

## Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: An Introduction for Teachers

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The title *Twelfth Night*<sup>1</sup> is revealing. The twelfth night of Christmas ends a day upon which inhibitions are abandoned and impulses run freely, a day upon which alone you may do “what you will,” a day upon which lords are fools and fools are lords, upon which the extreme is the mean and excess the norm. Hence, the reigning spirit of the day is comic inversion. That spirit, however, reigns only on that day, a day that is only an *interregnum*, an interlude,<sup>2</sup> surrounded on both sides by darkness and constraint. This provides a major clue to the atmosphere of the play, a clue that—if only by hint and allusion at times—we are not allowed to forget. Feste incarnates both the twelfth day festival and that which is ever behind and around it.

Shakespeare's opening scenes are pregnant with the themes that will weave through the rest of the action. The opening scene of *Twelfth Night* is no exception.

The Duke immediately asserts himself to be in love with Olivia. Yet, if one were to take his comments as a whole and their tone, one would have to conclude that she is his object more out of convenient proximity than out of genuine attraction. The Duke is in love with love itself. He is ripe for love. The very prospect of it sends him to extremes of sentiment (I. i. 25-27):

That instant was I turn'd into a Hart,  
And my desires like fell and cruell hounds,  
Ere since pursue me.

His excess of love for Olivia is in actuality an excess of objectless desire for love. Since desire is always desire *of* something, his desire seeks an object. Olivia is the nearest object. However, Olivia does not, and will not, love him. The Duke has deceived himself in his excess about his appropriateness as a lover for Olivia. Hence, there seems to be a necessary connection between ripeness or excess and self-deceit. By the ancient rule of like to like, the Duke in excess of love is drawn to Olivia in excess of mourning (I. i. 38-42).

*Du.* O she that hath a heart of that fine frame  
To pay this debt of loue but to a brother,  
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft  
Hath kill'd the flocke of all affections else  
That liue in her.

The expectation is thus created that Olivia's excess will be as riddled with self-deceit as the Duke's is.

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<sup>1</sup> Citations are to *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (NY, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. V. i. 392, where Feste calls the jest on Malvolio “this Enterlude.” In other words, the jest is an interlude within an interlude, which would be the equivalent here of a play within a play.

Before this expectation can be fulfilled, Viola, who just has been rescued from drowning, appears. Viola's first appearance is constructed as a parallel to Olivia's first appearance (cf. I. ii. 38 ff. to I. v. 36 ff.).<sup>3</sup> Both women are presented as having suffered the death of a brother who is in Heaven<sup>4</sup> or Elysium, but their difference in attitude toward that death is striking. Viola has presumably catechized herself in the way in which Feste catechizes Olivia,<sup>5</sup> but in Viola's case, the catechism has proved more educative. In addition, in Viola's moral character, there is neither self-deceit nor other-deceit; in Olivia's moral character, there are both.

When Viola lands, she converses with the captain (I. ii. 3-7):

*Vio.* What Country (Friends) is this?  
*Cap.* This is Illyria Ladie.  
*Vio.* And what should I do in Illyria?  
My brother he is in Elizium,  
Perchance he is not drown'd.

Two things stand out here. First, the similarity in sound between Illyria and Elysium connects the two in our minds: Illyria, then, is suggested to be a kind of paradise, a kind of heaven on earth.<sup>6</sup> Precisely what kind of paradise it is will not be revealed until later. Second, the actual drowning that is mentioned here will become the basis for a metaphorization of drowning that pervades the play.<sup>7</sup> Drowning is a double-edged metaphor: it can connote either loss of identity (as in submersion and death) or renewal of identity (as in baptism). In *Twelfth Night*, the former prevails more than the latter does.

Viola generously tips the captain (I. ii. 20), and in so doing, she reveals something important about herself. Indeed, one of the very few things with respect to which one can say "always" in Shakespeare's plays is that generous tipping indicates nobility of soul. References to the generosity, not only of Viola, but also of the Duke, Olivia, and Sebastian, abound.<sup>8</sup> In this context of nobility of action, the captain asserts that Orsino is "A noble Duke in nature, as in name" (I. ii. 27). The Duke, then, has a widespread public reputation for nobility. However, that reputation does not seem to square with the private Duke whom we have just seen. That private Duke is beside himself in more than one sense. In addition, the public Duke, as one finds out later, is a good and strong ruler. Therefore, the Duke is publicly noble but privately deficient in some sense. Subsequent events will bring his private aspect into coincidence with his public aspect, which means that these events are a significant educative interlude for the Duke.

