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## Rethinking Sexuality and Class in *Twelfth Night*

Our critical understanding of *Twelfth Night* has shifted radically in the past two or three decades. I don't know whether *audiences* who watched the play continued to 'feel actively good,' as Stephen Booth reported in 1985,<sup>1</sup> but critics came to think it a disturbing and cynical affair. Antonio and Malvolio, as it were, took over centre stage, underlining subtexts of unfulfilled homosexual longing and unappeasable class conflict. Though informed by historical research, the readings often turned out (as David Scott Kastan says) 'more significant as records of our present anxieties than as reconstructions of those of Shakespeare's time.'<sup>2</sup> Recent shifts of focus in historical and gender-based studies, however, are loosening up the tendency towards automatic foreclosure on such issues. The newer understanding of homoeroticism explores a freedom from labels; the newly probed idea of service strives more faithfully to reflect the social historians' models.<sup>3</sup> The time may be ripe not only to unbind the orthodoxies that have coloured the critical view of *Twelfth Night*, but also to integrate the altered social and historical perspectives with the formal imperatives of writing a comedy. Although my argument tactically sets itself against certain critical positions for purposes of clarity, its aim is a more inclusive understanding of the play.

I want to explore how Shakespeare's calculations in *Twelfth Night* are geared throughout towards the formal need for a comic ending plausible enough to be satisfying, yet still sensitive to the erotic and social problems his fable creates. Formally, the strongest possibility of comic satisfaction occurs in the final or resolving scene. Because readings of *Twelfth Night* often dwell on this scene as a site of particular sexual and social dissatisfac-

- 1 Booth, 167. Productions that influence such reactions have of course changed as well.
- 2 Kastan, 17. See also historian David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*: 'The danger, in these matters, lies in projecting present preoccupations onto the past.' In his judgment, e.g., 'the evidence suggests that cross-dressing in practice was neither the subversive abomination nor the eroticized transgression that some [literary] scholars have claimed' (114).
- 3 For homoeroticism, see, e.g., Hammond, but the central impulse seems to be the growing application of Alan Bray's work since 1982. David Schalkwyk notes that for literary studies, critical interest in service is surprisingly recent (77); see, e.g., his 'Love and Service,' Amanda Bailey on livery in *Taming of the Shrew*, and especially Michael Neill, ch 1.

tions, it seems an appropriate focus for discussion.<sup>4</sup> If we assume that Shakespeare is aware of dissonances he creates, how does he try to prevent their suborning the work's comic shape? (Success is not guaranteed: the ending of *All's Well That Ends Well*, for example, remains peculiarly disquieting.) Critics of course usually recognize that marriage is the desired closure for comedy. They commit their energies, however, to the homoerotic and societal issues that are explored before convention inevitably descends, arguing that these exert equivalent power over our imaginative or emotional perceptions. Our judgments that Shakespeare fails or refuses to bring off a comic ending stem from assumptions about the recalcitrance of the material. But, as I have implied, early modern frames can also reveal a cultural complexity less dogmatic and more tolerant of comedy's 'what you will.' Adopting the general ordering of issues in the final scene, I begin with conceptual, dramatic, and gender issues surrounding the 'arbitrary' amatory arrangement of the four protagonists before turning to class issues said to be exhibited in the subplot, culminating in the unfair punishment of Malvolio and the marriage of Sir Toby and Maria.

Protests against the arbitrary solutions of Shakespeare's ending often object to Olivia and Orsino's delight in accepting the sexually opposite half of the newly discovered twins as their desired partner. Olivia's unexamined acceptance of Sebastian, like Orsino's abrupt willingness to marry Viola, is, in this interpretation, cynical or desperate dramaturgy, the inexcusable mechanics required by the genre's conventional ending. Yet rather than being 'sudden,' the anticipated pairings have a plausibility that becomes clear upon reflection. (*Pride and Prejudice* might serve as a novelistic version of the model.) The evidence argues conscious authorial strategy, since it all arises from additions and alterations to the play's sources, mainly in the shaping of Olivia and Sebastian.<sup>5</sup> No reader of Barnabe Riche, for example, would ponder the suitability of Julina's marriage to Silvio. They are merely figures who perform actions necessary to the story. Even being a product of language rather than solely of action gives Shakespeare's characters an opacity that solicits probing.

4 Various kinds of dissatisfaction have long been part of the performance and critical history of *Twelfth Night*. The range of cuts, rewriting, and reordering shown by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performance texts indicate a play constantly reshaped to its audience's attitudes about sex and acceptable heroines. See Osborne, *The Trick of Similarity*. Productions since John Barton's for the Royal Shakespeare Company (1969–71) reflect this reimagining as well.

5 I think of the author here as 'Shakespeare,' but collaboration in many Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic texts does not undermine the argument. Barnabe Riche's *Apolonius and Silla* seems the most dominant source, though *Gl' Ingannati* offers several suggestive parallels: see Penman's translation, *The Deceived*. For comments on sources, including Terence's *Eunuch*, see Hutson. *Apolonius and Silla* is printed in the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night*, which I use as my text for the play.

Assuming then that Olivia's love can in some sense be probed, I begin with the question of how Shakespeare makes Sebastian a believable substitute for Cesario. Two elements in particular seem to stir Olivia's initial response to the page: first, a kind of androgynous youthfulness that might be attractive by comparison with a masculine, 'bear-like' Orsino (the Narcissus motifs of the episode suggest the comforts of 'likeness' in creating a transitional step);<sup>6</sup> second, a striking verbal exuberance. As to the first, Olivia agrees to see someone whom Malvolio presents as a figure of unthreatening maleness: 'Not old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy ... 'Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man. ... One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him' (1.5.158–64). Modern performances, in which men and women play the roles of the twins, obscure an important fact. Like Cesario, the Elizabethan theatre's Sebastian would be a boy actor: a photograph of the Globe Theatre's all-male production in 2003 reveals how much the two can look alike and project the same physical charm.<sup>7</sup> We also know that the period's primary love convention depends on visual stimulus: love at first sight is so strong a presumption that any other genesis is often defended by argument or paradox. 'Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?' (Phebe in *As You Like It*, quoting Kit Marlowe – with Rosalind, Orlando, Oliver, and Celia all offering 'proof'). The idea may also underwrite Sebastian's instant willingness to be betrothed to Olivia. Her beauty (apparently so great that it moves Cesario to abandon prose for blank verse) has been certified for us earlier in two registers by someone who hoped the contrary would be true: ' 'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white / Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on' (1.5.242–3); 'But if you were the devil, you are fair' (255).<sup>8</sup>

For all the likelihood that both Olivia and Sebastian are seduced by a visual perception, we probably feel that Olivia succumbs mainly to Cesario's way with words.<sup>9</sup> Several critics have commented on the allusion to Ovid's Echo in Cesario's 'babbling gossip of the air' (1.5.277), apparently

6 See the pattern argued for by McCary.

7 *New York Times*, Sunday 19 October 2003: arts section, 5 (though the actors are young men, not adolescents). Shakespeare's having already used twins – two sets! – in *Comedy of Errors* must mean that the premise did not exceed the audience's willingness to suspend disbelief, in spite of Ben Jonson's demand for actors who were identical twins before he would adapt Plautus's *Amphytruo* (Jonson, 1:144).

8 Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, 130–32, discusses Viola's corresponding erotic attraction to Olivia, but same-sex love in Shakespeare's comedy is apt to be one-sided (e.g., Phebe/Rosalind, and insofar as it is insinuated, Antonio/Bassanio and Antonio/Sebastian here) – unlike the Ovidian model cited in note 17 below.

