Malvolio, Viola, and the Question of Instrumentality: Defining Providence in *Twelfth Night*

by Maurice Hunt

The Elizabethan puritan George Gifford (ordained 1578) and the generally conforming protestant Richard Hooker represent notable positions in a late sixteenth-century debate within the English Church over whether Providence operates on humankind mainly through primary cause or secondary agent.\(^1\) Controversy in-

\(^1\) The phrase "generally conforming protestant" rather than "Anglican" more accurately locates Hooker's position in the Elizabethan English Church. Patrick Collinson, in *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), remarks that "Anglicanism," which was a term unknown to the sixteenth century... as an indication of a distinct system of divinity... is best avoided altogether" in descriptions of Elizabethan protestantism (13). Peter Lake, in *Anglicans and Puritans?* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), concludes that Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* "was certainly not a measured defence of an 'anglicanism' that did not yet exist" (145)—a judgment echoed by Diarmaid MacCulloch in *The Later Reformation in England 1547–1603* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 99–100. Noting that "Anglican" was a nineteenth-century coinage, Collinson, in "A Comment: Concerning the Name Puritan," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980): 483–88, admits that "it is hard to find a single term of convenience to take its ['Anglican's'] place. 'Protestant' will have to serve for many purposes. Otherwise we must talk as circumstances require of conformists and nonconformists, of 'the godly,' of formalists, of divines, ministers, preachers" (485). Lake has shown that Hooker was in several ways both less and more than a conformist (145–238, esp. 145–46, 151–60, 166–73, 182–86, 225–30); thus Hooker's conforming protestantism requires an adverbial qualifier such as "generally." Unlike the word "Anglican," "puritan" was a term used as early as 1566, during the vestments controversy, to describe a certain kind of "godly, precise" English protestant. (See Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* [London: Hambledon Press, 1983], 98). Nevertheless, Collinson points out that "it should never be forgotten that 'Puritan' began life as a term of more or less vulgar abuse and continued as a weapon of increasingly sophisticated stigmatisation... The persistently pejorative history of the term Puritan leads us to a paradox which makes nonsense of any scheme or categorisation for which 'Anglican' and 'Puritan' are hard and fast entities. The more complete the social acceptance and internalisation of the religion and lifestyle consistent with what we know as Puritan-
volved not so much an either/or choice as a question of degree (that to which Providence works mainly through primary cause or secondary instrument). When the stress falls on secondary agency, the ability of men and women to determine their destinies freely is greater, with providential deity known non-specifically through agents such as time and nature. In the other case, closely associated with Elizabethan puritanism, Providence works more immediately upon mortals, with a de-emphasis upon the importance of those persons or natural forces helping to create the design of God. Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* reprises this controversy within the English Church, contrasting, in the dramatic portraits of Malvolio and Viola, a caricature of a viewpoint represented by puritans such as Gifford with a form of an opinion eloquently expressed by Hooker. Portraying puritanical Malvolio’s notion of Providence as self-serving, Shakespeare satirizes his character’s belief in the unmediated, unearned, material blessing of the elect. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare endorses a more removed, less easily knowable deity who works through secondary agents such as the sea to reward individuals who have had to earn their blessing by selflessly serving others.

Comprehending what might be called a puritan Providence in *Twelfth Night* depends upon a grasp of the extent of puritan and anti-puritan motifs in the play. This range, associated with the character of Malvolio, is greater than previous critics have supposed. “Marry sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan” (II. iii. 140), Maria asserts in an utterance that has attracted critical commentary. Most critics have followed the lead of William P. Holden in understanding Maria to be saying that Malvolio “is somewhat like a Puritan.” But recently Paul Siegel, citing the usage of the phrase “a kind of Puritan” in John Marston’s *What You Will* (1601), has argued that Maria is not qualifying Malvolio’s puritanism but indicating that he “is an adherent of one of the Puritan sects.”

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he is' is not only a denial of the sincerity of Malvolio's religious professions, but also an allusion to the frequently voiced idea of the devil taking the form of a Puritan."5 Nevertheless, when Sir Andrew and Sir Toby question Malvolio's status as puritan, Maria's complete response undercuts Siegel's claim: "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 swaths: the best persuaded of himself, so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work" (II. iii. 140–53). Despite Siegel's argument, Maria sketches the character of a pompous egotist, finally constant to no religion but his own self-advancement, who now and then is a kind of puritan. Thus one must make a distinction. In the character of Malvolio, Shakespeare caricatures certain puritanical traits; he does not religiously stereotype the man as a whole. Still, the playwright's portrayal of Malvolio's anti-festive nature; precision in matters of conduct; somber, pretentious latinate diction; self-righteousness; and hostility to bear-baiting (II. v. 6–9) quickly matched certain traits of Olivia's steward with stereotypes of the puritan in Elizabethan playgoers' minds.6

When Maria calls Malvolio "a kind of Puritan," Sir Andrew Aguecheek exclaims, "O, if I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog" (II. iii. 140). One suspects that hating puritans gives Sir Andrew opportunities to declare his ridiculous knightly "valor." Hearing Fabian maintain that only "some laudable attempt, either of valour or policy" on Sir Andrew's part can regain Olivia's imagined affection for the knight, Sir Andrew replies, "And't be any way, it must be with valour, for policy I hate: I had as lief be a Brownist as a politician" (III. ii. 27–31). In the words of G. L. Kittredge, a Brownist was a "follower of Robert Browne, an extreme Puritan, founder of the Congregational

