# Twelfth Night Study Guide

## Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.



The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". 

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". 

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Introduction

*Twelfth Night* was written possibly as early as 1599, but is usually dated 1601. The earliest performance recorded is dated February 2, 1602 at the Middle Temple. Witness John Manningham observed that the play was "much like the Commedy of Errores, or Menechimi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni."* Shakespeare was most likely informed by at least three Italian plays titled *GI'Inganni,* ("The Frauds") which also utilize theme of mistaken identity. One of these Italian plays, written by Cuzio Gonzaga in 1592, even includes a character name "Cesare" or Cesario. However, the plot of *Twelfth Night* seems to be derived mainly from the story "Apolonius and Silla" by Barnaby Riche, in his *Riche, His Farewell to the Military Profession,* (1581), which in turn was based on another Italian comedy *GI'Ingannati* ("The Deceived"), first acted in 1531. Matteo Bandello's 1554 *Novelle,* translated into French by Francois de Belleforest in his 1579 *Histoires tragiques,* is another version of this story. *Twelfth Night* also shares similarities with other plays within the Shakespeare canon: *The Comedy of Errors* also includes identical twins, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* includes the theme of a girl dressed as a page, who must woo another woman for the man she loves.

Written most likely after his other comedies *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It,* and before the great tragedies *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *King Lear,* many critics agree that Shakespeare reached his comic peak with this play, praising him for his nearly perfect construction and comedic form in *Twelfth Night.* Nineteenth-century critic William Hazlitt wrote that "this is Justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies," and twentieth century director and critic Harley Granville-Barker called *Twelfth Night* "the last play of Shakespeare's golden age."

*Twelfth Night* explores a variety of themes and issues. The major theme of celebration and festivity was prevalent in all of the sources from which Shakespeare drew. Critics have explored the impact of this theme on the play's events as well as the limitations of celebration. The conflict between appearance and reality is brought to the fore by die elements of role-playing and disguise. Additionally, the use of language to deceive as well as the failure of characters to communicate effectively or truthfully are also issues studied and debated among critics and students of the play.

# Plot Summary

Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, is lovesick for Olivia, and has been trying to court her. His attendant arrives with the news that Olivia is discouraging suitors through her decision to mourn her brother's death for seven years. Meanwhile, Viola lands on the shore of Illyria after a shipwreck, assuming her twin brother has been lost at sea. The captain who saved her tells her of Orsino and Olivia, and helps to disguise her as a pageboy, to be known as Cesario, so she can work for Orsino. At Olivia's house, Sir Toby persuades Sir Andrew to continue pursuing Olivia for a wife. After only three days in Orsino's service, Viola/Cesario has won his confidence. She agrees to court Olivia for him, but secretly wishes to be his wife. When Viola/Cesario arrives to see Olivia, Malvolio attempts to send her away. Olivia, however, relents and receives Viola/Cesario, who begins romancing Olivia by abandoning her rehearsed speech. Olivia is intrigued and sends her attendants away as VIOla/Cesario eloquently delivers the heart of Orsino's message. She sends Viola/Cesario back to Orsino with the message that she cannot love him, but also with an invitation for Viola/Cesario to visit again. To insure Viola/Cesario's return, she sends Malvolio after her with a ring she claims VIOla/Cesario left behind.

# Characters

## Aguecheek (Sir Andrew Aguecheek):

He is a friend of Sir Toby Belch, a suitor to Sir Toby's rich niece, Olivia, and a participant in the play's subplot. (A subplot is a secondary or subordinate plot which often reflects on or complicates the major plot in a work of fiction such as a play.) In I.iii.20, Toby praises Sir Andrew Aguecheek for being gallant, or "as tall a man as any's in Illyria." He defends his friend as cultured and talented, claiming that Sir Andrew knows how to play a musical instrument and can speak "three or four languages word for word" (I.iii.25-28). Maria, on the other hand, calls Sir Andrew a "fool and a prodigal," a "great quarreller" and a "coward," who spends his nights getting drunk with Toby (I.iii.24, 30, 31, 36-37). What Sir Toby in fact values about his friend is his money, for Sir Andrew has a comfortable income of "three thousand ducats a year," and he spends it generously (I.iii.22).

Aguecheek□whose name suggests that he has a thin or pinched face as though he had a chill, or an ague□makes his first appearance in I.iii.44-139, where he shows himself to be indeed foolish. When, for example, Toby introduces him to Maria with the admonishment to "accost" or greet her, Sir Andrew mistakenly thinks that Maria's last name is "Accost" (I.iii.49,52). In response to a question in French, Sir Andrew proves that, contrary to Toby's claim, he has little knowledge of foreign languages, revealing instead his other, less academic interests: "What is *'pourquoi' 1* Do, or not do? I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting" (I.iii.91-93). Sir Andrew's principal grievance in the play is that he is wasting his time and money courting Olivia when she clearly has no interest in him but is in fact more attentive to Duke Orsino's page, Viola/ Cesario. Off and on during the play, he threatens to abandon his suit and go home, but Sir Toby flatters him, exploiting his love of "masques and revels" to convince Aguecheek to stay longer and spend more money (I.iii.l 13-14). In III.ii he even persuades the cowardly Sir Andrew to challenge Viola/Cesario to a duel. At the close of the play (V.i. 173-208), Aguecheek's money has been used up, and his head has been bloodied in a sword fight with Sebastian (whom he had mistaken for Viola/Cesario). Sir Toby, who has also been injured, takes the opportunity to tell Sir Andrew what he really thinks of him, and calls the knight "an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin fac'd knave, a gull!" (V.i.206-07).

Critics note that Sir Andrew Aguecheek's drunken revels with Sir Toby contribute to the festive, holiday atmosphere of the play. Further, because of his foolishness, his phony gallantry, and his lack of skill in wooing (in III.i.86-91, he memorizes flowery words that he hears Viola/Cesario using on Olivia, hoping to try them out later, himself), Sir Andrew has been described as a parody of a courtly lover. As such, he is also a parody of Duke Orsino□Sir Andrew's rival for Olivia's affections. (To parody means to imitate something or someone for the purposes of comic effect or ridicule.)

Critics have also remarked that sometimes Aguecheek is a poignant character, as for example, when he admits in I.iii.82-86 that he is not as witty or clever as he would like to be; and again in II.iii. 181, when in response to Toby's comment that he is adored by Maria, Sir Andrew wistfully replies, "I was ador'd once too." All the same, critics conclude that while these moments reveal Shakespeare's skill at creating complex characters, Sir Andrew Aguecheek remains a ridiculous figure.

## Andrew (Sir Andrew Aguecheek):

*See* Aguecheek

## Antonio:

He is a sea captain who becomes Sebastian's devoted friend after rescuing him from a shipwreck. Antonio's discussion with his new friend in II.i introduces the fact that Sebastian and his sister, Viola, are twins who were "born [with] in an hour" of one another (II.i.19). Antonio's affection for Sebastian is so strong that he decides to follow the young man to Orsino's household, even though Antonio has "many enemies in Orsino's court," and would face danger if he went there (II.i.45-48). When he catches up with Sebastian in III.hi, Antonio explains that he was once in a sea battle against the count's galleys and is wanted in Illyria for piracy. Antonio's status as an outlaw is significant to the action of *Twelfth Night* because it means that he must often leave Sebastian and not "walk too open" or he might be arrested (III.iii.37). Inevitably, during one of these separations he encounters Viola/Cesario and thinks that she is her brother 1 Sebastian, adding to the chaos in this play of shifting identities and miscommunication.

Scholars have remarked that during the Renaissance, friendship was considered more important than was sexual love, and that friendship is in fact one of the themes in *Twelfth Night.* Antonio repeatedly expresses his affection for Sebastian. In III.iii, he worries about Sebastian's safety in a foreign land, and helps him out by securing him room and board at a local inn; he even lends Sebastian a purseful of money for buying souvenirs (III.iii.38- 46). Thus Antonio feels deeply hurt when, mistaking her for Sebastian, he defends Viola/Cesario against Sir Andrew Aguecheek, only to be recognized and arrested by Orsino's men, and to have the astonished Viola/Cesario declare that she's never seen him before (III.iv.312-57). Feeling betrayed, the unhappy Antonio rethinks his definition of friendship. He concludes that he had been misled by Sebastian's good looks into thinking that he was a worthy companion, but now realizes that an honorable mind is more important when it comes to friendship than a pleasing exterior: "In nature there's no blemish but the mind; / None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind" (III.iv.367-68).

When he is delivered over to the duke in V.i, Antonio again reproaches Viola/Cesario for her apparent betrayal. Shortly afterward, it is his turn to be astonished when the real Sebastian appears, prompting Antonio to exclaim as he looks wonderingly at Viola and

her brother, "How have you made division of yourself? / An apple, cleft in two, is not more twin / Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?" (V.i.222-24).

## Attendants:

These are unnamed characters with no speaking parts. Attendants accompany the duke and Olivia throughout the play.