The disjunction between the private Duke and the public Duke implicitly invites us to address the problematics of the relationship between appearance and reality, a problematics to which at once Viola explicitly calls attention (I. ii. 51-55):

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<sup>3</sup> It can be no accident that the names "Viola" and "Olivia" are virtual anagrams for each other, except that "Olivia" has an extra "-i-." This excess "-i-" can be construed as the excess of self- or ego-absorption of which the person Olivia needs to be cured.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. I. v. 64-69: "*Clo.* Good Madona, why mournst thou?/ *Ol.* Good Foole, for my brothers death./ *Clo.* I think his soule is in hell, Madona./ *Ol.* I know his soule is in heauen, foole./ *Clo.* The more foole (Madona) to mourne for your/ Brothers soule, being in heauen."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. I. v. 60: "*Clo.* I must catechize you for it Madona."

<sup>6</sup> Cf. I. v. 28 and the references to Malvolio as "sathan."

<sup>7</sup> Except for *The Tempest*, the word "drowned" occurs more frequently in *Twelfth Night* than in any other Shakespearean play.

<sup>8</sup> Viola: I. ii. 56, III. i. 44, III. iv. 340-345; the Duke: I. iv. 41-43, II. iv. 72-74, V. i. 28-45; Olivia: I. v. 284; Sebastian: III. iii. 20-21, IV. i. 19-24. Cf. Anthonio: III. iii. 43.

There is a faire behaiour in thee Captaine,  
And though that nature with a beauteous wall  
Doth oft close in pollution: yet of thee  
I will beleue thou hast a minde that suites  
With this thy faire and outward character.

Virtually as soon as this remark is made by her, Viola, unable to serve Olivia (cf. I. ii. 44-50), resolves to disguise herself as a man (Cesario) in order to serve the Duke. Moreover, in a manner indicative of her maturity, she commits herself to time: "What else may hap, to time I will commit" (I. ii. 64; cf. I. ii. 44-47). Such a commitment to time<sup>9</sup> or life or circumstance is presented in Shakespeare's early comedies as the most meaningful response to the demands that existence places upon us. In so committing herself, Viola demonstrates her strength as a human being.

In the persons of Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew, the basic themes of the play are given further elaboration. In his very first remark, Toby points to Olivia's excess in mourning. We already know that it has been a year since Olivia's father died and almost a year since her brother died.<sup>10</sup> The death-excess of Olivia echoes the love-excess of Orsino: these excesses are somehow very like one another (a likeness suggested especially by the rapidity with which Olivia falls in love with Cesario<sup>11</sup>).

At the same time, there is a contrast between two other excesses, the care-excess of Olivia and the carefree-excess of Toby, two excesses that share—however different they may be in other respects—the same milieu, namely darkness. They share something else too, something that Toby's rich remark that "care's an enemy to life" (I. iii. 4-5) implies: not only is excess of care the enemy of life, but so too is excess of carefreeness, an excess for which Maria reprimands Toby in the name of Olivia.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, since even "the modest limits of order" (I. iii. 10-11) have been suspended since the beginning of the play, the agents of that order will have to see that it is gradually restored. Furthermore, Toby's indignation at the thought of confinement<sup>13</sup> obscures his very true confinement in the dark house of revelry. That is, Toby too is a victim of self-deceit, as Maria clearly sees.<sup>14</sup> Maria also sees basic nobility in Toby's moral character, nobility for which she expresses concern, thereby indicating that in her case, care is not an enemy to life.<sup>15</sup> Maria seems to be one of the most truly free and insightful persons in the play, along with Feste, Viola, and Sebastian. This is manifest in the contrast between her light-handed way of enforcing Olivia's orders and Malvolio's heavy-handed way of doing the same. One can even suggest that her prank on Malvolio is meant to be an education for Toby, an object lesson, so to speak, in moderation, because the dark house of ignorance in which Malvolio finds himself

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. II. iii. 93 (Malvolio as respectful of, but not responsive to, time) and III. iii. 46 (Sebastian as a man of time and knowledge).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. I. ii. 38-43: "*Cap.* A virtuous maid [i.e., Olivia], the daughter of a Count/ That did some twelvemonth since, then leauing her/ In the protection of his sonne, her brother,/ Who shortly also did: for whose deere loue/ (They say) she hath abiur'd the sight/ And company of men."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. I. v. 296 ff.: "[*Oli.*] Even so quickly may one catch...."