5 Siegel 218. See Holden 114 for Elizabethan stereotypes of the puritan as devil.
form of church government.” 7 Although, strictly speaking, one should term a Brownist a separatist rather than a puritan, English conformists resembled their monarch in considering a Brownist a puritan. 8 In Basilikon Doron, published in 1603 but written in the late sixteenth century, King James wrote, “Of this special sect I principally mean, when I speak of Puritans; divers of them, as Browne, Penrie, and others, having at sundry times come in Scotland, to sow their popple amongst us.” 9 In Sir Andrew’s limited vocabulary, the word “Brownist” is an insult—one that gets linked in the knight’s shallow understanding with policy. J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik note that Fabian, by the word “policy,” means “’clever stratagem,’” whereas Sir Andrew misunderstands it as “‘despicable intrigue’” (85). Fabian’s intention lies in prompting the fop to make a fool of himself, either through a swashbuckling act of which he is incapable or through a dull-witted scheme. Sir Andrew’s limited knowledge of the connotations of words commits him to choosing the alternative—a deed of valor which he is ill-equipped to perform. Choosing valor entails meeting the mighty romantic adversary into which Sir Toby’s report transforms Cesario. Knee-knocking fear becomes Sir Andrew’s comic punishment for misconstruing the word “policy.”

Granted these lapses, one does not take too seriously Sir Andrew’s notion of puritanism; still, it represents a stereotype held by a growing number of Shakespeare’s countrymen. The association of puritanism and Italianate policy was fast becoming a cliche. In The Picture of a Puritane (1605), a dialogue between a protestant and a puritan (slanted against the latter character), Oliver Ormerod has the protestant tell the puritan, “For it is not unknown to any that hath had any dealing with you in worldly affairs, how crafty and subtle you are in all your dealing.” 10 In this context, it is worth noting that Ben Jonson in Bartholomew Fair (1614) gave the name Dame Purecraft to one of his stage puritans.

Comically, Malvolio, the puritanical character of Twelfth Night, con-

7 Twelfth Night, ed. George Lyman Kittredge and rev. by Irving Ribner, The Kittredge Shakespeares (Waltham, MA: Ginn, 1966), 59. For the puritanical cast of Brownism, see G. B. Harrison, A Jacobean Journal, Being a Record of Those Things Most Talked of During the Years 1607 to 1610 (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1946), 176.

8 For the identification of separatists as puritans, see Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 22, 76.


10 Qtd. in Sasek, 248.
forms to Sir Andrew’s stereotypic view; he prides himself on his knowledge and practice of policy. Shakespeare reverses the stock sixteenth-century identification of policy as a “bad” Catholic (Italian/Spanish) practice by having Maria, whose name has Catholic overtones (especially strong when heard in the context of the play’s allusions to the Annunciation and Madonna), justly practice upon the puritanical Malvolio, punishing the politician who delights in secret codes. Part of Maria’s gulling of Malvolio involves Shakespeare’s evocation of a narrow, self-serving stereotype of Providence as the economic reward of the chosen. But first, however, a major obstacle to her scheme’s success must be overcome—the difference in rank that might discourage Malvolio from thinking that a Countess would marry a steward. Vainly believing that he and Olivia are attracted to each other, Malvolio blames Chance for placing him too low in the social register to win his prize. “’Tis but fortune, all is fortune,” Malvolio sadly meditates, “Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion” (II. v. 23–26). His conviction that Fortune rules him reveals, in a gloomy moment, his doubts about destiny. Not surprisingly, Malvolio’s vanity—and memory—help to dispel these doubts. He recalls that “The Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe” (II. v. 39–40). More important, his egotism accepts the love letter’s cue that a deity labors to reward him with a lady and her fortune.

The verse of the forged letter that Malvolio reads aloud names the father of the gods:

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\begin{align*}
&\textit{Jove knows I love;} \\
&\textit{But who?} \\
&\textit{Lips, do not move,} \\
&\textit{No man must know.}
\end{align*}
\]

(II. v. 98–101)

Fooled into believing that Olivia loves him, Malvolio thanks his stars, his horoscope, for his happiness, quickly qualifying his belief in astrological determinism by adding the name of the god appearing in the letter: “Jove and my stars be praised!” (II. v. 173–74). And when


\[\text{12 Evans conjectures that Malvolio’s “Jove” may possibly be “a replacement for an original God, to comply with the anti-profanity statute of 1606” (423).}\]
he reads that Olivia would have him continually smile in her presence, he concludes, "Jove, I thank thee, I will smile" (II. v. 178). That Shakespeare intended Malvolio's behavior to manifest a certain irresoluteness, even error, in religious belief is indicated by Maria's remark in act III. Referring to Malvolio's yellow stockings, cross-gartering, and silly grinning, she tells her fellow plotters, "If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourselves into stitches, follow me. Yond gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings!" (III. ii. 65–70). Kittredge notes that, by the turn of the sixteenth century, "cross-gartering was a fashion associated only with old men and Puritans, while Queen Elizabeth disliked the color yellow because it appeared in the flag of Spain" (48). By being "vainly" cross-gartered "like a pedant that keeps a school i' th' church" (III. ii. 72–73), puritanical Malvolio becomes more strongly associated with the misuse of religious institutions. Maria implies that her forged letter, which has been called an epistle, amounts to a religious tract testing the spiritual faith of its reader. "Turned heathen," Malvolio—not surprisingly—fails the test.

