

## INTRODUCTION

*Twelfth Night* is a very popular play in the theatre and during the last 100 years in particular it has inspired a staggering variety of approaches and readings by theatre directors and performers. Some directors emphasise the class war that is at the heart of the Malvolio narrative; others focus on sexuality and identity politics, which are fundamental to the Viola narrative. Some directors are seduced by realism, and aspire to create an Illyria that will be plausible and socially coherent, and others respond to the anti-realism in the play and flaunt its implausibility, its magical unrealism, its discontinuities and its topsy-turvy qualities so appropriate, in Shakespeare's day, to the feast of 6 January, twelfth night.

Various trajectories can be discerned through the four centuries of *Twelfth Night*'s performance history: over the last 120 years Malvolio has become more of an object of sympathy, sometimes even a tragic hero, especially in the final scenes of the play; Viola having sung her way through much of the eighteenth century, became elegiac for much of the nineteenth, exquisite but essentially passive, before becoming rather more assertive and sexually enquiring by the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Feste has grown from being an embarrassment, often marginalised by cutting, to a keynote figure, helping to establish tone and mood, a source of world-weary wisdom. However, the most crucial overall trend has undoubtedly been the move from seeing *Twelfth Night* securely as a comedy, to finding more unhappiness, misalliance, and indeed to seeing it as a comedy about to collapse into tragedy, a comedy infected by the proximity of *Hamlet*, which is close in date to *Twelfth Night*, rather than harking back to the broad comedy of Shakespeare's other twins play, *The Comedy of Errors*. The play becomes a comedy haunted by the loss of Shakespeare's son Hamnet, who would not come back from the dead to greet his twin sister Judith as Sebastian greets Viola, rather than a comedy intersecting, for example, in 2.5, with the technically brilliant physical comedy of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Some modern productions do buck the trend and not all modern Illyrias are full of doom and gloom, but it is currently the fashion to find less and less to laugh at in the play.

In order to discuss something of the territory *Twelfth Night* has ranged across in the course of its history in the theatre, this introduction begins chronologically, but moves to a more thematic approach when considering

the diversity offered by post-Second World War productions. The major areas of investigation here are: the attempt to locate a production geographically, culturally and politically by means of its vision of the world of Illyria; the treatment of the Malvolio narrative; the treatment of the Viola narrative; the radical change in the theatrical fortunes of Feste; and the implied commentary on theatrical practice offered by recorded *Twelfth Nights*.

The first documented performance of *Twelfth Night*, in which Shakespeare himself presumably appeared as a performer, took place on 2 February (Candlemas) 1602. John Manningham, a young lawyer at the Middle Temple, records:

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 beleieve his Lady widowe was in Love with him, by counterfayting a letter, as from his Lady, in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparraile, &c., and then when he came to practise, making him beleieve they tooke him to be mad.<sup>1</sup>

Manningham’s enthusiasm for the Malvolio plot suggests that Malvolio’s suffering was not an issue for him and his understanding that Olivia was a widow indicates she was dressed in mourning. Given that Viola is now seen to be a star part, it is surprising that Viola’s plot line is only referred to implicitly, in Manningham’s reference to the use of twins in his comparison between *Twelfth Night*, *Comedy of Errors* and the *Menaechmi*. It is possible that Manningham’s omission here may reflect the fact that it takes an astute first time audience to register Viola’s name, which is only identified in the final scene of the play (5.1.225).

*Twelfth Night* probably premiered, and was mostly performed, at the Globe playhouse around 1600–1. However, relocating *Twelfth Night* to the Middle Temple for the performance that Manningham enjoyed would not have been difficult, despite different sight lines, acoustics and audience demographic in comparison with the Globe, because the Folio text is not demanding in terms of staging: it requires ‘several doors’ in 2.2; some kind of box tree in 2.5 (although productions have often run the joke of a palpably inadequate ‘box tree’ for the eavesdroppers to hide behind); and Malvolio

1 Manningham Folio 12b. Edmondson comments that Manningham’s precision over the alternative title, *What You Will*, suggests its importance to Shakespeare ‘from an early stage’ (1–2).

is described as imprisoned ‘within’ in 4.2, which may have meant behind the doors at the back of the stage, presumably with a grille through which the actor playing Malvolio could speak.<sup>2</sup> Many of the play’s stage directions, such as the opening one ‘Enter ORSINO, Duke of Illyria, CURIO, and other Lords’ are left permissive, but the flexibility of ‘other Lords’ would be made precise in production. The play demands quite a few props – particularly jewels passing between various characters – and some kind of yellow-stockinged costume for Malvolio in 3.4.<sup>3</sup> The original casting is not known but boy actors would have played Olivia and Viola, and a small boy may have played Maria as there are references to that character’s height (1.5.168; 2.5.11; 3.2.52). It has been assumed that the role of Feste was written for Robert Armin, who had replaced Will Kemp as the clown of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, and the large number of songs given to Feste would certainly have provided a showcase for Armin’s singing skills.