## Belch (Sir Toby Belch):

He is Olivia's uncle and a co-director of the play's subplots involving Aguecheek and Malvolio. (A subplot is a secondary or subordinate plot which often reflects on or complicates the major plot in a work of fiction such as a play.) He is also a freeloader who lives off his niece and takes money from his friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Toby Belch is annoyed with Olivia, who has "abjur'd the company / And sight of men" and has chosen instead to spend seven years of her young life hidden and in mourning for her dead brother (I.ii.40-41). Believing that "care's an enemy to life," Toby indulges in food, drink, and song, and hopes to do so as long as there is "drink in Illyria" (I.iii.2-3, 40). His last name is appropriate to his dissipated manner of living, and his dissipation is in keeping with the play's festive title.

While characters like Viola and Feste comment on the passing of time and the decay of youthful ness, and while Olivia spends her hours keeping her brother's memory alive with her tears, Sir Toby alters time to suit his own purpose. During a long night of partying, for example, he announces to Sir Andrew that "Not to be a-bed after midnight is to be up betimes"□or that staying up late is the same as getting up early. He then cites a Latin quote which claims that being up before dawn is good for one's health (II.iii.1-3). Shortly afterward, when Olivia's steward, Malvolio, chastises him for being unconcerned about where he is or how late it has gotten ("Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?"), Sir Toby retorts that he has indeed been keeping time□in the "catches," or round-songs which he and his friends have been singing by turns (II.iii.91-92, 93).

Critics note that Sir Toby's drunken carelessness stands in direct opposition to Malvolio's strict ness and self-importance. "Art any more than a steward?"□Sir Toby sneers at the scolding Malvolio, who is in fact simply another of Olivia's servants, and thus lower in rank than both her and her uncle (II.iii.l 14). "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?"□Sir Toby adds, annoyed with the steward for being a killjoy (II.iii.l 14-16).

Thanks to Maria, Toby gets his revenge against the officious steward when Malvolio is fooled into believing that Olivia wants to marry him. The "gulling" of Malvolio begins as a joke shared with the audience, who listens in with Toby, Fabian, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek as Malvolio reads aloud a phony love-letter and succeeds at convincing himself that the letter is both genuine and meant for him (II.v). It ends with Malvolio's imprisonment in a dark room for his apparent insanity. By that time, the joke has gotten

old even for Sir Toby, who is already in serious trouble with his niece for his dissolute behavior and cannot afford to add this practical joke to his list of misdemeanors (IV.ii.66-71).

Critics remark that thanks to his drunken jokes and festive, topsy-turvy approach to life, Sir Toby Belch is an appealing character; at the same time, he is a sponger with a mean streak. To hang on to his lucrative source of income, Sir Toby spends much of his time persuading the well-off but foolish Sir Andrew that he has a chance at marrying Olivia. He even arranges a comically timid duel between Aguecheek and Viola/Cesario to prevent Sir Andrew's departure. But at the close of the play, Sir Andrew is out of money and both he and Sir Toby have been soundly beaten by Sebastian. Now, Sir Toby scorns his former meal-ticket, calling him "an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thinfac'd knave, a gull!" (V.i.206-07).

## Captain (Sea Captain):

His first and only appearance occurs in I.ii when he comes ashore with Viola after having rescued her from a shipwreck. The captain's role in the play is brief but useful since he provides us with important introductory information. For example, he tells Viola the name of the country where the play is set (Illyria), as well as the name of its ruler (Duke Orsino). He also informs her that he saw her brother Sebastian still alive and clinging to a mast after their ship sank, thus preparing the way for Sebastian's entrance in II.i. Finally, the captain is the character to whom Viola confides her plan to disguise herself as the youth, Cesario, and seek employment with Orsino. At the close of the play, Viola mentions that she left her "maiden weeds," or female clothing, in the captain's safekeeping while she masqueraded as Cesario, and that he can "confirm" that she is in fact Viola (V.i.249-56). The last we hear of the captain is that he has been imprisoned on charges brought against him by Malvolio; thus the captain's function at this point is to shift our attention away from the lovers and toward the steward, who, as Olivia now remembers, has himself been taken into custody for madness (V.i.274-83).

## Cesario (Viola/Cesario):

*See* Viola

## Clown:

*See* Feste

## Countess:

*See* Olivia

## Curio:

Curio is one of two gentlemen who serve Duke Orsino (the other is Valentine). In I.i.16 he invites Orsino deer hunting, thus giving the lovesick duke the opportunity to use the word "hart" (a term for a male deer) as a pun on the word "heart" and also providing Orsino with the chance to make an allusion to the Roman myth about the hunter Actaeon, who was transformed into a stag by the goddess Diana after seeing her bathing, and subsequently killed by his own hunting dogs. (A pun is a play on words which depends for its humor on the similarity of the sound of the words□for example, "heart" and "hart," "son" and "sun," "dear" and "deer."

An allusion is a brief or implied reference to something or someone in, for example, literature or history.) Orsino's ability to play word games even while he is pining for Olivia suggests that he is enamored with the idea of love rather than genuinely in love with the countess. Curio speaks again, in II.iv, when he seeks out Olivia's jester, Feste, to sing for the duke.

## Duke (Duke Orsino):

*See* Orsino

## Fabian:

He is one of Olivia's servants as well as a character in the play's subplot. (A subplot is a secondary or subordinate plot which often reflects on or complicates the major plot in a work of fiction such as a play.) In II.v, Fabian is invited by Sir Toby Belch to join him in spying on Malvolio when he finds and reads the phony love-note forged by Maria to look as though it were written to the steward by Olivia. Like Maria and Sir Toby, Fabian resents Malvolio for bringing him "out o' favor" with the countess, and thus looks forward to Malvolio's humiliation (II.v.7-8). Fabian's main function during the phony-letter scene is to restrain Sir Toby's outrage as Malvolio's fantasies about Olivia become increasingly arrogant. "Nay, patience," Fabian counsels Sir Toby, "or we break the sinews of our plot" and spoil the practical joke (II.v.75-76).

In III.ii and iv, Fabian helps Toby direct the various elements of the subplot. In Ill.ii, for example, he joins in persuading Sir Andrew Aguecheek to challenge his "rival," Viola/Cesario, to a duel. In III.iv.84-141, he participates once more in the practical joke against Malvolio. Shortly afterward, he sees "More matter for a May morning" (in other words, additional subject matter for a comedy) when Sir Andrew Aguecheek arrives with his timidly written challenge to Viola/Cesario (III.iv.142). Fabian's final moment of stage directing comes when he helps Toby to convince Viola/Cesario that Sir Andrew is a skilled and ferocious opponent (III.iv.257-72). His final appearance in the play occurs in V.i, when his employer, Olivia, puts an end to the comic subplot by ordering Fabian to release the "notoriously abus'd" Malvolio (V.i.315, 379). At this point, the confusion among the lovers has been resolved and each pair has been united (Orsino and Viola;

Olivia and Sebastian). Hoping to forestall any "quarrel" or "brawl" that would spoil the wonder of the moment and the lovers' happiness, Fabian voluntarily confesses to the role that he played, along with Sir Toby and Maria, in the humiliation of Malvolio (V.i.355-68).

## Feste (Feste, the Clown):

Feste, also referred to as "clown," is Olivia's professional jester, or fool. During the Renaissance, monarchs and sometimes members of the nobility retained fools in their households as a source of entertainment□to sing, make witty observations, and to engage in practical jokes. The traditional costume of a fool consisted of motley, or parti-colored cloth. Thus in I.v.57, when Feste declares, "I wear not motley in my brain," he means that although his body is clothed in the official garb of the jester, his mind is not "naturally" foolish□unlike, for example, the genuinely foolish mind of Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

To a certain extent□and true to his profession□Feste contributes to the holiday tone of *Twelfth Night.* His very name makes up part of the word, "festival," and he is frequently called upon during the play to sing or to make jokes. Critics have compared him to the Lord of Misrule who according to tradition is crowned, then placed in charge of Twelfth-night festivities and high jinks. Indeed in II.iii, Feste joins the drunken revels of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, singing love-songs at their request, participating in round-songs, and remarking that the raucous Sir Toby is in "admirable fooling" (II.iii.80). Additionally, in IV.ii, Feste observes the time-honored, Twelfth- Night practice of role-reversal when he disguises himself as the wise priest Sir Topas and treats the steward Malvolio like a madman or fool.

Feste has also been referred to as the only character in *Twelfth Night* who remains detached from the play's conflicts, thus being able to comment objectively on the other characters' actions and shortcomings. In I.v.57-72, for example, he argues that his employer Olivia is a fool when he points out that she mourns for her dead brother even though his soul lies safely in heaven. After singing for the duke in II.iv, Feste asks the god of melancholy to protect Orsino, and also asserts that the duke's mind is as changeable as the colors in an opal, thereby implying that his love-sickness is pure self-indulgence and likely to change its focus□as it does in V.i when Orsino readily settles for Viola in lieu of Olivia. None of this behavior surprises Feste because, as he observes in III.i.38- 39, all sorts of people all over the world do silly things: "Foolery ... does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines every where." In III.i, Viola sums up Feste's conventional function as commentator and wise fool when she declares that to be successful, a jester must pay close attention to the variety of social mores and human attitudes which occur around him:

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 labor 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.60-68)

Characters such as Olivia, Orsino, and Viola are not insulted by Feste's sharp observations because fools are expected to make entertaining comments and are exempt from the rules of tact which apply to the rest of society. It is significant, then, that the self-important Malvolio is the only person in the play who considers Feste's witticisms offensive (I.v.83-89).