Initially, the code of the letter—"M.O.A.I. doth sway my life" (II. v. 109)—obsesses Malvolio, who instinctively loves craft and guile. William Haller has described the extent to which early puritans such as John Machin and Lord Harington used private ciphers and hieroglyphs in their diaries to record their spiritual pilgrimage.13 Malvolio's egotistical fixation on the enigma in Maria's letter may constitute Shakespeare's satire of this self-important practice. More obviously, his juggling the alphabetical letters of the code to suggest his own name reflects conformists' accounts of puritans willfully twisting the literal sense of biblical passages to create meanings justifying their narrow beliefs. Hooker believed that puritanism sprang from a psychological disorder, an "unquiet wit of mind."14 In The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, he judges that this disorder drives puritans to "read the Scripture, [that] they may think that every thing soundeth towards the advancement of that discipline," and to abuse "the word of God, whether it be by misconstruction of the sense or by falsification of the words."15 "M.O.A.I." Malvolio repeats, realizing that the letters do not

appear in this sequence in his name; "and yet, to crush this a little," he adds, "it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name" (II. v. 139–41). Malvolio's "crushing"—his rearranging—of letters mirrors a solipsistic puritan practice. As he labors to make the four letters spell his name, the hidden tricksters crack the following jests:

_Mal._ "M"—Malvolio! "M"! Why, that begins my name!
_Fabian._ Did not I say he would work it out? the cur is excellent at faults.
_Mal._ "M"—But then there is no consonancy in the sequel; that suffers under probation: "A" should follow, but "O" does.
_Fabian._ And "O" shall end, I hope.
_Sir To._ Ay, or I'll cudgel him, and make him cry "O"!
_Mal._ And then "I" comes behind.
_Fabian._ Ay, and you had any eye behind you, you might see more detraction at your heels than fortunes before you.

(II. v. 126–38)

The lameness of Fabian's and Sir Toby's alternative reading of the initials serves to emphasize the arbitrariness of Malvolio's willful interpretation.

Concerning Olivia's sending Sir Toby to him as a veiled fulfillment of part of the letter, Malvolio assumes that he and Olivia have begun a secret duet of policy: "O ho, do you come near me now? No worse man than Sir Toby to look to me! This concurs directly with the letter" (III. iv. 64–66). Malvolio's deity delights in the practice of policy and rewards subjects who do likewise for their own materialistic ends. "I have limed her," Malvolio gloats, "but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful!" (III. iv. 74–75). "Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked" (III. iv. 83–84). Malvolio's fantasies of married life with Olivia revolve not around her beauteous person but around "Count Malvolio" (II. v. 35), sitting in a "branched velvet gown," "having come from a day-bed, where [he has] left Olivia sleeping," later playing with "some rich jewel" while he lords it over Sir Toby and the lighter folk (II. v. 44–80). His thanking Jove for the anticipated fulfillment of a materially enriching destiny highlights a self-centered idea of Providence, one linked in Twelfth Night with contemporary stereotypes of puritans rising socially through commerce and timeserving and thanking the supreme deity for their riches.

In The Redemption of Time (1606), the Banbury puritan William Whately argues that men should "buy out the Time, to traffique with it, as men do with wares... Good hours and opportunities and merchandise of the highest rate and price: and whosoever will have his soul thrive, must not suffer any of these bargains of Time to pass
him, but must buy up, and buy out all the minutes thereof.” Concerning this passage, G. F. Waller has stated that “the accommodation of Puritanism to the merchant’s appreciation of the commercial value of time is plain.”16 Whately’s metaphor of the godly and shrewd merchants virtually becomes an equation. While evidence exists that Elizabethan puritans as a rule were no more commercially zealous than conforming protestants, Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights frequently caricatured them as crass materialists. Gold-digging and avaricious figure prominently in the composite stereotype of the stage puritan, initially in the image of the puritan-priest of A Knack to Know a Knave (1592) and later in Ben Jonson’s comic portraits of Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome in The Alchemist (1610) and Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and Dame Purecraft in Bartholomew Fair.17 Thus Malvolio’s thinly-veiled greed is reflected by several dramatic caricatures of the morally precise but in fact materialistic puritan.

Unlike the God of a generally conforming protestant such as Richard Hooker, Jove’s providence, according to Malvolio, disdains to work through traditional secondary agents. The Renaissance distinction between the primary cause and the traditional secondary agents of Providence can be understood by contrasting Viola’s spiritual orientation with Malvolio’s emphasis upon the virtually unmediated involvement of deity in the daily life of the chosen. Shipwrecked on the seacoast of Illyria, Viola tells the Captain that she believes her brother “is in Elysium” (I. ii. 4). Granted that the word “heaven” would not have juxtaposed itself melodiously with the mention of Illyria in the preceding verse (I. ii. 3), Shakespeare gives his heroine a belief in a blessed


17 See The Alchemist II. v. III. i. IV. v. 42–88, V. iii. 43–53, V. v. 11–116; and Bartholomew Fair V. ii. 50–72. While Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome should, strictly speaking, be called separatists—English Anabaptists living in Amsterdam (Alchemist II. v. 20)—Jonson’s playgoers, like King James with regard to Brownists, most certainly thought of them as puritans. For confirmation of this fact, see Myers, 16. Holden (134–36) analyzes Ananias’ and Tribulation’s greed. Identifying the puritanical traits of the priest in A Knack, Myers argues that this character is “the very first stage puritan” (115–16)—a judgment verified by Mary G. M. Adkins, “The Genesis of Dramatic Satire Against the Puritan, As Illustrated in A Knack to Know a Knave,” Review of English Studies 22 (1946): 81–95. Adkins focuses the puritan/priest’s hypocritical avarice (84–86). Additional dramatic caricatures of the greedy Puritan—appearing in Blurt, Master-Constable IV. i; The Dutch Courtesan II. iii; The Isle of Gulls III. i.—are noted by E. N. S. Thompson, The Controversy Between Puritans and the Stage, Yale Studies in English 20 (New York: Henry Holt, 1903), 235; and by Heinemann, 84–85.
afterlife. When Olivia lifts her veil to show Cesario her face, Viola exclaims that it is “Excellently done, if God did all” (I. v. 239). And when confronted by the duelist whom Sir Toby has built up into a formidable adversary, she murmurs, “Pray God defend me!” (III. iv. 307). These and other references establish Viola’s Christian faith in a play written apparently to celebrate Christian feast days. Played most likely on Twelfth Night (January 6th) and definitely on Candlemas (February 2, 1602), Shakespeare’s comedy commemorates in delightful, secular form the Epiphany and the Purification of the Virgin Mary.18