9 Schalkwyk's emphasizing her sudden awareness of Cesario's 'class' (e.g., 90) ignores the play as 'staged': his clothing would immediately proclaim his status, as would Sebastian's (see 93). The discrepancy between his brash words and this elegant costume presumably leads Olivia to ask if he is a 'comedian' (only playing a part).

a phrase from Golding's translation:<sup>10</sup> through their witty exchange Olivia and Viola become acoustic images of each other, reapplying the idea of self-reflection central to the Narcissus myth of which Echo forms a part. In various guises this self-reflection interrogates the wooing motifs of the play. As a version of Narcissus, Olivia and Viola, both descending from Lyly's cheeky pages, mirror each other too completely.<sup>11</sup> Yet in Viola's evaluation of what happened (2.2.16–40), sexual identity outweighs shared temperament and language in shaping the emotions of their encounter. Olivia, believing Cesario is male, has allowed love (sexual desire) its onset; for Viola, who knows herself female, the temperamental affinity signalled by their banter arouses only sympathy. Her assumption is that love between women is flatly impossible: 'Poor lady, she were better love a dream' (25). The plot teases us with homoerotic attractions, but Viola's soliloquy denies that they are satisfying in any way: as a man, she says, her state is 'desperate' (the love she can achieve with Orsino as his page cannot match her hopes) and, since she is a woman (not, we note, because she loves another), Olivia's sighs are 'thrifless' (37–38). The normative scenario is clear. First tricked into a narcissistic love ('Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness'), Olivia will be rescued when the mirror image later takes shape as a biological 'other.'<sup>12</sup> Sebastian's role in resolving the narcissism theme is simply to offer difference; Shakespeare's sense of the plot requires further that his gender difference be entwined with sameness that is more than skin deep. He must somehow, in his own words later, be both man and maid.<sup>13</sup>

Although both twins are androgynous, the androgyny of each is manifested differently, shaded towards a sexual or gender identity. Viola is male only in her attire and in the extroverted confidence of her address. She is always female for us, regardless of what she wears; constant asides and speeches remind us that her fears or desires are those conventionally ascribed to women and girls.<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare employs this tactic, I think, less because theatregoers had to be diverted from awareness that the *players*

10 See, e.g., Taylor; Palmer; and Mallin, 204–12. See also Parker.

11 Hunter, 'Theatrical Politics and Shakespeare's Comedies, 1590–1600,' 242–43; and *John Lyly*, 299–348. Mirroring makes them candidates for perfect friendship, incidentally, though the period tended to deny the relationship to women.

12 See McCary. Sinfield laments that in such matters Shakespeare's plays are indeed 'heterosexist.'

13 Hutson is good on the distorting fixation of recent criticism on Sebastian's statement that Olivia is betrothed both to man and to a maid (143–47). His primary meaning for 'maid' here must be 'virgin.'

14 Howard agrees that Viola's is always a female subjectivity ('Crossdressing,' 431–32). In contrast, Adelman places strong emphasis on costume to determine identity (87). Oddly, Schalkwyk sees Viola-as-Cesario 'disallow[ed] ... from the subject position of an actively desiring woman' (91).

were actually boys than because they were watching female *characters* who were dressed as males. Juliet or Beatrice offers no such reminders, and Cleopatra's fear of being 'boyed' is striking because it formulates something we are not always conscious of.<sup>15</sup> The tactic of foregrounding Viola's female identity also promotes a degree of titillation at the potential sexual transgressions of her engagement with Olivia. As critics often note, however, lesbianism was barely conceivable as a practice in the period.<sup>16</sup> Characters like Phebe and Olivia jettison their impossible desire without noticeable turmoil when Ganymede and Cesario are revealed as female – that is, when they are forced to recognize that their love has been directed towards a woman.<sup>17</sup> A more psychologically conflicted version of women who think they love other women was available in Ovid, but Shakespeare apparently avoided its rhetoric just as he avoids the seamier sexual material in his sources. I shall return to homoeroticism later, since it plays a more complex role in the male relationships. The female-female attraction here, however, seems to function mostly as *frisson*.<sup>18</sup> Even before Viola's soliloquy rejects the possibility of sexual reciprocation, Shakespeare interpolates Sebastian's first appearance to assure the audience that there will be a male answer to Olivia's desire. Perceiving Viola (who already loves the Duke) beneath the page's disguise, and aware that Sebastian is walking around Illyria, we are insulated from Olivia's emotion – as we are not from Antonio's.

While Viola is barely male except in attire, the dual aspect of Sebastian's androgyny is carefully explored. The Elizabethan audience's first, external, impression – he looks like his sister! – is reinforced 'internally' in his conversation with Antonio. His exquisite sensitivity to the quality of his friend's feelings and the obligation it lays upon him might well be seen as a woman's trait:

But I perceive in you so excellent a touch of modesty, that you will not extort from me what I am willing to keep in: therefore it charges me in manners the rather to express myself. (2.1.11–14)

15 See the discussion of layeredness in Shapiro, e.g., 3.

16 Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, sensibly argues concerning its '(in)significance' that the relationships 'matter' to the women even if they do not arouse social concern. She examines the important category of *chaste* eroticized attractions.

17 The needs of comedy are met solely by supplying Phebe with an alternative male partner, while, as I argue, Olivia's happiness is more psychologically considered and planned for. Sidney's Philoclea, when she falls in love with a disguised Pyrocles, demonstrates an Ovidian anxiety and willingness to persist in the passion. See also Lyly's *Gallathea*, and the source for both in Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe (*Metamorphoses*, 9.665–796). These moments are plot complications, however, not resolutions.

18 Shannon, discussing *Gallathea* and *Twelfth Night*, alternatively sees the same-sex attraction of friendship as normative across the spectrum of love in 'Nature's Bias.'

Just a few lines later he sheds tears for his sister's death, though lesser partings can also evoke them. He himself considers crying a female response:

Fare ye well at once; my bosom is so full of kindness, and I am yet so near the manners of my mother, that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me. (38–41)

His generosity of spirit, a quality open to both males and females, parallels Viola's. So does his instinct for disguise: 'my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo.'<sup>19</sup> Eventually he will echo Viola's kind of buoyant commitment by eagerly accepting the 'dream' or 'madness' of his encounter with Olivia.

Yet we see him at the same time as fulfilling the period's ideas of the 'manly.' He chooses to leave Antonio's protection, striking out on his own without a specific destination, willing to accept whatever chance brings. The earliest image we have of him is iconically heroic. Viola's captain describes Sebastian's behaviour after the shipwreck:

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.<sup>20</sup> (1.2.11–17)

Although Sebastian may fall in love with Olivia at first sight, his reaction is rationally unfolded in soliloquy: he talks of wonder, madness, disputes, error, discourse, distrusting senses, and wrangling with reason; all articulate his masculinely 'logical' path towards accepting as definitive the 'smooth discreet and stable bearing' with which she commands her household (4.3.1–21). Inexplicably compliant with Olivia's wish for an instant betrothal, he nevertheless will not be a lap-dog: he enters a sword-fight in a matter of honour (the very fight Viola/Cesario evaded through conventional female cowardice) even at the risk of angering his lady:

19 The meaning of this 'revelation' may well be that he is not merely the gentleman 'Roderigo,' but the noble son of Sebastian of Messaline (2.1.16–17).