Critics have acknowledged Feste's role in communicating the play's more wistful theme of the shortness of life and the decay of youth. In I.v.52, Feste reminds Olivia that "beauty's a flower," or that it fades quickly. Elsewhere, he comments on the weakness of the body and the ravages of time by asserting that self-indulgence or "pleasure will be paid, one time or another." (II.iv.70-71).

Finally, *Twelfth Night* is filled with songs, many of which are sung by Feste, and most of which warn the listener of the harsh effects of time on love, beauty, and youth. In II.iii.47-52, he sings a verse which stresses the urgency of enjoying love and youth for the short time that it lasts. Feste closes the play with a song that documents the stages in a person's life□beginning with carefree childhood and including the grimmer aspects of adulthood, aging, and overindulgence.

## Gentlewoman:

A gentlewoman is mentioned in the stage directions of III.i as accompanying Olivia.

## Lords:

These are unnamed minor characters with no lines to speak. They appear with Orsino in the opening scene of the play.

## Malvolio:

He is Olivia's steward. Malvolio's name means "ill will." He wears dark clothing and has no sense of humor, both of which are appropriate to Olivia's observance of mourning. The countess values Malvolio as a servant because he "is sad [serious] and civil" (III.iv.5). However, she also chides him for being "sick of self-love," and□in a remark which looks ahead to Malvolio's gulling and his subsequent bitterness□Olivia adds that "To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets"□something Malvolio is unable to do (I.v.90, 91-93).

Olivia's servant Fabian dislikes Malvolio for bringing him "out o' favor" with the countess (II.v.7-8). Sir Toby Belch feels particularly antagonistic toward the steward because he condemns Toby's drunkenness, sabotages fun, and has ideas above his social station in life. Feste and Malvolio are complete opposites□in names and professions as well as their personalities. The steward has nothing but contempt for Feste's word games and riddles: "I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal," Malvolio tells the countess (I.v.83-84).

Thus the stage is set for the "gulling," or fooling, of Malvolio in II. v and all that it entails: his smiles, yellow stockings, and crossed garters which astound Olivia in III.iv; and his imprisonment for apparent madness by Toby and Maria in IV.ii. Both the festival of Twelfth Night and Shakespeare's play of the same name are about the inversion of social and personal expectations. Malvolio had hoped to rise above his social status and become a count; instead, he falls so low that by IV.ii, he has been locked in a dark room and is being badgered by a fool dressed in a fake beard and priestly robes. Seeking to be released from the dark room, Malvolio finds himself in the humiliating and ironic situation of having to "convince" Feste that he is not insane. "I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art," he tells the jester, to which Feste replies, "Then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool" (IV.ii.88,89-90).

Critics are divided over the justness of Malvolio's treatment, especially with regard to his incarceration in the dark room. Some have argued that he is a scapegoat who is humiliated simply for the sake of a few laughs. Others contend that the practical joke is genuinely funny and that it stays within the limits of good taste up until the moment that Malvolio is imprisoned and tormented by "Sir Topas." Alternatively, some critics point out that Malvolio would not have been fooled by Maria's nonsensical letter if he had not already harbored delusions of grandeur. Even before he catches sight of the letter, the steward can be heard fantasizing about marriage with Olivia, calling himself "Count Malvolio," and imagining his nemesis Sir Toby curtseying before him (II.v.23-80). In any case, the steward's angry threat in V.i.378□"I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you"□sounds an ominous note in the wake of Twelfth Night festivities and in anticipation of the joyful multiple marriages which await the close of this romantic comedy.

Ultimately most people agree that there is a difference between reading about the gulling of Malvolio and actually seeing it performed onstage. When they are caught up in the momentum of the actors' performances, and once they are able to see the grinning Malvolio in his cross-gartered yellow stockings, many audience members applaud Maria and Toby's revenge from start to finish. On the other hand, while experiencing the joke as it slowly unfolds in print, the reader has time to feel sympathy for the steward.

## Maria:

She is Olivia's lady-in-waiting. In I.iii, Maria draws our attention to Sir Toby Belch's habitual late nights and drunkenness when she warns him that his niece, Countess Olivia, has lost patience with his dissolute behavior. She also prepares us for the

entrance shortly afterward of Sir Andrew Aguecheek by referring to him as "a foolish knight" whom Sir Toby "brought in one night here to be [Olivia's] wooer" (I.iii.15-17). In I.v.1-31, she introduces us to the clown, Feste, when she scolds him on behalf of his employer, Olivia, for having been absent when Olivia wanted entertainment.

Maria's reproofs frequently give way to jokes and lively wordplay. She teases Sir Andrew Aguecheek for his foolishness in I.iii.66-79 and outdoes Feste at punning in I.v.1-31. Her cleverness inspires admiration in Sir Toby Belch, whose affection for her is apparent in the nicknames he gives her□names which also happen to indicate her small size. In II.iii.179, for example, Toby refers to her affectionately as "a beagle true-bred." Elsewhere he fondly describes her as a "little villain" and as his "metal [gold] of India" (II.v.13,14).InIII.ii.66,he calls her "the youngest wren of nine" (in other words, the smallest in a nest of wrens□a type of bird which is very small even after it is full-grown). In II.iii, Maria tries without success to quiet Sir Toby and his friends in their noisy revels, only to be chastised soon afterward-by Malvolio, who suspects her of encouraging Toby's drunkenness. In revenge, she invents the practical joke which humiliates Malvolio and forms part of the play's subplot. Calling the steward a puritanical "time-pleaser," or flatterer, who is conceited enough to believe "that all that look on him love him," Maria devises a trick meant to exploit "that vice in him" (II.iii. 148, 152-53). She mimics Olivia's handwriting while composing "some obscure epistles of love" and drops them where Malvolio is certain to find them (II.iii.155-56). Maria is confident that the steward thinks so highly of himself that he will believe it possible for the countess to fall in love with him, and sure enough, Malvolio convinces himself that the epistle, or letter, was written by Olivia to him. Maria helps things along by telling Malvolio that Olivia "affects" (is fond of) him (II.v.23-24), and by warning the countess that Malvolio is crazy, or "tainted in 's wits" (III.iv.13). Her practical joke is so successful that the delighted Sir Toby marries her "in recompense" (V.i.364).

## Musicians:

The musicians play for Orsino in the opening scene of the play. Although they are not mentioned specifically in the stage directions of II.iv (perhaps the are included in the "others" that accompany the duke), Orsino asks for music, and the stage directions indicate that music is played at this point in the scene.

## Officers:

The officers (1. Officer, 2. Officer) appear in Ill.iv when they arrest Antonio, and speak a couple of lines during the course of this action. The officers appear again in V.i when they present Antonio to Orsino. Only the first officer speaks in this scene.

## Olivia:

She is a rich countess who is loved by Orsino even though she does not feel the same way about him. In I.i.23-31, we learn that Olivia plans to spend seven years mourning

for her dead brother, during which time she will hide her face with a veil, reject any declarations of love, and weep daily to keep her brother's memory alive. Orsino considers the countess beautiful but cruel (II.iv.80-86). Viola's friend the captain describes Olivia as "a virtuous maid" (I.ii.36). Viola/Cesario calls her beautiful but "too proud," and scolds her for refusing to marry and for thus failing to "leave the world [a] copy" of her beauty by having children (I.v.243, 250-51). Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, is impatient with her: "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus?" he wonders in I.iii.1-2. Feste, who is Olivia's professional clown, or fool, argues that she is in fact the real fool since she wastes her youth and beauty in seclusion while weeping for a brother whose "soul is in heaven" (I.v.69-72).

When Viola/Cesario arrives with messages of love from the duke, Olivia is prepared to reject them as calmly as she has always done, and indeed she announces yet again that she "cannot love" Orsino, and that "He might [or should] have took his answer long ago," since she has consistently sent him the same negative reply (I.v.263-64). Olivia is not prepared, however, for her own infatuation with the duke's page (that is, the young gentlewoman, Viola, disguised as the youth, Cesario). "How now?" Olivia asks herself, "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.294-98)., Critics have pointed out that like several other characters in the play (Sebastian and Viola, for example), Olivia quickly accepts what happens to her as part of her fate. "Well, let it be," she concludes; "Fate, show thy force: ourselves we do not owe; / What is decreed must be; and be this so" (I.v.298, 310-11).