At the play’s beginning, Viola’s faith struggles with spiritual despair. Concerning her lost brother, she states, “Perchance he is not drown’d” (I. ii. 5). “It is perchance that you yourself were sav’d,” the Captain replies. “O my poor brother! and so perchance may he be,” Viola more confidently asserts. “True, madam,” the Captain continues, “and to comfort you with chance,”

Assure yourself, after our ship did split,
When you and those poor number sav’d with you
Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother,
Most provident in peril, bind himself
(Courage and hope both teaching him the practice)
To a strong mast that liv’d upon the sea;
Where, like Arion on the dolphin’s back,
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
So long as I could see.

(I. ii. 9–17)

Rather than comforting Viola with Chance, the Captain consoles her with a portrait of a brave brother enacting his own providence.

The Captain’s words cue Viola to take responsibility for preserving

18 See R. Chris Hassel, Jr., Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 77–89, 94–101; and Faith and Folly in Shakespeare’s Romantic Comedies (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), esp. 149–53, 162, 166–67. By celebrating certain feast days in the church year, Shakespeare in Twelfth Night encourages his audience to think of Providence as a series of graphic manifestations of divinity that, taken together, form a redemptive pattern annually repeated. And yet the play’s suggestion that Providence operates remotely through natural agents in a not easily knowable fashion seems to thwart this encouragement. Actually, however, no real contradiction exists. The supernatural events making up the church year occurred only once; their celebration on feast days simply approximates their original occurrence. Shakespeare implies in Twelfth Night that secular versions of miraculous moments of the church year result from the natural operation of a removed Providence that rewards the selfless behavior of favored mortals. What might appear to be two contradictory ideas of Providence in the play in fact are two dimensions of the same phenomenon.
herself. She does so when she shifts her identity in order to serve Duke Orsino. Later she indicates that her disguise as Cesario should be regarded in some sense as an attempt to resurrect Sebastian. Hearing Antonio mistakenly call her Sebastian, she exclaims,

I my brother know
Yet living in my glass; even such and so
In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate. O if it prove,
Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love!

(III. iv. 389–94)

Viola’s imitation of Sebastian’s dress amounts to a slightly pathological form of mourning. As long as she recreates Sebastian through her clothing, she never loses him. She can always see him “living” in her looking glass. But her exclamation—“O if it prove, / Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love”—transforms this motive into a conditional statement of metaphysical faith. Whereas the Captain’s portrait of Sebastian, “provident in peril,” makes him solely responsible for his own preservation, Viola attributes the saving of his life to the purposeful agency of tempests and sea waves motivated in their working by love. One might object that Viola’s metaphysical hypothesis lacks Christian overtones; the sea tempest that reunites separated lovers or friends had become a convention of prose romances that supplied Shakespeare with the plots for several plays, including Twelfth Night. Nevertheless, auditors’ awareness of the Christian allusions prominent in Twelfth Night urges them to interpret Viola’s references to the providential sea within the sustained context that these allusions and talk of religion create. Moreover, Malvolio’s idea of Providence begs comparison with an alternative more positively meaningful than a dutifully borrowed romance cliché. In a play whose title and allusions invite religious interpretation, the theology of Richard Hooker can provide the auditor with a key.

In Shakespeare’s age, both tempests and the sea were thought to be attributes of nature. “Nature . . . is nothing else but God’s instrument,” Hooker wrote in The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1:160). What is Providence to God, working His will through secondary natural agents, goes, according to Hooker, by different names among men: “Only thus much is discerned, that the natural generation and process of all things receiveth order of proceeding from the settled stability of divine understanding. This appointeth unto them their kinds of work-
ing; the disposition whereof in the purity of God's own knowledge and will is rightly termed by the name of Providence. The same being referred unto the things themselves here disposed by it, was wont by the ancient to be called natural Destiny” (1:159–60). Hooker sees no contradiction between Providence and Destiny, simply because God with few exceptions works generally (that is, remotely) through secondary natural agents such as sea tempests rather than by direct revelation (or intervention) to form designs that people at different times in different cultures name variously. “The manner of this divine efficiency, being far above us,” Hooker writes, “we are no more able to conceive by our reason, than creatures unreasonable by their sense are able to apprehend after what manner we dispose and order the course of our affairs” (1:159). Viola, unable to grasp directly the pattern of Providence, reasons that its agents, tempests and salt waves, are fresh in love. Still, the joyous design is God’s: “Those things which nature is said to do,” Hooker asserts, “are by divine art perform’d, using nature as an instrument; nor is there any such art or knowledge divine in nature herself working, but in the Guide of nature’s work” (1:159).

