Gender Trouble in *Twelfth Night*

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

The emergence of queer studies in the academy has led to many influential rereadings of Renaissance works, including those of Shakespeare.¹ While *Twelfth Night* continues to be one of the major textual sites for the discussion of homoerotic representation in Shakespeare, interpretive conclusions about the effect of same-sex attraction in this comedy are divided, especially in light of the natural "bias" of the heterosexual marriages in act 5.² The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian has proven the most fertile ground for queer inquiry; for example, Joseph Pequigney recently has set out, in New-Critical fashion, to prove the "sexual orientation" of these two characters as unquestionably "homosexual" in a play whose "recurring theme" is "bisexuality."³ Although Pequigney's observations are refreshing as well as important, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love" unproblematically applies contemporary constructions of sexual identity to an early modern culture in which the categories of homo- and bisexuality were neither fixed nor associated with identity. In fact, as I will argue, *Twelfth Night* is centrally concerned with demonstrating the uncategorical temper of sexual attraction.

The other main focus of queer study in this drama continues to be the relationship between the Countess Olivia and the cross-dressing Viola/Cesario, though critics, tellingly, have discussed the lesbian erotics that are integral to the first three acts of the play much less often.⁴ In her recent *Desire and Anxiety: The Circulation of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, Valerie Traub has acknowledged the lesbian overtones of the erotic scenes between Olivia and Viola as part of what she calls the play's "multiple erotic investments"; but her careful and ground-breaking study warns us that Viola's homoerotic investment is not celebrated in the play and concludes that *Twelfth Night* is less "comfortably" open in its representation of the "fluid circulation" of desire than *As You Like It*.⁵ In my view, the Olivia-Viola affair is more central to *Twelfth Night* than previously has been acknowledged. This centrality—along with the homoerotics found in relations between Antonio and Sebastian as well as between Orsino and his page—establish same-sex erotic attraction as a "major theme" in the play, to use Pequigney's shopworn term. But this theme functions neither as an uncomplicated promotion of a modern category of sexual orientation nor, from a more traditional perspective, as an ultimately contained representation of the licensed misrule of saturnalia.⁶ The representation of homoerotic attraction in *Twelfth Night* functions rather as a means of dramatizing the socially constructed basis of a sexuality that is determined by gender identity.

Judith Butler's critique of the notion that there are fixed identities based on the existence of genital difference provides a useful model for understanding how *Twelfth Night* uses the vagaries of erotic attraction to disrupt paradigms of sexuality. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the cultural meanings that attach to a sexed body—what we call gender—are theoretically applicable to either sex. Initially, Butler questions the idea that there is an essential, prediscursive subjectivity that attaches to the biology of either male of female, arguing that the "production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural constructions designated by gender."⁷ In other words, what she calls the law—the cultural,
social, and political imperatives of social reality—actually produces and then conceals the "constructedness" that lies behind the notion of an immutable, prediscursive "subject before the law" (2). Her attack on the concept of biological inherence is followed by an equally strong indictment of the "metaphysics of gender substance"—the unproblematic claim that a subject can choose a gendered identity, that the self can "be a woman" or a man (21).

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

[23]

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

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

**Early Modern Literary Studies**

**Trevor Nunn's Twelfth Night: Contemporary Film and Classic British Theatre**

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1. Released amidst a flurry of innovative Shakespeare films, Trevor Nunn's 1996 film of *Twelfth Night* can seem stodgy, retro, or just dull in comparison. [1] It is, as Herb Coursen writes, "one of the more straightforward translations of a Shakespeare script to film" (199). Overshadowed in its time by *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 1996) and other popular Shakespeare films, Nunn's "shaded and subtle" work - the phrase is Samuel Crowl's (1997: 36) - deserves critical reconsideration. [2] It inhabits a complex ground between tradition and innovation, doing important cultural work with classic theatrical elements - ensemble acting, text-based line readings, and formal resolution. Laurie E. Osborne has recently shown how the film's careful editing practices foster audience involvement by developing the relationships among Viola and Sebastian and their lovers, Orsino and Olivia. [3] Here I would like to concentrate on how Nunn's use of the experienced and intelligent actor Ben Kingsley as an idiosyncratic and disturbing Feste grounds the film in contemporary issues of feminism, sexuality, and gender identity. Kingsley's Feste, like the film in general, occupies a critical perspective that unsettles the complacency that might otherwise accompany a classic period-based production.

**Filming the past, playing the text**

2. Nunn's film, on the surface, steers clear of the "cutting-edge": its style is verbal, meditative and restrained - in short, "British." The performances are muted, the text relatively undisturbed, the poetry well spoken and expressive, the cinematography unobtrusive. The film has a mellow, elegiac affect, like the watery autumn light in which it is filmed. [4] As in many "heritage" films, the past is foregrounded, most obviously through the Victorian setting: wool and starched linen, muskets, a billiard table, mounted cavalry, croquet, kitchens out of *Upstairs / Downstairs* - all in the elaborate social geography of an English country house and village. [5] Heritage films, in their commitment to the past, shy
away from innovation, choosing to confirm rather than subvert the expectations of a classically literate audience. They present a world mediated by distance and literariness, isolated from surprises, kept polite by reliable, if old-fashioned social codes. To some extent, that's true of Nunn's *Twelfth Night*: we enjoy looking for what we would expect to find in a period country house - servants in livery, crisp topiary, predictable if dispensable decorum. As Geoffrey Macnab puts it, "Olivia . . . and her entourage . . . dress and behave as if they've just escaped from some nearby Merchant-Ivory production" (60). Tensions are kept in check by the distance of heritage. Olivia's mansion, a prominent artifact in the film, has the neat readability and clear boundaries of a National Trust property. The skirmishes of Orsino's army are well contained in a costume-drama past, far removed from the military horrors of the twentieth century. However engaged we may be in the action of *Twelfth Night*, we may expect to walk out unscathed, have tea at some converted carriage house, and calmly re-read the Shakespeare play.

3. But Nunn's film refuses to turn heritage into homage. Though a sense of the past informs the film, that past is not simple: early-modern modes of plot and character collide with Victorian stage business and are transfigured by contemporary film techniques. Catherine Belsey notes that unlike Elizabethan stage performance, film "tends to narrow plurality . . . to specify and fix a reading as its reading" (61-62). But there is a quality of openness in Nunn's use of the past that works against that narrowing. Malvolio's Elizabethan Puritanism is given a fin-de-siècle twist in his perusal of "L'Amour," which seems to be a Victorian soft-porn magazine; and the upward mobility associated with his "puritan" affiliations is grafted onto a distinctly nineteenth-century sexual fantasy as he embraces a marble nude statue. Viola's disguise subjects her not only to the gender dilemmas of the Shakespearean stage but also to that particular nineteenth-century masculinism, the men's club, with its cigars, wine, and billiards. Maria is both an Elizabethan, a conspirator in the patently stagy and clearly Shakespearean plot against Malvolio, and at the same time that most Victorian of creatures, a dependent woman with a "history." Olivia mourns like Mariana in the moated grange - richly, and with repeated Victorian rituals. These characters are all eminently Victorian. But like all Shakespearean roles, they have to answer to the theatrical, multi-vocal, carnivalesque Elizabethan text. Nunn's film opens rather than constricts, gleefully conspiring with Shakespeare to put these "Victorians" into situations that would not occur in a Victorian character-based novel. The statue Malvolio hugs is consistent with a Victorian country house, but the embrace is a zanier, more Elizabethan touch than we would expect in a novel or a traditional heritage film. Olivia, a richly velveted Victorian lady caught in the contradictions between her mourning and her desire, breaks with the conditions of the mise-en-scène, and announces a sudden character switch, with unmistakable Shakespearean theatricality: "Well, let it be!" (Nunn, 34).

4. If Nunn's film is a heritage film, the Shakespearean text is what it particularly inherits. The cast is chosen not just for their heritage film experience but also for their experience in articulating the verse and understanding the dramatic structures. Though there are many cuts, and a few additions, to the text, the film
follows an "old-fashioned" aesthetic in treating the text with respect and clarity. In contrast, most recent films of Shakespeare have tended to concentrate on theoretical rather than theatrical engagements with text, often quite explicitly resisting the traditional ideas of text. *Prospero's Books*, for example, seems less interested in performing *The Tempest* than in re-defining Shakespearean text itself; painstakingly hand-written, digitized, put into motion, the text seems to be more an institution to be deconstructed than a medium for drama. *Richard III* spends much of its time surprising us with what it can do with the text - locating it in "Fascist England," mythifying it with a nexus of over-determining symbols, and creating new rhythms for it with its self-conscious cross-cutting. *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* signals its aggressiveness toward the theatricalized text even in its title, repunctuated with an ampersand/cross and "authorized" with the Bard's name; such aggressiveness continues in - or is, rather, inseparable from - the film itself with its obvious priority for quoting film styles rather than engaging Shakespeare's language. [12]

5. I don't mean in any way to imply the failure of these films. They are exciting in themselves and as part of a movement, changing the relationship of Shakespeare and film and redefining the status of Shakespeare and his texts in contemporary culture. They mark a welcome alternative to the influential and markedly conservative Branagh films with their bluff, "English" Shakespeare. But these more daring films risk losing the resonance of the Shakespearean plays themselves. For all that Gielgud's accomplished voice fills *Prospero's Books*, the film hardly draws on - in fact, resists - the insights that Gielgud and other stage actors have gained about *The Tempest* in the many years of playing it. Similarly, even though the masterfully theatrical Ian McKellen dominates *Richard III*, the film sacrifices in its manic energy the theatrical and textual subtleties that such an actor is capable of. I would not want to forego the cinematic imagination of these films, nor would I pass up the way they grapple with issues of style, authority, textuality and ideology. But I would love to see other films as well: a film, for example, that might take *The Tempest* seriously as a text, using the intimacy of film to humanize the play's masque textures and penetrate the often-static surfaces of the characters. Or a *Richard III* that might incorporate the potent, but often-cut female characters as counter-agents to the monster Richard, and make cinematic action out of the patterned and formalistic language of that intricate play. Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, with its classic theatricality and its use of cinematic invention in the service of the text, is a film that may serve as an impetus for such explorations. [13] Nunn's film, though it is not unaware of theoretical and filmic concerns, interrupts a growing self-consciousness in Shakespeare films, and offers us some rewards for returning to a space where the text can resonate. [14]

6. For Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, that "resonant space" is associated with post-1960 British theatre, in particular with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and its competitor and frequent imitator the National Theatre. [15] Several of the important figures in the film - Nunn himself, Nigel Hawthorne (Malvolio), Nicholas Farrell (Antonio), and Ben Kingsley (Feste) - are long-time members of the RSC and the National; Nunn refers to his cast as "immensely experienced in classical work" (Crowdus, 38). Actors with such backgrounds bring to the film a
classic Shakespearean theatricality from their training in what Samuel Crowl called a "golden age" of London Shakespearean theatre (1992: 21), a time when, as Addenbrooke says, "the RSC actor . . . was an utterly dedicated artist who was equally at home in Shakespeare and modern drama - who could move from the complexity and precision of Shakespeare verse-speaking to the anarchic lunacy of the Marat-Sade with equal competence and assurance" (88). Others in the cast - Imogen Stubbs, Helena Bonham Carter, and Imelda Staunton - have more or less substantive experience in the RSC and the National. [16] These are not Shakespeare wannabes but veterans of classic Shakespeare theatre. As one reviewer put it, "the film succeeds in part due to Nunn's decision to ignore the box office lure of Hollywood stars, and to cast all the parts with outstanding British actors who can actually speak Shakespeare's lines with proper cadence and clarity." [17] That kind of verbal expertise, in contrast to the engaging but inexperienced line-speaking in the Luhrmann film, has - as the quotation implies - a double effect: both to place the film in a smaller cultural context (smaller, that is, than Hollywood and its appeal) and at the same time to use that context to give space to the text. [18]

7. The RSC of the 1960s centred on the text-based study of classic texts. [19] Under the direction of John Barton, the RSC became famous for its "unique textual discipline" (Nunn, "Introduction," n.p.) - perceptive line readings, metaphors apparently invented on the spot, expressive blank verse, attention to silent characters, motivation through textual cues. [20] The company worked to wrest meaning from the often dense but always authoritative text: as Nunn says of that time, "my dictat at the RSC had been 'we change him [Shakespeare] at our peril'" (Nunn, "Introduction," n.p.). RSC audiences, like the company, tended to be knowledgeable about the texts, anticipating how a production might handle the cruxes. Commitment to text on the part of the RSC went along with an engagement with issues and politics in the outside world. In the RSC of the 1960s and 70s, Shakespeare and other classics - the other Elizabethans, Chekhov, the Greek tragedians - resonated in startling new ways with contemporary social and political concerns, especially to support a resistant critical discourse among academics, artists and students and agendas of liberal social action. While Nunn is mostly known today for musical entertainments like Cats, his work with the RSC in the '60s was far more politically conscious. While honouring the classic text, the company pioneered anti-war, feminist, Marxist, post-colonial interpretations of Shakespeare - the 1962 King Lear of Peter Brook (with Paul Scofield), the Wars of the Roses of the same year, the "student" Hamlet of 1965 with David Warner. The RSC brought to these productions a steady interest in text and a fierce concern for relevance, created both by pointed interpretations of the old plays and by juxtaposition of old plays in repertory with contemporary, issue-oriented plays - perhaps most famously Brook's production of Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade in 1964 and the anti-Vietnam US of 1966. [21] In the 1960s, the RSC had a clear and unmistakable position - in comparison to the more conservative National Theatre - as "a democratic, no-nonsense institution with a very decidedly left-wing outlook" (Addenbrooke, 65-66).
8. But by the mid-1990s, a sea change had occurred in London theatre, making it difficult for a company like the RSC to maintain its radical-leftist consciousness. The RSC, in its later life housed like the National in a showcase London venue, opted increasingly for big-name, high-production revivals with less critical edge and higher market appeal. In some senses, then, the activist RSC was by the mid-1990s already something of a period artifact. [22] In this context, the classic theatricality and heritage affiliation of Nunn's film is complicated: does it look back to a "safe" Victorianism, or to the radical modernism of the 1960s? When you looked at the promotions for a costume-drama location film like Much Ado about Nothing, with big-time movie names like Denzel Washington, Robert Sean Leonard and Keanu Reaves, you would have known to expect a good time and significant amounts of eye-candy. But when you saw three years later a similar Shakespeare comedy involving classical theatre names like Trevor Nunn, Ben Kingsley and Nigel Hawthorne, your expectations would be less certain and the result more complex.

9. Ben Kingsley's presence as an enigmatic and searching Feste particularly complicates the film. He has a strong affiliation to the British theatre, starting with the RSC in 1967 and remaining active on stage through the mid-80s, working at the Royal Court and the National as well as the RSC. He was central to the RSC's program of politicized interpretations of classic texts, playing Demetrius in the ground-breaking Peter Brook production of A Midsummer Night's Dream (1970) and Hamlet in Buzz Goodbody's alternative production (1975). He also, of course, brings a powerful filmic presence, associated with the title role in Gandhi (dir. David Attenborough, 1982) and many other roles. [23] With his strong countenance and critical intelligence, Kingsley has a long history of work that forged thoughtful, often intellectual thematic connections among stage, script, film and world. Kingsley dominates Twelfth Night, but paradoxically and unusually, not by asserting himself but by retiring. With Kingsley, we find a Feste who is enigmatic, reserved, often withdrawing from the action; he seems to invite us to withdraw and consider, as well. He is not so much a wise commentator on the action (though he is that) as a "reader" of the action, a character who suggests subtext even as he performs text. He is a catalyst of the production of meaning. He stands, in a sense, for a classic interpretive process, the process of looking at texts as at once baffling and fascinating, complex and transparent, inescrutable and meaningful.

10. Kingsley's Feste shows such critical and probing intensity that he might well push the film beyond the genre of romantic comedy. But he also shows a corresponding gentleness that supports the comedy's romantic lyricism. He brings a complexity to the film, both supplying a humane center to the often manic and farcical plot, and at the same time suggesting that there are darker critical and social implications to the action than any of us - characters or viewers - might want to engage with. That complexity is, I think, also Nunn's intention in taking on this project: at once to create a romantic film for the mid-1990s, and at the same time to push the text towards the insights that we might have expected at the RSC in the late 1960s (and that we might still need in the 1990s). As a result, the film takes seriously both the text and the contemporary issues that arise from the text:
the vulnerability of young women, the masculine obsession with control, the attractions and dangers of transformations and alternativities of sexual identity.

"What think you of this fool...? Doth he not mend?"

11. When we first encounter Kingsley in the film, he appears only as a silent observer of Viola as she struggles to live after the shipwreck. Though Shakespeare opens the play in safety, in the court of Orsino (1.1), the film begins in disruption with the shipwreck (not in the text) and then its aftermath on a bleak beach (1.2; Nunn, 5-12). Viola is shown as vulnerable - grieving, exhausted, threatened by soldiers who poke at her baggage in "a brutal cursory way" and by sailors who eye her sexually (Nunn, 8-9). On the other hand, there are signs of hope. The captain is compassionate and helpful, and Viola herself responds to him warmly. In a number of two-shots of Viola and the captain, the film attunes us to the power of human connection, even as it shows us that we are in "enemy territory" (Nunn, "Introduction," n.p.). It is in that context that we see Kingsley's Feste for the first time, in a disorienting long shot from the beach to the top of the towering cliffs. High up, at a distance, he is a strange figure, unrooted, unexplained, and isolated (even those who know the play well will not expect to see Feste here). As we come closer, we find that he is, as Nunn's screenplay says, "unkempt... part vagabond, part itinerant entertainer" (Nunn, 9). We hear from him only two things, a faint chuckle and a snatch of a hummed tune. Is he one of the tramps of Waiting for Godot? Are we in Brecht, or perhaps Fellini? The film seems to want us to go beyond the intimate, reassuring two-shot of romantic comedy: move to the cliffs, it suggests, and we will see things in a sharper, more critical perspective. This observer, Feste, is at once compassionate and unsentimental, watching Viola's sorrow neither with an auspicious nor a drooping eye. He seems neither surprised by the world, nor fully accepting of it. The specific meaning of this enigmatic figure floats, undetermined by dialogue or action.