20 I take this to be an echo of Pyrocles at the shipwreck near the opening of the *Arcadia* – a great hero also androgynous enough to disguise himself as an Amazon. Its many echoes in his work suggest that Shakespeare reread the *Arcadia* after the 'completed' version was published in 1598. Once Sebastian demonstrates his own valour by drawing his sword when provoked, Shakespeare's apparent desire to increase Antonio's stature and emotional investment allows him to forget or replace this earlier image (5.1.76–77).

I am sorry, madam, I have hurt your kinsman:  
 But had it been the brother of my blood,  
 I must have done no less with wit and safety. (5.1.207–9)

We may object, of course, that ‘manliness’ is not what Olivia had in mind at all. But we may also feel that the play understands Olivia’s desire better than she herself does. Isn’t that the point of the two signal examples of self-delusion we encounter in the opening scene? If the action of comedy is often some kind of education, here Olivia’s education, Sebastian is shaped to be both necessary transition (Cesario’s double) and potential fulfilment (Sebastian himself).

Nor does Shakespeare forget about ‘words’ in conceiving a suitable Sebastian, as we can hear in his first speeches. Olivia has ended the previous scene by saying, ‘Fate, show thy force.’ Sebastian’s echo (mental kinship?) is pronounced, though unwitting: ‘my stars shine darkly over me; the malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours’ (2.1.3–5).<sup>21</sup> Antonio’s simple request to know his friend’s destination draws this response: ‘No, sooth, sir: my determinate voyage is mere extravagancy’ (10–11). The sentence lacks Viola’s metaphorical bent, but he catches another quality of her speech: ‘Good beauties,’ Cesario says, ‘let me sustain no scorn; I am very comptible, even to the least sinister usage’ (1.5.176–77). This is language with insistent Latinate flair, not cheeky, but clearly idiosyncratic. Sebastian too employs several registers: he matches Viola lexically and syntactically in the elaborate recognition scene and, as we have seen, both discriminates emotions with exquisite delicacy and logically parses the madness of his encounter with Olivia. The main plot characters are all rhetorically second-best to Viola, but Shakespeare still seems to have taken linguistic compatibility (a kind of echo) as seriously as he does mirror image. I find it suggestive that although the moments of Olivia’s falling in love are so spectacularly verbal, she does not speak with equally vibrant wit elsewhere in the play. I think we want to feel that the exchange releases a self that was previously dormant, but the wit may be a momentary game, revealing as little of the ‘true’ Olivia as does our original image of her as a sad cloisteress.<sup>22</sup> Cesario’s verbal bravura continues (except in her scene

21 His emotional reaction to his sister’s apparent death – a wish that he had died at the same moment (2.1.19–20) – chimes well with Olivia’s mourning for her brother.

22 In spite of Sir Toby’s declaring his niece’s grief excessive, this initial image fails to correspond to the Olivia we actually meet on stage: is it Maria’s exaggerated version of Olivia’s ‘excuse,’ joined with Valentine’s politic awareness of what would please the exorbitant idealism of the Duke? Douglas Parker suggests something similar (33) as Olivia’s own ploy (25f). The idea of Maria’s intervention is supported when Olivia asks Malvolio to say whatever he will to get rid of Orsino’s new messenger (1.5.108–10).

Olivia is subject to another piece of probable misinformation that commentators have accepted at face value. Sir Toby’s statement, ‘She’ll none o’ th’ Count; she’ll not match

with Feste, a professional word-twister) but Olivia generally speaks another language. In addition to being playful and flexibly self-ironic, it is also sensible and firm, and perceptively probes cause and effect. On the whole it nicely matches Sebastian's sensibility. Verbal pyrotechnics are aspects of 'holiday'; like the other goings-on of *Twelfth Night*, they enrich what we return to as everyday.<sup>23</sup> Yet the final speech of the play notably evokes this time to come as 'golden' for the four lovers.

Parallel issues arise from sorting out the second set of lovers. Like the sexual titillation of the Olivia-Cesario 'wooing,' Shakespeare's core fable can insinuate Orsino's sexual interest in his page (an idea that Riche, despite a strong penchant for leering, totally avoids).<sup>24</sup> This male bond is also 'resolved' by Viola's unmasking, but the comic action invites Orsino to discover that the quality of affection he feels for Cesario (now revealed as female) forms the groundwork of a more real and satisfying love than his Petrarchan desire for Olivia. Neither the strength of the affection nor its object changes at this moment, but learning that his page is a woman opens the door to both sexual desire and its expression. Being Orsino, he will of course idealize her: she will be not only his mistress but his 'fancy's queen.' The question of love between two males that is lightly touched here will come up again, in Antonio's intense relationship with Sebastian, material which in Shakespeare's day could be culturally acknowledged and more safely handled.

First, however, to conclude the matter of switching partners. The play's preparation for Orsino's shift is easily argued. Viola's intention to 'speak to him in many kinds of music' becomes an ability to respond to the Duke's moods in many sorts of words. Cesario offers sympathy, service, intelligence, loyalty, and wondrous articulateness ('Thou dost speak masterly') – even, as Orsino realizes in 5.1, self-sacrifice. Far from being worshipped as a remote idol, the page is subservient and always at hand, a constant companion whose company is never tiresome, whose interest in music and things 'poetical' (1.5.196) matches his own. The Viola who smiles at grief might almost speak Orsino's lovely lines about a song that is 'silly sooth': 'it is old and plain; / The spinsters and the knitters in the sun, / And the free maids that weave their thread with bones / Do use to chant it' (2.4.42–48). We see in this scene how interaction with Cesario as another human being dismantles Orsino's self-centredness and pierces his most cherished image of the lover (and thus of himself). He begins by

above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit; I have heard her swear't' (1.3.106–8) is surely fabricated to keep Sir Andrew on the string.

<sup>23</sup> The reference of course is to C.L. Barber's classic study, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.

<sup>24</sup> *Gl' Ingannati* articulates Flamminio's affection for his page without giving it a sexual valence. The audience, however, connects the affection with his original passion for the now-disguised Lelia. Her name, the female form of Lelius (the classical title for Cicero's *De amicitia*), might float a friendship theme.





The Duke is taken outside himself for the moment, more interested in this sufferer than in generalizing his own experience: 'But died thy sister of her love, my boy?' (120). Such are the possibilities of Orsino's future life with Viola: I find no cynicism in his later willingness to embrace them.

In this interchange between Orsino and his page, Cesario's identity as Viola remains uppermost. Yet her disguise is what enables the crucial scene to unfold. The intimacy of their conversation and the ease of their being together would not have occurred were Viola known to be a gentlewoman. We do not know precisely what an Elizabethan audience's perception of Orsino's ties to his page might have been, since it entails social relationships – master, mentor, friend – and their connection to the language of love that the intervening centuries have altered significantly.<sup>25</sup> But the thematic impetus for actually exploring the bond in the play (rather than, as with the lesbian subtext of Olivia's attraction to Viola, merely declaring it impossible) must arise from the strong claims made by friendship, generally deemed a male prerogative, on early modern society. Antonio and Sebastian offer a not-to-be-reordered example of one male's love for another. To the extent that this unscrambling the lovers depends upon Elizabethan assumptions about binary gender designations and normative expectations of male and female behaviour, I have silently relied on the general consensus found in the criticism. Antonio, Malvolio, and Maria's marriage to Sir Toby, however, call for more specific reference to the cultural and historical evidence before judging how they contribute to the comic resolution.