Elizabethan puritan conceptions of Providence contrasted with Hooker’s model by denying or downplaying the role of secondary natural agents. While Calvinist doctrine permeates the thought of both puritans and conforming protestants alike (Barbara Lewalski notes that “there was hardly one of the Elizabethan bishops who was not a Calvinist”), many conforming protestants (unlike doctrinal puritans) did not subscribe to the total depravity of nature, finding it an instrument worthy of God’s Providence. Peter Munz has remarked that “both Puritanism and Augustinianism sprang from the same source, namely, from the fear that one might subtract from God’s power and glory if one attributed any kind of efficacy to the world He had created” (47). Rigorously Calvinistic on this count, puritans did not consider nature a worthy medium for God’s Providence because Original Sin,

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20 Lewalski notes that, “as J. F. H. New points out, many English Calvinists who remained within the established church ... tended to find some value (and therefore less than total depravity) in the natural faculties of man and the goods of the natural order; to see (with Richard Hooker) the realms of nature and grace as hierarchically ordered rather than dialectically opposed; and to reserve some role, however ambiguously stated, for human response to divine grace” (20).
in their opinion, had utterly ruined it. In the Institutes, Calvin asserted
that if God were to work through a universal law of nature, His “particu-
lar goodness toward each one would be too unworthily reduced.”

21 On the other hand, “Hooker would indeed have wholeheartedly sub-
scribed to St. Thomas’s statement,” made in Summa contra Gentiles,
“that the existence and efficacy of second causes and, by implication,
of human reason, is evidence not of a lack of power in God, but of the
immensity of His goodness.”

22 Thus it is not surprising to find an Elizabethan puritan such as
George Gifford explicitly de-emphasizing the importance of instru-
mentality and second causes in the working of God’s Providence. In a
sermon preached on Genesis 45:8, Gifford wrote, “I come now to the
next thing, and that is, the Arguments Joseph makes use of to comfort
his Brethren that were so overcome with Shame and Fear. He doth
three times repeat it; the first is drawn from the Providence of God in
working this great thing, It was not you that sent me hither, but God; as if
he should have said, Do not look any more upon Second Causes; It is
ture, it was a Fault in you who sold me, but look upon the good Hand
and Providence of God in it, God sent me before you, and it was not you
that sent me hither, but God.”

23 The puritan continues: “I observe there
is nothing will make us more willing to forgive them that have done
us any Injury, than to look up to the Providence of God, and refer
all to that: we are apt to look to Instruments and Second Causes, and
not think of the Hand of God in them . . . and therefore in all unjust
oppression it is our work and duty to look above Men to the Prov-
dence of God, there we must hear the voice of the Rod, and him who hath
appointed it, and not dwell too much upon the Instruments or Second
Causes, they are but as the Ax or the Staff, or the Rod, it is God’s Hand
that limits, orders, and appoints them for holy and gracious ends”
(2, 5). For Gifford, the instruments of God’s Providence, when they
are mentioned at all, are not natural agents such as sea tempests but
almost always wicked men and women, who are likened to God’s ax
or rod, mortifying His elect.


22 Munz, 58.

23 George Gifford, The Great Mystery of Providence, or The various Methods of God in
Ordering and Over-ruling the Actions of Wicked Men and Devils to great and glorious Pur-
poses (London: S. Crouch, 1695), 1. For a portrait of Gifford, see Patrick Collinson, The
Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559–1625 (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1982), 103–5.
Considered within the context of a contemporary difference within the English Church over the process of God’s Providence, Malvolio’s belief that Jove makes Olivia the inconsequential instrument for a material blessing approximates a puritan position. “I have limed her,” Malvolio says of Olivia, “but it is Jove’s doing, and Jove make me thankful! . . . Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked” (III. iv. 74–75, 83–84). Since Shakespeare made puritanical Malvolio a comic butt of *Twelfth Night*, playgoers tend to think of his belief in deity’s virtually direct blessing of him as another sign of his egotism. And since this belief in Jove as the primary cause of Malvolio’s supposed good fortune suffers by comparison with the trust that likeable, modest Viola places in the agency of tempest and the sea, Shakespeare’s audience is inclined to think positively of a removed Providence that operates through the secondary causes of a beneficent creation.

The Hookerian working of Providence in *Twelfth Night* appears to require the participation of Viola. As Cesario, she becomes the agent of Providence, making possible the greater happiness of not only herself but Sebastian, Orsino, and Olivia as well. Had she not disguised herself as her twin brother, Orsino and Olivia would have no way of freeing themselves from a sterile, self-indulgent relationship. Selflessly serving her beloved Orsino’s passion for Olivia, the disguised Viola makes possible the liberating love of Olivia for Sebastian and eventually of Orsino for herself. A love offering no self-serving advantage becomes the providential instrument breaking the chains of self-love. Viola’s instrumentality gains luster from its offsetting foil—the agency of Feste as Sir Topas and its effect on the seemingly mad Malvolio.

Like Viola, Feste assumes a disguise, that of the curate Sir Topas. His commentary on his gown encourages audiences to think of him as a puritanical minister. “I will dissemble myself in’t,” he resolves, “and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown” (IV. ii. 4–6). Ministers of the Church of England were required to wear a surplice, a loose-fitting white gown with wide sleeves. Puritanical churchmen sometimes rejected this garment because it reminded them of Roman Catholicism. Some preferred to wear only the black Geneva gown; others hypocritically wore the surplice over that gown. “Though hon-

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24 Simmons argues that Malvolio’s repeated attribution of his imagined success to Jove represents Shakespeare’s parody of “the absolute and rigorous predestination of high Calvinism” (189).
esty be no puritan, yet it will do no hurt,” Lavatch moralizes in All’s Well That Ends Well; “It will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart” (I. iii. 97–99). Feste’s joke about not being the first to dissemble in the minister’s gown seems to depend upon a popular stereotype of the hypocritical puritan churchman. Lothian and Craik remark, “there is something ironical in the pitting of a Puritan minister against Malvolio, who is ‘a kind of Puritan.’” 25 Editors have noted the incongruity of Sir Toby’s calling Topas “Sir Topas” (IV. ii. 2). The elevated address, nevertheless, reinforces the popular image of the prideful minister, who conceals “the big heart” under the plain black gown.