By the time she sees Viola/Cesario again, Olivia is passionately in love and determined to win the page's affections, even at the cost of her own pride. Orsino earlier described Olivia as cruel, and she in her turn accuses Viola/Cesario of being scornful and proud (III.i. 144-51). Viola/Cesario pities the countess for her mistake, and for the "thriftless sighs" which Olivia's unrequited love will wring from her (II.ii.39). *Twelfth Night* is, however, a comedy: Renaissance comedies are meant to end in marriages and happiness. Thus when Olivia encounters Sebastian in IV.i, she mistakes him for Viola/Cesario, takes him home, and in IV.iii, she marries him. At the close of the play, her new husband, Sebastian, suggests that by falling in love with his disguised twin sister, Olivia was merely proving that nature meant for her all along to love someone like Sebastian (V.i.259-63).

Critics have argued that Olivia's prolonged period of mourning is as artificial as Orsino's courtly love, and that like the duke, the countess needs to be awakened from her dream world by Viola and her brother.

## Orsino (Duke Orsino, also known as the Count):

He is the duke of Illyria. Although he appears less often than most of the other major characters, his speeches are important to the play's assessment of love and human nature. When the play begins, Orsino is so preoccupied with unrequited love for Olivia that he feels unable to do anything but listen to music. "If music be the food of love, play

on," he tells his musicians, "Give me excess of it; that surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die" (I.i.1-3). He hopes to kill his feelings for Olivia by letting them gorge themselves to death on music□which has been described as the "food of love." Unfortunately, his feelings tire of the music before they can be sickened by it, and so his love for Olivia survives. Several lines afterward, the duke compares his love-sick heart to a "hart" (deer) which has been attacked by "cruel" hunting dogs (I.i. 17- 22). Later, when he hears that Olivia is in mourning for her dead brother and refuses to care for anyone else for the next seven years, Orsino is impressed by Orsino does not in fact appear in any scenes with his adored Olivia until the final one (V.i), when he gives up on her and at last falls in love with his former page, Viola. Although Olivia had never once been in love with him (according to Sir Toby, she refuses to marry anyone who is older than she is, or whose income or social rank is higher than hers [I.iii.109-11]), she acknowledges that Orsino is noble, good-looking, well-educated, brave, and admired by his people (I.v.258-62). As for Orsino's own affections, critics have observed that the duke is more devoted to love than he ever is to Olivia, and that his feelings are sterile and lack self-awareness. Thus as the play closes, he is able to shift instantly from idolizing Olivia to loving Viola, especially since in the meantime, through her sensible conversations and her fidelity, Viola has taught Orsino the enduring connection between love and friendship. her ability "To pay this debt of love" to someone who is simply a brother, and his mind boggles when he thinks about how great Olivia's devotion will be when she someday receives a wound from Cupid's "rich golden shaft," or the gold-tipped arrow of romantic love (I.i.32-38). As the scene closes, the duke decides to indulge rather than kill his love by surrounding himself with the heady fragrance of flowers (I.i.39-40).

Orsino's use of elaborate, poetic language to identify his feelings indicates that he is experiencing courtly love□a system of romantic love which flourished during the Middle Ages. According to this system, a man falls deeply in love□usually at first sight and, initially at least, without his affection being returned. The woman who is the object of this love is extraordinarily beautiful, but also extremely cruel for her refusal to reciprocate. The spurned lover feels ill and loses sleep; he alternately burns and freezes from the intensity of his passion. He is, as Orsino explains to Viola/Cesario, "Unstaid and skittish" in all of his thoughts and emotions "Save in the constant image of the creature / That is belov'd" (II.iv.18, 19-20). In conformity with tradition, the heartsick courtly lover often prefers to be alone, contemplating his unhappiness. As Duke Orsino puts it, "I myself am best / When least in company" (I.iv.37-38). When the afflicted lover finds himself with other people, he spends much of his time debating the nature of love. So for example in II.iv.29-41 and 89-109, the duke discusses with Viola/Cesario the differences between male and female affections and fidelity.

## Priest:

He is brought in by Olivia in IV.iii.22 to perform the marriage ceremony between her and the amazed but willing Sebastian, whom Olivia has mistaken for Viola/Cesario. Olivia sends for the priest once more in V.i. 142, so that he can testify that she and Viola/Cesario are married. Like every one else in the play, the priest is unable to tell any

difference between Sebastian and Viola/Cesario, so he does indeed verify Olivia's claim, which results in Viola's astonished denial and Orsino's jealous rage (V.i. 156-170).

## Sailors:

These are unnamed characters who appear with the captain and Viola in I.ii. They have no speaking parts.

## Sea Captain:

*See* Captain

## Sebastian:

He is Viola's twin brother. The two of them were victims of a shipwreck, and each believes the other has been drowned at sea. Unlike his sister, Sebastian makes only a few, short appearances in the play. He first enters in II.i, accompanied by his devoted rescuer, Antonio. Mourning the apparent death of Viola and feeling aimless in the foreign country of Illyria, Sebastian initially decides to head for Duke Orsino's court, but then in III.iii, opts instead for touring the local sights.

Sebastian has been called a passive character. His argument for setting off on his own in II.i is that he has been the victim of bad luck and does not want the "malignancy" of his own fate to influence Antonio's luck. In IV.i.24-43, he fights with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, but only because they attack him first after mistaking him for Viola/Cesario. When Olivia offers to take him to her home after ward, he is amazed but goes along without questioning her□agreeing to be "rul'd" by her request, and concluding that "If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!" (IV.i.64, 63). His reaction to Olivia's proposal of marriage in IV.iii is the same: even though he is astonished by her behavior, he submits to a hasty wedding. In IV.iii. 1-21, Sebastian describes his state of mind: sometimes he thinks he is the victim of a misunderstanding, while at other times he wonders whether he or the citizens of Illyria are insane. In any case, Sebastian wishes that Antonio were with him, and observes that "His counsel now might do me golden service" (IV.iii.8).

It is made clear in the play that Sebastian is a very young man. Antonio refers to him as a "young gentleman" and a "boy" (III.iv.312; V.i.77), and he affectionately lends Sebastian a purseful of money with which to buy souvenirs (III.iii.44-45). Once the confusion regarding Viola and her brother has been solved in V.i.263, Sebastian himself refers to his youthfulness, telling Olivia that she has married "a maid," or virgin, as well as a man. This reference to a maid highlights his resemblance to (and hence confusion with) his sister, Viola, but it also emphasizes Sebastian's youthfulness.

Critics point out that at first, Sebastian's arrival throws the unsuspecting members of Olivia's and Orsino's households into confusion (since they mistake him for

Viola/Cesario), but that ultimately, Sebastian's presence on the stage with his sister is necessary to the happy resolution of the play. Both he and Olivia are contented with their marriage to one another, and Viola is free to stop being Cesario and to marry her beloved Orsino.

## Servant:

A servant appears in III.iv and addresses Olivia.

## Toby (Sir Toby Belch):

*See* Belch

## Valentine:

He is one of two gentlemen who serve Duke Orsino (the other is Curio). Valentine has a couple of brief speeches which present information important to action of the play. The first one occurs in I.i.23-31 when, after trying unsuccessfully to deliver a message from Orsino to Olivia, he informs the lovesick duke that the countess is observing seven years of mourning for her dead brother, during which time she will remain cloistered at home with her face veiled. Then in I.iv.1-8, Valentine remarks to Viola (newly disguised as Cesario) that within only three short days, she has won the duke's favor as a page. Shortly afterward, Orsino uses his favorite new page "Cesario" to court Olivia, thereby inadvertently initiating a love triangle between himself, Viola/Cesario, and the countess.

## Viola (Cesario; Viola/Cesario):

She is a gentlewoman from a country called Messaline, and also the twin sister of Sebastian. Viola first appears on the coast of Illyria in I.ii, accompanied by the captain who saved her from drowning in a shipwreck, and concerned about the fate of her missing brother, who had been traveling with her. "And what should I do in Illyria?"□she wonders□ "My brother he is in Elysium [heaven]" (I.ii.3-4). Once the captain gives her reason to hope that her brother is still alive, Viola sets about the business offending for herself in a foreign country. At the close of I.ii, Viola has decided to disguise herself and seek employment with Duke Orsino; I.ii is the first and last time that Viola appears in women's clothing. For the rest of the play she wears men's clothing appropriate to her disguise as Orsino's page, Cesario.

