CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

INTRODUCTION

Date and Early Performances

On 2 February 1602, the feast of Candlemas, a young lawyer of the Middle Temple called John Manningham wrote in his diary:

> At our feast wee had a play called 'Twelve Night, or What You Will', much like the *Commedy of Errores*, or *Menechmi* in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practise in it to make the Steward beleeve his Lady Widdow was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in generall termes, telling him what she liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his aparaile, &c, and then when he came to practise making him beleeve they tooke him to be mad.[1]

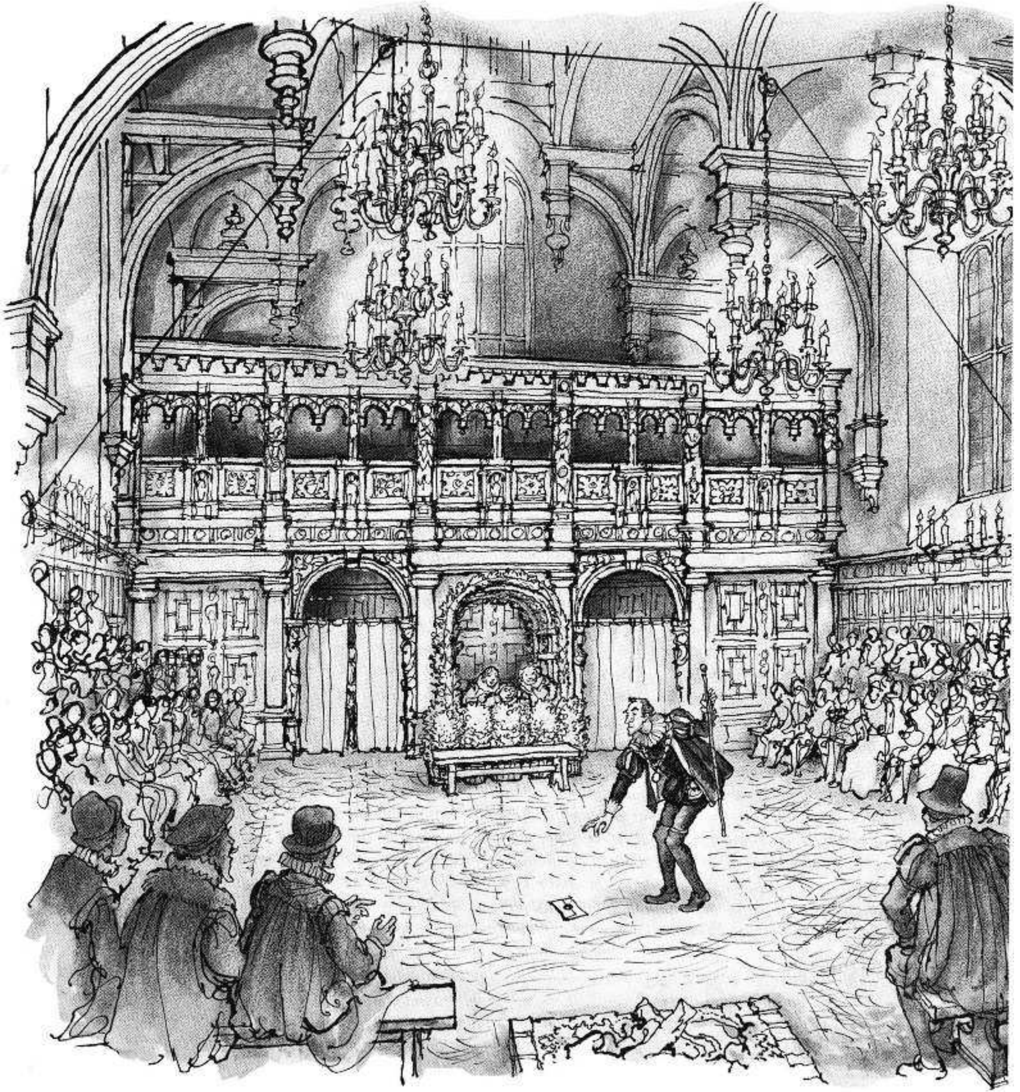
A play suitable for the period of winter feasts between Christmas and Lent, *Twelfth Night* was also performed at court at Easter 1618 and Candlemas 1623. Twelfth Night itself is 6 January, the feast of the Epiphany, or the visit of the Three Kings to the Christ child. Leslie Hotson, in an extended piece of literary and historical detective work, argued that the play had its first performance before the Queen and an Italian visitor, Virginio Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, on Twelfth Night 1601.[2] Certainly the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company) performed at court on that occasion, but although there are many details of the preparations, the actual play is frustratingly unnamed. We do know that, in keeping with the festive spirit of the occasion, the play chosen was to be one 'that shalbe best furnished with rich apparell, have greate variety and change of Musicke and daunces, and of a Subiect that may be most pleasing to her Maiestie'.[3] This is not a bad description of *Twelfth Night*, with its two 'great house' settings, its theme of romantic love, and its many musical interludes; and although it does not feature dances (as *Much Ado About Nothing* does), the extended joke on types of dance at the end of 1.3 might have amused the Queen, an enthusiastic dancer. Its three strong female characters, Viola, Olivia and Maria, who drive the plot, might also have appealed to the ageing 'Gloriana', Queen Elizabeth I. The clown's name, Feste, apparently Shakespeare's invention, also connects the play with festive occasions. And as E. S. Donno has remarked, the play's alternative title, 'What You Will' – that is, whatever you like – may 'evoke the mood of twelfth-night holiday: a time for sentiment, frivolity, pranks and misrule'.[4]

