and thus reinforce, Antonio's history. Antonio's role as a Christlike giver of love becomes clearer yet when we contrast Riche's moral with the fuller treatment of love in *Twelfth Night*. Riche writes of well-deserved love. But what distinguishes Antonio's love for Sebastian is precisely that it is unearned.

Despite his affiliation with Christ, however, Antonio is not to be taken as Christ. Unlike Christ, for example, he finally expects something in return for his generosity toward Sebastian, even becoming angered at Viola/Cesario when she refuses him (III.iv). Shakespeare had explored once before the implications of unworldly, idealistic conduct in his other generous Antonio, the one in *The Merchant of Venice*. There such giving in some sense fails; the setting is wrong for martyrdom to thrive. The practical aspects of Venetian life cannot, apparently, be wholly reconciled with Antonio's oblivious altruism. The earlier Antonio cannot become a full member of the familial society in Act V, where, still depressed, he stands rather apart from the newly-weds. He therefore teaches us that irrational, devoted sacrifice must be compromised because people like Bassanio inevitably have to divide their love between, in his case, wife and friends; he teaches us, in other words, that human love may resemble but cannot equal the divine. But the Antonio in *Twelfth Night*, although as human as his predecessor, displays the other side of altruism—its ability to inspire others to give more than they otherwise would, its capacity to strip from us all barriers to love.13

If this Antonio were going to be able to convey such high-minded ideas without irony and yet still give Orsino cause to arrest him, then his crime would have to be handled delicately, if not ambiguously. I believe this is why mystery abounds in our knowledge of Antonio's past. Whereas several critics have called him a “pirate,” as does Orsino (V.i.69), Antonio respectfully denies that identity:

Be pleas'd that I shake off these names you give me.  
Antonio never yet was thief or pirate,  
Though I confess, on base and ground enough,  
Orsino's enemy.

(V.i.72-76)

These lines may make Antonio appear the victim of a false arrest, but in truth the presentation of conflict between Antonio and Orsino never allows us to take sides. Whenever either man advances his case against the other, each appears believable and principled. For example, Antonio implies that his quarrel with Orsino has been a matter of conscience, a struggle for justice:

SEB.

Belike you slew great number of his [Orsino's] people?

ANT.

Th' offense is not of such a bloody nature,  
Albeit the quality of the time and quarrel  
Might well have given us bloody argument.  
It might have since been answer'd in repaying  
What we took from them, which for traffic's sake
Most of our city did. Only myself stood out,
For which if I be lapsed in this place
I shall pay dear.

(III.iii.29-37)

Antonio alone, by his own account, is unwilling to compromise his standards “for traffic's sake,” as his fellow citizens have done. On the other hand, Orsino's charge of “piracy” against Antonio suggests that the captain has “stood out” against the Duke for selfish gain (l. 35). Similarly, the Duke's officer indicates that the fight between Antonio and Orsino has been bloody, even though Antonio maintains that the conflict never came to bloodshed (ll. 30-32, quoted directly above). Even the name of Orsino's nephew, for whose lost leg Orsino blames Antonio (V.i.63), remains ambiguous. Does “Titus” suggest the pagan slaughterer or Paul's friend? If the first instance were true, we would favor Antonio for subduing a menace; if we believed the second, Orsino would seem nobler, and Antonio would appear a vicious slayer of innocence. As if to compound the problem of judging ethically between these two men, Orsino himself begrudgingly commends Antonio's bravery in the face of great danger:

A baubling vessel was he captain of,
For shallow draught and bulk unprizable,
With which such scathful grapple did he make
With the most noble bottom of our fleet,
That very envy, and the tongue of loss,
Cried fame and honor on him.

(V.i.54-59)

This sustained tension between the claims of Antonio and those of Orsino appears deliberate indeed. If nothing else, it exonerates Antonio from culpability enough to win him our esteem and does so without seriously damaging our opinion of Orsino, whom we must also finally respect. Thus, Antonio can serve dramatically as a model for candor and the unobstructed giving of love—for, in other words, Erasmian folly. And eventually Antonio's wise folly is reflected in numerous other characters, most notably in Feste.

III

While Antonio reveals to the characters and the audience an ideal behavior that is difficult for most of us to practice, Feste shows us the next best thing: a worldly, practical honesty. Feste is at home with money, as much of it as he can entice away from his audience, but his financial acumen never sullies his frankness. He thus still generously gives of himself. Although his dramatic functions are many and various, one of Feste's main purposes is to remind us that one may possess two types of folly. The two are related in that both represent innocence, yet they differ in their desirability. One, potentially dangerous—even self-destructive—is the folly aligned with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, whose childishness is not only fun, but possibly instructive to a character like Malvolio—that is, until it turns in on the revelers. Anyone but a Puritan would applaud their trick on Malvolio, which Maria calls a “physic” (II.iii.173). Yet when the revelers go on to plot against themselves and hence divide their little society, they demonstrate that childlike insouciance can get out of hand. In the scheme against Sir Andrew, Sir Toby winds up a fool, in the worst sense. He has underestimated his competition, Sebastían, who beats the duper into the duped (V.i.175-76). The revelers' folly, then, can go either way, but it tends to cause harm.

Against this folly Feste juxtaposes another that is also childish and perhaps reckless, but nevertheless fruitful. It involves a lack of pretense and the absence of barriers to truth and love, and it characterizes especially
Antonio. Feste aims to make everyone a fool of this higher quality because it is a freeing kind of foolery. It is the wise folly that the Christian Humanists sought and the folly that R. Chris Hassel defends as Pauline: “Let no man deceive himselfe. If any man among you seeme to bee wise in this world, let him bee a foole, that hee may be wise. For the wisdome of this world is foolishnesse with God.”\textsuperscript{15} R. H. Goldsmith, in his \textit{Wise Fools in Shakespeare}, believes that this type of folly belongs to Lear's fool.\textsuperscript{16} But it is Feste's too, for without it the characters in \textit{Twelfth Night} would never let down the walls that separate them and learn to love one another completely. Feste's jokes on Olivia therefore work to loosen her up, to “mend” her grief with the abandon of laughter (I.v.74).\textsuperscript{17} Before Olivia acquires a healthy folly, Feste ridicules her restraint in terms of unhealthy folly:

CLO.

... Good madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.

OLI.

Can you do it?

CLO.

Dexteriously, good madonna.

OLI.

Make your proof.

CLO.

I must catechize you for it, madonna. Good my mouse of virtue, answer me.

OLI.

Well, sir, for want of other idleness, I'll bide your proof.

CLO.

Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?

OLI.

Good fool, for my brother's death.

CLO.

I think his soul is in hell, madonna.

OLI.

I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLO.

The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen.

(I.v.57-72)
Feste's “madonna,” which no other Shakespearean fool uses, communicates both the clown's affectionate respect for his mistress and the misguided religious devotion her excessive grief entails. Feste attempts to break down Olivia's stern demeanor, and he succeeds here insofar as he escapes punishment. He prepares for the following meeting with Viola/Cesario, who cracks Olivia's defenses all the more. When Olivia finally becomes “mad” for Cesario (III.iv.14), she is essentially cured of the spiritual illness that has prevented her from loving completely; her feelings for others begin to outweigh her concern for herself: with an action that parallels Antonio's defense of Viola/Cesario in III.iv, Olivia rescues Sebastian from Sir Toby's drawn sword in the next scene (IV.i.45-51). Of course, Sebastian can defend himself, as we later learn (V.i.175-76). But the point is that wise folly is transforming Olivia into one like Antonio.

It is also this folly that could save Malvolio from himself, if he could respond to his embarrassment generously. In exposing his foolishness, Feste and the revelers give him the chance to see through his false god, restraint. But Malvolio proves hypocritical: it is acceptable for him to wear gay yellow stockings in commemoration of his love, but not for anyone else to have fun. Furthermore, Malvolio is blind to his own folly. As Feste/Sir Topas implies, Malvolio will stay imprisoned in his own private “hell” until he opens himself up to the ridiculous (IV.ii.46):

CLO.

What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild-fowl?

MAL.

That the soul of our grandam might happily inhabit a bird.

CLO.

What think'st thou of his opinion?

MAL.

I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.

CLO.

Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness. Thou shalt hold th' opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam. Fare thee well.

(IV.ii.50-60)

Perhaps not until Malvolio can indulge in such foolish play with Feste will he be capable of faith in God and in the afterlife, which require a wisely foolish lack of skepticism to endorse.

One could argue that, in prolonging his jokes on Malvolio, Feste becomes cruel—even more cruel than Sir Toby and Maria. All three carry their foolery to the extent of terrifying Malvolio, of realizing his and our darkest fantasy: that we are mad and do not know it. But, whether for guilt or for fear of his niece's displeasure (IV.ii.66-71), Sir Toby departs with Maria from the cell, while Feste lingers to plague Malvolio further (II. 72 ff.). Still, the fool continues to derive more than mere amusement by torturing Malvolio. In his roundabout way he goes on trying to jolt Malvolio out of his rigid sanity and to instruct Malvolio: “Alas, sir, be patient” (l. 103). Symbolically, it is also Feste who brings Malvolio the instruments of his “delivery” from confinement: paper, ink, and light, suggestive of knowledge and perhaps even of salvation. If in the end Feste's attempts to save Malvolio from himself are unsuccessful, it is not because Feste has failed to show either interest in or compassion toward Malvolio's predicament. Malvolio insistently suffers from the very pride in himself and attachment to his own opinions that work against tolerant Christian love. This believer in
his own superiority provides a bad example in *Twelfth Night* of true spirituality.

Whereas Malvolio is hardened against wise folly, Orsino and Viola are, like Olivia, more pliable. Feste hints that these characters can become wiser fools when he pokes fun at Orsino and Olivia in one breath: “I would be sorry, sir [Viola/Cesario], but the fool should be as oft with your master as with my mistress” (III.i.39-41). Feste's ambiguous line can make either of two statements. First, if “should” is taken to mean “is,” then Feste says that Olivia and Orsino are too often fools, in the undesirable sense of folly. But second, if “should” means “ought to,” the line can mean that Olivia and Orsino should be wise fools more often. Here again, Feste brings the two kinds of folly into play: until later, Olivia and Orsino are wrong-headed fools and, as Feste implies, could benefit from positive, wise folly.

Viola too becomes involved with both types of folly. When her disguise embroils her in the complicated love relationship with Olivia, she indirectly admits to her unfortunate lack of foresight: “now I am your fool” (III.i.144). She has earlier recognized the potential danger of pretense: “Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much” (II.ii.27-28). The threat posed by her unmasking, however, is greater to her than the fear of hurting Olivia. Orsino's love carries a high price. Are we to praise Viola for paying it when it could affect another so adversely? I think not. Without accusing her, I think we need to question her, to look closely at her progress through the play. Why, for instance, does Feste, who strives to instill folly in the characters, express a dislike for her?: “… in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible” (III.i.28-30). Viola takes his comment in stride, so perhaps he delivers it inoffensively. Yet it is possible that Feste senses barriers around Viola which, like her disguise, inhibit her love and her honesty as much as Olivia's grief has emotionally crippled her. It is also possible, if Feste is somehow criticizing Viola's evasiveness, that Viola either ignores him or misses the point. For Viola shows us, in other situations, that she would rather remain safe behind her disguise than risk exposing her true self and losing Orsino. She may ultimately share Olivia's ability to become changed by folly, but she resists that change far longer and more tenaciously than her equally love-stricken counterpart.

**IV**

Viola's characterization throughout *Twelfth Night* reveals that the play concerns itself fundamentally with her moral growth. Shakespeare continually plays Viola off the other characters to illustrate how far she has come and how much farther she has to go. Initially, she has all the makings of an Antonio. She generously rewards first the sea captain and then Feste (I.ii.18, III.i.43), and she lashes out at ingratitude when Antonio accuses her of it (III.iv.354-57). Her willingness to woo another woman for the man she loves also indicates her magnanimity.

Yet she often appears self-absorbed. Nowhere is this trait clearer than when she offers Antonio only half her coffer (III.iv.345-47). Next to the total altruism that Antonio showed Sebastian in the preceding scene (III.iii.38), Viola's reserve seems downright stingy. Granted, Viola is not rich; nor does she even know Antonio. Her giving anything at all under these circumstances could thus be admired. But the contrast between the two characters is evident: Viola is willing to go far for someone else, but only so far. Similarly, Viola has good reason in III.iv to be stunned by the sudden possibility that Sebastian may yet live and thus to ignore Antonio's arrest; but Antonio, having intervened to save her life, surely deserves more attention from Viola/Cesario than she gives. Even if Viola exits at the close of this scene in pursuit of Antonio and the officers, she apparently does so not to aid Antonio but to discover more about Sebastian's history.

This key episode in which Viola and Antonio are contrasted reveals the major obstacle that Viola must surmount before she can grow to love completely: fear of losing control. That she loves both her brother and her master is obvious to us, but a great deal of the potential and actual destructiveness in *Twelfth Night* arises from Viola's refusal to expose herself openly to others—to give herself away. She is consistently associated with walls—barriers to love—throughout the play. Her disguise becomes an emblem of her and others' fear:
many such walls appear in the play and must be let down or broken through before genuine love can be enjoyed. Orsino uses clichéd love language to put a safe distance between himself and Olivia (e.g., I.i); Viola refers to the hypocrisy of most people, who hide their wickedness behind the “beauteous wall” of appearance (I.ii.48); Viola herself attempts to use language like Orsino's in wooing Olivia and in protecting herself, until she finds it will not shield her well (e.g., II.ii); Olivia hides in her house and behind her wit and her veil (II.ii, etc.). The spirit of Epiphany, represented by Antonio's willingness to manifest his true self for the sake of another, is stifled behind these barriers.

Viola's brilliant repartee with Feste demonstrates her capacity for folly, for letting go and enjoying another's company (III.i.1-59). Admiring his wit, she expresses appreciation for its wisdom and thus signals her own association with Christlike folly and her own understanding that folly comes in two forms: “For folly that he wisely shows is fit, / But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit” (III.i.67-68). But when Feste cuts gently at Orsino's folly (ll. 39-41), Viola resists hearing more: “Nay, and thou pass upon me, I'll no more with thee” (ll. 42-43). Viola here seems reluctant to acknowledge the value of Feste's remarks. For a long time she appears unable either to admit that Orsino's attraction to Olivia is not genuine love or to deal directly with her feelings for Orsino. Her reaction to Feste's song in II.iv exemplifies the poor judgment that results from her infatuation. “Come away, come away, death” has got to be some of the most morbid verse ever set to music, as Feste kindly suggests to Orsino (II.iv.73-78), and the music that accompanies it would be anything but cheering. But Viola identifies with its gloom: “It gives a very echo to the seat / Where Love is thron'd” (II.iv.21-22). Viola's exaggerated sympathy for Orsino's pain mirrors his self-indulgence.

In its irrationality, Viola's love for Orsino resembles Antonio's love for Sebastian and Olivia's for Viola/Cesario. It is potentially good folly. But enclosed within her, it waxes overly melancholic. When she can express it in even veiled language, as she does in II.iv, it regains some of its health:

VIOLANTA.

My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

DUKETA.

VIOLA.

A blank, my lord; she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

(ll. 107-15)
Perhaps because this passage demands that Viola objectify her feelings, it is less self-pitying than her attraction to Feste's song. Furthermore, Viola's hidden love at least eventually permits her to instruct Orsino:

VIO.

But if she [Olivia] cannot love you, sir?

DUKE.

I cannot be so answer'd.

VIO.

(II.iv.87-88)

Yet Viola herself realizes that secret longings fester within, “like a worm i’ th’ bud.” The self must be honestly exposed to survive; Viola must reveal her inner self to become fully human.

Another of Viola's potential virtues emerges as she is compared and contrasted with Malvolio. In much the same way that Malvolio seeks to unravel the letter he finds in II.v, Viola tries to read the significance of the allegedly returned ring in II.ii. The concept linking the two scenes is interpretation. On this score Viola obviously does much better than Malvolio. Her vision is not so dreamy-eyed as to obscure the true meaning of receiving the ring, whereas poor Malvolio's hopes absolutely blind him to the facts. Viola's visionary quality—composed of a clear-sightedness like Feste's and a power like Antonio's to perceive how others feel—will guide her through the snarls to come. Yet on this point too she fudges, when she thrusts all responsibility onto an external force: “O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie” (II.ii.40-41). Notwithstanding the partial truth of this statement, Viola will sooner or later have to participate in shaping her own life. Time can and does help, but it requires a cooperation from her, a total commitment of herself to love.

Whether or not Viola learns how to make such an investment directly from Antonio, the sea captain's dramatic purpose is to provide such an example, and Viola comes to reflect his behavior. The turning point for her, when all the potentially fine qualities we have seen in her come together, is also the heart of the play. It comes in her answer to Orsino's angry threat on her life:

I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

(V.i.130-31)

The Christian implications of the “sacrificial lamb” ought to ring clear, and Viola's sudden “willingness” to give not just some, but all, endows her with new virtue:

And I most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.

(ll. 132-33)

Like Antonio, who has earlier offered to protect her with his life (III.iv.312-14), Viola now substitutes herself for Olivia, in order to give Orsino “rest.” She gladly takes upon herself the punishment through which Orsino would “spite” another. Here lies the Epiphany in Twelfth Night, where the meaning of Christ's birth, His
sacrifice for humanity, manifests itself in the actions of human beings. Viola's commitment of her life to love is the wisest folly she can pursue. To dismiss all barriers to love, to disregard even the welfare of one's physical being, is divine.

Viola's altruistic attitude toward love, which alludes to a Christian ideal, permits spiritual love and romantic love to be linked in *Twelfth Night*. Ultimately, we are not shown a world in which different types of love—say, physical and non-physical—are qualitatively different or are opposed. Rather, Christian love, as epitomized in Antonio, works itself into the worldliest of relationships through the four lovers, principally Viola, as well as through Feste. Thus, Christian love can inform romantic love, and the two comic traditions that shape the play—the romantic and the serious—are joined compatibly as Viola grows to become more like Antonio. Significantly, in this final scene Olivia also grows to accept Viola/Cesario as a “sister” and Orsino as her brother (ll. 326, 317). The good folly that is well on its way to triumphing over all is not limited to romantic love, but leads to general good will and fellowship.

Appropriately, after Viola's declaration of devotion to Orsino, the majority of the characters are in some respect set free. Viola's self-sacrifice is not the single twist in the plot that accounts for every subsequent revelation: many other actions, like Sebastian's entrance (l. 208), intervene before Viola's true identity is discovered. But Viola's new openness to love sets a tone early in the scene for the series of manifestations and apparent miracles to follow. The twins are reunited; the four lovers are rightly matched; the sea captain who has possession of Viola's clothes is “enlarged” (l. 278); and Malvolio is “deliver'd” (l. 315), though that does not guarantee his freedom, which only he can claim for himself. Even Fabian, caught up in the “wonder” of “this present hour,” freely confesses the joke on Malvolio and tries to ease the tension between the revelers and the steward (ll. 355-68). “Golden time” is ripe for love like Antonio's.

But the play's problematic nature persists to the end, modifying and augmenting the harmonious resolution. For instance, what of Antonio? Are we to assume that Orsino will also set him free? It seems rather that the question of Antonio's future, like so many other questions at the closing, is left dangling for a reason. Interestingly, the other salient loose end here is that Viola has still not removed her disguise by the time *Twelfth Night* is finished. These two details do more than blur the play's resolution, as do questions about whether Malvolio will repair his ruined pride and whether Maria will help curb her new husband's former excesses. Most importantly, these unresolved elements involve the audience's sense of responsibility in determining their own future. Indeed, Act V would not challenge us morally if it clearly and simply showed that all ended well. *Twelfth Night* finally asks us whether we will make all well by divesting ourselves of the walls around us that shut out love like Antonio's and keep it imprisoned. Will we embrace the spirit of Epiphany, which shapes the play throughout, and thus free Christian love in our own world? By agreeing to, we will, in effect, liberate Antonio and change as radically as if we moved, along with Viola, from male to female. When *Twelfth Night* closes, it has already “pleased” us, as Feste promises (V.i.408). If it is also going to teach us when the “play is done” (l. 407), then we must respond to it by unveiling.

Notes

2. Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, *As You Like It*, IV.iii.156 ff.
3. Pepys recorded this comment in his *Diary* on Twelfth Day, 6 January 1633.
5. Barton, p. 403.
8. “Epiphany²,” *OED*. 
The question of whether *Twelfth Night* alludes to Christian concerns contributes to a larger debate about the play's essential nature and tone. Striding the romantic comedies on one end and the problem plays on the other, *Twelfth Night* reflects shades of both. Most critics have responded to this confusion by singling out either the romantic or the problematic strands and ignoring the rest. Hence, readings of the play as either light or serious (even dark) abound. By far the greater number of these interpretations settle in the romantic camp. One characteristic of this group is their denial of the play's titular reference to Christian concepts.

As I have implied, however, there are exceptions. In addition to those I mention in my text, Richard Henze explores the juxtaposition between apparently secular and festive elements of *Twelfth Night* and the play's Christian allusions in “*Twelfth Night*: Free Disposition on the Sea of Love,” *The Sewanee Review*, 83 (1975), 267-83. But Henze’s chief concern, in contrast with Hollander’s, is the very confusion that this mingling of traits produces in the audience. Nor does Henze feel that the play's variety of interpretations can be reconciled, though he develops an entire reading of the work based on doing justice to its several faces: “I should like to propose a solution to this puzzle of interpretations: that *Twelfth Night* is a play about opposites and that each of [its possible interpretations] tends to treat just one pair of opposites” (p. 267). While I find Henze's discussion stimulating, I shall argue that the “opposites” he identifies—between the religious and the secular—are meant less to conflict than to enrich each other.


10. Lewalski, pp. 176-78.
12. Two critics have recently addressed the generosity of *Twelfth Night*'s Antonio, each in ways unique from mine and from each other, yet in ways equally provocative. Camille Wells Slights, “The Principle of Recompense in *Twelfth Night*,” *Modern Language Review*, 77 (1982), 537-46, argues that the play's ideal of love is not altruism, but reciprocated love. Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), believes that because Antonio loves so purely and passionately, he is, in the play's context, a “subversive,” a “misfit,” a “starving dispossessed” (pp. 118-20).
13. Robert Hills Goldsmith, in *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1955), has observed that, in this regard, Feste belongs to both the romantic plot and the subplot. He can thus mediate between the two (see especially ch. iv).
16. For a point similar to mine about Feste's effect on Olivia, see Hassel, *Faith and Folly*, p. 154.
18. Richard A. Levin carries this point to what seems to me an unsubstantiated extreme. In “Viola: Dr. Johnson's ‘Excellent Schemer,’” *Durham University Journal*, 71 (1979), 213-22, Levin not only accuses Viola of self-centered behavior; he sees her as a conniver and the whole play as covered with ironically romantic “glitter” (p. 222).
19. C. L. Barber, in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), has also thought about this detail of Feste's distaste. But Barber suggests that Feste does not like Viola because in their exchange “he finds himself beaten at his own game” (p. 254).
A few critics have studied Viola's maturation in psycho-sexual terms. Helen Moglen, who seems to me the best at this approach, sees Viola's disguise as a cocoon within which she can experiment in a "homoerotic relationship" before she is ready to engage in a mature union with Orsino. Such experimentation, of course, centers on Viola's wooing of Oliva in I.v and III.i. Finally, the experimentation leads to a society that can attain "personal freedom," as well as accept "responsibility." Moglen's Freudian angle on Viola's growth is important and enlightening, yet it assumes a great deal about the text. In addition, it arrives at moral conclusions less by moral observation than by scientific inquiry. To assess how Viola's role meshes with that of Christian Epiphany, one needs to observe not so much her psychological growth as her moral development. This done, one perceives other changes in her character that have unique bearing on the play's meaning. See "Disguise and Development: The Self and Society in Twelfth Night," Literature and Psychology, 23 (1973), 13-20. For similar approaches to disguise and maturation in the play, see J. Dennis Huston, "'When I Came to Man's Estate': Twelfth Night and Problems of Identity," Modern Language Quarterly, 33 (1972), 274-88; Nancy K. Hayles, "Sexual Disguise in As You Like It and Twelfth Night," Shakespeare Survey, 32 (1979), 63-72; and Robert Kimbrough, "Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare's Disguise," Shakespeare Quarterly, 33 (1982), 17-33.


Viola's [offer of money to Antonio] is a carefully thought-out loan to a helpful but puzzling stranger. She moves slowly towards the offer. "I'll lend" is preceded by a series of subordinate clauses and phrases outlining her reasons and stressing her poverty. "My having is not much" repeats the content of the line before, and adds to our impression that Viola feels an uncomfortable need to justify herself.

(p. 82; emphasis added)

Yearling's context here is entirely different from mine, yet she aptly makes my point about Viola's extreme caution in giving, as contrasted with Antonio's boundless, irrational charity.


[In the following essay, Cahill offers a psychoanalytic reading of Malvolio in Twelfth Night, highlighting his narcissism and painful identity crisis as well as his thwarted and obsessive desires for sexual, social, and personal fulfillment.]

The origins of the main plot in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night have been traced to a cluster of earlier comedies and their derivatives; however, the subplot, involving Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and their "gull," Malvolio, was entirely Shakespeare's invention. Like the main story, the Malvolio subplot also involves comic "errors," disguise and performance, and the pursuit of marriage. It similarly explores the themes of identity, desire, and the confusion of both. In fact, the "gulling" of Malvolio and Sir Toby's debauched revelry literalize the "misrule" of the main story. But the subplot does not resolve itself as neatly as the main plot does; indeed, it fails to resolve itself at all. It might be supposed, then, that Shakespeare sought to counter the easy connubial resolutions inherent in his sources with something more problematic, thereby adding to the comic ending of the play something of a tragic one. Joel Fineman wrote that Malvolio "plays the role of the outsider whose unhappiness is the measure of comic spirit, the alternative to comedy that makes us value the comic all the more" (33). To take this idea one step further, we can say that Malvolio alerts us to the necessity
of comedy and to the profound implications of its failure. In a sense, with the problem of Malvolio, Shakespeare answers the question: What if things in Illyria hadn't turned out so well?

The source of this potential for failure is the comic force that drives both the subplot and the main story: “misrule.” The subtitle of the play, Or, What you will, offers an ambiguous but provocative addition to our understanding of the “misrule” that was an important element of traditional Twelfth Night celebrations. “Will” has been generally interpreted as “volition” or “desire,” so as to suggest that the logic of the play turns on wishful thinking rather than an objective reality. But in the saturnalian tradition, “what you will” also refers to identity, as in “what you will be.” The narcissistic desires of Orsino and Olivia and the strategic disguise of Viola suggest that one's identity, social or personal, is derived from one's desire. Consider Olivia's question to Viola/Cesario, “What are you? What would you?” (1.5.212-213). Here, identity and desire become almost synonymous, perhaps because under the confusion of misrule both are ambiguous. Further, in Renaissance England, whom one married was an important factor in determining one's identity, particularly if a change in social rank was involved. Thus “what you will,” in this comedy of courtship and marriage, also means “whom you will have” or “who will have you.” In the complicated love triangle of these characters, misrule is the rule, and real desire and real identity become temporarily lost in a conflation of poses and possibilities.

Malvolio also confuses identity and desire when, walking in Olivia's garden, he muses, “To be Count Malvolio!” (2.5.35). But we know that Malvolio's fantasy is a pose without possibility. He is a literal example of the Italian malvoglio, which means “ill will,” but here also seems to imply “wrong desire.” Malvolio's sin is not only his alienating behavior toward others in the household, but also both the inappropriate desire to marry his mistress and rise in social rank and the sin of “self-love.” The punishment for such sins, as he discovers, is severe. By comparison, the desiring characters of the main story, confused though they may be, commit no wrong and receive no punishment. The narcissism of Orsino and Olivia, while potent, is less overt or perhaps an allowed vice of the aristocracy. Likewise, while pursuing Orsino in conscious disguise, Viola goes safely, if miraculously, undetected. Although the plights of the characters of the main story do suggest the precariousness and risk inherent in the confusion of identity and desire, which will be the locus and necessary prescription of the Malvolio subplot, these characters are nonetheless successful. Ultimately, for Viola, Sebastian, Olivia, and Orsino, “what you will” is an invitation to comic possibility; for Malvolio, however, it is an invitation to personal tragedy.²

If identity and desire function in the psychological realm, they also do in the social realm. The dialogic relation between plot and subplot, I submit, works on both levels; and herein lies a crucial difference between the plots. Whereas the main plot invokes a fantastical, almost timeless space, where an unchallenged aristocracy enjoys tremendous (if limited) emotional freedom, the subplot is more historically-specific, more obviously grounded in Elizabethan social relations: a reflection not of another time and place, like Illyria, but of England at the end of the 16th Century. As a result, the characters in the main plot are not ultimately obliged to act in a world with real consequences, while Malvolio most certainly is. Such an obligation or lack thereof is fundamental to the projection of a “self” in that world. With this difference in mind, the project of this essay will be to describe Malvolio's struggle with his identity and desires as historical and psychological “facts” that is, by historicizing the role of the household steward and his social sphere, and by investigating the possible contributions of modern identity theory. Then, I will read the elements of Malvolio's struggle back through the main plot in an effort to more fully describe the relation between the two plots.

Although much has been said of the meaning of Twelfth Night's subtitle, its specific connection to the play's subplot seems to have gone unnoticed. Olivia is the only character in the play to actually utter the words of the subtitle, when she says to Malvolio, “If it be a suit from the count, I am sick, or not at home what you will to dismiss it” (1.5.109-110, emphasis added). In telling Malvolio to use his discretion as steward and to do “what [he] will,” Olivia gives him permission to use any form of falseness to prevent the disruption of her mourning. Although we later realize, through her sudden infatuation with Viola/Cesario, that Olivia's mournful intentions
are not altogether sincere, her cloistered behavior is in fact in Malvolio's best interest: it makes him indispensable. I argue, then, that Olivia's command to do "what you will" formally initiates the Malvolio subplot, not only because it invokes verbatim the subtitle of the play, but more importantly because, as we shall see, it reveals much about Malvolio's position as Olivia's trusted steward and the paradoxical role of a steward in a household with neither a master nor a masterly mistress.

While we tend to think of Malvolio as an ambitious social climber who rejects his middle-class origins in hopes of marrying into nobility, we cannot be at all certain that this is what Shakespeare had in mind. In most sixteenth-century aristocratic households, particularly those of important noblemen, the steward had his own status. He was often a kinsman of the master and invariably a man of gentle birth. Indeed, during the parliaments of Elizabeth's reign, at least 190 members were, had been, or would become stewards (Hainsworth 7). When the steward was the head servant of the household, as was often the case, he commanded great respect. Thus, Spenser writes in *The Faerie Queen* (1590): "The first of them that eldest was and best / Of all the house had charge and government / As Guardian and Steward of the rest" (1.10.37.3). The "rest" in a noble household of the period may have been up to a hundred servants and dependents, over whom the steward had sway and kept order (Stone 29). As implied by the name of "Order," the steward in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (c. 1630), the keeping of order in the household was the steward's prime objective, and for this reason, he was often likely to be unpopular with the lesser servants. However, this responsibility offered the steward privileges as well. Regardless of his social origins, he dressed as an aristocrat and followed the fashions of the day. Because he often acted as a representative of the master and saw to the comfort of guests and visitors, a well-dressed steward reflected positively on the wealth and status of the master.

But this is not to say that the steward had a clearly defined sense of power. In fact, the great challenge of stewardship during the Renaissance was to deftly negotiate the blurred line between responsibility and authority. His position was inherently an ambiguous one. Although, as the representative of the master, the steward had a nominal charge of the household, in reality he rarely made important decisions without consulting its head. Lawrence Stone argued that all household servants, stewards included, were considered "equal with children as subordinate members of the household" (27). Although this may be somewhat overstated, it does suggest that, while the steward was often charged with the duties and even the authority of a master, he was rarely treated like one. Moreover, the steward's position was inexorably linked to the fortunes of the household, which at the beginning of the seventeenth century were under constant threat of instability. As the size of the aristocratic household decreased during the period of great social, political and economic upheaval of the élite that preceded the English Revolution, the power and significance of the household steward consequently declined.

This combination of inherent ambiguity and decreasing power undoubtedly presented real problems for the steward of a noble household, such as Malvolio. When we consider further that the death of Olivia's father, followed shortly by that of her brother, has left the household without a *paterfamilias*, we may suppose an even greater difficulty. The lack of a patriarch might have required greater responsibility on the part of the steward, but it did not usually mean that he was given more authority. It appears that the many contradictions involved in stewardship were satisfactorily contained by the presence, or at least the existence, of the paterfamilias; with the permanent absence of the master, therefore, the steward might have been liable to tremendous feelings of role ambiguity.

Indeed, for Malvolio this ambiguity is not uncomplicated. Olivia is aware of her new power as mistress of the household, but she is not particularly interested in exercising it. What she is interested in, in fact, is "misrule." Thus, Malvolio occupies a subordinate role in relation to a mistress who is neither dominant nor authoritative but playful. As steward, it is his presumptive office to exercise her power for her, but Olivia's own desires prevent that. Even his job of keeping order in the house becomes impossible because Olivia does not support his efforts. Although he has become the ultimate masculine authority in the household, Malvolio is unable to
control the debauchery of Sir Toby as Olivia's father or brother might have. Because Olivia is, at least temporarily, undecided about the nature of the relation between her steward and herself, Malvolio is confused about his own appropriate role. A better steward, we might suppose, one with a greater sense of his place and power, would have been able to accept, even easily handle, these ambiguities. But Malvolio, lacking a firm sense of his place in the social hierarchy, cannot accept them. Instead, he tries to amend the situation by alternately railing at the disorder and fantasizing about becoming in name what in some ways he has already become in authority. 9

In this way, we can begin to talk about Malvolio's "identity crisis," why he is of "distempered appetite" (1.5.73), and why he cannot live comfortably in Olivia's household. Whether Malvolio is of gentle or middling birth is not so important as the kind of "self" he projects as a member of the household. Critics who have too reductively labeled Malvolio a "social climber" or diagnosed his dissatisfaction as a case of class hyper-consciousness have neglected to consider the role of identity, and its formation and resolution (or their failure), in the development of Malvolio's discontent. I argue that, beyond other valid considerations, the character of Malvolio is principally driven by his anxious but unconscious desire to resolve his ambiguous masculine identity.

The use of modern identity theory to understand early modern drama has received considerable and widely diverse critical attention in recent years. Logical justifications for such an analysis have held that as the rise of a powerful merchant class in the Renaissance disrupted the continuities of feudal and aristocratic life, a modern notion of "self," divided and in crisis, first appeared. Although historians disagree on the nature of this revolution, I want to suggest that the question of what might have constituted a "self" in the Renaissance is one to which Twelfth Night provides two answers, at least indirectly. As I have argued, there is in the main plot and the subplot a distinct difference in dramatic "subjectivities": in the former, the self is "fashioned" by the interactions of concrete social status and the free-play of experience; in the latter, status is not necessarily stable and unreliable experience is the source of debilitating anxiety. Regardless of Malvolio's rank, he consistently disrupts the continuities of life in Illyria (however temporarily discontinuous they may be) and does so in terms of the nature of status and the effects of experience. Through these disruptions, Malvolio projects a self that is, above all, divided and in crisis. Thus, in discussing the "identity" of such a character in modern terms, I am assuming that Shakespeare has, in a sense, already done so. At the very least, such an approach offers a vocabulary for understanding the play's treatment of the problem of identity—an understanding that is somewhere between a metaphor for a particular socially and politically informed psychological truth and the thing itself.

Erik Erikson's stages of identity formation offer some insight into the problems of identity formation or psychosexual development. 11 In adolescence, a child may be concerned with how he appears to others, compared to how he feels about himself. That is, his social identity and personal or ego identity may seem at odds. In this stage, there is a danger of "role diffusion" or doubt about one's sexual identity, which adolescents may seek to avoid by over-identifying with a person of the same or opposite sex, by having a "crush" or "falling in love." This response is "an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffuse ego images" onto another and "seeing them thus reflected and gradually clarified" (Childhood 228). In young adulthood, when one is faced with the social expectation of courtship and marriage, such "role diffusion" may become a fear of ego loss through self-abandon (i.e., intimacy), and may lead to a deep sense of isolation and, ultimately, self-absorption. A normal adult eventually learns to "lose himself" in sexuality and friendship without the fear of being "engulfed." Where these attempts at intimacy fail, however, the result, in maturity, may be a regression to "individual stagnation," "interpersonal impoverishment," and an obsessive need for "pseudo-intimacy" (Childhood 231).

We may detect a disparity between the social and personal identities of the steward who "practic[es] behavior to his own shadow" (2.5.17). Malvolio's personal identity as one deserving "exalted respect" (2.5.23) is significantly different from his social identity as a "time-pleaser" (2.3.148). A healthy person, on the other
hand, eventually bridges the gap between the way he perceives himself and the way he believes others perceive him. On this matter, Erikson states:

The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one's self-sameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity.