12. Given that Feste is introduced as an observer of Viola, we are encouraged to speculate on his connection with her, and his interest in the issues facing her: how does a young woman deal with such loss as she has experienced? As a woman in a frightening world of men, how can she act? Early in the film, Feste suggests an understanding of the marginalized position of women. We will see him more directly interacting with Viola later in the film. For now, his apparent compassion for Viola's situation is evident; the film swiftly extends this compassion to include Maria and Olivia. For each he serves as a sympathetic catalyst for improvement, driven by his vision of something better for the women he cares for. First we watch him with Maria (1.5.27; Nunn, 22). This efficient, busy housekeeper leaves her accounts to fetch him in, feeds him under the eyes of a disapproving kitchen staff, remembers some unnamed personal sorrow "in the war", and joins in his comic routines (she finishes his joke about "two points"). It's a short sequence that demonstrates how Feste's unpredictable acuity is both needed and unexpected in this otherwise highly controlled household. It comes to a head when Feste, admiring Maria's willingness to tell a joke, smiles warmly and drops a bomb: "... if Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as pretty a piece of Eve's flesh [as
marriageable? as any in Illyria" (1.5.22-25; Nunn, 23). It's a sharp analysis of the
dependence of a housekeeper of a certain age on the unspoken "love" of an
unreliable alcoholic aristocrat. It is no joke: it subjects the comic tensions of this
household to what we can surmise to be a feminist critique of marriage and
gender.

13. Kingsley's Feste specializes in bringing issues - and folly - out in the open. When
Feste first encounters Olivia, he confronts her with the possibility that her
obsessive mourning may be wrong: "As there is no true cuckold but calamity, so
beauty's a flower" (1.5.44-45; Nunn, 24). The riddle has a pointed meaning: under
the pressures of desire and time ("beauty's a flower"), marrying oneself to grief
("calamity") is not a valid possibility (one's grief will inevitably be adulterated,
"cuckolded"). Not surprisingly, no one appears to catch this riddle's meaning: all
we get is the sense that there is some important issue Feste is prodding Olivia
about. [29] But as he pursues his needling, Feste manoeuvres for a position from
which he can confront Olivia more directly. A long travelling shot which shows
him scampering to catch up with Olivia suddenly becomes a dizzy crane shot
swirling around the two of them. He "catechizes" her: "Good madonna, why
mourn'st thou?" "Good fool, for my brother's death." "I think his soul is in hell,
madonna." "I know his soul is in heaven, fool." "The more fool, madonna, to
mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (1.5.57-62; Nunn, 24). Across
differences of gender, age, class, and style, Feste engages her with an intimate and
destabilizing critique. He cuts, but not with cruelty: while he exposes the
indulgence of her mourning, he also consoles her and begins to wake her to
renewed life. Olivia, though stung, realizes his compassion (she checks her
annoyance "in spite of herself, seeing FESTE's good intention" [Nunn, 24]). Her
relief at seeing his good will then activates her, motivating a question to Malvolio:
"What think you of this fool, Malvolio? Doth he not mend?" ["mend": "get better
as an entertainer; make us morally better"] [see Plate 1].

Her invitation for comment is gracious but naïve: she forgets that this puritan will
answer in the harshest way: "Yes, and shall do, till the pangs of death shake him"
["do" = "mend": "get better as a fool, become even more foolish"]). Malvolio
imposes his cruel ontology - once a fool, ever a fool - and an eschatology to match: in death, and after, folly will lead to punishment. This first speech of Malvolio marks him as Feste's opposite: where Feste is associated with sensitivity and change, Malvolio clings to control and stability. As Malvolio goes deeper into his fantasy of sexual and patriarchal privilege, Feste becomes a more intense critical force interrogating rigidity and repression.

14. Kingsley's renditions of Feste's songs are not only lyrical but critical as well. As the film website says, Feste is an "observer [who] sees through people . . . what he chooses to sing to people is intentionally relevant and disturbing." As he sings "O Mistress Mine" (2.5), he awakens the agency of all three of the women with whom he has made his empathetic connection. Nunn's biggest transformation of the text takes place here, as he intercuts scenes of the singing in the kitchen with shots of Olivia alone in bed, and of Viola with Orsino, so that Feste's one song can weave around the shared dilemma of all three women: time is short, options are limited. [30] "O mistress mine! Where are you roaming? / O, stay and hear your true love's coming" (2.3.36ff; Nunn, 43-47). The song is a classic RSC moment of suspended action - lighting subdued, stage quiet, listeners scattered about in significant groupings. Kingsley sings simply; in this resonant space, he can quietly engage his listeners with the "sweet ambivalence" of this song of melancholy desire. [31] Each listener takes it in. The men are silently aware of the impact of the song - we see Andrew's dimwitted regret and Toby's drunken awareness of love passing him by. But Maria, isolated from the men, is more acutely conscious of the song's application to her. She sings with Feste: "In delay there lies no plenty - / Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty." [see Plate 2]

Their harmony resonates across their differences: her enforced subordination as a female dependent and his angry repeated assertion of the bitterness of the world. "Youth's a stuff [as he angrily shakes his head] will not endure." Is there hope? The song lyrics promise that "Journeys end in lover's meeting," but this hopeful line is not actually sung in the film. As Viola asks, "How will this fadge?" As a woman and a dependent, Maria cannot directly initiate change; Toby has no incentive to do so. But the song helps Maria take advantage of the ways in which
she can act - first in joining Feste in music, then in hatching the plot against Malvolio. The song arouses even the lethargic Toby, reminding him of love and silently exposing what blocks it - his class-based pride, his manly English bluffness, and his dependence on Maria and his anger at being dependent on her. The song enacts a lyric conspiracy between Maria and Feste, a polyvocal performance of the difficult path to romantic union. [32]

15. Nunn inter-cuts to take Feste's tune to another part of the house, into Olivia's pre-Raphaelite bedchamber (Nunn, 43). For the half-sleeping Olivia, the song is apparently an erotic and disturbing sign of her desire for Viola, heard distantly, as in a dream. Like the music that faintly enters Madeline's bedroom in a similar scene in Keats' poem "The Eve of St. Agnes," the bedroom scene engages the Romantic fascination with moments of suspended desire. As in most Romantic lyrics, the deferral of satisfaction is both disturbing and utterly necessary. Feste moves passion towards fulfillment ("then come kiss me, sweet and twenty") and at the same time warns of the uncertainty of fulfillment ("What's to come is still unsure."). [33] The art of the singer - or the lyric poet - is to create an image of truth that is as precious and disturbing as a dream, that we remember even "on the cold hill's side." [34]

16. None of the lovers featured in this midnight scene know what "lovers' meetings" lie ahead, least of all Viola. Feste's power to figure the precious instability of the moment seems to bring his song even to her, though she's not in the same house and not (textually) part of the scene. Nunn cuts across the text to include a textually later scene between Viola and Orsino (2.4: "That old and antique song we heard last night...") as if it were happening at the same time as the revels in the kitchen. As the song is heard in Orsino's smoking room, we have masculine images of cigar smoke and stiff wool instead of the soft white-linen femininity of Olivia's bedchamber (2.4.1-40; Nunn, 42-46). Orsino, self-absorbed and more than a little cruel, imposes his view of love on Viola. Man's desire, he asserts, is by its nature "giddy and unfirm" (she sadly acknowledges, "I think they are, my lord"). Women, he says, are in their very selves utterly transient: "women are as roses, whose fair flow'r, / Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour" (2.4.32-38; Nunn, 46). Behind this dialog, we hear a "song without words," a piano version of Feste's song. The piano, that quintessential nineteenth-century century instrument of passion, self-reflection, sorrow and aggrandizement, fittingly becomes the background to Orsino's dark meditation about how, because of women, "what's to come is still unsure."

17. What's to come for all these characters - marriages, consummations, and resolutions - is far from sure. Like a classic Romantic lyric or a Chekhov play, this sequence is full of tensions, deferrals, richness, and pleasure. [35] In this film, it is Feste who gives us that pleasure, the same Feste who searchingly analyzes folly. We might say that Kingsley's Feste is a poet-figure; it would be even more apt to call him an entertainer, the kind of dedicated, thoughtful, lyrical and compassionate entertainer that could bring us back again and again to Shakespeare's plays - a man of the classic theatre, in short. In that sense, he stands for the way I like to see this film working: taking a view both of the familiar - the well-known, virtually unchanging, often-repeated text of *Twelfth Night* - and
imbuing it with new, unstable, unsettling resonance. Even in the utterly familiar - "That old and antique song we heard last night" - we may not be quite sure of "what's to come," and that uncertainty may, oddly, give us pleasure. [36]

"Pleasure will be paid"

18. As the play progresses, the pleasure gets complicated. The plot against Malvolio intensifies, Olivia's desire becomes more frank and more public, Orsino gets more deeply embroiled in his desires, and Viola grows increasingly vulnerable to the crosscurrents of power and desire around her. In the film, Feste is our primary means of understanding this journey into complexity: he looks squarely at what's going wrong and at the same time enjoys the process by which things get made right. From his perspective, we see danger, sorrow, and madness as part of the pleasure of a classic text being brought into the contemporary world. He reminds us that theatre uses a cycle of repetition and performance in order to find in the old, fixed, classic text that which resonates with the new. But nothing comes cheap: with the pleasure of the art comes the cost of being unsettled by it.

19. For example, the film turns a verbal and witty scene between Feste and Viola into a warning about the dangers that Viola faces in her sexual and social instability. The scene is their encounter as Viola comes to woo Olivia a second time ("Save thee, friend, and thy music": 3.1.1-61; Nunn, 64-65). There's an intensifying rhythm to the scene, based on a classic RSC commitment to the potential of an apparently trivial text. Viola dismounts from her horse and rubs her cramping thighs; she knows that her disguise is uncomfortable, but she doesn't yet understand how dangerous it is - how it has aroused desire in Olivia and thrust Viola into an untenable position with Orsino. She meets Feste playing his concertina, and greets him. [37] Feste silently thrusts his hand out for a tip. It's a request, but also a challenge, as if he wants something more than money from her. As the two trade word play, Viola rises to the occasion, chopping logic like a man, even playing a sight-gag she shares with her brother, a magic trick with a coin. [38] With a faint smile, Feste challenges her in a deeper way: "Now Jove, in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard!" She answers him in a riddling speech: "By my troth, I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one, though I would not have it grow on my chin." She starts toward the house. But Feste intervenes, "I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus." She responds with breezy self-control, mastering the allusion ("I understand you, sir"), giving another coin, and again walking toward the house. Here's where the real challenge comes - a surprise, but also a logical extension of the gathering tension. Feste turns on Viola, suddenly advancing into her one-shot from the edge of the film frame, as he intensely reminds her, "Cressida was a beggar." [see Plate 3]
In the story to which he alludes, Cressida, a young Greek woman at loose ends in Troy; ended up "a beggar" - and, he doesn't need to say, a whore and leper as well. Feste knows that such vulnerable and isolated young women as Cressida and Viola are in danger; the beautiful myths of romantic love can end up badly. Is this interchange a warning to Viola? Yes. And yet it's also just a part of a pleasurable little scene between two performers intent on topping one another with their jokes and gags. Nor is "Cressida" a "real woman," but an artifact of other performances, the heroine of other "songs" - Chaucer's, Henryson's, soon Shakespeare's. Feste's sober warning of the dangers that might lie ahead for Viola is also a reminder of the pleasure we take in performing the stories that embody those dangers.

20. Feste's wit and music resonate with his critical, knowing perspectives. Not long after the "Cressida" exchange, Viola meets him again on a dark and stormy night. She and Orsino have been heated up by wine, cigars, erotic conversation and music (2.4.14-19; Nunn, 74). Viola is uneasy in her desire for this restless man who thinks, wrongly, that he's being constant to another woman. In fact, as the film makes clear, he's recklessly "unstaid and skittish in all motions." He longs for Feste's music, which he hears in the distance, and "hurts wildly down the path." Feste is hanging out in a barn, which Nunn calls his "squat," and is "a bit the worse for drink" (Nunn, 74). This entertainer apparently lives on the margins - rootless, solitary, and maybe a bit crazy; coming to see him constitutes a risky moment for the duke, charged with eroticism - and lyric pleasure. As Feste sings "Come away, come away, death," Orsino and Viola abandon themselves to the pleasures of the moment. Orsino moves to stand by Viola; then, taking her hand, he whispers in her ear. The song, he asserts, is a harmless pastoral - "It is silly sooth, / And dallyes with the innocence of love / Like the old age" (2.4.45-47; Nunn, 75). But he's wrong. In Feste's hands, this sophisticated madrigal enacts a love-death that probes the dangers of love. It explores an annihilation beyond death, for the song's "slain" lover not only pronounces his own death ("I am slain by a fair cruel maid") but also the eradication of any memorial: "not a friend greet / My poor corpse. . . . Lay me O where / Sad true lover never find my grave, / To weep there." (2.4.50-65; Nunn, 75-77). Feste's rendition, engaged and intense, resonates with Viola's history of loss and with her own self-annihilation in disguise and (apparently) unfulfillable desire.

21. Orsino almost makes a move on her, as the romantic ballad - Kingsley's guitar and voice now supported by orchestral soundtrack - works its power. Orsino seems half asleep, hardly conscious of his own desire; it is Viola who is fully aware of the erotic moment. We watch from Feste's point of view, as "CESARIO is
yearningly aroused - and begins slowly, slowly to turn her head towards ORSINO'S mouth" (Nunn, 77). [see Plate 4]

But the kiss is never consummated, because the song comes to an abrupt end. If the song were truly "silly sooth," as Orsino calls it (that is, mere entertainment music), the romantic moment might be held indefinitely. [39] But it's not just background music, it is a lyric of tragic desire, and as such has to have an end. In the tense silence as the song ends, Feste looks hard at the lovers with what Nunn calls "his X-ray eyes" ("Introduction," n.p.). Under that gaze, Orsino pulls rank, patronizingly tossing a coin to Feste: "There's for thy pains" ["pains" = labour]. Feste, however, turns Orsino's conventional use of "pains" back on him: "No pains, sir. I take pleasure in singing." In foregrounding the pun, he links the pain of the song's tragic content and the pleasure of his labour. Orsino, still trying to regain detachment, joins him in the "pleasurable" realm of art, as a patron: "I'll pay thy pleasure, then." "Truly, sir," says Feste dryly, "and pleasure will be paid" (2.4.66-70; Nunn, 77).

22. "Pleasure will be paid" is a conventional moral tag. But in this tense context it conveys something more, implying a diagnosis of the moral complications of erotic and artistic pleasure. Under Feste's gaze, Orsino surely sees his friendship for "Cesario" as it must look to the public. The duke seems not to have realized until now that his military-academy court with its concentrated masculinity and communal athleticism, fed by his constant talk of love and sudden favouring of a beautiful youth, is likely to cross the lines of heteronormative sexuality. [40] Now he sees himself about to kiss this boy. Understandably, he rushes out of the barn into the open air, appalled at how close he is to breaking the codes of sexuality. Orsino, after all, has not been at the countless RSC productions that have explored "alternative" sexualities in order to break down the single-minded codes of compulsory heterosexuality. He has not been able to absorb the post-1960s momentum of interpretive criticism on the romantic comedies exploring gender and sexuality. He is aware that something is strange, but he has no clue about what it is. [41] Viola presumably understands Feste's penetrating gaze and haunting song more accurately. In being about to kiss Orsino, she may have
forgotten that he thinks she's a boy. But she certainly knows her own desires: she's a woman in love with a man. For him, the kiss would be an unwelcome and scary distraction from his obsessive courtship; for her, it would be a step towards a "natural" consummation of her love. The knowing perspective from which we see all this confusion is Feste's: as Stephen Holden of The New York Times wrote, "Mr. Kingsley's laughing brown eyes seem to be stealing glimpses a century ahead into the age of sexual reassignment and hormone therapy." [42]

23. Breaking off the kiss makes Viola sharply aware of the discrepancy between her desires and the likelihood of fulfilling them. In the cliff-side scene that follows (2.4.77-120; Nunn, 78-79) Orsino sends Viola to woo Olivia ("Once more, Cesario, / Get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty"). This time Viola can't bear Orsino's obliviousness - to her, to Olivia, to women in general. "But if she cannot love you, sir?" When he cries, "I cannot so be answered," she shouts, "Sooth, but you must." In response to Viola's assertion of "some lady" who loves him as deeply as he loves Olivia, Orsino frankly expresses his distrust of women: "no woman's sides / Can bear the beating of so strong a passion / As love doth give my heart." Herself now more than ever conscious of her desire for him, she realizes that she must teach him about the emotions of women. "Ay, but I know. . . " she cries angrily. She has started to use the language of personal - woman's - experience, but she backs off to maintain her disguise. In her intense story ("My father had a daughter loved a man. . . "), she shows Orsino that a woman can evidence passion, generosity, dignity and submission. Women "are as true of heart as we."

24. The turmoil of the scene - tragically heightened by shots of cliffs and surf - plays out Orsino's obsessive desire for Olivia and his confused homoerotic attraction to Viola. [43] But even as the film evokes the powerful issues of gender identity and repressed sexuality, it pulls away from the tragedy that might lie there: we are not going to enter the world of secrets, lies, or violence. Viola backs down and promises him, "I'll do my best to woo your lady." Given the way romantic comedy works, she has to remain "Cesario" for the play to resolve its tangle. That resolution, clearly, will be in marriage: her hopes that "myself would be his wife" are also the play's. Desire, far from being secret, will find a way to reveal itself and cut through complication. Even in the darkest moments, the play and the film see their endings clearly, though not how we will get there. The "sense of an ending" is largely represented by Kingsley's Feste. His unflustered observation and resolute interrogation of the dangerous sides of the action at once acknowledge and defuse the sense of tragedy. As the character Feste, he seems to know things that will help to lead the comedy to its resolution - the vulnerability of women, the scariness of homosexual encounter in a patriarchal society, the dangers of repression and the limits of freedom. As the actor Kingsley, too, he seems to represent the way in which classic RSC theatre repeatedly delves into the darker sides of the text, even as it promises that the classic endings will prevail, that the entertainment will please us in the end.