<sup>12</sup> I. iii. 10-11: "*Maria.* I, but you must confine your selfe within the modest limits of order."

<sup>13</sup> I. iii. 12-15: "*To.* Confine? Ile confine my selfe no finer then I am; these cloathes are good enough to drinke in, and so be these boots too: and they be not, let them hang themselues in their own straps."

<sup>14</sup> Cf. I. iii. 16: "That quaffing and drinking will undoe you."

<sup>15</sup> This is the first clue to Maria's love for Toby, a love that Feste is the only one to discern. Cf. I. v. 26-28: "*Clo.* ...if sir *Toby* would leaue drinking, then wert as witty a piece of *Eues* flesh, as any in *Illyria*."

incarcerated<sup>16</sup> is only a graphic embodiment of the dark house in which Toby himself is also confined. Even more than that—as Feste realizes along with Maria, and as subsequent events allow one to infer—it is an education for Olivia and Orsino as well, and their expressions of concern for Malvolio<sup>17</sup> reflect their dawning awareness of that.

In addition to her freedom and insight, Maria's wit is evident throughout the conversation with Sir Andrew (I. iii. 52 ff.). Sir Andrew is being deceived by Toby into thinking that he is a suitor to Olivia, and his deceit in this matter shows—as will be confirmed in Olivia's later conversation with Feste (I. v.)—that self-deceit has reached virtually epidemic proportions in Illyria.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, when Toby asks, "Is it a world to hide vertues in?" (I. iii. 123), he strikes one keynote of the play. Whether or not it is a world in which virtues *should be* hidden, certainly it is a world in which virtues *are* hidden, something that is characteristic of the twelfth night festivities, in which vices are elevated and virtues are denigrated, in which the world's values are—if only temporarily—inverted, and in which Taurus governs the legs and thighs instead of governing the neck, as it should (cf. I. iii. 128-131). This inversion of values is manifested in the ambiguities of sexuality—especially the pervasive homoeroticism—that characterize the play.<sup>19</sup>

The homoeroticism rises to the surface in the Duke's expression of his growing affection for Cesario (Viola)<sup>20</sup> and in the expression of Cesario (Viola in *man's* clothing, i.e., to all appearances a man) of his (her) desire to marry the Duke.<sup>21</sup> One might even say that the education of Olivia and Orsino moves from autoeroticism through homoeroticism to heteroeroticism. This seems to be part of the reason for Malvolio's ineducability, namely that in neither the inverted world of twelfth night nor the non-inverted world of every other night, does he have a homoerotic educator, and so his apparent leap directly from autoeroticism to heteroeroticism is in actuality only a shift from one level of autoeroticism to another.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> IV. ii. 48-49: "*Mal.* I say this house is as darke as Ignorance, thogh Ignorance were as darke as hell." Cf. III. iv. 138: "*To.* Wee'l have him in a darke room & bound." Also, cf. IV. ii. 31-47: "*Mal.* Sir *Topas*...they have layde mee here in hideous darknesse. *Clown.* Fye,...sayst thou that house is darke. *Mal.* As hell sir *Topas.* *Clo.* ...yet complainest thou of obstruction? *Mal.* ...this house is darke? *Clo.* Madman thou errest: I say there is no darknesse but ignorance...." Finally, cf. V. i. 360 ff.: "[*Mal.*] Why have you suffer'd me to be imprison'd, / Kept in a darke house...? Tell me why?"

<sup>17</sup> Cf. esp. V. i. 389 ("*Oli.* Alas poore Foole, how haue they baffel'd thee?") and 399 ("*Du.* Pursue him, and entreate him to a peace.").

<sup>18</sup> Consider the following:

I. i. 24: "*Du.* Me thought she purg'd the ayre of pestilence."

I. iii. 3-4: "*Sir To.* What a plague meanes my Neece to take the death of her brother thus?"

I. v. 296-299: "*Ol.* Even so quickly may one catch the plague? / Me thinkes I feel this youths perfections / With an invisible, and subtle stealth / To creepe in at mine eyes."