In 1954 Leslie Hotson devoted a monograph to arguing that the first performance of the play was on Twelfth Night, 6 January, 1601. Hotson writes in thrilling style but the evidence remains completely circumstantial. Because Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, played at court before Queen Elizabeth and an Italian guest, Virginio Orsini, duke of Bracciano on 6 January 1601, Hotson imagines Shakespeare writing the play to order between St Stephen’s day, 26 December, and 6 January, and performing in conditions which very much reflect a 1950s vision of how Elizabethan theatre worked.<sup>4</sup> While Hotson’s case remains unproven, the notion of performing the play on Twelfth Night has appealed to many theatre directors over the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

*Twelfth Night* was also performed at court for James I on Easter Monday, 6 April 1618, and on Candlemas, 2 February, in 1623, the year that the text of the play first became available for reading. Shakespeare had died in 1616 with *Twelfth Night* unpublished but in 1623 Shakespeare’s colleagues John Heminges and Henry Condell saw the First Folio through the press, and this included *Twelfth Night or What You Will*. The records of Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, use the title ‘Malvolio’ for the 1623 performance and

2 For a detailed discussion of the staging of 4.2 see Carnegie.

3 For a consideration of essential props and original staging possibilities see Thomson 87–108.

4 Elam is more persuaded of the case for *Twelfth Night* being performed on this occasion than I am, but he also notes that Gregor Sarrazin and J. W. Draper had explored the possible Italian link before Hotson wrote it all up as a ripping yarn.

5 See, for example, Williams (1931), Clayton (1950), Carey (1954), James (1973).

two other early commentators also testify Malvolio's ability to dominate the play.<sup>6</sup> Leonard Digges claims:

. . . loe, in a trice  
 The Cockpit Galleries, Boxes, all are full  
 To hear *Malvoglio*, that crosse garter'd Gull.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Charles I, in annotating his Shakespeare Folio, wrote 'Malvolio' by the title of the play, something which reads ironically in the light of those twentieth-century productions that have reconfigured the play's action, casting Malvolio explicitly as a Puritan who is, by the end of the play, ready and waiting to start the English revolution that would deprive Charles of his kingdom and his life.

After the Restoration, *Twelfth Night* was assigned to Davenant's Duke of York's Men. Pepys saw it three times at Lincoln's Inn Fields: on 11 September 1661, when Charles II was present, but, for Pepys (II 177), the play seemed a 'burthen' and he 'took no pleasure at all in it';<sup>8</sup> on 6 January 1663 Pepys (IV 6) thought it 'acted well, though it be but a silly play and not relating at all to the name or day'; after a performance on 20 January 1669 he complained it was 'one of the weakest plays that ever I saw on the stage'. By contrast John Downes records that the play 'had mighty Success by its well Performance', that 'All the Parts being justly Acted Crown'd the Play', which 'was got up on purpose to be Acted on Twelfth Night' (Downes 23). Downes records that the leading actor of the company, Thomas Betterton, took the largest role, Toby, but then Downes only lists the actors playing Andrew, Feste, Malvolio and Olivia, something which suggests that the Viola/Orsino narrative failed to make an impact, or may have been deeply cut, possibly even excised. Viola's narrative, however, did get an airing in reworked form in the 1670s with the first performances of Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*, in which Fidelia, dressed as a man, courts Olivia, on behalf of Fidelia's beloved master.

In 1703 William Burnaby adapted *Twelfth Night* as *Love Betray'd; or the Agreeable Disappointment*.<sup>9</sup> *Love Betray'd* was not a success, but it does offer

6 Bawcutt 140. Herbert's record is for the year 1622/3.

7 Digges's poem was published posthumously in *Poems: written by Wil. Shakespeare Gent.*, 1640.

8 This was partly because of his feelings of guilt because he had sworn to his wife he 'would never go to a play without her'.