"I am the man!!"
25. The film explores issues of feminism, gender and sexuality resolutely yet cautiously, knowingly engaging the story with contemporary analyses while holding the action in a semi-closeted "heritage" fin-de-siècle. [44] The shipboard prologue, for example, which displays Sebastian "in drag" (performing "O Mistress Mine" with Viola in harem costumes), domesticates transvestitism even as it mocks the complacency of colonial travelers as they enjoy this transvestite show. The extended shot of Viola in the sea that follows echoes Jane Campion's film *The Piano* and hints at that film's feminist analysis of colonial manifestations of woman's vulnerability; and yet the allusion occurs so briefly that it hardly suggests that this romantic comedy film will delve so graphically as Campion's into that disturbing area. Nunn's film engages (but largely comically) the intense sexual politics of the later twentieth century; as Anthony Lane points out, the play, like other great comedies, depends on "a taste for subterfuge" (2001: 76).

26. Nunn's *Twelfth Night* plays into 1990s same-sex liberationism, and at the same time sets pretty clear limits on how liberated it's going to be. The lesbian potential of the Olivia-Viola relationship is manifested early in the film, when "Cesario" intrudes on Olivia's mourning and Olivia begins to fixate on this "boy" (1.5.149-258; Nunn, 29-34). Olivia's attraction is clearly lesbian: Viola is (to our view) obviously a woman, the masculinity a transparent disguise. Olivia may believe that she's flirting with a man, but for us, all signs - including Viola's false mustache - keep reminding us that Viola is a woman. The lush Victorian interior, the rituals of candle-lighting and veils, the sensuous cinematography - all suggest an eroticized space of soft-porn lesbian romance. [45] At the peak of the move into lesbian romance is a brief two-shot of Viola and Olivia near the French doors leading to the garden, lovingly enveloped by rich darkness, and romantically back-lit by the mellow light coming in between the velvet curtains. [see Plate 5]

As Viola tells Olivia how Orsino loves her "with sighs of fire," the women's mouths pass close to each other, lips open - in our perspective, about to kiss. But the kiss is denied (like the kiss in the scene between "Cesario" and Orsino). The two move past each other, from the eroticized drawing room to the chilly openness of the lawn, where the roles change drastically. There Viola makes a
passionate enactment of male courtship ("Make me a willow cabin at your gate. . . ."). This speech is highly masculine: brash, funny, public and loud, and builds to a climax in its indiscreet shout "Olivia!" - a far cry from the secrecy of the muted parlour scene. [46] The line is clearly drawn between the parlour and the garden, between the private stirrings of alternative desire and the public reassertion of social expectations. Viola will later sum it up with a safely heterosexual conclusion, amused rather than distressed to find that "I am the man!" (2.2.23; Nunn, 37). [47]

27. In line with many contemporary interpretations of Twelfth Night, the film's Antonio displays an obvious longing for Sebastian ("if you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant"). [48] This potentially gay relationship, however, is doomed from the start by cluelessness on Sebastian's part, who senses something odd in Antonio but seems never to have considered the possibility of a man desiring another man. So Antonio, closeted by necessity, has to live a cycle of intimations and unspoken rejections, a hard fate made memorably visible by the sad-sack countenance that Nicholas Farrell brings to the part. One might imagine staging Antonio in a more liberal tonality - matching him, perhaps, with a Sebastian who understands homosexual desire even as he declines it. [49] But the Feste who oversees the critical conscience of the film would hardly have approved such a sentimental ending; the tones of this film are in general comic but not so easily sweep the issues under the rug.

28. And yet, one might expect that in some way, in the 1990s, Nunn would have gone further with same-sex issues. Certainly criticism of the play has emphatically explored these issues. [50] And filmmakers like Derek Jarman have shown that we can push the classic texts to resist and subvert the dominant histories of interpretation. Nunn, however, is not about to break apart the text or go against the grain of a received understanding of the meanings of romantic comedy. For him, the text still leads through disruption, not into it. As Richard Burt has recently articulated, same-sex desire and homoerotic possibility lead in Nunn's film not towards a queer aesthetic but towards the liberation, and liberalization, of heterosexual potentialities (1998, 176-180). [51]

29. Given the importance of cross-dressing in contemporary theatre and film, a play like Twelfth Night - featuring a woman dressed as a man - might be expected to engage the transgressive potential of that theme. [52] Both the video box and the video distributor's U.S. website evoke the carnivalesque humour of camp cross-dressing films, commending the film as "Wittier than The Birdcage and more fun than To Wong Foo." [53] Another marketing tag (on the IMDB website) reads, "Before Priscilla crossed the desert, Wong Foo met Julie Newmar, and the Birdcage was unlocked, there was . . . ." In this knowingly unfinished chronology, Twelfth Night is slyly catalogued as an originary text of transvestite camp, transgressive and liberatory, an active conspirator in the crossing of deserts and the unlocking of birdcages. But the marketing also limits the transgressive implications. Prominent on the video box is another tag: "Never send a boy to do a man's job, especially if he's a girl" [italics original]. Despite the titillating sense of sexual intrigue, there is a prescriptive tone to the tag ("never send"), which casts a shadow of normative moralizing. The punchline ("especially if he's a girl")
strikes an essentializing note that counters any serious gender-bending possibilities. "Cesario" may look like a boy, but in fact "he's a girl." The issues, then, are marketed as problems of disguise - which preserves an essential identity - rather than the more transgressive ones of cross-dressing - which threatens identity. [54]

30. The film treats cross-dressing as a theatrical situation, a pleasurable complication on the path to resolution, rather than a commitment to contemporary theories of identity shifts and gender performance. [55] The audience is constantly reminded of the mechanics of Viola's disguise, and thus of her essential and (as Osborne calls it) "transparent femininity" (1996: 99). During the opening credits, we witness Viola's makeover under the paternal guidance of the sea captain. Later, we watch Viola retire to her bedroom and unbind her breasts, exhausted by the men's-club demands of Orsino's court. [56] When a fencing master touches her breast in correcting her stance, she responds with surprise, as if she's genuinely amazed that a man would touch her on the breast. She is an unguarded innocent, hardly a transgressive cross-dresser - though certainly a sexual being, aroused by her contacts with Olivia and Orsino. [57] Though quotations on the video marketing may suggest that the film belongs in camp or even queer genres, and though same-sex eroticism is clearly strongly referenced in the near-kiss shots, a different suggestion appears in the art-work used on the poster and the video box. [see Plate 6]

In this collage of three headshots, Viola and Olivia are hardly close to an erotic encounter. Viola's eyes are fixed not on Olivia but beyond her to Orsino, in obvious adoration. Olivia, too, is looking away from Viola into the near distance, as if she were seeing the invisible Sebastian who's going to make everything work out fine. [58] The marketing has picked up on the careful touch with which Nunn treats the sexual implications of the play: Viola's cross-dressing is more comic than transgressive, because her destiny - as a woman - is so clearly signalled from the beginning.

"My tale is done"

31. This film with its strong sense of classic form makes us constantly aware of the pressure of its ending, the intricate resolution necessary for a Shakespearean
romantic comedy. This teleological impulse is closely tied to Feste, whose bemused detachment suggests that he, from the beginning, can see the "big picture." The film, however, does not rush to a simple resolution. Like Feste, who is both seer and entertainer, the film makes clear where things are going and yet suspends arrival as long as it can. As a good comedy, it complicates resolution for our further pleasure. Among the several complications is the situation of Maria. Her fate is shown to depend on Toby, who seems reluctant to propose to her. The complications come as Toby pursues his revenge against Malvolio: he goes deeper than he intended into the excitement of what Nunn calls this "blood sport" (88). By the time he gets Malvolio into the madhouse (4.2; Nunn, 106-109), Toby is drunk and Maria "distressed and pained." Shaken, he acknowledges that "I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot pursue't with any safety."

Awkwardly, then, he finallyakens to his need for Maria, making a harsh and awkward sexual demand: "Sir Toby goes a few paces and turns. Maria goes to support him. Sir Toby grabs her and kisses her fiercely on the mouth and the throat, aroused by the whole incident" (Nunn, 109). He "proposes" not marriage but sex: "Come by and by to my chamber." As he leaves without waiting for an answer, the camera looks to Maria for her response to this complex of issues. She looks at Feste, who nods slowly; then she leaves to join Toby. [59] Feste's sombre observation authorizes this resolution without pretending that it constitutes a simple or happy ending. Apparently, no happy wedding transpires; Feste watches through the church window as a small and indistinct couple "move nervously towards the altar rail" (Nunn, 113). Toby's discomfort with his capitulation to Maria presumably motivates his final scene with Andrew, as his anger flares suddenly and viciously, and he publicly labels Andrew "a thin-faced knave, a gull!" (5.1.199; Nunn, 121). Feste looks on with another of his now-familiar response shots: a look full of sorrow, a knowing counterpart to the happy sentiments circulating about in the scene of general reunion and resolution. Given the complicated passages of their love, it's no wonder Toby and Maria have to leave Illyria at the end.

32. Even in the recognition scene (5.1), when the move to resolution is strongest, Nunn holds it in suspension. The revelations move on with inevitable sureness and yet without haste. Viola takes an age to recognize Sebastian; their walking towards each other and their interrogation of their mutual parentage are slow, almost dreamlike. She holds the resolution in abeyance: "Do not embrace me," she tells her brother, until all the signs are clear. If she seems to want to hold to her disguise, it may be because what lies beyond it is scary. It would be scary if this were real life. But in more than one sense, it's not real, it's art. After all, Sebastian and Viola have performed this scene before: when he peels off her moustache in this recognition scene, it's a reprise of their shipboard vaudeville act. Feste looks on this performance with a complex gesture. His hand moves slowly past his mouth - as if to trace where Viola's moustache had been? - and then down, to touch briefly, gently, on his chest - as if to carry the implications of the disguise and its removal into his heart. A few moments later, another of his wonderful gestures suspends and seals the action: as Orsino and Viola finally kiss,
we watch him - first looking aside at them, then front and center at us, quizzically rubbing the side of his nose.

33. The final actions of the recognition scene are Feste's. From his coat pocket, he brings out Viola's necklace, discarded on the beach; silently he puts it on her. The ritualized act deepens and complicates her re-transformation into woman. Taken off in sorrow and vulnerability, the necklace returns to her as a mark of strength. In disguise, she has assumed the mobility and the freedom of masculinity; now the necklace seems to signify her essential womanhood. At the same time, however, its presence on her neck must remind us of its long absence through the play, and the history of her shift from that identity, her life as "Cesario." The closure of Viola's time as boy is thus solemnized in a way that heightens the unresolved liminality of her status throughout the play. [60]

34. Feste's other action is silently to deliver Malvolio's letter to Olivia, the letter which will "resolve" Malvolio's madness. The letter ensures that Malvolio's purgatory is still to come, that he will be publicly, theatrically humiliated in the next scene. In the hall of Olivia's house, Feste draws out the scene, slowly descending the staircase, proudly showing that he is mockingly wearing Malvolio's toupee. He is hardly a peacemaker but a showman, coming to twist the knife once more for our pleasure. Silent, enigmatic, even compassionate through much of the film, here he shows directly why he hates Malvolio. "But do you remember: 'Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? . . . And you smile not, he's gagged?'" (5.1.362-364; Nunn, 129). Malvolio is the enemy of the entertainer; he abhors the classic theatre with its laughter and ambiguity. He is the puritan who is to shut down the stages of London, who - like other puritans in the 1990s, perhaps - feels that he has the only acceptable handle on social control. But for an interrogator like Feste, it's not Malvolio's regimes of surveillance and repression that will keep us in balance. The struggle between wildness and control is a fierce one, performed anew every day. "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," he says. Time does not lead us straight to some blessed commonwealth of the virtuous (safe from distractions of "cakes and ale"), but is a fierce and vengeful "whirligig" - part whirlwind (just as Feste is part prophet), part child's spinning top, fast and unpredictable.

35. The epilogue, sung by Feste, seems at first to neatly summarize the play's resolutions in a stanza-by-stanza picture of man's life from youth to age (5.1.376-395; Nunn, 130-133). The first four stanzas are illustrated, respectively, with four vignettes that reflect the song's evocation of the stages of life: first Andrew leaves in his comic pony-trap ("A foolish thing was but a toy"); then Antonio, "'Gainst whom men shut their gates," glumly walks out of the gates; [61] then Toby and Maria climb into a carriage in a gloomy wood reminiscent of the Brothers Grimm and Arthur Rackham ("By swaggering did I never thrive"); and last of the four, Malvolio walks out with his suitcase, headed to a lonely exile ("when I came unto my beds"). [62] The parallels of song and action are neat, but the song itself, with its enigmatic syntax and refrain ("the rain it raineth every day") opens up more questions than resolutions. By its expulsion of the foolish, the perverse, the neurotic and the joyless, the film signals the mixed conditions and the costs of the happy ending. "Normalcy" is established, but not easily, and probably not forever.
The whirligig may well keep turning in its wild fashion; Malvolio promises, after all, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you" (5.1.365; Nunn, 130).

36. For a moment, a formal closure - a "happy ending" - is apparently reified as the two principal couples and their faithful retainers enjoy a happy country dance, putting aside the differences of class and the struggles of sexuality and sexual identity. [63] [see Plate 7]

Though the Shakespeare text ends with Viola still dressed as a boy (5.1.372-75), Nunn re-costumes her in "maid's garments" - hair curled, cleavage amply framed in a rich pastel gown. Her sexual identity now fixed, she dances with Olivia, Sebastian and Orsino in a fantasy of mutuality. [64] The ending celebrates a utopian society that will maintain even in marriage the bond of brother and sister, the Platonic love of woman and woman, and perhaps even the friendship of boy with man - bonds that are often disrupted by heterosexual resolutions in Shakespearean comedy. This upbeat dance is the background to the credits, and it feels like the end of the film. [65]

37. But it's not: there is one more stanza of the epilogue, and one more oddball to account for - Feste himself. We see him after the dance and the credits, on a cliff above the sea as at the beginning, but this time from above. He sings the final verse of the epilogue, the one that doesn't fit the pattern:

A great while ago the world was 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.

It's obviously the end of the film; but even now the end is deferred by repetition. The end of the last verse isn't actually the end, but is repeated three times as Feste comes ever closer to the camera, varying his inflections: "every day . . . [closer]. . . every day . . . [laughing out loud]. . . every day!" [see Plate 8]
He spins around in a solitary jig, "twirling like a top down the seacoast ridge" (Brown, 15) and rounds a corner, dropping out of sight. What's this odd, charming and almost secret post-epilogue doing here?

38. The final "every day" is not sung, but spoken, and the return from lyric to dramatic speech signals the return of the theatrical. [66] Feste is, like Kingsley himself, a classic man of the theatre, well-seasoned in performance. He knows what it's like to do the show night after night, to stage Twelfth Night again and again, and to come back to the classic texts. He's seen it all - the passions of Illyrians, the conventions of romantic comedy, and the illusions of theatre - and of filmmaking. He knows that it has happened a hundred times and may well happen hundreds more. But he knows also that there's more work that a Shakespearean text like Twelfth Night can do in the world. He seems happy to be part of the whirligig that brings the old text back into our view, to mend us, comfort us, or set us on a new path. He gives us a dance more disturbing than the sentimental line dance of the party in the hall. This artist dances alone on the cold hillside, an elfin and independent voice singing the lyrics of possibility and desire, "celebrating the paradoxes of constancy and change" (Brown, 27). "Every day!" is a loaded and edgy phrase: it's the curse and the blessing of the classic, that it happens again and again, every day, new and yet familiar. [67]

Notes

Stills are taken from the video of Twelfth Night with the kind permission of Entertainment Film Distributors (U.K.).

of Shakespeare films like Nunn's with the "striking and imaginative" styles of Loncraine's Richard III. [Return to essay]

2. The U.S. release date of the Luhrmann film (1 Nov 1996) was just a week after Nunn's (25 Oct 1996), overshadowing it critically and at the box office (dates from IMDB). Nunn's comment in an interview with Gary Crowdus acknowledges the differences between the two films: of the Luhrmann film, he says,

   It didn't score particularly high marks with me for the amount of text that managed to survive or, in many cases, the decisions that were taken about what that text actually meant, how it was learned or how it was phrased. All of that pales into insignificance when you consider that the director achieved a completely personal vision that contained urgency and immediacy and anger and relevance, all of which did address itself to a youthful audience that responded. So I think there's great value in it as a film, but I don't think of it as being the total solution. (Crowdus, 39)

   Kenneth S. Rothwell (240) commends Nunn's work as "gracefully and wittily" meeting the challenge of filming Shakespeare's bittersweet play, but his treatment is largely descriptive. That the film has a classic visual appeal is indicated by Rothwell using a still from it for the dustjacket of his book. Peter Holland commends Nunn's film as "[u]nobtrusively effective (unlike the exhilarating ostentation of Luhrmann's film or the dulling ostentation of Branagh's Hamlet)" (n.p.). [Return to essay]

3. I agree with Osborne that "In Nunn's Twelfth Night, our 'natural perspective' on the twins, like that in Shakespeare's play, proves at once fragmented and continuous -- and therefore ideological rather than 'natural"' (2001: 106), and am interested in exploring how Feste's particular presence contributes to that effect. [Return to essay]

4. Cinematographer Clive Tickner used a tobacco filter "to 'age' [the set], while keeping the autumn skies luminous" (Twelfth Night. Website). [Return to essay]

5. If the mise en scène of Twelfth Night links it with literary heritage films, so does its casting: Helena Bonham Carter (Olivia) established her fame in the witty adaptation of Forster's A Room With A View (dir. James Ivory, 1986), Nigel Hawthorne (Malvolio) starred in highly literate Madness of King George (dir. Nicholas Hytner, 1994), Imogen Stubbs (Viola) and Imelda Staunton (Maria) appeared in Sense and Sensibility (dir. Ang Lee, 1995), Toby Stephens (Orsino) in the off-beat period film Orlando (dir. Sally Potter, 1992). In what may be an arch reference to the heritage associations of the cast, Nunn gives Sebastian a copy of "Baedeker's Illyria," which he uses for his sightseeing until he is seduced by Olivia (Helena Bonham Carter): in A Room with a View Bonham Carter's character throws away in her Baedeker in favour of other pursuits. [Return to essay]