By her next appearance in the play and after only three days, Viola/Cesario has become the duke's favorite attendant. Orsino sends her to court Olivia for him, with strict instructions to "stand at her doors" and insist upon admittance (I.iv.16). In an aside, Viola/Cesario confesses that she has herself fallen secretly in love with the duke: "Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife (I.iv.42). (An aside occurs when a character speaks to the audience without being overheard by the other characters

onstage. Asides are used to reveal the character's inner thoughts.) In spite of her own feelings, Viola/Cesario loyally persists until she is allowed to deliver her message to Olivia, leading Malvolio to complain that Orsino's page is "fortified against any denial" (I.v.145). Olivia promptly rejects the duke's lovesick message, but she is intrigued with his messenger's boldness; by the end of the interview, the countess has fallen in love with Viola/Cesario, with chaotic results. In II.i, Sebastian offers a brief but affectionate description of his twin, Viola, whom he thinks has drowned at sea:

A lady, sir, though it was said she much
resembled me, was yet of many accounted
beautiful;
but though I could not with such estimable wonder
overfar believe that, yet thus far I will boldly
publish
her: she bore a mind that envy could not but call
fair.
(II.i.25-29)

All other assessments of Viola occur after she has disguised herself as Cesario; therefore, they focus not on her womanly beauty but on her apparent boyishness, and more on the boldness of her mind than on its "fairness," or virtue. Malvolio, for example, grumpily asserts that Viola/Cesario is "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 'tis almost an apple. Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man. He is very well-favor'd, and he speaks very shrewishly. One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him" (I.v.156-62). The steward's difficulty in settling on an accurate description of Viola/Cesario results in dramatic irony. Dramatic irony happens when the audience understands the real significance of a character's words or actions, but the character or those around him or her do not. In this case, both Viola and the audience know that she is a woman, but everyone else is struggling to decide whether she is a boy or an extremely young-looking man.

Another example of dramatic irony is the duke's remark to his page that "they shall yet belie thy happy years, / That say thou art a man"; this produces a comical moment because we know that no matter how many years pass, Viola/Cesario will never become a man (I.iv.30-31); Orsino's observation shortly afterward that Viola/Cesario's "small pipe" (vocal chords), is as high and clear as a "maiden's" is also amusing for its dramatic irony, since we know and Viola/Cesario knows that she is indeed a maiden and that her "shrill and sound" voice will never break (I.iv.32-33). (See also Feste's arch but good-natured blessing that Viola/Cesario may someday grow a beard, and her wistfully comic aside in response [III.i.44-48]). These moments of dramatic irony contribute to a sympathetic portrait of Viola by giving us something in common with her□we as the audience share information with Viola which for the moment she feels she must withhold from the other characters.

Viola has been called a central character because of her influence over other characters in the play. Some critics suggest that her disguise as Cesario allows her and the

audience to see through the pretenses of characters like Olivia and Orsino. For example, Olivia's reclusive and elaborate period of mourning for her brother stands in contrast to Viola's optimistic and active engagement with the world of Illyria in spite of her own brother's apparent death. Additionally, Viola's patient and self-sacrificing love for Orsino helps the duke to reassess his own artificial and self-indulgent love of love. Viola's observations about the destructive influence of time and melancholy on youth and beauty have been compared to similar remarks made by Feste. In I.v.241-43, for example, she upbraids Olivia for wasting her beauty by leading it to the grave rather than marrying and transmitting her beauty to her children. In II.iv. 110-15, thinking of her own hidden love for Orsino, Viola paints a vivid picture of the effects of time and unrequited, unproclaimed love on the "damask cheek" of a maiden who "sate like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief."

It has also been pointed out that Viola can be fatalistic in her attitude to time. When she discovers that Olivia has fallen in love with her, Viola/Cesario pities the countess, but concludes that time "must untangle this, not I / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie" (II.ii.40-41).

Interestingly, unlike other Shakespearean female characters who adopt disguises, Viola does not remove her men's clothing at the end of the play, and the rest of the characters, including Duke Orsino, are left to take her true identity on faith.

## Viola/Cesario:

*See* Viola

# Character Studies

## Viola and Olivia

The principal scenes shared by Olivia and Viola begin with scene v in Act I, when the two women meet face to face. Viola has heard of Olivia from the captaIn and Orsino, but meets her for the first tIme when she arrives with Orsino's message. From early in the conversation, Viola/Cesario matches Olivia in wit, and wins an audience with her, even though Olivia has heard Orsino's message before. Yet she is intrigued with Viola/Cesario's bold style, and responds to Viola/Cesario's request to lift her veil. Viola/Cesario encourages Olivia to not leave her beauty in the grave but to embrace love while she is young and have children to carry it on. When Olivia starts asking questions of Viola/Cesario, it becomes clear that her energies have shifted from maintaining her refusal of Orsino, to learning more about the page who is such an eloquent gentleman. When in Act II, scene ii, Viola/Cesario receIves the ring from Malvolio that Olivia claims she left, Viola begins to realize the futility of the love triangle her disguise has created: "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?"

Olivia continues to pursue Viola/Cesario, and Viola continues to deflect her attentions. When Olivia encounters Sebastian in Act IV, scene i, she asks him back to her house and he goes. When he seems amenable to her affections, she wastes no time in finding a priest to officiate the fledgling commitment between them. This, however, creates a problem when Olivia meets Viola/Cesario again in the final act, and Viola/ Cesario acts surprised at OlivIa's familiar tone Viola confesses that she loves the Duke, so Olivia, feeling betrayed and not wanting to be taken for a fool, brings out the priest to vouch for their vows. The confusion clears when Sebastian arrives on the scene, and Olivia realizes that she is indeed betrothed-to a real man-and Viola is freed from her disguise and is engaged to marry the Duke.

The comparison of Viola and Olivia has engaged Critics in frequent debate. Viola and Olivia, whose names are essentially anagrams of each other, are parallel characters in many ways; however, Viola is generally regarded as the principle character. The women begin the play in similar circumstances: Olivia disguises herself behind a veil of mourning, and Viola dresses as a pageboy. They both have also recently lost brothers; however each woman approaches those situations differently. While Olivia chooses to waste her youth engaged in a meaningless ritual of mourning, languishing in exquisite self-denial, Viola continues to hope for her brother's welfare, but chooses to get on with the business of living. Furthermore, It is Viola, some critics argue, who possesses the ability to *see* past the masks of the other characters, and who encourages Olivia to drop the veil and seize love while she is young. Olivia recognizes the value in this and does so, in a misdirected way at first, but with happy results at the end. Viola's arrival in Illyria is key to the action of *Twelfth Night;* without the insights she shares with Olivia and Orsino on love and life, the lovesick Duke and the stubborn object of his affections may have otherwise simply grown old and died in a stalemate. Furthermore, Viola becomes

interchangeable with Olivia to the Duke, when he abruptly ends his pining for Olivia when he learns that Viola is a woman and accepts her in place of Olivia as a wife.

## Malvolio

Olivia's steward Malvolio, whose name literally means "ill-wisher," first appears in Act I, scene v, with his lady Olivia. HIS disposition is in direct opposition with Feste the clown, as Feste softens Olivia with his wit. Malvolio, however, is not won over. His insults to the clown prompt Olivia to declare "0, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite."

Malvolio is the center of the subplot which develops in Act II, scene iii, as Feste, SIr Andrew, Sir Toby and Maria are participating in revelry. Malvolio interrupts the merriment to say that if they cannot be quiet they will have to leave. The merrymakers mock and dIsregard Malvolio, so he vows to tell Olivia of the disruption their festivities are causing. In revenge, the four merrymakers devise a plan to make Malvolio look foolIsh in Olivia's eyes by capitalizing on his oversized ego.

In the fifth scene of Act II, Maria Writes a letter supposedly from Olivia and drops it in Malvolio's path. He is letting his mind wander to the preferential way Olivia treats him, and contemplating himself in the role of her husband, the Count. Suddenly he spies the letter and reads the cryptic message. His vanity identifies him as the object of Olivia's secret love, as he "crushes" the letters M.O.A.I. to fit his name. The letter asks Its subject to appear smiling in yellow stockings and crossed garters which Malvolio does at the first chance he gets to *see* Olivia, in Act Ill, scene iv. She thinks he has gone mad and sends for Sir Toby to look after him. The merrymakers torment Malvolio further in Act IV, scene ii, by disguising Feste as a priest, who convinces Malvolio that he has gone blind. Sir Toby finally decides to end the game, and Feste grants Malvolio's request for pen and paper, which Malvolio uses to record the injustices done to him for Olivia to read. When he finally gets an audience with her in the final act she promises Malvolio that he will be both "plaintiff and the judge Of thine own cause," but Malvolio storms out declaring "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!"

Critics often note that the character of Malvolio stands in stark contrast to the atmosphere of gaiety that pervades the play. In a society where sensual indulgence is encouraged, Malvolio stands for law and order and is vilified for his position. He is fighting a losing battle, as Sir Toby points out in Act II, scene ii, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" -in other words, "do you think that your attitude of righteousness will stop us from partying?" He has been compared by some scholars to the Puritans of Elizabethan times for his somber attitude and his crushing of the message in the letter to fit his fantasies, much like the Puritans bent the Biblical text to suit their own purposes. It is often noted that, because of his dissimilarity to the rest of the characters, Malvolio's presence in the play is critical. He plays the defender of the rules meant to be broken, in order to provide a scapegoat for the pranks of the merrymakers. Without the tension his character creates, the comic possibilities of the play would be severely diminished. Malvolio's punishment is

particularly fitting because it exploits his own character defects. It is his own vanity that delivers him into the hands of the merrymakers and overcomes his rational restraint. Thus Malvolio is tricked into appearing opposite of his true nature: the consummate killjoy is smiling and dressed like a clown.