[1] John Manningham, *Diary*, quoted in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, II: The Comedies, 1597–1603*, 1958, p. 269.
[2] J. L. Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, 1954.
[3] Hotson, *The First Night*, p. 15, quoting the Lord Chamberlain's memorandum.
[4] Elizabeth Story Donno, Introduction to the New Cambridge edition of *Twelfth Night*, 1985, p. 4. She comments further that the repeated catch-phrase 'That's all one', 'adds to the air of lightheartedness and inconsequence proper to a comedy whose subtitle is What You Will' (p. 5).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information



1 *Twelfth Night* as presented in Middle Temple Hall, London, on 2 February 1602, by C. Walter Hodges
a Act 2, Scene 5: 'What employment have we here?'

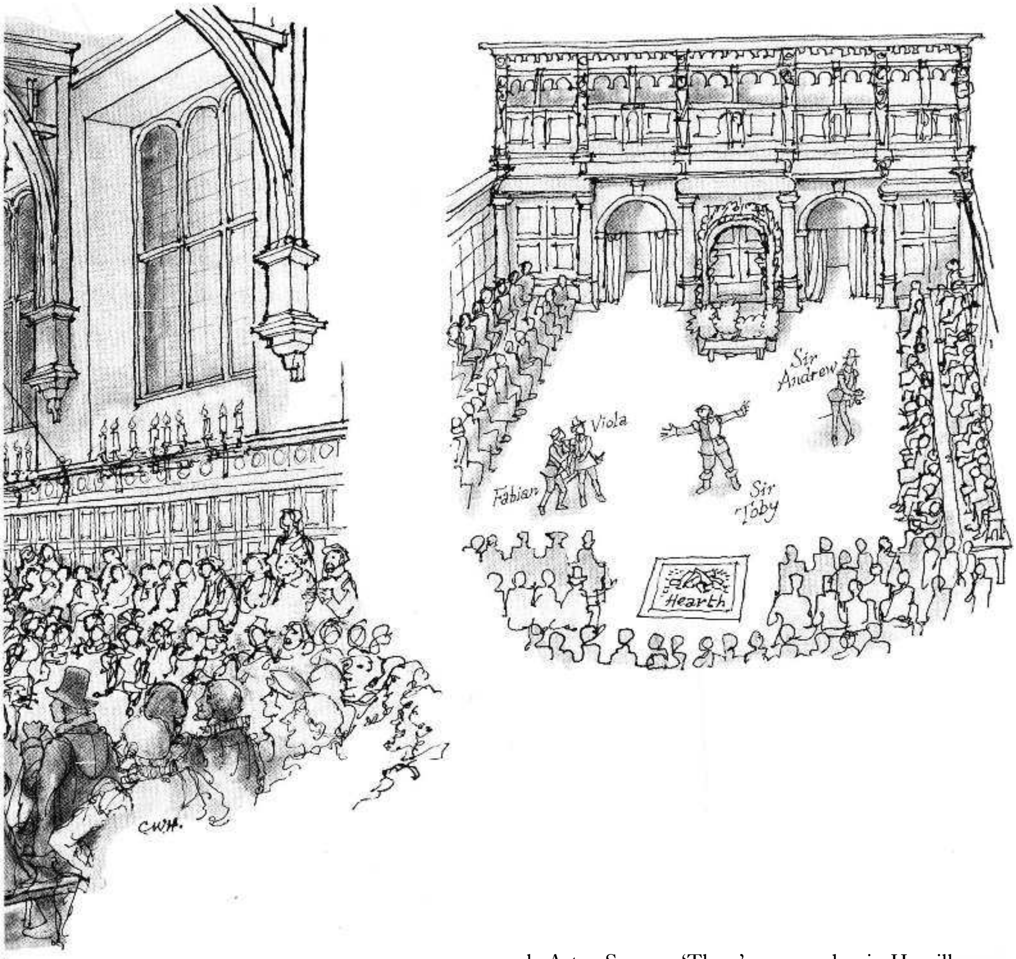
Given the internal evidence that the play was probably written in 1600 or 1601,[1] a performance at court on Twelfth Night 1601 is not impossible. But there is nothing to