6. Timothy Corrigan describes the heritage film's "post-postmodern yearning for good plots and characters with depth... a nostalgia for past worlds of coherency, romance, adventure, and some degree of psychological and social order" (72). The producers of Twelfth Night, David Parfitt and Stephen Evans, are associated with the heritage genre, having worked together on The Madness of King George, and later on The Wings of the Dove (dir. Iain Softley, 1997). [Return to essay]
7. Nunn's *Twelfth Night* shares its country house location with the BBC Time/Life video of the play (dir. John Gorrie, 1980) which, as Laurie E. Osborne notes, established an "intimacy with the country house [that] ties *Twelfth Night* to other popular BBC productions like *Upstairs, Downstairs* and places the play firmly within the BBC's larger commitment to English culture and manners" (1996: 119). [Return to essay]

8. Ricky Eyres, the art director, had worked previously on the powerfully militarized *Edward II* (dir. Derek Jarman, 1991), and was to go on to shoot *Saving Private Ryan* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1998), where the wars of the past are evoked rather more disturbingly. [Return to essay]

9. Claire Monk, in a thoughtful review essay of the film *Carrington* (dir. Christopher Hampton, 1995), outlines some of the ways heritage films can move beyond "their promotion of a conservative, bourgeois, pastoral, 'English' national identity" (33). For a discussion of complex modes of fidelity and homage, see Mary Favret, "Being True to Jane Austen." *The Portrait of a Lady* (dir. Jane Campion, 1996), released in the same year as *Twelfth Night*, is a period drama with a heritage affiliation, yet has a strong anti-heritage ideology, a rejection of the politeness often characterizing films in this genre (see Lizzie Frank, "On the Brink"). [Return to essay]

10. The Victorian setting causes some trouble that the film never resolves, such as the oddly ramshackle "mad room" for Malvolio which negates the earnest therapies of the nineteenth century. Nor does the idea of Illyria as an isolated city-state at war with some apparently nearby and probably dynastically related enemy fit with British communication and governmental efficiency in the height of the Empire. [Return to essay]

11. By "text" I mean not just the script of the play but also the "inherently multiple" nature of the accumulation of histories of critical and performance interpretation (Osborne 1996: 15). [Return to essay]

12. One might add *Looking for Richard* with its fractured documentary approach, and *Titus* (dir. Julie Taymor, 1999) with its baroque visual priorities. The title of Nunn's film is deliberately low-key, using only the title of the play and not the authorial "Shakespeare." In the actual title shot, Nunn even goes so far as to include the play's enigmatic subtitle (*Or, What you Will*), more than a little baffling to non-Shakespeareans. Nunn acknowledges that some film industry consultants resisted his use of Shakespeare's title (Nunn, "Introduction," n.p.). [Return to essay]

13. Nunn acknowledges the struggles between film and text: creating his opening scene with its added voiceover (written by Nunn), he says, "I wept, I resisted, I tampered" ("Introduction," n.p.). Nunn's iambic pentameter prologue, with its hints at rhyme and its antique diction ("Dauntless, her brother plunges in the main") is in keeping with the 19th-century history of the text. Osborne (1996: 23) quotes an 1882 condensation of the play by one Samuel Ferguson, with a sound similar to Nunn's:

Conceive a shipwreck; and imagine two
Of the passengers, with fractions of the crew
At several ventures on the Illyrian coast
Escaped, each deeming that the other's lost.
Twins are they, Greeks, a sister and a brother
So like you'd scarce know either from the other.

14. I would not agree with Anthony Lane, however, that filmmakers need to "trust" Shakespeare, rather than to mess with him. Lane writes: "I don't mind if the film [William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, in this case] recruits Shakespeare to the banner of hip, but I resent the covert implication that Shakespeare still, to an extent, gets in the way of the hoopla, and that the language is more hindrance than help" (1996: 66). An anthology of essays assembled just before Twelfth Night was released (Boose and Burt, Shakespeare: The Movie) comments that "just where the film industry will take Shakespeare seems quite up for grabs." The editors go on to speculate on two very different possibilities: the "teen-target, popular film [which] has rocketed into the huge-budget model" or "artsy-artsy cultural elitism that was bound not to make money" ("Introduction," 2-3). It is particularly difficult to find strongly interpretive films of the comedies, though The Tempest has had Greenaway and Jarman to lead the way (see Michael Hattaway, "The Comedies on Film"). Russell Jackson earlier noted the need for good film versions of the comedies, rather than films that seem made, as he says, "to make sure that some sort of homage has been paid to Shakespeare" (100). Peter Holland, too, suggests that "In its consistent intelligence Twelfth Night seems to me to be the model future filmmakers looking towards Shakespearean comedy would be best advised to follow" (n.p.). A recent (March 2002) seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America, led by Sam Crowl, suggests that some excellent critical work on the comedies is being done.

15. For background on these companies, in particular the RSC, see Sally Beauman, The Royal Shakespeare Company; Steven Adler, Rough Magic: Making Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company; and David Addenbrooke, The Royal Shakespeare Company: The Peter Hall Years.

16. Among the 10 principals, all have extensive British theatre resumes; among them, only Richard E. Grant (Sir Andrew), Mel Smith (Sir Toby) and Stephen Mackintosh (Sebastian) show no RSC or National Theatre roles, according to the film's website.

17. The announcement of the film for the Telluride film festival, as quoted by Burt (1998, 190). Nunn's strategy is not as resolutely RSC-oriented as that pursued by Adrian Noble in his Midsummer Night's Dream of the same year. He cast the film entirely with RSC actors, and, according to Kenneth Rothwell, "[t]he impeccable RSC diction carries more polish than feeling" (246).

18. Nunn writes that he was encouraged to cast "participants who would provide huge box-office value, despite, in most cases, never having played Shakespeare before. . . . In the end . . . I was overjoyed to have a cast who were skilled and comfortable in the idiom and who despite the privations of wind-swept Cornwall very late in the year, cared deeply about their work, about each other, and above all, about Shakespeare." ("Introduction," n.p.). In an interview, he cites text, as opposed to plot or theme, as the primary motivation for filming Shakespeare: "the
fundamental reason that one is filming Shakespeare is to take Shakespeare's text to a wider audience" (Crowdus, 37). [Return to essay]

19. See (as well as Beauman) Samuel Crowl (Shakespeare Observed), and J. L. Styan (The Shakespeare Revolution). [Return to essay]

20. The most detailed documentation of the textual study that characterized RSC work are the well-known workshop videos featuring Nunn and Barton, and the associated text by Barton (Playing Shakespeare). [Return to essay]

21. Peter Brook characterized Peter Hall's directorship of the RSC in the 1960s as working on the "principle that it was actors in touch with contemporary life - through contemporary works - who had to be the people to interpret Shakespeare" (quoted by Philip Barnes). Alan Sinfield documents "the combination of traditional authority and urgent contemporaneity" that characterized Nunn's directorship and the RSC in the 60s and 70s, though in Sinfield's view, the radicalism is illusory: "[t]he underlying pressure is towards deference and inertia" (159, 178). As Adler notes, in the early 60s "the company was exploring new styles of production and daring to interpret Shakespeare's plays in radical ways...[as well as] the production of new works that were radical in both politics and performance style" (56). [Return to essay]

22. In a 1998 editorial about the decline of the RSC, Simon Callow wrote: "for a group to function at the level that the RSC reached under Hall and then Nunn...the inspiration, whether from an idea or from an individual, needs to be white hot. Somewhere, they lost their power to inspire their members to think of themselves as...an ensemble" ("Theatre: Thrift, Horatio, Thrift! And stuff the Quality" Independent [London], 14 Nov 1998, 12; quoted in Adler, 84). [Return to essay]


24. For treatment of some of these issues in the play, see Michaela Röll, "'Three'-floating Sexuality" and Casey Charles, "Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night." [Return to essay]

25. Act, scene, and line numbers (where appropriate) refer to the text of the play in the Norton edition. Page numbers after "Nunn" are references to the screenplay. [Return to essay]

26. Quotations in italics are Nunn's stage directions in the screenplay. [Return to essay]

27. Kingsley "was determined to play the truth-teller in his own true voice, eschewing make-up and wearing clothes similar to what he wears in life" (Twelfth Night website). Nunn reports Kingsley saying, "I want to be undisguised, unadorned, with a shaven head" (Laroque, 91). [Return to essay]

28. The noun in the text is in the plural - "in the wars" (1.5.11). Maria's delivery of the line is far from the joke it appears to be in the text; her voice is laden with unexplained emotion. The change to "in the war" brings it home from a collective abstraction to some specific war,
presumably the recent actions with Messaline, and its effects on Maria (perhaps the death of Olivia's brother?). [Return to essay]

29. The line is only part of a difficult speech about "mending" and "patching" (1.5.37-46) that Nunn keeps remarkably intact. Nunn acknowledges that he faced "the problems of textual length and esoteric language," trying to balance comprehensibility with keeping Feste's language as part of his centrality (Nunn, "Introduction," n.p.). [Return to essay]

30. Coursen has an excellent description of the textual manipulations and "complicated editing" of the scene (207). [Return to essay]

31. The phrase is Eric Brown's (15). [Return to essay]


33. As Brown notes, the film creates moments in which "promised futures move tantalizingly away, even as uncertain futures wind their way unexpectedly into the present to create a 'golden time' of partial rapprochement" (16). Feste's song with its strong intercutting can be seen as (again, Brown's words), "a temporal disruption in the text that mirrors the temporal divisions unfolding in the film's thematics" (19). [Return to essay]

34. Crowl notes how the film uses lyric for complexity in repeated patterns: "The film keeps returning to music and song...to capture the play's lyric quality." He further notes the similarity to operatic lyricism: the revels scene is "a quartet of moving (pun intended) images of love's perplexing variety" (1997: 36). [Return to essay]

35. Geoffrey Macnab notes the Chekhovian aspects of the film (60). [Return to essay]

36. A complex pleasure is figured at the end of this intricate scene, as Nunn gives us a montage of faint smiles, first from Feste and then from his audience -- Viola, Orsino, Andrew, and Toby -- each seeming a little off-balance, and not too sure about how to feel about it. [Return to essay]

37. The concertina is the instrument we have seen him play as he sang "O Mistress Mine" in the kitchen, the tune that for Viola "gives a very echo to the seat / Where love is throned." It is no wonder, then, that Viola stops and greets the musician. [Return to essay]

38. In the screenplay there is a further interchange around the "I do not care for you" idea before Viola does the coin trick. It was cut, perhaps because it would have accelerated the discomfort of Feste's probings too quickly, before Viola had a chance to show her skill at keeping up her disguise. [Return to essay]
39. "Silly" here implies both triviality and in the older meaning mystery (as in the German "selig"). [Return to essay]

40. Nunn himself likens the court of Orsino to "a military academy" (Crowdus, 39). [Return to essay]

41. Richard Burt sees Orsino in Nunn's film as more knowingly gay than I do, citing Orsino's "diminished interest in the revealed Viola [at the end of the film, which suggests] that he preferred her when she was a he" (1997: 244). For me, the power of the final dance with the very womanly Viola enacts the opposite dynamic, suggesting that he prefers her in her "essential" womanliness. [Return to essay]

42. Burt ascribes to Feste - in his interruption of his song and his male voyeuristic gaze - the symbolic action of the disruption of homoerotic potential (1998, 180). I read Feste's role as much more indicative of the acknowledgement of the homoerotic desire, and his interruption of the kiss as a deferral of the almost inevitable heterosexual resolution. Burt seems to see Feste as an agent of a hetero-normative establishment; for me, his scruffiness, intensity, inscrutability, and his eventual disappearance before the coupling at the end of the film mark him as an agent of the counter-culture. [Return to essay]

43. The cliffs and surf are identified with films of tragedy rather than romantic comedy, featuring strongly in films of *Hamlet* (dir. Laurence Olivier, 1948; dir. Grigori Kozintsev, 1964) and *Othello* (dir. Orson Welles, 1952; dir. Oliver Parker, 1995). [Return to essay]

44. A review by Sean Means shows how the film's highlighting of sexuality triggers a degree of contemporaneity surprising to a film audience: "What kind of sick, twisted pervert was this Shakespeare guy anyway? Someone who was ahead of the game. . . ." The review ends by ranking the film among recent Shakespeare movies as "perhaps the most modern (even more so than the tres-chic *Romeo & Juliet*)" (n.p.). [Return to essay]

45. The chemistry between the two actresses is strong, as well: Helena Bonham Carter sensually shows her character's fascination with the prettiness of Imogen Stubbs. The film website notes that the two were at school together, and quotes Stubbs' comment that "Whenever I play with Helena, it's very giggly. . . ." As Crowl notes, "Nunn's camera richly caresses the pert and ripe profiles of Stubbs and Helena Bonham Carter as they move in and out of entanglement" (1997: 37). [Return to essay]

46. Nunn literalizes the publicness of this move by cutting to Malvolio's startled response from within the house. [Return to essay]

47. The restraint of Nunn's treatment is in contrast with an earlier film version of *Twelfth Night*, a 1972 Playboy production (dir. Ron Wertheim), which I have not seen. In this production, as described by Richard Burt, lesbian sexuality is explicitly displayed, though "gay male sexuality is pretty much written out of the film's authentic coupledom" (1997: 264). [Return to essay]
48. See, for example, Joseph Pequigney, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice.*" [Return to essay]

49. The screenplay indicates that some gesture of union was originally intended for the final scene, but it seems to have been cut: Orsino was to release Antonio from his handcuffs, bring him to Sebastian, who then would take him to Viola (Nunn, 126). Whether this was seen as a restorative for Antonio or a further slap in the face is hard to tell: what would he say or think of this woman disguised as his beloved? [Return to essay]

50. For example, see Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety* and Michaela Röll, "Three'-floating Sexuality." [Return to essay]

51. The way the film and its marketing pull back from the homoerotic may have to do with the secondary school market for a well-performed video of such a frequently taught play as *Twelfth Night*. Elaine Hobby points out that section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act of 1988 in the U.K. forbids a local authority to promote the teaching of homosexuality. Even without such a law, she asserts, few public schools in England or the U.S. can dare to seem gay-promoting (125). As Russell Jackson notes, "Shakespeare films have always had a peculiar and privileged 'afterlife', accentuated since the late 1970s by their greater availability in video form for home consumption and school and university study." This afterlife, as Jackson argues, tends to increase the danger that film and text work together to extended a fixed, iconic, and essentially conservative status for "Shakespeare" (100-101). [Return to essay]

52. See Jonathan Crewe, "In the Field of Dreams," and Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests*. Boose and Burt note the recent connection of the study of transvestite performance in Shakespeare with pop culture figures ("Totally Clueless?," 10). [Return to essay]

53. Video box (New Line Home Video) and Fine Line website. Matt Wolf noted in his review that "anyone expecting 'The Birdcage' or 'To Wong Foo'-style hi-jinks will be in for a surprise." Eric Brown also comments on the disjunct between the "rollicking, gender-bending *jeu d'esprit*" suggested by the marketing, and the disruptions and chiaroscuro of the film itself (28). [Return to essay]

54. Stephen Buhler also notes the transgressive suggestion of the marketing, and comments that "the most transgressive elements in the resulting film involve Nunn's own anxiety about rearranging Shakespeare's materials..." (156). [Return to essay]

55. In his comparison of the play *Twelfth Night* with the film *The Crying Game* (dir. Neil Jordan, 1992) Jonathan Crewe sees the play as using homoeroticism and cross-dressing to critique and partly undo the enforced marriage plot, but asserts that the play cannot "access a fully utopian multiplicity of gender and desire" (102). Its transgressive aspects are finally seen only as transitional: "Same-sex desire...[is] a transitional phase in the otherwise intractable heterosexual marriage plot, while the pretty youth serves as a transitional object" (108). Crewe's article, published in 1995, does not of course reference Nunn's 1996 film. [Return to essay]
56. Nunn's choice here to give Viola a separate room - implausible in this barracks atmosphere - maintains her "womanly" privacy. Osborne notes that nineteenth-century performance editions of the play also "downplay . . . the impropriety of Viola's stay in Orsino's house" (1996: 92). Similarly, Nunn plays up the modesty of Viola as she attends at Orsino's bath. [Return to essay]

57. It may be that her surprise at the fencing-master's touch indicates not just concern for her disguise, but sexual interest as well. [Return to essay]

58. A related collage on the cover of the published screenplay makes the heterosexual teleology even clearer. It shows not the dangerous triangle but a safe gathering of four principals, undisguised and ready to be matched as the end of the play will have it. [Return to essay]

59. The screenplay indicates that Maria looks "clandestinely at Feste who is shaking his head slowly at her. Maria breathes deeply, and then goes with whatever dignity she can retain." Presumably, "shaking his head" is not meant to indicate dissent, as it would in U.S. usage; or perhaps the intended gesture was reversed in shooting. At any rate, the film clearly shows Feste nodding "yes." [Return to essay]

60. Liminality is a key theme in Eric Brown's detailed analysis of madness and deferral in Nunn's film. [Return to essay]

61. Antonio's posture before the gates of Olivia's echoes Masaccio's great fresco, The Expulsion from Paradise. [Return to essay]


63. More than one reviewer commented on the conservatism of the resolution: "the lovers are joyously sorted along traditional hetero lines" (Dan Hulbert, Atlanta Constitution). Peter Marks in the New York Times indirectly quotes Nunn as saying that "the relationship between the Duke and Viola, in her male guise, is ambiguous and blossoms into love the moment she reveals herself to be a woman." In quotes on the film website, Nunn twice uses the phrase "real love" to characterize Orsino in his love for the Viola he knows to be a woman. [Return to essay]

64. Such line dances, with their democratic inclusiveness, figure strongly in the Jane Austen films, for example in the several balls filmed in Persuasion (dir. Roger Michell, 1995). In Nunn's version, the dance quite self-consciously includes the "downstairs" folk - servants, gardeners (Fabian), sea captains, in happy togetherness with their privileged masters. [Return to essay]

65. Since credits now normally mark the end of a film, at least half of my students left the film during the dance. [Return to essay]

66. I do not mean to imply that the "theatrical" excludes lyric, but that the theatrical is in the standard Western repertory based primarily in the spoken rather than the sung. [Return to essay]
67. I'm grateful for the help of my students at Oberlin College, with whom I first discussed this film, and the encouragement and suggestions of my colleagues, particularly Mike Reynolds, Scott McMillin, David Young, Kate Thomas, Robert Pierce and Phyllis Gorfain. [Return to essay]

**Works Cited**


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Responses to this piece intended for the Readers' Forum may be sent to the Editor at L.M.Hopkins@shu.ac.uk.