II. iii. 57-59: "*To.* A contagious breath. *An.* Very sweet and contagious ifaith. *To.* To heare by the nose, it is dulcet in contagion."

III. iv. 132-133: "*To.* His very genius hath taken the infection of the deuce man."

<sup>19</sup> Only in a community in which sexual identity is strong could these ambiguities be explored fully, and only in such a community could men play women's roles without eliciting laughter and/or embarrassment.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. I. iv. 4-5 ("[*Val.*] ...he hath known you but three dayes, and already you are no stranger."), 11 ("*Duke.* Who saw *Cesario* hoa?"), and 13-15 ("[*Duke.*] *Cesario,* / Thou knowst no lesse, but all: I have unclasp'd / To thee the booke euen of my secret soule.").

<sup>21</sup> I. iv. 44-46: "*Uio.* Ile do my best / To woe your Lady: yet a barrefull strife, / Who ere I woe, my selfe would be his wife."

<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on education as homoerotic is Socratic-Platonic in spirit.

Finally, Olivia and Feste appear. Feste has been away from his duties for quite some time.<sup>23</sup> Precisely why he has been absent never is revealed explicitly, although there is evidence for conjecture. Since he has been in the household for two generations,<sup>24</sup> perhaps he is weary of his constant fooling, or perhaps—and this seems more correct—his age and experience have given him a deep enough insight into his function and into those for whom he functions so that he is present only when he is needed, i.e., only in a time of lawlessness and/or crisis, a disordered condition of the removal of which he correctly sees himself as an instrument. In other words, twelfth day sunrise calls him forth, and on sunrise of the following day, he decorously recedes.

From the first, Feste's wit and perceptiveness are evident, as are Olivia's goodness and kindness in the way in which she allows Feste to speak to her and to reveal her own excess and self-deceit to her.

Malvolio's attitude toward Feste is in marked contrast to Olivia's: Malvolio describes Feste as "a barren rascall" (I. v. 82) and as "no better than the fooles Zanies" (I. v. 87). Of course, Malvolio is Olivia's steward, and his moral character—as Olivia herself indicates—is full of self-love, so that her beneficent tone toward him is also an indication of her basic nobility, however much that may be currently overlaid with excess. Malvolio too is excessive: his self-estimation is far out of proportion to his nature, station, and abilities, i.e., he appears to himself as different from what he actually is, and he suffers from a degree of self-deception that is bigger than that of anyone else in the play, a self-deception of which Feste is quick to take advantage, but not in an unkind way.

Olivia and Feste become allied in kindness toward Toby.<sup>25</sup> Just as now "the foole shall looke to the madman" (the madman being not only the drunken Toby, but also the approaching Malvolio, in whose direction Feste is undoubtedly looking), so too will he later look to the madman Malvolio in the dark prison.

Finally, Viola as Cesario enters to court Olivia for the Duke, and the situation in this fifth scene is erotically parallel to that in the fourth scene, except that there homoeroticism was burgeoning into heteroeroticism,<sup>26</sup> while here apparent heteroeroticism obscures a substratum of homoeroticism that is burgeoning into genuine heteroeroticism.<sup>27</sup>

The situation now is this: Orsino loves Olivia, Olivia loves Cesario (Viola), and Viola loves Orsino, a situation that may be presented schematically, again using the principle of like to like on the basis of which one would love what is loved by one's beloved, thus:

Olivia }	}	love	Cesario (= Viola)
Orsino ]			

<sup>23</sup> I. v. 3-5 ("Ma. Nay, either tell me where thou hast bin...: my Lady will hang thee for thy absence.") and 17 ("Ma. Yet you will be hang'd for being so long absent.").

<sup>24</sup> cf. II. iv. 13-14: "Cur. Feste the Iester my Lord, a foole that the Ladie *Oliviaes* father tooke much delight in."

<sup>25</sup> I. v. 135-137: "[OL.] ...go looke after him [i.e., Toby]. Clo. He is but mad yet Madona, and the foole shall looke to the madman."

<sup>26</sup> I. iv. 32-41, esp. 37, between the Duke and Cesario (Viola).

<sup>27</sup> I. v. between the Duke and Cesario (Viola) [Cesario-Sebastian].

The complications of appearances thus continue to multiply, but the solution is already implicit: if Viola should become two persons, one female and one male, then a resolution would be at hand.