9 Burnaby, Preface page 1 (n.p.), disingenuously claims he owes only 'about Fifty of the Lines' to *Twelfth Night* and marks some borrowed lines with double inverted commas. Furness (407) converted William Burnaby into Charles Burnaby and a surprising number of other commentators follow this.

insight into what Burnaby felt needed attention in order for *Twelfth Night* to work theatrically in 1703. For example, Burnaby has Cæsario (Viola) in love with Moreno (Orsino) for ‘Two years’ (11), rather than having Viola fall rapidly in love between 1.2 and 1.4. Cæsario sings for Moreno, as Shakespeare’s Viola suggests she will (1.2.57–8), although the Folio text gives her no songs. Concern about the cruelty of the plot against Taquilet (a combination of Malvolio and Andrew), is expressed by Emilia (Maria) who comments ‘If he shou’d come to lose his Place for his Love, this Business wou’d end too cruelly’ (25). At Cæsario’s prompting Rodoregue (Antonio) is explicitly pardoned and ‘shall share the blessings of this hour’ (60), whereas Shakespeare does not indicate how Antonio’s narrative ends. In addition Burnaby relocates the play to Venice, a popular location for later productions of *Twelfth Night*, and the Olivia character, Villaretta, becomes a widow, something which resonates with Manningham’s memory of Olivia in the 1601/2 performance.

*Twelfth Night* was then absent from the stage until 1741, when under the management of Charles Fleetwood at Drury Lane, Hannah Pritchard played Viola, while the consummate comedienne Kitty Clive began a long association with the role of Olivia. Clive was also famous for her singing skills and her performance helped reshape Olivia into a singing role for most of the rest of the century, although as Olivia, and Viola, sang more, Feste began to sing less.<sup>10</sup> The 1741 production also featured the Malvolio of Charles Macklin, who one month later was to astound London with a compelling Shylock, which moved away from the standard comic caricature of the time. As Macklin was researching Shylock when he first played Malvolio, it is possible his Malvolio may also have included some gravitas.

In the late eighteenth century *Twelfth Night* was often revived for one or two performances only, often around Twelfth Night. The fact the play was occasionally used for benefit performances suggests some degree of popularity.<sup>11</sup> Several of the individual actors who had great success with *Twelfth Night* during the latter part of the eighteenth century are memorialised by Charles Lamb and although he was writing ‘two-and-thirty years’ after some of the events he was recalling (Lamb 154), he vividly evokes, for example, the performance of James Dodd as Andrew and how ‘In expressing slowness of apprehension this actor surpassed all others’ (159). Lamb also argues for the unusual ‘richness and a dignity’ in Robert Bensley’s performances

<sup>10</sup> Bell’s 1774 edition of *Twelfth Night*, which claims to record contemporary staging, cut Feste’s songs in 2.3 and in 2.4.

<sup>11</sup> Benefit performances are not generally recorded in the list of productions. For *Twelfth Night* and benefits see Laurie Osborne, 1996a, 54–5.

of Malvolio, and reminds his readers that ‘when Bensley was occasionally absent from the theatre, John Kemble thought it no derogation to succeed to the part’ (157), something which suggests a Malvolio tilting in the direction of decorum.<sup>12</sup> For Lamb, Bensley ‘threw over the part an air of Spanish loftiness. He looked, spake and moved like an old Castilian’ (158) and he evoked Don Quixote: ‘when the decent sobrieties of the character began to give way, and the poison of self-love, in his conceit of the Countess’s affection, gradually to work, you would have thought that the hero of La Mancha in person stood before you’.<sup>13</sup> Lamb confesses ‘I never saw the catastrophe of this character, while Bensley played it, without a kind of tragic interest’ (159). Sylvan Barnet produces evidence to suggest that ‘Lamb’s discussion of Bensley [. . .] is Lamb writing of his own Malvolio, rather than of Bensley’s’ (187), and certainly Bensley’s Malvolio is remembered in a rather different vein by James Boaden:

I never laughed with Bensley but once, and then he represented Malvolio, in which I thought him perfection. Bensley had been a soldier, yet his stage walk eternally reminded you of the ‘*one, two, three, hop*’ of the dancing-master; this scientific progress of legs, in yellow stockings, most villainously cross-gartered, with a horrible laugh of ugly conceit to top the whole rendered him Shakespeare’s Malvolio at all points.

(Boaden, Vol. I, 124)

However, Bensley was best known for serious roles, and this plus the ‘grotesque’ element of his performances (Barnet 185) may have created a serio-comic mixture of a Malvolio.