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The Harrowing of Malvolio: The Theological Background of *Twelfth Night*, Act 4, Scene 2

PAUL DEAN

References:


There is no need at this date to make a laborious case for Shakespeare's knowledge of the Harrowing of Hell play from the medieval mystery cycles. Over thirty years ago, Glynne Wickham showed that the Porter scene in *Macbeth* draws on the iconography of that episode. I wish to suggest that Act 4, scene 2 of *Twelfth Night*, in which Feste as Sir Topaz visits the imprisoned Malvolio, contains some oblique theological allusions which are partly to be understood in terms of the Harrowing and partly in terms of Reformation theological debate. I accept the view, now academically quite respectable, that Shakespeare was at least brought up as a Catholic, and will suggest that this may colour the tone of the later part of the scene.

It is an article of the Apostles' Creed, inserted by the fourth synod of Sirmium in the middle of the fourth century, that Christ *descendit ad inferos*. The translation of these words which was included in the English Prayer Book from 1549 onwards—“he descended into Hell”—misrepresents the Latin, which actually means “to the people in the lower place,” that is, Limbo, the borderline state (*limbus* is Latin for “edge”), neither Hell nor Heaven, in which the holy souls of Old Testament times awaited their redeemer. (The mistaken translation is repeated in the fourth of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.) The crucial proof-text of this doctrine in the canonical New Testament is 1 Peter 3:18 which states that after his death Jesus preached “unto the spirits that are in prison,” a text quoted by the Duke in *Measure for Measure* (2.3.1-5). The story is elaborated in apocryphal writings. For instance, in the fragmentary *Gospel of Peter* (not by the Apostle) the resurrection appearance of Jesus is accompanied by a cross, and a voice is heard from the sky saying, “Hast thou preached unto them that sleep?” to which “an answer was heard from the cross, saying: Yea.” The fullest surviving treatment occurs in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (otherwise known as the *Acts of Pilate*), which exists in one Greek and two Latin texts and also in a Middle English version. In the Latin text the story of the visitation of Jesus to the infernal regions, his defeat of Satan, Death and Hell, and his liberation of the souls of patriarchs and prophets, is narrated by the two sons of Simeon, Karinus and Leucius, who have been raised from the dead for this purpose. Remarkably, although they can speak, they ask for paper in order to write their story down.
Malvolio's request to Feste). Naturally, the contrast between the darkness of Hell and the brightness of Christ's coming is stressed, similarly to the contrast in *Twelfth Night* 4.2, and interestingly Satan is called “the prince of Tartarus” (p. 130), which reminds us of Sir Toby's undertaking to follow his “most excellent devil of wit,” Maria, “to the gates of Tartar” (2.5.195-96). Significantly, in the play which in so many ways anticipates *Twelfth Night* — *The Comedy of Errors* — Antipholus of Syracuse is said by his servant Dromio to be “in Tartar limbo, worse than hell” (4.2.32).

The Middle English poem has one or two touches which may or may not be significant in a Shakespearian context: for instance the couplet “Long is o and long is ay / Tille þat comeþ domesday” (MS Bodl. Digby 86, ll. 247-48), which reminds us of the play with the letters “M.O.A.I.” in *Twelfth Night* (2.5.115-30). It is tempting to take “A” and “O” in the Middle English poem as Alpha and Omega, and at least one critic has detected the same symbolism in Maria's letter. It is also interesting that, while in the Digby MS of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* the keeper of Hell-gate calls himself a “zatewarde” (l. 132), in the Auchinleck MS he says, “Ich haue herd wordes hard / whi y no may be no steward” (ll. 145-46, my italics). There is, further, the enigmatic Syriac “Hymn of the Pearl” in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*; this has been connected, on rather flimsy evidence, with the Harrowing, but it mentions, among other items of interest to a reader of *Twelfth Night*, Egypt, a change of clothing, a pearl, and a magic letter, and contains these remarkable verses:

But suddenly, when I saw the garment made like unto me as it had been in a mirror.  
And I beheld upon it all myself [ or saw it wholly in myself], and I knew and saw myself through it,  
that we were divided asunder, being of one; and again were one in one shape.

—which cannot help reminding us of the meeting of Viola and Sebastian. There is no evidence that Shakespeare had read these apocryphal books, but it may be that he and they share some traditions whose origin and transmission are now lost to us. Certainly the correspondences are striking.

The Harrowing was selected early for dramatic representation; the earliest surviving play on the subject—which is also the earliest known liturgical play—dates from the eighth century, and it is included in all the extant mystery cycles. At Chester the pageant was presented by the Cooks and Innkeepers, at York by the Saddlers. The Chester assignment shows an ingenious grim humour, since the cooking-pot or cauldron is a common feature of the iconography of Hell, the “Devil's kitchen” (the popular imagining of the story must have blurred the distinction between Hades and Limbo). The reformist dramatist, and Bishop of Ossory, John Bale, by his own account, wrote a play on the Harrowing, now lost, which apparently drew on the popular iconography of the event. The basic pattern in all the cycles is the same: Jesus approaches the gates of Hell, demanding entrance; the initial incredulity and scorn of the devils gives way to fear and terror, and, in Satan's case, to indignation at this invasion of his territory; Jesus enters unopposed and preaches salvation to the patriarchs, who acclaim him and are then led off to Heaven.
There are other liturgical reasons why the Harrowing of Hell should be relevant to a play entitled *Twelfth Night*. “A silly play,” wrote Samuel Pepys in his diary for 6 January 1663, “and not relating at all to the name or day.” He could not have been more mistaken. The appropriateness of the feast of the Epiphany to the play has been demonstrated by a number of critics. The lessons appointed for the feast—from Isaiah 60, Ephesians 3 and Matthew 2, but especially the first two—have strong thematic connections with the play in their emphasis on the dispersal of darkness (and “mist” in Isaiah) by light. This, which reads like a metaphor for intellectual and spiritual illumination, is echoed in Feste's “There is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog” (4.2.43-45) and in Malvolio's requests for light. The “Egyptians in their fog” is a reference to one of the plagues in the book of Exodus (10:21-23), and the Exodus was established as a type of the Harrowing of Hell. In the Epistle passage from Ephesians, St Paul writes as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ”; this connects with Malvolio's imprisonment, and the fact that the Epistle is sent to the Ephesian church is particularly noteworthy, given that Ephesus is the location of *The Comedy of Errors*, which, as I mentioned earlier, is extensively drawn on in *Twelfth Night*. Furthermore, if one looks beyond the feast of the Epiphany itself to its subsequent season, one finds repeatedly that the liturgical readings strike familiar notes. For the First Sunday after Epiphany the Epistle is from Romans 12, in which St Paul warns his readers “that no man stand high in his own conceit, more than it becometh him to esteem of him self: but so judge of him self, that he be gentle and sober”; for the Second Sunday, from the same chapter, “Bless them which persecute you: bless, I say, and curse not”; for the Third Sunday, from the same chapter, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. For it is written: vengeance is mine, I will reward, saith the Lord.” All these are pieces of advice which the proud and vengeful Malvolio might well have taken to heart.

What is the connection between the feast of the Epiphany and the Harrowing? Here we must look, not to scripture or doctrine but to tradition and social custom. The festive dimensions of *Twelfth Night* have been thoroughly investigated by C. L. Barber and, more recently, François Laroque, and we now take for granted the play's subtext of festive licence, the anarchic reign of lords of misrule, and the battle of Carnival and Lent. In pre-Reformation England Epiphany or Twelfth Night marked the conclusion of the Yuletide revels, although their “festive emblems and decorations (ivy, holly and the Yule log) were not taken out of the houses until Candlemas,” that is to say 2 February—interestingly, the date on which the only recorded production of *Twelfth Night* in Shakespeare's lifetime occurred. Laroque observes: *Twelfth Night* does convey the general atmosphere of the “misrule” that was latent during the Christmas cycle of festivities and that made it possible to turn the world upside-down. That is why the themes and images connected with the idea of reversal are so important to the play. . . . This was indeed a crossroads in the year, when night won out over day and the interplay of misunderstandings brought forth a comedy of errors and metamorphoses.

In such a context, we would not look to Shakespeare for a straightforward allegory of the Harrowing of Hell, but rather for a kind of parody of it, and that is what we are given, together with a parody of an exorcism, the ritual which re-enacted the incursion into diabolical territory of the saving power of Christ.
To turn now to 4.2 itself, we should note that the tone of the scene is by no means easy to determine. Warren and Wells describe it as an “extraordinary episode” and infer from the Folio stage direction “Malvolio within” that Malvolio was placed under the stage, the traditional location for Hell (as in Doctor Faustus and, less certainly, Hamlet). Perhaps he was under the trapdoor on which the cauldron in The Jew of Malta or Macbeth must have stood. Warren and Wells are willing to allow an element of sadistic cruelty and torment to the scene. By contrast, J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik in their edition detect a slackening of intensity at this point, while Joost Daalder in a recent article finds the scene merely farcical, adopting the view that Elizabethan audiences would have found Malvolio’s insanity amusing. However that may be, he is clearly not amused, but rather distressed. Perhaps the most subtle reading comes from Alexander Leggatt, who contends that “Malvolio in his dark room is the play’s most vivid image of the trapped isolated self. . . . Egotism and loveless solitude are a kind of damnation, and the imprisoned Malvolio is our clearest image of this.”

Glancing at Shakespeare’s treatment of a parallel sequence in The Comedy of Errors may be of assistance here. The originally comic mistakes of identity in the earlier play result in a degree of psychological disorientation and estrangement on the part of Antipholus of Ephesus which darkens the tone considerably. Ephesus, more blatantly but no less truly than Illyria, is “full of cozenage, / As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,” (1.2.97-99), a place where people “wander in illusions” (4.3.43). Eventually Antipholus concludes that he has been bewitched. Thereafter he increasingly resembles Malvolio. His companions, thinking him mad and possessed, attempt to pacify him (4.4.48-60); the more he declares “I am not mad” (4.4.59) the more this is taken as proof of his insanity, and Pinch’s suggestion that he and his servant Dromio “must be bound and laid in some dark room” (4.4.95) is followed, as he later complains in seeking redress from the Duke (5.1.246-54).

Shakespeare’s adaptations of this sequence of events in Twelfth Night are revealing. Antipholus’s friends sincerely believe him to be insane and undertake what they assume is the standard treatment in such cases, whereas Toby, Maria, Fabian and Feste deliberately set out to “make [Malvolio] mad indeed” (3.4.128). Furthermore, Malvolio, unlike Antipholus, has no companion in his incarceration, and is tormented by a visitor who makes light of (and brings light, but no illumination, to) his predicament. (Is Feste, then, a kind of Lucifer—the light-bearer?) Shakespeare, then, recast his original idea in such a way as to make the supposed madman’s plight more stark and desperate. The callousness with which Malvolio is treated is underlined by the detached attitude taken by the tricksters. Sir Toby envisages the imprisonment as a “pastime” and a “device” (3.4.133-34), and his unease as “this knavery” and “this sport” (4.2.68, 70) proceeds is due not to moral scruples but results from a selfish anxiety not to get into further trouble with Olivia. At the end of the play Feste describes the encounter as an “interlude” (5.1.63)—a game which is also his revenge for Malvolio’s contemptuous treatment of him. This gives it a more personal and pointed character, heightened by the absence of Sir Toby and Maria for much of the scene.

This is not to say, of course, that Malvolio is entirely correct in believing himself to be sane. The “self-love” of which Olivia accuses him (1.5.85) is a severe limitation, isolating him in the world of his own mind; his physical imprisonment, as Leggatt’s comments, quoted above, imply, is merely the symbol of his psychological and spiritual imprisonment. He becomes narcissistically
enslaved to his own image, as constructed in Maria's letter, “practising behaviour to his own shadow” (2.5.14-15). He is no more “free” than Orsino, Olivia, or Viola, all of whom are to varying extents trapped by their own idées fixes; and no more temperate than the revellers whom he detests. He speaks the simple truth when he tells Feste “I am no more mad than you are” (4.2.48-49), although he might equally have said “no less.” Irrational extremism is one of Shakespeare’s targets in this comedy. Malvolio is not the only character whose “devils” require to be exorcised: arguably he is the only character for whom the attempted exorcism fails. Orsino hopes to “entreat him to a peace” (5.1.370), but there is no certainty that he will be softened. As Marion Bodwell Smith well says, at the end of the play he “only knows that he has been made a fool of, not that he has been a fool.”

Feste's opening words as Sir Topaz, “What ho, I say, peace in this prison” (4.2.19), echo, as has often been noted, the formula for the Visitation of the Sick, and also recall the fact that the blessing of houses was traditional at Epiphany. Feste is disguising his voice (cf. “to him in thine own voice,” 66), and Malvolio is initially perplexed: “Who calls there?” (21). In character, Feste utters an exorcism formula—“Out, hyperbolical fiend” (26), pretending to address, not Malvolio, but the “dishonest Satan” (32) who possesses him. He sets out to “prove” Malvolio's insanity by disturbing his confidence in the evidence of his senses, denying the darkness of the prison; then, when invited to engage in logical dispute, puts the question “What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?” (50). Lothian and Craik note the link with Doctor Faustus, and whilst it would be unreasonable to put too much weight on a glancing allusion, given Faustus's subject of enslavement to devils it cannot be wholly ignored. There is also an Ovidian reference, as Jonathan Bate has noted: instead of the “constant question” (49) of “formal rational discourse” which Malvolio requested, he is offered “a question that leads to the inconsistencies of Pythagorean metempsychosis,” a question, in other words, about a form of dualism, aptly posed to one who is “sometimes . . . a kind of puritan . . . . The dev'l a puritan that he is” (2.3.130, 136). In that connection we should consider the possibility that, when Sir Toby accuses Malvolio of opposition to “cakes and ale” (2.3.108) Shakespeare may be glancing at Puritan opposition to the Catholic understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice. Equally, Feste's Pythagorean question probes Malvolio's reluctance to admit the scholastic distinction between essence and accident upon which the doctrine of transubstantiation rested.

In the second “visitation” of 4.2, when Feste appears in propria persona, Shakespeare evokes the world of Reformation controversy. Feste enters singing a song, “Hey Robin, jolly Robin, tell me how thy lady does,” which is based on a poem by Wyatt which also exists in a shorter, probably earlier, version in the so-called Henry VIII’s MS. Like the lady in the song, Olivia is “unkind” and “loves another”; this lady may also be England, whose attachment to the Protestant religion has resulted in spiritual darkness. (Compare Bale's use of the character Widow England for the opposite polemical point in his King John.) Feigning sudden recognition of Malvolio, Feste asks pitifully, “Alas sir, how fell you besides your five wits?” (86). As Lothian and Craik note in the New Arden edition, Five Wits was a character in the play Everyman (c. 1495). His function there is to insist on the sacred character and spiritual power of the priest, and to expound the Catholic doctrine that there are seven sacraments, rather than the two which Protestantism taught. In the ensuing dialogue Malvolio, the Puritan, is made to ask repeatedly for “a candle,” “some light,” “light” again (82, 106, 111), so that he may communicate with “my lady” (111,
picking up the phrase from the song), who was “Madonna” to Feste (1.5.38-65) when he “catechized” her as he has catechized Malvolio. Malvolio is effectively driven to confess that he is in spiritual as well as physical darkness, and Feste makes his final exit with a piece of doggerel typical of a morality Vice, in which he addresses Malvolio as “goodman devil” (132). The Folio draws increased attention to the contradiction by printing two words, “good man,” but according to OED the word can also mean the head of an establishment (so a kind of steward—with reference to “stews” as a brothel?) and the keeper of a prison. All this suggests how the puritan has been unmasked for the fiendish hypocrite that he really is.

The “harrowing” depicted in this scene does not correspond point by point to that of medieval tradition. Shakespeare is characteristically elusive and allusive, working on several levels simultaneously. He presents Malvolio as a soul enslaved to spiritual darkness, who fails to recognise his visitor's true character, while Feste's ministrations only add to his victim's confusion and bewilderment. The tradition of the Harrowing is turned upside-down, not to deny that its liberation is possible, but perhaps to suggest that those who make themselves outcasts set in motion their own exclusion from paradisal harmony. The name “Malvolio” may then suggest not only ill-will but mistaken faith. After all, when his letter is finally delivered to Olivia, Feste warns that “a madman's epistles are no gospels” (5.1.281).36

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4The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus , ed. W. H. Hulme, EETS Extra Series 100 (London, 1907). Page references are inserted in my text. M. R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament 94-95, considers that the Gospel cannot be earlier than the fourth century but that the Harrowing episode, which contains material two centuries older, was attached to the rest of the text in the fifth century.


6OED , s.v. “Steward ( sb.)” section 4, cites “Steward of Helle” as a figurative phrase from a poem of c. 1436; conversely, section 6 cites “Loue is heouene stiward” from the Ancrene Riwle.


In the N-Town cycle (nos. 33 and 35) the Harrowing is, exceptionally, performed by Anima Christi, a separate character from Jesus, and, in a striking structural effect, the episode is interrupted by the Deposition from the Cross: see The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8, ed. Stephen Spector, EETS Supplementary Series 11 (Oxford: OUP, 1991). Anima Christi also appears in the Greban and Rome Passion plays (Lynette R. Muir, “The Trinity in Medieval Drama,” Comparative Drama 10.2 [1976]: 124).

We may remember not only the Porter in Macbeth (“here you may roast your goose”) but also the denouement of The Jew of Malta.

Bale mentioned the play when being interrogated for heresy in 1536, and accused of denying this article of the Creed. See Greg Walker, Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 192.

Quoted by Warren and Wells p. 2 and n. 1.


Liturgies, ed. Clay, 89-91.

Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1959), esp. 240-61; Laroque, Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage, tr. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 227-28, 254-56 (it should be said, however, that Laroque's general survey of festivity is more valuable than his somewhat superficial comments on this play specifically: and
his statement that the title “probably owes more to the occasion on which [the play] was performed than to the themes of the play and its internal symbolism” [227] is quite erroneous. See also Warren and Wells 4-8. Illuminating background is also provided by Michael D. Bristol, Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England (London: Methuen, 1985), esp. 202-04, and Ronald Hutton, The Rise and Fall of Merry England: the Ritual Year 1400-1700 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). [page 213]

18Laroque 153.