[1] The two references to the 'sophy' or Shah of Persia (2.5.149 and 3.4.236) may reflect the contemporary interest in Sir Anthony Sherley's accounts of his travels in Persia in 1599 (published 1600 and 1601). In 3.2.62–3 Maria refers to 'the new map with the augmentation of the Indies': this is probably Edward Wright's *Hydrographiae Descriptio*, published 1599, one of the first to use rhumb-lines; it shows the East Indies in greater detail than previously.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information



b Act 3, Scene 4: 'There's no remedy, sir. He will fight with you for's oath sake.'

suggest that this would have been the first night – nor that the performance that Manningham saw the following year in the Middle Temple Hall was the premiere.[1] It is safest to assume that the play had its first performance at the Globe in 1600 or 1601. Manningham's memorandum shows that it was early adapted for temporary indoor stages, and T. J. King established in 1971 that 'the play is well suited for performance in front of an unlocalized screen with two doorways, such as those at the Middle Temple'.[2]

[1] Anthony Arlidge, *Shakespeare and the Prince of Love*, 2000.
[2] T. J. King, *Shakespearean Staging, 1599–1642*, 1971, p. 98. It is equally possible that the play was staged at the western (high table) end of the hall, as were those in Cambridge college halls in this period: see Alan H. Nelson, *Early Cambridge Theatres: College, University, and Town Stages, 1464–1720*, 1994. King's schema of the play's entrances and exits using only two doors (whether screen or high table end) is shown on pp. 99–115 of his book.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

The Play's Sources

When Manningham wrote that *Twelfth Night* was 'most like . . . that in Italian called *Inganni*', he may have confused Nicolò Secchi's 1547 play of that title with *Gl'Ingannati* ('The Deceived') written and performed by the Academy of the Intronati in Siena in 1531 (published 1537, 1554). There is no known contemporary English translation of *Gl'Ingannati*,[1] but it is possible that some version of it was performed by one of the Italian companies that visited England in the second half of the sixteenth century, and that Manningham and Shakespeare saw it; or that Shakespeare read the play or the version made in French by Charles Estienne, *Les Abusés* (published 1543). In this play, rambling and dramatically simple though it is, there is a basic plot congruence with *Twelfth Night* in the story of the young girl who disguises herself as a page in order to be near the man she loves, finds herself wooing another woman on his behalf and in turn becomes the object of that woman's desire. There is a twin brother, who arrives after many years' adventures to look for his sister (and father), and is willingly seduced by the Olivia-figure. More significantly, there are at least four scenes that are strikingly close to scenes in Shakespeare: parallels to Orsino's and Viola's conversations in 1.4 and 2.4; another to Olivia's declaration of love to 'Cesario' in 3.1; and the threat of violence by Orsino to Viola in 5.1 when he believes his servant is unfaithful to him. However, the meeting between the twins in Shakespeare, 'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons' (5.1.200), a climax which produces such wonder and delight onstage and in the theatre audience, is not in *Gl'Ingannati*: in that play the heroine Lelia changes back into her woman's clothes for the final dénouement.