(Ego Development 23)\(^\text{12}\)

Even before his gulling, Malvolio lacks the emotional constancy and unity that such simultaneity requires. Once Maria's “device” has been set, the very combination of self-deception and deception by others would seem to make the achievement of a resolved personal identity quite impossible.

The basis of Malvolio's gulling is that only with such an inflated notion of himself could he believe that Olivia loved him. Everyone except Malvolio understands that a match with Olivia is impossible, not only because Malvolio is her steward, but also because he is neither “generous, guiltless [nor] of free disposition” and perhaps completely unable to love. We might call his eagerness to believe an “over-identification” with both Olivia and the possibility of becoming her husband. In his fantasy of becoming Count Malvolio, Malvolio seems to project the ambiguity or “role diffusion” he associates with his position as steward onto both Olivia and the role of her noble husband in order to see the possibility of something better. “To be Count Malvolio” would be, in name and station, to have a much more clearly defined place in life. Yet, in his inability to accept the ambiguities of his role as steward, Malvolio has neither a place nor the companionship it would offer. His isolation and consequent self-absorption seem to derive from his inability to achieve intimacy with any other person. The result of Malvolio's failure to live harmoniously and intimately with others in the household is, as Erikson predicts, something akin to “interpersonal impoverishment.”

An important distinction between Shakespeare's identity drama and modern identity theory is that Renaissance England generally did not distinguish between the specific stages of adolescence, young adulthood, and maturity (Kahn 197). In Shakespeare's day, the status of real “manhood” was not achieved by all men, and a kind of “adolescence” ensued until a man not only came of age but also took a wife and produced an heir. Patriarchal power in Renaissance England belonged not to men generally but to married men with families, and it was unlikely for a bachelor to gain a position of high social or political status.\(^\text{13}\) Thus, without a wife to confirm his manhood and a household to call his own, Malvolio, like Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, remains in a kind of adolescence. This may further explain his fantasy of becoming “Count Malvolio.” Like an adolescent day-dream of manhood, Malvolio imagines occupying not only a higher social position but also the identity-affirming position of paterfamilias. If we consider Malvolio's masculine identity unresolved in part because he remains unmarried, and therefore childless, then we can see that Olivia's unstable household, because it lacks a patriarch, further problematizes his struggle. Malvolio's situation paradoxically invites and denies his participation in reestablishing such a patriarchy, which for him would help to complete the process of identity formation.

In negotiating the space of ambiguity that comprises his search for identity, Malvolio is caught within still another paradox. Not only is the “misrule” of Olivia's household (and Illyria generally) contrary to his objectives as steward, but the emotional versatility required to accommodate such “misrule” is beyond his ability.\(^\text{14}\) Because Malvolio can only respond to the revelry and humor of the household with indignation, his officious performance becomes a failure of play. Consider his first appearance in Act 1, Scene 4, which immediately identifies him as the anti-comic figure, the opposite of Feste, Olivia's clown. Although Olivia is purportedly in mourning, she finds comic relief in Feste's jibes at Malvolio, and even provokes her steward by asking him, “How say you to that, Malvolio?” Not only does Malvolio refuse to play Feste's game, but he also insults Olivia for playing it: “I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal.” If we consider the psychological dimensions of the relationship between Olivia and Malvolio that I have discussed, we can see
that Malvolio is in an impossible situation. His job is to maintain order in the household so that Olivia may properly mourn; but because she is not really in mourning, she enjoys Feste's disorderly playfulness. Malvolio's reaction to this disorder is "distempered" because his world does not make sense. In attacking what he sees as Feste's vulnerability "Look you now, he's out of his guard" (1.5.82-86) he reveals his own: that he can never allow himself to be "out of his guard." Olivia shows that she understands this when she exclaims, "O you are sick of self-love, Malvolio!" (1.5.90). His narcissistic isolation is his protective shell that attempts to fend off both the "bird-bolts" and "cannon bullets" (1.5.93) of others. Malvolio cannot distinguish between innocent teasing and real offense because in Olivia's household the distinction is unstable, if not meaningless.

Feste's jesting represents not only the lack of order in the household, but also what appears to be the beginning of the end of Olivia's mourning, which may be a threat to Malvolio's present power. So long as Olivia has "abjured the sight and company of men" (1.2.40-41), Malvolio, as her keeper of the house, retains a special significance. He is, in fact, the most important man in her life, which she admits when, noting his "distract" behavior, she declares, "I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry" (3.4.62-63). As such status is jeopardized, Malvolio fears not only losing his present power and thus perhaps being "unmanned" but also being reminded of his lack of real patriarchal power. This fear seems to account for his disagreeable behavior in this scene. His description of the "manner of man" (1.5.152) that is Viola/Cesario is a curious one which makes the point:

Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy: as is a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man. One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him.

(1.5.156-162)

This pubescent youth, he seems to say to Olivia, is hardly man enough for your serious consideration. It is perhaps for the same reason that Malvolio specifically calls Feste a "barren" rascal. On one hand, Malvolio is dutifully protecting his mistress; on the other hand, he is projecting his deepest fear: his failure to achieve a resolved masculine identity.

Similarly, Malvolio's failure to either control or abide the antics of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria, is closely tied to his difficult relation to Olivia. This is evident in Malvolio's first remonstrations against Sir Toby's debauchery: "Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbors you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders" (2.3.95-97). Whether Olivia actually instructed Malvolio to deliver Sir Toby an ultimatum we cannot be sure, but Malvolio would have her "allied" to order, and therefore to himself. Toby senses Malvolio's implicit meaning and offers his cutting double question: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.114-116). To be "more than a steward," for Malvolio, might indeed mean to be a nobleman and possibly Count Malvolio, Olivia's husband. Toby and the others object to the fact that Malvolio is overstepping his bounds, not by insisting on order in the house, for that is his job, but by allying himself so closely with Olivia. They seem to realize that this violation of the social order is much more egregious than their late-night revelry. Sir Toby's suggestion that Malvolio is "virtuous" is a sharply ironic criticism that subtly points to the steward's hypocritical desire for Olivia. Maria calls him "a kind of puritan" (2.3.139), not because she thinks he is an actual puritan, but because he is like one in his hypocritical, self-absorbed pomposity. The designation, as Shakespeare used it, had no narrowly defined religious or political connotation. One historian notes, of the puritan designation in pre-Revolutionary English writing: "There were many Malvolios. Contemporary references to puritan hypocrisy are frequent, and they usually refer to the combination of godly phrases with economic or other less noble motives" (Hill 25). Here, Toby and Maria insinuate the hypocritical righteousness of Malvolio's pretending to protect Olivia from Toby's debauchery while simultaneously entertaining sexual and matrimonial thoughts about her.
Maria, however, also sees beyond Malvolio's “puritan” hypocrisy, to a self-division exceeding that of “phrases” and “motives,” and one that lies at the core of his own self-concept. Thus, she explains to Sir Toby, “it is his grounds of faith that all who look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work” (2.3.151-153). In constructing her “revenge,” Maria recognizes that the disparity between Malvolio's “self-love” and that fact that others know him as “an affectioned ass” (2.3.148) is his greatest vulnerability. By convincing Malvolio that Olivia loves him, Maria intends to “put him in such a dream that when the image of it leaves him, he must run mad” (2.5.193-194). To put Malvolio in such a dream would be to fool him into believing that his social identity and personal identity were the same indeed, that all his problems were solved. For “to be Count Malvolio” would be to marry Olivia, to rise in station, to bring order to the house, and finally to resolve his identity into that of a mature man.

In Malvolio's performance of his fantasy, he imagines having “the humour of state” (2.5.52), or freedom of rank, that he entirely lacks as a steward: “I frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my some rich jewel” (1.5.59-60). On one level, this is a thinly veiled fantasy of lust and power, in which he substitutes a sexually suggestive “jewel” for his steward's chain. Malvolio imagines possessing the sexual liberty that would render Olivia available to him, as well as the sexual potency that would signify his complete manhood. But he also imagines the ability to play, to be “generous, guiltless, and of free disposition,” as if such emotional freedom were the sole property of the nobility. Ironically, of course, even in his luxurious imaginings, Malvolio is not playing as much as he is being played with. Finally, when the gulling is over and “the image of [Count Malvolio] leaves him,” he does not “run mad” so much as he is threatened with what Erickson called “ego loss.” By rejecting his “calling” of stewardship, Malvolio has rejected his own selfhood, and in a sense no longer has any coherent identity at all.

Outwardly, Maria's gulling is intended to make Malvolio an extreme and ridiculous version of the person he desires to be. On another level, however, it also seems clearly calculated to destroy his very identity. We can see in Malvolio's reading of the letter his attempt to “crush” (2.5.140) himself into the identity of “the unknown beloved” (2.5.90) when he is presented with the puzzle, “M.O.A.I. doth sway my life” (2.5.107). Malvolio's effort to “make that resemble something in [him]” (2.5.119-120) results in the literal disintegration of his name. He cannot solve the puzzle because he does not really know who he is. Maria's pithy construction, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em” (2.5.145-146), similarly reveals her understanding of Malvolio's predicament. To be “born great” is to have an identity that is ontologically fixed: one is simply great. To “achieve greatness” is performative and thus involves attaining an identity through some act. But to have “greatness thrust upon” one involves no willful or original act at all, but merely a reaction, perhaps desperate, to one's circumstances. In Malvolio's case, it is to nominally accept the benefits of a resolved adult identity without actually having achieved one. The letter tells Malvolio, “thou art made if thou desir'st to be so; if not, let me see thee a steward still” (2.5.155-156). Though Malvolio does indeed desire to be “made” into a nobleman and a patriarch, the effect of the gulling is not that he is left “a steward still,” but that he is virtually un-made, his identity left in tatters.

The “Count Malvolio” who presents himself to Olivia “cross-gartered” and “smiling” seems to be the imaginary fulfillment of Malvolio's wish to transcend his paradoxical position as steward by marrying his mistress and thereby resolving his masculine identity. When Olivia reacts incredulously to Malvolio's behavior, asking, “God comfort thee! Why dost thou smile so and kiss thy hand so oft?” (3.4.32-33), she fails to acknowledge and endorse the new “identity” Malvolio has assumed. Instead, she answers his gestures with ambivalence and confusion and finally dismisses him, leaving him wholly unsatisfied, “a steward still.” Thus, the truly cruel element of the gulling is the way it sets up an inevitable conflict between what Malvolio unconsciously wishes were true and what he consciously discovers is not. Because the imbrication of the conscious and unconscious seems to direct much of the subtext of the main plot of Twelfth Night, it seems appropriate to investigate Malvolio's fantasy not only in terms of its conscious effects, but also its unconscious causes. I submit that if we read his fantasy as a “day-dream” or even an actual dream, then it may reveal not only something of his hidden desires, but, perhaps more importantly, how he comes to understand, if only
unconsciously, the complex social and psychological matrix within which he attempts to define himself.

The work of Freud suggests to me several readings of Malvolio's fantasy that look to childhood desires as the origin of adult fantasies. In the essay “Family Romances,” Freud considers the (male) child who invents an imaginary parentage in order to cope with the realization that his parents are not the heroic, infallible people he thought they were when he was younger. By altering his past, the child effectively alters his conception of the present and future as well. Such a desire can be profound enough to follow the child into adulthood. Freud writes:

> A characteristic example of this peculiar imaginative activity is to be seen in the familiar day-dreaming which persists far beyond puberty. If these day-dreams are carefully examined, they are found to serve as the fulfillment of wishes and as a correction of actual life. They have two principal aims, an erotic and an ambitious one.

(Similarly, Malvolio imagines “Count Malvolio,” who may be either the invented father or the son the father produced, or both simultaneously, and who may represent the symbolic fulfillment of a wish to correct his origins. Comparing himself, or his parents, with Olivia, or her parents, and finding his own situation inadequate, Malvolio may be said to invent a past, and thus a present and future, which are more satisfying to him. The “ambitious aim” relates to Malvolio's rise in social status and is apparent in his disdainful treatment of Sir Toby in the fantasy. The “erotic aim” is to “bring his mother into situations of secret infidelity” (239), through which such an alternative parent-age might have been possible. Such an adulterous act may be symbolically represented by Malvolio's socially proscribed wooing of Olivia. In this reading, the manifestation of his unconscious desire is largely a function of difference in social rank, a difference first perceived in childhood, but one more fully and perhaps painfully demarcated in Malvolio's adult role as steward.

Yet, as Freud argued in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the greatest influences of adult dreams are not experiences of childhood but of infancy: “A wish which is represented in a dream must be an infantile one” (533). But dreams, as wish-fulfillments, are not always inspired by the most obvious desires, and the true wish may be disguised or distorted. Through interpretation, we may find that the latent dream thoughts are altogether different from the manifest dream content. For example, in the dream, Olivia seems to be Malvolio's heterosexual object choice, and Count Malvolio, his id-driven alter-ego. Thus, the dream appears to be a clear fulfillment of Malvolio's ambitious and sexual desire to become her noble husband. Here, the latent infantile wish might involve the satisfaction of Oedipal desire through identification with the father. Yet, the true wish may be less obvious. At the time of the dream, Olivia has officially renewed her interest in Orsino's suit (through Viola/Cesario), and any accepted suitor is, to Malvolio, a rival for Olivia's love. Such a rival might be represented by the stately Count Malvolio. Indeed, the character in *Twelfth Night* who most closely resembles Count Malvolio is Orsino himself. Thus, it may appear that in becoming the noble Count, Malvolio has identified with his rival and then literally replaced him, thereby removing the threat the rival posed. This interpretation, in which the same latent infantile wish to possess the mother may involve taking the place of the father, suggests that Malvolio's desire for Olivia is part of a larger sense of masculine rivalry, and one derived from his first, infantile sense of it.

However, consider further that, beyond her beauty and charm, Olivia's greatest attraction for Malvolio may be that she, unlike any other, holds the power and title he desires: she is the head of the household. Perhaps his dream is not the fulfillment of a wish to have her, but rather to be her. The latent infantile wish in this scenario might involve the resolution of Oedipal desire through identification with the mother. Of course, in this identification across both class and gender, to be Olivia is also to desire a noble husband. Accordingly, Count Malvolio is not whom Malvolio wants to be, but rather whom he wants to have. Indeed, this may be readily
apparent in the dream when we consider that it mentions Olivia only in passing and is primarily concerned with an attractive nobleman being attended by his servants. Malvolio's dream is, in a sense, a sexually charged fantasy whose main figure is another man. Here, the manifest dream of heterosexual jealousy and desire may reflect, in Freudian terms, an insufficiently repressed homosexual impulse. More importantly, however, this interpretation suggests that Malvolio's identification with rank and authority, with real power as he most directly experiences it through Olivia, is stronger than his identification with his masculinity and even heterosexual desire.

To reiterate, the point of these interpretations is not to describe definitively the source of Malvolio's desires; rather, because the correspondences between unconscious desire and conscious action are rarely direct, they may reveal, in their indirectness, not only latent desire, but also the social and psychological dynamics that provide the context for such desire. Thus, with a contingent understanding of Malvolio's long held feelings of social inferiority, his native sense of masculine rivalry, and his powerful identification with rank and authority, we can see more clearly how his search for a resolved identity is so vulnerable to the possibility, even the inevitability, of failure.

As I have suggested, the relationship between this failure and Malvolio's dream-turned-nightmare is a symbolic one. Thus, it is not surprising that the action which follows the gulling—Malvolio's cruel punishment—is also highly symbolic. Psychoanalysis, literature, and Western culture generally have found a metaphor for identity crisis or ego loss in various images of captivity, darkness, and maternal engulfment, in which the psychic isolation experienced by the individual is symbolized by his physical isolation. Malvolio's punishment, his being taken to "a dark room and bound" (3.4.135-136), is such a metaphor. Like his fantasy, it suggests more than one interpretation. In an Eriksonian reading, Malvolio's overtures to Olivia may be called a failed attempt at "losing himself" in sexuality and intimacy (or perhaps merely "pseudo-intimacy"), which results in his feeling "isolated" or "engulfed," or, indeed, in the most literal manifestation of "interpersonal impoverishment." We may further note that Malvolio's punishment, like Maria's letter, seems custom-designed for his particular sexual crime of wrong desire for his mistress. That is, the "hideous darkness" (4.2.30) of the cellar, like Lear's "sulphurous pit" (KL 4.6.128), may signify feminine sexuality, the sexual darkness of Olivia, to which his unmediated desire has transported him. The lunatic's cellar is also the darkness of Malvolio's identity crisis, which is chiefly manifest as what Maria claims to be his "madness"; thus, the cellar is a public symbol of this alleged madness. Antipholus of Ephesus, in The Comedy of Errors, faces a similar fate when, his problems with identity having caused considerable confusion and provoked accusations of insanity, he is threatened with being "bound and laid in some dark room" (TCE 4.4.94), which was a common and curiously symbolic treatment for those thought to be insane in Shakespeare's day. For Sir Toby, however, who suggests and executes the punishment, the cellar is also a private symbol of the steward's self-doubt, of which Sir Toby and the others are all too aware. But the metaphor is also Malvolio's. Knowing that he has been "madly used" but not knowing exactly how, he is in figurative darkness about the gulling. In his psychic turmoil, the darkness of ignorance and deception, anxiety and sexuality, seem to merge, and his punishment for not seeing the truth (that is, for being gulled) is his not seeing anything at all.

On the other hand, his real "madness" is his obsessive rationality and insistence that the room is dark. Even in his vulnerable position, Malvolio is determined to discuss the matter rationally, "in any constant question" (4.2.48-49). The consummate steward, he refuses to accept any form of disorder. Thus, as it indicates the disorder of both his identity crisis and his physical predicament, this scene is emblematic of Malvolio's inability to accommodate the failures of logic and the chaos of misrule. In Illyria, such reasonableableness is problematic.

Learning to accept the disorder of experience, to enjoy its possibilities, and, like Viola, to allow time to "untangle" the hard knots of life's confusion, are what makes the characters of the main plot ultimately successful in finding mates. From their precarious beginnings, Viola, Sebastian, Olivia, and Orsino experiment with adult identities, try them out on one another, and "play" with the possibilities each identity
offers. This quest continues until the “play,” and the theatrical performance itself, come to a conclusion, and marriage permanently confirms upon each character his or her adult identity. Along the way, however, in the midst of their experimentation, the potential for error and crisis is apparent, and it is here that we can begin to explore the close thematic relation between main plot and subplot.

An undercurrent of tragic potential, which is first suggested by the deaths and melancholy that begin Act 1, can be found in the language of possibility, uncertainty, and anxiety that each character uses. For example, we hear in Orsino's first speech on the ephemeral nature of love, with its curious phrase, “so full of shapes is fancy, / That it alone is high fantastical” (1.1.1415), an almost infinite multiplicity of desire that seems to be capable of containing, if only for a moment, the wishes of every character in the play, even Antonio's. This possibility is first realized when Viola decides to don the disguise of a eunuch and serve Orsino by speaking to him in “many sorts of music” (1.2.58). The phrase echoes the music that is Orsino's “food of love,” but also looks forward to the very different sorts of music or shapes of fancy, homosexual and heterosexual, that Viola will speak to both Olivia and Orsino, and which will be an important cause of the play's confusion.

This possibility becomes endemic uncertainty when the disguise and self-deception running rampant in Illyria, like the carnival masquerades of the solstitial celebration, manifest various levels of identity and potentially limitless prospects for human interaction. Like Malvolio, the characters in the main plot's love-triangle perform a specific identity not their own, in order to satisfy a specific desire. Viola does this consciously, while Olivia and Orsino, in their obsessive narcissism, do it unconsciously. Even Sebastian, in all his apparent innocence, has used the alias “Roderigo” for unknown reasons. For each of these characters, the outward or performative “self” is capable of splitting off from the inward “self” (a split that is not unlike Erikson's social and ego identities). For example, although Viola compliments the sea captain for having “a mind that suits with [his] fair and outward character” (1.2.50-51), only fourteen lines later she dons a disguise. We are told by Viola's captain that Orsino is “a noble duke, in nature as in name” (1.2.25), yet Orsino's plan to have Viola/Cesario “act [his] woes” (1.4.26) provides strong evidence that his woes are indeed an act, and that he is not what he appears. Olivia too, who “they say … hath abjured the company and sight of men” (1.2.40-41), nonetheless entertains the jokes of Feste and has clearly moved beyond her need to mourn, though she says otherwise.

It is significant that the characters in Twelfth Night acknowledge the falseness that is common to their society and the different levels of identity that are possible (personal and social, inward and outward, ontologically “fixed” and performative). Consistently, almost habitually, they express a conscious awareness “that nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution” (1.2.48-49). Although this was a commonplace of Renaissance, and specifically Shakespearean, speech, as in the “fair cruel” of the Sonnets, the language of Twelfth Night is charged with a distinctive anxiety about the potential for being deceived. For example, Olivia knows that one might easily be taken in by appearances, for the speeches of suitors are “like to be feigned” (1.5.196), and “the eye is too great a flatterer for the mind” (1.5.309). Olivia's visual fixations, indicative of her own narcissism, initially cause her to fall in love with Viola/Cesario (and later enable her to switch to Sebastian in Act 5 without a second thought). Perhaps it is because Olivia is self-conscious of her own falseness that she is so wary of it in others.

In her first meeting with Viola/Cesario, Olivia is almost obsessively aware of the possibility of outward deception, and she reveals her anxiety by asking an extraordinary number of questions regarding Viola/Cesario's identity and desire. Consider those asked in 1.5 alone:

Taken together, these questions sound like the ravings of a paranoid. Not only is Olivia suspicious of the suit from the count, but she is also skeptically enamored of Viola/Cesario. To be sure, Olivia's questions are part of a ritualized courtly flirtation that is a form of play. But they also represent a tremendous anxiety about the failure of play, or what can only be called reality. That is, if this young man with whom Olivia has fallen in love is something other than the person he seems, the result of courtship could be, by Elizabethan standards, quite disastrous.

Viola/Cesario, in her response to these questions, admits, “I am not what I am” (3.1.141), conceding openly, if ambiguously, that “what I am and what I would are as secret as maidenhead” (1.5.215-216). Despite her disguise, Viola/Cesario makes it quite clear that she “care[s] not who knows so much of [her] mettle” (3.4.272), and she takes few pains to keep her true identity hidden. Perhaps this is because, unlike any other character, she has the singular emotional unity of “one heart, one bosom, and one truth” (3.1.158) and a relatively strong sense of her own identity. Nevertheless, on finding that Olivia has fallen in love with her, Viola/Cesario realizes the great danger, for herself and for Olivia, that her falseness has created:

Disguise thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I (poor monster) fond as much on him
As she (mistaken) seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am a man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman–no alas the day!–
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?
O time, thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.

(2.2.27-41)

Despite Viola's own constancy, the “fantastical” possibilities of identity and desire, like Orsino's love, always “receiveth as the sea” (1.1.11) those who entertain them, and, like the sea, either embrace or engulf. Viola's “pregnant enemy” is the tragic possibility of identity crisis that Malvolio ultimately suffers. It is Malvolio who becomes the “poor monster” that Viola risks becoming but does not. Viola sees that in her disguise she has caused tremendous confusion of desire brought on by the confusion of identity. Because she does not know how this dilemma will “fadge,” she must trust the untangling of the confusion to time, or to the process of maturation, and hope that “Nature to her bias” (5.1.260) will untie the knot.

In this element of vulnerability, where mistakes create monsters and, as Feste says, “the wrong side may be turned outward” (3.1.13), that we can see perhaps the most important connection between the two plots, which is also the primary cause of the play's confusion: the problem of misplaced desire. In the main story, each of the characters is madly desirous of another, whom he or she cannot have, perhaps in a way similar to what Erikson called “overidentification.” Orsino desires Olivia, who desires Viola/Cesario, who desires Orsino (and even Antonio hopelessly desires Sebastian). Ultimately, Viola/Cesario is the only character whose original desires are satisfied; the others must compromise with alternatives. Still, except for Antonio, who in the final act seems to disappear from the story altogether, every character in the main story is satisfactorily re-paired, and thus repaired from the story's confusion and anxiety. For Malvolio, however, no such reparations are possible.

We are obliged to ask, then, given the extreme narcissism of the other characters and the curiously hurried marriage arrangements in Act 5, whether Malvolio's malvoglio is essentially any different from the desires of the characters of the main story. Why is Malvolio's desire for his mistress so egregious if Olivia has, in pursuing Cesario, evinced few scruples about falling in love with servants? Olivia and Orsino, and arguably even Viola and Sebastian, are full of self-love; why is Malvolio “sick” with it? How authentic is the affection
that narcissistic Orsino has for narcissistic Olivia, a woman whom he hardly knows and who has been ever so “constant” in her refusals? What about his sudden love for Viola/Cesario, whom he only recently thought to be merely a nice young man? Likewise, is the “love” Olivia easily transfers from Viola/Cesario to Sebastian born of real affection? Was this love ever anything more than a case of her eyes being “too great a flatterer for [her] mind?” And what about Sebastian's marriage to a perfect stranger? The final act of Twelfth Night elicits an unavoidable feeling that the unlikely, last-minute marriages and the somewhat abrupt conclusion of the play rely on a kind of fairytale artifice, while summarily dismissing these important questions.23 The vulnerabilities and tragic possibilities of Viola's, Sebastian's, Olivia's, and Orsino's quests for love and selfhood seem to have been displaced onto Malvolio, whose quests for the very same things are failed ones. His particular position of ambiguous authority, his own social inferiority, his faltering ego (perhaps his emerging modern “self,” divided and doubtful), all contribute to making him a very convenient scapegoat. For, ultimately, as the receptacle for the play's unwanted tragic potential, the Malvolio subplot makes comedy possible for the main plot.

Yet it is part of Shakespeare's genius in Twelfth Night to make this displacement incomplete, thereby linking plot and subplot even more closely. When in the final scene Malvolio declares, “I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” (5.1.378), we ought not take his meaning lightly. His true revenge, we might say, is his refusal to allow the main plot to be completely resolved before the end of the play. Having jailed the captain who aided Viola with her disguise and held her clothes in the interim, Malvolio keeps Viola from donning her “maiden weeds” (5.1.255) and thereby properly accepting Orsino as her husband. Moreover, Viola says to her brother, Sebastian, “Do not embrace me, till each circumstance, / Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump / That I am Viola” (5.1.2251-253). As long as Viola remains in disguise, the “misrule” of the main plot is never set straight.24 Of course, neither is the subplot. When Malvolio enters to announce the wrong that he believes Olivia has done him, she responds with the assurance that he will have justice; but this too must wait until she knows the “grounds and authors” (5.1.353) of the gulling. After Malvolio's angry exit, Orsino selfishly commands Fabian, “Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace; he hath not told us of the captain yet” (5.1.380-381). But neither Malvolio nor anyone else comes to finish the unfinished story.

If the characters of the main plot are fundamentally different from Malvolio, then, as we have seen, they also share much in common with him. There is no final marriage procession in Twelfth Night, as there are in most Shakespearean comedies, because under the circumstances, with a bride in men's clothing and a steward “notoriously abused,” none seems appropriate. The problem of Malvolio has become a problem for the characters of the main plot, and one they can solve only superficially. The underlying darkness of the play is finally, if ambiguously, played out by Feste, the last character on the stage. As the mediator between the play's two plots, Feste seems to be privileged with the wisdom that each plot holds for the other. Part of that wisdom, suggested by his name, is that the revelry and “misrule” of the Twelfth Night celebration are a natural and necessary part of life. From the perspective of modern psychology, we may add that experimentation and confusion are normal aspects of identity development. Feste's second and more ominous truth, however, is that “anything that's mended is but patched” (1.5.47-48): that although the comic fictions of life may conceal tragic possibility, they do not eliminate it. His final song, which comically describes the passage from boyhood into manhood, leaves the play with an ambivalence that points to King Lear, whose clown shares Feste's refrain.25 The concluding lines of the song are as abrupt and apparently unresolved as the play itself:

A great while ago the world begun,
With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you everyday.

(5.1.405-408)

The lines sum up the play and its happy ending by dismissing them altogether. The banal send-off, like the
too-convenient marriages, overtly covers over the ambiguous final status of the play's characters simply by ending the play. It is not Feste's theme, as some critics have argued, that the progress of life and the coming into "man's estate" (5.1.393) represent a mundane but reliable transition from milestone to milestone or a mere passing of time, but rather than drama, particularly comedy, makes life seem to be so by masking its pitfalls. Although the play's marriages represent the joining of three noble families and the restoration of patriarchal rule in Illyria, the disruptive anger of the steward remains. Thus, Feste's truth resonates: "anything that's mended is but patched."

Stephen Greenblatt writes that "the form of the drama itself invites reflection upon the extent to which it is possible for one man to assume the identity of another" (219). Twelfth Night and its two plots not only invite such reflection, but they enact it, with only ambiguous conclusions. Such is the nature of identity. The steward's failed imposture of a noble count, and his failure to resolve his masculine identity, are contrasted to the successful identity experimentations of the main plot. However, Malvolio's failures are also analogous to the failure of the main plot to resolve itself completely; thus, they integrate plot and subplot and tie him to the whole structure of the play. For all his differences, he is as much the play's insider as he is its outsider. But he is still its outsider. The play's final word, then, is ultimately dependent upon Malvolio's final status, the valence and social significance assigned to his "difference." The implications for a materialist analysis are perhaps too neatly apparent from a modern perspective: if the unchallenged aristocracy of the main plot remains unchallenged in a world without consequences, this is only a temporary repression of a dialectical inevitability. Yet, such inevitability is nowhere to be found in the play's text. Indeed, the meaning of dramatic non-resolution must not be found beyond the play but within it. In the same way, Twelfth Night must be understood not in terms of the ends of identity and desire, but in their processual struggle. "What you will" signifies many things, but it is also a question, and one whose answers lie inextricably between plot and subplot.

Notes

1. Plautus's Menaechmi, also a probable source for The Comedy of Errors, and Gl' Ingannati, an early sixteenth-century Italian comedy of mistaken identity and surrogate courting, may have been well-known to Shakespeare. A likelier direct source is the English "historie" of "Apolonius and Silla" from Barnaby Riche's Farewell to the Military Profession (1581). Riche's tale, while more violent and bawdy than Shakespeare's version, similarly begins by unraveling the problems of mistaken identity and misplaced desire, only to sew them up again neatly with the reunion of twins and the celebration of a double marriage. See Bullough, 269-372. Israel Gollancz's preface to the 1894 Temple edition of Twelfth Night notes that in Il Sacrificio, the "poetical introduction" of Gl' Ingannati, there occurs the name "Malevoli," which suggests the name "Malvolio." However, beyond the nominal connection, there is no evidence that the later character is a substantive derivation. See Gollancz vi-vii.

2. The word "tragedy" is used speculatively, but not casually. In Aristotelian terms, Malvolio might arguably have the necessary traits of a tragic hero. As the steward of a great noble household and the most trusted servant of its mistress, he has achieved a certain degree of glory and good fortune; most essentially, he is a man of some excellence and uprightness and quite free of baseness. His inadequacy or positive fault (harmartia) concerns his unresolved masculine identity, which is one of the primary subjects of this essay.

3. See Malcomson 38, who argues that "the play veils and manipulates the rank of Malvolio. …"

4. Cunnington 66; also the source of the Spenser and Massinger quotations. See also Gouws 478-479; and Hunt 282.

5. We may be confident that Renaissance audiences recognized this to be true, in the same way, perhaps, that today we recognize—even stigmatize—the very difficult position of the butler, whose character, according to the time-honored adage of mystery novels, is the first to be impugned.

6. On the treatment of servants in 17th and 18th C. aristocratic households, see Hainsworth 245.
While the role of the household steward declined, that of the estate steward increased. With enclosure and industrialization, the larger noble estates became complicated organizations that required professional management. In the Seventeenth Century, the estate steward was a very powerful figure, while the household steward had become all but extinct and was replaced by the more butler-like majordomo, who wielded much less authority. See Hainsworth 10.

Although there were women, often widows of some maturity, who successfully managed wealth and property during the Renaissance, a great noble household left in the hands of a young, unmarried woman, no matter how capable, signified a distinct disadvantage. See Hainsworth 10.

I am indebted to Constance Jordan for helping me to understand the structural dynamics of the Renaissance household. See her Renaissance Feminism.

Following Erikson, I will use this term to mean “loss of ego identity.” For a useful discussion of the early history of the expression, see Erikson, Identity: Youth and Crisis 16-19.

See Childhood 219-234. While Erikson describes eight stages of ego development, my discussion concerns only three: Adolescence (Identity v. Role Diffusion); Young Adulthood (Intimacy v. Isolation); and Adulthood (Generativity v. Stagnation). The application of Erikson's work to identity formation in Shakespeare is well-developed in Coppélia Kahn's “The Providential Tempest and the Shakespearean Family,” in Man's Estate, 195-225. Although Kahn's work does not consider the Malvolio subplot, I am deeply indebted to her discussions of Twelfth Night, masculine identity in the Renaissance, and the identity theories of Erikson.


See Stone, Family 27; Laslett 12; and Kahn 12-17.

I am indebted to David Willbern's “Malvolio's Fall,” which considers “the steward's collision with the merrymakers, the nature of the damage he suffers, and its relevance to the general theme of festivity” (86).

Olivia's association of Malvolio with her dowry is further evidence that she considers him to be a kind of temporary, substitute husband.

For a contrary view, see Malcolmson 45.

See Mueschke and Fleisher 732-733: “The stage satire of the Puritans was as popular with theater audiences as the Puritans themselves were unpopular, and the occasional suggestion of a Puritanical bias in Malvolio's pretentious virtue added to the opportunities for satire and ridicule of the steward” (733).

In Shakespeare, smiling almost always signifies deception in the smiler, and often leads to his demise. Compare Malvolio's fate with some of Shakespeare's other “smiling” characters: Hamlet's Claudius “O villain, villain, smiling damned villain” (1.5.106); the “smiling” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (2.2.332); Oswald, the “smiling rogue” of King Lear (2.2.79); and Timon's flattering lords, the “most smiling, smooth, detested parasites” (3.6.104).

I agree with Fineman's argument that the main plot's “playfully designed chaos is only possible because the sex difference, the ‘little thing’ (3.4.282-283) Viola lacks, is secure, acknowledged, presumed” (82), and Barber's point that “when the normal is secure … playful aberration is benign” (245). However, as I have argued, there is little that is “normal” or “secure” about Olivia and her household at the time when she meets Viola/Cesario; likewise, from the play's beginning, Orsino's narcissism seems to have him perched at the edge of a pond grasping at a phantasm. Only Viola's singular unity lends benignity to the play's chaos. The chaos that is not so benign is that which leads Fineman to admit that “this is comedy, but comedy that knows worse than itself” (85).

For an interesting recent discussion of Orsino's metaphors of engulfment and digestion, see René Girard 112-114.

This is what C. L. Barber might have called an “inadequate object.” See 246-247.

Perhaps this is because, unlike the apparent desires of the others, Malvolio's misplaced desire for Olivia, does not seem to be based in any real affection at all. Moreover, while the other characters mediate their desires through surrogates and equivocation, Malvolio expresses his overtly, in this way offending not only the decorum of courtly love, but also the rules of social status. While Orsino sends
embassies of love, and Olivia gives Viola/Cesario a ring and Sebastian a pearl, Malvolio's material expressions of his affection, his cross-gartering and smiling, are not tokens of real love. Because they are not of his own invention but specifically prescribed by the gulling, they become fetishes or intended symbolic actions that finally have no symbolic content for Malvolio the lover.

23. David Scott Kastan writes: “To call attention to the formal rather than the psychological justifications of [Twelfth Night’s] conclusion … is not to find the ending either inadequate or ironic, but only to see it as it is: as a self-consciously improbable—though thoroughly desirable—resolution of loyalties and affections” (577). Valerie Traub also comments instructively: “Insofar as gender hierarchies seem to be both temporarily transgressed and formally reinstated, the question of subversion versus containment can only be resolved by crediting either the expense of dramatic energy or comedic closure” (120).

24. See Willbern 89.

25. Compare Feste's song,

When that I was and-a little tiny boy,
   With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
   For the rain it raineth every day.

(5.1.366-369)

with the one King Lear's fool sings in the middle of the storm,

He that has a tiny little wit,
   With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
   Though the rain it raineth every day.

(KL 3.2.74-77)

26. Although Feste's song suggests various interpretations, I disagree with Barbara Everett’s more conventional reading that “the theme of the song is, after all, simply growing up, accepting the principle that nights before have mornings after; that life consists in passing time, and in knowing it” (308). I prefer Coddin’s reading of the song as one which “call[s] attention to the illusory nature of comic resolution …”: “The final line, ‘And we'll strive to please you everyday,’ is a reminder that playing itself, while trafficking in illusion, is historically embedded, materially reproducible in time and space, and thus vulnerable to ‘wind and rain,’ to the threats that escape closure,” 323. See also Kastan 578.

27. Coddin argues that “Twelfth Night pointedly reinforces neither aristocratic nor anti-court values; rather, by exploding the kinds of social classifications propounded by contemporary critics into a multiplicity of slippery, contingent positions, the play subversively confounds holiday and history, festive ‘license’ and contestation,” 312.