19This was the performance witnessed and commented on by John Manningham (see Warren and Wells 1), and the play was also presented on 2 February 1623 (Warren and Wells 4). Although the use of the name “Candlemas” survived, the Catholic liturgical ceremonies associated with it had been forbidden in 1548 and the feast itself was omitted from the Edwardine prayer books, although pockets of clerical resistance remained into the 1560s and 1570s; see Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 459, 589. Leslie Hotson's attempt, in The First Night of Twelfth Night (London: Hart-Davis, 1954), to establish the first performance of Shakespeare's play as occurring on 6 January 1601 “has not won general acceptance” (Warren and Wells 4).

In the light of Feste's would-be Pandarism (3.1.50-51) it is interesting to note that a lost play, Troilus and Pandar , was performed at Court on Twelfth Night 1516 (Seth Lerer, Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit [Cambridge: CUP, 1997] 30, 34-35). Pandar was, we recall, the letter-bearer between the lovers, another link with Feste's role in the prison scene. The first masque of Elizabeth's reign took place on Twelfth Night 1559, with “crows, asses, and wolves dressed as cardinals, bishops, and abbots” (Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage [Oxford: Clarendon, 1923] 1: 155)—a Pythagorean metempsychosis? Lyly's Midas , another play concerned with magical transformation, was acted at Court on Twelfth Night 1590, according to its title-page. See further note 27 below.

20Laroque 227.

21Warren and Wells 58.

22Lothian and Craik lxxv.


24Alexander Leggatt, Shakespeare's Comedy of Love (London: Methuen, 1974) 244.

25This picture of Ephesus derives from New Testament sources. In Acts 19 it is depicted as a place populated by sorcerers, amateur exorcists, and idolaters. The use of St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians for scripture readings at Epiphany has already been noted.

26And is Shakespeare remembering the climactic scene in Marlowe's Edward II , the visit of the murderer Lightborn to the imprisoned king?


Lothian and Craik, in their note ad loc., quote from the 1559 Prayer Book: “The Priest entering into the sick person's house, shall say, Peace be in this house, and to all that dwell in it” (ed. Clay 225; cf. Hassel, *Renaissance Drama and the English Church* [page 214] Year 84). It might be added that, in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549) the priest then recites Psalm 143, including the words, “For the enemy hath persecuted my soul: he hath smitten my life down to the ground: he hath laid me in the darkness, as the men that have been long dead” (*The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, Everyman ed. [London: Dent, 1910] 259, spelling modernised). This Psalm was dropped from the Second Prayer Book of 1552, and from that of 1559.

Donna B. Hamilton (above, note 13) unconvincingly argues that the episode is related to contemporary interest in the case of John Darrell, a Puritan imprisoned for exorcism in 1598.

Reference to the Revels ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993). I wonder whether the famous strikes of the clock which punctuate Faustus's last speech could be one reason why a clock strikes in *Twelfth Night* 3.1, causing Olivia to say that “the clock upbraids me with the waste of time” (128).

Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* 148.

The phrase is tantalizing, but the eucharistic associations are unmistakable. In the mid-15th century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jews refer disparagingly to the consecrated Host as a “cake” which they attempt to cook in a cauldron (see *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS Supplementary Series 1 [Oxford: OUP, 1970]. Text VI, ll. 285, 495, 700), while in January 1548 the reformer Anthony Gilby disparaged the Catholics for believing that “a vile cake” could be “made God and man” (quoted by Aidan Cardinal Gasquet and Edmund Bishop, *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer*, 3rd ed. [London: Sheed & Ward, 1928] 91). In the Injunctions issued for the “suppression of superstition” in 1559, Elizabeth required the communion bread to resemble “the usual bread and water, heretofore named singing cakes” (quoted in William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* [Cambridge: CUP, 1968] 112). In the Injunctions issued for the “suppression of superstition” in 1559, Elizabeth required the communion bread to resemble “the usual bread and water, heretofore named singing cakes” (quoted in William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* [Cambridge: CUP, 1968] 112). The medieval practice of choosing the King of the Bean to preside over the Twelfth Night revels, by dropping a bean into cake mix and electing the person who found it in his slice (Hutton, *Rise and Fall of Merry England* 60), re-surfaced once under Elizabeth in 1566 (Chambers 1: 19, 4: 82).
For a recent brief account of this see David Luscombe, *Medieval Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 42-43.


I cannot end without thanking my colleague Martin Cawte for many hours spent in discussing the material in this article. I owe numerous insights to him.

Readers are invited to submit their responses to the editors at editors@connotations.de.

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William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*

A study showing how Shakespeare's choice of form, structure and language shape meaning

by Jenia Geraghty

*Wit, and't be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says Quinapalus? 'Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.'*

Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed to an audience from different social classes and of varying levels of intellect. Thus they contain down-to-earth characters who appeal to the working classes, side-by-side with complexities of plot which would satisfy the appetites of the aristocrats among the audience. His contemporary status is different, and Shakespeare's plays have become a symbol of culture and education, being widely used as a subject for academic study and literary criticism. A close critical analysis of *Twelfth Night* can reveal how Shakespeare manipulates the form, structure, and language to contribute to the meaning of his plays.
Form

Through the form of dialogue Shakespeare conveys the relationship between characters. For example, the friendship and understanding between Olivia, and her servant Feste, the clown, is shown in their dialogue in Act 1, Scene 5. In this scene Shakespeare shows that both characters are intellectuals by constructing their colloquy in prose.

Characterising Feste, Shakespeare gives him the aphorism,

Better a witty fool than a foolish wit. [Feste. Act 1, scene 5]

This line illustrates the clown's acumen; and is a delightful example of the way in which he uses language, as well as form to manifest Feste's character. Far from being a fool, the clown is erudite and sagely and able to present the audience with a higher knowledge of the plot than that presented by the other characters in the play. This witty remark is a clear indication of his aloofness from the events of the play. He can look upon the unfolding scenario with the detachment of an outsider due to his minimal involvement with the action. Feste is a roaming entertainer who has the advantage of not having to take sides; he is an observer not a participant.

Another illustration of the way in which Shakespeare uses form to give meaning is in the dialogue between Viola and the Duke Orsino in Act 2 scene 4, where one line of iambic pentameter is frequently shared by the two characters. For example:

Viola: I should your Lordship.
Orsino: And what's her history?

. . .

Viola: Sir, shall I to this lady?
Orsino: Ay, that's the theme.

The merging of the characters' half-lines into one whole line is cleverly used by Shakespeare to show that the two characters are destined to be together. This technique of linking lines, which Shakespeare uses elsewhere, for example in Romeo and Juliet, shows the balance that the two characters provide for each other. This is an example of how he uses the form of language to aid the actors in portraying the characters in the way he intends.

Structure

The structure of a Shakespeare play also contributes to its meaning. In most of his plays there is a pattern consisting of three main sections:
Exposition - establishing the main character relationships in a situation involving a conflict.

Development - building up the dramatic tension and moving the conflict established to its climax. (In *Twelfth Night*, increasing complications resulting from love, and mistaken identity.)

Denouement - resolution of the conflict and re-establishing some form of equilibrium. (In *Twelfth Night*, the realisation of the disguises and the pairing up of the characters.)

The scenes of *Twelfth Night* are carefully woven together in order to create tension and humour, and to prepare us, almost subconsciously, for what is going to happen. We are given fragments of manageable information throughout the play so that when the complex plot unfolds we understand it by piecing together all the information given to us in previous scenes. For example, to return to the Duke and Viola, the audience is aware of the fact that she is disguised as a man, so understands more than the Duke himself does as he struggles with his feelings, believing he is falling in love with a man.

The audience is fed important information in Act 2 Scene 1 when Antonio and Sebastian meet and converse:

Sebastian: . . . some hour before you took me from the breach of the sea was my sister drowned.

Antonio: Alas the day!

Sebastian: A lady, sir, though it was said she much resembled me, was yet of many accounted beautiful. [Act 2, Scene 1]

Through these lines Shakespeare lets the audience in on the fact that Sebastian is alive, and that he believes his sister Viola to be dead, and that the two resemble one another in appearance. We also see how Sebastian feels for his sister as he talks about her so passionately. This is an important part of the development stage of the play as it prepares us for the role which mistaken identity will play in the plot, and sets up the potential for dramatic irony.

Another scene which prepares us for dramatic irony is when Maria, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby write the letter to Malvolio, under the pretence that it is from Olivia. As we the audience are aware of this deception it sets up the dramatic irony, because Malvolio himself is not aware of it when he finds and reads the letter during Act 2, Scene 5. Presuming the letter is for him, and from Olivia, he proceeds to embarrass himself.

The structure in which many subplots run through the play can be described as 'River Action'; actions not closely linked are moving in parallel to be integrated at the end of the play. This contrasts to the single or episodic action in *Macbeth*, or the mirror action
in *King Lear* where there is both a main and a sub-plot present. Shakespeare has used this structural technique to create both humour and tension. The subplots also pick up on the themes of love and mistaken identities, preparing us for the part those themes will play in the main plot.

**Language**

Shakespeare also supports the events and actions in the play through language, using it to convey to the audience the feelings and thoughts of the characters as they respond to events.

Language is used first and foremost for the purpose of conveying a difference in feelings or attitudes in different situations. For example Malvolio speaks in prose at the beginning of the play, showing intelligence, but near the end he speaks in verse;

> Lady, you have. Pray you, pursue that letter.  
> You must not now deny that it is in your hand:  
> Write from it, if you can, in hand or phrase,  
> Or say 'tis not your seal, not your invention. [Act 5, Scene 1]

Here Shakespeare has distorted the rhythm so that it cannot fit the rule of iambic pentameter, thus showing that Malvolio is feeling strong emotion. His confusion and humiliation becomes apparent through the breathless manner in which he speaks.

In contrast, we have these smoothly-flowing lines from Orsino:

> If music be the food of love, play on,  
> Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,  
> The appetite may sicken, and so die. [Act 1, Scene 1]

By using iambic pentameter here Shakespeare defines Orsino's character to a certain degree. Iambic pentameter shows control and yet the emphasis here is on the instability and the intensity of his love for Olivia. The audience cannot help but feel pity towards his self-induced love sickness, but at the same time the situation provokes hilarity, as he has never actually met Olivia. This leads us to believe he is 'in love with being in love'.

Characters are there to instigate an emotional reaction from the audience, and when considering the characters of a Shakespeare play we may find as much characterisation as in a novel, but we must also consider that the characters have a mechanical function in the scheme of the play as a whole. It can help to think of them as vehicles to carry ideas or themes; for example Orsino introduces the theme of love.

The diction Shakespeare gives to his characters contributes to their characterisation. He gives characters with more intelligence a large vocabulary, where feeble-minded characters are more limited. Evidence of this in *Twelfth Night* is perhaps not as obvious
as in other plays such as *The Tempest*, where Caliban has a very limited vocabulary, and struggles to find words. But characteristics of language such as imagery, metaphors, vocabulary and syntax used by Malvolio contrast for example with those used by the Clown. Although both characters are of a higher intelligence, the language chosen for each is very different;

Feste, the Clown, often plays with words, uses puns and aphorisms.

Wit, and't be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says Quinapalus? 'Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.' God bless thee, lady! [Act 1, Scene 5]

He proves to be intelligent in that he is witty and wise. He also proves to be quite mysterious, seeming to know more than most, but still being observant and quiet.

Malvolio is more well-spoken than witty, but he is more pompous and arrogant.

I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you! [Act 5, Scene 1]

That final line from Malvolio's is there to make the audience pity him. By using the metaphor of 'the whole pack of you' an image is immediately created of a group surrounding him. The metaphor describes how he has been made a fool of by all of them, and also signifies his isolation from the rest of the cast and how he has become a loose end of the play, as everybody else has found love or companionship with another person in the play.

After analysing the way in which Shakespeare uses form, structure and language to shape meaning I have come to the conclusion that we are not consciously aware of these techniques when we are the audience. Directors and actors may take these factors into consideration when performing a play, to assist in conveying meaning to the audience. Different directors may interpret the text in different ways, but the play should be performed in such a way that subtle clues help the audience receive messages and understand the complexity of the developing plot, so that we are not obliged to be continually struggling to interpret the text for ourselves.

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Studies in Shakespeare

The Ironies of Happy Endings: An
Introduction to *Twelfth Night*

[The following is the text of a lecture prepared by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC, for students in English 366: Studies in Shakespeare, in]
Introduction

Twelfth Night, written around 1600, is the last of the great romantic comedies of Shakespeare's early maturity (e.g., Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It), immediately preceding the period of the so-called Problem Plays and the great tragedies. Like these other comedies, Twelfth Night is written in the pastoral tradition and explores, as its central concern, the nature of love between men and women as a preparation for marriage and integration into a richer and fuller social existence.

However, Twelfth Night is, in some ways, somewhat different from the other plays mentioned. In the first place, it incorporates in its sub-plot a style of comedy derived from a different tradition from pastoral, namely, the comedy of manners, something which gives the play a sharper cutting edge insofar as attention to social issues is concerned. In addition (and related to this feature) Twelfth Night is clearly a more fragile and ambiguous affirmation of the values all these plays endorse. Coming to this work directly from the much more robust world of As You Like It or Much Ado About Nothing, we cannot help being struck by the ways in which, for all their clear similarities, Twelfth Night raises ironic questions about the ways in which the difficulties of young love are resolved.

In this lecture I would like, first of all, to explore some of the ways in which the treatment of the issue of love is here recognizably similar to and yet significantly different from the treatment of the same theme in As You Like It. Then, I should like to qualify those remarks by considering how Twelfth Night, in the very process of affirming the importance of love,
raises questions about the very things it seems to celebrate. The most obvious manifestation of this sense occurs in the situation and character of Viola (especially in comparison with Rosalind from *As You Like It*). And finally, I'll be directing my attention to the sub-plot of *Twelfth Night*.

**The Pastoral Romance in *Twelfth Night***

*Twelfth Night* is clearly part of the same tradition as *As You Like It*, and many of the dramatic elements are very similar. In both plays, the main plot features a young, intelligent female faced with the task of negotiating her way through a courtship with a man who needs to be educated into an understanding of what it means to love intelligently (rather than sentimentally). To carry out this task, she adopts a disguise as a young man and improvises her way through a series of meetings and conversations with a wide variety of people (prominent among them the young man who is the object of her affections), until, through a series of circumstances the complexities are happily (and somewhat implausibly) resolved. Part of the plot clearly raises gender issues and explore homoerotic possibilities in much the same way as in *As You Like It*.

All of this takes place in an environment far away from the realities of urban political life, in a never-never land, so to speak, not quite as rustic as the Forest of Ardenne, perhaps, but divorced from the immediate demands of normal social living, a place where no one seems to do any work or to answer to the demands of significant social responsibilities, at least not as an immediately urgent priority. The country estate of Olivia and the court of Orsino are places almost exclusively devoted to leisure, music, love, and much fun—in that sense, they are removed from the practical realities of urban life and continue the pastoral tradition. At the same time, they both contain structures of authority, so that we do not have here the sort of freedom Rosalind enjoys in the Forest of Ardenne (more about that later).

[Parenthetically, we might observe here the absence in *Twelfth Night* of parents, a feature of the play which confers upon the participants a greater sense of
freedom than in other Shakespearean comedies. Here the lovers are free to shape their lives without answering to the most obviously controlling features of the social tradition into which they are born.

The central issue in the courtship of Viola and Orsino, as in the courtship of Rosalind and Orlando, is the need to educate the man out of his excessively sentimental vision of love, a wallowing in the conventional literary emotions appropriate to love, so that he reaches a sharper, more intelligent and aware vision of the reality of the experience. By the end of the process, the man has learned to alter the language with which he expresses his feelings, the most immediately indication of a transformed understanding of his own feelings.

Parenthetically, it is worth stressing here the importance in all these comedies of what I call emotional intelligence. Shakespeare's main point here seems to be that the powerful and important feelings of love can be easily corrupted by a false appreciation for the experience, especially as that corruption manifests itself in sentimentality and posing, a tendency not to confront the experience directly and honestly but to wrap oneself up in the conventional language of love and to adopt the conventional poses of the distraught lover. It's as if these plays are, in part, a warning about the dangers of falling in love with love or with the conventions of love rather than looking directly at or listening clearly to the object of one's love. Such tendencies are dangerous because they cloud people's perceptions and blunt their feelings. The continuing attention in As You Like It and Twelfth Night to the language of love, therefore, is clearly linked to an important moral issue: those who describe their highly charged emotional states in conventional terms or who adopt conventional ways of describing their emotional state are, in a sense, corrupting the experience. They are being unintelligently sentimental and therefore dishonest (to themselves and to others).

For all these similarities between As You Like It and Twelfth Night, however, there are some obvious differences, all of which tend to stress that Viola's task is considerably more difficult that Rosalind's and
that the happy outcome is much more in doubt and 
(as we shall see) less unambiguously celebratory than 
in *As You Like It*. I'll be going into this last point in 
greater detail later, but for the moment let me list 
some obvious differences which bring out the issue I 
mentioned.

Prominent among these differences is the fact that 
Viola has far less freedom and authority than 
Rosalind does. Viola may be dressed up as a man, but 
Cesario is a servant to the man she loves and has to 
act on his misguided instructions. She certainly cannot 
challenge him directly or engage in complex role-
playing games as Rosalind can freely do. Moreover, 
the love Olivia expresses for Viola complicates this 
issue, because Viola/Cesario is not free to treat Olivia 
as she might like. She lacks the face-to-face equality 
Rosalind has with Orlando, a freedom which frees 
Rosalind to initiate the courtship games and to 
address Orlando as an equal (and to childe him and 
mock him as she wishes), and obviously she has the 
class authority to dismiss Phoebe with a curt reminder 
about selling when she can.

Viola's situation is further complicated by the fact that 
Orsino is far more in love with love than is Orlando 
and hence much more difficult to move out of his 
emotional wallowing (Orlando, by comparison is a 
very quick learner). This difficulty is compounded by 
the fact that Orsino is a man capable (as we see) of a 
violent streak when thwarted (there's a much more 
powerful and vulnerable ego working in him than in 
Orlando). Similarly the complication of Olivia's 
feelings introduce complexities which are not easy for 
Viola to solve, because Olivia is also a person with 
some authority and because Viola cannot confront 
Olivia as she might like to without offending Orsino.