Shakespeare's principal source for *Twelfth Night* was undoubtedly the prose narrative version of *Gl'Ingannati*, 'Apolonius and Silla', which formed part of Barnabe Riche's popular book published in 1581 (reprinted 1583, 1594), *Riche his Farewell to Military Profession*: 'conteining verie pleasaunt discourses fit for a peacable tyme. Gathered together for the onely delight of the courteous Gentlewomen bothe of England and Irelande, For whose onely pleasure they were collected together, And unto whom they are directed and dedicated.'[2] In fact the narrator frequently addresses remarks to his 'gentlewomen' auditors in the course of the story; this habit marks a major difference between the two texts' treatment of the romance narrative, particularly in their conception of the heroine.

Both Riche's story and Shakespeare's play centre on the adventures of a young woman who disguises herself as a boy in order to be close to her unknowing beloved, a powerful and self-absorbed duke. In both the heroine must woo the duke's aloof mistress – and in both the lady falls for the messenger rather than the absent suitor. Further, the heroine (Silla in Riche, Viola in *Twelfth Night*) has a brother (Silvio, equivalent to Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*) to whom she is virtually identical. (In Riche

[1] An edited translation can be found in Bullough, *Sources*, pp. 286–339. A more recent discussion of the play's complex genealogy can be found in Louise George Clubb, 'Italian stories on the stage', Alexander Leggatt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, 2002, pp. 38–42.

[2] Bullough, *Sources*, p. 344. Bullough reprints the whole tale, as does Ard.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

the brother is already absent 'servyng in the warres' in Africa.) In due course he turns up, not knowing that his sister is in the same city and disguised as him, and he is quickly wooed and won by the lady (Julina/Olivia). After many misunderstandings and some grief, the truth emerges, and each of the siblings is happily paired off in marriage with the right partner.

The differences between these two narratives – one a story that was probably read aloud in a domestic context, the other a play designed for performance in a public theatre – might be characterised as embodying the different 'textures' of prose and poetry. Riche's tale is gossipy – hence his appeals to his 'gentlewomen' listeners: it has elements of sexual sensationalism, such as can be found in gossip magazines today. In Riche's tale, the heroine's adventures begin on board ship when, after rebuffing an offer of marriage from the captain, she is threatened with rape (she is still at this point dressed as a girl, but one of lower class, and is accompanied by a faithful servant posing as her brother). The storm and shipwreck arrive just in time to save her from killing herself to save her honour. On gaining land she disguises herself in male clothing 'to prevent a nomber of injuries that might bee proffered to a woman that was lefte in her case'.[1] When her brother Silvio turns up and is 'entertained' by Julina, that one night – described in somewhat salacious detail – results in Julina's pregnancy. Silvio, unknowing, sets off on his travels again. And when the disguised Silla protests in the dénouement that 'he' is incapable of getting a woman with child, she proves her point by 'loosing his garmentes doune to his stomacke, and shew[ing] Julina his breastes and pretie teats'.[2] Silvio in due course hearing of his sister, now happily married, is 'striken with greate remorse to make Julina amendes, understanding her to bee a noble ladie and was lefte defamed to the worlde through his default'.[3]

Riche's story has a glamorous air of worldliness: sex and class are emphasised in a fairly straightforward way as motivators of people's behaviour. Shakespeare's play, so close to Riche in plot, has by contrast a poetic air. 'Most wonderful!', as Olivia exclaims, on seeing the 'identical' twins finally on stage together (5.1.209). Importantly, Viola never removes her male clothing. At every point in the play where Viola's physical sex could clarify the situation, Shakespeare opts instead to emphasise through complex and suggestive poetry the infinite complications of both gender and sexuality.