Works Cited


Criticism: Production Reviews: Russell Jackson (review date winter 2002)


[In the following excerpted review of the 2001 to 2002 Royal Shakespeare Company season at Stratford-upon-Avon, Jackson observes the erotic and decadent qualities of director Lindsay Posner's staging of Twelfth Night and highlights several individual performances, including Guy Henry's strangely empathetic Malvolio and Mark Hadfield's touching Feste.]

[In the set designed by Ashley Martin-Davis for Lindsay Posner's Twelfth Night,] Olivia's household was represented permanently by the furnishing of [an] alcove on the right of the forestage: black furniture, including a piano, a grandfather clock, a small table, some austere chairs, and a row of ancestral photographs. There were also two telltale Beardsley drawings that slyly indicated her suppressed longings. Orsino's court was exclusively male and military, but he openly indulged himself in the tastes of a fin-de-siecle aesthete. After a mimed prologue representing the storm, in which two figures struggled against a translucent plastic drop that billowed up and away as if it were at once clouds, sea, and a sail, the play proper began with the duke (Jo Stone-Fewings) listening to a melancholic performance on flute and guitar. The walls of his apartment were hung with a collection of decadent art, including more or less erotic and vivid contributions from Klimt, Matisse, and others. As confirmation of his openly passionate nature, he also owned a red sofa. In the center of the stage, covering the whole area up to the backcloth, was a flowery reddish carpet, and green louvered screens were drawn across at proscenium-arch level to close off the front for interior scenes. These pulled back to reveal a stormy sky and sea on the backdrop and the very wet Viola and the captain, who came up over a slight rise onto the carpeted acting area, followed by two sailors carrying a large trunk.

Thus Illyria was specific in time and social register but, at the same time, a palpable fiction. It accommodated the social relationships of the play well but did not aim for a realistic sense of the country-house milieu. The program indicated that it was situated in the 1900s, but in fact this was the long nineteenth century beloved of stage designers. The period allows characters to wear swords, employ servants, and show signs of wishing to escape from the sexual and social constrictions of a formal society. Toby's perilous tightrope walk along the edge of social acceptability, ending with his downwardly mobile marriage to the lady's maid Maria (Alison Fiske), paralleled Malvolio's hapless social and romantic adventure. (In “Victorian” productions, the more exalted status of waiting gentlewoman usually translates down a class or two.) Olivia treated Malvolio with affection and trust, and for all his self-absorption, he would not have been an implausible or absurd partner for her if she had been minded to match below her degree. Maria's affection for the impossible Toby (Barry Stanton) was touching: when they first appeared, she was sponging the vomit off his jacket after another hard night's drinking. Toby reciprocated with possessiveness, if not the same degree of feeling for her. “She's a true beagle” was followed with an aggressive territorial claim—“and one that adores me”—to which Sir Andrew's
sad “I was adored once” was not so much a moment of pathos as an attempt not to be cut out by Toby's claim to the glamour of being worshipped. Toby's grossness (he vomited on his tie before “A plague o’ these pickled herring”) was accompanied by a constant undertow of bullying, which qualified his regret at the extreme humiliation of Malvolio and confirmed the brutality with which he finally discarded the foppish, vacuously sparkish, and ever-hopeful Sir Andrew (Christopher Good.)

When Toby speaks of being adored, the verb has been heard once already, on Antonio’s lips: in fact the most outspoken passion of the play was that of Antonio (Joseph Mydell) for Sebastian (Ben Meyjes). Viola's brother and his friend were discovered on a bed, which they had evidently shared, Antonio reaching out toward Sebastian, who got up and put on his jacket with no apparent sense of his friend's loving gesture. There was strong suggestion of sexual opportunism in the young man. He emerged from his encounter with Olivia with his shirt hanging out of his trousers, happy to be shown a good time and bribed with pearls when occasion offered. At the end of the play neither Sebastian nor anyone else noticed that nothing had been done to free Antonio, who was left in manacles. Sebastian's willingness to make the most of his bisexuality, according to the circumstances in which he found himself, was an appropriate counterweight to Viola's equivocal situation. Olivia, played with a slightly eccentric precision of enunciation by Matilda Ziegler, was just as ready as Sebastian for the main chance, and her earlier demureness was soon discarded. She positively dragged Sebastian off, first to her bed and then to the altar, and as usual there was a big laugh for her exclamation of “O wonderful” in the final scene at the prospect of two men at her disposal. Cesario/Viola's promotion in Orsino's exclusively male world was signaled by her being entrusted with his clothes when he appeared in his underwear at the beginning of 2.4. There was the by-now-customary moment during “Come away, death” when his hand reached out to her hair, and she yielded for a moment to the impulse to accept the caress. She withdrew when she realized what had happened, but it was not made a moment of embarrassment. At the end of the play, however, Olivia kissed “Cesario,” but Orsino, who had already shown some confusion at the prospect of seeing Viola as his “fancy's queen” in her “woman's weeds,” pulled back from kissing “him.”

At the beginning of the season Viola (Zoe Waite) was passionate but a little too energetic and waggish, which may have been the result of overprojection on a wide stage in a large space. As the season progressed, her performance relaxed and grew in subtlety. Guy Henry as Malvolio tended to get broader and more physical, particularly in the letter scene and in his appearance before Olivia with his trousers rolled up to reveal yellow socks with suspenders and painful-looking cross-garters. He thrust his pelvis at her and lolled his tongue suggestively, bounding about like a demented kangaroo. From his first appearance, his slightly strangulated voice, with a touch of Welsh beneath the overpolished vowels, and stiff gait betrayed the not-quite-complete acquisition of upperclass demeanor. His notions of upward mobility and romance were soon evident. When Olivia gave him her ring to carry to Cesario, he handled it as though it were a love-token for himself and after discovering and interpreting the letter, the conclusion that she loved him was followed by a sob. For all his arrogance and folly, and the absurdity of his behavior, Malvolio's degradation was moving. Only his hands were visible through a grating in the forestage during most of his imprisonment as a madman in the “dark house.” In the final scene, as he learned the cause of his discomfiture, he continued to clutch the now soiled but still potent letter. After a quiet but bitter “I'll be revenged—on the whole pack of you,” his final exit was simple and dignified. He walked quickly but not hurriedly to the back of the stage and off. It was a hard exit to follow, but in one of the productions most revealing moments, Orsino and his men laughed: the women, shocked by both Malvolio and this faux pas, remained silent.

This was an enjoyable, thoughtful interpretation, with some moments of real eloquence, an Orsino who was ardent and handsome enough to justify Viola's love, and an affecting Feste with a wistful voice. Mark Hadfield's fool had acquired an anthology of mannerisms and gags from several sources, including Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, and Little Tich—a famously agile and strikingly diminutive music-hall performer, whose yard-long shoes were alluded to but not quite imitated in Feste's oversized footwear. He was for all weathers but resigned to the effects of the wind and the rain. During his final song, in a production gesture
that has become familiar, Andrew, Toby, and Maria were seen making their exit from Illyria. Joseph Mydell's being the only black actor among the principals emphasized Antonio's status as an outsider, although the final sight of him in manacles had a resonance of which the production itself had not in fact taken notice.

**Criticism: Production Reviews: Kenneth Gross (review date January 2002)**


In the following review of the 2002 Holderness Theater Company production of *Twelfth Night* directed by Rebecca Holderness, Gross praises the minimalist staging of the play and calls attention to its fine dramaturgical effects, including the setting, lighting, dance, and music.

At the opening of Rebecca Holderness's production of *Twelfth Night*, one saw on the stage floor an elongated pile of crumpled sheets of paper. Over the course of the show these were variously kicked at, danced over, scattered, rearranged, and blown away. Given the plot of *Twelfth Night*, the papers suggested the detritus of sea-storm and shipwreck, seaweed and shells, also rejected and lost letters, even discarded scripts and newspapers. Mere litter at one moment, at the next they could be carefully arranged into a circle to create the sad, enclosed garden of Olivia. (Other props were scarce: a stool, a fishbowl, some umbrellas.) Without calling too much attention to the idea, they might have made the New York audience think of the chaos of paper that filled lower Manhattan in the weeks after the World Trade Center disaster—the snow of pages from destroyed offices as well as the innumerable messages, memorials, and photographs affixed to walls in the surrounding neighborhood, fading and tearing over time. This was a *Twelfth Night* after the Eleventh, alive to the sense of mourning and disaster, the feeling for the fragility of things, that sifts through Shakespeare's comedy.

In this minimalist setting (designed by Christine Jones) the words of individual actors could carry a peculiar weight. Shakespeare's text overall came through with great clarity, with a sense of each moment being open to a new thought. One felt a quick, ferociously direct confrontation between speakers, which was by turns comic, seductive, mocking, and aggressive. The disguises so many of the characters assumed heightened rather than blocked this directness, as if their own masks betrayed them, making them speak their minds more clearly and dangerously. This suggested the director's stark reading of the play: that in a world so endangered, the only community worth having is one in which people are ready to challenge each other, to risk offense, if it compels others to reveal their hearts.

Close attention to the text was combined with a more postmodern interest in layers of performance and choreographed movement. Multifaceted forms of music and dance that took their cue from the original text's preoccupation with the erotic and oceanic power of music connected the action of the play. The young, punkish Sir Toby (Jared Coseglia) danced to raucous and noisy techno-music from his boom box. The court of the youthful and melancholy Orsino (Bob Airhart) included a lounge singer (Andrea Haring) who serenaded the duke with old torch songs, including Peggy Lee's “Perhaps.” Feste (Kevin Kuhlke), alone on the stage at the beginning of the second act, strummed Bach on his guitar. And when Viola (Jocelyn Rose), disguised as the boyish messenger Cesario, told the mourning Olivia (Christianna Nelson) how he/she would woo her, she (Viola) broke into a brief impromptu aria, as much to her own surprise as to Olivia's.

A corps of dancers on stage (guided wonderfully by Dan Weltner) also formed an ever-changing, secondary world of bodily motions, picking up on hidden energies in the plot. In the show’s opening scene, for example, two groups of dancers faced each other, moving in wave-like, advancing and retreating masses to create onstage the sea-storm that divides the fated brother and sister—a storm described but never shown in the original text. In Orsino's house, the torch singer seemed to draw dancers onto the stage for an impromptu
tango. And following Olivia's speech acknowledging her fearful love for Cesario, a solitary dancer (Ellie Dvorkin) moved with slow, meditative simplicity across the stage, translating the note of Olivia's love into a different key. Another lone dancer (Brendan McCall), moving behind a scrim, imaged for us the menaced, isolated feelings of Antonio (Craig Bacon), apparently betrayed by the young man he had saved from drowning.

These elements of movement and music—supported by Loren Bevan's sparesly elegant costumes, a subtle score of storm-noises and melodies by composer Elizabeth Stanton, and lush, shifting lighting by Matthew Adelson—did more than just provide a symbolic accompaniment or underscoring for the action. It reinforced the intense, sometimes mysterious sense of complicity that marked the work of the ensemble cast and produced such unexpected turns on the text. A single example will suffice here. Kevin Kuhlke's volatile but reflective, brooding Feste was protective of Olivia, and often distrustful of the work of amateur fools. He could even at moments show a strange solicitude for the very man he had helped to gull, the steward Malvolio (strongly and scarily played by Randolph Rand). This was especially marked in the cellar scene, as the abject, imprisoned servant lay half-naked on the ground, staring into the fictive darkness with wide open eyes. In the original text, Feste, having agreed to convey a letter from Malvolio to Olivia, departs the stage singing a song that invokes the comic Vice of the morality plays, fighting the devil with a wooden sword. At the end, the “old Vice” cries “like a mad lad, 'Pare thy nails, dad / Adieu, goodman devil!'” In this production, while Feste began the song, it was completed by the imprisoned Malvolio as he rose and walked slowly offstage, half stealing the song for himself, half accepting it as a gift. Sung with restrained, dream-like menace, the ditty became both a token of some shifted self-knowledge in Malvolio and an expression of his wished-for (if still comic) revenge against those who had so notoriously abused him.

**Criticism: Production Reviews: Robert Brustein (review date August 2002)**


In the following review of Brian Kulick's 2002 staging of Twelfth Night at the open-air Delacorte Theatre in New York City's Central Park, Brustein contends that Kulick and his star-studded cast barely explored the depths of character and theme offered by Shakespeare's text.

The season being summer, it is time for Shakespeare, particularly Twelfth Night, which, along with As You Like It and A Midsummer Night's Dream, is a perennial favorite of outdoor festivals. In my time, I must have endured a hundred nights of Twelfth Night, one of them not that long ago in the very Delacorte Theater where the current version is being staged, the sole offering of the New York Shakespeare Festival's summer season. Like that previous production, which starred Michelle Pfeiffer and Jeff Goldblum, this one is a celebrity gathering featuring a number of movie and television luminaries. Some of these actors, notably those with stage experience, actually have some chops. Others should have been advised not to serve their theater apprenticeships in important Shakespearean roles.

They have not been helped much by their director, Brian Kulick, whose imaginative contribution seems to have been pretty much exhausted by the visual concept. Walt Spangler's attractive design, set against the green-carpeted, moon-drenched background of Central Park, is composed of a majestic blue fun-park scoop that occupies half the stage, on the rest of which sits a derelict wreck of a blue ship with a huge hole in its side. Through this opening can be glimpsed a bit of the cargo—notably a large nude odalisque—which suggests that Sebastian and Viola might have been engaged in smuggling paintings into the Florentine art market before being shipwrecked in Illyria. The blue ship serves as a prop for the court scenes. The scoop provides the occasion for most of the physical action, which consists mainly of characters sliding down the polished wooden surface on Persian carpets. This is fun for about ten minutes. After the eleventh or twelfth
such prank (and virtually every member of the cast gets a shot at it), it begins to grow a trifle tedious.

This *Twelfth Night* is lovely to look at—Miguel Angel Huidor's colorful nineteenth-century costumes and Michael Chybowski's shimmering lighting are especially attractive. But it lacks a strong interpretive approach other than the way it finds double entendres (otherwise known as Shakespeare's bawdry) in much of the language. Is Kulick trying to prove Viola's belief that “they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton”? To be sure, *Twelfth Night* has many such verbal allusions, the broadest being the way Malvolio unconsciously spells out a rude word for Olivia's private parts. And it may be that Shakespeare's adolescent weakness for sexual puns is especially riotous in *Twelfth Night* (like Feste, Shakespeare in his lighter moments is a “corrupter of words”).

But the play also enjoys a sensual understructure that is almost entirely ignored in this production. The lesbian implications of Olivia's attraction to a young woman disguised as a boy are hardly touched upon, largely because Julia Stiles's Viola fails to summon up more than a pinched smirk in response to Kathryn Meisle's insistent attentions. With her singsong delivery and immobile features, Stiles is the latest in a Central Park tradition of casting untrained movie stars in ingenue roles, and it does not help her already weak vocal projection that the airlines seem to have timed their shuttles over Manhattan to muffle her speeches. Stiles and the considerably more mature Meisle often seem to be in different plays—or, more accurately, different media.

Similarly, although Antonio's passion for Sebastian (Zach Braff) gets some emphasis with the help of a subtle performance by Sterling Brown, the impact of Viola's gender confusion on Orsino's sense of male pride is barely explored. This is not to say that Jimmy Smits's Orsino lacks manliness—he comes off as a very dashing romantic swashbuckler in his red dressing gown and hussar uniform. But once Orsino has established his infatuation with music, the director leaves him nowhere to go. Nor has the composer (Duncan Sheik) provided much in the way of lyrical support. The songs are of indifferent quality, and they are indifferently sung by Michael Potts as Feste.

Where the production finds some strength is in its comic scenes. Oliver Platt as a Dickensian Sir Toby and Michael Stuhlbarg as a spindly Sir Andrew generally form a strong team, looting the beached ship and squirting wineskins at each other. And Christopher Lloyd's Malvolio, a shiny-domed menace out of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, is a good foil for their foolery. But considering Lloyd's genius for manic farce, it is puzzling that he seems too restrained here and fails to capture some of the pain and rejection that lies beneath the pompous self-satisfaction of an egregious ass.

By the time this *Twelfth Night* ends, it seems to be well into its thirteenth night. The production has long since exhausted our goodwill and patience. The recognition scene, in which Viola and Sebastian take about ten minutes to acknowledge that they are brother and sister—surely this is what Ionesco was satirizing in *The Bald Soprano*, where a long-married husband and wife have a hard time recognizing each other despite mountains of evidence—seems even more interminable than the one in *Cymbeline*. We are no longer interested in which Jack gets which Jill, because we've never believed in any of the relationships. There was more sense of the play, and more playful sensuality, in the concluding scene of John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*—in which Gwyneth Paltrow, her wet smock clinging to her delicate body, walked from the sea to alight upon the beach of Illyria—than in this entire plodding three-hour evening.

**Criticism: Production Reviews: John Mullan (essay date 1 November 2002)**

In the following excerpted review of the 2002 Donmar Warehouse Theatre staging of Twelfth Night directed by Sam Mendes, Mullan contends that an overemphasis on the erotic and sensual aspects of the drama, as well as on the suffering of Malvolio, obscured its comic elements and proved detrimental to the production.

We owe to the memoranda book of law student John Manningham our knowledge that Twelfth Night was written just before or just after Hamlet. Manningham records seeing it early in 1602, though until his diary was unearthed in the nineteenth century it was commonly supposed that this romantic comedy of loss redeemed by kind tempests was late Shakespeare. With the confidence of documentary evidence, we now see how close it is to that tragedy of forbidden mourning. Like Hamlet, it opens after a death, and asks how long someone need mourn. Hamlet is told by his mother that, after two months, he has worn his “nighted colour” long enough. In Twelfth Night, Olivia has sworn to devote herself to the “sad remembrance” of her dead brother for seven years, daily watering her chamber “with eye-offending brine”. Manningham described Olivia as a “lady widow”, a mistake that evidences the excess of her grieving. The boy playing her in 1602 must have been veiled and dressed in black, as actresses have been ever since, and the watching student naturally thought her suspended from life by her devotion to the memory of a dead husband. …

… Sam Mendes’s already garlanded new production of Twelfth Night … [begins] by inviting us to disbelieve those who mourn. Characters in inky garb are protesting too much. Mendes has Orsino (a gloomy, angry Mark Strong) and his attendants wearing black, in would-be sympathy with the woman the Duke so self-indulgently “loves”. Yet we soon realize that Helen McCrory’s Olivia is quite ready for something better than doleful seclusion and can scarcely conceal her kittenish inclinations. She smirks under her veil at Feste’s sallies and the tone of her “What kind o’ man is he?”, when informed that “Cesario” will not depart without seeing her, tells us that she is no natural “cloistress”. …

[This] Twelfth Night … puts its faith in sexual allure. Helen McCrory’s Olivia is a chuckling temptress. The director has surely gone awry here. As Olivia strives to warm “Cesario”, she discards her black robe to reveal a transparent black negligée. Viola’s “I pity you” takes on just the wrong implications. Later, Olivia takes Sebastian (Gyuri Sárossy) straight to bed (as she does in the Barnaby Riche tale which Shakespeare transformed into his play). In case we did not follow McCrory’s come-hither tone (“would thou’dst be ruled by me”) and Sárossy’s laddish alacrity (“Madam, I will”), the two emerge, deshabillés, a couple of scenes later. Sebastian’s strange readiness to become betrothed to a woman he has just met is explained away as post-coital euphoria. His lines about it being “wonder that enwraps me thus, / Yet ‘is not madness” duly got a laugh.

“Wonder” is just what the erotic theory loses. In that extraordinary interim where the twins finally find themselves on the stage together, and their presence works its amazement on the other witnessing characters, Olivia exclaims “Most wonderful!” McCrory produced a feline growl of relish, as if contemplating double helpings of the sensual delights that she had so recently enjoyed. Again, everyone laughed, and the moment was lost. The erotic element was emphasized by physical contact. There is a great deal of touching for a play whose two figures of authority, Orsino and Olivia, are supposed to command conventional respect. Sometimes this works, as when Emily Watson’s Viola unconsciously takes Orsino’s hand while they listen to Feste sing, only for both to pull back a moment later. Elsewhere it is distracting. After “Cesario” has captivated him with her tale of her father’s daughter’s concealed love, Orsino seizes his “page” and kisses him/her passionately. This has happened before in productions of the play, but always risks undoing the perplexing growth of feeling in Orsino. “O learn to read what silent love hath writ” was the line from Sonnet 23 projected on to the back of the set as we took our seats. Orsino must find love where it is not expected (and banish the self-regarding amorousness that he has been displaying before). Here, his physical demonstrativeness substitutes for emotional change.

Yet there are successes. The most striking aspect of the staging is the huge picture frame through which characters sometimes enter or depart, and in which they sometimes remain while the action proceeds. Without being reductive, it catches the sense of characters being preoccupied, foolishly or touchingly, by those who
are not present. It also allows Mendes to keep Malvolio, blindfolded and straitjacketed, “in frame” all the
while that the lovers are luckily finding their mates. Indeed, rather against the grain of stage directions,
Malvolio is with us throughout his scenes of confinement. The Folio text specifies “Malvolio within”,
suggesting that he remains concealed as he is tormented by Feste/Sir Topaz. Here, he is entirely visible,
preyed on for our discomfiting entertainment. The impression is strengthened by the playing of Sir Toby
Belch (Paul Jesson) as a would-be tormentor throughout. His final contemptuous rejection of a weary Sir
Andrew (David Bradley) is but the confirmation of what is apparent all along. In this production, Malvolio's
suffering is maximized (though it cannot be appropriate to have Olivia actually strike him when he makes
those absurd advances to her). In large measure this is made persuasive by Simon Russell-Beale's poignant
performance. His self-importance is richly ridiculous—a little camp and very tender of his dignity—yet it
always suggests a kind of torment, finally revealed. …

Mendes's *Twelfth Night* seems not quite able to trust the madness wrought by love and self-love in the
comedy. Confidently performed, eloquently spoken, and accompanied by George Stiles's subtle music and
song settings, it leaves you entertained, but moved only by that foolish steward's inevitable humiliation.

**Criticism: Themes: F. B. Tromly (essay date spring 1974)**

SOURCE: Tromly, F. B. “*Twelfth Night*: Folly's Talents and the Ethics of Shakespearean Comedy.” Mosaic 7,
no. 3 (spring 1974): 53-68.

*[In the following essay, Tromly suggests that folly is a positive force in Twelfth Night, one that allow the
characters to come to terms with life by learning to accept “delusion, vulnerability, and mortality.”]*

Well, God give them wisdom that have it, and those that are fools, let them use their talents.

(I, v, 13-14)

To speak of the ethics of Shakespearean comedy, and especially those of a play so dedicated to “good
fooling” as *Twelfth Night*, smacks of critical perversity. When Feste asks Toby and Andrew, “Would you have
a love song, or a song of good life [a song praising the virtuous life],” the two superannuated roaring boys
surely answer for the audience as well as for themselves. Toby exclaims, “A love song, a love song,” and
Andrew's response, as usual, is a vacuous echo: “Ay, ay, I care not for good life” (II, iii, 32-35). Only a
Malvolio would want to deny the play the cakes and ale of comic release. The vision of romantic comedy
tends to hold the reality principle in abeyance, to dissolve it in music and moonlight, and hence our quotidian
notions of ethical conduct may seem irrelevant to Illyria and the forest of Arden.

Also, one hesitates to dilate on the ethics of Shakespeare's comedies because there is a sense in which the
comic world actively subverts moral codes. It does so by suggesting that people stumble upon rather than earn
their happiness, and hence it reassures us that felicity is not reserved for the conspicuously virtuous. As every
Jack gets his Jill, hormones seem as instrumental as head or heart in bringing about the inevitable mass
marriages. The romantic comedies manage to sidestep the crushing moral issues which lie at the core of
tragedy because they insinuate that mistakes simply don't count. To borrow the Captain's words to Viola,
comedy works to “comfort you with chance” (I, ii, 8).

Whatever the ethics of the comedies may be, they have nothing to do with law. The comic form capitalizes on
an important psychic fact: that breaking the law, and watching it be broken, are deeply satisfying. The
exhilaration which comedy creates stems partially from its systematic violation of statutory law as well as the
law of probability. Shakespeare's comedies insist on the inadequacy of the law, and their denouements often
turn on its violation. In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock gets his comeuppance when his insistence on the
strict application of the law backfires. The attempt of the humorous Egeus to inflict “the ancient privilege of Athens” upon his nubile daughter carries the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into the license of the woods. Nowhere in the comedies does the law seem so inimical and foreign to human needs as in *Measure for Measure*, where the “most biting laws” (I, iii, 19) are often imaged as a beast of prey. Frequently the comedies insinuate that the law is itself unlawful. In his first appearance on stage, Falstaff derides the “rusty curb of old father antic the law” (I, ii, 56), which implies that the law is the true lord of misrule. It is no coincidence that many of Shakespeare's comedies locate their action during a time of Holiday or Carnival, when the proper law is the inversion of law.

This enmity between comedy and law is a consequence of comedy's most fundamental ethical axiom—that only limited moral achievement can be expected of man. Comedy discovers its perspective on morality in its insistence on human weakness. It is that great melancholic, Hamlet, who voices the discrepancy which comedy creates between the demands of the law and man's congenital inability to fulfill them. When Polonius says that he will treat the visiting players “according to their desert,” Hamlet retorts:

> God's bodkin, man, much better! Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

(II, ii, 516-19)

Man delights not Hamlet, nor woman neither, as he has told Rosencrantz and Guildenstern a few moments earlier. The actions of Claudius, Gertrude, and Ophelia, and his mistaken sense of his own cowardice, have given him ample cause to revile human frailty, and yet, for a moment, he contemplates moral failure with a tolerant equanimity. Since everyone merits the whip for misdemeanour, no one should have to suffer what he deserves. Huck Finn, the Hamlet of Hannibal, shares the Prince's point of view when he decides to help the murderers trapped on a sinking steamship:

> I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain't no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it?2

Like Hamlet, Huck never forgets that he is “low-down and ornery.”

No less an authority on comedy than Falstaff endorses Hamlet's and Huck's viewpoint. When Hal tries to shame him for cheating Mistress Quickly, Falstaff replies:

> Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell, and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty.

(III, iii, 158-62)

Shakespearean comedy acknowledges the consequences of the Fall, but, like Falstaff, it proceeds to turn Calvinism inside-out by suggesting that man's frailty should exonerate rather than damn him. For the Calvinist, man is depraved, but for the comic artist he is only deprived. In Shakespearean comedy the key terms for man's limitation are two: frailty and folly. These terms are close in meaning, but not interchangeable. Folly resides primarily in the mind, while frailty is weakness of the flesh. In the romantic comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*, folly predominates, while in the so-called “dark comedies” the emphasis shifts to frailty. But, regardless of differences of emphasis, comedy always fashions a world of diminished moral expectation. Paradoxical as it may sound, Shakespeare's comedies are...
less sanguine about human potentiality than the tragedies. The gentle scepticism of the comedies questions excellence in evil as well as in goodness; as Don John and Oliver discover, comic villainy is destined to incompetence, vulnerable to the sleuthing of a Dogberry.

Twelfth Night, the last and richest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, gathers up the themes of the earlier comedies, and one senses in the play a new exploration of the possibilities of comic form. It is almost as if Shakespeare wrote Twelfth Night after mulling over his earlier comedies and deciding he would have a last try. The most telling manifestation of Shakespeare's new commitment is the play's emphasis on human limitation. None of the other romantic comedies forces us to question human capability in the way Twelfth Night does. None of the earlier comedies gives us so much of the dark side of comedy's moon. The movement from Twelfth Night to Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida (all written in about two years) is not as surprising as it may first seem.3

Twelfth Night is of course not unique among the romantic comedies in its reference to the sadness of things. All the comedies employ what might be called tragic relief. In Northrop Frye's phrase, “in almost any comedy we may become aware of having been delivered from the tragedy.”4 In fact, most of Shakespeare's so-called “happy comedies” begin and end in shadow. A Midsummer Night's Dream, for instance, begins with images of the waning moon, the wasting away of desire, and love won by inflicting injury. It ends with a lamentable comedy (lamentably acted), with the tolling of “the iron tongue of midnight,” and with Puck describing how the screech owl “Puts the wretch that lies in woe / In remembrance of a shroud” (V, i, 366-67). Similarly, the opening lines of Love's Labour's Lost refer to “brazen tombs,” “the disgrace of death,” and “cormorant devouring Time,” and at the end the sombre announcement of the King's death breaks in upon the festivities. A pair of seasonal songs concludes the play, with the song of Winter significantly following that of Spring. Thus, the whirligig of Time brings in his revenges on us all. The romantic comedies always hint at the incompleteness of their vision.

Twelfth Night is a play of much mirth, good fooling. Twelfth Night, itself, we should recall, was traditionally a time of licensed festivity and carnival. Inversions of hierarchy, masqueradings, song, and excessive drink were the disorder of the day. Shakespeare's play beautifully recreates the celebratory nature of its social occasion.5 Yet, the play constantly reminds us that its lovers and roisterers are playing out their games in a context of suffering, hazard, and death. To put it another way, the foreground of the play is festive, but in its immediate background Shakespeare constantly reminds us that life isn't always happy, and in fact cannot sustain happiness for long.

At the outset, we hear of the recent deaths of Olivia's father and brother, as well as a reference to pestilence in the air. Then in the next scene we hear a vivid description of a shipwreck, meet a defenceless young woman cast ashore in a foreign land, and entertain the likelihood of yet another dead brother. The ensuing complication of the action creates confusion and anxiety among the characters, who experience intensely such painful emotions as jealousy and impute ingratitude and disloyalty to the people closest to them. Also, the sub-plot concerning the gulling of Malvolio leaves a bad taste in many readers' mouths and suggests that even foolery has its dark side. The play reminds Clifford Leech of those social occasions on which “we look coldly on the merry-making and the good relationship and see the precariousness of our tolerance for one another, the degree of pretence in all sociability.”6

Perhaps the darkest aspect of the play is its frequent reference to the remorseless attrition of mutability. It refuses to let us forget that “beauty's a flower” (I, v, 47) and that women are as roses, which die “even when they to perfection grow” (II, iv, 40). Even its songs, which dally with the innocence of love, concern themselves with the interment of dead lovers and remind us that “youth's a stuff will not endure” (II, iii, 49). The play ends with Feste's piercingly lonely and plangent song—as we leave the playhouse we walk into the world of its insistent refrain, where “the rain it raineth every day.”
The darkness of the play is not confined to these sombre references to disaster and time's ruthless passage. The action of the plot creates for the audience a constant spectacle of illusion and deception. The limitations of the characters are bodied forth most vividly in their lack of knowledge about the world and themselves. They are constantly deceived about their own identity as well as that of others. To borrow a phrase from Feste, the play gives us “Misprision in the highest degree” (I, v, 50). Shakespeare sharpens the audience's awareness of the characters' illusions by always giving it more information than the people on stage possess. In none of the other romantic comedies is the discrepancy between the Olympian awareness of the audience and the limited awareness of the characters so sustained. Bertrand Evans informs us that in no less than seven scenes in Twelfth Night, the audience holds an advantage in awareness over all who take part. He goes on to say that “In the course of the action every named person takes a turn below our vantage-point, and below the vantage-point of some other person or persons; in this play neither heroine nor clown is totally spared.” Nor, it might be added, is the audience itself totally spared. In Act II, Feste refers to what the Elizabethans called the “picture of We Three” (II, iii, 15-16), which was a picture of two asses, the looker-on becoming the third. The audience's enjoyment of a fictional representation of deluded people ironically suggests that it, too, is part of the picture—the third ass.

To catalogue all the illusions which beset the characters would require a sizeable essay in itself. But a casual sample may suggest the frequency of delusion in the play. Toby gulls Andrew into thinking he has a chance with Olivia; in a parallel action, the downstairs people memorably gull Malvolio with similar hopes for Olivia. Of course they only intensify a process of self-deception in Malvolio which is already well under way. Meanwhile, Viola deludes everyone by posing as a man named Cesario. But it is only with the appearance of Sebastian in Act III that confusion reaches its climax. Antonio is baffled by the apparent refusal of his bosom friend Sebastian to recognize him; Sebastian, in turn, is baffled by the vigor of Olivia's advances (he must have thought that Illyrian women were uncommonly brazen), and by the people who walk up and hit him for no apparent reason; Viola is deluded not only in her ridiculous fear that Aguecheek is a mean man in a duel, but she is also puzzled by Olivia's insistence that they are married and by Antonio's insistence that they are old friends; Toby and Andrew are bruised as well as baffled by the sudden show of manliness on the part of Sebastian (who they think is Cesario); and even Feste, the most distanced and objective spectator in the play, is baffled by Cesario's apparent refusal to recognize him. Feste expresses the pervasive sense of bewilderment when he remarks that “Nothing that is so is so” (IV, i, 8). For its inhabitants, the world of Illyria increasingly assumes the fierce vexation of a dream and even the terror of nightmare. As the play dances to its conclusion, characters increasingly speculate on the possibility that they have become mad. And Malvolio remains locked in his darkened room, accused of madness and demoniacal possession. Like Puck, the audience may well exclaim, “What fools these mortals be.” But there is no Puck-figure in Twelfth Night, no need for supernatural high jinks and magic potions to confuse the characters. The Illyrians are quite capable of creating their own confusion.

The ethics of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, and of Twelfth Night in particular, center on one problem: given the harshness of the world, given man's vulnerability and frailty, given his propensity for self-deception, how can he get by? How can the play resolve itself happily? One indication of Shakespeare's deliberate exploration of comic form in Twelfth Night is that he poses this question explicitly. When Viola realizes that Olivia is in love with her impersonation of a man, she soliloquizes:

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge?

(II, ii, 26-32)
The modulation of tone in Viola's speech suggests the great range of feeling that *Twelfth Night* contains. She begins in the idiom of theology, with sombre reference to “wickedness” and “the pregnant enemy,” but her language soon descends to the reassuringly colloquial: “How will this fadge?” And notice the comic implications of the rhymed lines:

*Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,*  
*For such as we are made of, such we be.*

Although Viola's logic scarcely would suffice in an ethical treatise, it is convincing in the same way as Falstaff's is. Since we are what we are made of, our frailty is the cause of our moral shortcomings, not ourselves. Her clear implication is that man is too frail to be punished. But her question remains: How does life fadge?

As I mentioned earlier, it is always dangerous to imply that comic characters are fully responsible for earning or creating their happiness. Luck is usually involved in bringing about the vital recognition which resolves the plot; at the end of Act V, happiness seems to come wheezing in from the wings. In *Twelfth Night* the appearance of Viola's shipwrecked twin Sebastian intensifies and then suddenly disentangles the perplexities of the plot. If Sebastian had not found a mast in the shipwreck to buoy him up, or if he and his sister had not chanced to meet in Illyria, then the major characters in the play would have remained permanently stuck in an increasingly intolerable situation.

But to say that Lady Luck presides over the resolution of comic plots is not to say that comic characters, frail as they may be, can do nothing to advance the resolution. Most emphatically, Shakespeare's comedies do not embody or advocate a philosophy of fatalism, cosmic do-nothingness. Sebastian does, after all, actively bind himself to the mast that saves him, and he does choose to visit Illyria (even though he doesn't know that his sister is there). If human resolve counted for nothing, then the comic world would become farcical or absurd, and ethical discrimination about its inhabitants would become impossible. Such is not the case in *Twelfth Night*.

As John Russell Brown has argued convincingly, the romantic comedies “do not formulate a judgement in the manner of the history-plays and early tragedies, nor in the manner of satirical comedy, but a judgement is implicit nevertheless.” What we need to discover in *Twelfth Night* is the precise relationship between the plentiful limitations of its characters and the happiness that befalls most of them at the end. What values mediate between the characters' frailty and the fadging of the plot? It may be helpful to recall a sententious couplet that Antonio delivers:

*In nature there's no blemish but the mind;*  
*None can be called deformed but the unkind.*

(II, iv, 347-48)

The word “unkind” here means both “un-natural” and “un-loving.” If, as Brown has suggested, there is an implicit judgement in *Twelfth Night*, it will take its positive force from such values as love, the heart, and nature.

My contention is that folly is the idea which resides at the center of the play's implied values and focuses them. It may seem strange to talk about folly as a positive value, since it would seem to be the opposite of wisdom, and therefore a bad thing. And, at first glance, the constant delusion which the characters suffer would seem to be their greatest limitation, the greatest barrier separating them from their happiness. But a closer look at the plot will change our negative valuation of folly. The task of a satirist like Ben Jonson is to scourge folly, but in *Twelfth Night* it becomes a great and positive, if mischievous, force. Folly bestows upon
the characters the delusions which allow them to embrace their limitations. It liberates those natural qualities
which enable them to pursue a life of fulfillment in a very harsh world. The play suggests that one can come
to terms with life only by accepting the nature of things—delusion, vulnerability, and mortality.

But if the play reveals the wisdom of a foolish acquiescence to nature's order, it unequivocally condemns
passivity. Throughout the play the positive aspect of folly is associated with the notion of spending one's
talents, of sharing one's gifts with the world. The notion of sharing talents appears often in Shakespeare, and
most notably in the early sonnets, which exhort the young man to procreate and thereby increase nature's
store.9 In the language of Sonnet #4:

Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend,
And, being frank, she lends to those are free.