Bensley’s Malvolio had the good fortune to play, from 1785 on, alongside the highly regarded Viola of Dora Jordan. Jordan was a comic actress, a particular favourite in breeches parts, but she also found pathos in the role, and won Charles Lamb over with her performance of spontaneity, particularly during her ‘Patience on a monument’ speech (2.4.106ff.; Lamb 155): Jordan ‘used no rhetoric in her passion; or it was nature’s own rhetoric, most legitimate then, when it seemed altogether without rule or law’ and the speech

was no set speech, that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line to make up the music [. . .] but, when she had declared her sister’s history to be a ‘blank,’ and that she ‘never told her love,’ there was a pause, as if the story had ended – and then the image of the ‘worm in the bud’ came up as a new

<sup>12</sup> Lamb 157. Kemble played Malvolio 19 March, 13, 21 May 1789 (Van Lennep Part 5, Vol. II, 1138, 1154, 1157).

<sup>13</sup> Spanishness later became a regular feature of nineteenth-century Malvolios.

suggestion – and the heightened image of ‘Patience’ still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. (Lamb 155)

The *Public Advertiser* (16 November 1785) also approved Jordan’s Viola which it found ‘serious, gentle, tender and sentimental’. Meanwhile Boaden, in his biography of Jordan, claims ‘the mere melody of her utterance brought tears into the eyes’ and Viola’s ‘passion had never so modest and enchanting an interpreter’ (Boaden, Vol. I, 76). Boaden also quotes Joshua Reynolds’s verdict that Jordan’s Viola ‘combines *feeling* with sportive effect, and does as much by the music of her *melancholy* as the music of her *laugh*’ (Vol. I, 221). Given all this musicality, and the fact that Jordan was famous for her singing ability, it is not surprising that this Viola also sang.

Several images of Jordan in the role of Viola survive. A painting by Hoppner has Jordan as Cesario in a hussar’s high hat and regimental coat, but with delicate, feminine features, whilst an illustration by Henry Bunbury of the duel scene accentuates the ample proportions of Jordan’s bosom and hips to such an extent that it seems impossible that her Cesario could have passed for a boy; nevertheless, it was presumably in a gesture towards a realistic presentation of twins that, on 10 February 1790, Jordan’s brother, George Bland, played Sebastian.<sup>14</sup>

This was the period when many traditional comic routines were developed around the playing of the revelry of 2.3; for example, William Dunlap remembers with enjoyment that:

The picture presented, when the two knights are discovered with their pipes and potations, as exhibited by Dodd and Palmer, is ineffaceable [. . . Dodd’s] thin legs in scarlet stockings, his knees raised nearly to his chin, by placing his feet on the front cross-piece of the chair (the degraded drunkards being seated with a table, tankards, pipes, and candles, between them), a candle in one hand and pipe in the other, endeavouring in vain to bring the two together; while, in representing the swaggering Sir Toby, Palmer’s gigantic limbs outstretched seemed to indicate the enjoyment of that physical superiority which nature had given him. (cited in Sprague 6)

<sup>14</sup> See Van Lennep Part 5, Vol. II, 1226. Other siblings playing Viola and Sebastian include: Mrs Henry Siddons (Harriet Murray) and William Murray (1815); Ellen and Fred Terry (Irving 1884); Teresa and Heron Carvic (Wolfitt 1937); twins performed in Owen (1942) when Marjorie Matthews played Viola and her twin sister, Joan Salberg, played Sebastian, an effect echoed in 1986 when in Armfield’s filmed production Gillian Jones played Viola and Sebastian, with her twin sister, Elspeth Jones, standing in as Sebastian for some shots in 5.1.

Long term it was John Philip Kemble's production of *Twelfth Night* which had the most significant impact, although Kemble built on the work of, for example, David Garrick, whose production of *Twelfth Night* is partly documented in Bell's Shakespeare edition. Kemble's published promptbook records the results of over twenty years' work on the play: cuts, additions, erasures of inconsistencies, as well as his decision to reverse the opening two scenes of the play, an arrangement which has proved enduringly attractive to directors, particularly those wanting to open the proceedings with a tremendous storm.<sup>15</sup> Kemble also popularised songs that became perennial favourites, such as 'Which is the properest day to drink?' in 2.3; he restructured the action to produce strong curtains; and he reshaped the multi-focussed opening act so that Viola is more securely the star (Shattuck, 1974, ii). Meanwhile Andrew was built up, Feste cut back, especially his songs, and Antonio's love for Sebastian much edited.<sup>16</sup> Olivia and Viola's exchanges were trimmed, and rendered more decorous. Kemble was particularly careful about regularising Shakespeare's text and, for example, Orsino does not fluctuate between 'count' and 'duke' but is consistently a 'duke'; and Toby is always Olivia's 'uncle', not her 'cousin'. Many of Kemble's adjustments to *Twelfth Night* became standard theatre practice, and could still be seen at work in later productions by, for example, Henry Irving (1884), Frank Benson (1892) and Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1901).<sup>17</sup>