## Feste

Feste the clown is the perpetrator of folly in *Twelfth Night* and the polar opposite of his colleague, Malvolio, Olivia's other servant. Feste's function in this society is to be an objective observer and commentator, and in so doing reveal the ridiculousness in the others' behavior. In first appearance, in Act I, scene v, he convinces Olivia that it is foolish to mourn her brother's death when his soul is in heaven. Later, in Act II, scene iv, Feste sings for Orsino, who requests a silly love song. Feste, however, perhaps to poke fun at Orsino's excessive lovesickness performs a melodramatic song about a lover who died alone for an unrequited love. The Duke in response briskly dismisses him. When Feste, dressed as Sir Topas, a priest, visits Malvolio in his confinement in Act IV, scene ii, he tries to convince Malvolio that he is blind, and that things are really quite different from the way Malvolio perceives them. In the final act, Feste summarizes the play with a song.

Commentators point out that, paradoxically, the character designated as a fool is the one who grasps the simple truths behind the action, which is that appearance does not always reflect reality. Feste observes of himself *"culcullus non facit monachum"* [the cowl does not make the monk]; that's as much to say as I do not wear motley on my brain" -in other words, "the way I dress does not define me; while I may look stupid, my mind is quite sharp." When first encountering Feste in Act III, scene i, Viola is one of the few characters to appreciate the depth of his insight when she observes, "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool, And to do that well craves a kind of wit."

# Conclusion

*Twelfth Night* is most often praised by critics for its comedic form and artistic unity. Its interrelated themes are complex and intriguing, and have inspired many controversial and contradicting theories. Some view it as Shakespeare's farewell to comedy, and note that its melancholy undertone foreshadow his great tragedies. However, most twentieth-century critics agree that festivity and Saturnalian pursuits lie at the heart of this play. *(See also Shakespearean Criticism, Vols. 1 and 26)*

# 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.

# Overviews

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6
- Critical Essay #7
- Critical Essay #8
- Critical Essay #9
- Critical Essay #10
- Critical Essay #11
- Critical Essay #12
- Critical Essay #13

# Critical Essay #1

Source: "Preface to *Twelfth Night"* in *Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. VI,* B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1974, pp. 26-32.

*[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 Shake speare'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 writ ing, 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 *Ham. let, 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 u p on a passionate love romance, perseveres in this unti (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 amous 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 p lan, for it is about her house that the later action 0 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-playas 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 com p anions as he can find: Maria and Fabian and the Foo . 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, forthe 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 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 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 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 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 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 wil1 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.

# Critical Essay #2

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 *Gi'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. The topics of madness and self-deception were first introduced in the late nineteenth century by the French critic E. Montegut, who saw *Twelfth Night* as a carnival farce (a farce is a humorous drama which relies more heavily on improbable situations and coarse wit than on character and plot development). During that same time, Frederick Furnivall developed a companion theory to Montegut's carnival madness: he noted the "shadow of death and distress across the sunshine" of the play, triggering a continuing stream of criticism in that vein. Continuing in the theme put forth by Furnivall, twentieth-century critic Thad Jenkins Logan discusses the dark side of festivity, demonstrating that by abolishing limits of festivity in the stage world of Illyria, the audience will grow in its understanding that In reality, festivIty taken to its extreme breaks down and creates an unsafe atmosphere for its participants.

Recent commentary has also focussed on the two titles of the play *(Twelfth Night* or *What You Will).* Michael Taylor demonstrates how the actions of various characters support both titles of the play: some point towards the passive acceptance of festivity's role in shaping events, while others embody the active stance suggested by "what you will." Maurice Charney uses Robert Herrick's 1648 poem, "Twelfe night, or King and Queene," to illustrate the festive atmosphere of Twelfth Night Renaissance celebrations.

*"'Twelfth Night'* and *'What You Will,* " in *Critical Quarterly,* Vol. 16, No. 01, Spring, 1974, pp. 71-80.

*[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 MalvoltO, 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 langour 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?' (1.3.117-118).

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' (1.3.8), 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 'lovethoughts' 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' (1.1.23-24). 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.4.1819) 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' (1.1.3). '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' (1.4.20) he urges Viola, for (in a prophetic line) 'It shall become thee well to act my woes' (1.4.25). 'What shall I do?' (V.l.l09) 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?' (1.3.83), 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.1.111-13)

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 p lay'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' (1.2.55) 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?' (1.2.3). In her disguise as Cesario, she obeys Orsino's instructions to the letter, much to Malvolio's discomfiture. 'He's fortified against any denial' (1.5.138-139) Malvolio complains to an intrigued OlIvia, 'He'll speak with you, will you or no' (1.5.147-148). How much her purposefulness becomes her is indicated, of course, in Olivia's admiring, 'You might do much' (1.5.263). 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?' (1.5.281) 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 cloisters 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.
(1.1.29-33)

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' (11.3.136139). 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' (11.5.135-137). 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. (11.5.137-141) 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'* (11.5.142-143) [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).

# Critical Essay #3

Source: *"Twelfth Night:* The Limits of Festivity" in *Studies in English Literature, 1500 to 1900,* Vol. 22, No.2, Spring, 1982, pp. 223-38.

*[Logan explores the darker side of the carnival atmo sphere 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 Saturnalian 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 inter p retations. It is clear that festive experience permits 0 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." J an Kott, in a brilliant though idiosyncratic assess ment 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 playa conservative, Apollonian Shakespeare, 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 eclat 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 pur *sue* "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" (ILiii.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 choos *es.* 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; 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.li.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 metaphoric 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 playas 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.ll0). 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, 1 do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, 1 do not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, 1 would it would make you invisible" (I1I.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 "disintegration" 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 Illyna 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.4O-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 channeled 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 ' the bud Peed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smi1ing at grief.
(II.iv.ll0-15)

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 denay," 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 mayor 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 Thelerne) 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 *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 Oliviaare 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.

# Critical Essay #4

Many critics have identified the problem of identity as a major issue in *Twelfth Night* and correlate the self-deception and disguises which are prevalent in the play with this theme. Frank Kermode has explored the limits of "wonder and madness" as they relate to identity issues within the play. Critic S. Nagarajan argues that self-deception-demonstrated by the disguises adopted by many of the characters clouds the reason of the characters involved.

While *Twelfth Night* is rich with characters who adopt disguises or play roles, many critics, including Karen Greif and J. Dennis Huston, both find Viola's gender-switching disguise to be the central focus of the play. In Greif's view, Viola is unlike the other characters in that she is keenly aware of her role-playing, and her admission of her true identity at the play's end is the event that makes it possible for Orsino and Olivia to drop their unfulfilling roles and find love. Grief also points out that Feste is aware of the untrustworthy nature of words and appearances. J. Dennis Huston places Viola's adoption of a disguise in psychoanalytical context: he sees her adoption of a masculine disguise as motivated by a reluctance to *em* brace her sexual identity.

Source: '"When I Came to Man's Estate': *Twelfth Night* and Problems of Identity," in *Modern Language Quarterly,* Vol. 33, No.3, September, 1972, pp. 274-88.

*[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 *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 *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 *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 *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 com plications of plot are under the guiding and benefi cent control of a dramatist who means to bring them eventually to a harmonious conclusion. If in the pro cess he can successfully employ one of his favorite dramatic sleights of hand, double time, that is only further proof of his superhuman 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 chang es 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 Shake speare'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 note, 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 Malaria'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 of 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 quieter, 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 Illyna.

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.i.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 Illyna.

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 Faste'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, appareled 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 readymade possibilities for comedy nourished by misunderstanding and mistaken identity, and Shakespeare was hardly one to throwaway 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 shoulder, 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)
0, what a rogue and peasant slave am II
(II.ii.576)
To be, or not to be: that is the question. . . .
(III.1.56)
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

masculinity 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 die 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: "0 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 controlOlivia 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.34). 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 masculineness 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:

0 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)
0 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 p lay: she must then put away her masculine usurpe 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 reconciliation's 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. Orisino 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 his mood 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.34). 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.12022). 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.

# Critical Essay #5

The use of language in *Twelfth Night* contributes to the sense of comedic festivity: much of the humor in the play centers on wordplay or choice of language. Feste and Viola both use words skillfully, revealing only as much as they choose to reveal. Some critics, such as Yumi Murakami, have examined the relationship between wordplay and characterization. Murakami argues that wordplay is used by Viola, Olivia, and Maria to engage their wit and intellect; by Feste to express humor and sarcasm; and by Orsino as a means of presenting his poetry. Other critics, including Terrence Eagleton, have analyzed the destructive nature and power of language in *Twelfth Night.*

Critics take different views on whether the characters' speeches and messages communicate the truth or not. Ralph Berry contends that most of the acts of communications in *Twelfth Night* serve only to reinforce the characters' fantasies and convey no real truth. Elizabeth Yearling, however, argues that despite the disguises and deceptions of the characters, their speech conveys a true sense of their personalities. Both would agree, however, that the double meanings and jests of the play reinforce the thematic contrast of fantasy and reality.

Source: "The Messages of *Twelfth Night,"* in *Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form,* Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 196-212.