Nature's ideology here seems distinctly socialistic—to those who share, more will be lent. Or, as a popular
collection of ethical sentences put it: “God will increase that little that thou hast, if thou purposest to giue of
that little.”10 The play's emphasis on giving is apparent in its stage-business as well as in its plot and language;
coins, purses, jewels, and rings are constantly being exchanged.

The most telling reference in the play to folly's talents is a remark by Feste: “Well, God give them reason that
have it, and those that are fools, let them use their talents” (I, v, 13-14). The implication of Feste's oblique
remark is that God may well give reason to those who have it, because no one in fact does possess it. The
category of “those that are fools” includes everyone. The fools of the world must live by using their talents.
Giving is the proper fruition of folly.

A brief and very selective glance at Erasmus' Praise of Folly may help to illuminate Shakespeare's concerns in
Twelfth Night. Erasmus' personified Folly is the self-appointed scourge of Stoical restraint, and she identifies
herself with the natural world of impulse, passion and energy. She defines herself as the principle which
makes life and its constricted possibilities not only tolerable, but even fun. “Would life without pleasure be
called life at all?” she asks.11 Constantly she reminds us of how harsh life would be without the amelioration
of folly. Through her banter and foolery runs an awareness, as in the comedies, of the sorrow and limitation to
which man is born. Unlike all the other gifts of the gods, folly is available to all (p. 135).

In the wisdom of her folly she realizes that the examined life is hardly life at all, much less worth living. For
Folly, pleasure and delusion are synonymous. She would agree with Mark Twain's exhortation: “Don't part
with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live.”12 Folly proceeds to
inform us, with characteristic immodesty, that she is the only begetter of all social bonds; without the illusions
which she bestows beneficially on man, everyone in his wisdom would scorn love, friendship, marriage, and
even procreation (pp. 111-13). It is folly's deluded happiness which makes fellowship and sharing possible.
She argues, in short, that all of life is nothing more than a play of folly. The world is a great stage of fools, and
folly is its producer, director, and ever-diligent prompter.

Erasmus' Folly tells us that without folly life is a sombre play, that our illusions and self-love make life
bearable, that folly ministers to our infirmity. Twelfth Night dramatizes and concretizes the Erasmian notion
that life is but a play of folly. In the microcosmic “wooden O,” the Globe Theatre, the price of a penny turns
Erasmus' metaphor into reality. In Twelfth Night Feste, the professional fool, defends the significance of
foolerly (to say nothing of his job) against the attacks of Olivia and Malvolio. It is Feste who states the
hallowed transvaluation which places Folly above Wisdom:

Wit, an't be thy will, put me into good fooling. Those wits that think they have thee do very
oft prove fools, and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says
Quinapalus? “Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.”
Shakespeare frequently uses Feste as a chorus to comment on various renderings of his theme, but to catalogue his remarks on folly is not itself enough. The notion of folly and its talents pervades the play—shaping its plot, individuating its characters, and supplying some of its dominant symbols.

The first two scenes of Twelfth Night have the impact of expanded metaphors, since their distinct environments suggest the contrasts which shape the play's values. The first scene gives us the Duke's too-famous “If music be the food of love” speech and an attendant's revealing description of Olivia's elaborate plans to “season a brother's dead love.” The second scene presents Viola's conversation with the Captain about her shipwreck and the possibility of her brother's survival, and it concludes with her plans to disguise herself and attend the Duke. The rhythm joining the scenes is a common one in Shakespeare: they move from elegant verse to expository prose, from court to country, from the artifice of fashionable poses to the elemental strife of nature. Also, the scenes contrast two quite different attitudes toward life—a prudence which is sterile, since it is isolated from nature and human community, and a folly which is fruitful, since it is open to the hazard of nature and human relationship.\textsuperscript{13}

In the first scene Duke Orsino manifests the constricting prudence of isolating oneself in a world of artifice. Associated with his need for artifice is a self-dramatizing passivity. Thus, his language alternates between magniloquent gesture (he apostrophizes four times), and languorous, cloying sweetness (his stock of adjectives seems limited to “sweet,” “rich,” and “fine”). In his sybaritic self-indulgence, he intends to bombard his sensorium, so that “surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die” (I, i, 2-3). Passivity and lassitude seem to be central ingredients in his notion of love. Images of downward motion dominate his speeches, and it soon becomes apparent that he is a connoisseur of love's dying falls. Whatever enters into the sea of his love, he tells us, “falls into abatement and low price / Even in a minute” (I, i, 13-14). As he leaves the stage, his intention is to lapse into “sweet beds of flow'rs” (I, i, 41).

Although Olivia will have nothing of the Duke, the description of her plans for mourning suggests that the two of them are kindred spirits. Like the Duke, she has adopted a role and intends to play it to the hilt. Her role also is passive and life-denying; she will savour her sorrow and use the brine of her tears to season and indeed pickle “a brother's dead love” (which is not the same as a dead brother's love). The languor of the Duke finds its counterpart in Olivia's unnatural rigidity; for seven years (no more, no less) she will impose on herself the regimented life of a cloistress and “water once a day her chamber round / With eye-offending brine” (I, i, 30-31). Doubtless, she will place saucepans in strategic places, so that her tears won't streak the furniture. Implicit in Olivia's scenario is a callow contempt for time and nature. She must learn the lesson that Benedick learns in Much Ado about Nothing; as Don Pedro says of Benedick's tidy plans: “Well, you will temporize with the hours” (I, i, 244).

The second scene of the play carries us from the sea of Orsino's hungry love and from Olivia's briny tears to the driving element that casually splits ships in two. The cloistered world of the Duke's canopied bowers and Olivia's chamber gives way to a liquid world of hazard. The sea symbolizes the relentless reality which both Orsino and Olivia have structured their lives to avoid. But their self-indulgent roles are a luxury which chance doesn't afford Viola. She must set aside her sorrow for her brother and get on with the difficult business of living. The briskness of her language stands in sharp contrast to Orsino's prolixity and suggests the pressure of the moment:

\textit{And what should I do in Illyria?}
\textit{My brother he is in Elysium.}
\textit{Perchance he is not drowned. What think you, sailors?}

(I, ii, 3-5)
Though Viola realizes that “nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution” (I, ii, 48-49), yet she takes the calculated risk that the Captain's mind accords with his trustworthy appearance. She must rely on other people to survive. With surprising rapidity, she formulates an ad hoc plan of action—to disguise herself and serve the Duke. Viola realizes the hazard of the future, but she still manages to commit herself resolutely to it: “What else may hap to time I will commit.” Unlike the Duke and Olivia, Viola opens herself to the processes of time and nature. Using imagery that suggests childbirth and maturation of fruit, she hopes that she might not

Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
What my estate is.

(I, ii, 42-44)

Her final words to the Captain suggest her stance toward life: “I thank thee. Lead me on” (I, ii, 64).

As many critics have noted, the movement of Shakespearean comedy is toward community; in the final scene congestion takes on symbolic value. Twelfth Night is no exception; it opens with its central characters in isolation and it reaches its resolution when they come together. The principal human agent for creating this community is Viola. This is not to suggest, however, that she foresees the happy consequences of her actions. Until the final scene, Viola has every reason to fear that her disguise has begotten disaster. When she realizes that Olivia loves her, Viola invokes a higher power to resolve what seems a hopeless dilemma: “O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie” (II, ii, 39-40). Not only does her disguise as the page Cesario lead a woman to fall in love with her, but it also prevents the man she adores from recognizing her proper sex. Yet Shakespeare also suggests that the delusions created by Viola's disguise serve a positive function, since they draw Orsino and Olivia out of themselves and into the world. Paradoxically, Viola's disguise creates a hard knot of cross-purposes which both entangles the three characters and releases them from themselves.  

Viola's effect on Olivia is immediate and shattering. Significantly, Olivia allows Viola to enter her presence, even though to do so violates the oath she has just taken, only when she learns that Viola is “Not yet old enough for a man nor young enough for a boy … 'Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man” (I, v, 150-53). Because Viola is not threateningly masculine, she is allowed to enter. When Olivia identifies herself as lady of the house (“If I do not usurp myself, I am”), Viola impresses on her the need to share her gifts:

Most certain, if you are she, you do usurp yourself; for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve.”

(I, v, 179-80)

And a few lines later Viola states an argument familiar from the early sonnets:

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave,
And leave the world no copy.

(I, v, 227-29)

Olivia responds with a playfully legalistic travesty of the notion of sharing talents:

O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted. I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoiried, and every particle and utensil labeled to my will. …
But Viola's energetic description of how she would woo Olivia, along with the force of her beauty and sententious comments, shakes Olivia to the core. After she decides to pursue Viola's love, she soliloquizes:

I do I know not what, and fear to find
Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind.
Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be—and be this so!

Her language here is reminiscent of Viola's commitment to time and chance at the end of I, ii. Olivia realizes that her love for Viola may be misguided, and yet she commits herself to an active role in the world. Consequently, her commitment is to folly: “I do I know not what.” Viola's presence has awakened in her the crucial perception: “ourselves we do not owe.” By Act V, Olivia will be ready to love Viola's double—who can return her love. It is Olivia's folly, not a growth into self-knowledge, that leads her to Sebastian. As Sebastian memorably tells her:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.

Our generous delusions are part of nature's bias—they lead us along paths we don't understand, to a joy we fear to expect.

The Duke's response to the disguised Viola is less dramatic than Olivia's; the apparent masculinity which they share confines the Duke's affection to a loving friendship. And yet, in retrospect, it seems clear that the only way that Viola possibly could have reached the Duke is indirectly, through the masculine disguise which she has assumed. Just as Viola's disguise prepares Olivia for Sebastian, so it prepares Orsino for Viola's revealed feminine self, a self which he both sees and doesn't see beneath the thin disguise. The example of Viola's dedicated friendship is the proper antidote to the Duke's conception of himself as a “high fantastical” lover, for whom giddy fancy is the badge of authenticity. For instance, Viola's description of her father's daughter, who loved a man, concealed her love, and “sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief” (II, iv, 113-14) creates a tender pathos. But it also gives the Duke an example of feminine constancy, and suggests how the refusal to love results in sepulchral rigidity. As Feste's song puts it, “In delay there lies no plenty” (II, iii, 47). In the final scene, the Duke discovers the full force of his passion for Viola only in the rich confusion surrounding Olivia's betrothal to Sebastian. The Duke realizes that, unbeknownst to himself, he cares far more about losing his page than Olivia. Just as the shipwreck becomes “a most happy wrack” (V, i, 258), so the Duke's folly carries him to his happiness. In a way that the politic Polonius couldn't begin to comprehend, it is with “assays of bias” and “by indirections” that the lovers find directions out.

If a production of Twelfth Night is to realize fully the play's concern with investing folly's talents in a world of hazard, it must carefully exploit the possibilities of gait and gesture. One of the central metaphors, both in the action and language of the play, is the journey. The willingness of certain characters to journey, to wander by indirection, suggests their openness to life. The play's cloistered figures, on the other hand, employ messengers to avoid undertaking journeys themselves. Until the final scene, Duke Orsino is a virtual recluse. He is, as he says, “best / When least in company” (I, iv, 36-37), and he communicates with the world through messengers—first Valentine, then Viola. He never leaves the refuge of his palace until the final scene when his very appearance at Olivia's house suggests that he is a changed man. At the beginning of the play Olivia too relies upon messengers for her commerce with the world. She dispatches Maria and Malvolio to restrain
the antics of Toby and Andrew, and she sends Malvolio after Viola to present her with a ring. The character who perambulates most in the play is Viola; her constant motion suggests her commitments. And, in the person of Feste, “Foolery … does walk about the orb like the sun” (III, i, 37).

The metaphor of the voyage is perhaps most significant in the subplot concerning the friendship of Sebastian and Antonio. The major function of this brief subplot is to infuse the reality principle into the play, to stress the risk involved in loving. Antonio has befriended the shipwrecked Sebastian, who insists that he must leave his host and search for his sister. Significantly, Sebastian says that “My determinate voyage is mere extravagancy” (II, i, 9-10), which suggests that he (and, by implication, all men) is a wanderer in a world of chance. What he doesn’t know is that, hopeless as they may seem, “Journeys end in lovers meeting” (II, iii, 40).

Antonio resolves at once to follow Sebastian to Orsino’s court, even though he knows the Illyrians have a price on his head for his past military exploits. His brief soliloquy before he exits reveals his commitment:

I have many enemies in Orsino's court,  
Else would I very shortly see thee there.  
But come what may, I do adore thee so  
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.  

(II, i, 40-43)

Antonio’s language and situation here recall Viola in the first act (“What else may hap, to time I will commit”), and Olivia’s closing words in the previous scene (“I do I know not what …”). And, in another symbolic action, when he catches up with Sebastian in Illyria, Antonio insists that his friend take his purse. Antonio stands in the play as a paradigm for giving “without retention or restraint” (V, i, 75). But the danger is not sport, and the giving is fraught with hazard. When Antonio comes to the aid of Viola (who he thinks is Sebastian) in her quarrel with Andrew, he is immediately recognized by the law and clapped into irons. Like another Antonio who hazards himself to help a friend, he doesn’t miss death by far. He is as foolish as everyone else.

The theme of sharing one's talents takes a hilariously comic direction in the person of Sir Andrew Aguecheck. In the play's cast of fools, Andrew is the thing itself, and he admirably discharges the part of the natural fool, the moron. Nature has been uncommonly parsimonious in her gifts to Andrew; he has neither good looks, not wit, nor skills to recommend him. He takes upon himself the demanding role of virile suitor, and, as his surname suggests, he is singularly ill-equipped for it. But nature has compensated for her niggardliness by bestowing upon Andrew a generous capacity for delusion. In the words of Erasmus' Folly, where nature “has kept back some of her gifts, she usually adds a little more Self-Love.” Andrew has the joyful obliviousness of a small boy admitted to his big brother's circle of friends—the mockery of the big people is forgotten in the ecstasy of being part of the gang. Life presents itself to Andrew’s glazed eyes as glorious spectacle; as he fatuously proclaims: “I delight in masques and revels sometimes altogether” (I, iii, 101-102). And the sum of his consciousness seems monopolized by his desperate attempt to remember the big words which his friends use.

Dr. Johnson informs us, with customary forthrightness, that Andrew's "character is, in a great measure, that of natural fatuity, and is therefore not the proper prey of a satirist." Johnson here is not giving folly its due; not only is Andrew not fair game for the predatory satirist, but he is a positive figure in the play. Fool that he is, he is a totally social creature and draws his sustenance from good fellowship. Whatever gifts he may have he is willing to share. It is not merely in regard to his ducats that “He's a very fool and a prodigal” (I, iii, 22). When he tells Toby of his skill at cutting capers, Toby exhorts him to share his great gifts with the world:
Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before ’em? … Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto? … Is it a world to hide virtues in?

(I, iii, 112-18)

(Toby's words are of course an implicit comment on the self-imposed isolation of Olivia and Orsino, which we have seen two scenes earlier.) As always, Andrew takes Toby at his word, and the scene ends with one of the great moments of the play—Andrew vigorously executing spavined capers all over the stage.

Andrew is one of many foils (and fools) which the play sets up in opposition to Malvolio. The discrepancy between the harshness of Malvolio's fate and what the play awards to the other characters is striking, and it compels us to consider whether he has indeed “been most notoriously abused” (V, i, 368). The baffling of Malvolio, like the rejection of Falstaff and the punishment of Shylock, has occasioned so much critical debate that we should be prepared to accept the complex and perhaps ambivalent responses which it evokes. Only the most rigid of positivists would argue that there is a single “right” way to respond to Malvolio at the end of the play. But in the context of the play's examination of folly and its talents, Malvolio's function is clear: he serves as the antitype of the ideas I have been discussing. In terms of the biblical parable, he is an anomaly, a steward who refuses to share his master's talents.

More than anyone else in the play, Malvolio is associated with law. We learn, for instance, that the kind Captain who befriended Viola has been imprisoned “at Malvolio's suit” (V, i, 266-69); the closing lines of the play recall this legal action, perhaps to temper the sympathy the audience may feel at Malvolio's exit. Also, he is the zealous enforcer of law and order in Olivia's household. Ironically his insistence on order seems itself disorderly, since Twelfth Night festivities are properly a time for licensed disorder. His concern for order seems hypocritical, since his own secret desire is to violate the social order by marrying Olivia and becoming owner rather than steward. One recalls Ophelia crying out in her madness: “It is the false steward, that stole his master's daughter” (Ham, IV, v, 171-72).

Malvolio remains isolated throughout the play. His dismissal of the plotters is telling: “Go off; I discard you. Let me enjoy my private” (III, iv, 83-84). As his name suggests, he is the bad appetite, the inward-turning love; Olivia's incisive rebuke points directly to his shortcomings:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets.

(I, v, 85-88)

Olivia's criticism of Malvolio here is occasioned by the anger which he has shown to Feste, and this antipathy to foolery manifests his lack of fellow-feeling. Nowhere is his lack of generosity more striking than in the way he relishes the time when “the pangs of death” will shake Feste out of his folly (I, v, 70).

Although Malvolio of course does not know it, he is the greatest fool of all in the play.17 As Viola tells us, “wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit” (III, i, 66). His delusion that Olivia loves him is monstrous, the offspring of a self-love that is more monstrous yet. The forged letter deceives him with ridiculous ease (an effect magnified by the voluble comments of the conspirators hidden in the box-tree), and he reveals his weakness when he says of the cryptic M.O.A.I.: “If I could make that resemble something in me” (II, v, 112-13). He defines the world in terms of himself, and his folly is totally unredeemed by generous impulse. His intention is to read “politic authors” (II, v, 148).
The punishment which Toby and Maria devise for him (to lock him up in a dark room and convince him that he is possessed by a devil) fashions multiple ironies. First, Malvolio's incarceration recalls his imprisonment of the Captain as well as the virtual isolation he has imposed on himself throughout the play. Also, the darkness of the room suggests his deluded mind; at one point he cries out “this house is dark as ignorance” (IV, ii, 45). And the business about demoniacal possession is also appropriate, since he has been possessed with self-love and since acquiring possessions has been a major aim of his life.  

Malvolio is not the only character to feel the sting of poetic justice for the manipulation of others. Andrew's plans to marry Olivia come to nothing but an empty purse, and his challenge to Viola bloodies his own coxcomb. But even with these disappointments, Andrew's folly remains invincible, his lack of self-knowledge intact. The play metes out a harsher, three-fold punishment on Toby. For his attempt to extend Carnival indefinitely, he is denied the services of Dick Surgeon, who is dead drunk at eight in the morning (V, i, 190-91). For his bullying of Viola, he has his pate cracked, courtesy of Sebastian. And, perhaps most painfully of all, he pays for his exploitation of Andrew when his erstwhile gull humiliates him by offering to help him dress his wounds (V, i, 196-99). The spirit of folly, even though it descends in the play to “sportful malice” (V, i, 355), prevents the calculation of Toby and Andrew from reaching the invidious form it assumes in Malvolio.

At the end of the play, we may feel that Viola, Sebastian, Olivia, and Orsino have had happiness thrust upon them. They have done they knew not what and discovered their hearts' joy. Their folly has allowed nature to draw them, almost in spite of themselves, to her kind bias. The conclusion is especially poignant because of its tentativeness. The play has given full exposure to the hazard of folly, and Feste's concluding song (another stanza of which the Fool sings in King Lear) reminds us that, outside the artifice of the play, the consequences of folly can be hangovers, marital strife, and beggary. The conclusion of the play becomes even more poignant when seen in the context of Shakespeare's career. In the plays which follow Twelfth Night, comedies and romances as well as tragedies, Shakespeare will not allow his central characters to escape the heavy burden of self-knowledge.

Notes

1. All Quotations of Shakespeare are from the revised Pelican Complete Works, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969).
9. “There is no idea to which Shakespeare returns more often than the doctrine taught by the parable of the talents.” Edward Hubler, The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets (Princeton, 1952), p. 95. John Russell Brown terms this idea in the comedies the theme of “Love's Wealth” (op. cit.).
12. The Portable Mark Twain, p. 566.
13. For the relationship between hazard and giving in *The Merchant of Venice*, see Sylvan Barnet, “Prodigality and Time in *The Merchant of Venice.*** PMLA, 87 (1972), 26-30.
17. In several places the play suggests paradoxically that the characters who do not recognize folly are the true fools; cf. Feste’s catechism of Olivia in I, v.
18. For the play on the demoniacal and acquisitive senses of “possession,” see *RII* [*Richard III*], II, i, 107-08. Also, Malvolio’s cry that “They have here propertied me” (IV, ii, 89) ironically reminds us of his acquisitiveness.

**Criticism: Themes: Thad Jenkins Logan (essay date spring 1982)**


*[In the following essay, Logan claims that Twelfth Night—despite its ostensible depiction of a festive and happy resolution—contains glimpses of the darker side of human desire.]*

In a recent article, Richard A. Levin has remarked on the existence of “two alternate approaches to Shakespearean comedy”: the one, exemplified by the work of C. L. Barber and Northrop Frye, focuses on the comedies as celebrations of social order, in which the protagonists are engaged in growth and self-discovery; the other, practiced by W. H. Auden, Harold C. Goddard, and Jan Kott, finds in the plays a “serious treatment of psychological states” and a “negative comment about social conditions.” Levin attributes this bifurcation in critical response to the fact that our response to the plays is fundamentally complex, and it is the complexity of our response to *Twelfth Night* that I mean to discuss here. I propose to consider the play as a Saturnalian comedy which evokes in its audience a recognition of the limits of festivity by abolishing such limits in the stage-world of Illyria. While my thesis may not please those who view *Twelfth Night* as a comedy of romantic education and moral redemption, I am in fact attempting to demonstrate that the divergent approaches cited by Levin may (in some sense) be reconciled if we posit that the locus of growth and self-discovery is the audience.

In *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare presents us with a world given over to pleasure, intoxication, and freedom. Any accurate interpretation must acknowledge the thematic importance of festivity, and critics like Barber, Leslie Hotson, L. G. Salingar, and John Hollander have provided valuable insights in this respect. Yet none of these critics has dealt quite adequately with the particular nature of festivity in this play, and my concentration on the dark side of the carnival world of *Twelfth Night* should be viewed as a supplement to their interpretations. It is clear that festive experience permits of distinctions: a New Year’s Eve party, a Christmas dinner, and a wedding are all festive occasions, but constitute different experiences. Similarly, from a point of view of structure, the formal features which lead Barber to characterize a comedy as “festive” may be discovered in many plays, but crucial differences among the plays exist within that framework. The experience of *Twelfth Night* is very different from that of *As You Like It* or *Midsummer Night's Dream*, plays in which a critic may find similar dramatic elements and a number of formal analogues; I conceive the identifying, distinctive experience of *Twelfth Night* to be a function of the nature of festivity in that play. As its title suggests, the world of this play is a night world, and festivity here has lost its innocence.

Leslie Hotson has noted that the subtitle “what you will” recalls the motto of the Abbaye de Thélème: “fay ce que vouldras.” The phrase suggests that a fundamental concern of the play is what one critic has called
“multiple pleasures and wills to pleasure.” Jan Kott, in a brilliant though idiosyncratic assessment of *Twelfth Night*, asserts that sex is the theme of the play; this is accurate enough but it is incomplete, since the secondary plot is highly significant in terms of stage time, and that plot is not primarily centered on sexuality, but on a set of drives that have to do with food, drink, song, dance, and fun. “Revelry” is probably as good a term as any to describe these particular sorts of pleasure, and I will use it in this essay to refer specifically to them. The relationship between the two plots is, in part, dependent on the fact that revelry and eroticism are closely allied; they are the two faces of Saturnalian experience. *Twelfth Night*, then, is an anatomy of festivity which focuses in the main plot on sexuality and in the sub-plot on revelry; the subtitle implies that these are what we, the audience, want.

It is crucial to recognize that the play makes an appeal to our own drives toward pleasure, toward liberation from the restraints of ordinary life. This is not, finally, an immoral play, but its authentic morality can only be discovered if we are willing to make a descent into the night world: its meaning remains opaque if we insist on seeing at every moment in every play a conservative, Apollonian Shakespeare. (We will do well to remember that Dionysus is the presiding genius of the theater.) *Twelfth Night* is not an enticement to licentious behavior, but it is an invitation to participate imaginatively in a Saturnalian feast.

A pervasive atmosphere of liberty and license is established by the opening scenes. The first thing we recognize about Illyria is that it is a world of privilege and leisure in which the aristocracy are at play. Goddard, whose vision of the play is in many ways similar to my own, calls Illyria “a counterfeit Elysium” (p. 302), and characterizes its citizens as parasitical pleasure-seekers, partly on the grounds that any aristocratic society is founded on “the unrecognized labors of others” (p. 303). Certainly, there are only two characters in the play who seem to have any work to do: they are Feste and Malvolio, whose positions in the social world will be discussed at greater length; for most of the characters, leisure is a way of life. There are no rude mechanicals here. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria are clearly not members of the lower class, although the conventions of comedy and Shakespeare's usual practices have sometimes led directors to make that mistake about them. That the characters of the sub-plot are themselves members of the aristocracy is a significant feature of this play. Olivia and Orsino are at the very top of the social hierarchy; they are young, rich, elegant, and fashionable. The captain who rescues Viola suggests something of their éclat in his initial description of Orsino:

> And then 'twas fresh in murmur (as you know,  
> What great ones do, the less will prattle of)  
> That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.

(I.ii.32-34)

Even the shipwrecked twins are well-off; Sebastian is amply provided for by the doting Antonio upon his arrival in Illyria, and Viola has somehow emerged from the sea with enough gold to pay the captain “bounteously.”

The wealth and social position of the characters are important in several ways and should be established clearly in production; besides setting the action in a framework of aristocratic values, pleasures, and mores, they contribute a great deal to a sense of liberation and license. Characters are, in part, free to pursue “what they will” because they can afford to do so. The financial conditions upon which Illyrian revelry depends are made explicit by Sir Toby: “Let's to bed, knight. Thou hadst need send for more money” (II.iii.182 and 183). Along with economic freedom, the social status of the main characters allows them to pursue pleasure according to their fancy. Orsino is attended by courtiers who provide him with music, and presumably with “sweet beds of flow'rs,” on command; Olivia speaks to Cesario / Sebastian from a position of power, arranging rendezvous as she chooses. Her disorderly kinsman and his guest may be threatened by her displeasure, but they are apparently in no danger from any sort of civil authority; in the brawl that follows the...
practical joke played on Viola and Sir Andrew, it is only the outsider, Antonio, who is arrested.

Political power is, in fact, vested in Orsino; as the Duke of Illyria, he might be expected to function as the parent-figure in Northrop Frye's model of the structure of comedy. From his first speech, however, it becomes clear that Orsino is not going to embody principles of law, order, and restraint in this comic world. In fact, there are no parents at all in Illyria, as Joseph Summers has cogently noted. Here, the social order is in the hands of youth, and wealth and power are at the service of youth's pursuit of pleasure.

It is Malvolio, of course, who fills the dramatic functions of the senex and the blocking figure, but what is curious about Malvolio in this respect is that he is a servant of Olivia. In a comic world noticeably lacking parents, Malvolio becomes a parent figure insofar as he performs some characteristic parental roles: it is he who tells the revellers to be quiet and go to bed. Yet Malvolio is a remarkably ineffective blocking figure; he shows himself powerless to control Sir Toby and Maria, much less to inhibit the actions of the lovers. The figure who stands for law and order in this play is not only the butt of practical jokes, but is, in the structure of the play's society, only an employee. As such, he has no real authority: his "parenting" may be made use of by Olivia when it is convenient, and dispensed with when it is not. No one is morally or legally compelled to obey Malvolio; certainly no one is inclined to do so, nor is anyone inclined to share his stolid, earnest, workaday consciousness.

In the course of the play, the sort of consciousness that Malvolio embodies is literally locked away in the dark. His imprisonment is a striking emblem of the psychic reversal that underlies Saturnalian festivity: impulses that are normally repressed are liberated, while the controls of the super-ego are temporarily held in check. What gives Illyria its distinctive atmosphere is our sense that in this world such a reversal is a way of life. For most of the characters, everyday is holiday. Festivity is the norm here, and misrule is the order of the night.

The audience of Twelfth Night participates imaginatively in an experience of psychic liberation, but does not share the "madness" of the Illyrians; in Freudian terms, our ego and super-ego continue to function normally. There are modes of awareness available to us that are not available to the characters (we hold, for example, the keys to all riddles of identity in this play), and we retain an integrity of consciousness that the characters do not. Freud, of course, conceived of art as a transformation of unconscious fantasy material into a publicly acceptable form; while a Freudian theory of art tends to be limited and reductive, it provides a useful model for an audience's experience of Twelfth Night. Fantasies of love and anarchy, given free rein in Illyria, are presented on the stage, made present for our contemplation as well as our imaginative participation. It is as though we are allowed to be at once asleep and awake; our own fantasies, "what we will," are newly discovered to us. The sorts of things we learn about the night-world of the psyche are profoundly disturbing. Festivity turns out to be fraught with dangers and complications: Eros mocks the individual; Dionysis is a god of pain as well as a god of pleasure.

According to Leslie Hotson, for Shakespeare and his original audience "what the Dalmatian-Croatian Illyria brought to mind was thoughts of wild riot and drunkenness." In the sub-plot of Twelfth Night, as in the Bacchic rites, what riot and drunkenness lead to are violence and cruelty. Among all Shakespeare's comedies, it is only in Twelfth Night and As You Like It that there is literally blood on the stage. It is characteristic of the violence in the former play to be artificial in the sense of being invented by the characters themselves rather than necessitated by the movement of the plot or brought in from outside the comic world by a villain. In As You Like It, for instance, violence is created by the wicked Duke Frederick or by the encounter of man and nature. Because the violence of Twelfth Night, at least that which we see on the stage, is directly or indirectly effected by an appetite for diversion, there is always an element of superfluity about it that is curiously disturbing; it is like the underside of play. Violence in this play is optional, chosen, "what we will."
Freud has taught us that cruelty is the genesis of practical jokes. Whether or not Malvolio deserves his treatment at the hands of Maria, it seems to me that her sadistic impulses towards him are obvious. Once he has been gulled into smiles and yellow stockings, her response to him is “I can hardly forbear hurling things at him” (III.ii.81). Her “sportful malice” creates a web of illusion that is, up to a point, very funny indeed. Yet from the moment Malvolio cries out “they have laid me here in hideous darkness” (IV.ii.29 and 30), he begins to claim a share of the audience's sympathy. His plight is too close to our own nightmare fears, his language too evocative, for us to feel quite comfortable laughing at him. The feeling that the joke has gone too far is voiced by Sir Toby: “I would we were well rid of this knavery” (IV.ii. 67-68). The game threatens to come real: “We shall make him mad indeed,” objects Fabian, to which Maria responds, “The house will be the quieter” (III.iv.133-34). She has, she says, “dogg'd him like his murtherer” (III.ii.76-77), and she is in earnest in her perpetration of psychic violence. That Maria bears the name of the Virgin is another example of the reversal characteristic of Saturnalian festivity.

Once Malvolio has fallen prey to the machinations of the revellers and to his own fantasies, Sir Toby's idea of a good time is to set Cesario and Sir Andrew at one another. He does not, of course, expect blood to be spilled—certainly not his own—but he has not reckoned with encountering the energies of Sebastian. Energy is precisely what he does encounter, however, and it leaves him and his companion broken and bloody. The play discovers to us the fact that festive revelry is likely to unleash psychic forces that are not easily controlled. In the metaphorical language of stage action, the wounded revellers function both in terms of myth and in terms of quotidian experience: in one sense, they are suffering the predictable consequences of a drunken brawl; in another, they remind us that the rites of Bacchus culminate in bloodshed.

There is within the play world one character who provides an ironic commentary on revelry, who seems to know that the pursuit of pleasure can be destructive, and who leads the audience toward a recognition of the emptiness of festive excess. Paradoxically, this is Feste the jester, whose name and office closely associate him with the festive experience. Festivity, as I have suggested, is the conceptual and experiential link between the sub-plot and the main plot; similarly, Feste acts in the play as a link between different sets of characters, moving freely from one group to another, like the spirit of festivity incarnate in the world of Illyria. But oddly, festivity itself, as incarnate in Feste, seems to participate in the principle of reversal characteristic of the play, and hover on the verge of becoming its opposite.

As Feste moves through the world of Illyria, he challenges our assumptions about festivity and foolery; he suggests not only that the fool is the only sane person in this world, but also that festivity is not as satisfying an experience as we might imagine. All three of his songs direct our attention to aspects of experience we might prefer to forget: death, the swift passage of time, and the fact that, on the whole, life is likely to bring us more pain than pleasure. Feste does not often amuse us, or the other characters; we do not often laugh with him—he does not give us occasion to do so. He seems to be, on the whole, rather an unhappy fellow. He is first discovered to us as an employee who may be dismissed; like Malvolio, Feste is a professional. Festivity is work for him, and it is evidently work which has become tiresome. He appears on stage as though he is returning from a long absence; his first words are “Let her hang me!” in response to Maria's scolding that his absence has displeased Olivia. It is easy to imagine Feste played as though he were disillusioned, cynical, and bored. Olivia herself calls him “a dry fool,” says he grows dishonest, and tells him “your fooling grows old, and people dislike it” (I.v.110). Feste is distanced from the other inhabitants of Illyria because he is immune to the lures of drink, love, fantasy, and the distortions they create; he seems to have known these things and come out the other side. The festive experience is his trade; it holds no mysteries for him, and no delights.

Feste and Malvolio are, as we might expect, antagonists. They quarrel early in the play, and in the last scene Feste recalls that quarrel, taking special pleasure in Malvolio's humiliation and the part he has played in it. There seems to be a good deal of personal rancor in his “And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges” (V.i.376, 377). The experience of dislike is not a common one in Shakespeare's comedies, and its appearance here is disturbing. Feste also does not like Viola, who makes a serious mistake about his nature; “I
warrant thou art a merry fellow, and car'st for nothing.” His response is a cold one: “Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible” (III.i.26-30). The straightforward statement of dislike, of a motiveless personal hostility, sounds a new note in the comic world; it is, of course, Feste who at the end of the play will lead us out of that world.

There is a similar moment of “dis-integration” when Sir Toby reveals his true feelings about Sir Andrew: “Will you help?—an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-fac’d knave, a gull!” (V.i.206-207). There is never much sense of a human community established in Twelfth Night. Friendship is not a significant structural feature of the main plot, as it is in Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It. The revellers’ fellowship is broken by the end of the play, and they do not participate in the happy ending. We are, admittedly, told that Sir Toby has married Maria, but we do not see them together on stage at the end.

Antonio, so far as we can tell from the script, is never released from arrest, and Malvolio leaves the stage in anger. Critical notions that the end of the play is a vision of harmony and communal integration seem to me totally unjustified. A social community based on charitable love is never created in Twelfth Night; here, erotic love does not become a figure for charity, and marriage does not symbolize a universal harmony.

“What is love?” asks Feste. The conclusions we are led toward by the action of Twelfth Night are not, on the whole, happy ones. Sexuality in Illyria is mysterious and illusive. “What are we? What would we?” are questions the play sets for its audience. In Feste's lyric, love is the immediate gratification of desire: “Then come kiss me sweet and twenty.” The play, however, begins with a stalemate: desire is frustrated, and fantasies conflict. Orsino wants Olivia, Olivia “will admit no kind of suit.” It is the characteristic situation of courtly love; the roles Olivia and Orsino choose to play are familiar ones. In the course of the play, Shakespeare leads us from conventional modalities of love to a discovery of other erotic truths. This discovery is effected by the relationship of the four lovers as it is played out in the stage-world.

Part of the extraordinary appeal of Viola and Sebastian (and they have been almost as attractive to critics as to the characters in the play) comes from their air of innocence. Both Olivia and Orsino explicitly use the word “youth” on almost every occasion when they speak to or about Cesario. The twins bring a special vernal quality into the play; it is their appearance that breaks the stalemate established in the first scene. They are, in a sense, the green world. A significant number of critics assume that they teach Olivia and Orsino the meaning of love, and redeem the world into which they enter. I believe that such an interpretation does not sufficiently acknowledge our experience of the erotic aspects of the play. It is important, first of all, to notice that both Viola and Sebastian are androgynous.

Throughout the play we are compelled to pay attention to Viola's shifting sexual identity. We see her first as a girl, and watch her make decisions about how to present herself to the world; the idea of disguise thus becomes prominent, and entails the awareness that we ordinarily determine gender by dress, by appearance. The possibility of disguise suggests that there is something arbitrary about identity, and a disguise that involves a change of gender similarly suggests that our apprehension of sexual identity is mutable and susceptible to illusion. After her first scene, Viola never again appears to us as anything but a boy; unlike Rosalind, she does not re-assume her “woman's weeds” at the end of the play. A number of lines in the play draw attention to her disguise. The most notable is Orsino's description:

Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

(Liv.31-34)
A modern audience perceives this as a moment in which Orsino is close to discovering the “truth” about Cesario; Shakespeare, however, must have written the lines assuming that Orsino would deliver them to a boy disguised as a girl disguised as a boy. Viola, in fact, seems to be both a boy and a girl, and is romantically involved with both a man and a woman.