The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian is emotionally freighted from the outset. Much of Antonio's language demonstrates the early modern overlap in vocabulary for all strong positive feelings, the extent to which a single language was applied unselfconsciously in discourses of erotic love, friendship, and religion alike. 'Love' for the period must basically have signified 'attraction': it is a word they can apply to the force driving iron to a magnet.<sup>26</sup> Antonio's readiness to put his purse at Sebastian's disposal, his reluctance to part from him, and especially their constant companionship, 'No interim, not a minute's vacancy / Both day and night' (5.1.78–83, 93–94), all have precedents in the standard texts of friendship – and also in accounts of early modern life: John Aubrey records that Beaumont and Fletcher shared a 'wonderful consimilarity of phansey,'

25 Sedgwick, 35. Schalkwyk's important article explores the intertwined language of love and service.

26 'O Lord! – to see the admirable power and noble effects of love, whereby the seeming insensible loadstone, with a secret beauty holding the spirit of iron in it, can draw that hard-hearted thing unto it, and like a virtuous mistress not only make it bow itself, but with it make it aspire to so high a love as of the heavenly poles' (Sidney, *Arcadia*, 165). It is also the force that literally holds Dante's cosmos together.

which caused the dearness of friendship between them ... They lived together on the Banke side, not far from the Play-house, both batchelors; lay together ... had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire; the same cloathes and cloake, &c., between them. (*Brief Lives*, 1:95–96; qtd by Masten, 61)

In *Euphuus* Lyly says of the hero's friendship with Philautus, 'All things went in common between them, which all men accounted commendable,' summing up a list that includes sharing one bed, one book, and the inability to refrain from each other's company for even a minute.<sup>27</sup> These actions and sentiments – Alan Bray's excellent account calls them a code – circulated in the society with great approval. Yet in spite of such general acceptance, anyone armed with suspicion or malice could use them as evidence of immorality: 'Public signs of male friendship – open to all the world to see – could be read in a different and sodomitical light to the one intended.'<sup>28</sup> The language of friendship long considered appropriate by European culture far exceeds the boundaries we assume today. In the twelfth century, for example, St Anselm wrote to two relatives (whom he apparently had never met) on the occasion of their deciding to become monks,

My eyes eagerly long to see your face, most beloved; my arms stretch out to your embraces. My lips long for your kisses; whatever remains of my life desires your company, so that my soul's joy may be full in time to come.<sup>29</sup>

According to Renaissance theory, friendship occurs between male equals, usually either aristocrats or gentlemen; it is superior to male-female erotic relationships because it is a product of moral choice which finds pleasure in souls, not bodies, and superior also to marriage (a contract with extraneous tangled goals).<sup>30</sup> Deployment of these tenets in Shakespeare's work is almost always under stress through real and imagined sexual rivalry between the friends.<sup>31</sup> And his sharpest confrontation between

27 Qtd by Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England,' 53. Cited as 'Signs.' Cf Celia and Rosalind on separation at *As You Like It*, 1.3.93–96.

28 Bray, 'Signs,' 53. The key here is 'public,' and we should note that Shakespeare's plays and *Sonnets*, as well as many of the speeches and actions of Francis Bacon, the Earl of Southampton, and others (cited in 'Signs'), were not hidden or secret. See now Bray's fuller examination in *The Friend*.

29 Greenberg, 285, citing Southern, 69. Anselm may allude to the kiss of peace (see Bray, *The Friend*). Konstan says that later extravagance of language and mixing of *amor-amicitia* does not occur in classical times. Traub cites some seventeenth-century letters between women friends that adopt the same language (*Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 184–86). See also Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*.

30 Montaigne offers a classic account in 'De l'amitié' (205–19).

31 Friendship between equals in the comedies (Proteus and Valentine, Arcite and Palemon) is severely attacked by rivalry for the woman both love, although *Two Gentlemen of Verona*

friendship and marriage – the ring episode in *The Merchant of Venice* – challenges friendship theory by staging the primacy of the marriage bond. Catherine Belsey associates this judgment with ideas developing in the 1590s of the companionate marriage, in which a woman is considered sufficiently rational and moral to be an ‘equal’ friend (Belsey, 149–50). Montaigne (a generation earlier and in a Catholic country) is daring enough to see that this kind of male-female bond would constitute an ideal satisfaction: ‘if it were possible to fashion such a relationship, willing and free, in which not only the souls had this full enjoyment but in which the bodies too shared in the union – where the whole human being was involved – it is certain that the loving-friendship would be more full and more abundant.’ But he is also conventional enough to regret that women are not adequate to the ideal:

women are in truth not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship, nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn. (210)

There is no example yet of a woman attaining to this bond of loving-friendship, he writes, ‘and by the common agreement of the Ancient schools of philosophy she is excluded from it.’<sup>32</sup> (Orsino in 2.4 denies women the capacity for love on the same grounds Montaigne denies them the capacity for friendship.)

Shakespeare’s non-rivalrous friendships involving two males, not groups as in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* or *Much Ado about Nothing*, often occur between men who are unequal in age or social standing. There seems reason also to question the full mutuality of the bond. Antonio has been supplying money to the younger Bassanio (the name is a diminutive of Sebastian, Cynthia Lewis tells us);<sup>33</sup> *Twelfth Night*’s Antonio is older, more experienced, and the financier of their travels; the Sonnet Poet is older and morally wiser than the young friend, yet the latter is much his social superior (the ‘equal’ who intrudes, though only in a minor way, is the *rival*

notoriously reaffirms its priority by Valentine’s offer to give over his beloved to the ‘friend’ who has attempted to rape her. Leontes projects such rivalry onto his bond with his old friend Polixenes in *Winter’s Tale*.

32 Even in terms of female-female friendships, Shakespeare is more generous: note Hermione and Helena before the intervention of love, Titania and the Indian queen, Cecilia and Rosalind. Its association with pre-maturity (and idyllic fantasy?) in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* is pushed further into childhood and elaborated (for boys) in *Winter’s Tale*. Emilia’s similarly idyllic love for Flavina (who dies at eleven) is, however, allowed continuing weight (*Two Noble Kinsmen* 1.3.49–85): see Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, ch. 3.

33 See Lewis. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Proteus’s rejected love, Julia, disguises herself as a page named Sebastian, a name apparently associated in Shakespeare’s mind (in the comic period) with androgynous young men. In this context, *The Tempest*’s Antonio and Sebastian are oddly named, though Antonio remains the mentor.

poet).<sup>34</sup> Such relationships between unequals faintly suggest what Montaigne calls the 'licence of the Greeks,' but the classical model for pederasty is more firmly pedagogical, in theory geared towards instilling in the boy the male wisdom and moral excellence that will allow his soul to match the beauty of his body. Montaigne is amusingly clear on its difference from friendship: 'rightly abhorrent to our manners,' it is 'simply based on physical beauty, a false image of generation in the body (for it could not have been based on the mind, which had yet to show itself ...)' (210). Whatever the exact nature of these bonds, the language of mentorship or of service was the same language of love in which friends spoke to each other. The respected Protestant statesman Hubert Languet could petulantly complain to Philip Sidney that the months elapsed since his last letter were proof that the young man no longer loved him, or he could write of their friendship in this vein:

But my affection for you has entered my heart far more deeply than any I have ever felt for anyone else, and it has so wholly taken possession there that it tries to rule alone, and, as it were, to practice tyranny.<sup>35</sup>

The words reveal no 'clue' to the exact nature of the relationship.