*[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 Olivisa from hiss 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 earned 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 non-communication. 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.

*Marta:* He has been yonder I' the sun practicing behavior to his own shadow this half hour.
(II,S, 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 no-communication. 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:

*Malvo/io:* 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.
*Malvo/io'* 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" 01, 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" 01, 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 antagonists 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?" 01, 1, 198199) 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 recompense thereof. . ." 01, 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 inassimilable 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.

# Critical Essay #6

Source: "Language, Theme, and Character in *Twelfth*

*Night,"* in *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespearean Study and Production,* Vol. 35, 1982, pp. 79-86.

*[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 vanes 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 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 holiday festivities and the ordinary world of work and responsibility.]*

[By the late sixteenth century, If 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, happened 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 slipperiness 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 over worn' (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 courtesies 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 call'd 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' (II. 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 semiserious 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 overexposure; 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'lllend' 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. Weare persuaded that the speaker is not the illusory Cesario. No courteous surface falsifies these emotions.

Although *Twelfth NIght* includes Feste's skepticism 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 *semb. lative* 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' *0.100).* Act 5, scene 1 brings more new vocabulary-'baubling' and 'unprizable' describe Antonio's ship (ll. 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), 'intercepter' (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?' (1.3.122-6). 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: 'substractor' 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 litera ry user of 'bum-bally' (3.4.178), the meanest kind 0 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?' (ll. 8892). 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, Whereto 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 contin *ues* with what seem to be the same sort of inquiries: 'How does he love me?'; 'Why, what would you?'; 'What is your parentage?' 01. 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.

0 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 relIes 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 arrrial 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 h,mself. 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 h,m aside.
[1. 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.
(1. 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.

# Critical Essay #7

Although Viola and Olivia are closely linked as characters in *Twelfth Night,* critics often view Viola as the central character of the play. While critics H. N. Hudson and William H. Fleming identify Viola as a character who unifies the action, Lydia Forbes points out that Olivia serves the purpose of linking the plot elements as the woman who Orsino loves, Viola woos, and the head of the household that Malvolio, Feste, Sir Toby, and Mana all call home. Forbes also discusses the depth of Viola's self-knowledge, which allows her to adopt a disguise and to *see* with clarity beyond the self-deception of others in the play.

Critics have also focused on Viola as embodying Shakespeare's ideal of love in her patience and in her attitude of self-sacnfice. Critic Barbara Lewalski notes that Viola's behavior sets her apart from her fellow characters and represents "the Word made flesh," reflecting the spirit of Epiphany and Christmas. Cynthia Lewis chronicles Viola's moral growth and how it reflects the sacrificial nature of Antonio's love, Antonia being the Christ figure of *Twelfth Night,* according to Lewis. While Viola is generally regarded as the principle figure in the plot, Olivia's character parallels Viola on many levels. In his essay, Douglas Parker compares the women and outlines those qualities that lead him to describe them as non-genetic twins. For additional alayses of the characters of Viola and Olivia, see the essay by Harley Granville Barker in the OVERVIEWS section, and the essay by J. Dennis Huston in the ROLE-PLAYING AND PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY section.

Source: "What You Will?" in *Shakespeare Quarterly,* Vol. XIII, No.4, Autumn, 1962, pp. 475-85.

*[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 her. self 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 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 £111 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". . . .

# Critical Essay #8

Source: "Viola, Antonio, and Epiphany in *Twelfth Night"* in *Essays in Literature,* Vol. XIII, No.2, Fall, 1986, pp. 187-99.

*[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.8, 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 Christ like 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. 3941), 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.7378), 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 1t 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 l' th' bud Feed on her damask cheek; she pin'd in thought,
And w1th a green and yellow melancholy She sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
*(l1.* 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: "0 time, thou must untangle this, not **I,** / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie" (II.ii.4O-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 wel 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 (II. 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" (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. 35568). "Golden time" is ripe for love like Antonio's.

But the play's problematic nature persists to the end, modifying an augmenting the harmonious resolution. For instance, what of Antonio? Are we to as *sume* 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.

# Critical Essay #9

Source: "Shakespeare's Female Twins in *Twelfth*

*Night:* In Defense of Olivia" in *English Studies in Canada,* Vol. XIII, No.1, March, 1987, pp. 23-34.

*[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 the 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 IILi. 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 to-morrow" (IILiv.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 (Lv.). In short, while Orsino's love renders him "unstaid and skittish in all motions" (ILiv.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 Liv. 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 Lv. 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 p lay. She is poignantly aware and understanding 0 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 cruell'st 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 *die* 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 skilful 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 skilful 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 skilful 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 over them 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 fading 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.I61-69)

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" (IILi.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 Lv. 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 ILii. 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:

0 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 cornie 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.

# Critical Essay #10

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."

Critics in the nineteenth century argued whether or not Malvolio was a Puritan, or represented the emerging bourgeoisie class, questions which are still being debated today. Twentieth-century critic Paul Siegel also identified Malvolio with Puritan self-discipline and predictability. Melvin Seiden identifies Malvolio with both the Puritans and the new bourgeoisie. However, he asserts that Shakespeare created those parallels only as a pretext for setting Malvolio up as the scapegoat, sacrificed to bring the Bard's comedy to life.

In a departure from the generally accepted interpretation, Seiden also argues that Malvolio's rigid adherence to order springs not from excessive self-love, but from a sense of inferiority. David Wilbern argues that Malvolio's gulling results from the emergence of his latent sexual desire for Olivia, and discusses the carnality at the core of the play. For further analysis of Malvolio's character, see the essay by Thad Jenkins Logan in the section on CELEBRATION AND FESTIVITY and the essay by Ralph Berry in the LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION section.

Source: "Malvolio Reconsidered," in *University of Kansas Cay Review,* Vol. XXVIII, No.2, December, 1961, pp. 105-114.

*[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 bourgeoisie, 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 atypical 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 cornic 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'etre,* 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 manqué, 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 who, because of offensive seriousness (made to appear an antithetical ridiculousness) allows what is also ludicrous in the lovers to maintain its sober faced 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 playas 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 cornic 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 ur-version of the man of the future, the petty bourgeous. 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 deep-rooted 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: "0, 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 anticomic 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 un-Shakespearean. 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-cornic 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 reinstituting 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 p unishments meted out to him during the course 0 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.

# Critical Essay #11

Source: "Malvolio's Fall," in *Shakespeare Quarterly,* Vol. 29, No.1, Winter, 1978, Pl'. 85-90.

*[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 Malvo110 '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 in sight into the psychology of Malvolio the censor, and into Shakespeare's erotic play with language. Malvolzo'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 Malvolzo 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]:

*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.
(1. 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.

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 daybed, 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 it self, 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: Twelfe 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. li. 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. "0 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 p ersonal 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. 11. 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, "0, 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 arch deceiver, 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 01. 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 (I. 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" (I. 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, extra dramatic 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 re. turn 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 care. fully embed this grossest of verbal improprieties in a play which even Eric Partridge [in *Shakespeare's Bawdy,* (1968)] calls "the cleanest comedy except *A Midsum.mer 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 cry p rogram literally spells out. The idealized festivity 0 *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.

# Critical Essay #12

Feste is considered by many critics to be the best of Shakespeare's fools. Some critics, such as Hermann Ulrici, consider Feste the central figure in *Twelfth Night.* Ulrici maintained that the meaning of the play was concentrated in the fool. Surabhi Bnerjee argues that Feste plays an integral role in the play in that he enhances the spirit of festivity. Similarly, Peter Hall argues that Feste is the central figure of the play, and describes him as bitter, insecure, and cynical.

Alan S. Downer points out that it is Feste who exposes the true motives behind the others' actions, and in so doing propels the theme that unifies the three subplots which make up the play, and lifts *Twelfth Night* above a conventional romantic comedy. While Downer asserts that Feste does not actually manipulate the plot, Joan Hartwig argues that the actions of Feste and Maria mimic the hand of Fate, driving Malvolio's destiny without the mercy that Fate actually bestows upon the others. For further analysis of Feste's character, see the essay by Thad Jenkins Logan in the CELEBRATION AND FESTIVITY section.

Source: "Feste's Night" in *College English,* Vol.

13, No.5, February, 1952, pp. 258-65.

*[Downer examines Peste's role as the fool in* Twelfth Night *, which allows Peste 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 "cucullus 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 Tramo-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, i-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 he fore 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 h,s soul is in hell, madonna.
OLIVIA: 1 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
[1, 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 tranquility. Whereupon Feste sings:

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be la,d.
Flyaway, flyaway, breath,
I'm slain by a fair cruel maid
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
0 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, 0 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 kmd 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 ram, 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 ram.

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.

# Critical Essay #13

Source: "Feste's 'Whirligig of Time' and the Comic Providence of *Twelfth Night,"* in *ELH,* Vol. 40, No.4, Winter, 1973, pp. 501-13.

*[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 Mana 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 fads to anticipate the intrusion of Feste and Mana. 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) [quotations from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* ed.