John Liston, who played Malvolio for Kemble in later performances, had only qualified success in the role according to John Genest (Vol. VIII, 227): Liston 'was truly comic' in the letter scene (2.5) and 'when he entered cross-gartered' (3.4), but 'on the whole Malvolio was a part out of his line'. However, the singing Olivias (see Figure 1) and Violas continued to be popular and it seems a logical progression that in 1820 *Twelfth Night* became an opera: Frederick Reynolds adapted the text, and Henry Bishop provided the music.<sup>18</sup> Introduced songs included 'Who is Sylvia' from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and the production featured 'The Masque of Juno and Ceres', which owed something to *The Tempest*. Maria Tree played Viola, a role her sister Ellen Tree/Kean was later to have great success with; while Leigh Hunt admired Maria Tree's performance, the fact he spent thirteen lines of his review salivating over the display of her legs indicates he was not merely interested in her acting.<sup>19</sup> Although the production's Malvolio,

<sup>15</sup> See Schafer, 2006 for further discussion of Kemble's reversal of the opening scenes.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, Introduction to Kemble's published promptbook, 2–3.

<sup>17</sup> The promptbook was also reprinted with corrections and additional cuts.

<sup>18</sup> For more details of operas based on *Twelfth Night* see the Appendix: adaptations (p. 226).

<sup>19</sup> Leigh Hunt, 228. For a detailed consideration of Maria Tree's performance see Laurie Osborne, 1996b.





1 Elizabeth Farren as a lute-playing, singing Olivia.

William Farren, was famous for straightforwardly comic roles, this operatic *Twelfth Night* is also possibly the first production to have staged 4.2, the dark room, with Malvolio visible to the audience, something which, as David Carnegie argues, has profound repercussions in terms of generating sympathy for the character (Carnegie 395; see pp. 44–5).

For most of the nineteenth century *Twelfth Night* was only intermittently popular, although some individuals, such as Samuel Phelps, achieved critical and commercial success with the play. Phelps's 1848 *Twelfth Night* featured Phelps himself as a Malvolio who had a 'frozen calm' and who 'sails about as a sort of iceberg, towering over spray and tumult [. . .] There is condescension in all he does [. . .] His acceptance of his lady's love is quite as approving as it is grateful' (Bayle Bernard, *Weekly Dispatch*, quoted in W. M. Phelps 162). Henry Morley (*Examiner* 24 January 1857) provides more detail: this Malvolio was 'in bearing and attire modelled upon the fashion of the Spaniard, as impassive in his manner as a Spanish king should be', and Phelps took Olivia's comment 'you are sick of self-love, Malvolio' as the key note to the role. Morley comments that 'we are not allowed to suppose for a moment that [. . . Malvolio] loves his mistress' and he 'walks [. . .] in the heaviness of grandeur, with a face grave through very emptiness of all expression. This *Malvolio* stalks blind about the world; his eyes are very nearly covered with their heavy lids, for there is nothing in the world without that is worth noticing, it is enough for him to contemplate the excellence within.' Morley records that 'When locked up as a madman [Malvolio] is sustained by his self-content, and by the honest certainty that he has been notoriously abused' and Phelps's delivery of Malvolio's final line was memorable: 'he is retiring in state without deigning a word to his tormentors' when suddenly 'marching back with as much increase of speed as is consistent with magnificence, he threatens all – including now Olivia in his contempt – "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!"' Although most critical attention was focussed on Phelps's new reading of Malvolio, there was considerable praise for the decision to cut back on traditional comic business which had accrued particularly around 2.3, the drinking scene. The Phelps promptbook (S11) also indicates a significant return in many respects to Shakespeare, as opposed to Kemble.<sup>20</sup>

In 1850 Charles Kean opened the Princess's Theatre with a production of *Twelfth Night* which built on the high reputation of the Viola of Mrs Charles Kean/Ellen Tree.<sup>21</sup> Tree had first appeared in *Twelfth Night* as Olivia, when aged seventeen, but from 1832 she had frequently played Viola, to acclaim in England and the US.<sup>22</sup> In 1840 she played the role for Eliza Vestris at Covent

20 Phelps played Malvolio for many years and reprised the role for Charles Calvert in 1873.

21 Kean's *Twelfth Night* influenced the work of The Meiningen Court Theatre which produced the play in 1872. When they performed later in London (John Osborne 56) *The Times* (1 June 1881) praised the ensemble acting but claimed overall: 'It was artistic, it was picturesque, it was amusing, it was, in brief, everything except Shakespearian.'

22 Cole (331). Tree's appearance as Olivia was in a benefit for her sister Maria Tree.