Sebastian also combines characteristics of both genders, Although I have remarked on his energy, Sebastian says of himself (on parting with Antonio), “I am yet so near the manners of my mother, that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me” (II.i.40-42). In relation to both Antonio and Olivia, Sebastian takes a passive, classically feminine role; he enjoys their attentions, and allows them to present him with lavish gifts. Now in one sense Antonio is a nurturing parent-figure, and again the principle of reversal is operative; the parent is subservient to the child: “If you will not murther me for my love,” cries Antonio, “let me be your servant” (II.i.35-36). Antonio not only speaks to Sebastian like a doting parent, however, but also like a lover. Against Sebastian's wishes, he has followed him to Illyria:

I could not stay behind you. My desire
(More sharp than filed steel) did spur me forth,
And not all love to see you (though so much
As might have drawn one to a longer voyage)
But jealousy what might befall your travel.

(III.iii.4-8)

Like Viola, Sebastian is involved in erotic relationships with both a man and a woman.

The twins' androgyny may be, as some critics have suggested, related to their youth and innocence, but it also makes any romantic relationship into which they enter suspect. As soon as Viola/Cesario becomes an object of desire, we are drawn into the night world. Insofar as Viola is a girl, her encounters with Olivia inevitably suggest lesbianism; insofar as Cesario is a boy, all his relations with Orsino suggest homosexuality. Barber, in attempting to deal with this issue, assures us that “with sexual as with other relations, it is when the normal is secure that playful aberration is benign.” Undoubtedly, but what sexual relation can we perceive as normal in Illyria?

What we see on stage in the course of the play is a delirious erotic chase; Viola pursues Orsino who pursues Olivia who pursues both Viola and Sebastian, who is pursued by Antonio. Salingar has noted that “the main action of Twelfth Night, then, is planned with a suggestive likeness to a revel.” Indeed. And the sort of revel it is most like is an orgy. Ordinarily, sexual experience is private, and involves two partners. In orgiastic experience, the number of possible sexual partners is multiplied, and distinctions of gender become less important. On the stage, we see Sebastian erotically linked with Antonio and Olivia, Orsino with Cesario and Olivia, Viola with Orsino and Olivia, Olivia with Viola and Sebastian. For the spectators of this “whirligig,” and for the characters caught up in it, the complexities of eroticism in Illyria are dizzying.

There never is, needless to say, a real orgy; the playwright is in control of the revels, after all, and the comedy ends in marriage; sexual energy is channelled into appropriate social institutions. In Barber's words, “delusions and misapprehensions are resolved by the finding of objects appropriate to passions.” Well, yes. Orsino marries Cesario, who loves him, and Olivia marries a man. But by this time passions have so slipped their moorings in terms of objects of desire (who, for example, does Olivia love?) that this finding of objects appropriate to passions seems rather like a game of musical chairs. My point is that the marriages at the end of Twelfth Night do not convince us that sexuality is ever ordered and controlled with regard to the individual in society.

In the final scene Olivia and Orsino claim their partners. There is no doubt, from an audience's perspective, who is in control here: Olivia and Orsino are older and they possess social status that the twins do not; they
further control the scene in the special theatrical sense of having most of the lines. Olivia has already, by the
last scene, engineered a marriage with the complaisant Sebastian. Having effect ed her own wedding by sheer
force of will, it is Olivia who moves at the end of the play to arrange the betrothal of Viola and Orsino:

My Lord, so please you, these things further thought on,
To think me well a sister as a wife,
One day shall crown th' alliance on't, so please you,
Here at my house and at my proper cost.

(V.i.316-19)

Orsino embraces her offer, and takes Viola's hand. It is important to remember that if we saw this scene in a
theater, we would see him take Cesario's hand; the actor is still dressed as a boy, as he is some moments later
when Orsino leads him from the stage.

Throughout the play, Olivia and Orsino are self-absorbed, self-willed and self-indulgent creatures: there is no
evidence that they change significantly as a result of their encounters with the twins. Orsino's last words,
like his first, are about himself: “But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's
queen” (V.i.387-88). He is still speaking of “fancy.” Orsino's anagnorisis seems to involve only the
recognition that if he cannot have Olivia he may as well take Cesario: “I shall have share in this most happy
wrack” (V.i.266). Similarly, there is no reason for an audience to believe that Olivia has made meaningful
discoveries about the nature of love. If she was headstrong and reckless in loving Cesario, it is hard to see her
as docile and prudent in her relations with Sebastian. At the end of the play, as at the beginning, Olivia is
doing precisely what she wants to do.

While Olivia and Orsino have not really learned anything about love during the play, we in the audience have.
As I have suggested earlier, when external obstacles to the pursuit of love are removed, as they are in Illyria, it
is the nature of passion itself that lovers must contend with. “Bright things come to confusion” readily enough
in our world without the interference of blocking figures. Love, first of all, can be unrequited. It is, horribly
enough, possible to love someone who—for no good reason—just does not return that love. Olivia makes it
perfectly clear:

I cannot love him,
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
In voices well divulg'd, free, learn'd, and valiant,
And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
A gracious person. But yet I cannot love him.

(I.v.257-62)

Orsino responds, “I cannot be so answer'd,” and continues to long for what he cannot have in a particularly
elegant, “poetical” fashion. Olivia, faced with rejection by Cesario, takes a more active approach; her
“headstrong potent fault” finds expression in direct, aggressive confrontation with Cesario. It is Viola whose
response to loving without requital has become best known:

She never told her love,
But let concealement like a worm i' the bud
Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

(II.iv.110-15)
It has been argued that this is not really an accurate description of Viola; perhaps it is exaggerated, but certainly Viola's reaction to loving one who loves another is of this same kind; she waits for “Time” to resolve a painful situation made more painful by her concealed identity. It seems to me very peculiar to regard this as a norm or an ideal, as some critics suggest.\textsuperscript{23}

At last, of course, Viola has her reward; Orsino's love for Olivia, which could “give no place, bide no denay,” suddenly turns to her. That love can so turn is another of its characteristics that \textit{Twelfth Night} discovers to us; again, it is an old truth. Here, in a comic structure, love's capriciousness works toward a comic resolution of the plot. Orsino can, after all, love Viola; Olivia can just as well marry Sebastian as Cesario. Yet Dr. Johnson's objection to Olivia's marriage is, as one might expect, lucid and to the point.\textsuperscript{24} Only in myth and ritual are twins the same person, and while the stage world is, in part, a mythic realm, theater—and Shakespeare's theater in particular—is closely bound to the empirical, naturalistic world the audience inhabits. In that frame of reference, Olivia abandons her vow of chastity to pursue the first new man she meets, marries his (her) twin brother by mistake, and seems willing to transfer her affections to a man she does not know because he looks like the one she fell in love with.

The crucial point is this: at the end of the play we perceive that love really has little or nothing to do with personality. It is, as Kott has said of love in \textit{As You Like It}, an electric current that passes through the bodies of men and women, boys and girls.\textsuperscript{25} Passion violates identity. That this is true in terms of the individual's consciousness is a truism. “Ourselves we do not owe,” cries Olivia, succumbing to her feelings for Cesario. The action of \textit{Twelfth Night} suggests that it is not only the personality of the lover that is disrupted by passion: it is personality itself, the whole concept of unique, distinct identity. Cesario, the beloved, is both Viola and Sebastian; it really doesn't matter. Olivia and Viola are ultimately as interchangeable as their names suggest. As in Spenser's Garden of Adonis, forms change, but Form remains; here, however, the “Form” is not a structure or a pattern, but energy, energy which propels individuals, sometimes against their will, toward others who may or may not be so moved. Such, it seems to me, is love in \textit{Twelfth Night}.

Shakespeare has made similar suggestions about the nature of love in \textit{As You Like It} and \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, plays which also deal with psychic liberation; yet these plays do not lead us to a dark vision of the psyche. Nor do they have the melancholy tone of \textit{Twelfth Night}; the language of this comedy is unusual in being not bawdy but grim. There are remarkably few ribald puns in \textit{Twelfth Night}; by my count, there are twenty-nine references to madness in the play, twenty-two references to disease, twenty-five to devilry, and thirty-seven to destruction and death. The play's somber language would seem to be at odds with its festive structure; in my view, the structure and language are particularly compatible given the nature of festivity in \textit{Twelfth Night}.

One difference between Illyria and the Wood of Athens is that in the wood, powerful and ultimately benevolent beings exist to set things right, beings who are intimately allied with, indeed embodiments of, the natural world. Illyria is a city, not a forest. In \textit{Twelfth Night}, unlike \textit{As You Like It} and \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, festivity is divorced from pastoral, and this is crucially important to our experience of the play, since it means that sexuality is not perceived in relation to nature.

The concept of nature which the Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages made a distinction between material phenomena (natura naturata) and an organizing principle (natura naturans); the latter was conceived as a structuring energy which, under Divine Providence, brought the physical phenomena into existence and patterned their being. As a manifestation of natura naturans, sexuality may wreak havoc in individual lives, but pursues its own ends of fertility and generation.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, as in \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, a loss of identity can result from being subsumed in forces greater than the conscious self; personality may be blurred or erased by these forces, but finally they are beneficent in that they drive towards the preservation of life. The multiple marriages at the end of \textit{As You Like It} provoke even from Jacques the comment (the realization), “these couples are coming to the ark.” But in \textit{Twelfth Night}, the absence of pastoral distances festivity from fertility,
just as the absence of bawdry distances sexuality from a simple, homely pleasure that all humans share with the beasts.\textsuperscript{27} Illyria is beautiful, aristocratic, and sterile.

Festivity in \textit{Twelfth Night} is divorced not only from nature, but, as I have indicated, from occasion. It is not a temporary release from social restraints but a permanent condition. The Forest of Arden and the Wood of Athens are places into which people enter in the course of the play and from which they will return; there is, to paraphrase Ralph Berry, “no escape from Illyria.”\textsuperscript{28} The marriages there do not seem to place erotic love in a community, or to anchor it in a social life where impulses are ordered—not necessarily repressed, but controlled and contained.

That ordering, in a healthy society, provides more, rather than less individual freedom; the ability to control drives and impulses means, for the individual, freedom from the tyranny of the unconscious, while societal restraints ultimately protect the individual from the tyranny of others. The real tragedy of Malvolio lies in the fact that in this play the principle of order has become too rigid and too perverse to accommodate pleasure. Of course we laugh at him, he is ridiculous, yet his expulsion from the comic world brings an end to “Shakespeare's Festive Comedy,” since it means that sobriety and intoxication, parents and children, workday and holiday, restraint and release, cannot be reconciled. In this way, Malvolio's exit is as disturbing as Mercade's entrance in \textit{Love's Labours Lost} with his message of death. We feel, in the audience, the necessity of somehow making peace with him, and he is gone. His last line must certainly include everyone in the theater.

The play itself has discovered to us the dangers of life without the principle of order that Malvolio stands for; Feste's final song serves as a vivid reminder. The Rabelaisian ideal of freedom (the Abbaye de Thélème) only is possible when human nature can be trusted; doing what we will can be a horror if the forces that drive us are dark. In \textit{Twelfth Night} Shakespeare leads us to explore the possibility that our drives to pleasure are ultimately irreconcilable with social and moral norms of goodness; it is the antithesis of \textit{As You Like It}, which works from the hypothesis that people are basically good at heart. In \textit{As You Like It}, the characters and the audience arrive at a restoration of the world; in \textit{Twelfth Night} what the characters and the audience come to are the limits of festival, and at that extremity are violence and indiscriminate passion.

The play does not so much tell us but show us that these are what we want. It is the audience who finally approve, with their laughter and applause, the actions of the characters. I do not mean to suggest that we should not laugh and applaud, or that we should become a community of Malvolios, hostile to pleasure. This is a very funny play, and nearly all the characters—certainly including Orsino and Olivia—are enormously appealing. That is just the point. What I am suggesting is this: to delight in the pranks of the revellers is to participate vicariously in a form of Dionysian frenzy; to assent to the ending, to confirm it as a “happy” one, is to embrace the possibility of erotic love as trans-personal and trans-sexual. But the play does not wholeheartedly confirm the value of Saturnalian pleasure; if it is not sentimentalized in production, if festivity is allowed to reach its limits, then the play itself will create an awareness that “what we will” is potentially dark and dangerous.

\textbf{Notes}

view the locus of this surfeiting is the audience. The text used throughout this essay is *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

3. Hotson, p. 158.
6. Salingar links the sub-plot and the main plot with reference to the Elizabethan trope of love as madness, and allies madness with revelry.
10. Joseph Summers, “The Masks of *Twelfth Night,*” *The University of Kansas City Review* 22 (October 1955): 25. Summers makes several interesting points, among them that Olivia and Orsino embody conventional, literary modes of love (p. 26), and that Feste “is the one professional among a crowd of amateurs” (p. 29). His interpretation of the play as a whole, however, is quite different from my own.
13. The revels of the “lighter people” in *Twelfth Night* have perceptible affinities with the rites of Dionysus, not so much because Shakespeare was influenced by classical drama or myth, as because he was aware of certain characteristically human modes of experience. Another way of seeing this is to follow Hotson and Barber in affirming the close ties between Shakespeare's drama and traditional British forms of festivity, themselves descended from a Northwest European paganism which in many ways parallels that of the classical world. Sir James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* (1922; abridged edn. London: Macmillan, 1923), provides an exhaustive commentary on the pre-Christian rituals of Europe and their structural similarity to the rites and myths of antiquity. His comments on “The Roman Saturnalia,” pp. 583-87, are particularly relevant to *Twelfth Night*. Robert Graves, in *The Greek Myths* (New York: Braziller, 1955), also draws explicit parallels between those myths and European paganism.
15. Goddard also notes Maria's cruelty (p. 298). I disagree, however, with his conclusion that this cruelty would go entirely unnoticed by an audience in the theater.
17. Walter N. King, in his Introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, notes that Cesario “roused the best qualities in Orsino and Olivia” (p. 10), and concludes that “as each reaches out toward union with Cesario, each is concurrently discovering what love is and is not” (p. 9). Although Goddard
conceived the ending of the play to be ambiguous, he saw the possibility that “these two beings from outside Illyria … will redeem that world by lifting it at least a little toward a more spiritual level” (p. 304). Barbara Lewalski, in “Thematic Patterns in Twelfth Night,” Shakespeare Studies 1 (1965): 168-81, sees Viola and Sebastian as types of Christ, and Hassel remarks on Viola’s “ministry” to Olivia and Orsino.


21. Barber, p. 244.

22. In his chapter on Twelfth Night in Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), Ralph Berry argues convincingly that “they have begun neither to understand nor confront their problems” (p. 211). Berry's sense of the play is very similar to my own, although he focuses on different elements.

23. Porter Williams, Jr., for example, states that “Viola is always the touchstone” (p. 198). Summers sees her as “a standard of normality” (p. 29), while Goddard finds her “a being of higher order … a Lady from the Sea” (p. 304).


27. Barber also notes the scarcity of “direct sexual reference” (p. 258).

28. Berry titles his chapter on As You Like It “No Exit from Arden.”

**Criticism: Themes: Camille Slights (essay date July 1982)**


*[In the following essay, Slights maintains that Twelfth Night illustrates the thematic principal of reciprocity as the foundation of successful human relationships.]*

Like Shakespeare's other romantic comedies, Twelfth Night moves from personal frustration and social disorder to individual fulfilment and social harmony by means of what Leo Salingar has shown to be the traditional comic combination of beneficent fortune and human intrigue.¹ This basic pattern, of course, takes a radically different form in each play. In comparison with many of the comedies, Twelfth Night begins with remarkably little conflict. The opening scenes introduce no villain bent on dissension and destruction, nor do they reveal disruptive antagonism between parents and children or between love and law. In contrast to the passion and anger of the first scene of A Midsummer Night's Dream, the restless melancholy that pervades the beginning of The Merchant of Venice, or the brutality and tyranny that precipitate the action in As You Like It, the dominant note of Orsino's court and of Olivia's household is static self-containment. To be sure, both Orsino and Olivia sincerely profess great unhappiness, but, as many critics have noted, a strain of complacent self-absorption dilutes the poignancy of Orsino's love-melancholy and of Olivia's grief. Orsino's concentration
on his own emotions cuts him off from real personal relationships as effectively as does Olivia's withdrawal or Sir Toby's careless hedonism. The self-absorption of the native Illyrians and Viola's involuntary exile present a spectacle of isolation rather than confrontation, not so much a society in disorder as a series of discrete individuals without the interconnexions that constitute a society.

While the beginning of *Twelfth Night* is unusually static, the conclusion is strikingly active. Far from tying up a few loose ends, the last scene contains major events in both the double main plot and the sub-plot. Both pairs of lovers meet with full awareness for the first time. Viola finally wins Orsino's love, Orsino and Olivia, in different ways, discover whom it is they love, and Malvolio is released from imprisonment. Beginning calmly and purposefully enough with Orsino's first attempt to woo Olivia in person, the scene gathers intensity through a series of increasingly bitter confrontations. Orsino's banter with Feste is interrupted when Antonio appears, ominously under armed guard. Recognition as the duke's old enemy, however, is less galling to him than the apparent ingratitude of Sebastian (Viola-Cesario). At Olivia's entrance the tone darkens further with Orsino's jealous spite and threat to murder his presumed rival, to 'sacrifice the lamb that I do love' (V. 1. 130). On the priest's confirming Cesario's marriage to Olivia, Orsino's rage is replaced by even more bitter contempt at such betrayal. In quick succession Viola-Cesario has provoked condemnation as an 'ingrateful boy' (l. 77) from Antonio, sorrow at the faithless cowardice of her new husband from Olivia, and, from the man she loves, a threat of death and disgusted rejection as 'a dissembling cub' (l. 164). The crescendo of pain and anger climaxes in the bloody spectacle of Sir Andrew's and Sir Toby's broken heads and Toby's vicious attack on his friend: ‘Will you help?—an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin-fac'd knave, a gull!’ (l. 206).

At the midpoint of the scene, as Sir Toby and Sir Andrew exit to find help for their bleeding heads, Sebastian enters and the scene reverses direction. In the first half, relationships disintegrate in the whirling confusions of mistaken identities emanating from Viola's disguise. In the second half, new relationships form from the revelation and identification of the twins, Sebastian and Viola. The scene performs the conventional function of uniting lovers and reuniting family, but the emphasis is less on restoration and reconciliation than on the discovery of unexpected relationships and acceptance of new obligations. Sebastian's reunions with Antonio and Viola reveal that Olivia is betrothed not to a cowardly faithless boy but to a strong loyal man. By identifying Viola, Sebastian's appearance transforms Orsino from Cesario's master and Olivia's unsuccessful suitor into Viola's future husband and Olivia's prospective brother-in-law. Viola suddenly hears herself hailed as Olivia's sister and Orsino's mistress. Through marriages prospective and already performed, Maria, Toby, Olivia, Sebastian, Viola, and Orsino become one extended family, in households where Malvolio, Fabian, and Feste have secure positions.

In *Twelfth Night*, then, the comic movement from disorder to harmony is more particularly the transformation of isolation and fragmentation into mutuality and cohesion. The personal and societal problems at the beginning of the play result not from envy, aggression, or malice, but from a perhaps no less insidious, and equally universal, ambition for self-sufficiency. As the social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss points out, mankind has always dreamed of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing. At either end of the earth and at both extremes of time, the Sumerian myth of the golden age and the Andaman myth of the future life correspond, … removing to an equally unattainable past or future the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might keep to oneself.\(^3\)

Orsino's vision of self-surfeiting desires, Olivia's projected isolation, Toby's life of unconfined pleasure, and Malvolio's 'practicing behavior to his own shadow' (II. 5. 17) are all versions of this dream of inviolable autonomy. Their various attempts to create these solipsistic paradises in Illyria produce an atmosphere of sterility, a society without cohesion. While a current of self-indulgence runs through Orsino's and Olivia's
pain, the real dangers of isolation from the protection of human society threaten the more cheerful characters. Viola and Sebastian are separated and shipwrecked in unknown country, Sir Toby and Feste are threatened with dismissal from Olivia's household, and Antonio is banned from Orsino's territory on pain of death. By the end of the play this sense of incipient disintegration has disappeared from the enlarged and cohesive group, and the communal joy and affection are achieved largely in terms of what Lévi-Strauss, in the passage quoted above, calls the law of exchange.

Instead of celebrating personal and social harmony with the dancing and wedding festivities that end most of the comedies, the final scene of Twelfth Night demonstrates the mutual obligations imposed by the complicated new relationships. Public recognition of Viola's female identity depends on recovering her 'maid's garments' (l. 275) from the sea captain who befriended her. The captain, in prison under some legal obligation to Malvolio, cannot be released until Malvolio is satisfied. The need for Malvolio reminds Olivia of her responsibility to him and Feste of the letter in his charge. The letter brings Malvolio's release, which in turn precipitates Fabian's confession of responsibility. Meanwhile Olivia's and Sebastian's wedding festivities wait on Orsino's and Viola's, and Viola remains Cesario until Malvolio is pacified. This cycle of mutual dependence gives an open-ended quality to the ending of the play. Our confident expectation that 'golden time' (l. 382) will bring happiness to the lovers is complemented by our sense of continuing obligations. Reciprocal love, the design of Twelfth Night implies, naturally culminates not in a private dream-world of complete fulfilment, but in the give and take of human society.

This happy, albeit imperfect, ending is possible only when the major characters have come to terms with the inescapable mutuality of communal life through a series of exchanges, often financial transactions. We usually think of The Merchant of Venice as Shakespeare's treatment of the relationship of wealth to love, but, as Porter Williams, Jr, has pointed out, 'seldom in a play does money flow so freely' as in Twelfth Night.4 Viola gives gold to the sea captain, Antonio gives his purse to Sebastian, Orsino sends a jewel to Olivia, Olivia showers gifts on Cesario, Viola-Cesario offers to divide her wealth with Antonio, and they all repeatedly give money to Feste. Economic advantage is not a prime motive for any of the characters, but hardly a scene goes by when they are not engaged in giving or receiving money or jewels. The lovers in the forest of Arden may rely on Hymen to arrange their nuptials, but in Illyria Olivia knows that someone must pay for the double wedding that is to replace the differences and frustrations of the past with a joyous alliance:

My lord, so please you, these things further thought on,
To think me as well a sister as a wife,
One day shall crown th'alliance on't, so please you,
Here at my house and at my proper cost.

(V. 1. 316)

Illyria definitely is not Gonzalo's imaginary commonwealth without trade, service, or riches.

This emphasis on giving and receiving serves, as Porter Williams says, to contrast the generous and loving nature of Viola, Orsino, and Olivia with the selfishness of Malvolio and Sir Toby, but he oversimplifies, I think, when he suggests that the money and gifts that change hands so freely 'symbolize generous love and friendship' and that 'such giving and receiving must be done without counting the cost or measuring the risk' (p. 194). Orsino's financial generosity is patently not identified with generous love. Admittedly, he does not count the cost in his courtship of Olivia. His motives are not mercenary and his emissaries bear jewels; nevertheless, his love is self-regarding. In the first scene, for example, when he makes the expected pun on Curio's suggestion to hunt the hart, he first seems to be directing his thoughts beyond himself, thinking of the noble Olivia:
Will you go hunt, my lord?

DUKE.

What, Curio?

CUR.

The hart.

DUKE.

Why, so I do, the noblest that I have.

(I. 1. 16)

But immediately we discover that the noble heart Orsino pursues is his own:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.

(l. 18)

His love for Olivia does not give rise to thoughts of serving her or sharing with her but of reigning supreme in her:

These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and fill'd
Her sweet perfections with one self king!

(l. 36)

In the meantime he seeks solitude: ‘for I myself am best / When least in company (1. 4. 37).

Viola too is generous, but, while her love is more selfless than Orsino's, her economic liberality is less purely spontaneous and more thoughtful. When she gives gold to the sea captain, she does so explicitly in gratitude for the comfort he has given her: ‘For saying so, there's gold’ (1. 2. 18). She promises to pay him more in return for specific help she requests from him:

I prithee (and I'll pay thee bounteously)
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent.

(1. 2. 52)

She is fully aware that she takes a risk in trusting him:

And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.
And she is not averse to reinforcing his good will with the hope that ‘It may be worth thy pains’ (l. 57). Just as she gladly pays for help she needs, she expects to earn her way with the duke she proposes to serve, confident that she can prove ‘worth his service’ (l. 59). Like the other characters, Viola is tempted by the attractions of solitude: she would like to join Olivia in her isolated grief and postpone being ‘delivered to the world’ (l. 42), but she readily accepts the necessity of taking part in the commerce of human society.

The idea of reward for service continues in Viola's first scene with Orsino. The short scene opens with Valentine commenting on Cesario's advancement: ‘If the Duke continue these favors towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanc'd; he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger’ (l. 4). The dialogue between Orsino and Viola ends with the duke's promise:

And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord,
To call his fortunes thine.

The effect is not to stress Orsino's generosity, or to suggest his vulgarity in offering reward, but to show that Viola belongs; she has become an active participant in the reciprocal relationships that bind the social group together. Indeed, the play as a whole, I think, demonstrates the principle of reciprocity, the unwritten rule, according to Marcel Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, by which the exchange of goods creates mutually-satisfying relationships among individuals and groups.

Building on Mauss's seminal study of the gift in primitive societies, these social anthropologists point out that exchanges of goods may be complex social events—at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, and morphological—rather than solely, or even primarily, economic transactions. Most basically, ‘the agreed transfer of a valuable from one individual to another makes these individuals into partners’ because it implies that the gift will be reciprocated with a counter-gift, usually of equivalent or greater value. Through the principle of reciprocity, then, the act of exchange binds the giver and the recipient in a relationship. To give is to create an obligation; to take is to imply a willingness to pay that debt. Consequently, to refuse a gift is an insulting rejection of relationship with the giver, and to take without repaying is either humiliating failure or an act of aggression in the eyes of the whole society.

The principle of reciprocity operates most clearly through Feste. His first scene, Act I, Scene 5, establishes his position as a professional entertainer. After Maria's warning that his absence has threatened his security as Olivia's fool, he successfully fools Olivia out of her bad humour and in return receives her support and protection when Malvolio attacks him. In Act II he sings, first for Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and then for Orsino, demonstrating each time that he who pays the piper calls the tune. There is nothing demeaning in the financial aspect of the transaction, despite A. C. Bradley's worry that Feste is offended and disgusted by Orsino's offer of payment. Feste sings for pleasure, as he tells Orsino, but ‘pleasure will be paid, one time or another’ (II, 4. 70), and he pockets as his due the money Toby, Andrew, and Orsino pay for the pleasure he gives them. The scenes where Feste is paid for his foolery follow the same pattern. In Act III, Scene 1, his witty wordplays elicit coins from Viola as well as an appreciative analysis of the fool's art. Similarly, at the beginning of Act V, Scene 1, Orsino pays for Feste's excellent foolery and promises further bounty if he will carry a message. Feste's cleverness in getting his tips doubled, as he tells Orsino, is not ‘the sin of covetousness’ (V. 1. 47), but part of his performance, rather like the plea for applause by the epilogue to a Renaissance play. Often, Feste expresses gratitude for these payments in a wittily pertinent blessing: ‘Now the melancholy god protect thee’ to Orsino, and to Viola-Cesario: ‘Now Jove, in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard!’ (II. 4. 73; III. 1. 44).
The only significant departure from the pattern of a mutually satisfying exchange of talented performance for money comes when Feste tries to deliver to Sebastian a message intended for Cesario. Feste's words, of course, make no sense at all to Sebastian, who in exasperation tips the fool in an effort to get rid of him:

I prithee, foolish Greek, depart from me.
There's money for thee. If you tarry longer,
I shall give worse payment.

(IV. 1. 18)

Instead of begging for more or invoking a witty blessing on his benefactor, this time Feste responds with open contempt: ‘By my troth, thou hast an open hand. These wise men that give fools money get themselves a good report—after fourteen years' purchase’ (l. 21). When the young man seems to deny his identity and his relationships with people in Illyria, Feste's words, his medium of exchange, lose their value, and the exchange process breaks down: ‘No, I do not know you, nor I am not sent to you by my lady, to bid you come speak with her, nor your name is not Master Cesario, nor this is not my nose neither: nothing that is so is so’ (l. 5). Because Sebastian cannot receive Feste's message, his offer of money is not part of a reciprocal exchange but, from his point of view, an insulting dismissal and, from Feste's, a wise man's folly.

Sebastian's refusal to participate results, of course, from Feste's mistake, not from Sebastian's rejection of the principle of reciprocity. His scenes with Antonio stress his dual awareness that taking implies an obligation to give and that gifts of love cannot be reduced to an economic transaction. ‘Recompense’, Shakespeare's word for the idea of reciprocity, is the subject of his first speech: ‘My stars shine darkly over me. The malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours; therefore I shall crave of you your leave, that I may bear my evils alone. It were a bad recompense for your love, to lay any of them on you’ (II. 1. 3). He pursues isolation because he feels unable to enter into a balanced mutual relationship. But when Antonio persists in offering help and protection, Sebastian understands that rejecting such love would be unkind, although gratitude is the only recompense he can give:

My kind Antonio, 
I can no other answer make but thanks,
And thanks; and ever oft good turns
Are shuffled off with such uncurrent pay;
But were my worth as is my conscience firm,
You should find better dealing.

(III. 3. 13)

Similarly, Sebastian values the pearl Olivia gives him as symbol of the wonder of her love and reciprocates by vowing eternal love.

Thus the transfer of wealth from one person to another in *Twelfth Night* creates and expresses a wide variety of relationships: entertainer with audience, employer with employee, friend with friend, and husband with wife. Concomitantly, repudiating the principle of reciprocity signals the breakdown of community and the outbreak of hostility. The extreme case is Antonio, who is excluded from Illyria because he refuses to repay what he has taken from Duke Orsino. His offence, he explains to Sebastian,

might have since been answer'd in repaying
What we took from them, which for traffic's sake
Most of our city did. Only myself stood out,
For which if I be lapsed in this place
I shall pay dear.

1051
Antonio knows that because he has refused to repay, he will pay dearly if he is recognized, for the ugly reverse of the reciprocity binding people harmoniously together is the requital of injury with injury in a divisive cycle of revenge. Similarly, when it appears that Sebastian is unwilling to return his purse, Antonio's love turns to hostility. The refusal is a denial of their relationship, and to claim no relationship is to create a hostile one. Antonio has sincerely believed his love to be totally selfless and his generosity to expect no return. But in the crisis produced by Orsino's revenge and by the confusion of brother and sister, he discovers that he has counted on receiving loyalty and gratitude in return for giving Sebastian 'his life' and 'my love' (V. 1. 80, 81). Without such recompense love is impossible, and his adulation is transformed to scorn.

Sir Toby's relationship with Andrew Aguecheek also demonstrates the principle of reciprocity by negative example. Toby coaxes money from the thin-faced knight, who receives nothing in return but deceptive assurances of success in his courtship of Olivia. Because Toby is exploitative and Andrew foolish, we see their companionship as a travesty of friendship, and its disintegration in the last act strikes us as no loss and no surprise. Toby's high-spirited gaiety is equalled by his selfish disregard for other people, but even he realizes that 'pleasure will be paid, one time or another', and he marries Maria 'in recompense' (V. 1. 364) for her part in the gulling of Malvolio.

Only Malvolio stands outside the lines of exchange that link the characters in increasingly complex patterns of relationship. He is the only major character who pays Feste nothing and neither gives nor receives a gift. He lacks the 'generous' and 'free' temperament that provides a sense of proportion, as Olivia tells him (I. 5. 91, 92), but he is no more greedy than Sir Toby, who calculates that he has cost Sir Andrew 'some two thousand … or so' (III. 2. 54-55), or than Sir Andrew, who expects to repair his fortune by marrying Olivia. The measure of Malvolio's self-love is not his miserliness or covetousness but his presumptuous belief that he lives in a sphere above and beyond ordinary human relationships. Maria's attempts to define what is so odious about Malvolio (he is a 'puritan' and a 'time-pleaser' (II. 3. 140, 148)) at first sound contradictory, if a puritan is one who self-righteously condemns lapses from a moral ideal and a 'time-pleaser' one who cynically manipulates worldly affairs for self-aggrandizement. But Maria is right both times; the puritan and the politician meet in Malvolio's self-esteem and in his contempt for people and for human relationships as ends in themselves. This total lack of identification with other people both incites and provides the means for Malvolio's gulling. When his insults provoke the conspirators to revenge, they can easily persuade him that Fortune has singled him out for greatness. Maria's letter merely reinforces his desire to 'wash off gross acquaintance' and his assumption that he condescends to speak to ordinary mortals as 'nightingales answer daws' (II. 5. 162-63; III. 4. 35-36).

In Twelfth Night money symbolizes not love so much as a broader engagement with the real and imperfect world; paying, lending, giving, and taking are signs of willingness to have commerce with human society. Because the attitude that controls Malvolio's response to other people is 'I am not of your element' (III. 4. 124), he does not take part in the exchanges of wealth that engage the other characters. Even when he is duped into believing that Olivia has given him her love and, by marrying him, will give him wealth and power, he feels no obligation or gratitude. He thanks 'Jove' and 'my stars' (II. 5. 172), but not Olivia. He believes that 'nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes' (III. 4. 81) and that no human actions, not even his own, contribute to this perfect felicity.

The success of the plot against him teaches Malvolio the vulnerability he shares with the rest of mankind. In his distress he appeals to Feste for help, and promises, 'I will live to be thankful to thee for't'; 'It shall advantage thee'; 'I'll requite it in the highest degree' (IV. 2. 82, 111, 118). A demonstration of dependency so humiliating and a promise to reciprocate offered under duress do not promise Malvolio's sudden conversion to brotherly love, but even his departing curse, 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (V. 1. 378), does not inspire, in the theatre, the dread or pathos critics often solemnly attribute to it. Malvolio may never learn with
Prospero that ‘the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance’, but even his comically impotent fury registers his dawning awareness that he is ‘one of their kind’ (The Tempest, V. 1. 27-28, 23). In suffering wrong and experiencing the natural human desire to hurt back, he is at least entering the rough give and take of the real world. And Olivia's immediate sympathy and Orsino's command to ‘Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace’ (V. 1. 380) assure the audience, I think, of future reconciliation.

While all the characters take part in the process of exchange, Viola is distinguished by her fuller understanding of the conscious and unconscious operation of the principle of reciprocity. Hating ingratitude more than any other vice, she repays Orsino's trust and favour with loyal service, faithfully wooing Olivia for him despite her own longing to be his wife. And the heart of her plea to Olivia is that love deserves recompense; ‘My master, not myself, lacks recompense’ (I. 5. 285), she replies tartly when Olivia offers to tip her. However great Olivia's beauty, she argues, Orsino's love could be ‘but recompen'sd’ (l. 253) by winning her. Indeed, Viola breaks through Olivia's reserve by teaching her that the gifts of nature too bring an obligation to give in return, for ‘what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve’ (l. 188). The lesson Olivia learns, ‘ourselves we do not owe’ (l. 310), strikingly resembles the ‘basic theme’ which Marcel Mauss's English editor finds in the anthropologist's analysis of reciprocity: ‘One belongs to others and not to oneself.’

Still, for all Viola's advocacy of the human obligation to love and to give, it is impossible for her to reciprocate the love Olivia gives to Cesario, a fiction Viola has created. And she begins to regret her male disguise when she realizes the falseness of her position in relation to Olivia. As Cesario she clearly tells Olivia that she can never love her but, even so, she accepts Olivia's gifts, sparing her the pain and humiliation of having these symbols of love rejected.

Recognizing the reciprocal nature of human relationships, then, does not solve all problems. It is impossible to give without desiring some return, but to expect exact recompense, as Feste demonstrates to Fabian, makes an absurd sham of giving: ‘to give a dog and in recompense desire my dog again’ (V. 1. 6). Giving without recompense may be self-indulgent, insulting, foolish, or tyrannical, but failing to give is self-destructive, as Viola reminds us, describing her father's daughter who ‘never told her love, / But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud / Feed on her damask cheek’ (II. 4. 110).

Not even Viola, then, can discover a way out of the tangled personal relationships that make up the plot of Twelfth Night. Beneficent fortune, not human wit, creates the happy ending. It is the fact that Sebastian exists, rather than moral education or spiritual growth, that solves the problems troubling the inhabitants of Illyria. The sorting out of couples in the last scene, however, is not merely a mechanically-contrived happy ending; it is, rather, the culmination of the reciprocal exchanges I have been tracing. In the course of the action, all the major characters have been tempted by the dream of self-sufficiency, but have been forced, by circumstances and by their own needs and desires, into relationships where they become aware of their obligations to and dependence on others. Viola-Cesario is the key figure in the process. She triggers Olivia's abandonment of her vows of celibacy and provides her with the humbling experience of finding the real world intractable to her will. She provides Orsino with real human love as an alternative to a self-centred fantasy. When all fantasies of limitless personal power and happiness collapse in the last scene under the pressure of the destructive
aspect of reciprocity, Orsino and Olivia are ready to relinquish their dreams of Olivia and Cesario for the real love of Viola and Sebastian. Finally repelled from worshipping at ‘uncivil’ Olivia's ‘ingrate … altars’ (V. 1. 112, 113), Orsino's first reaction is the angry cruelty that is so often the corollary of sentimentality. But when Sebastian's arrival reveals Viola's identity, he asks for Viola's hand and gives her his in grateful recompense for ‘service done him’ (l. 321).