Alfred Harbage (1969).] 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.31O, 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 significantlyfrom 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 *se* curing "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 noto riously 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 0' 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 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 an 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 h,de.]* Lie thou there *[throws down a letter];* for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling. *Ex,t.*

*Enter Malvolio.*

MALVOLIO 'Tis but fortune, all is fortune. Maria once told me she [OIivia] 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 disdainfullaughter. 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 Mana, 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 miscontrues 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 Cesano: "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.

*MalvoltO within.*
MALVOLIO Who calls there)
CLOWN Sir T opas 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.
MAL VOLIO 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 sym bolic implications of Malvolio's blindness. The audi ence 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 emb lematic 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 bnngs into focus when she says "Thou mightiest 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 Illyna 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 indefinable 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 playas 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 manipu1ation 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.

# Adaptations

*Twelfth Night.* Cedric Messina, Dr. Jonathan Miller, BBC, 1980.

Set in an aristocratic country house. Part of the "Shakespeare Plays" series. Distributed by Ambrose Video Publishing, Inc. 124 minutes.

*Twelfth Night: An Introduction.* BHE Education Ltd., Seabourn Enterprises Ltd., 1969.

Brief narrative bridges connect the performances of key scenes Distributed by Phoenix/BFA Films. 23 minutes.

# Further Study

## Literary Commentary

Barber, C. L. "Testing Courtesy and Humanity in *Twelfth Night,"* in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy,* Princeton University Press, 1959, pp. 240-61.

Provides an overview of the play by considering different themes, first centering the argument on the key word "madness." The critic also considers social and sexual roles, and how their temporary inversion serves to solidify what is considered normal.

Berry, Ralph. "The Season of *Twelfth Night." New York Literary Forum* 1 (Spring 1978): 139-149.

Compares late nineteenth-century productions of the play with modern ones, finding that the former emphasized comedic elements of the play at the expense of its darker themes.

-. "'Twelfth Night': The Experience of the Audience." *Shakespeare Survey* 34 (1981) 111-19.

Contends that the play would have had a disturbing effect on Its Original audiences, much like a joke that goes too far

Charney, Maurice. "Comic Premises of *Twelfth Night." New York Literary Forum* 1 (Spring 1978): 151-65.

Examines Robert Herrick's 1648 poem "Twelfe night, or King and Queene" from Hesperides, and discusses the cultural context it provides for Twelfth Night festivities of that era.

Crane, Milton. *"Twelfth Night* and Shakespearean Comedy." *Shakespeare Quarterly* VI, No.1 {Winter 1955): 1-8.

Places *Twelfth Night* in the context of Shakespeare's comedies, which Crane contends are based upon themes of classical comedy but depart from these conventions to an increasingly larger degree in the later plays.

Donno, Elizabeth Story. Introduction to *Twelfth Night or What You Will,* by William Shakespeare, edited by Elizabeth Story Donno, pp. 1-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Provides an overview of Issues relating to the play, including its sources, theatrical history, and critical commentary.

Eagleton, Terrence. "Language and Reality in 'Twelfth Night.'" *The Critical Quarterly* 9, No.3 (Autumn 1967): 217-28.

Delves into the complex relationship between language, roles, and illusion in the play.

Fleming, William H. *"Twelfth Night" Shakespeare' Plots: A Study in Dramatic Construction,* pp. 68-76. London

Hutchinson & Co (publishers) Ltd, 1949.

Praises the lyrical elements of *Twelfth Night* as a means of expressing the theme of love, and discusses the humor, farce, and satire within the play.

Fortin, Rene E *"Twelfth Night* Shakespeare's Drama of Initiation." *Papers on Language and Literature* VIII, No. 2 (Spring 1972): 135-46.

Provides a symbolic interpretation of the playas a drama centering on Viola's search for her sexual identity.

Furnivall, F. J. *New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: "Twelfe Night or, What You Will".* Written by William Shakespeare. Translated and edited by Horace Howard Furness. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1901, pp. 385.

Argues that despite the happy spirit of the play, there is a "shadow of death and distress" in the play.

Gaskill, Gayle. "The Role of Fortune in *Twelfth Night." Iowa English Bulletin* 30, No.1 (Fall 1980): 20-23, 32.

Examines the workings of fortune in the play, and how each character's nature is revealed by their reaction to it.

Gerard, Albert. "Shipload of Fools: A Note on *Twelfth Night." English Studies* 45, No.2 (Autumn 1964): 109.

Sees in *Twelfth Night* intimations of the tragic themes of Shakespeare's later plays.

Greif, Karen. "Plays and Playing in *Twelfth Night." Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespearean Study and Production* 34 (1981): 121-30.

Greif examines the relationship between appearance and reality in Twelfth Night, exploring ways in which each character engages in self-deception or the deception of others.

Hotson, Leslie. *The First Night of "Twelfth Night."* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954, 256 p.

Suggests that *Twelfth Night* was originally commissioned by Queen Elizabeth for a Twelfth Night performance given in 1600-01, in honor of Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano. Provides evidence for the earliest performance of *Twelfth Night* and offers insights on the thematic importance of festivity.

Hudson, H. N. "Shakespeare's Characters: "Twelfth Night." *Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters,* Vol. I, revised edition. Morristown, NJ: Ginn & Company, 1872, pp. 351-73

Discusses Shakespeare's supposed aversion to the Puritans of his time and argues that Shakespeare wanted us to pity Malvolio.

Legatt, Alexander. "Twelfth Night" and "Conclusion' Beyond Twelfth Night." In his *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love,* pp. 221-66. London: Methuen, 1974.

Offers an extended analysis of the play, concluding that *Twelfth Night* is unique among Shakespeare's comedies in its depiction of the Opposition between an ideal "golden world" of order and the seemingly disordered everyday world.

Lewalski, Barbara K. "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night." Shakespeare Studies: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* I, (1965): 168-81.

Discusses the pagan celebration of Twelfth Night and examines the Christian concept of Epiphany in the play.

Montegut, E. *New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: "Twelfe Night or, What You Will".* Written by William Shakespeare. Translated and edited by Horace Howard Furness. New York: J. B Lippincott Company, 1901, pp. 382-84.

Presents the theory that *Twelfth Night* 15 a masquerade and carnival farce. Stresses the ambiguity in the play and discusses how the characters are "slaves" of their individual defects and perspectives.

Schwartz, Ellas. *"Twelfth Night* and the Meaning of Shakespearean Comedy." *College English* 28, No.7 (April 1967). 508-19.

Contends that *Twelfth Night* is not a satiric comedy but a profound vision of merriment and festivity.

Siegel, Paul N. "Malvolio' Comic Puritan Automaton." *New York Literary Forum* 6 (1980): 217-30.

Analyzes Malvolio as a representation of Puritan self-discipline and predictability.

Stane, Bob. "The Genealogy of Sir Andrew Aguecheek." *The Shakespeare Newsletter* XXXII, Nos. 5 and 6 (Winter 1982): 32.

Suggests that the role of Sir Andrew Aguecheek was inspired by a personality type readily recognizable to all levels of English society.

Swander, Homer. *"Twelfth Night:* Critics, Players, and a Script." *Educational Theatre Journal* XVI, No.2 (May 1964): 114-21.

Surveys critical reactions to various New York productions of the play, arguing that to be successful a production must convey the underlying moral warning against self-love and folly.

Ulrici, Hermann. "Criticisms of Shakespeare's Dramas: "Twelfth Night." *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: And His Relation to Calderon and Goethe.* Translated by A. J W. Morrison. London. Chapman Brothers, 1846, pp. 246-53.

Argues that in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare creates a world of contradiction, fantasy, and chaos, and that Feste is the central figure in *Twelfth Night* Ulrici maintains that the meaning of the play was concentrated in the fool.

Warren, Roger. "Orsino and Sonnet 56" *Notes and Queries* 18, No.4 (April 1971): 146-47.

Relates Orsino's opening speech to Shakespeare's Sonnet 56, suggesting that a deeper understanding of love underlies Orsino's idealism.

-. "'Smiling at Grief': Some Techniques of Comedy in 'Twelfth Night' and 'Cosi Fan Tutte.'" *Shakespeare Survey* 32 (1979): 79-84.

Compares the comic elements of the play to Mozart's opera *Cosi Fan Tutte,* finding similarities in the artists' approaches and their willingness to explore the complexities of human emotions.

Williams, Porter, Jr "Mistakes In *Twelfth Night* and Their Resolution: A Study in Some Relationships of Plot and Theme" *PMLA* LXXVI, No.3 (June 1961): 193-99.

Shows how the mistakes made by characters in the play reveal themes of love and personal relationships common to all of Shakespeare's comedies.

BOOKRAGS

# Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Shakespeare for Students*.

**Project Editor**
David Galens

**Editorial**
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

**Research**
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

**Data Capture**
Beverly Jendrowski

**Permissions**
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

**Imaging and Multimedia**
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

**Product Design**
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

**Manufacturing**
Stacy Melson



*For more information, contact*
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Shakespeare for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Shakespeare for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Shakespeare for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Shakespeare for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535