Nicolò Secchi's *Gl'Inganni* (1547) also features 'identical' male/female twins, both dressed in male attire, the girl secretly in love with a noble youth, whose sister Portia is in turn in love with her, thinking her to be a boy, Ruberto. The brother and sister have previously rediscovered each other, so 'Ruberto' is able to persuade her brother to substitute for her in the bed of Portia; consequently, Portia has become pregnant. Bullough prints a selection of dialogue from this play which has similarities to the 'Patience on a monument' discussion between Viola and Orsino (2.4). As Bullough points out, '*Twelfth Night* belongs to a tradition in which the Plautine twins become

[1] Ibid., p. 350.
[2] Ibid., p. 361.
[3] Ibid., p. 363.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

differentiated in sex, thus affording a greater variety of intrigue' in both plays and prose stories.[1] There are, thus, several analogues to the play, but Riche's popular story (itself part of this tradition, and conveniently in English) is clearly the major source for Shakespeare's work.

Imaginary Geography and Stage Space

The boy-girl twins are visually identical. This is one of the signs that the play belongs to the genre of romance. The first ten minutes of the play chart a delicate course into this genre. The audience sees and hears a rich and noble young man, surrounded by attentive musicians and servants, uttering his own mellifluous variations on the clichés of Petrarchan love poetry:

O when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires like fell and cruel hounds
E'er since pursue me.

(1.1.19–23)

Away before me to sweet beds of flowers:
Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers.

(1.1.40–1)

We could be anywhere in the artificial world of Renaissance romance. The next scene opens with an equally romantic image of a shipwrecked maiden; in many productions she appears with long flowing hair and wearing the remains of a very feminine dress. The scene's first words invoke the distant lands of classical romance:

VIOLA What country, friends, is this?
CAPTAIN This is Illyria, lady.

Illyria (though it may evoke *illusion* and *lyrical* to modern ears) is in fact the ancient name for that part of the eastern Adriatic coastal region north of the gulf of Corinth.[2] It was, however, also noted for its pirates during the Renaissance (see note at 3.3.9–11), and Orsino accuses Antonio of being a 'notable' one (5.1.58). The Royal Shakespeare Company's 1987 production (director Bill Alexander) made a rare foray into realistic representation of this geo-political setting: the action took place in a recognisably Hellenic village square, all whitewashed houses; and Antony Sher's Malvolio was costumed as some kind of Orthodox church functionary, who had lost the respect of a decadent society.

[1] Ibid., p. 270.
[2] For a full discussion of what 'Illyria' actually signified to an educated sixteenth-century person, see Patricia Parker, 'Was Illyria as Mysterious and Foreign as We Think?', in Ostovich *et al.* (eds.), *The Mysterious and The Foreign in Early Modern England*, 2008, pp. 209–33; and Elizabeth Pentland 'Beyond the "Lyric" in Illyricum: Some Early Modern Backgrounds to *Twelfth Night*', in James Schiffer (ed.), *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, 2011, pp. 149–66.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

Viola's response to the Captain's information is a decision to disguise herself, indicating an awareness of potential danger (like Riche's Silla); and she thus becomes an inhabitant of a liminal zone, an unplaceable figure. Cast up from a vaguely Italianate 'Messaline' on shore in Illyria,[1] abutting the Turkish empire, she elects to appear as neither male nor female, a 'eunuch' – a sexual and therefore social neuter. When next we see her, however, Viola is 'Cesario', a young male page within a European-style pattern of dependence on a great lord. Further, the 'town' which the characters traverse is recognisably English – modelled on London, with its famous buildings, great houses, gardens, orchards and 'south suburbs' where there is a good lodging-house, 'the Elephant' (Shakespeare here flatters a local hostelry close to the Globe (see note at 3.3.39)). Orsino's court is 'due west' of Olivia's house (3.1.119); it can be imagined as being near the grand palaces of Westminster, Whitehall and St James. Standing on the stage of the Globe theatre, Viola can say 'Then westward ho!' and knowingly evoke the cry of the Thames watermen to be heard just outside the walls of the theatre. The theatre's stage was oriented towards the north-east, so that Olivia and Viola might be imagined gesturing towards the stage-left door in the tiring-house wall during this exchange. These local references might have created the shock of the familiar in the play's first audiences: where a 'romance' such as Riche's is by definition exotic, other-worldly, the theatre's transformation of the tale interweaves familiar English features with the exotic dream-like atmosphere. The minor role of Antonio, Sebastian's loving friend (and Shakespeare's invention) has the important function in the play of establishing this realistic quality, with his talk of Sebastian's seeing this imaginary town – part London, part strange and distant place – and spending money lent by Antonio on 'some toy / You have desire to purchase' (3.3.44–5).