Sir Topas the curate is sent to cure Malvolio’s madness—an irony of the highest order when considered in light of conforming protestant opinion that puritanism stems from a psychological disorder. In setting the puritanical minister upon Malvolio, Maria and Sir Toby direct the mad to cure the mad. Malvolio’s inability to detect the fool within the puritanical minister amounts to religious satire. While representing a standard Elizabethan treatment for lunacy, Malvolio’s imprisonment in a dark room symbolizes his religious ignorance. “I say there is no darkness but ignorance,” Feste pronounces, “in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog” (IV. ii. 43–45). In Malvolio’s case, the allusion to Exodus 10: 21–23, the plague of darkness, suggests punishment for heathenish misbelief.

According to Sir Toby, Malvolio is roughly treated for the household’s “pleasure, and his penance” (II. iv. 138–39). Through Feste and Malvolio’s dialogue, Shakespeare implies that the steward’s penance involves the correctness of his religious beliefs. When Feste as Sir Topas asks tormented Malvolio, “What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?” (IV. ii. 51–52), the steward replies, “That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird” (IV. ii. 53–54). And when the Clown asks him what he thinks of this opinion, Malvolio sanely and devoutly answers, “I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion” (IV. ii. 56–57). The positive resonance of this judgment suggests that Malvolio’s “purgatorial” penance—anathema for the puritan—has to a degree refined and corrected his religious beliefs. Sir Topas’ reply to Malvolio’s answer—“Fare thee well; remain thou still in darkness. Thou shalt hold th’ opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispos-

25 Twelfth Night, 121.
cess the soul of thy grandam" (IV. ii. 58–61)—reflects through comic distortion the unsoundness of the puritan minister’s doctrine. In this context, Malvolio’s reply seems orthodox. The candlelight that Malvolio begs—and that Feste supplies—figuratively signifies Malvolio’s newly illumined mind, and the clear letter that he writes to Olivia protesting his sanity displaces the epistle of love whose meaning he vainly wrenched.

In Malvolio, Shakespeare caricatures certain puritanical traits without stereotyping the entire character. The ultimate conformity of Malvolio’s opinion suggests not only religious growth but also the potential for membership in the rejuvenated society of Illyria. The dynamics of Malvolio’s decision not to join the play’s reconstituted society suggest why Feste, despite his prompting of orthodox belief in Malvolio, cannot be regarded as an instrument of Providence in the same way that Viola can. Sir Topas may have elicited conforming religious opinion from Malvolio, but he does not correct the steward’s self-love. In fact, Feste precipitates Malvolio’s final desire for vengeance. Critics seldom point out that Feste is partly to blame for Malvolio’s vindictiveness at play’s end. Despite Fabian’s plea for mutual forgiveness and forbearance at the moment of the lovers’ newly found joy, Feste cannot resist taunting Malvolio with his punishment for previously baiting the Clown: “I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir, but that’s all one. ‘By the Lord, fool, I am not mad.’ But do you remember, ‘Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal, and you smile not, he’s gagged’? And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges” (V. i. 371–76). Feste’s concluding word “revenges” triggers the almost simultaneous cry of Malvolio: “I’ll be reveng’d on the whole pack of you!” (V. i. 377). As he rushes off stage, Malvolio’s self-love prevents him from laughing at himself and practicing mutual forgiveness. Feste’s unforgiving, bitter attitude contrasts with Viola’s selflessness, making his agency as Sir Topas a foil to her genuine instrumentality.

In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare conveys the impression that tempests and salt waves have been kind to Viola, that Providence has favored her, because she has been disposed to think the best of everything. As a rule, playgoers believe that Providence should reward a young woman who generously interprets adversity, who devoutly preserves a lost brother’s memory. Viola’s selfless, patient love seems to bring down Providence’s blessing upon her as well as on the lovers for whom she has been instrumental. It comes as something of a surprise to learn that Elizabethan religious doctrine, as interpreted by a majority of protes-
nants, did not easily accommodate this impression. During the 1590s, puritans in places like Cambridge challenged that part of Article XVII of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1563), the Article titled “Of Predestination and Election,” that asserted that God’s grace pertains to all men and women. Citing Calvin’s commentary on the scriptures, puritans such as William Perkins made a powerful case for special Providence, for the belief that the doctrine of election applies only to a segment of humankind. According to a late Elizabethan puritan view, the deeds of both elect and reprobate men and women, regardless of their moral quality or number, could never alter God’s grace, which was imagined forever fixed for individual souls from the beginning of time. A protestant like Hooker countered the puritan effort to restrict the provenance of grace by claiming that grace theoretically pertains to everyone and that, during a lifetime, virtuous behavior could assure salvation. As early as the 1580s, Hooker wrote in a sermon, “In God there were two wills; an antecedent and a consequent will: his first will, that all mankind should be saved; but his second will was, that those only should be saved, that did live answerable to that degree of grace which he had offered or afforded.” With this view, Hooker differs not only from puritan but also from orthodox protestant doctrine.