Therefore, it is precisely at this point (II. i) that Sebastian appears to convert the apparently two Viola into an actual two.<sup>28</sup> With Sebastian “bound to the Count Orsino’s Court” (II. i. 40), not only does one see that resolution already in progress, but also one sees that Sebastian’s nobility is every inch the equal of Viola’s nobility.<sup>29</sup>

The return to Viola is not as painful for us as it otherwise might be. Even though her perplexity at the realization that Olivia has fallen in love with her (II. ii. 24) causes her to lament the evils of appearance, “Disguise, I see thou art a wickednesse” (II. ii. 29), and even though she is perplexed at her own twoness (II. ii. 38-41<sup>30</sup>), she asserts (II. ii. 42-43):

O time, thou must untangle this, not I,  
It is too hard a knot for me t’untie.

In other words, she resolutely commits herself anew to appearance and to that which reveals appearance for what it actually is, namely time.

Here it is apposite to mention another characteristic of the twelfth night spirit, namely its suspension of time. This suspension of time accounts for the phenomenon that the action of the play takes both three days (I. iv. 5) and three months (V. i. 96-103). The twelfth night spirit makes three months seem to be three days, and it is only in the final moments, when time resumes again and unties the knot to which Viola refers that the apparently three days are seen as actually three months. It is Feste’s singing that mirrors the ever-increasing encroachment of time on the festivities, which makes explicit the undertone of sadness and tragedy that has implicitly been there since the melancholy music with which the play opened.<sup>31</sup>

One can see this already in Feste’s “love song” (II. iii. 50-55):

What is loue, tis not heereafter,  
Present mirth, hath present laughter:  
What’s to come, is still unsure.  
In delay there lies no plentie,  
Then come kisse me sweet and twentie:  
Youths a stufte will not endure.

This is a peculiar love song, because it is a song that reveals the reality behind twelfth night love. Twelfth night is total presentness—pastless and futureless—neither herebefore nor hereafter, a timeless present surrounded by uncertainty, to be enjoyed while it lasts without, however, losing the awareness that it does not last long. In a way, what characterizes the tenuous love and youth of twelfth night characterizes what is beyond it: life too is “a stufte will not endure,” since death is an omnipresent shadow

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. V. i. 236-238 (“*Ant.* How have you made diuision of yourselfe,/ An apple cleft in two, is not more twin/ Then these two creatures.”) and 229 (“*Du.* One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons.”).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. III. iii. 46, where Sebastian is allied with time and knowledge.

<sup>30</sup> “[*Vi.*] As I am man,/ My state is desperate for my maisters love:/ As I am woman (now alas the day)/ What thriftlesse sighes shall poor *Olivia* breath?”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. I. i. 7: “[*Duke.*] That straine agen, it had a dying fall.”

that gives human existence a somber character.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, from Feste's "love song" one can infer that however illusory and ephemeral the twelfth night spirit is, still it represents something precious, namely life in the raw, made more precious by the death and darkness that surround it.

Malvolio's intrusion here is jarring, and so the plan to deceive and gull him is hatched (II. iii. 131 ff.). Malvolio as the embodiment of excessive order and restraint represents a kind of death in life,<sup>33</sup> or a wish to suppress even allowed unrestraint that he expresses in his wish to suppress even an allowed fool.<sup>34</sup>

Next, the dim beginnings of the Duke's growth in awareness and Feste's sensitivity to that growth are suggested. The Duke requests to hear again the old song that eased his passion (II. iv. 5-6), a song that used to be sung by (II. iv. 52-53)

The Spinsters and the Knitters in the Sun,  
And the free maides that weave their thred with bones.

I would suggest that "the free maides" are meant to evoke the three maids, i.e., the Fates, who alone are free, spinning out the fabric of human life until that fabric becomes a shroud.

There seems, then, to be a burgeoning awareness in the Duke that the freedom of twelfth night is a spurious freedom, so that he now begins to yearn, if only dimly, for "the old age" (II. iv. 56), for the time before twelfth night, for the time before he became overwhelmed in his private life by an excess of sentiment. Feste senses this new awareness in the Duke and tries to foster it with his song (II. iv. 60-71), a tough ballad dealing with the harsh reality of death.<sup>35</sup> Feste further reinforces his lesson with a warning,<sup>36</sup> after which—perhaps realizing that the Duke is not quite ready for what he has said, a conclusion that the Duke's confusion justifies (II. iv. 77)—Feste departs abruptly. Of course, he is bidden to leave, but that bidding does not account for the abruptness of his departure, because on the other occasions on which he is bidden to leave, he does everything that he can to prolong the departure (I. v. 37 ff., esp. 37, 39, 52, 109-110, 133, and 135-137).