The play's imagined world is represented by the semiotic use of stage space. The Globe had a deep and wide thrust stage, with its two doors of entrance in the tiring-house wall upstage; the same configuration could easily be re-created in Middle Temple Hall or the halls of royal palaces. A particularly important function of the two doors is to provide amusing (and sometimes confusing) near-misses for the encounters of the twins with each other or with those who are interested in them. This is a dramatic technique that Shakespeare had already energetically exploited in *The Comedy of Errors*, with its two sets of twins and its continual opportunities for farcical misidentification. In *Twelfth Night* a more serious (though still essentially comic) situation is explored, largely because the fact that the twins are of opposite genders produces different social behaviour, despite the fact that they look like one individual.

Tim Fitzpatrick has proposed a revision of T. J. King's theoretical staging of the play using the two doors, but with a more precisely delineated sense of this semiotic dramatic function. Alert to internal stage directions in the text, Fitzpatrick suggests the stage-left door always signifies 'outwards' from the current scene (e.g. towards the town), the stage-right door 'inwards' (e.g. into a house).[2] Olivia, for example, might regularly use

[1] Trevor Nunn's 1996 film somewhat confusingly locates the action in Sicily (Sebastian's guidebook is the fictional *Baedeker's Illyria from Randazzo to Mistretta*); the film was actually shot on location in Cornwall.
[2] Tim Fitzpatrick, 'Stage management, dramaturgy and spatial semiotics in Shakespeare's dialogue', *Theatre Research International* 23, 1 (1999), 1–23.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

2 Antony Sher as Malvolio, Jim Hooper as Fabian, Roger Allam as Sir Toby, Pippa Guard as Maria, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1987. Act 3, Scene 4: 'Which way is he, in the name of sanctity?' Joe Cocks Studio Collection. © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

the stage-right door: this would reflect her 'cloistered' status in her house – except for her exit with Sebastian and the Priest to the 'chantry by', a move outwards for her, physically and emotionally (4.3.24). In Act 5's appearance of both the twins on stage, this schema would place Viola downstage left, with Orsino upstage to her right (they have come from his house to visit Olivia). He would thus be shielding her from Sebastian who would also enter from stage left, after the procession of wounded knights Toby and Andrew (who are led off to the surgeon 'inwards', stage right). Olivia would remain in her usual area, stage right throughout, so that she would be the first to see the alignment of the twins, Sebastian upstage, Viola downstage. During Orsino's and Olivia's exclamations Sebastian would come forward to stand downstage opposite Viola for their recognition dialogue, thus ending up close to Olivia just as Viola is to Orsino, in a symmetrical and symbolic pattern across the front of the stage. The play's romance plot is perfectly completed, though the play itself is not finished. (This is, of course, only one possible staging of this scene on the Elizabethan stage. Tim Carroll's production for the new Globe (London, 2002) used the two doors differently and produced more broad comedy during the final revelations: Viola hid behind a stage pillar when she first spotted Sebastian; Orsino addressed 'Your master quits you' (5.1.300) to the wrong twin, and was comically embarrassed at his mistake.)

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

Puritans and Clowns

In 3.4.108–9 Shakespeare gives the minor character Fabian the line, 'If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.' The audience's attention is deliberately drawn to the play itself and its artifice, although what Fabian is referring to is in fact the gulling of Malvolio in the sub-plot of the play. This story is not in the romance sources but is purely Shakespeare's invention, and it draws on elements of the Elizabethan world which he and his audience knew (hence Manningham's delight in the 'good practise' of tricking the steward). And as is customary in Shakespearean comedy, the dramatic themes of the main romance plot are reflected, played in different registers and ironically varied in the prose comedy and farce of the sub-plot.