The element that distinguishes *Twelfth Night's* Antonio from *The Merchant of Venice's*, that brings to mind the speaker of the *Sonnets*, is his formulating the bond as adoration: he treated the young man with 'sanctity of love; / And to his image, which methought did promise / Most venerable worth, did I devotion' (3.4.370–72). The quality, schematically related in the play to Orsino's idolization of Olivia, points to contamination of male friendship by the Petrarchan paradigm. Sebastian, Olivia, and the *Sonnets'* fair youth share 'heavenly' space with Beatrice, Laura, and Stella in the minds of their lovers,<sup>36</sup> which is why the contrasting dark lady's eyes are nothing like the sun. Viola, too, when she walks, treads on the ground. *Twelfth Night* gives strong, sympathetic expression to Antonio's passion – especially when he feels that it has been abused – without necessarily sexualizing it. Deborah Shuger's important distinction between eroticism and sexuality seems relevant:

34 All three lovers may well be inferior in social rank, although it is thematized only in the *Sonnets* (cf also Helena's love for Bertram in *All's Well*). Sir Andrew may have been played by the young actor who performed Slender in *Merry Wives of Windsor*: is Sir Toby an older mentor?

35 Text from Charles Levy, Cornell dissertation, quoted by Edward Berry, 36 (dated 24 December 1573). The correspondence was undertaken in part for the exercise of polishing Sidney's Latin style. Berry notes the mixture of Cicero (*De amicitia*) and Petrarch in the language.

36 Again with a difference: although beautiful and occasionally disdainful, the Sonnet friend does not share these mistresses' moral superiority.

most recent work on the body tends to presuppose that erotic desire (the longing for union with the beloved) *is* sexual desire (genital arousal). Whether true or false, this presupposition is not characteristic of the Renaissance and can only impede efforts to grasp its discourses of desire. ... desire was not identified with sexuality before the late seventeenth century. ... Even when writing about romantic love (which, of course, does have a sexual component), Renaissance authors tend to assume a distinction between erotic and sexual response – which is not the same as a distinction between spiritual and physical love. Erotic desire is physical, but it primarily affects the upper body; it is engendered in the eyes and dwells in the heart.<sup>37</sup>

Homoerotic and heterosexual love are not in the sixteenth century mutually exclusive in a person's makeup. We all have pondered the Sonnet poet, who not only engages in passionate sexual pursuit of the dark lady, but begins the sequence (notoriously) by pleading that the wondrous young friend should marry and beget children – that he should satisfy purely societal, familial, or procreative obligations that for us would weaken their erotic bond. Montaigne may also be adduced: his sexual alliances with mistresses or his wife do not prevent his assertion that intellectually and spiritually his most passionate bond was with Estienne de la Boëtie. It was a friendship in which 'souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together.'<sup>38</sup> *The Merchant of Venice's* Antonio may or may not fit into this pattern. His intense love ratifies his obligation as a friend: whatever melancholy he may feel because Bassanio seeks to marry an heiress in Belmont<sup>39</sup> does not deter him from financing the journey. The contests between Portia and Antonio played out over the ring, though these give discordant focus to Antonio's claim, turn out not to be a zero-sum game. Friendship and marriage abide together at the end of the play, the love for the friend not replaced but incorporated. This is Portia's understanding throughout: she has already accepted Antonio as her husband's 'bosom lover' and the semblance of his soul (3.4.11–21).<sup>40</sup> The 'triumph' of marriage here is part of the play's comic ending, its assertions derived from the culturally sanctioned ideal of an intense male friendship that does not

37 Shuger, 271–72. Bray's terminology is different, but he too protests against reducing 'the range of what we recognize today as being sexual to the narrow question of sexual intercourse' (*The Friend*, 316).

38 Montaigne, 211–12. His account of purely sexual love with women anticipates Sonnet 129, even to the mad craving whose enjoyment is its loss (208–9).

39 So unacceptable is such an idea, even to himself, that he protests ignorance of his melancholy's origin (1.1.1–46, but also 119–21). For Bassanio, I find the peculiar coolness of his character makes passion directed towards anyone seem questionable.

40 Sinfield, in contrast, reads much of the action as Portia's premeditated plot to displace Antonio in Bassanio's heart.

exclude other strong love. Antonio's loss, while felt as significant, is magnified by modern expectations.

The possibility of incorporation colours the ending of *Twelfth Night* as well. Its Antonio need not be desolate and is certainly not excluded from the feast. The denouement of 5.1 is composed of many elements, which must be presented seriatim on the stage (compare the final recognitions and reconciliations of *The Winter's Tale*). Sebastian warmly embraces Antonio immediately upon seeing him and acknowledges his strong affection in the violence of his metaphor, even calling him 'thou,' although in earlier conversations they addressed each other only with the formal 'you':

Antonio! O my dear Antonio,  
How have the hours rack'd and tortur'd me,  
Since I have lost thee! (5.1.216–18)

Antonio, shaken by the existence of two 'identical' figures, warily sets up the next exchange: 'Sebastian are you?' / 'Fearest thou that, Antonio?' Sebastian's response – how could you doubt that I am the man you have known? – displays the tenderness necessary to affirm their closeness. His emotion temporarily occludes the mirror-figure standing in the crowd. But the long-awaited recognition scene between brother and sister instantly follows, sweeping the action forward to the romantic repercussions of Viola's unmasking. Antonio's silence for the rest of the play is no more emotionally significant than Florizel's after 5.1 in *The Winter's Tale*. He is included in the group, his role as Sebastian's friend a strand in the social tapestry that *Twelfth Night* weaves.<sup>41</sup> Because Antonio's language of love carried no claim to exclusivity for Shakespeare's audience, it would not have required his melancholy isolation.<sup>42</sup> The sharp contrast between the Elizabethan perception and our own makes this argument, opened in the previous paragraph, bear repeating. For homoerotic relationships in earlier periods their intensity is not 'defining,' but lives side by side in the same person with what to our experience seem incompatible or paradoxical sexual practices and prejudices. Alan Bray's research here is central: strong moral and legal punishments for sodomy in the period raised the bar on what society *defined* by that word (especially since sodomy was thought to be undertaken in conjunction with such acts as treason, witchcraft, and heresy), so that men failed to view their own actions in its terms.<sup>43</sup> The

41 Twinship is so frequently a trope for friendship in early literature (see Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*) that Sebastian's literal twinship in 5.1 may confront the convention. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew present an example of false friendship.

42 Osborne comments on an analogous need felt by later periods (but not by Shakespeare) to stage Antonio's pardon for piracy. See 'Antonio's Pardon,' 108.

43 Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. Although the felony was punishable by death for virtually the whole period, only two men were executed for sodomy in England

cultural impulse was not to apply labels. Shakespeare's audience presumably registered the intensity of Antonio's feelings and validated them as contributing both to the spectrum of what everyone wills and to the complex nature of anyone's desire.<sup>44</sup>

The next passage brings the revelation of Cesario as Viola, a much-anticipated moment spectacularly orchestrated as a multiple recognition scene. Criticism has made a sexual issue of Viola's remaining dressed as page at the end of the play. My own inclination is to explain it dramaturgically: the pace of unfolding action that relegates Antonio to silence after his moment of recognition with Sebastian also leaves her no time to change costume. The dramatic heart of the scene is the two figures dressed exactly alike – 'A natural perspective, that is, and is not' (5.1.215). Thus she must be 'discovered,' as it were, while still playing the role of page.<sup>45</sup> That she is no longer simply 'Cesario' to Orsino is indicated by his new use of the formal 'you.' Shakespeare artfully superimposes the image of the female Viola on the final moment, letting us imagine a second (enhanced) 'recognition':

Cesario, come,  
For so you shall be while you are a man;  
But when in other habits you are seen,  
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

He asks the audience to recall Viola dressed in a gown, as she first appeared to us in 1.2, underlining yet again our awareness that the Duke's delightful servant 'Cesario' is a young woman.<sup>46</sup>

between 1541 and 1631; both had wives, children, and political or religious beliefs that made them suspicious (Greenberg, 323–24). The array of monstrous activities expected to accompany sodomy were heresy, treason, sorcery, popery, buggery, incest, and rape. The familiar trio of charges against Christopher Marlowe (sodomy, heresy, and treason) allows Stephen Orgel now to judge even his long-accepted homosexuality uncertain (ch. 14). See also Bray, *The Friend*, 190 and passim, supporting the uncertainty of judgments.