Viola, in other words, cannot take charge of her 
courtship, as Rosalind can. Viola has to hang on in 
shifting circumstances (where other people are in 
charge) and hope things will work out in the end. In 
that sense, she is more passive than Rosalind, or at 
least less of an actor that a reactor, and the happy 
outcome at the end of the play is less a tribute to her 
ability to shape events than to her faith in love, her 
ability to endure in difficult circumstances, and to win
through because of her enduring faith in people (and, of course, her luck).

[Rosalind, by comparison, is in charge of her own script. She can determine the schedule of her meetings with Orlando, set the rules (especially the linguistic rules), and decide when to reveal her identity. And she knows all this from the start. In that sense, she does not have to wait for circumstances to sort themselves out—she has the freedom and power to set the circumstances herself. She also knows where she is and who all the people around her are all the time. She has a friend to confide in and a Fool to amuse her. Most important, she is sure almost from the start that Orlando loves her. And so on. All of these features make the comedy in *As You Like It* far more robust than in *Twelfth Night*.]

**Viola: Some Observations**

We can sense some of these important differences the very first time we meet Viola. She has been cast up on the shore of a strange land. She does not know where she is, and she has no close friends to turn to. Not surprisingly, her very first words indicate confusion and a sense of despair (or disorientation): "What country, friends is this? . . . And what should I do in Illyria." Her first response is dismay, a sense of disorientation. But (and this is her most important characteristic) she moves out of her dismay to engage others around her, to ask for help. In her initial circumstances, a woman alone surrounded by strange men in a strange country, she has every reason to be afraid.

Given some reassurance, she seizes upon a slender hope and initiates a plan. She knows she's taking a dangerous chance (after all, the Captain might abuse her trust), but within a few moments, she is offering him money (again a potentially dangerous act) and within moments she is moving purposefully away with a plan and a group around her. The initial confusion and despair are being addressed with courage and hope. The shift in her situation from the beginning of the scene to the end of it may not seem like much, but it sets the rhythm of her encounters
with life and establishes for us the major outline of her character.

The staging of this moment can really bring out these aspects of Viola's character. In one production I saw (at the Old Vic in the late 1970's), at first she was lying unconscious on the ground, soaking wet. The first sight she saw on waking up were some strange men standing around her—a potentially frightening situation (and her first instinct was to find somewhere to hide). But she, with some difficulty and trepidation, gathers herself together, establishes contact with that word "friends" (which is a gamble) and trusts them, in spite of the risk. She has no precise sense of what she's getting into or where it will lead, but she takes active charge of situation (to the extent she is capable of), hoping that things will work out: "What else may hap, to time I will commit. . . ." (1.2).

The dynamic of this opening scene is the key to understanding the quality of Viola, a dynamic we see repeated throughout the play. Unlike Rosalind, she is in a potentially desperate situation and there is always an awareness in her that things may not work out—she is always only one step away from disaster. But she puts her trust in other people to help her and (most importantly) in time: things will work out if only she can just keep up her courage and hope.

The issue of trust in this play is important, and it's particularly noticeable when we come to it from the history plays, where trusting people, even one's own family, is a risky business, something to avoid. Those who do trust too easily are, as often as not, destroyed through that very trust (another common experience in the tragedies). One of the features which makes this play a comedy, of course, is that trust in our fellow human beings is not betrayed—most people respect others enough not to let a potential personal advantage overcome their generosity of spirit.

This issue is not so prominent in As You Like It, because Rosalind is surrounded by people whom she already trusts (Celia, Touchstone, Orlando, Duke Senior and his followers)—she doesn't have to take potentially dangerous chances on people (she runs no risks if her disguise is revealed, for example).
Another point to notice in this scene is Viola's spontaneous generosity—she freely gives money to the Captain for his good news and later promises more. Again, this is taking a chance—after all, if she reveals she has money, there's always a risk that the men will simply rob her. But, again, the generosity is met with a similar generosity from the Captain. In terms of the language we used to discuss earlier plays, what's happening here is that Viola is trusting in social bonds, and the people she trusts are honouring those bonds (the same principle is brought out in the relationships of Sebastian, Viola's twin, and the people he meets).

This symbolic importance of money, introduced here for the first time, is worth attending to throughout the play, especially in the case of Viola. Such spontaneous giving declares a character who is ready to honour and reward others as fellow human beings and who is not motivated (as others are) by self-interest or a deceitful wish to get rich at other people's expense. Giving money, like singing, is an obvious gesture of one's desire to share what one has with the world, to open oneself up to the world—not a prudent gesture in some environments (as the advice of Polonius to his son in *Hamlet* reminds us) but the mark of a truly comic spirit, one which trusts in the goodness of others.

**Viola in the Courtship of Orsino and Olivia**

The situation into which Viola walks is a complex romantic relationship based on mutual posing, in which Orsino and Olivia, in their different ways, are equally committed to wallowing in a conventionally emotional language, to enjoying the delicious but self-absorbed feelings of selfish emotional excess.

This quality emerges most famously in the opening speech of the play, when Orsino calls for music, his "food of love," only to order it to stop when it fails to live up to his expectation. What's important to notice here is Orsino's language, particularly the way in which his vocabulary defines an attitude of self-indulgence. The speech is justly famous as expressing a fine poetical attitude, and it suggests there's a latent emotional intelligence in Orsino—for the image of
love as the sea swallowing up everything and instantly
dissolving it so that its value is destroyed is the
obvious criticism of his attitude to love, which for
him is an experience that transforms beautiful things
into nothing, based, as it is, on his own appetite
surfing on excess (in other words, Orsino is his
own best critic, even if he is not intending that).
Earlier I used the word "wallow" to depict such an
emotional excess, and this image brings out the sense
precisely. The fact that Orsino himself delivers the
strongest criticism of his own attitude is, as I say, an
endorsement of the notion that Orsino is intelligent
enough to see the limitations of what he's doing (even
if he's not about to abandon it).

The clearest visual evidence of Orsino's self-indulgent
infatuation with an attitude is the way in which his
emotions, his love, de-energize him. He has no wish
to engage with the world or, indeed, to do anything
but luxuriate in his own feelings. Here the reactions
of those standing around are important in any staging.
We sense in the immediate reaction of Curio ("Will
you go hunt, my lord") a certain impatience with all
this languor, a desire to engage in some physical
activity. Orsino's extremely hackneyed response,
which turns the hunting metaphor into the most
conventional of Petrarchan puns, the lover as a
stricken deer, confirms the attitude first illustrated in
his speech (as does his style of courtship, of course,
which involves no active efforts on his part).

Olivia is in a situation somewhat similar. She has
vowed to remain hidden from the world for seven
years, living as a nun, weeping her way around her
room once a day, all to keep her grief alive, as she
puts it, "to season/ A brother's dead love, which she
would keep fresh/ And lasting in her sad
remembrance" (1.1.30-1) (Viola, we know, also has
lost a brother). We learn this about her before we
meet her, so in a sense we are set up to see her as
wrapping herself up in an excess of her own
emotionalism, just as Orsino is doing (the fact that he
admires this trait in her drives home the comparison).

Once we meet Olivia, we can see immediately that
this report of her is clearly false. She may be dressed
in mourning attire, but unlike Orsino she is enjoying
talking and interacting with others (particularly the Fool) and, significantly, she speaks prose. (In the production I have referred to earlier, Olivia's first entrance was preceded by an infectious merry laughter, a mood which contrasted with her formal mourning attire). It's difficult not to entertain the notion that she has concocted her "mourning," at least in part, as an excuse not to commit herself to marriage, to enjoy being an independent young woman in charge of her own properties: the formal grieving gives her a reason to deflect Orsino's romantic overtures.

In that sense, Olivia is clear much more emotionally intelligent at first than Orsino. That becomes evident by the speed with which she drops her adopted pose and commits herself to a new erotically charged experience. The first meeting with Viola arouses in her feelings which she recognizes as urgent and important—and rather than fighting them or denying them, she decides to act on them, in the full knowledge that she is taking an enormous chance. Like Viola she decides to act and put her faith in time working things out:

I do I know not what, and fear to find 
Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind. 
Fate show thy force! Ourselves we do not owe. 
What is decreed must be—and be this so! (1.5.287-290)

This instant willingness to break out of her artificially imposed isolation and take a chance on her deepest feelings is a mark of Olivia's emotional courage. Unlike Orsino (at the moment), she is not one to deny the chance to escape her self-imposed emotional isolation. The fact that she is wrong about the gender is no indication that she is wrong, although (as we shall see), her sudden love for Viola raises important issues of love and gender.

The Language of Love

What's important to note in Viola's interactions with Olivia (and later with Orsino) is the manner in which
she awakens Olivia's interest. This response is generated above all by Viola/Cesario's language, which both mocks the conventionality of Orsino's and Olivia's emotional posturing and educates Olivia into the reality of true passion.

The issue of the language of love, in other words, is important here (as in As You Like It) but in Twelfth Night the issue is more complex. Rosalind's basic strategy for dealing with Orsino's or Phebe's or Silvius's attachment to sentimental conventions as the appropriate language for love is constantly to deflate the language of those conventions with vigorous colloquial prose which challenges the sincerity of the artificial diction in an attempt to wake the sentimental lovers up to the realities of their feelings. Thus, Rosalind can happily dismiss the notion that any male lover has ever died for love and can curtly instruct Phebe to sell when she can.

This strategy is not available to Viola/Cesario, simply because she cannot afford to insult either Orlando or Orsino, from whom she takes orders. She cannot speak to either of them directly about how she feels. Nevertheless, she strives to make them aware of the ways in which their attachment to the conventional sentiments of love is false, unintelligent, and inappropriate.

For instance, when Viola/Cesario first approaches Olivia (with the first message from Orsino), she deliberately mocks the language of the message she is bringing:

Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty—I pray you tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her. I would be loath to cast away my speech; for, besides that it is excellently well penn'd, I have taken great pains to con it. . . . Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical. (1.5.157)

Olivia is astute enough to see what is going on (as her curt response "It is the more like to be feigned; I pray you keep it in" suggests) and asks Viola if she is a
comedian. In fact, Olivia's first interest in Viola/Cesario may well be awakened by the sense that here she is dealing with someone who is not playing the conventional game who is, in fact, deliberately, although very subtly, mocking them—as is clearly suggested by the combination of the highly inflated language describing the unmatched beauty of the lady of the house alongside the genuine doubt about which woman such language is intended for (one would think that if the lady is indeed as magnificent as the words indicate, Viola would have no trouble recognizing her).

But Viola's real strength with language—something which really opens the eyes of both Orsino and Olivia—emerges when she puts all her pent-up feelings about being in love at a time when she cannot speak openly about it into a speech defining for her what true love is. One such moment comes at near the end of 1.5:

VIOLA: If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense;
I would not understand it.

OLIVIA: Why, what would you?

VIOLA: Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloa your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me!
This very famous speech announces clearly the difference between heartfelt emotion expressed with intelligent passion and the conventional language of Orsino's message ("adoration, fertile tears, / With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire"). Viola's emotional outburst is clearly motivated (she's under considerable strain in this scene, confronting the woman loved by the person she wants for herself), and the integrity of the feeling manifests itself in the rich colloquialisms in the language ("Halloa your name to the reverberate hills/ And make the babbling gossip of the air/ Cry out "Olivia!"). The sincerity in the utterance stops Olivia in her tracks, for by the end of this speech her feelings for Viola/Cesario are clearly engaged. This transformation is not just a matter of Viola's taking her to task for hiding herself away from the world, refusing to give anything of herself, but also a response to the urgent emotional spontaneity—the sharing of an urgently felt human feeling which Viola's speech communicates.

The fact that Olivia responds so quickly to this emotional urgency in Viola is a testament to Olivia's essentially healthy emotional state. She understands well enough what Viola is talking about and is ready to take a chance, to drop the emotional pretense she has been engaged in and follow where her deepest feelings lead, even though that represents a great gamble.

Viola has the same effect later in the play on Orsino in 2.4, when the two of them have a conversation about love, particularly about the different natures of men and women in love. The scene culminates in this exchange:

DUKE: Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

VIOLA: Ay, but I know—

DUKE: What dost thou know?

VIOLA: Too well what love women to men may owe.
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

DUKE: And what's her history?

VIOLA: A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pin'd in thought;
And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more; but indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows but little in our love.

DUKE: But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

VIOLA: I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too—and yet I know not.
Sir, shall I to this lady?

Here again, Viola is speaking out of a complex emotional tension—confronting the man she truly loves and unable to speak directly of her feelings to him. But the fiction of her sister "like Patience on a monument,/ Smiling at grief" is an eloquent expression of her own feelings—and the intensity of the moment pulls Orsino momentarily out of his self-absorption, and he becomes, for the first time, genuinely interested in someone else. She's forcing him to listen to a voice of love which is not simply
giving him back the conventional sentiments he uses to assess his own feelings for Olivia.

It seems clear in moments like this (and elsewhere) that Orsino, perhaps like Orlando (in *As You Like It*) falls in love—or at least is brought to a better understanding of what it means to be in love—by having his feelings engaged by a woman in disguise as a man. There may even be a sense here that such gender confusion is necessary to shake Orsino out of his gendered understanding of love which is so frozen in conventional sentiment that he is unable to deal with the reality of other people's feelings. Perhaps it takes the love for a man (or someone he thinks is a man) to teach him that love is not first and foremost an exercise in linguistic conventionality.

In fact, considering this theme in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, one is tempted to offer the (perhaps overstated) suggestion that love between man and woman is rendered problematic, especially for the man, because society and tradition instantly offer (and perhaps, in his mind, require) a conventional language and behaviour for dealing with the experience. In that sense, there is instant pressure for him to corrupt the experience. These plays offer the idea that a growing erotic attachment to someone of the same gender (in disguise, to be sure) challenges that conventionality precisely because such love can develop without the instant pressure to conform to traditional expectations (in the case of homoerotic attachments traditions do not provide the same pressures to conform to convention). I don't mean to press this suggestion too hard, but it is noteworthy how in both plays, homoerotic love is presented as a wonderfully educative experience, presenting the man with emotional possibilities which overcome the barriers to a full and rich and intelligent sense of love in a way that seems prohibited by conventional heterosexual courtship rituals.

This point seems evident in Orsino's reaction when he learns (in 5.1) that Olivia has apparently married Viola/Cesario. He's intensely, even murderously, angry, but it's worth probing the nature of that anger. What is it that most disappoints him, the loss of Cesario ("the lamb that I do love"), or the loss of
Olivia. His own speech reveals that the loss of Olivia is less a blow to his feelings of love than to his ego—his will to marry Olivia has been thwarted. So he's in a position where his deepest feelings of love are fighting his desire to manifest his own power to enforce his will (or at least to punish those who have thwarted his will).

At this point, we can recognize, if we have not already, the tragic potential in this situation (not unlike, say, Othello). The deceptions which have brought about this situation bring with them the possibility for fatal mistakes and enormous suffering. Viola calls disguise a "wickedness/ Wherein the pregnant enemy does much" (2.2.25); the fact that here disguise brings about no irreversible disaster, as it routinely does in the tragedies, perhaps is a tribute to a world in which no one is using disguise actively to promote evil or self-interested ends. Nevertheless, true, intelligent love wins out here largely as a matter of timing and luck as much as anything else. Hence, Viola's triumph, the fact that the dedication to her own true feelings and to trusting others succeeds, is much more fragile than in As You Like It, where there is never any threat to Rosalind's scheme to educate Orlando (mainly because Orlando has no strong ego or the power to enforce his will on anyone) and never any doubt about the outcome (in her mind or in ours).

The Sub-Plot: The Gulling of Malvolio

The sub-plot of Twelfth Night, the gulling of Malvolio by Sir Toby Belch, Maria, Feste, and Aguecheek, is justly famous as one of Shakespeare's funniest experiments in New Comedy, that is, in a style of comedy which is basically quite different from the pastoral romantic style of the main plot. The basis for the sub-plot is one of the oldest and most popular subjects for New Comedy, the unmasking of the hypocrite, a satiric exposure of apparent virtue so as to humiliate the hypocrite and make him ridiculous. I don't propose to say much about this sub-plot by itself, but I would like to make some observations of the connection between this story and the main plot involving the young lovers.
The duping of Malvolio is linked to main plot thematically in the obvious sense that it deals with a variety of love, namely, self-love, a wholesale preoccupation with self-interest and a refusal to see anyone as important other than oneself. Such a preoccupation, as in the case of Malvolio, leads to a misconception of the world and a total vulnerability to being manipulated into betraying oneself, as Malvolio does, by trusting that one's desires match the reality of the situation. Malvolio is punished—and is relatively easy to punish—because he is so wrapped up in his own importance that he sees no value in anything else or anyone other than himself, and his conceit about himself, along with his secret desires for social advancement and power, make him easy to tempt into ridiculous behaviour.

This point is made most obviously by the instant antipathy between Feste, the fool, and Malvolio. Malvolio sees no point in having a Fool around, especially one who seems as old and tired as Feste, in whose jokes Malvolio finds no amusement. It's important to note that the major motivation for the trick on Malvolio is the insult he makes to the Fool when we first meet them, together with his total dislike for any sort of fun.

Malvolio, in other words, is a kill-joy, a person with no sense of humour and with no place in his scheme of things for anything other than what he thinks is important. Everyone (other than Malvolio) recognizes this. Olivia tells him he is sick of self love, and Sir Toby Beleh roars at him some of the most famous lines of the play: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.104). This quality in Malvolio makes him, rather like Jaques in *As You Like It*, the character most at odds with the comic spirit of the play.

But there's an essential difference between Jaques and Malvolio which makes the latter's presence in the play a good deal heavier. Malvolio is Olivia's steward, the person chiefly responsible for running her household, the master of the accounts. And Olivia tells us quite clearly that Malvolio is essential to her—"I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry" (3.4.57). He may be Olivia's servant, not of the same class as
Sir Toby or Sir Andrew, and he may be a hypocrite with thoughts well above his station, but his work carries a weight that clearly matters. And that makes some difference to his final words, in which he promises revenge on all those present.

Let me elaborate this a bit further (at the risk of making an unnecessary digression). Three times in one scene (2.3), other characters call Malvolio a Puritan, using that term in a derogatory sense to indicate someone they hate, someone who needs to be exposed for what he is. This does not necessarily mean that Malvolio is a radically religious Protestant, but it suggests that what they don't like about him is his excessive devotion to those things the Puritans were known for: seriousness, work, enforcing a strict code of morality in which there was no room for fun, colour, and entertainment (the Puritans were the moving force behind those who wanted to close the theatres as immoral places), and a hostility to art generally. In that sense, the Puritan often becomes (as here in this play) the symbol for an attitude excessively hostile to certain aspects of human experience. Exposing Malvolio thus becomes a way of neutralizing his power as a kill joy.