Neither explicitly nor implicitly does the language of Article XVII suggest that how men and women live their lives affects individual predestination. As Martha Tuck Rozett has established concerning Elizabethan sermons delivered at Paul’s Cross, good deeds for puritan and protestant alike justified one’s election. They proved to the doers that God had saved them—not that the doers (because of the good deeds) deserved to be saved. And yet Hooker implies that behavior “answerable” to predestined grace (matching it/responding to


27 Qtd. in Porter, 382.

it) actually delivers that grace.\textsuperscript{29} Unlike puritans, at least unlike them as regards their doctrinal views,\textsuperscript{30} and unlike protestants conforming to the language of Article XVII, Shakespeare in Twelfth Night approximates the liberal (some may have said “popish”) view of Hooker. He implies that Providence’s election of Viola is conditional, that is, that Providence might reward her just as it might any non-reprobate, but that it in fact does so because she has made her life “answerable to that degree of grace” available to her. Viola’s generous attitudes and deeds “answer” the beneficence of Providence, appearing to elicit—rather than ratify—the blessing of grace upon her. The impression that providential grace follows from gracious behavior fixes Shakespeare on the far liberal left—perhaps even off the scale—of the spectrum of sixteenth-century doctrinal protestant opinions about election and the workings of Providence.

Shakespeare’s endorsement in Twelfth Night of a general rather than special Providence, particularly a general Providence that works through the agency of nature, appears in other comedies and romances. For example, it can be shown that Helena’s pilgrimage first to the shrine of St. Jaques and then to Florence and Bertram has providential overtones in All’s Well That Ends Well.\textsuperscript{31} And yet the agent

\textsuperscript{29} For the Thomistic basis of Hooker’s notion of the conditionality of election, see Porter, 380–82. Hooker’s “answerable” lives, entailing the importance of human choice, moved the English Church nearer to the Arminian controversy of the early seventeenth-century.

\textsuperscript{30} Rozett presents evidence that Elizabethan puritan preachers, including William Perkins, on occasion contradicted their Calvinist doctrine by implying in their sermons that “education, reformation,” and repentance were “capable of effecting salvation” (45–53, esp. 51). Her evidence contradicts MacCulloch, that “at Paul’s Cross, the pulpit [was] under the direct eye of the government and the Church’s leadership: until 1632 all the sermons which touched on the question of predestination took an orthodox Calvinist line” (77). (MacCulloch bases his judgment upon—and partly quotes—the conclusion of Nicholas Tyacke, Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987], 249.) For Rozett, the contradiction between Calvinist doctrine and puritan sermon practice illustrates H. C. Porter’s maxim: “however Calvinist in the study, the preacher must be Arminian in the pulpit” (51). Nevertheless, so-called “Arminian” moments in Elizabethan puritan sermons represent anomalies. Hooker’s opinions continue to provide the representative matrices for clarifying Providence in Twelfth Night because his ideas form a synthesis in which sermon utterances complement rather than conflict with written doctrine. Hooker’s notion of conditional grace, of lives answerable to offered grace, reflects the religious tolerance, the drive for inclusiveness, and the empathy for humanity apparent on almost every page of Ecclesiastical Polity.

identified in the play for bringing Helena and Bertram together over a vast distance is not God or Providence or "the heavens" but nature: "The mightiest space in fortune nature brings / To join like likes, and kiss like native things" (I. i. 222–23). However, it is in The Tempest that the Hookerian cast of Shakespearean Providence that we discovered in Twelfth Night most clearly reveals itself. A brief, concluding examination of this late romance not only strengthens but also clarifies the preceding analysis of Twelfth Night.

As harpy, Ariel in act III of The Tempest pronounces a providential judgment upon Alonso in language resembling that in a central passage of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Recently R. A. D. Grant has demonstrated that Jacobean political doctrine encouraged seventeenth-century playgoers to think of Prospero's magical rule of the characters on his island as equivalent to that of divine Providence. Like the protestant God, Prospero appears intent upon driving Alonso and perhaps Antonio and Sebastian through what Barbara Lewalski has termed "the Protestant-Pauline paradigm of salvation." While doctrinally this paradigm possessed six stages (election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification), experientially it was marked by a conversion followed by repentance, saving faith, and a new spiritual life. The harpy Ariel's thunderous direction for the three men of sin's salvation is "heart's sorrow, / And a clear life ensuing" (III. iii. 81–82)—that is to say, repentance and sanctification. Lewalski has shown that generally conforming Elizabethan and Jacobean protestants as well as puritans subscribed to the Protestant-Pauline paradigm of salvation. Granted this broad spiritual context in The Tempest, contemporary play-


33 Lewalski, 24, and 16–23.

34 Shakespeare's words "heart's sorrow" condense in a memorable phrase of The Tempest the English protestant language for repentance. Although a puritan, William Perkins defined repentance in accordance with generally conforming protestant doctrine: the sinner "finds himself to be in bondage under Satan, hell, death, and damnation: at which most terrible sight his heart is smitten with fear and trembling, through the consideration of his hellish and damnable estate. This sorrow if it continue and increase to some measure, hath certain symptoms in the body" (italics mine, qtd. by Lewalski, 21–22). Moreover, by the phrase "a clear life ensuing," Shakespeare echoes the language for the new, sinless life that develops during the phase of sanctification, when God's defaced image in the soul undergoes repair (see Lewalski, 18).
goers could find the best gloss on Ariel’s pronouncement in a central judgment of Hooker’s.