44 For Adelman, Antonio provides 'unambiguous' signals (88); Bruce R. Smith says, 'On the subject of homoerotic desire, people are willing to say yes to Shakespeare's plays,' but not to his Sonnets (411). He dismisses the category of male/male friendship as merely a 'strategy of evasion' (412).

45 Male attire is necessary too for the action that proves her total commitment to Orsino's 'service': the willing sacrifice of her life. Schalkwyk is good on this material, though more might be said on the cultural anomaly of the *female* as lover and servant.

46 Orsino's desire to have her remain 'Cesario' for a short while not only prolongs the new paradoxical pleasure of having a beloved who is a devoted 'servant' and companion, but (generously?) echoes her own offer to Sebastian to delay the time between recognition and full embrace as his sister (249–53) – though the offer mostly works to turn the scene's attention to Malvolio. (The parallel delays must undercut the erotic valence of her disguise.) For recent discussions that problematize her remaining in male clothing, see, e.g., Adelman, 89–91; Hodgdon, 187; and Ko.



Questions of Cesario's 'identity' open up the issue of audience reception. By dwelling on the moments where Shakespeare's audience is conscious that his female characters were 'really' boys, criticism discounts the many playgoers of the period who were remarkably unsophisticated. Puritan diatribe against spectators who ogle boys lewdly dressed as women, for example, can be set against Francis Beaumont's amusement at playgoers who confuse stage action with actuality. His *Knight of the Burning Pestle* reveals their fluid though naïve sense of where to situate the 'real,' their 'limited capacity to "decode" dramatic conventions.'<sup>47</sup> The Citizen's Wife sometimes understands (male) characters to be 'boys,' sometimes to be whatever characters are identified as (an old man, a gentleman);<sup>48</sup> the Citizen will join Rafe in battle onstage to make sure 'justice' is done. While it may be the uneducated who are burlesqued here and in the mechanicals' misapprehensions about presenting moonlight, some version of their permeable reality also informs the ordinary experience of literature and drama. Aristotle's discussion of catharsis assumes that drama affects us emotionally and intellectually as though it were our own lives.<sup>49</sup> The idea underpins axioms today about 'identifying' with protagonists.

Emphasizing the particular moments when spectators see the boy beneath the female character, though it promotes exciting or arresting criticism,<sup>50</sup> distorts the audience's dominant experience of the play, which, as is generally agreed, accepts women characters as female. The strength of such a conventional response is shown by the parallel mechanism of disguise in Shakespeare's theatre: spectators accept the surface reality of his actors just as characters onstage accept the surface identity of figures who are disguised, however flimsy the disguise and however probable that in 'real life' they would not be fooled. Willingness to suspend disbelief implies provisional engagement with the stage's hypothetical reality. Disguise not only furnishes a model for this engagement but paradoxically tests it, since it creates differing perspectives for the characters and the audience: in contrast to the 'single' response onstage, the playgoer always sees Kent beneath the servant Caius, Imogen beneath the boy Fidele, Oberon even when he is invisible. For the spectator, the doubleness does

47 Sheldon P. Zitner, introduction to Beaumont, 38–39.

48 In twelve lines (act 1, lines 95–107), the Wife begins by asking whether Master Humphrey, a friend of the old merchant character, is not one of Richard Mulcaster's scholars, and ends by accusing that merchant of having been an 'old stringer' (fornicator) in his days. Yet she and her husband never see female characters as other than female (Hodgdon, 180, notes that the eyewitness accounts of John Manningham, Henry Jackson, and Simon Forman never see female characters as other than female).

49 Renaissance theory moralized the effect to contend that kings who watch tragedies in which murderous actions are punished will fear to be tyrants. See Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 117 and note (189). Hamlet tests a version of this theory on Claudius.

50 See, e.g., Stallybrass, and Howard, 'Sex and Social Conflict.'

not create a problem: a character's identity remains defined by its initial or 'revealed' role in the drama. Cesario's aside, 'A little thing will make me tell them how much I lack of a man' (3.4.307–9), channels the audience's perception to 'Viola' more readily than to the young page or the boy who plays the role.<sup>51</sup> While allowing the local awareness of layered sexual identities in performance,<sup>52</sup> I want to limit the contribution they make to the audience's overall perception of the play. They are not strong enough, I think, to obstruct either narrative energy or comic endings.

I have thus far reconsidered three problems said to darken our reception of *Twelfth Night's* final scene: the arbitrary pairing of the four lovers; Antonio as outsider, abandoned and hurt; the homoeroticism of Viola's remaining in male costume. For each, I have sought to place the disturbing element in a fuller context of Elizabethan perceptions of the issues, or alongside other factors such as the generic imperatives that shape Renaissance poetics. Two further problems, often considered in terms of 'class,' arise from the subplot: Malvolio's angry refusal of a comic resolution, and the marriage between Maria and Sir Toby. My desire is again to resituate these actions within a spectrum of historically relevant social practices, and also to see both characters and actions as consonant with the choices of mature comedy.

Literary critics still tend to think in terms of classes (considering it a kind of 'shorthand') in spite of protests by social historians that applying the concept to pre-Restoration England is misleading.<sup>53</sup> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishmen themselves, of course, spoke instead of 'estates, degrees, and sorts.' In the transition from this language to the eighteenth century's 'classes,' historians say, lies a 'transformation of the very way in which people conceived of their social world.'<sup>54</sup> Tudor and Stuart accounts acknowledged a hierarchy descending from the titular

51 I do not read this line as a reference to the boy actor's youth. Cesario's 'identical twin,' also a boy actor, is presumably seen as manly enough in all departments, and heroes in romance are conventionally extremely young. Portia too distinguishes female character from male disguise in terms of this 'lack' (*Merchant*, 2.4.60–63).

52 See Shapiro on shifting among the three layers of the female page: play-boy, female character, male persona (3). Does Hamlet's comment on the boy actor's height and voice colour our reception of the Player Queen? The rogue and peasant slave soliloquy examines the circulation of emotion among 'player,' 'character,' and audience.

53 E.g., Ralph Berry and Burnett. Coddon makes use of Weimann and Krieger, older studies based on 'class.' Draper is rather nasty about Malvolio and Maria as examples of their class; others more casually adopt some of the same attitudes: e.g., Everett, 301; Barton, 307; and Howard, 'Crossdressing,' 433.