Sir Toby Belch, for example: as a literal embodiment of the 'good life', that is, bodily pleasure, he represents an alternative idea of 'virtue' to the puritanism of Malvolio; he gives it a more generous epicurean meaning. At the end of his very first scene, encouraging Sir Andrew to dance, he cries, 'Is it a world to hide virtues in?' (1.3.107) – meaning, of course, Sir Andrew's dubious 'abilities', based on the hapless knight's attempts to embody the Renaissance ideal of the courtly lover. Sir Toby likes to show off his own superiority in word-play: when Malvolio reproves his roistering, he replies indignantly, 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?' (2.3.97–9). But it is Malvolio's plain speech that has the most powerful last word: 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!' (5.1.355). The repressive forces that Malvolio (in Italian, 'ill-will') embodies remain a real threat to the play's romantic optimism about 'golden time' (5.1.359), and remind us instead of the realities of the 'every day', in which there are periods when pleasure is denied. As the worldly-wise observer Feste remarks, 'pleasure will be paid, one time or another' (2.4.68).

In Catholic European culture, the *topos* of Carnival versus Lent had been common for centuries.[1] Carnival, or Mardi Gras, was that period immediately preceding the forty days of self-denial of Lent, which in turn was relieved by Easter and the arrival of spring. Performances of *Twelfth Night* at Candlemas, 2 February, would remind the audience of the imminence of Lent. Sir Toby and his fellow-roisterers, with their creed of 'cakes and ale', symbolise a refusal of the self-denial required by this religious tradition. Sir Toby can also be seen as a Lord of Misrule,[2] the disruptive figure allowed temporary reign at feast–days, and he is therefore a problematic presence to one who is identified by Maria as 'a kind of puritan' (2.3.119).

Malvolio, Olivia's household steward, represents not only the anti-flesh asceticism of the allegorical figure of Lent, but also the very real spread of such attitudes at the time when increasing numbers of Elizabethans were critical of the imperfectly

[1] For discussion of the critical theory of carnival, particularly as it applies to Shakespearean drama, see pp. 34–5 below.

[2] '[I]n the feaste of Christmas, there was in the kinges house, wheresoever hee was lodged, at the Feast of Christmas, a Lord of Misrule, or Maister of merry disports, and the like had yee in the house of every noble man, of honor, or good worshippe . . . These Lordes beginning their rule on Alhollon [All-Hallows] Eve, continued the same till . . . Candlemas day: In all which space there were fine and subtle disguisinges, Maskes and Mummeries . . .' (John Stow, *A Survey of London*, reprinted from the text of 1603, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols., 1908, vol. 1, p. 97).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12627-5 — Twelfth Night
3rd Edition
Excerpt
More Information

3 Maerten van Cleve, Lent surprising revellers at a carnival meal. The Warburg Institute, London

reformed Church of England, and sought to establish a 'purer' religion and polity, cleansed of all the old Catholic practices. Within three decades of the first performance of *Twelfth Night* the Puritan party had made powerful inroads in Parliament; Oliver Cromwell's English Revolution was the upshot, culminating in the public beheading of the ritualist Anglican King Charles I in 1649. Ben Jonson satirises the religious Puritan in the figure of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614): a hypocritical epicure who speaks a preacher's jargon, he does not have the psychological or social complexity of Malvolio, who is described as only 'sometimes . . . a kind of puritan' (2.3.119). Maria goes on to qualify this epithet:

> The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths. The best persuaded of himself: so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him . . . (2.3.124–8)

The attack on Malvolio is a familiar comic theme, the humiliation of a pompous ass who thinks he is better than he is. For the time being only – and for pleasing relevance to the play's first audience – is he represented by the word 'puritan'. In fact Malvolio was played throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a self-satisfied 'Castilian': Robert Bensley began with 'an air of Spanish loftiness' and metamorphosed into a manic Quixotic figure under the influence of his delusion. A century later, Henry Irving was playing in the same visual style, but hinting at 'low birth', and a sense of inferiority that culminated in a tragic humiliation. He exited from the letter

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org