[Parenthetically, we should note here that exposing or attacking the Puritan character—or a character manifesting the Puritan spirit—is a major theme in English literature. In one way or another, many great writers take aim squarely at the dehumanizing qualities they see in the Puritan understanding of life: Jonson, Shakespeare, the Brontes, George Eliot, Dickens, Lawrence, to name some of the most prominent. Many of the most famous villains of traditional literature (Bulstrode, Gradgrind, Joseph, and so on) are presented to us in explicit Puritan form. Literature celebrating Puritanism is less rich, but there are some famous books in that tradition, notably *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

Malvolio is, of course, successfully humiliated and exposed—the trick is very funny (and helps Shakespeare to put into the play his crudest joke) and the punishment in the prison a damning parody of Puritan doctrine. But one wonders about that promise of revenge. If Malvolio is, as Olivia tells us, essential
to the running of her estates, the one who does the major work of keeping the place going (and no one else seems interested or capable of doing that), then his departure at the end of the play casts a certain ironic shadow over the communal joy. The effect is not a major one, of course, but it registers as having more weight than the refusal of Jaques in *As You Like It* to return to the court, for Malvolio has social power through his utility. He may not rank as high as Sir Toby Belch, but it's clear enough which one of the two we want to have around if there's work to be done.

In fact, there's a sense in *Twelfth Night* that the traditional aristocracy or upper middle class is not nearly as robust, healthy, and capable as in *As You Like It*. That point is clear enough in the figures of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who are (though funny) boorish and ridiculous. But one might also get a whiff of decadence from Orsino as well, since we never see him here actually doing anything really significant or very active. Throughout much of the play there’s a languor about him which might convey a sense that he doesn’t have much to do or is so fully committed to his own leisure that he has no real duties, no responsibilities to his dukedom or to other people, whose job is to entertain him. I don’t want to belabour this point or undercut the fine points of Orsino’s character, but simply to call attention to a quality of this play which conveys a sense of what one interpreter (whose name escapes me) has referred to as a golden sunset falling over Orsino’s palace at the end of the play. For all the beauty of young love and the happy working out of all complications, the ending is in a far lower key than the other comedies, where multiple wedding ceremonies and dancing and joyous group music seal the final celebrations.

[To inject a more personal note here: for some reason I always sense that *Twelfth Night* takes place in a very hot climate (like the Mediterranean or Latin America) where a certain lassitude is the order of business among those with money, in contrast to the world of *As You Like It* where the robust climate of the Forest of Ardenne promotes a more active life. That may indicate as well as anything else the sense of ripeness}
or over-ripeness or incipient decadence in *Twelfth Night*, in contrast to the more youthful vigour of *As You Like It*]

**Feste**

But the character who does the most to establish the curiously ironic tone of *Twelfth Night* is Feste, the clown, one of Shakespeare's most interesting and elusive characters. Feste's official role is clear enough—he's a licensed court jester, given the liberty to mock those around him (like Touchstone). What makes him particularly interesting is the note of sadness that seems to come from him, especially in his songs.

From the start, there's a sense that Feste is old or feeling old and tired. He's been absent from Olivia's home for some inexplicable reason (in some productions there's a clear indication that he's been drinking). And the first impression we get is that he's not a particularly good fool—his jokes lack the wit and energy of Touchstone, and thus there's a real sting in Malvolio's initial insult that Feste is no longer up to the job of being funny—and it seems clear that that insult really connects ("Look you now, he's out of his guard already"). He has no answer ready for Malvolio, and has to rely upon Olivia to rescue him.

Throughout the play, Feste is far more the observer than the active participant. He joins in the revels and the plot against Malvolio, but doesn't initiate them. His most distinctive active contribution to the play is his singing, which always carries a sombre, elegiac note.

> What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;  
> Present mirth hath present laughter;  
> What's to come is still unsure:  
> In delay there lies no plenty;  
> Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty!  
> Youth's a stuff will not endure.  
> (2.3.43)

The song (of which this is the second verse) is justly famous as a beautiful love song, but the joy at lovers' meeting which the first verse celebrates is seriously
qualified in this second stanza by the sense of its impermanence. That impermanence is not, as with Rosalind, a source of robust humour but rather of an underlying elegiac note, a note of sadness.

The final note he gives to the play leaves us with a pleasant, but distinctly sombre note (quite different from the final comic twist in the epilogue of As You Like It). That final song repeatedly comes to rest on the image of rain coming down every day, delivered to us as a solo by the character who best sums up, in his own personality, the elusive quality of the wise comic, the person who has become a professional jester, not because he is, like Touchstone, filled with an exaggerated sense of fun and wit, but because faced with the sadness of life and the impermanence of young love, the best thing to do is to celebrate what joys life does offer.

Feste is, in other words, Shakespeare's tribute to one of the most eloquent and elusive figures in our literature, the sad clown--the person intelligent enough to see through any of the easy superficial solutions to life's pains but wise enough to understand that there is little use in protesting the tribulations of human life (since that leads to self-destructive tragic conclusions). Hence, the best thing one can do is to turn away from the mystery and ultimate questions about the meaning and value of it all to celebrate the joys that are possible. But the awareness that such celebrations are not the reality of life and may not be sufficient to compensate for the final destructiveness of time introduces a mature note of sadness into his jesting and singing.

In that sense, Feste's presence in the play, his movement back and forth between one character and another, his singing, and his final goodbye help to establish a distinctively different tone for this play. Yes, the ending is structurally comic in a very conventional way (lovers reunited, villain no longer present, marriages pending), but the ironic undertones of his presence, more than anything else, inject a note of fragility into the proceedings, not enough to destroy the joy, of course, but sufficiently strong to cast some shadows around the young lovers.
The fact that Shakespeare gives such a prominent role to Feste, the sad clown, and lets him have the final word, together with the other elements which make the comedy in *Twelfth Night* so much more fragile than in *As You Like It*, suggests that Shakespeare's comic vision was, by 1600, running out of confidence and energy, coming under strain, and becoming qualified by all sorts of doubts. So it's not surprising to note that this is the last of the great romantic comedies, still affirming that comic pastoral vision, but only just. Beyond this ambiguous final affirmation lies a very different world, the much more problematic and troubling vision of the tragedies.

**Shakespeare's Women in Drag: Viola**

*(February, 2002)*

William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night or What You Will*
D. J. Palmer (editor), *Twelfth Night: A Casebook*

Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*
Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*
Martin Holmes, *Shakespeare's Public*
Albert Bermel, *Shakespeare at the Moment: Playing the Comedies*
Philip Brockbank (editor), *Players of Shakespeare, 1*
John Palmer, *Comic Characters of Shakespeare*

*Twelfth Night* in a way, is almost the opposite of *As You Like It*. Whereas Rosalind in *As You Like It* can tease and confuse Orlando, confident in the knowledge he loves her and that she can reveal herself to him in good time, Viola in Twelfth Night feels trapped in her impersonation as a male and is forced into the almost humiliating position of having to pleading the case of the man she is in love with to another woman (as was also the case for Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, although there it wasn't such a big part of the plot).

In *As You Like It* and the *Merchant*, the entire burden of the comedy is born by Rosalind and Portia. Rosalind and Portia have to be funny, because otherwise the plays fail as comedies. But Viola is primarily not a comic character, and she's not central to the play to the extent that Rosalind and Portia are to theirs. In *Twelfth Night*, it's the situation that's funny, not the female lead.
Rosalind and Portia are completely comfortable in their impersonations --- they glory in them, in fact. Their masquerades are comic because they get such a kick out of taking on a male role.

On the other hand, in Viola's case, the comedy comes from her awkwardness in trying to fill a role she doesn't know how to play. Although there are times, especially in the beginning, when she seems very boyish (or at least the text supports an actress who is capable of playing her that way), she finds trying to be a male completely bewildering. (Just as, in fact, many adolescent males do.) She's a young woman (maybe seventeen years old, and, incidentally, of comparatively high status, as the beginning of the play shows) still in the process of figuring out how all the male-female stuff works, and now she suddenly finds herself playing on the opposite team, the object of man-to-man talks about women from Orsino. At times, Viola appears as very much the young man, and a few minutes later she's very much the confused young woman, in love with a man who's trying to help teach her how to grow up as a male. Obviously the actress playing her has lots of choices, but for me, this flickering back-and-forth shift from male to female is the most charming thing about her.

She is in a strange country with no protector, and has been told that the Lady of the land, Olivia, is in seclusion. She applies, disguised as a male, Cesario, to be the servant of Duke Orsino. And within a few days, she has happen to her what so often happens to me when I offer to help someone out: she is asked to do a task that she has no idea how to carry out. Namely she is asked to deliver a love message (oral, not a letter) to this lady, Olivia, who is adamantly refusing to see anyone.

But Olivia does allow Viola to see her, apparently on the grounds that Viola has been described as a young man. Younger men are apparently more interesting to her than older nobility such as Orsino.

Viola is now completely awkward, in a funny way. This is one of the moments in the play where I see her as very boyish.

*Cesario* (Viola). Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty ---

And then it occurs to Viola that before she throws out all these extravagant compliments, she ought to be sure she's talking to the right person. So she interrupts herself to say (I modernize her language a little)

*Cesario* (Viola). Excuse me, tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her. I would be loath to cast away my speech, for besides the fact that it is
excellently well written, I've gone to a lot of trouble to memorize it. Good beauties, let me sustain no scorn. I have very sensitive feelings.

*Olivia.* Whence came you, sir?

*Cesario.* I can say little more except for the speech I learned, and that answer's not part of it. Good gentle one, give me modest assurance if you be the lady of the house, that I may proceed with my speech.

Olivia has asked Viola what seems like a simple question in normal polite conversation, but in Viola's situation, the question of where she came from is one she would have an especially difficult time finding an answer for. Olivia, of course, finds the answer the boy has given her bizarre.

*Olivia.* Are you an actor?

*Cesario.* No, my profound heart. And yet (I swear by the very fangs of malice) I am not the person that I play. Are you the lady of the house?

*Olivia.* If I do not usurp myself, I am.

*Cesario.* Most certain, if you are she, then you do usurp yourself: for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve. But this is all beside the point. I will continue my speech in your praise and then get to the heart of my message.

*Olivia.* Oh, skip the praise and get to the important part.

*Cesario.* Alas, I went to a lot of trouble to learn it, and 'tis very poetical.

Shakespeare is just riffing at this point. Just inventing banter, which was clearly one of the kinds of writing that came most easily to him.

But in the process, he is inventing the personality for Cesaro (Viola). He is discovering who Cesaro is by listening to the words that come out of his (her) mouth. (I've read critics who are skeptical of this sort of statement. But writers will know what I'm talking about.)

And one can certainly see how Olivia would be charmed by this awkward and rather feminine-looking boy. Certainly the audience is charmed by him/her.
Olivia falls in love with Viola, or rather with her male persona Cesario. Viola seems to be wondering, "What is this whole love business about really, if Olivia can be in love with me when my masculinity is only a disguise?" And yet she's not quite willing to take the next step and wonder whether her own love for Orsino is any deeper than this.

It seems to me that Viola is one of Shakespeare's most poignant heroines. Desdemona and Juliet and Ophelia are tragically poignant, because of the way they are rejected by the men they love. (Assuming that Ophelia is in fact in love with Hamlet, which is something Shakespeare seems to change his mind about a little more than half way through the play.) Viola on the other hand is only comically poignant, but I think we feel for her more deeply than for either Desdemona or Juliet or Ophelia, because we know her better and because in a way, although her situation is less serious, her emotions seem more touching. Or at least, that's my response.

Anyone who's ever been in love and found themselves unable to tell the other person about it will respond to the interchange between Orsino and Viola in Act 2 Scene 4. Viola, trapped in her role as a boy, tells him about her love for him, but in a way that he won't be able to understand, starting with a play upon the word "favor," which Orsino uses as a synonym for face.

_Duke._ My life upon it, young though thou art, thine eye Hath strayed upon some favor that it loves. Hath it not, boy?

_Cesaro (Viola)._ A little, by your favor.

_Duke._ What sort of woman is it?

_Viola._ Of your complexion.

_Duke_
. Too old, by heaven. Let still a woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways the level in her husband's heart.
Our fancies [i.e. men's] are more giddy and infirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.

Viola. I think as much, my lord.

Duke

. Then let thy love be younger than thyself.
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

Viola

. And so they are; alas, that they are so!
To die, even when they to perfection grow!

After a short break for Feste to sing a song, Orsino, assuming that he is talking to an
young man, tells Viola that women's love is not as deep as men's (contradicting, by
the way, what he had said only lines previously):

Duke

. There is no woman's sides
Can hide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much. Women lack retention.
Alas, their love may be called appetite.
Not motion of the liver, but of the palate,
That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt;
But mine is all as hungry as the sea
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between the love a woman can bear me
And that I love Olivia.

Viola replies, in one of her most famous passages (Act 2, Scene 4):
Viola. My father had a daughter loved a man;
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should love your lordship.

Duke

. And what's her history?

Viola. A blank, my lord: she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i’ the bud
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was this not love indeed?

"My life is hopeless," Viola is saying. "The rest of my life will be a blank."

At this moment, as I see it, Viola is her most completely feminine. She is speaking from her heart, and in doing so she will not be able to maintain her Cesario persona. All Orsino has to do, it seems, is look at her to realize that she's a woman and is in love with him. But of course he doesn't. An essential part of the comedy of all chick flicks, in fact (or chick plays), is that when it comes to women, men are really dumb and can't see what's before their eyes. It's funny because it's what the audience wants to believe.

And yet, at the same time, there can be another overtone here. Orsino believes that this is an adolescent boy, Cesario, speaking to him. And in Shakespeare's own theatre it would in fact have been a boy playing the part. Now when Cesario (i.e. Viola) says to him that she has loved a man "a little of your complexion and about your years," and then a little later says,

My father had a daughter loved a man;
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should love your lordship,

it might occur to Orsino, if he is perceptive enough, that this boy Cesario is actually telling him in a masked way that he has a crush on him. Since Orsino is, at the very least, very fond of Cesario, he would undoubtedly smile at this, although without commenting.
Does Orsino in fact draw this conclusion? Well, since he exists only in our imaginations, and since the text certainly doesn't say so, this is a question that can be answered only by ourselves, or by the actor playing Orsino. The point is though that at least some members of the audience would pick up this overtone.

Irony is among Shakespeare's most frequent tools. In the example of Marc Antony's funeral speech in *Julius Caesar*, where Antony keeps repeating "And Brutus is an honorable man," the true meaning behind the overt meaning is immediately obvious to the audience, and the use of irony gets the point across even more effectively.

But true dramatic irony, which is much prettier than this, as in the case of Viola's lines quoted above, is when the audience understands the hidden meaning but the character in the play does not. And Viola's lines are an example of the very prettiest use of dramatic irony, when the hidden meaning is something that requires a little thought for us to decipher, and when there may in fact be more than one hidden meaning.

In the *Merchant of Venice*, it is difficult to love Portia because she is so completely invulnerable, so completely in control. (And consequently I believe that it is important that the actress play Portia in a way that gives her a little vulnerability.) Even though logically her situation is more precarious than either Rosalind or Viola because she has more at risk if discovered, there's never much doubt but that she'll be able to make things come out completely as she wants them to.

Rosalind has her moments of vulnerability, but only moments. And we can see that Rosalind's situation is competely a matter of choice. She can extricate herself at any moment simply by revealing her true identity.

Viola, on the other hand, is all vulnerability. She can't simply say to Orsino, "Excuse me, our lordship, but I have to tell you something really important. I'm really not a boy, I'm a girl." Because...

Because? Why can't Viola simply reveal that she is a woman? Well, in the first place, Shakespeare never gives us a chance to consider this possibility. And secondly, the play would collapse if she were to do so. But, beyond this, she is much more at risk than Rosalind. Orsino's whole affection towards her is predicated on the incorrect belief that she's male, and she can't really know for sure how that would change if he knew the truth. And if Orsino's attitude toward her would change, then until Sebastian arrives Viola would be an woman alone with no male protector. I don't think that an Elizabethan audience would have much trouble understanding her need for disguise.

I think that in *Twelfth Night*, even more than in *As You Like It* or *Much Ado About Nothing* or any of the other comedies, Shakespeare treats the whole idea of love as a
joke. Olivia was in love with Cesario, who was really Viola. Well, at the end Sebastian shows up, and he looks exactly like Cesario, so he's a perfectly adequate replacement. (Despite the fact that Olivia's attraction to Cesario, i.e. Viola, was in large part based on a vulnerability in Cesario that Sebastian does not seem to have. On the other hand, Sebastian is a more suitable match for Olivia than Cesario, even though he's not as cute.) And Orsino was in love with Olivia, but his real affection (as opposed to infatuation) was for his young male servant Cesario. But it turns out that Cesario is really a woman, Viola. Okay, fine, forget Olivia, and now Orsino will be in love with Viola.

Okay, so it's all farce, and quite charming. The big joke is that the absurdity of the whole thing. But jokes like this are only really funny if they're saying something to us, something we don't quite want to take seriously. We don't really want to believe that love is only skin deep, an absurdity.

Or do we?

What is it that makes people like these comedies so much?

I think that maybe in order for a romantic comedy to work, the author has to be in love with his leading female character. Shakespeare was clearly in love with Rosalind. Lucky for him, the audience also loves her, otherwise we would notice how indulgent he is toward her.

As to Portia, it's not so clear. Shakespeare certainly didn't seem to about her enough to give her any good lines, except for the Mercy Speech. Of course there are lots of ways of playing her, but she doesn't seem to be a very soft character. As mentioned, there's not much vulnerability in her, there's something about her that's rather hard and glossy. Her role in the play is mostly functional. She serves her purpose and defeats Shylock and we admire her (well, some of do, at least), but I don't think we love her.

But with respect to Viola. One can see that Shakespeare had an affection for Viola, a compassion. But it's a different sort of feeling.

Do we fall in love with the woman who is outrageous and sexy, like Rosalind? Or do we fall in love with the one who is fragile and awkward and vulnerable, like Viola?

Me, I tend to fall in love with both.