To understand the importance of Hooker for this episode, one must realize that what the theater audience hears Ariel saying is not quite what Alonso hears. Alonso does not directly hear Ariel’s description of the King’s forgotten sin, the judgment of Ferdinand’s “death,” and the spirit’s direction for repentance and a clear life. Nature translates the message for Alonso:

Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc’d
The name of Prosper; it did base my trespass.
Therefore my son i’ th’ ooze is bedded; and
I’ll seek him deeper than e’er plummet sounded,
And with him there lie mudded.

(III. iii. 95–101)

Like Viola, Helena, and a host of other Shakespearean characters, Alonso apprehends Providence through its secondary agent, nature. The billows speak and the winds sing his crime, while the thunder names Prospero. Clearly, Alonso’s apprehension of Ariel’s words is not the same as the audience’s unmediated, god-like hearing of them. As a preface to his pronouncement, Ariel has exclaimed, “You are three men of sin, whom Destiny, / That hath to instrument this lower world / And what is in’t, the never-surfeited sea / Hath caus’d to belch up you” (III. iii. 53–56). Near the beginning of *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker, in a passage previously cited, wrote, “Only thus much is discerned, that the natural generation and process of all things receiveth order of proceeding from the settled stability of divine understanding. This appointeth unto them their kinds of working; the disposition whereof in the purity of God’s own knowledge and will is rightly termed by the name of Providence. The same being referred unto the things themselves here disposed by it, was wont by the ancient to be called natural Destiny” (1:159–60). Like ancient humankind according to Hooker, Alonso might call the Providence that he apprehends through nature destiny. Shakespeare’s character cannot lay claim to the unmediated grasp of “the purity of God’s own knowledge and will.” For Alonso, the indirect understanding of the workings of Providence functions as a test of the perceiver’s faith—one that he almost fatally fails before passing.
The Hookerian cast of Prospero's Providence in *The Tempest* is consistent with other liberal protestant features of this late romance. While Caliban might be taken to represent a Calvinist view of innate depravity, the protestant shading of this characterization is optimistic. Caliban can reason out his own salvation. More important, the underlying scheme of the late romances, a scheme wherein nature mediates divine art as it guides and rectifies humankind's arts (which in turn mend fallen nature), ultimately reflects a viewpoint memorably expressed by Hooker (in a passage that also has been previously cited): "Those things which nature is said to do, are by divine art performed, using nature as an instrument; nor is there any such art or knowledge divine in nature herself working, but in the Guide of nature's work" (1:159). John F. Danby has shown that this scheme of divine art and nature guiding humankind's arts and fallen nature provides a framework for Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. To the degree that Shakespearean...

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35 For Caliban's ability to reason as Aristotle defined the process, see my Shakespeare's *Romance of the Word* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 126–28. According to John F. H. New, in Anglican and Puritan: *The Basis of Their Opposition*, 1558–1640 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), the conformist "John Jewel made his recognition of reason quite explicit when he commented on Alexander Severus's arbitration of a dispute over a plot of land: the Emperor had decided rightly, 'being a heathen, and void of faith, and led only by the guiding of nature.' Again, Jewel was convinced that American Indians would distinguish correctly between the English and Roman religions out of innate perspicacity. 'I doubt not but nature herself would lead them to judge that ours is light and yours darkness.' Similarly, [Lancelot] Andrewes admitted man's ability for valid choosing. 'Now then, this is the rule of reason, the guide of all choice, evermore to take the better and leave the worse. This would man do. *Haec est lex hominis* " (8). Like the conforming protestant Jewel's heathen, Caliban, "void of faith, and led only by the guiding of nature," can reason analogically (Temp. III. ii. 98–103). Like Jewel's American Indian, he can judge that Prospero's spiritual rule is preferable to Stephano's exploitation. Like the conformist Andrewes' humankind, he can learn "to take the better and leave the worse." Caliban's reasoning to take the better and leave the worse culminates in his rejection of Stephano's government and his plea for Prospero's grace: "and I'll be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass / Was I to take this drunkard for a god, / And worship this dull fool!" (Temp. V. i. 295–98). Puritans and other mostly non-conforming protestants, on the other hand, as a rule "asserted a total inability of man to desire and to choose rightly, and in that lay their alienation from Anglicanism" (New, 10). For Elizabeth Bieman, in William Shakespeare: *The Romances*, TEAS 478 (Boston: Twayne, 1990), 105, "Caliban's final metanoia," his repentance, undercuts "the stern Calvinistic doctrine that some are predestined to salvation and some are not."

36 The relationship between the two arts and two natures is most memorably expressed in the late romances in *The Winter's Tale*, IV. iv. 79–97. A typical visual representation of it is Robert Fludd's *Ultriusque Cosmi Historia* (1617–19) (Evans, pl. 17).

romantic comedy and romance reflect the organizational dynamics of the immensely influential Arcadia,\textsuperscript{38} the playwright's staging of a liberal protestant rather than a puritan or rigorously Calvinistic Providence is perhaps inevitable. Still, neither Sidney nor any other Elizabethan writer of romance accounts for Shakespeare's endorsement of what might be called a liberal protestant Providence, especially in a play such as Twelfth Night, where he contrasts it with a comic rendering of what could be termed a puritan stereotype of divine intervention.\textsuperscript{39}

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\textsuperscript{39} Hamilton offers an alternative argument that "Twelfth Night takes much of its lexicon from the discourse of church politics," displaying "its connection to the issues of religious controversy with a disarming playfulness" (\textit{Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England}, 86-110, esp. 86). She also finds Hooker's tolerance and drive for religious inclusiveness appropriate matrices for mapping Shakespeare's spiritual position in \textit{Twelfth Night} (106-9).