The ensuing conversation between the Duke and Viola (II. iv. 84 ff.) shows that the Duke has relapsed. When Viola tries to reveal herself obliquely to him, she sees that he is not ready yet for the revelation, so she changes the subject.<sup>37</sup> The Duke will not regain his former toughness until he is recalled to himself by the arrest of Anthonio (V. i. 50-98) and the betrothal of Olivia. As a reaction to his excess of sentiment, at first, he exhibits an excess of toughness (V. i. 122-180), but that is mitigated quickly by the appearance of Sebastian (V. i. 221 ff.).

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<sup>32</sup> Toby's growing realization of this is indicated when he sings, "*O the twelfe day of December*" (II. iii. 85) and then, in concert with Feste, railingly sings at Malvolio snatches of a song, one of whose themes is the inevitability of human mortality. Cf. II. iii. 105-106: "*To. But I will never dye. Clo. Sir Toby there you lye.*"

<sup>33</sup> Cf. II. iii. 88-93, in which Malvolio reveals that he is timebound. By that, I mean that he is respectful only of artificial or conventional time, but insensitive and unresponsive to natural time.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. I. v. 92, where Olivia calls Feste an allowed fool.

<sup>35</sup> The clown's song begins "*Come away, come away death.*"

<sup>36</sup> II. iv. 78-83: "*Clo. Now the melancholly God protect thee...for thy minde is a very Opall.... Farewell.*"

<sup>37</sup> II. iv. 128-130: "*Vio. I am all the daughters of my Fathers house,/ And all the brothers too: and yet I know not./ Sir, shall I to this Lady?*"

The second act concludes (II. v.) with the beautifully executed prank on Malvolio who interprets what he will from the ambiguous letter that Maria left for him to find.<sup>38</sup> On the crest of the prank's wave, Toby expresses his fondness for Maria<sup>39</sup> in a way that presages their marriage in the fifth act: when Maria asks him whether he will follow her, he responds, "To the gates of Tartar, thou most excellent diuell of wit" (II. v. 194-195). In other words, he will follow her until death brings them to the gates of hell, i.e., until "death do them part." Therefore, Act II ends with an implied impending wedding (cf. II. v. 170).

Because of Feste's conversation with her, Viola is able to assert (III. i. 60-67):

This fellow is wise enough to play the foole,  
And to do that well, craves a kind of wit:  
He must observe their mood on whom he iests,  
The quality of persons, and the time:  
And like the Haggard, checke every Feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practice,  
As full of labour as a Wise-mans Art:  
For folly that he wisely shewes, is fit.

In other words, although Feste appears foolish, he is possessed of understanding and wisdom regarding human nature. He is also, as Viola indicates (III. i. 63), the person in the play who is most sensitive to the requirements of time. As Viola's moral character enables her to discern, he is a true touchstone.

In the conversation between Cesario (Viola) and Olivia, one now sees Olivia's burgeoning awareness of time and its responsibility,<sup>40</sup> an awareness that grows until she can perceive her own excess or madness (III. iv. 17-18):

I am as madde as hee,  
If sad and me[r]ry madnesse equall bee.

This will be echoed by Sebastian after his puzzling encounter with Feste (IV. i. 28): "Are all the people mad?" he asks.

The more the madness spreads, the more one sees the need for twelfth night to dissipate, a dissipation that is strongly signaled by the arrest of Anthonio (III. iv. 317 ff.), namely by the resumption of law and order. The arrest scene is striking, because it is perhaps the only time in Shakespearean comedy when one sees police officers who are competent, i.e., police officers who arrest the right person for the right reasons. This scene serves a multiple function. First, it indicates how well the Duke rules, because the efficiency of law enforcement is derivative from the efficiency of the person from whom

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<sup>38</sup> This might also be taken as an oblique reference to Shakespeare's future critics. As such, it would point to the difficulty of discerning Shakespeare's true meaning, a meaning that is intentionally obscured so that only a very careful and close reading of the text will reveal it, but also so that every individual, whatever his or her capacity, may derive something from it that is congruent with his or her own perspective. Furthermore, it advises the critic to be free from narrow seriousness, from blind presuppositions, and from empty formality (cf. II. v. 111-112). Also, cf. III. iv. 130-131: "*Fa*. If this [i.e., Malvolio's behavior] were plaid vpon a stage now, I could condemne it as an improbable fiction."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. II. iii. 173-174.