54 Wrightson, 'Estates, Degrees and Sorts,' 31. See also Laslett; Cressy, 'Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England'; and Wrightson's book, *English Society, 1580–1680*. Post-revisionist historians concur: 'Social stratification is more clear cut in a capitalist society than in feudal ones' (Hughes, 117–18). The Civil War is itself part of the transition between these kinds of society, though earlier tensions existed (Hughes, 150).

nobility to mere paupers, but the essential division of society was much simpler. Richard Mulcaster could say in 1581 that 'all the people which be in our countrie be either gentlemen or of the commonality.'<sup>55</sup> As we might guess, the rank of gentlemen was most in flux: doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and university graduates were sometimes included among the gentry. William Harrison's *Description of England* (1577) feels the need to temper his social scheme with reality by according gentle status to any man who can 'live without manuell labour and thereto is able and will beare the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman.'<sup>56</sup> Yet in spite of the significant deference derived through gentility, the actual experiences of people often blurred these demarcations. Gentlemen by rank – and in their youth, aristocrats as well – were placed in service to noble households, or apprenticed in merchant and trading establishments.<sup>57</sup>

In aristocratic households, as Mark Burnett tells us, the steward and gentleman usher were often 'scholars with expertise in classical learning or languages' (156). Kate Mertes describes a system where well-born children are placed in aristocratic families to serve as pages, 'henchmen,'<sup>58</sup> chambermaids, etc, 'for the sake of military, social and academic education,' or for purposes of family politics. The practice changes within Tudor times. In 1598, in a tract called *A Health to the Gentlemanly Profession of Serving-Men*, one I.M. laments the replacement of gentlemen servants by persons drawn from outside the gentry (and links this practice to the general moral decline of the period).<sup>59</sup> The designation of both Maria and Malvolio as 'gentle'

55 Only 4 or 5 per cent of the population were gentry or above in Laslett's estimate (27). Mulcaster is quoted in Wrightson, 'Estates,' 38. Distinctions beyond Mulcaster's crucial line were of less significance to the society at large, though not necessarily to individuals. One recalls the Queen's decision against Philip Sidney, who alleged equality with the Earl of Oxford because they both were gentlemen. The unattractive Bertrand, in *All's Well*, has strong sense of unbridgeable difference between counts and doctor's daughters that is not shared by his mother or the King. On the other hand, 'Lord' Bassanio claims for himself only the status of gentleman (*Merchant*, 3.2.255), while Proteus and Valentine, apparently noble, are identified in the play's title as *Two Gentlemen*.

56 Wrightson, 'Estates,' 39, quoting from the 1600 printing of *Harrison's Description of England*, part 2, 128–29.

57 See Stone and Fawtier; Burnett; and Mertes.

58 Titania's changeling, e.g., is an Indian prince who Oberon thinks is old enough to serve as his henchman. Quotation appears on Mertes, 30; description of categories, 30–68.

59 Walter Darrell's conduct book, *A Short Discourse of the Life of Servingmen* (1578), specifies the replacement figure as 'the rich farmer's son,' who he feels has no personal code of judgment. Reasons for the process by which the servant class lost its nobility include centralization of government and the bureaucracy (new paths to social success) and formalization of what was considered 'education.' Mertes's date for the change is by 1600 (see 187–92); Girouard is inclined to see continuity until 1630 (though households of more than one hundred were increasingly rare after 1600 [85]). See also Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 165–67. Neill, ch 1, discusses some of this material, noting that every member of the society (the monarch included) was 'servant' to some master (22).

several times in the course of *Twelfth Night* may indicate – along with its interest in Puritan controversy – that the play harks back to the early 1580s.<sup>60</sup> If so, it adds a layer of nostalgia to the ‘golden time’ of an action that unfolds in a very English Illyria.

Olivia’s household, notwithstanding certain parallels to the social accounts we have, models no historical reality. Burnett says that Olivia’s estate is ‘plagued by servants and knights whose combined actions make a mockery of carefully gradated domestic hierarchies’ (160). In fact, for a play that is said to subscribe to or manifest so many ‘class’ attitudes, it is remarkably casual in conferring titles and status. Olivia is always a Countess and Sir Andrew is always a young knight currently enjoying a good income – but everyone else is in flux. Orsino is a Count or a Duke (sometimes both within a few lines); Sir Toby’s consanguinity makes him either uncle or cousin; Sebastian and Viola are certainly gentle (as Cesario claims [1.5.283]), but their father’s wide reputation in the Mediterranean may underwrite the nobility Orsino ascribes to Sebastian in the final scene (‘right noble is his blood’).<sup>61</sup> Malvolio seems without status other than his occupation offers him until he is incarcerated, when he calls himself a gentleman (4.2.85), a ranking ratified later by Olivia and Orsino; Olivia calls Maria ‘my gentlewoman,’ but others refer to her four times as ‘wench.’ Fabian is notoriously difficult for editors to classify because of a fluctuating intimacy in his address to gentle characters, and Feste’s apparent education clashes with his low degree as fool.<sup>62</sup> Status is clearly viewed as a factor in the audience’s judgment and satisfaction – thus we are given a suddenly noble consort for Olivia to marry and perhaps, as Cristina Malcolmson suggests, a gentleman Malvolio when sympathy is called for<sup>63</sup> – but Shakespeare’s sense of how rank operates in the unfolding action is less than ideological. The claim to gentility of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, Malvolio, Maria, and perhaps Fabian must call into question the common assumption that the subplot depicts the ‘lower classes.’<sup>64</sup>

60 The argument is from Mallin. He adduces also ‘Elizabeth worship’ and a plot parallel to the Simier wooing of Elizabeth for the Duke of Anjou (ingeniously worked out). He offers no reason for the twenty-year retrospect.

61 Mere gentility is acceptable to Olivia (Cesario makes no greater claim), whereas Riche’s Julina (a wealthy and noble widow) is willing to marry an ordinary servingman (169). His Silvio and Silla are introduced to the reader immediately as children of a Duke.

62 Antonio and Viola’s sea captain both speak in blank verse, though Antonio not exclusively. Viola nevertheless addresses the captain (condescendingly) as ‘thou’ (Schalkwyk, 93). Almost everyone speaks prose (at length) at some time in the play.

63 Malcolmson, 38. Oddly, she finds that Maria’s being both a chambermaid and a gentlewoman is ‘confused’ (53n8).

64 It is not to be thought, of course, that the less clear cut stratification of early modern England left no place for prejudice and disdain among the various orders. The figure of the steward evokes a full spectrum of responses. The Earl of Pembroke, e.g., objected in 1598 that the Earl of Essex’s steward, a very wealthy knight, was only a household servant. On the other hand, John Webster clearly anticipates audience sympathy for

I begin with Malvolio. He is presented as a particular combination of two familiar figures – the steward and the Puritan – but strongly inflected by thematic material developed elsewhere in the play. The strategy offers several contexts for perceiving him. Occupation alone will not define Malvolio's status, as we have noted, since stewards were often well-educated gentlemen. Burnett's account of the prevailing stereotype of the steward suggests that society was rather hostile (155), with his ambivalent place at the top of the household service hierarchy generating suspicion from both masters and subordinates. Subordinates complain that he is lording his power over them; masters fear becoming victims of his dishonesty, hypocrisy, or unscrupulous ambition. Insinuations of sexual intimacy with either male or female members of the household (above and below the stairs) recur, perhaps owing to extensive opportunity and the peculiar dynamics of power relationships.<sup>65</sup>

While Malvolio embodies a recognizable version of some of these anxieties, he is tellingly neither dishonest nor unscrupulous. The society's central fear concerning the 'false steward' (Burnett, 164) is irrelevant to him. Evidence for hypocrisy must be derived from Maria's accusation that he is a time-server; libido barely peeps through his fantasy life as Count Malvolio. The letter scene instead dwells on the self-love that allows him to believe Olivia adores him, and watches him convert self-importance into an exercise of domestic power over the household. We see ambition, to be sure, but so ludicrously presented as to defuse our perception of either sexual or social threat. Self-love and delusion sidetrack our awareness of stereotype. The other quality his characterization insists upon is hostility to pleasure, suitable to a figure of order in the household, but an unexpected wrinkle for a usually more worldly steward.