The sudden reversal from hostility and disintegrating relationships to love and alliance results from the amazing yet natural division of Cesario into Viola and Sebastian. This separation of brother and sister into two independent people symbolically illustrates Lévi-Strauss's theory that the principle of reciprocity binds people together in stable societies through the prohibition of incest and its wider social application, the custom of exogamy. He speculate that incest ‘in the broadest sense of the word, consists in obtaining by oneself, and for oneself, instead of by another, and for another’ (p. 489). The functional value of reciprocal exchange in marriage alliances and of the prohibition of marriage within certain degrees is to maintain ‘the group as a group, … avoiding the indefinite fission and segmentation which the practice of consanguineous marriages would bring about’ (p. 479).

So too in Twelfth Night, it is only when Olivia's exclusive allegiance to her brother is relinquished, and when brother and sister are brought together so that they can be publicly divided, that a harmonious and cohesive society becomes possible. The strangers from across the sea rescue the native Illyrians both from the sterility of self-preoccupation and from the divisive violence of their inevitable conflicts. Viola and Sebastian free Orsino and Olivia from illusions of exclusive self-fulfilment and total dominance and give them instead the shared happiness of mutual love. Neither Shakespeare nor the anthropologists claim that awareness of the principle of reciprocity can fundamentally alter the finite, complex nature of the human condition, but in his last romantic comedy Shakespeare suggests that by understanding our mutual needs we can choose love, generosity, and alliance rather than isolation, stagnation, and division.

Notes

2. Quotations throughout are from The Riverside Shakespeare, edited by G. Blakemore Evans and others (Boston, Massachusetts, 1974).
8. Compare Seneca, De Beneficiis, ‘A gift is not a benefit if the best part of it is lacking—the fact that it was given as a mark of esteem’ (Moral Essays, III, 49).
9. III. 4. 354-57. Compare Seneca: ‘Homicides, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, robbers, sacrilegious men, and traitors there always will be; but worse than all these is the crime of ingratitude’ (p. 33).
11. In her discussion of mutual love in Shakespeare's romantic comedies, Marianne L. Novy presents the meeting of Sebastian and Viola as emblematic of mutual love between man and woman (‘“And You
“Smile Not, He's Gagged”: Mutuality in Shakespearean Comedy’, *PQ [Philological Quarterly]*, 55 (1976), 178-94). Without denying that the loving reunion is crucial to the mutual happiness of the ending, I want to argue that its primary function is to divide Cesario, the brother-sister amalgam, into two people, a division which allows new love relationships to succeed long-established biological ones.

**Criticism: Themes: Marcus Cheng Chye Tan (essay date 2001)**


[In the following essay, Tan discusses the relationship of music to Twelfth Night's theme of sexual ambivalence.]

**THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF TWELFTH NIGHT**

Taken as Shakespeare's farewell to romantic comedy and written around the same time as *Hamlet,* *Twelfth Night* presents a high comedy of elusive complexity that preempts the problem plays. Contesting a “universal consent [that] the very height of gay comedy is attained in *Twelfth Night,*” modern critics note that *Twelfth Night* possesses “darker” features of the problem plays but, as C. L. Barber suggests in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy,* the play manages to restore the festive through its comic resolution, affirming what Jonathan Dollimore terms “the telos of harmonic integration.”

Elements of “dark tragedy” constantly complicate the “sunny identity of spirit.” The gulling of Malvolio is often seen by modern sensibilities as an excessively cruel prank passing into the domain of sadism. The latter's ignored plea for help while locked in the dark room, exacerbated by Feste's cruel taunting, becomes a comic joke that proves excessive for the audience. In addition, Orsino's unsettling “murderous” rage and Viola's swooning acceptance of a love death cause the play to “walk the edge of violence” till the arrival of Sebastian in Act V. Malvolio's unresolved vow of vengeance (V.i.376), sworn after the union of the lovers, threatens a newly established harmony, prompting the audience to speculate on his possible return, which could turn comedy into tragedy. Consequently, Harold Bloom asserts that “*Twelfth Night* is of no genre.” The play possesses a generic elusiveness that, like the problem plays, superficially adopts a comic genre but constantly threatens to metamorphose into a tragedy, suggesting that “the whole bright revel emerges from shadow.”

*Twelfth Night* also plays about with hermeneutics. As Bloom observes, “[the play is] another “poem unlimited.” One cannot get to the end of it, because even some of the most apparently incidental lines reverberate infinitely.” Generic uncertainty and the interpretive “reverberations” of the text plunge both literary and performance critics into a crisis of hermeneutic subjectivity echoed in *Twelfth Night* 's secondary title, *What You Will.* Such an irresolute title playfully jests at hermeneutics, freeing interpretation of the play from the stipulations of its title and flipantly reducing “what it is” to “what you want it to be.”

The multiplicities resultant from varying interpretations of the text contribute to this highly unstable nature of *Twelfth Night.* Laurie E. Osborne's seminal study of the various performance editions of *Twelfth Night* proves that the dramatic text is constantly subjected to historically specific tastes. Her work demonstrates how we must avoid “the trick of singularity” (II.v.151), dispelling the myth of a singular text and realising the presence of multiple texts of *Twelfth Night.* Davies echoes this elusive multiplicity when he remarks that “*Twelfth Night* contains multitudinous *Twelfth Nights* and the dormant seeds of many more, whether generated by a producer's singular comprehensive reading of the text or the nuanced particularities of the
actors' voices.”

Considering *Twelfth Night* in performance, Michael Billington believes that this is among the hardest of Shakespearean plays to stage because of its “kaleidoscopic range of moods,” from melancholia to drunken revelry, high-strung tension to joyous sadness. In performance, “elusiveness” takes on a different definition. Unlike other Shakespearean plays where temporal location is either “real” (such as in the history plays) or “fantastic” (as in *The Tempest*), Illyria is at once both. Its dreamlike environment presents difficulties in achieving verisimilitude on the stage. Furthermore, the manifold possibilities of staging the “‘darker” and complex elements, such as those mentioned, can disclose directorial bias and effect particularised impressions of character. Malvolio can become the Puritan Shylock or an oppressed victim. The trickery of physical allure between the infatuated lovers can metamorphose into a homoerotic attraction just as the homosocial bond between Antonio and Sebastian proves susceptible to varying interpretations. These possibilities demonstrate, in congruence with Osborne and Davies's observations, *Twelfth Night*'s elusive and unstable nature both as text and in performance.

Perhaps the most salient reason for *Twelfth Night*'s elusive nature lies in the difficulty of striking a balance between the play's light and dark aspects. In its stage history, few directors have managed to evoke what Stanley Wells terms “the transmuting alchemy”—that which unlocks both the play's ambivalent darkness and resonant comedy. This dialectical duality of “ambivalent darkness” and “resonant comedy” is not merely resultant from emplotment and dramatic staging. Music also contributes to this elusive nature of *Twelfth Night* because it eludes any attempts at an understanding of its aesthetics. *Twelfth Night* becomes a play that, like music, can communicate simultaneously joy and sadness, festive revelry and a deep-rooted melancholy, and so share a common feature of elusiveness. It is perhaps this pervasive presence of music that accentuates the elusive quality of *Twelfth Night*.

**MUSICAL ELUSIVENESS AND ELUSIVE MUSIC**

Jean-Pierre Barricelli, in *Melopoiesis*, observes that Shakespearean plays are “verbal” dramas which transmogrify into “musical” dramas at pivotal interstices in the text. This is certainly true of *Twelfth Night*, where music permeates the play and is tightly interwoven into the dramatic structure and thematic concerns such as love, gender, and time. As Davies observes, “*Twelfth Night* is all music.” It begins, ends and progresses with music, not solely via its quintessential songs but “the melodious recitative of its language,” where the verse structure becomes “musical” in form.

It is by virtue of this musical quality that *Twelfth Night* has an unsettling elusiveness, a “peculiar sweet sadness,” possessing both a spirit of revelry and a pervasive melancholia. Barbara Everett encapsulates this ambiguity when she states that,

*Twelfth Night* is itself an elusive work, which—perhaps because of this quality of ‘musicality’ or aesthetic self-consistency, an expressive reticence, seems to resist critic's attempts to explain or define or even describe the work as a whole, to say how or why it succeeds and why we value and admire it so.

*Twelfth Night*'s elusiveness and resistance to critical placement resembles music's elusive nature. Music is “a supreme mystery of the science of man” whose inner spirit cannot be easily expressed through language. It is that “which we cannot define in words, or include in any category of thought … a language we speak and understand, but which we are unable to translate.” The central dichotomies in musicology and music criticism remain: can music be described adequately by language and is music a “language” in itself? If it is a language system, what it expresses or communicates is ambiguous. Perhaps music will remain perpetually enigmatic and ineffable, just as *Twelfth Night* proves to be elusive because of this pervasive presence of music.
MUSIC AS THEME AND IDEA; MUSIC AS PERFORMATIVE

The difficulties encountered in the discussion of an aesthetics of music amidst the disputations of its nature has confined scholarship in Shakespearean music, and in particular, music in Twelfth Night, to a discursive consideration. Canonical works such as those by John H. Long, Richmond Noble and Peter J. Seng approach music as an idea or theme in the play to evade the hazardous terrain of musical aesthetics. By investigating the lyrical content and contextualization of each song, these works engage music in Twelfth Night as a prevailing thematic concern, and regard it as a conventional adjunct to the dramatic action whose primary function lies in the establishment of mood and atmosphere. Despite their importance in the field of Shakespearean music scholarship, such studies have seldom considered the performative aspects of music or music's musicality, treating it discursively and thematically whilst establishing the historical justification and contextualization of the musical texts. Furthermore, music's contributory role to the elusive and problematic nature of this comedy has not been explored.

As an alternative parameter to the thematic understanding of music (and its functions) in Twelfth Night, this paper seeks to understand music as performative, through an analysis of the songs in the play, and hopes to prove that Twelfth Night's elusive quality is accentuated by the frequency and prevalence of music. A framework of musicological analysis will be employed, through an examination of the music's formal dimensions such as notational sequencing, major-minor contradistinctions, harmony, rhythm, and other properties to show how music, when heard and understood as performative, can modulate responses to the play.

Like a dramatic performance, music varies with nuances in every performance, yielding a diverse range of responses despite an “authoritative” score. Thence, there is no absolute meaning in a piece of music yet an analysis of music's musicality renders a range of possible meanings delimited within the boundaries scripted in the score. These meanings are never arbitrary for the arrangement of an ensemble of notes with its dynamic properties indicates a specific range of particular responses. Meaning in music is then a tonal range of possible responses. This range remains intrinsic to the song despite possible stylistic variations and interpretations.

THE POLITICS OF HOMOEROTICISM

There is critical consensus in scholarship on Twelfth Night that issues of gender contribute to Twelfth Night's darker tonality. In the play, disguise causes gender confusion that further leads to suggestions of homoerotic love. As Casey Charles observes, “Twelfth Night is centrally concerned with demonstrating the uncategorical temper of sexual attraction.” These ever-present “dark” suggestions of homoeroticism and “ambi-sexuality” not only subvert the harmonious order in Illyria but produce the elusive nature of the play.

Shakespearean comedy constantly appeals to the body and in particular to sexuality as the heart of its theatrical magic. Cross-dressing, as a central leitmotif in issues of gender, is employed in several comedies and best exemplified in Twelfth Night. Twelfth Night is arguably about bisexuality and the fashioning of gender. Exhaustive studies have been done in relation to disguise, transvestism and mimesis leading to notions of androgyny and homoeroticism in the play. The following discussion thus seeks to illuminate the ways in which music contributes to this nexus of issues on gender explored by preceding scholarship.

Illusionism that leads to ambiguity is the very substance of the theatrical experience in Twelfth Night, where Viola embodies this ambiguity effected through the illusion of disguise. On the Shakespearean stage, the double cross-dressing convention (boy playing girl disguised as man) complicates gender relations on the dramatic and meta-dramatic levels. The issue of an artistically licensed homoeroticism effected through stage transvestism becomes then a central problematic in Twelfth Night.
On stage, the three contingent dimensions of Viola/Cesario's corporeality, her physiological sex as a boy actor, her gender identity in the drama as a woman, and her gender performance as Cesario, encourage the audience to view him/her as a sexually enticing qua transvestized boy. Because her gender is consistently the ulterior topic of conversation when she is present (I.v.185, I.v.158-161, III.i.143), the audience's eyes are invited to dwell upon the actor's body as a pretty boy, inadvertently stimulating homoerotic desire. Her/his multiple-disguised presence triggers an attraction in both genders, within the fiction of Illyria and the non-fiction of an Elizabethan audience. Furthermore, pederastic intimations between Antonio and Sebastian invite further speculation of same-sex love in *Twelfth Night.*

Homoeroticism on the Renaissance stage was neither misogynist nor confined to men. Lesbianism was also a common feature as Valerie Traub shows. The stage articulated a discourse of desires and acts that can be articulated and correlated with our modern understanding of diverse erotic practices among women. At the narrative level, the romantic discourse in *Twelfth Night* is improperly addressed by a woman disguised as a young man to another woman and vice versa (from Olivia to Viola/Cesario). At the performative level, it is still improperly addressed from one boy in boy's costume to another boy cross-dressed as a woman. “The proper axis of desire is thus crisscrossed by improper ones.”

---

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much [...] 
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love:
As I am woman [now alas the day!]
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?

(II.ii.26-27, 33-38)

Viola's articulation of anxiety has implicitly served as a summation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes toward transvestism and homoeroticism. Cross-dressing is presented as wicked while homoerotic desire is implicitly monstrous. The pregnancy of disguise threatens to deliver an apocalyptic disruption of a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, not only in Illyria but in a conservative English society. Anti-theatricalists and religious authorities charged the playhouse as a “Venus Palace,” a place of erotic arousal that promoted sodomitical practices among theatergoers and encouraged such behavior and effeminacy in the general population.

**A MUSICOLOGY OF GENDER AND THE MUSIC OF ANDROGYNY**

Homoeroticism has, in scholarship on *Twelfth Night,* been the central focus of gender issues in the play. However, recent critics such as Rackin and Greenblatt have considered the problematics of androgyny, implied by Viola's disguises, as the pivotal agency of *Twelfth Night* 's double tonality. Music, in performance, is a dramaturgical device that can modulate our understanding of these concerns of androgyny. By being a unique performative discourse alongside the visual and verbal lines of action, the songs in *Twelfth Night* augment the visual cross-dressing (physical presence and costume) and gender (con)fusion that results.

Music is, as Susan McClary notes, “shaped by constructions of gender and sexuality.” In most dramatic music, there exist musical utterances inflected on the basis of gender. The rise of opera in the seventeenth century saw the birth of a musical semiotics of gender—a set of conventions for constructing “masculinity” and “femininity” in music. Such codes of gender differences are informed by prevalent attitudes of the time, for instance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, music was regarded as a predominantly male occupation.
These attitudes toward gender and music were inherited from the misogynist ideas of the classical poets and philosophers. Females who undertook music studies or performance were cast as vile and contemptible, unless they were of the highest social classes. This attitude was prevalent because music was considered a representative of the destructive power of feminine sexuality that needed to be disciplined.\textsuperscript{41} Music is then, as McClary points out, a gendered discourse rooted in social attitudes concerning gender. Musical semiotics can thus tell us as much about the actual music as it can suggest how particular pitches and rhythms, as opposed to others, can delineate gender.

“O Mistress Mine” is among the more popular songs of the play. Although this song is not “gendered” in any deliberate compositional way as the operas of Cavalli were, an understanding of its formal arrangement can possibly suggest the androgynous nature of cross-dressed Viola/Cesario. The song, however, is not sung by Viola/Cesario but by Feste. In its dramatic context, the song, sung as a “love song” (II.iii.38), garners its affective power through irony, for Feste sings seemingly without realising its implications. The audience is, conversely, made aware of not merely the thematics of the song but the musical qualities (and their possible extra-musical connotations) because it is performed. The sub-plot thus comments on the main plot in an intersection of lines of actions (as Trevor Nunn's production demonstrates).

In Thomas Morley's instrumental arrangement for viols (1599), “O Mistress Mine” is set to the key of G.\textsuperscript{42} Although there is inconclusiveness over the versions Shakespeare employed in his stage productions, there is general consensus that Morley's arrangement, later adapted and varied by William Byrd (ca. 1619), was probably used.\textsuperscript{43}

The G major scale lies “in-between” in the Western harmonic scale of seven major tones in a single octave. In Naylor's version, the song is set to F major, a note whose placement is exactly mid-point in the notational sequence beginning in C.\textsuperscript{44} Likewise, Andrew Charlton’s arrangement sets the song in F major while retaining Morley’s original tune.\textsuperscript{45} Both keys are suggestive of an in-betweenness that could be associated with the gendered “middleness” of androgyny. Hollander suggests that this song directs attention to the overall themes and individual characters, and in particular refers to Viola/Cesario, “the boy-girl true love, ‘that can sing both high and low.’”\textsuperscript{46}

The harmony of the song implies the androgynous nature of Viola as well.\textsuperscript{47} Morley’s settings employ the entire notational range within the octave of G major, beginning with the tonic which ascends an entire scale degree and returns back. The aural patterning of this sequence at once reveals a range of ascending and descending notes indicative of Viola’s “high and low” vocal abilities. The almost equal number of downward and upward staves suggests the high and low tonal movements, further indicating the range required in the performance of the song. The singer’s ability is challenged by the range—from the VI of the lower degree (lower E in measures 12 and 18) to XIII of the tonic (higher G in measures 10 and 16). High ascending notes have often been associated, in traditional musicology, with higher voices of “the maiden's organ,” whose “small pipes” are “shrill and sound,” and are “semblative of a woman's part” (I.v.32-34). Conversely, lower bass notes of “deep and dreadful organpipe[s]” (\textit{The Tempest} III.iii.98) are often attributed to the masculine persona. Viola’s ability to sing both these ranges, according to Feste, reinforces her dual-gender effected through disguise.

The boy-actor playing Viola (though he does not sing this song) meta-dramatically reinforces this androgynous notion since his pubertal voice lies in-between the shrill “maiden's organs” and the bass “organpipes.” His range and vocal quality would then have resembled the countertenors or male sopranos of the Baroque era.\textsuperscript{48} “O Mistress Mine” performed by countertenor Alfred Deller of the Deller consort is one such example. The pubertal youth who is “[n]ot yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy” (I.v.158)—a description of Cesario by Malvolio—is then most fitting to portray an androgynous Viola/Cesario. Like the latter, the youth is ambivalent in gender identity and orientation as he embodies a “pre-sexual androgynous youthfulness.”\textsuperscript{49}
“O Mistress Mine,” though not sung in the presence of the androgynous figure, recalls Viola/Cesario's ambi-sexuality as it musically fuses, in an embodied whole of the androgyne, what s/he still considers as dual genders in her/his “poor monster” soliloquy in II.ii. The dramatic irony arises because the song actualises her fears of metamorphosing into an unnatural monstrosity. As a distinctive action in performance, “O Mistress Mine” enhances the visual action of stage transvestism effected through costume and the boy-actor. The tune actualises the notions of androgyny and creates performatively, via an aural experience, the figure of the androgyne because the song’s “high and low” tonalities are sung by (and embodied in) the same person. The binary oppositions found in the visual text of costume-change (where gender cannot be “fused” because it is still constructed [and reconstructed] as a superficial switch of clothing) are dissolved in the harmonics of the tune sung by the pubescent youth. The matrix of experience resultant from the conjunction of the verbal text, visual action and aural harmony creates then the notion of androgyny.

In Trevor Nunn's filmic adaptation, composer Shaun Davey exploits this androgynous possibility of “O Mistress Mine” by having the twins disguised as look-alike girls and singing this tune in unison. Davey's cabaret-style adaptation of the folk song provides a different tune in C major but resonates with Morley's melody and tempo. By having the twins sing together, beginning on a middle-C, Davey accentuates the ambivalent gender of the twins for this is a note that plays “mid-way” and can be sung by both males and females. Sebastian sings in falsetto through much of the song but resumes his masculine tenor and descends to a low G when the lyric indicates “both high and low,” demonstrating how musical range can determine or disguise gender.

In Morley's arrangement, Viola/Cesario's androgynous identity is reinforced further with the song's conclusion on a perfect cadence. In the final measure, the chord of the dominant returns to the tonic, implying not just finality but reasserting the “middleness” of androgyne. This perfect cadence, keeping firmly within the harmonic framework, correlates with Rene Fortin's belief that Viola, in her bisexuality, embodies the myth of the androgyne. In Neoplatonic tradition, the androgyne was associated with an ideal prelapsarian perfection. This perfect figure exemplifies the “primordial totality of being,” embodying and displaying the strengths of both sexes, and representing “the ultimate harmony with which the individual might be endowed.”

Yet the androgyne is “terrifying and seductive precisely because s/he incarnates and emblematizes the disruptive element, signaling not just another category crisis, but—much more disquietingly—a crisis of “‘category” itself.’ In II.ii, Viola recognizes her state as “poor monster,” a Renaissance appellation reserved for unnatural prodigies. Her androgynous fusion deepens the sense of indeterminacy characteristic of the play itself. As Davies notes,

    Shakespeare's cryptic use of the boy-actor playing the girl-boy heroine goes further than mere reversal: it extends female characterisation into a realm which confounds sex-differentiation.

Viola/Cesario's sexual “ambi-valence,” in Jungian terms, “fuses both gender-polarities, animus and anima, in a transgressive wholeness [...] by trespassing over the borders of what society constructs as ‘male’ and ‘female’ behaviour.” Although Barber believes that the saturnalian reversal of sexual roles does not threaten the social structure but serves instead to consolidate it, the threat posed by transvestism, leading to an ambiguous sexual existence that incites potential homosexual impropriety, causes the play to walk the edge of chaos where social and sexual perimeters are violated. Sexual identity becomes a “performance,” readily transformable by the clothes one wears. Such was the idea antitheatricalists of the Renaissance feared most—a fluidity of gender and the resultant licentiousness. The music of “O Mistress Mine” likewise blurs the distinctions between masculine and feminine. “The homoerotic shades into the heterosexual” as they both sing a common tune. Music, via its formal qualities in performance, accentuates as it embodies the themes of sexual ambivalence.
HOMOSOCIAL DRUNKENNESS AND THE MASCULINE DISCOURSE OF SONGS

The drunken revel songs in II.iii stand in contrast to the “androgynous” love tune of “O Mistress Mine” as they create a homosocial ethos. In As You Like It, the masculine courtly ritual of hunting ends with a catch (IV.iii.10-19). The hunt and catch become significant masculine activities that reverberate with a homosocial cadence. The image set before us, in performance, is a bond of masculinity where the men move in a circle after killing the deer, rejoicing in a catch that can repeat itself ad infinitum. This motional and musical circle ostracises the women who become “only a ghostly presence.”

Such a masculine ritual is repeated in the catches of Sir Toby and companions as Maria is significantly left out of the singing though she is physically present. Although many stage (and filmic) productions have interpreted Maria’s role as complicit in (and co-opted into) the festivity which gives cause for Malvolio’s reprimand, the dramatic text remains silent on her role in this misrule. She can thus be interpreted as a silent associate of the merry drunks or as an ostracised other.

The catches together exude an abrupt male persona with short unison passages and common stresses on the downbeats, especially in the example of “Hold Thy Peace.” The dotted figures, accompanied by several quavers and semi-quavers of generally low notes (measures 1-3), create an aggressive downbeat that leads the song into subsequent rounds while creating the whirligig of motion, hence occasioning its ad infinitum characteristic.

Though a common “cake and ale” (II.iii.115) tune, “Three Merry Men Be We” reinforces via its lyrics the visual performance of three men prancing around in a circle of drunken merriment, exemplified in Kenneth Branagh’s 1991 production of Twelfth Night. The rise in tone (measures 1, 3 and 7) expresses, as Cooke propounds, “an outgoing emotion.” Like “Hold Thy Peace,” the major mode (here in B-flat major) evokes an emotion of joy and pleasure. Such an association of mode and emotion has long been exploited in Western music. The major modes of these songs, then, create a mood of festive revelry that balances the minor modes of ambiguity and melancholy felt in other songs such as “Come Away, Come Away Death” and “Hey, Robin, Jolly Robin.”

Tonal mode is also a marker of gender. Eighteenth-century theorist Georg Andreas Sorge explained the hierarchical distinction between major and minor triads in terms he regarded as both natural and God-given—the respective powers of male and female:

Just as in the universe there has always been created a creature more splendid and perfect than the others of God, we observe exactly this also in musical harmony … the first (major triad) can be likened to the male, the second (minor triad) to the female sex.

Arnold Schoenberg’s Theory of Harmony (1911) resonates with Sorge’s ideas. The major mode, considered as masculine, was “natural” while the minor mode, in its association with femininity, was regarded as “unnatural.”

In traditional, pre-feminist Western musicology, cadence was an important marker of gender. A cadence is called “masculine” if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and “feminine” if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. Hence, the masculine ending is identified as the objective and rationale of musical discourses while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles. Such a definition is bound in a binary opposition that associates strength with masculinity and normalcy, and weakness with femininity and abnormality. In “Three Merry Men Be We” and “There Dwelt a Man in Babylon,” the cadences fall on the strong beat (first beat in “tree” of “Three Merry Men Be We” and fourth beat in “la-di” of “There Dwelt a Man in Babylon”). Although it is arguable that the songs were never completed and sung only in abstract, they nevertheless, in composition, seem to reinforce a masculine solidarity characteristic of such drinking
songs.

Grout notes that these rounds were often accompanied with humorous and ribald texts sung unaccompanied by a convivial group, usually of men because of its lewd content. According to Seng, such catches and drinking songs were popular in the sixteenth century and the male audience would have easily recognised them and participated in the singing. The drinking songs then intensify a homosocial ethos, characteristic of Renaissance patriarchy, that merges performance and reality as both audience and characters partake of this masculine ritual.

The drinking songs become more significant because their dramatic placement, following “O Mistress Mine,” undoes the fearful androgynous transgression suggested by the harmonies of the love song. Such a reading of sexual tensions becomes possible when we note how readily Sir Toby shifts focus away from the love tune to the catches (II.iii.57-61). The emphatic masculinity evoked by these catches, though it can be seen as an excess of revelry that leads to disorder in Olivia's household, re-establishes the social system of patriarchy.

Malvolio's interruption gives cause for antagonism in both audience and characters for he disrupts a moment of masculine bonding. Despite legitimately exercising his stewardship, Malvolio is cast as a “Shylockian other” (and possibly a “feminine other” since he disrupts what is considered a virile pursuit) that needs to be expelled. Ironically, another catch (“Farewell Dear Heart”) is used to banish the Puritan steward in an exclusionary manner just as the rounds in *As You Like It* exclude the feminine “other(s).”

**MELANCHOLIC LOVE TUNES AND THE TWIN THEMES OF LOVE AND MUSIC**

Love is an important aspect in discussions of gender. The Renaissance, inheriting many Neoplatonic ideas, considered music to be intimately connected with love. Thomas Morley (1597) adopted the Platonic definition of music as “a science of love matters occupied in harmonie and rhythmos” while Thomas Ravenscroft (1614) notes that music can truly express the universal passion of love and that the power of love may teach a man music. The opening lines of *Twelfth Night* readily establish this relationship between music and emotion, where “music [is] the food of love” (I.i.1). Although Long notes that this music is one that feeds Orsino's melancholia, it can perhaps be seen as a measure by which the latter learns to love and to await his “true love” (II.iii.41).

Love and music are thus considered as “twin themes” in *Twelfth Night*. As Lynn Liptak Budd notes, “[m]usic is more than a tool of courtship in this play. It is an active ingredient in and metaphor for love itself and for love's frustrations.” Much of the incidental (instrumental) music in *Twelfth Night* then, functions to create an atmosphere of romance (e.g., I.i, II.iv).

“Come Away, Come Away Death,” however, serves to problematize the notion of love in *Twelfth Night* as noted by critics. This scene (II.iv) is “the emotional heart of the play” and exemplifies the play's “elusive” quality with its shifting and bittersweet mood occasioned by music. The song is extravagant and almost parodic of the theme of death from unrequited love. It is unusual that Orsino would find such a song “reliev[ing] [his] passion much” (II.iv.4) since the lyrics propound a hopeless love that ends in death. Davies notes that the song contributes to the atmosphere of melancholy with its “peculiar sweet sadness” and feeds Orsino's love-sickness which is now protracted to extremes.

Although the settings of the original song have been lost, Long has attempted to reconstruct the tune by adapting a traditional Elizabethan tune entitled “Heart's ease.” Set in the key of B flat major, the song revels in the minor mode, producing a dark tonality that shades the play as well. The predominance of G minor chords (measures 1, 3, 7 etc), together with other minor chords within the diatonic scale (C minor in measures 9 and 10) darkens the modality of the moment. Following a time signature of 6/8, the downbeats (first and fourth beats) constantly articulate the fatalistic sense of the lyrics (e.g. “death” in measure 3, “slain” in
measure 7, “‘cruel’ in measure 8, “death” in measure 13), accentuating the dark nature of the song. Charlton's adaptation set in F major, a copy of Long's with minor variations, permits the minor mode (G minor and D minor) to prevail over the major as well.75

Musicologists have theorized the affective power of the minor mode in Western music and queried its frequent association with negative emotions. Leonard Meyer postulates the nature of the mode's chromatic potentiality as a possible explanation. Chromaticism possesses ambiguity not only because “chromatic alterations delay or block the expected motion to the normal diatonic tone” but also because a persistent “uniformity of progression” tends to create ambiguity and general tonal instability.76 Peter Kivy explains the power of the minor from a historical perspective, purporting that contentment and joy, among other “resolved” states of feeling, have historically come to be associated with the stable diatonic harmonies of the major mode. Conversely, extreme states have become associated with the “more forceful departures of chromaticism and its modal representative, that is, the minor mode.”77

The tune which is traditionally used for “Gone Away Death” not only darkens the tonality of the play by its musicality but punctuates the dramatic action by its contextual placement as well. It demonstrates the shifting moods, within a single scene, created by music—from the “light airs” (II.iv.5) heard the night before to Feste's melancholic tune. The song precedes Viola/Ceasario's passionate address on love sitting like “Patience on a monument” (II.iv.115). Ironic undertones arise because Orsino fails to realize that it is not his “death” that has been sung but Viola's “death” through her imaginary sister's love.78 Furthermore, in seeking to escape death by demanding the continued pursuit of Olivia's love, Orsino realizes his own “death” by sending his true love away. The song's foreboding melancholy is felt by Viola as well since she realizes that she too, could go to her grave without being able to declare her love. The powerful effect of the song then ironizes Orsino's claim that it is “old and plain” (II.iv.43), sung by common folk about the innocence of love.

“Hey, Robin, Jolly Robin” likewise ironizes its ostensible function via its musicality. Seng notes that the song is used mockingly by Feste to taunt Malvolio, who believes that his lover Olivia loves not him but another—Viola. Though the song may be addressed specifically to Malvolio, it also applies to Viola and Orsino's situation as well since they all share in the knot of confused love.

William Cornyshe's composition (ca. 1485-ca.1523), creates, however, not a tone of mockery (or “jolly-ness”) but of melancholic sadness, particularly because of the use of the Dorian mode where the song is transposed up by a fourth.79 Like “Come Away, Come Away Death,” the song's minor modality predominates yet again (G minor). Fox-Good notes that the minor quality of the initiating G minor chord emerges more clearly because of the entrance of the second and third voices.80 Feste's solitary singing however, heightens the isolation felt not only by Malvolio but perhaps by Feste too since he is the only character not scripted to love another. Furthermore, the singing of fragments from the song without resolutions or cadences amplifies uncertainty.81 Thus, the song's peculiar and affecting melancholy awakens in us a sense of loneliness, sitting like “Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief” (II.iv.115-116)—a grief that clouds the sunny spirit of Twelfth Night.

The songs in Twelfth Night mediate the issue of gender relations and the dissolution of gender categories as they operate within the dialectics of gender. Music's ambiguous nature compels the understanding of such gender distinctions as possibilities rather than absolutes. It can at once delineate masculinity or androgyny or neither, thus exemplifying music's elusive nature. Likewise, music is not only “the food of love” but it exposes love's problematic nature and deep-seated melancholy, thereby creating a double tonality within the play.

Notes
1. Richmond Noble, Shakespeare's Use of Song (Oxford 1923) 80.
7. All quotes are taken from the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above).
9. Barber (n. 2 above) 259.
13. Davies (n. 10 above) x-xi.
15. See Billington (n. 14 above) 8-11 for a discussion on Illyria between four RSC directors.
16. Quote taken from Billington (n. 14 above) xxx.
18. Davies (n. 10 above) 36.
19. Ibid.
20. For a detailed discussion on the musicality of verse, see Davies (n. 10 above) 34-61.
26. See n. 1 above.
27. See n. 21 above.
30. Charles (n. 28 above) 121-124.
32. See Joseph Pequigney, “The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and The Merchant of Venice,” *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992) 201-209, for a further explication of the homoeroticism between Antonio and Sebastian.
35. See Traub (n. 33 above) 157.
37. Greenblatt (n. 29 above) 88.
40. Ibid. 7.
42. See appendix 1a. [Appendices contain musical scores that are not here reproduced.]
43. See Long (n. 25 above) 169-172; Seng (n. 21 above) 96-97; and the introduction of the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 181-182, for a further discussion on the authenticity of “O Mistress Mine.”
44. See appendix 1b.
47. In speaking about chordal harmony, I will utilize terms used in music theory. Chords will be referred to by letter and mode (e.g., G major) or Roman numeral (upper case for major chords, lower case for minor). Thus the triad based on the first note of the major scale is denoted as “I” and the second as “II” and so on. The degrees of the scale will also be referred to by their names. The first in the scale degree is known as the tonic of the key, the fourth as the subdominant, fifth as dominant and seventh as the leading note.
49. Davies (n. 10 above) 115.
51. Rackin (n. 38 above) 34.
52. Fortin (n. 50 above) 141.
55. Davies (n. 10 above) 114.
56. Ibid. 56.
57. Barber (n. 2 above) 245.
58. Davies (n. 10 above) 59.
60. See appendix 2. Two versions of the song exist. I have here referred to an anonymous composition printed by Thomas Ravenscroft in *Deutromelia* (1609). This is also the version that Long suggests (n. 25 above, 173). The other is found in a manuscript book of rounds collected by Thomas Lant (1580). See the introduction to the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 84.
61. See appendix 3.
63. See appendixes 5, 6a, and 6b.
64. Quoted in McClary (n. 39 above) 11.
65. McClary (n. 39 above) 10.
66. See appendix 4.
67. “Hold Thy Peace” is not considered here because it is a catch that has no formal resolution and thus, proves difficult to determine its cadence.
69. Quoted in Austern (n. 41 above) 55.
70. Long (n. 25 above) 168.
71. Budd (n. 53 above) 179.
73. Seng (n. 21 above) 110.
74. See appendix 5.
76. Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 67-68.
77. Quoted in Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 69.
79. See appendix 6a, measure 10. I have provided two different scores of the same composition. The first is the fragment sung by Feste from Cornyshe's composition. The second, appendix 6b, is the complete score for three voices.
80. Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 67.
81. Ibid. 69.

**Twelfth Night Literary Criticism (Vol. 85): Further Reading**

**CRITICISM**


*Studies the dynamics of same-sex feminine desire, focusing on the relationship between Olivia and Viola/Cesario in Twelfth Night.*


*Comments on the textual uniqueness of Twelfth Night and examines some of the idiosyncrasies of its manuscript history.*


*Surveys language, structure, theme, and characterization in Twelfth Night and describes the play as the epitome of Shakespearean romantic comedy.*


*Explores the theme of identity in Twelfth Night and examines the symbolism associated with Viola's pseudonym Cesario.*


*Probes Shakespeare's treatment of androgyny through an examination of the disguised Viola in Twelfth Night and Rosalind in As You Like It.*

Centers on the final recognition scene between Viola and Sebastian in Act V, scene i of Twelfth Night, analyzing its relationship to the play's concerns with sexual indeterminacy and deferral.


Questions “festive” interpretations of Twelfth Night that view the play as authorizing a temporary celebration of misrule and personal liberation for the purposes of self-discovery.


Summarizes the history of the “Noli me tangere” (“Touch me not”) icon in Renaissance religious drama and explores the significance of its use in Twelfth Night.


Emphasizes the similarities of theme, plot, and structure in Twelfth Night and King Lear.


Presents a summary of Twelfth Night's sources, themes, characters, and circumstances of composition.