<sup>40</sup> III. i. 129 ("*Ol*. Why then me thinkes 'tis time to smile agen.") and 134 ([*after the clock strikes*] "The clocke vpbraides me with the waste of time").

the law's authority is derived, namely the ruler.<sup>41</sup> Second, it reveals graphically that the human community cannot sustain an unending twelfth night: law is required. Third, it reveals to Viola that her brother Sebastian is both alive and in Illyria, and with this revealed, the way is clear for her marriage to the Duke. Therefore, parallel to Act II, Act III ends with an implied impending wedding.

At the beginning of the fourth act, in the conversation between Feste and Sebastian, Feste articulates the philosophical principle that informs twelfth night festivities (IV. i. 10): "Nothing that is so, is so." He repeats it in its obverse form when he meets Toby in the "prison" (IV. ii. 17-18): "that that is, is: so I being M. Parson, am M. Parson; for what is that, but that? and is, but is?"<sup>42</sup> This is ruthless Heracleiteanism of the first order, and it must be restrained. The restraint is brought about when it becomes clear that the flux, however much it may free humans in certain ways, at bottom imprisons them as much as does excessive stolidity, i.e., the restraint is brought about when it becomes clear that the revelers share Malvolio's dark house of ignorance, a house no more dark than Olivia's or Orsino's, for all the apparent brightness of their houses.

Malvolio's inability to approve of vulgar Pythagoreanism (IV. ii. 52-62), which is merely the flux doctrine with respect to souls, arises from his inability to respond to the twelfth night spirit, a spirit that, however licentious (i.e., improperly and excessively lacking in restraint), is amenable to education and proper restraint, as opposed to the improper and excessive restraint that Malvolio, in the darkness of his ignorance, represents. When Feste accedes to Malvolio's request for ink, paper, and *light*, it is Feste's last attempt to bring light into the darkness of Malvolio's intellect, an attempt that fails.

The image of Malvolio in the dungeon is not lost on the other persons (cf. V. i. 307-308): they see that it is "A naturall Perspective, that is, and is not" (V. i. 230), i.e., it is a mimesis of nature as an admixture of being and non-being, of light/knowledge/fullness and darkness/ignorance/emptiness. In other words, it is a true mirror (cf. V. i. 280), one that reveals to persons their own inner selves (cf. V. i. 21, 158, and 264-268) and allows them to leave the illusory twelfth night spirit in order to restore reality, in order to restore time.

However, as Feste makes clear, time's "whirlegigge...brings in his reuenges" (V. i. 395-396). When the illusion of the twelfth night fades away, Feste—the knowing ignorant or the dark enlightener—is left alone with the reality of his song (V. i. 409-428). In addition, hearing the song, one realizes that what has occurred can occur only on twelfth night, "*But that's all one, our Play is done*" and "*the raine it raineth every day,*" i.e., every day but twelfth night. Therefore, the appearance of twelfth night gives way to the tragic, timebound existence of which Feste is the major voice.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The same reasoning would apply to Olivia: cf. Sebastian's remark at IV. iii. 18-23.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. II. iii. 6-7 and III. i. 143-146.

<sup>43</sup> In Shakespeare's early comedies, one sees that the appearance of comedy is not the same as its reality, i.e., that under the comic surface is an implied tragic universe. For example, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the chorus of Balthasar's song asserts, "*Then sigh not so, but let them goe,/ And be you blithe and bonnie,/ Conuerting all your sounds of woe,/ Into hey nony nony*" (II. iii. 70-73). This, then, is the role of comedy: to convert the sounds of woe into laughter. This is re-echoed in the song from *As You Like It*: "*Come hither, come hither, come hither:/ Heere shall he see no enemy,/ But Winter and rough Weather*" (II. v. 7-9). The realization at which one arrives from Shakespeare's early comedies is that the comic events that we observe are the Spring in a tragic existence that is represented by Winter or rough weather. As the comedies progress, then, they begin more and more to assume tragic overtones. The supreme early statement of this is *Twelfth Night*.