Concentrates on the textual history of Twelfth Night, exploring crucial revisions of the play's text that occurred in the early seventeenth century, resulting in the 1623 Folio edition.


The anonymous critic approves of director Sam Mendes's production of Twelfth Night at the Donmar Warehouse in London, praising its “intelligent simplicity” despite its relatively subdued comedy.


Concentrates on Twelfth Night's theme of love.


Psychoanalytic reading of Twelfth Night's Malvolio that views his character as a dramatic paradigm of the paranoid's unconscious projection of sexual anxiety.
Teaching Guide

Teaching Guide: Introduction

So you’re going to teach William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. Whether it’s your first or hundredth time, Twelfth Night has been a mainstay of English classrooms for generations. While it has its challenging spots—complicated language and complexly layered themes—teaching this text to your class will be rewarding for you and your students. Studying Twelfth Night will give them unique insight into the concept of metatheatre and important themes surrounding gender, performance, and love. This guide highlights some of the most salient aspects of the text before you begin teaching.

Note: This content is available to Teacher Subscribers in a convenient, formatted pdf.

Facts at a Glance

- **Publication Date:** Performed 1602; Published 1623
- **Recommended Grade Level:** 9-12
- **Approximate Word Count:** 20,000
- **Author:** William Shakespeare
- **Country of Origin:** England
- **Genre:** Comedy
- **Literary Period:** Renaissance
- **Conflict:** Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society
- **Setting:** Illyria, a fictional city resembling Italy
- **Structure:** Five-Act Stage Comedy

Twelfth Night

As You Like It (written 1599) is another stage comedy by William Shakespeare. Considered to be one of Shakespeare’s “mature comedies” alongside Twelfth Night and Much Ado About Nothing, it explores metatheatre and themes surrounding gender and love through its crossdressing protagonist, Rosalind. Similar to Twelfth Night, As You Like It features an active heroine who must rely on her wits in order to find love and resolve conflicts.

The Great Gatsby (1925) is a novel written by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It follows narrator Nick Carraway as he becomes entangled with the charismatic and mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby and Gatsby’s longtime infatuation with Daisy Buchanan. Gatsby’s idealized vision of Daisy and desperate desire to impress her mirrors Orsino’s dogged pursuit of Olivia in spite of her disinterest. Additionally, Gatsby’s desire to transcend his class, only to fall short, mirrors Malvolio’s scorned ambitions.

Hamlet (1603) is a tragedy by William Shakespeare. Though Twelfth Night is a comedy, it interrogates themes that have the potential to verge into more serious subject matter. The impact of disguise and performance on identity is explored as Viola pretends to be a male servant. Hamlet also engages with this theme but in a more dangerous setting, offering a glimpse at the multifaceted nature of themes.

Orlando (1928) is a novel written by Virginia Woolf. It explores the fluidity of gender through its protagonist, Orlando, who is transformed from male to female. Orlando’s experiences closely interrogate gender and the
different experiences that accompany living as a man or a woman. The novel, like *Twelfth Night*, grapples with issues surrounding internal and external identity and the frustration entailed in being unable to align them.

“What is our Life?” is a short lyric poem by Sir Walter Raleigh, written sometime between 1590 and 1618, that ruminates on the idea of life as a performance. Raleigh portrays life as a “short comedy” and asks readers to question whether the apparent insignificance of a human life is a blessing or a curse. Much like Shakespeare’s comedies, Raleigh’s poem considers an oftentimes depressing theme from a lighter perspective, encouraging readers to enjoy their brief moment on the stage.

**Teaching Guide: Key Plot Points**

**Viola is Shipwrecked and Decides to Disguise Herself (Act 1, Scene 2):** Viola, a young noblewoman, is rescued from a shipwreck by a sea captain. Viola assumes that she is the only survivor of the wreckage and laments the loss of her twin brother, Sebastian. The sea captain tells her that Illyria, the country she is in, is ruled by the noble Duke Orsino and that Orsino is currently romantically pursuing the Countess Olivia. Lady Olivia has sworn off the company of men as she mourns for her recently deceased brother. With the help of the sea captain, Viola decides to disguise herself as a man and enters Duke Orsino’s court.

**Orsino Sends Cesario to Woo Olivia (Act 1, Scene 5):** Three days after the shipwreck, Viola has joined Duke Orsino’s household as a male servant named Cesario. Orsino dispatches Cesario to woo Lady Olivia on his behalf. Olivia initially refuses to meet with Cesario as she has vowed not to entertain any male suitors, but Cesario’s persistence wins her over. Olivia firmly rejects Duke Orsino’s proposal, but she finds herself attracted to Cesario and sends her steward Malvolio to give Cesario a ring on her behalf. Viola laments that circumstances have become so complicated, as she herself has fallen in love with Orsino.

**Malvolio is Deceived and Olivia Proposes to Cesario (Act 2, Scene 5 and Act 3, Scene 1):** As retribution for Malvolio’s pompous attitude, several members of Olivia’s household decide to play a prank on him. Olivia’s servant Maria composes a letter designed to resemble Olivia’s handwriting, expressing love for Malvolio and instructing him to wear absurd clothes and behave ridiculously. Olivia’s uncle Sir Toby, her suitor Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and her servant Fabian spy on Malvolio as he discovers the letter and gleefully vows to follow its instructions. Meanwhile, Olivia proposes marriage to Cesario, who gently rejects her.

**Sebastien and Antonio Arrive in Illyria, Malvolio is Locked Up, and Sir Andrew Challenges Cesario to a Duel (Act 3, Scenes 3 and 4):** Viola’s twin brother, Sebastian, arrives in Illyria with Antonio, who saved him from the shipwreck. Meanwhile, Malvolio follows the instructions from the letter he believes to have been written by Olivia. His actions scandalize Olivia, who has him locked up in order to regain his wits. Sir Toby then goads Sir Andrew into challenging Cesario to a duel for Olivia’s affections. Viola has never dueled before, on account of being a woman, but is unable to avoid the encounter. The duel is interrupted by Antonio, who mistakes Viola for Sebastian and intervenes. Antonio—who is considered a criminal in Illyria—is arrested, and the confused Viola ignores his pleas for help.

**Viola and Sebastian Reunite and the Confusion is Settled (Act 5, Scene 1):** Orsino and Cesario go to Olivia’s house in order to confront Antonio and continue pursuing Olivia for Orsino. Antonio angrily remarks that Cesario, who he believes is Sebastian, has betrayed his friendship. Orsino and Cesario are greeted by Olivia, who addresses a bewildered Cesario as her husband. Orsino angrily rebuffs Cesario, who he believes has betrayed him by stealing Olivia’s affections. Sebastian’s arrival ends the confusion: the twins reunite and reveal that Olivia has actually married Sebastian, who she mistook for Cesario. Upon realizing that Cesario is actually Viola, a noblewoman, Orsino proposes to her and she happily accepts. The joyous atmosphere is interrupted by the arrival of Malvolio, who realizes he has been duped and swears revenge on the other
Teaching Guide: History of the Text

_Twelfth Night_’s Publication and Performance History: The first known performance of _Twelfth Night_ took place on February 2, 1602, during Candlemas (the last day of the forty-day Christmas festival season). Like many of Shakespeare’s plays, _Twelfth Night_ was not formally published until the release of what is now termed the First Folio in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death. _Twelfth Night_’s memorable characters and subversive treatment of gender have helped it retain its popularity into the modern day. It has been updated and adapted numerous times for film, stage, and print.

- The title of the play refers to the twelfth day of Christmas. This indicates that the play was written with the intention of being performed during the Christmas-Epiphany season, which lasts from December 25 to February 2. One of the hallmarks of Twelfth Night festivities in Shakespeare’s time was the intermingling of social classes, with servants and nobles celebrating together. The mixing of classes is a source of comedy in _Twelfth Night_, as Malvolio is tricked into pursuing a woman above his station and Viola, an aristocratic woman, dresses and behaves as a male servant.
- _Twelfth Night_ is the only Shakespearean text to have a formalized additional title. Though it is primarily referred to as _Twelfth Night_, the play’s full title is set in the First Folio as _Twelfth Night, or What You Will_. Some scholars view this secondary title as a nod to the festive and carefree attitude surrounding the Twelfth Night holiday. Others have drawn a connection between the irreverent sentiments of _What You Will_ and Shakespeare’s 1599 comedy, _As You Like It_.

Shakespeare and Metatheatre: The term metatheatre refers to the act of calling attention to a play’s nature as a dramatic performance. A recurring theme throughout Shakespeare’s body of work is the idea that life itself is a series of performances. This is reflected through subtle acknowledgements of fictionality and performance within his works. The plots of several of Shakespeare’s plays, including _Hamlet_, _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_, and _The Tempest_, include stagings of other, fictional plays. One of the most famous quotes from _As You Like It_ asserts that “all the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players.” Metatheatre is present in _Twelfth Night_ as well because the plot and comedy arise from Viola’s role as an actress.

- Gender on the Shakespearean Stage: Elizabethans believed that acting was a masculine profession and that such a transitory and oftentimes unsavory lifestyle was unsuitable for women. As such, almost all theatre troupes were composed of male performers, with female roles played by prepubescent boys. Though most modern treatments of _Twelfth Night_ cast female performers as Viola, the role would have originally featured a male actor playing a female character pretending to be a man. This would have enhanced the metatheatrical elements of the play, providing a constant visual reminder of both Viola’s disguise and performance.

The English Renaissance and Inspirations for _Twelfth Night_: From the late 15th to the early 17th centuries, England underwent a significant cultural and artistic shift known as the English Renaissance. The proliferation of the printing press in the 15th and early 16th centuries increased literacy and heightened interest in literature as an art form. This further inspired a resurgence of interest in classical works, with many scholars devoting themselves to translating Greek and Roman literature into English. Art, literature, and drama produced during the English Renaissance incorporated references and homages to classical forms and myths, as is evidenced in _Twelfth Night_ by the frequent allusions to Greco-Roman mythology.

- Sources for _Twelfth Night_: English Renaissance writers adapted Greco-Roman plotlines and characters into their writing. For example, plotlines involving mistaken identity were common
comedic fodder. *Twelfth Night* is thought to have been inspired by Barnabe Rich’s story “Apollonius and Silla,” which was based on the Italian comedy *Gl’ingannati*, or *The Deceived Ones*, written collectively by members of the Siennese Accademia degli Intronati in 1531. Though its plot is more similar to that of “Apollonius and Silla,” *Twelfth Night* notably takes the idea of the disguised heroine falling in love with her employer from *Gl’ingannati*. Another potential influence is Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, which involves twins who are mistaken for one another and of which Shakespeare’s 1594 play *The Comedy of Errors* is a direct adaptation.

---

**Teaching Guide: Significant Allusions**

**Allusions to Ancient Greece and Rome:** The English Renaissance brought about a renewed interest in classical works, namely Greco-Roman mythology and history. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare uses allusions to mythological figures in order to characterize Orsino’s declarations of love as hyperbolic and inauthentic. Notable mythological allusions in *Twelfth Night* include the following:

- In act 1, scene 1, Orsino hopes that Olivia will someday be struck by love’s “golden shaft,” an allusion to **Cupid**, the Greek god of love. Cupid’s golden arrows inspired insatiable love and desire in mortals. Orsino’s allusion to Cupid suggests that his love for Olivia is externally motivated and forced upon him, rather than founded on true affection. Cupid’s arrows were also often considered a source of misery, especially in cases of unrequited love.

- Also in act 1, scene 1, Orsino compares Olivia to **Diana**, the Roman goddess of chastity and the hunt, by alluding to the story of Diana and Actaeon from **Ovid’s Metamorphoses**. After being caught watching Diana bathe, Actaeon is turned into a “hart,” or male deer, and hunted down by his own dogs. Through this allusion, Orsino implies that the “cruel hounds” that pursue him are his own desires.

- Orsino reuses this allusion when, in act 1, scene 4, he compares Cesario’s “smooth and rubious” lips to those of Diana. The repetition of this allusion serves two functions. First, Orsino’s commendation of Cesario’s beauty reminds the audience that Cesario is actually Viola, a woman. Second, this comparison highlights the hyperbolic nature of Orsino’s love and foreshadows the rapid transfer of his affections from Olivia to Viola.

- In act 5, scene 1, Orsino compares himself to an “Egyptian thief,” in reference to the character of **Thyamis** from the *Aethiopica*, a novel written by Greek writer Heliodorus of Emesa in the 3rd century CE. Thyamis, the leader of a band of Egyptian thieves, falls in love with Chariclea, the heroine of the story. When “faced with death,” Thyamis attempts to kill Chariclea to prevent any other man from having her. The implication of this allusion is that Orsino would rather kill Olivia than see her married to Cesario, highlighting the dangers of possessive, unbalanced love.

---

**Teaching Guide: Teaching Approaches**

**Disguise and Performance:** Appearances and disguises are central elements of the plot of *Twelfth Night*, and many characters use physical and verbal means to hide their true feelings or identities. The myriad disguises contribute to the confusion that drives the play’s plot, and thematically suggest that disguise and performance prevent people from forming meaningful connections.

- **For discussion:** How does Viola’s disguise complicate her relationships with Orsino and Olivia? What does this suggest about how disguises impact interpersonal relations?

- **For discussion:** Consider how other characters might be performing. Do you think that Olivia’s grief over her brother’s death is genuine or a performance? What about Orsino’s love for Olivia? Do other
characters engage in performance? Defend your answers using evidence from the text.

- **For discussion:** How is the confusion over identity resolved? Do you think that the characters will now be able to form more meaningful, honest relationships? Why or why not?

- **For discussion:** A recurring theme in Shakespeare’s works is that life itself is a performance and that people act out different roles in different scenarios. Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not? Are there moments in your own life where you feel like you have to put on a performance?

**Internal vs. External Identity:** Themes surrounding identity in *Twelfth Night* manifest through the disparity between a character’s sense of self and the way they are perceived by others. The contrast between internal and external identity is particularly apparent in the case of Viola, as she is forced to grapple with her thoughts and feelings along with the external perceptions that result from her role as Cesario. And, although Olivia ends up heterosexually married to a man, it was a woman who first won her heart, calling into question the nature of gender, sexuality, and Olivia’s identity.

- **For discussion:** Why does Viola choose to disguise herself as a man rather than being honest about her identity? Do you think the Cesario persona is an authentic extension of Viola or is it simply an act? What evidence from the text makes you think so?

- **For discussion:** By the end of the play, Cesario has become—in the minds of other characters—a separate entity from Viola. This is evidenced by Orsino’s claim that Viola will continue to be Cesario so long as she is dressed as a man. What does this suggest about the power of external perception in shaping identity? Do you agree with Orsino that clothes and external presentation can define a person’s identity? Why or why not?

- **For discussion:** How is Sebastian’s claim that Olivia has married both a “maid and man” a double entendre? What is the implication of this remark on his marriage to Olivia? To what extent can Sebastian be considered a replacement for the unobtainable Cesario?

- **For discussion:** How does the subplot describing Malvolio’s deception and imprisonment engage with the idea of external identity? How does the way Malvolio sees himself contrast with the way that other characters view him? What does he hope to accomplish by dressing and speaking the way he does? Does it work? Why or why not?

**The Dangers of Unbalanced Love:** For the majority of *Twelfth Night*, confusion, inequity, and dishonesty dominate the relationships between characters. Malvolio is tricked into believing that Olivia loves him, Viola reluctantly woos Olivia on Orsino’s behalf, and Olivia falls for Cesario without realizing that he is actually a woman in disguise. This confusion culminates in Malvolio being locked in a dungeon and Orsino threatening to kill Cesario and Olivia for seemingly marrying behind his back. Though all seems well after Sebastian and Viola reveal their identities, the suffering and jealousy experienced before that point highlight the perils of excessive or imbalanced love.

- **For discussion:** *Twelfth Night* begins with Duke Orsino hyperbolically professing his love for Olivia. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to introduce Orsino’s romantic woes before any other plot elements? What tone does this set for the rest of the play?

- **For discussion:** How do different characters experience romantic love? Is it primarily a positive or negative experience? What about platonic love? To what extent is love associated with suffering? What does the play suggest is the cause of this suffering?

- **For discussion:** The characters in *Twelfth Night* experience a variety of imbalances during their pursuit of love, including class differences, hidden identities, and a lack of reciprocation. What methods do different characters use in order to overcome these barriers? Are any of them successful? What does this suggest about the nature of unbalanced love?

- **For discussion:** What are some examples of balanced love—either romantic or platonic—in the play? Do you think that the couples who end up together at the end of the play have found balance? Why or why not?
Metatheatre: Metatheatre refers to a dramatic work’s recognition of its own fictionality. From plays-within-plays to witty asides to the audience, Shakespeare’s body of work is filled with metatheatrical elements, and *Twelfth Night* is no exception. Metatheatre is established mainly through Viola, who is dressed as a man for the majority of the play. Viola’s disguise allows the audience to recognize her as an actress. Furthermore, though modern performances typically employ female actors, the role would have originally been played by a young boy, creating a visual reminder that Viola is not what she seems.

- **For discussion:** When *Twelfth Night* was first performed, Viola would have been played by a male actor. How does this impact your understanding of the play? Does your interpretation of the play change if Viola is played by a female actor? How so? What does this suggest about how gender is performed?
- **For discussion:** In act 3, scene 4, Fabian notes that if the events of *Twelfth Night* were “played upon a stage now, [he] could condemn it as an improbable fiction.” How is this statement ironic? What does it suggest about the relationship between fiction and reality?
- **For discussion:** How might a live theatre production of *Twelfth Night* differ from a film version in terms of metatheatricality? Imagine that you are the director of a theatrical production of *Twelfth Night*. How might decisions like casting, costumes, music, and props impact how an audience interprets the play? Would you choose to enhance or minimize the metatheatrical elements of the play? How would you do so?

Tricky Issues to Address

Shakespeare’s Diction and Syntax Are Unfamiliar: *Twelfth Night* may present a challenge for students because of its unfamiliar vocabulary and verse structure. Unfamiliar language can be especially difficult with a comedy, as much of the humor is found in Shakespeare’s wordplay. Helping students navigate conventions of Early Modern English will allow them to better engage with *Twelfth Night*’s themes and technical elements.

- **What to do:** Consider introducing students to the plot of *Twelfth Night* prior to reading the text. The added context will allow them to more easily parse the unfamiliar language.
- **What to do:** Read aloud the first section of the assigned reading as a class, allowing time for students to ask questions and grow accustomed to the style. Giving students a chance to hear the text read aloud introduces them to the concepts of meter, verse, and prose, and experience how those devices function within the play.
- **What to do:** Screen scenes from a filmed version of *Twelfth Night* to give students a better understanding of how tone and humor can be conveyed. Also remind them that actors can interpret the text in a variety of ways and that no performance can be considered definitive.
- **What to do:** Consider handing out vocabulary sheets prior to each section of assigned reading. Instruct students to write down unfamiliar words, phrases, or concepts and encourage them to research some of the items on their list. Have students share their research in small groups and consider addressing common difficulties as a class.

*Twelfth Night* Upholds Traditional Gender and Class Distinctions: Though *Twelfth Night* is often lauded for its subversive explorations of gender, its resolution upholds a traditional model of marriage and, by extension, of women’s roles. The play also mocks the ambitions of the lower classes: Malvolio is humiliated for attempting to transcend his station. While students may feel confident contextualizing the outdatedness of the text’s sexism, for instance, they might be confused by the brutality of Malvolio’s treatment, given the play’s classification as a comedy.
• What to do: Remind students that both gender and class are broad themes within *Twelfth Night* and encourage them to consider how the sexist or classist sentiments espoused by certain characters advance or complicate these themes. Ask students if they think these moments are meant to be interpreted straightforwardly, and whether or not the play provides refutations of sexism or classism.

**Content Notice:** *Twelfth Night* contains bawdy humor, and sanctions sexist and classist language and beliefs.

### Alternative Approaches to Teaching *Twelfth Night*

While the main ideas, characters, themes, and discussion questions above are typically the focal points of units involving teaching *Twelfth Night*, the following suggestions represent alternative readings that may enrich your students’ experience and understanding of the play.

**Focus on clothing as a motif.** Clothing is a motif within *Twelfth Night*, from Viola’s “woman’s weeds” to Malvolio’s ridiculous yellow stockings and crossed garters. How do characters’ outfits influence their self-expression? How do clothes affect the way they are perceived by others? In what ways are clothes comparable to costumes in *Twelfth Night*? How does clothing as a motif support the idea of life as a performance?

**Focus on the Malvolio subplot and class as a theme.** Though *Twelfth Night* is a comedy, not every character is given a happy ending. Malvolio swears vengeance against the central characters after learning that he has been duped, creating a contrast to the otherwise joyful ending. Furthermore, unlike Viola, whose subversion of gender is readily accepted by the other characters, Malvolio’s efforts to defy his class are met with scorn and ridicule.

• **For discussion:** What does Malvolio’s treatment suggest about the privileges given to the nobility in terms of self-expression? What does it suggest about the limits of ambition? How is class enforced by the other characters in the play?

• **For discussion:** Do you empathize with Malvolio, or do you think he got what he deserved? Why do you feel that way? How does the message of the play change based on whether the Malvolio subplot is read as comic or tragic?

• **For discussion:** What might revenge look like for Malvolio? (How) Do you think he will obtain it?

**Focus on Feste as a character, and the legacy of the Shakespearean Fool.** Shakespeare’s fools are some of his most fascinating and clever characters, from Touchstone in *As You Like It* to the Fool in *King Lear*. Though the fool was a common archetype in Elizabethan theatre, Shakespearean fools are known for diverging from their purely comedic roots. They often engage the other characters and the audience with meaningful questions and commentary relating to the themes of a play. *Twelfth Night*’s Feste continues this legacy, providing wise commentary and witty humor in equal measure.

• **For discussion:** Feste’s songs are often out of tune with the festive events going on around him. What might this suggest about the true message of the play?

• **For discussion:** What does Feste mean when he says “better a witty fool than a foolish wit”? How is Feste’s intelligence established? Why do you think Shakespeare made Feste, a lowborn character, arguably the wittiest presence in the play?

• **For discussion:** Feste’s ability to travel between Orsino’s and Olivia’s estates gives him a near-omniscient presence within the play. He also has very little stake in the outcome of events. (How) Does this lack of investment enable him to be an honest reporter of events? (How) Does this
honesty manifest itself during his interactions with other characters?

Focus on *Twelfth Night* as a comedy. Mistaken identity, separated twins, and role reversal are comedic tropes that can be found across many of Shakespeare’s plays. How have comedy tropes changed between Shakespeare’s time and the modern day? Have you seen any of these tropes in more modern media? Do you find *Twelfth Night* funny? Why or why not? How might you update the play’s humor to be more accessible to a modern audience?
Quotes

Quotes in Context: "If Music Be The Food Of Love, Play On"

Context: The ruler of Illyria, Duke Orsino, is in love with Olivia, a young, beautiful, and very wealthy countess who is in mourning for a dead brother. The duke's affection is not requited by the countess, who will not admit his emissary or hear his protestations of love and pleads mourning for her brother as the reason she may not. At the beginning of the play, Duke Orsino is listening to melancholy music as he waits for his messenger to Olivia, Valentine, to return with news from her. (Over 150 years later, in 1775, another English dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, paraphrased, in The Rivals, this famous quotation thus: "Is not music the food of love?") (In modern times, the phrase "a dying fall" is used by T. S. Eliot in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, l. 52.)

DUKEIf music be the food of love, play on,Give me excess of it; that, surfeiting,The appetite may sicken, and so die.That strain again--it had a dying fall.O, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet soundThat breathes upon a bank of violets,Stealing, and giving odour...

Quotes in Context: "Journeys End In Lovers' Meeting"

Context: Sir Toby Belch, uncle to Olivia, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are at Olivia's house when Feste, her servant and jester, enters. Sir Toby and Andrew have been talking nonsense, and with Feste's entrance all three continue in the same vein. The older men ask Feste for a song, and he asks if they would like a love song or one of "good life." Toby chooses a love song, and Andrew assents because he does not care for good life. Feste then sings one of Shakespeare's loveliest songs, both stanzas of which follow:

FESTEO mistress mine, where are you roaming?O stay and hear, your true love's coming,That can sing both high and low.Trip no further pretty sweeting;Journeys end in lover's meeting,Every wise man's son doth know...What is love? 'Tis not hereafter:Present mirth hath present laughter,What's to come is still unsure.In delay there lies no plenty,Then come kiss me sweet and twenty.Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Quotes in Context: "Laugh Yourselves Into Stitches"

Context: Malvolio, a pompous, self-loving, and sour steward in Countess Olivia's household, harbors ridiculous aspirations for his mistress' affections. He is disliked by Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's bibulous uncle, and Maria, Olivia's waiting woman. Seeking revenge on Malvolio for his officious interference with their drinking late one night, they obtain their goal by preparing a love note in Olivia's hand and style and dropping it in Malvolio's path. He believes it to be from Olivia and obeys its instructions to appear before her cross-gartered, in yellow stockings, smiling, and kissing his hand--affectations which she abhors. As he approaches, Maria fetches Sir Toby and Fabian, a servant who also dislikes Malvolio, with these words:

MARIIf you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourselves into stitches, follow me. Yond gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly, can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings.SIR TOBYAnd cross-gartered?MARIAMost villainously...
Quotes in Context: "Love Sought Is Good, But Given Unsought Is Better"

Context: Viola, on a sea voyage with her twin brother, Sebastian, is shipwrecked on the seacoast of Illyria. Convinced that her brother has been drowned, she determines to serve temporarily the ruler of Illyria, Duke Orsino, in the guise of a eunuch and under the name of Cesario. The duke employs her thus to press his suit for the hand of the Countess Olivia, who does not love him and who has put him off by pleading mourning for a dead brother. Viola-Cesario, with an entourage, calls at Olivia's home, gains admittance, and attempts to persuade Olivia of the duke's devotion. Olivia rejects the duke but realizes that she has fallen in love with the messenger, believing Viola to be a man. Now, on Viola-Cesario's second visit, Olivia confesses her love, and in an attempt to persuade an angry and perplexed Viola she argues:

OLIVIA. . .Cesario, by the roses of the spring,By maidhood, honour, truth, and every thing, I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride, Nor wit, nor reason, can my passion hide. Do not extort thy reasons from this clause, For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause. But rather reason thus with reason fetter; Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.

Quotes in Context: "Many A Good Hanging Prevents A Bad Marriage"

Context: Maria, Countess Olivia's waiting woman, is quarreling with Feste, the Clown, another of Olivia's servants, and he returns her some saucy answers:

MARIANay, either tell me where thou hast been, or I will not open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter, in way of thy excuse. My lady will hang thee for thy absence. FESTE Let her hang me. He that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours. MARIAMake that good. FESTE He shall see none to fear. . . . MARIAYet you will be hanged for being so long absent, or, to be turned away. Is not that as good as a hanging to you? FESTE Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage; . . .

Quotes in Context: "Midsummer Madness"

Context: A self-loving steward, Malvolio, nurses ridiculous aspirations for the affections of his mistress, Countess Olivia. He is greatly disliked by Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's bibulous uncle, and Maria, the countess' waiting woman. They, together with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a ridiculous and hopeless suitor to Olivia and tool of Sir Toby, seek revenge on Malvolio because he has interfered in their affairs. They accomplish their aim by dropping a love note for him to discover in the garden. He finds it and, completely duped into believing it to be from Olivia and meant for him, obeys its injunctions to appear before her in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, smiling idiotically and kissing his hand. Olivia, in mourning for a dead brother, is amazed by the sober and civil steward's appearance and behavior, and thinks he is mad.

MALVOLIO Remember who commended thy yellow stockings— OLIVIA Thy yellow stockings? MALVOLIO And wished to see thee cross-gartered. OLIVIA Cross-gartered? MALVOLIO Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so—. . . If not, let me see thee a servant still. OLIVIA Why this is very midsummer madness. . . . Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. . . . Let some of my people have a special care of him, . . .
Quotes in Context: "No More Cakes And Ale"

Context: It is after midnight at the home of the wealthy countess Olivia. Sir Toby Belch, her riotous uncle and house guest, and his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek are joined in their drinking and jesting by Feste, a clownish servant of Olivia. When Feste is prevailed upon to sing, the group becomes so noisy that Maria, Olivia's waiting-woman, warns them that Olivia will surely dispatch her ill-tempered steward, Malvolio, to put an end to the din. Malvolio appears and upbraids the rioters for lack of "wit, manners, and honesty," but Sir Toby and Feste respond by singing contemptuous responses and finally saying to Malvolio:

SIR TOBY Out o' tune sir, ye lie. Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale? FESTE Yes by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' th' mouth too. SIR TOBY Th'art i' th' right. Go sir, rub your chain with crumbs. A stoup of wine, Maria.

Quotes in Context: "Patience On A Monument"

Context: In Illyria, Viola, a shipwrecked gentlewoman, is disguised as a page, "Cesario," in the service of Duke Orsino, whom she secretly loves. Orsino, professing overpowering sentiment for the wealthy Countess Olivia, sends "Cesario" with messages of love to Olivia, who in turn falls in love with "Cesario." Viola, still in disguise, while arguing with Orsino about the ability of a man to love versus the ability of a woman to love, relates the story of her father's daughter, herself of course, who harbored a deep secret passion:

VIOLA . . . My father had a daughter loved a man, As it might be perhaps, were I a woman, I should your lordship. DUKE And what's her history? VIOLA A blank my lord. She never told her love, But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought, And with a green and yellow melancholy She sat like Patience on a monument, Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed? We men may say more, swear more, but indeed our shows are more than will; for still we prove much in our vows, but little in our love.

Quotes in Context: "Some Have Greatness Thrust Upon Them"

Context: Malvolio is a self-loving, pompous steward in Countess Olivia's household. He nurses ridiculous aspirations for Olivia's affections, and is disliked by Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's bibulous uncle, and Maria, Olivia's waiting woman. They, together with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Sir Toby's friend and hopeless suitor for the countess' hand, seek revenge on Malvolio because he has officiously interfered with their drinking and merrymaking late one night. Maria prepares, in imitation of Olivia's handwriting and style, a love note to drop in Malvolio's way. He, walking in the garden, finds the note, recognizes the handwriting, breaks the seal, reads the contents and becomes convinced that the epistle is from Olivia and is meant for him. Thus he is completely gulled, and the revenge of the tricksters is well in train. The letter proper begins:

MALVOLIO [reads] If this falls into thy hand, revolve. In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy fates open their hands, . . .
Quotes in Context: "Youth's A Stuff Will Not Endure"

Context: The hand of the young, beautiful, and wealthy Countess Olivia is sought by a foolish knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, encourages, for his own bibulous and financial ends, Sir Andrew's quite hopeless suit. Sir Andrew, recently persuaded to remain in attendance on Olivia for another month, is drinking and carousing with Sir Toby late at night. They are joined by Feste, Olivia's jester, who is prevailed upon by the two tipsters to sing a love song. This is the second stanza:

FESTE
What is love? 'Tis not hereafter; Present mirth hath present laughter, What's to come is still unsure. In delay there lies no plenty; Then come kiss me sweet and twenty. Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Character and Theme Quotes: Essential Quotes by Character: Viola

Essential Passage 1: Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 55-64

VIOLA:
I prithee, and I'll pay thee bounteously,
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haphly shall become
The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke:
Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him:
It may be worth thy pains; for I can sing
And speak to him in many sorts of music
That will allow me very worth his service.
What else may hap to time I will commit;
Only shape thou silence to my wit.

Summary

Viola, a gentlewoman of Messaline, has been shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria, along with the ship’s captain. Having a twin brother on the ship, Viola believes him drowned. On inquiring from the captain where they are, she learns that Illyria is the captain’s birthplace, and they are near the home of Count Orsino, a duke who is currently a bachelor. Viola had heard her father speak of Orsino and is curious about the bachelorhood
of so rich and noble a man. The captain tells her of Orsino’s love for Olivia, a lady of the region. However, because Olivia is in mourning for her father and brother, she will accept no suitors. Viola is intrigued by this tale and decides that she would like to aid the duke’s suit. At first she proposes to present herself as a lady-in-waiting to Olivia, but the captain informs her that Olivia is not even accepting visitors. Viola then decides to disguise herself as a male eunuch (i.e., person surgically altered prior to the onset of puberty so as to prevent the development of secondary sex characteristics such as a beard) to Count Orsino as a servant. Her intent is to act as a matchmaker between Orsino and Olivia because she desires to see true love fulfilled.

**Essential Passage 2:** Act 1, Scene 4, Lines 22-44

**DUKE ORSINO:**

O, then unfold the passion of my love,

Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith:

It shall become thee well to act my woes;

She will attend it better in thy youth

Than in a nuncio's of more grave aspect.

**VIOLA:**

I think not so, my lord.

**DUKE ORSINO:**

Dear lad, believe it;

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,

That say thou art a man: Diana's lip

Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe

Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,

And all is semblative a woman's part.

I know thy constellation is right apt

For this affair. Some four or five attend him:
All, if you will; for I myself am best

When least in company. Prosper well in this

And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord,

To call his fortunes thine.

VIOLA:

I'll do my best

To woo your lady. [Aside] Yet, a barful strife!

Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife.

Summary

Viola has presented herself to Count Orsino as a eunuch named Cesario. Within a matter of days, she has earned his trust to the point where he is comfortable sending Viola to Olivia to persuade her to accept his suit. Orsino believes that Olivia will be more accepting of “Cesario” than she will of himself. Although Viola is doubtful, Orsino points out that her feminine appearance will be less off-putting than his own. He observes that Viola’s features are closer to a woman’s than a man’s. Her mouth is softer, her voice more tender, her very appearance is womanly (this is a reference to his belief that “Cesario” is a eunuch and thus has retained more boyish qualities). Orsino sends Viola off with several attendants and bids them leave, as he wants to be alone. Viola promises that she will do her best to present him as a fitting suitor to Olivia, but in an aside she reveals that she is now in love with Orsino and would sooner woo him for herself.

Essential Passage 3: Act 5, Scene 1, Lines 258-284

VIOLA:

If nothing lets to make us happy both

But this my masculine usurp'd attire,

Do not embrace me till each circumstance

Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump

That I am Viola: which to confirm,

I'll bring you to a captain in this town,

Where lie my maiden weeds; by whose gentle help
I was preserved to serve this noble Count;
All the occurrence of my fortune since
Hath been between this lady and this lord.

SEBASTIAN:
[To Olivia]
So comes it, lady, you have been
mistook:
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived,
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.

DUKE ORSINO:
Be not amazed; right noble is his blood.
If this be so, as yet the glass seems true,
I shall have share in this most happy wreck:
[To Viola.]
Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times,
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.

VIOLA:
And all those sayings will I overswear;
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orbed continent the fire
That severs day from night.
DUKE ORSINO:

Give me thy hand;

And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.

Summary

At the conclusion of the play, all the principal characters are together on stage. Sebastian and Viola meet for the first time since the shipwreck. Because both believe the other has been drowned, they are incredulous at what they see, Sebastian more so, since his sister is dressed as a man. Yet Viola reveals herself to be a noble lady and the sister of Sebastian. As proof, she mentions the sea captain, resident in the town, who has her original clothing. Sebastian then says to Olivia, whom he has just married, that she escaped being wedded to a woman. Instead, she has been married to a virginal man and thus has retained her honor. Orsino wonders at Viola’s deception, yet remembers that she, as Cesario, promised him that she loved Orsino as she could never love a woman. As Viola swears her love to him again, Orsino asks for her hand in marriage.

Analysis of Essential Passages

As the central character in *Twelfth Night*, Viola is the hub of the action and the link between the play's different plots. She is the connection between the home of Orsino and that of Olivia, where the drama involving “Cesario,” Sebastian, and Olivia is played out. Her ability to be “all things to all men” facilitates the chaos of the disguised identities, hidden plots, and unknown twists that weave through the story.

After the shipwreck, she decides to be a matchmaker to two people who are strangers to her. Unable to play the part of a woman and serve Olivia, she ingeniously takes up the guise of a man to serve Orsino. Wisely she portrays herself as a eunuch. Because a eunuch has undergone surgery as a youth in order to prohibit the onset of puberty, her high voice and lack of beard will give some credence to her disguise, whereas a simple costume change would have immediately revealed her true gender.

Yet her femininity is still apparent, even with such a plausible disguise. Orsino identifies not just womanly features but the subtle personality differences that were attributed to a woman of that time. It is these attributes that Orsino believes will make “Cesario” more acceptable to Olivia as a messenger than if he had sent a man. This perception on the part of Orsino will also ease the way at the end from his thinking of her as a man to thinking of her as a woman and thus an “acceptable” object of love.

In one of the play's several plot twists, Viola falls in love with the man she is to represent to another woman. Yet, against what might be expected, Viola in no way shirks this duty; she truly tries to present Orsino to Olivia as the man of her dreams. The complication arises, however, when Olivia falls in love with Viola in the guise of Cesario. The oddness of this lies not so much in the fact of their being two women, but in the fact that Cesario is a eunuch. Viola’s seeming “boyishness” hides her femininity but does not hide her attractiveness to either gender. This misunderstanding is the root of the comedic element in Shakespearean drama: in the Bard's plays, there are most always complications on the road to love.

As the romantic resolutions unfold in the final act, it is Viola’s revelation of her gender that ties up all the loose ends. Olivia’s hasty marriage to Sebastian is the catalyst that forces her to reveal her true identity. Olivia has believed that she has known “Cesario” for enough time to warrant marriage, yet Sebastian has known Olivia for a very short time indeed before he acceded to her request to wed. Olivia’s confusion of Sebastian for “Cesario” propels Viola to uncover her true self. Also, her shock in finding her brother alive slows this
revelation so a full explanation can advance the plot.

Almost unbelievably swiftly, Orsino transfers his love from Olivia to a person just moments before he believed to be a male eunuch. Yet instantaneous love is a typical Shakespearean element to speedily resolve conflicts and bring the plot to a conclusion. Thus all (with the exception of the embittered Malvolio) are joined in happy wedlock, completing the revelries that are associated with the “Twelfth Night” festivities of the Christmas holidays.

Character and Theme Quotes: Essential Quotes by Theme: Love

Essential Passage 1: Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 1-15

DUKE ORSINO:

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more;
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.

Summary

Orsino, Count (or Duke) of Illyria, is sick with love for the lady Olivia. In his chamber, he is listening to the court musicians perform a love song. Bidding them to play on, he hopes the music will increase his feeling of love until he is sick of it. Overindulgence will break the obsession, he believes, and thus release him from the
pain of unrequited affection. At last he calls a halt to the music, saying it is not so sweet as when it first began: he is sick of the music but not of love. Orsino thinks that there does not seem to be a limit to love’s capacity. Like the sea that refuses to rise no matter how much water is added to it from the rivers and the rains, his love for Olivia is full. He acknowledges that as the sea level changes with the rise and fall of the tides, love may do likewise without changing capacity. His messenger arrives to announce that Olivia will not entertain Orsino’s suit, because she is still in mourning after the death of her brother. Orsino is content to wait but vows he will not give up until he wins Olivia’s heart.

**Essential Passage 2: Act 2, Scene 4, Lines 103-120**

**DUKE ORSINO:**

There is no woman's sides

Can bide the beating of so strong a passion

As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart

So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.

Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,

No motion of the liver, but the palate,

That suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt;

But mine is all as hungry as the sea,

And can digest as much: make no compare

Between that love a woman can bear me

And that I owe Olivia.

**VIOLA:**

Ay, but I know—

**DUKE ORSINO:**

What dost thou know?

**VIOLA:**

Too well what love women to men may owe:
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.

My father had a daughter loved a man,

As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,

I should your lordship.

Summary

Orsino has commissioned Viola/Cesario to plead his case to Olivia, who refuses to accept him as a suitor. He commands Cesario to force Olivia love him, which Cesario states cannot be possible. Love is not obedient to a command, but must be given freely. Orsino, however, disagrees. He believes that a woman is subject to passion, but not to love, and therefore her passions must be appealed to. A woman’s love, he says, is like an appetite that must be fed. A man’s capacity, however, is as big as the sea, which can accept all love and still not be satisfied. But a woman is too weak and too inconstant to be capable of so much love, and therefore is easily swayed. Viola/Cesario knows, however, the amount of love a woman may give to a man. She refers to “her father’s daughter” who once loved a man, as Cesario himself would love Orsino—if he were a woman. Of course, since Cesario is really Viola, she is skirting around the edges of a confession of her own love for Orsino, to which Orsino is immune.

Essential Passage 3: Act 3, Scene 1, Lines 157-164

    OLIVIA:

    Cesario, by the roses of the spring,

    By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,

    I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,

    Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

    Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,

    For that I woo thou therefore hast no cause,

    But rather reason thus with reason fetter,

    Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.

Summary

Viola in the disguise of Cesario has come to woo Olivia on behalf of Orsino, who is sick with love for her. Yet Olivia is not open to love due to the grief she feels at the death of a brother. However, this grief seems to fade when she comes into increasing contact with Viola/Cesario. Gradually Olivia falls in love with Cesario, despite the fact that he on a mission to win her affections for another and he is (as Olivia believes) a eunuch. Olivia pushes past Cesario’s scorn and swears her love. Because Olivia woos Cesario, he has no reason to woo her in return. Yet she presents to Cesario the belief that a love that has been sought for is good, but a love that is given freely is even better. It is this better kind of love that she is offering to Cesario.
Analysis of Essential Passages

Love is a constant theme in Shakespearean comedy, especially a love that encounters difficulties. The hurdles that love encounters in _Twelfth Night_ are varied, yielding to many twists and turns until the final resolution, when all marry the person they are somehow destined to marry.

Count Orsino represents love that is unrequited. His devotion to Olivia is rejected, not so much because of the source of the love, but because of the circumstances in which the love is first acknowledged. Orsino, however, also believes that love is pure emotion. As an emotion, it can be controlled, in the case of the opening act by cranking up the level of that emotion until its very weight causes it to fall into a more manageable state. It is a habit that can be overcome. It is delicious treat that can lose its appeal by surfeit. The emotion of love is temporary, so it must be satisfied before it dies away.

Yet in his argument with Viola (who is disguised as Cesario), it is a woman’s love that Orsino stamps as emotional rather than stable. This is indicative of the ephemeral nature of his love, which will become apparent in the final act as he so easily transfers his “undying passion” from Olivia to Viola. The near-anagram state of the two women’s names perhaps indicates that it does not really matter whom one loves, just so long as one loves someone (at least in Orsino’s point of view).

It is Viola, however, who has the clearest understanding of love. Although her love has come quickly to fall upon Orsino, it does not change. In fact, it rises to the level of self-sacrifice, as Viola does not renege in her duty to encourage Olivia to fall in love with Orsino, despite Viola’s own feelings for him. Her steadiness is perhaps not deserved by so vacillating a person as Orsino, but nevertheless she bestows it freely on him.

As Olivia freely gives her love to “Cesario” (and by extension and more appropriately to Sebastian), Olivia also reflects the nature of love. It is love unsought and therefore of a higher value. Like Orsino, Sebastian quickly decides he loves Olivia, with as little thought.

The women in _Twelfth Night_ thus show a more thorough understanding of constant love than do the men. Despite Orsino’s contention that a woman’s love is based on mere passion, it is the women who give their hearts thorough examination. Despite the obstacles, as usual, love conquers all. As the fate of the flawed hero is ruled by destiny in Shakespearean tragedies, so too destiny rules in the matters of love in the comedies.

Quotes

_O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,_  
_That notwithstanding thy capacity_  
_Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,_  
_Of what validity and pitch so'er,_  
_But falls into abatement and low price_  
_Even in a minute._  
(I.i.9-14)

Orsino's opening meditation on his unrequited love for Olivia encompasses some of the most famous lines and images in the whole Shakespeare canon. The lines also identify the major themes and concerns of _Twelfth Night_. In the lines above, the references to love and to the sea encompass elements that will resound throughout the action of the play. Orsino compares the capacity of love to the capacity of the ocean in its ability to be infinite and overpowering. (cf: Juliet in _Romeo and Juliet_ who also expresses her love in the same terms: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / my love as deep. The more I give to thee / the more I have for both are infinite" II.i.175-177.) He goes on to say that love can also be destructive since, like the sea, its
ability to completely consume the mind and heart of a person can eventually destroy them—much as the sea eventually destroys and devalues everything that is washed into it.

So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.
(I.i.14-15)

The essence of these lines is that love can take many shapes and forms. Not only that, but it can also be highly imaginative in the way it presents itself and consumes the mind and imagination of lovers. The word 'fancy' is often associated with love in Shakespeare, particularly with love that is illusory or deceptive. Orsino's over-romanticised love for Olivia is deceptive in that his love is presented as fancy: he loves with his eyes and only imagines that his love comes from the heart. The notion of fancy, or illusory love sets up the situation for Orsino's journey in the play. He needs to be 'cured' of his imaginative fancies about love and to discover what 'true' love really is.

O when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
(I.i.18-19)

Orsino's declaration of his love for Olivia prepares us for the play's focus on the kaleidoscopic nature of love. Love in Illyria takes many different forms: love at first sight; love versus lust; self-love; self-indulgent love; the love of true friendship; true love. In this quote it is clear that Orsino's love for Olivia is based on his first sighting of her: his love is about seeing rather than feeling. His words also identify love with disease, specifically a pestilence or plague. To the Elizabethans, the word 'pestilence' carried negative and frightening associations since the plague was an ever-present threat to their lives. In this case, Orsino suggests that the very sight of Olivia has the power to cleanse the air around her of disease, but the irony is that Orsino himself has fallen prey to the disease of love.

That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.
(I.i.20-22)

One of the play's many classical allusions, and one that expresses love in violent imagery. Orsino is vividly expressing his frustrated love for Olivia by comparing himself in metaphor to the hunter Actaeon. In Greek legend, Actaeon saw the goddess Artemis bathing naked in a river. In punishment she turned him into a stag whereupon he was pursued by his own hounds and torn to pieces by them. These lines again highlight the destructive abilities of love, particularly of illusory love. Orsino is also continuing the hart/heart pun on Valentine's earlier question as to whether Orsino intends to hunt that day.

And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother, he is in Elysium.
(I.ii.2-3)

Viola believes that her brother has drowned during the storm that wrecked the ship. She asks what is to become of her now that her brother is no longer alive to protect her. Elysium, the classical Greek equivalent to heaven represents a place of peace and eternal joy. The similarity in the sounds of the names seems to link Illyria with Elysium, suggesting a place of security and happiness. The inference is that Illyria will eventually provide the healing that Viola needs after the (apparent) loss of her brother.
There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I well believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.
(I.ii.43-47)

Viola confides her plans for disguising herself as a boy to the Sea-Captain who has saved her from the storm. She comments that although a fair and kindly exterior can sometimes conceal a corrupt soul, she believes that the Captain's nature is as true and loyal as his appearance suggests. This being so she intends to trust him with her secret plan of dressing herself as a boy to protect herself whilst she is in Illyria, and will even ask the Captain's aid in achieving this.

Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes.
(I.v.285-288)

As Orsino does in Act I, scene i, Olivia identifies the notion of love at first sight. She declares that 'Cesario's' charms are working on her eyes and she is overwhelmed by what she has seen. Just as Orsino's love for Olivia is presented as 'fancy' or illusory love, so is Olivia's sudden and violent emotion towards Viola-Cesario. Yet this is also a comic moment since as an audience, we know of her vow of seven-year grieving (reported by Valentine in Act I, scene i). With the advent of Viola-Cesario, Olivia's solemn vow towards the memory of her brother is completely overturned in the extravagance of her reactions to this personable young man. It is the moment at which Olivia's character displays the comic edge that remains throughout the play altering our image from than the romantic, tragic figure in mourning that Orsino has described.

Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe.
What is decreed must be; and be this so.
(I.v.300-301)

Olivia's rapturous rhyming couplet after Viola-Cesario's exit at the end of Act I, scene v, identifies another of the play's themes: that of Fate as the ultimate controller of human destiny. Olivia's words are comparable with Viola's invocation to Time to "untangle this, not I." (II.ii.40), when she realises that Olivia "loves me sure" (II.ii.22). In this scene, Olivia places the situation in the hands of Fate because, she argues, humans do not own (ie: control) their own destinies, therefore she will have to wait and see what happens. (cf: Helena in All's Well That Ends Well whose attitude is opposite: Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie / Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky / Gives us free scope … " (I.i.212-214). She ends with a variation on the proverbial phrase "what must be will be." This gleeful resolution to let Fate take its course anticipates the comic situation at the end of the play where Olivia does try and take Fate into her own hands by marrying 'Cesario' out-of-hand.

Did you never see the picture of 'we three'?
(II.iii.15-16)

This is a topical reference to the caption of contemporary seventeenth-century 'trick' pictures of two fools or clowns, in which the viewer of the picture then becomes the third 'fool'. An anonymous painting of two fools, possibly the well-known jesters Tom Derry and Archie Armstrong, exists by this title 'WeeThree Logerhds' and it is possible that Shakespeare has something like this painting in mind when he wrote this line. Other versions are known to have existed as inn signs, in which the two 'fools' were depicted as asses, which may
explain Sir Toby's greeting to Feste "Welcome, ass" (II.iii.17).

Dost thou think that because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?
(II.iii.110-111)

Sir Toby is confronting an irate Malvolio who has come to investigate the noise made by the midnight revelry of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste. The 'cakes and ale' of Sir Toby's speech are a metaphor for the title of the play and also encompasses the idea of Illyria as a place of permanent informality and festivity. Twelfth Night marked the end of the season of Christmas festivity and Yuletide leniency which pervaded the great English houses over the twelve days of Christmas from 25 December to 6 January. During this period normal conventions and behaviour were disregarded and all attention given to merry-making and revelry. Malvolio, who is said to be "a kind of puritan" (II.iii.119) represents the puritanical disapproval of over-eating and drinking—so much so that he is prepared to challenge his employer's uncle on his behaviour. Sir Toby's mocking question is both a challenge to Malvolio's authority and his puritan beliefs. It highlights his scorn and disregard for his niece's steward, and anticipates the 'revenge' he takes on Malvolio later in the play when he has him imprisoned in the dark house.

Why, thou hast put him in such a dream that when the image of it leaves him, he must run mad.
(II.v.186-188)

The image of love wavering closely between dreaming and madness is another of the play's motifs. Maria is referring to the 'dream' that Malvolio is experiencing of Olivia being in love with him through the trick played by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian. She suggests that once Malvolio realises it is a trick and that Olivia is not in love with him, the knowledge will drive him mad. Compare these lines with Sebastian's lines in Act IV, scene i and his soliloquy at the beginning of Act IV, scene iii. Olivia has declared that she is in love with him, and he has never seen her before. In IV.i he initially decides that "this is a dream / … If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep" (IV.i.60-62). The dreamlike state continues and in IV.iii he is desperately trying to seek some kind of explanation for the situation he finds himself in. He tries to convince himself that "'tis not madness" (IV.iii.4), and "this may be some error but no madness" (IV.iii.10), but is finally forced to conclude "that I am mad, / Or else the lady's mad" (IV.iii.15-16). Sebastian's 'dream' is temporary in that the apparent madness is dispelled when the identity of the twins is finally revealed and he can claim Olivia as his wife. However Malvolio's experience in the dark house turns his 'dream' into a living nightmare in which his protestations of sanity are ignored and he is humiliated and humbled.

Have you not set mine honour at the stake
And baited it with all th'unmuzzled thoughts
That tyrannous heart can think?
(III.i.116-118)

Another example of the violent intensity of love. Olivia is referring to the Elizabethan sport of bear-baiting in which a bear was tethered to a stake and is baited by dogs which eventually tore it to pieces. Olivia's metaphor suggests that she is the bear, and her love for Cesario resembles the unmuzzled dogs that tear at the bear's flesh. This violent image is similar to the one Orsino uses at the beginning of the play in which he compares himself to Actaeon being torn apart by dogs.

Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound. My niece is already in the belief that he's mad.
(III.iv.130-1)
Sir Toby's injunction continues the motif of madness, but introduces a darker and more troublesome side to the play. Whilst love can induce a kind of madness that can create the kind of melancholy suffered by Orsino, Sir Toby is refers here to mental insanity. The common cure for insanity during this period was to imprison the patient in a dark room in the belief that the darkness would drive out the evil spirits from the patient's body. This cruel and often violent practice that continued for many years. Sir Toby's proposal to subject Malvolio to this 'cure' when he knows that the madness is not real indicates a dark side to Sir Toby's character. (cf: Dr. Pinch's proposed treatment for Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*: "They must be bound and laid in some dark room" IV.iv.95).

Nothing that is so, is so.
(IV.i.8)

This line, more than any other perhaps, encompasses one of the dominant themes of *Twelfth Night*, that of deceptive appearances. Within the world of the play almost everything is deceptive: appearances, love, even death. Feste is speaking this line to Sebastian, whom he believes to be Cesario. Yet Cesario is not who he 'seems' to be either. The play is dominated by a man who 'seems' to be in love with a woman who does not return his love, and this woman herself is in love with a woman who 'seems' to be a man. Viola's brother 'seems' to be drowned, and Sebastian believes his sister to have died during the shipwreck. These images of deceptive reality also capture the mercurial spirit of the world of Illyria. Shakespeare has endowed Illyria with a kind of magical quality that allows these inversions of normal behaviour and situations. It is only in Illyria that the festival of Twelfth Night can be carried on permanently by Sir Toby and his associates; only in Illyria in which girls can masquerade as boys; only in Illyria where dead siblings can be resurrected. Illyria 'seems' like a real place with a sea-coast, storms and ruling dukes, but it too is not as it seems to be. It is a make-believe world of illusion and fantasy comparable with Shakespeare's other 'created', 'magical' worlds: the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, and Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*.

Feste's line reminds Malvolio of the incident in Act I, scene v in which Malvolio dismisses the wit of the fool. Clearly, Feste has nursed a grudge against the steward for his condescending rebuke, and the 'jest' against Malvolio in the dark house has been by way of Feste's revenge. The 'whirligig of time' becomes the explanation as to why Malvolio has been treated the way he has. The wheel has come full circle and Feste's remark seems to indicate that through the Sir Topas jest he and Malvolio are now square and the 'feud' between them can end. Malvolio however does not see it this way and seems set to continue the feud, which casts a damper of reality over the closing moments of the play. In the theatre, these lines have been played in countless different ways—particularly with regard to Malvolio's final line and exit. Malvolio's threat could be directly addressed to the perpetrators of the 'joke'—Maria, Sir Toby and Fabian, or more specifically at Feste with whom he seems to have a running antagonism. Maria describes Malvolio as a "kind of Puritan" (II.iii.135), and it has also been suggested that this line anticipates the Puritan control of England forty years later during which the theatres were closed and 'Twelfth Night' revels were ended.
Short-Answer Quizzes

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act I, Scene 1 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What is the major theme of the play?

2. With whom is the Duke in love?

3. In what kinds of poetry does the Duke express his love?

4. Is it entirely true that the Duke is “in love with love”?

5. What type of metaphor does the Duke use when he addresses the “spirit of love”?

6. What is the subtitle of the play?

7. Toward what does the title *Twelfth Night* orient the reader?

8. What recreation does Curio ask the Duke about?

9. What is “*Twelfth Night*”?

10. What kind of part does love play in the festival atmosphere of the play?

Answers
1. Love is the major theme of the play.

2. The Duke is in love with Olivia.

3. The Duke’s poetry contains metaphors, puns, synesthesia, and similes.

4. No, it is not completely true because the Duke is clearly in love with Olivia, a specific person.

5. He uses a metaphor drawn from falconry when he addresses the “spirit of love.”

6. The subtitle of the play is “What You Will.”

7. The title orients the reader toward the playful and festive atmosphere of the action.

8. Curio asks the Duke if he is going hunting.

9. “*Twelfth Night*” is a holiday and occasion for merriment.

10. Love plays an important part as the characters meet and pair off.
Short-Answer Quizzes: Act I, Scene 2 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. Where do we first meet Viola?
2. What happened to Viola’s brother?
3. What kind of nature does Viola have?
4. What does Shakespeare imply about love in his shift of thematic emphasis?
5. What device does Viola use to get into the Duke’s service?
6. Is it clear what Viola wants to achieve in the Duke’s service?
7. How does Shakespeare symbolize Viola’s practical side?
8. Is Twelfth Night the only play that involves a character putting on a disguise?
9. What other significant Shakespearean theme does Viola state?
10. What image that the Duke employs does Viola also use?

Answers
1. We first meet Viola on a seacoast.
2. He was separated from Viola when the ship sank.
3. Viola has a practical nature.
4. Shakespeare implies that there’s more to love than mere poetry.
5. Viola uses the disguise device to get into the Duke’s service.
6. No, it is not clear as yet what Viola’s specific goal is.
7. Shakespeare symbolizes Viola’s practical side by having her offer money in payment for favors to her.
8. No, Shakespeare has used disguised characters in other plays.
9. Viola states the theme of “appearances versus reality.”
10. Viola repeats the music image of the first scene.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act I, Scene 3 Questions and Answers
Study Questions
1. Do we meet Olivia in this scene?

2. What is Sir Andrew’s relationship to Sir Toby?

3. What did Maria hear about Sir Andrew’s purpose for being in the house?

4. What does the presence of Maria and Sir Toby as characters imply?

5. Who brings in a note of competition to the scene?

6. Does Sir Andrew seem an appropriate suitor for Olivia?

7. What else do Sir Toby and Sir Andrew illustrate in the play?

8. How does Shakespeare reveal Sir Toby’s free spirit?

9. What is “ploce”?

10. What type of imagery does Sir Toby introduce at the end of the scene?

Answers
1. No, we do not meet Olivia in this scene.

2. They are friends.

3. Maria heard that Sir Toby brought him to the house to woo Olivia.

4. They imply that love is for all kinds of people, no matter what their status is.

5. Sir Andrew brings in a note of competition.

6. No, the scene leaves us with the impression that Sir Andrew may not be an appropriate suitor for Olivia.

7. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew illustrate the party-and-fun atmosphere, as implied in the title’s holiday.

8. Shakespeare reveals Sir Toby’s free spirit through the language.

9. “Ploce” is the repetition of a word in a different sense.

10. Sir Toby introduces a succession of “dance” images.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act I, Scene 4 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What is Viola’s male name?

2. What task does the Duke assign Cesario?
3. For whom does Cesario feel love for?

4. To what genre does the play Twelfth Night belong?

5. What kind of an ending do we expect in comedy?

6. What kind of vision does comedy have, according to Northrop Frye?

7. What is the community of Illyria doing about the Duke’s love?

8. How does the Duke respond to Cesario’s doubts that Olivia is too “abandoned to her sorrow” to listen to his suit?

9. Does the Duke change?

10. What does Orsino display at the end of the scene?

Answers
1. Viola’s male name is “Cesario.”

2. The Duke assigns Cesario the task of pursuing Olivia for him.


4. Twelfth Night belongs to the genre of “comedy.”

5. We expect a happy ending in comedy.

6. Comedy’s vision has a social significance.

7. The community in Illyria is well aware of and talking about the Duke’s love.

8. The Duke tells him to “be clamorous and leap all civil bounds.”


10. Orsino displays common sense at the end of the scene.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act I, Scene 5 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What does Maria threaten the Clown with?

2. What kind of attitude does the Clown evidence toward Olivia?

3. What does the Clown try to prove about Olivia?

4. What is the name of Olivia’s steward?
5. What does Olivia put on before speaking with Cesario?

6. Who falls in love with whom in this scene?

7. What do the two love twists we’ve witnessed suggest?

8. Which character serves to emphasize the subjective nature of “love”?

9. In what manner are the Clown’s insults couched?

10. That type of metaphor does Cesario use to lend emphasis to the great love the Duke holds for Olivia?

**Answers**

1. Maria threatens the Clown with punishment for his absence.

2. The Clown evidences an offhand attitude toward Olivia.

3. The Clown tries to prove that Olivia is a fool.

4. Malvolio is Olivia’s steward.

5. Olivia puts on a veil before speaking with Cesario.

6. Olivia falls in love with Cesario.

7. The love twists suggest just how subjective is the experience of love.

8. The Clown’s speech emphasizes the subjective nature of “love.”

9. The Clown’s insults are couched in a jarringly logical manner.

10. Cesario uses an extended theological metaphor to reflect the Duke’s great love.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act II, Scene 1 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**

1. What is Antonio’s occupation?

2. What relation does Sebastian hold to Viola?

3. What does Sebastian think has happened to Viola?

4. Where do Antonio and Sebastian find themselves in this scene?

5. What purpose does this scene serve?

6. How would you characterize the style of the dialogue?

7. Where does Sebastian say he is headed?
8. What does Antonio want to do for Sebastian?

9. Name one source for *Twelfth Night*.

10. Essentially, what do the sources and the play *Twelfth Night* have in common?

**Answers**

1. Antonio is a sea captain.

2. Sebastian is Viola’s brother.

3. Sebastian thinks that Viola has drowned.

4. They find themselves on Illyria’s shore.

5. The purpose of this scene is to inform us about Viola’s twin brother.

6. The style is one of formal, straightforward prose.

7. Sebastian says he is headed for Orsino’s court.

8. Antonio wishes to serve Sebastian.

9. The sources for *Twelfth Night* are Gl’Ingannati, Bandello, and Riche.

10. The sources have the four essential characters and the plot in common with Shakespeare.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act II, Scene 2 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**

1. Why does Malvolio seek Cesario?

2. Whose ring is it?

3. What kind of speech is it that Cesario utters?

4. What does Malvolio emphasize to Cesario?

5. Where does Malvolio put the ring?

6. What does Cesario feel about the ring?

7. Who has fallen in love with Cesario?

8. What does Cesario wonder in the latter part of the soliloquy?

9. What motif does Cesario repeat in his soliloquy?

10. What is the critics’ attitude toward Malvolio?
Answers
1. Malvolio seeks Cesario to give him a ring.
2. It is a ring from Olivia.
3. Cesario utters a soliloquy.
4. Malvolio emphasizes that Olivia wants Orsino to stop his wooing.
5. Malvolio places the ring on the ground.
6. Cesario feels confused about the ring.
7. Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario.
8. Cesario wonders how the mistaken love will be resolved.
9. Cesario repeats the motif of “appearances versus reality.”
10. Critics have argued over how to interpret Malvolio.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act II, Scene 3 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What does going to bed after midnight mean for Sir Toby?
2. What does Sir Andrew call Feste the Clown?
3. What ability of the Clown does Sir Andrew compliment?
4. What do Sir Toby and Andrew offer to Feste for his singing?
5. What two types of songs does the Clown suggest?
6. What does the Clown’s song define?
7. In keeping with the holiday tradition, what title can we apply to Sir Toby?
8. What plot is hatched in this scene?
9. What is Maria’s motive for the scheme?
10. What does Maria plan to drop in Malvolio’s way?

Answers
1. For Sir Toby, going to bed after midnight means going to bed early.
2. Sir Andrew calls Feste “the fool.”
3. Sir Andrew compliments the Clown’s singing voice.

4. They offer him money.

5. The Clown suggests either a love song or a song with a moral.

6. The Clown’s song defines “love.”

7. Sir Toby can take on the title of the “lord of misrule.”

8. The comic plot is hatched in this scene.

9. Maria’s motive for the scheme is revenge.

10. Maria plans to drop letters in Malvolio’s way.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act II, Scene 4 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**
1. What is the first item the Duke requests?

2. Who is not immediately available to sing the song?

3. What kind of a lover does Orsino classify himself as?

4. What does the Duke surmise about Cesario?

5. According to the Duke, does the age of the man in a relationship matter?

6. What does the Clown’s song focus on?

7. Who does the Clown insult?

8. Where does Cesario go once again?

9. What warning does Cesario give to Orsino about Olivia?

10. In what does the lover of the Clown’s song wish to be laid?

**Answers**
1. The Duke requests some music.

2. The Clown is not immediately available to sing the song.

3. Orsino classifies himself as a “true lover.”

4. The Duke surmises that Cesario has been in love.

5. Yes, the age of the male partner does matter.


9. Cesario warns the Duke that Olivia is not open to romance with him.

10. The lover is ready to be buried in a coffin.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act II, Scene 5 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**

1. Who is Fabian?

2. What is his motive for tricking Malvolio?

3. Who has worked out the scheme?

4. Where will the spectators of the device hide?

5. What does Malvolio fancy himself?

6. What kind of intention do Sir Toby and Andrew evidence by their remarks?

7. In whose handwriting supposedly is the letter that Malvolio finds?

8. What four letters in the letter lead Malvolio to believe it is addressed to him?

9. What is the source of imagery used by Sir Toby, Andrew, Maria, and Fabian to characterize Malvolio’s situation?

10. From whom is Malvolio alienated?

**Answers**

1. Fabian is another of Olivia’s servants.

2. Fabian apparently has a bone to pick with Malvolio.

3. Maria has worked out the scheme.

4. The spectators will hide in a box tree.

5. Malvolio fancies himself a suitor to Olivia.

6. Sir Toby and Andrew evidence a sadistic intention.

7. The letter is supposedly in Olivia’s handwriting.
8. “M, O, A, I” lead Malvolio to believe it is addressed to him.

9. They use animal imagery to enlighten us about Malvolio’s situation.

10. Malvolio is alienated from the rest of the household.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act III, Scene 1 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**
1. What instrument is the Clown holding?

2. Where does the Clown say he lives by?

3. Why is the Clown upset with words?

4. Rather than Lady Olivia’s fool, what does Feste claim to be?

5. What does Cesario praise while waiting for Olivia?

6. Who declares love in this scene?

7. What is Olivia’s response to Cesario’s wooing for the Duke?

8. Between what two characters does Shakespeare establish a kinship?

9. What happens when wise men act foolishly?

10. According to Herschel Baker, what do the characters lack?

**Answers**
1. The Clown is holding a tabor.

2. The Clown says he lives by a church.

3. The Clown is upset with words because they are rascals whose bonds disgraced them.

4. Feste claims to be Olivia’s “corrupter of words.”

5. Cesario praises the Clown’s skill as a fool.

6. Olivia declares her love for Cesario in this scene.

7. Olivia rejects the Duke.

8. Shakespeare establishes a kinship between Cesario and the Clown.

9. They betray their common sense.

10. The characters lack self-knowledge.
Study Questions
1. What is Sir Andrew getting ready to do?

2. On whom does Andrew see Olivia bestow her affection?

3. What is Fabian’s explanation for that favoritism?

4. What element does Fabian think will stir Olivia’s passion?

5. What idea does Sir Toby come up with to help Sir Andrew?

6. What task does Sir Toby assign Sir Andrew?

7. What does Sir Toby not plan to do, though?

8. In what manner does Sir Toby hail Maria?

9. How does Maria describe Malvolio’s absorption in the letter?

10. What role does Sir Toby continue to play well?

Answers
1. Sir Andrew is getting ready to leave.

2. Andrew sees Olivia bestow her affection on Cesario.

3. Fabian asserts that she is doing that to exasperate Andrew and to rouse him to some action.

4. Fabian thinks that valor will stir Olivia to passion.

5. Sir Toby comes up with the idea of a fight.

6. Sir Toby assigns a letter to Sir Andrew to be delivered to Cesario.

7. Sir Toby does not plan to deliver the letter.

8. Sir Toby hails Maria in an affectionate manner.

9. Maria describes Malvolio’s absorption in the letter as hilarious.

10. Sir Toby continues to play the role of “lord of misrule” well.
Study Questions
1. What does Sebastian say he will not do to Antonio?
2. Where do they meet?
3. What encouraged Antonio to keep up with Sebastian?
4. How does Antonio describe the area they’re in?
5. What does Sebastian desire to do in Illyria?
6. Why does Antonio have to decline Sebastian’s offer to see the town?
7. What does Sebastian reckon Antonio has done?
8. What does Antonio say he is guilty of?
9. Who is the missing link in the love strands?
10. With what character does Sebastian have a similar thematic function?

Answers
1. Sebastian says he will not chide him.
2. They meet in a street.
3. Antonio’s love and concern for Sebastian encouraged him to keep up.
4. Antonio describes the area as “rough and unhospitable.”
5. Sebastian desires to go sightseeing.
6. Antonio has to decline Sebastian’s offer to accompany him because he is a wanted man.
7. Sebastian reckons Antonio has murdered.
8. Antonio says he is guilty of piracy.
9. Antonio is the missing link in the love strands.
10. Sebastian and Viola have similar thematic functions.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act III, Scene 4 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. How is Olivia feeling at the opening of the scene?
2. What does Olivia commend about Malvolio?
3. What influence sways Malvolio’s mind as he speaks with Olivia?

4. In what words does Malvolio try to dismiss Sir Toby when he enters?

5. What does Sir Toby indicate his attitude toward Malvolio will be when the trick is done?

6. What does Sir Andrew return with?

7. How receptive is Cesario to Olivia’s love?

8. With what news does Sir Toby alarm Cesario?

9. What does the knowledge of Sebastian’s existence make of this scene?

10. How can we characterize Malvolio’s dialogue with Olivia?

Answers
1. Olivia is out of sorts.

2. Olivia commends Malvolio’s nature.

3. The commands of the letter sway Malvolio’s mind as he speaks with Olivia.

4. Malvolio tries to dismiss Sir Toby with “Go off; I discard you.”

5. Sir Toby indicates that he will show mercy on Malvolio when the trick is done.

6. Sir Andrew returns with the letter he wrote.

7. Cesario is not receptive to Olivia’s love.

8. Sir Toby alarms Cesario with the report that Sir Andrew is preparing to attack him.

9. Knowledge of Sebastian’s existence makes this a climactic scene.

10. We can characterize Malvolio’s dialogue with Olivia as comic and perverse.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act IV, Scene 1 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. How does Sebastian react to Feste?

2. What does Sebastian tell the Clown to vent elsewhere?

3. Who tells the other to abandon his pretense?

4. Who fights in this scene?

5. When the Clown sees the fray, what does he do?
6. Who breaks up the fight?

7. How does Olivia characterize Sir Toby’s behavior?

8. To whom does Olivia issue an invitation?

9. How does Sebastian respond to Olivia’s invitation?

10. What does Maurice Charney say about Feste’s mind?

**Answers**

1. Sebastian dismisses the Clown.

2. Sebastian tells the Clown to vent his folly elsewhere.

3. Feste tells Sebastian to abandon his pretense, “ungird thy strangeness.”

4. Sebastian, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby fight in this scene.

5. The Clown goes off to inform Olivia.

6. Olivia breaks up the fight.

7. Olivia calls Sir Toby a “rudesby” and “ungracious wretch.”

8. Olivia issues an invitation to Sebastian.

9. Sebastian is surprised at Olivia’s invitation.

10. Maurice Charney says that Feste has an “agile mind at wordplay.”

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act IV, Scene 2 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**

1. What two articles does Maria give the Clown?

2. Whom does she want Feste to play?

3. What label does Sir Topas greet Malvolio with?

4. What kind of room is Malvolio in?

5. What are the two sources of light in that room?

6. How does Malvolio perceive himself?

7. What items does Malvolio request from Sir Topas?

8. What kind of test does Malvolio ask for?
9. Why does Sir Toby feel compelled to put a stop to the trick?

10. What image in the scene suggests the cruelty of Maria and Sir Toby?

**Answers**
1. Maria gives the Clown a gown and a beard.
2. Maria wants Feste to play Sir Topas.
3. Sir Topas greets Malvolio as “Malvolio the lunatic.”
4. Malvolio is in a very dark room.
5. The two sources of light in the room are bay windows and clerestories.
6. Malvolio perceives himself as a wronged man.
7. Malvolio requests a candle, pen, ink, and paper from Sir Topas.
8. Malvolio asks for a test of his sanity.
9. Sir Toby feels compelled to put a stop to the trick because Olivia disapproves of his nonsense.
10. The darkness image suggests the cruelty of Maria and Sir Toby.

**Short-Answer Quizzes: Act IV, Scene 3 Questions and Answers**

**Study Questions**
1. Why is the garden an appropriate setting for this scene?
2. What does Sebastian try to come to terms with?
3. What does the rapidity of the love match prevent us from obtaining?
4. What gift has Olivia given Sebastian?
5. Whom does Sebastian wish to speak with?
6. Does he accept or reject Olivia’s love?
7. What skill of Olivia’s does Sebastian praise?
8. What plans has Olivia made?
9. Who has she brought to carry out those plans?
10. What is the key symbolic element of this scene?
Questions and Answers

1. It is appropriate because a wedding is about to take place.
2. Sebastian tries to come to terms with his good luck.
3. The rapidity of the love match prevents us from obtaining Sebastian’s feelings about love.
4. Olivia gives Sebastian a pearl.
5. Sebastian wishes to speak with Antonio.
6. He accepts Olivia’s love.
7. Sebastian praises Olivia’s management of affairs in the house.
8. Olivia has planned a wedding ceremony.
9. She has brought a priest to tie the knot.
10. The key symbolic element is the twins.

Short-Answer Quizzes: Act V, Scene 1 Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. Whose letter does Feste refuse to show Fabian?
2. With what disparaging term does the Clown refer to himself and Fabian?
3. Whom does Antonio think Cesario is?
4. Why does Olivia call in the priest?
5. What has happened to Sir Andrew?
6. What does Sebastian’s presence signal?
7. Whom does Malvolio cast blame on in his letter?
8. With Olivia and Sebastian being the first couple, who make up the second couple?
9. Who make up the third pairing?
10. What satisfaction does Malvolio want for the trick?

Answers
1. Feste refuses to show Malvolio’s letter.
2. The Clown refers to Fabian and himself as Olivia’s “trappings.”
3. Antonio thinks Cesario is Sebastian.

4. Olivia calls in the priest to verify her marriage to Sebastian.

5. Sir Andrew has been injured by Sebastian.

6. Sebastian’s presence signals the resolution of the mistaken identity plot.

7. Malvolio casts blame on Olivia.

8. The second couple consists of the Duke and Viola.

9. Sir Toby and Maria make up the third couple.

10. Malvolio desires revenge on all his malefactors.