These two ideas – self-love and moral severity – are connected for us in Malvolio's first scene, where he cuttingly refuses to be amused by Feste's wit. Olivia reproves his lack of proportion, suggesting that it is a matter of mental as well as moral health:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets. (1.5.89–93)<sup>66</sup>

Antonio, the virtuous steward whom the Duchess of Malfi chooses to marry in the face of the psychotic concern for noble blood that rules her brothers. Shakespeare's Flavius in *Timon of Athens* is an impossibly virtuous steward (e.g., 4.2.22–29). These are Burnett's examples (171–75), in addition to the unsympathetic figure in Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher* (1602–3). *The Changeling's* steward, De Flores, offers Neill evidence for social tensions within the office (36–39).

65 See Burnett, and Bray, 'Signs.' Jardine seems to overstate the case. The Overburian chambermaid (first printed 1615) is servant as sexual object.

66 Maria reinforces this judgment: he is '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'; she will

The issue is immediately ethical: 'generous ... and of free disposition' point to nobility of mind; not being 'guiltless' may imply undue suspicion or paranoia. His 'distempered appetite,' coloured by the aggressive metaphor of cannon-bullets, invites contrast with the Duke's analogy between music and the food of love or with Sir Toby's penchant for pickled herring and tankards of ale. The differing quality of these appetites helps calibrate the thematic link that his self-love and delusion form with Olivia and Orsino. Orsino seems deluded about the nature and object of his love, and Olivia about how love for a brother is expressed, but Malvolio's fantasies of love abandon Olivia on a daybed in order to pursue the greater satisfaction of domestic tyranny. (He is then not punished for the 'same' fault that his betters are allowed to harbour unreprieved.)<sup>67</sup>

Though linked with Olivia and Orsino in the examination of self-love and delusion, Malvolio alone acts with a moral severity that angers most other members of the household and is inimical to comedy itself. Shakespeare 'thickens' his presentation of the steward's self-righteousness by gesturing towards Puritanism. Maria's initial assertion, 'Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan' (2.3.140), invokes the Puritan satire of the contemporary stage, yet the statement is much qualified (note 'sometimes,' 'kind of'). Sir Andrew's response of mindless animosity elicits Maria's retraction ('The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly').<sup>68</sup> She substitutes a list of more individuated faults that, aside from the suggestion of opportunistic hypocrisy in 'time-pleaser,' insist rather on a pretension to knowledge (he 'cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths') and on his extraordinary self-love than on more usual Puritan qualities. At most, then, Malvolio is a quasi-Puritan, a label that interrogates the stereotype it proposes. Nor does Puritanism help with establishing his place on the social ladder, since Puritan beliefs were held by aristocrats and gentlemen as well as by the commonality. 'Ambition' is no more firmly assignable. A refusal to make him wholly a Puritan may even reflect the broader provenance of moral attacks on the theatre.<sup>69</sup>

make it the basis for his gulling (2.3.149–53). If Malvolio is Olivia's 'known discreet man' in her next lines, his reproof is not 'railing' (1.5.93–96).

67 See Hollander's classic discrimination between love seeking satisfaction outside oneself and love directed inward. Krieger objects because there is no evidence for the view that Malvolio's love is directed inward, but also offers none for his own assertion that Malvolio loves Olivia (123). One notes, however, that Malvolio enters 2.5 musing over Olivia's love for *him*. For another protest against unfairness, see, e.g., Baker in the Signet edition of *Twelfth Night*, lxx.

68 Mallin observes the subliminal confirmation in Maria's formal denial: 'the Devil is a Puritan,' standard Anglican cant, underlies her statement (170). Shakespeare, as often, will have it both ways – stereotypes, like conventions, are suspect, but they can still embody truths. The passage may well catch the audience participating in Sir Andrew's attitude.

69 See, e.g., Knapp, 14; and Rice, 2 and ch 1.

Understanding Malvolio principally as a servant, Puritan, or social upstart thus smudges not only the careful lines distinguishing him from the period's stereotypes but also the historical content of the categories themselves. The unconventionality and layering of his conception are arguments that he was not created as a type or as the magnet for an issue. We experience this complexity in our conflicted response to his final scene. The demand for revenge notwithstanding, Olivia's offer of justice highlights his rigidity and separation from the community, a position we reject generically in order to embrace comedy's more inclusive and tolerant society. Yet despite his puritanical antagonism to the community, Malvolio is not merely a figure of ridicule or menace. He has indeed been most notoriously abused and we sympathize with him for it. Although such doubleness unsettles the final moments of the play, I would argue that the destabilization is perceptibly less than class enmity would generate.<sup>70</sup>

Malvolio's role in the play is also (principally?) conceived in conjunction with Sir Toby's. The strategy may do as much for such a blocking figure as a comedy can (short of conversion). We are asked to balance his narrow uprightness against Sir Toby's drunken irresponsibility. The exaggerated thematic antithesis between them prevents choosing one at the expense of the other: what one wants is some middle ground.<sup>71</sup> In the interest of this balancing, I would propose that if Malvolio is 'better' than many accounts of him suggest – not an upstart member of the 'middle class' (even if one existed in 1600), but a reasonably well-educated gentleman steward with repressive instincts and dubious but not ruthless ambitions<sup>72</sup> – Sir Toby is perhaps shaded more negatively than his reception indicates. He is someone I think we judge largely apart from his social status, although an audience might well measure his drunken licence and eagerness to fleece his companion against ideals of knightly behaviour (Falstaff, surely Sir Toby's 'original,' is also a knight).<sup>73</sup> The trajectory of Sir Toby's behaviour

70 See Neill on rebellious servants: 'it is not strictly "class" that is at issue but rather less familiar discriminations of status ... This is why the disaffections of service typically appear not as the anger of an oppressed underclass, but the envy or resentment of marginal men' (41).

71 Heal comments on a fourteenth-century dialogue, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, that sets up a similar (unresolved) opposition: 'Reciprocity and Exchange in the Late Medieval Household,' 189.

72 Wrightson, 'Estates': not until the 1620s and 1630s is there evidence even for the term 'middling sort.' There is a comparable assessment of Malvolio in Salingar, 211 and 225n34. But for Howard he is a 'class-jumper' and 'upstart crow' ('Crossdressing,' 433).

73 There is nevertheless much in Sir Toby's characterization that runs true to social type: his easy confidence, articulateness, wit, intelligence in gauging various situations, willingness to use his sword. Barber calls him 'gentlemanly liberty incarnate' (250). Falstaff too is played off against Puritan values, though they are of his own selecting. It may be too pious to assume that 'knight' automatically carried moral expectations for Elizabethans: it seems irrelevant for judging Sir Andrew.

in the play follows an almost consistently darkening path. From simple drunken carousing (Maria's initial charge), he later boasts of bilking Sir Andrew of his allowance to support their life of revelry ('I have been dear to him, lad, some two thousand strong or so' [3.1.52–53]), then pounces on an opportunity to steal Sir Andrew's valuable horse ('Marry, I'll ride your horse as well as I ride you' [3.4.295–96]). This last adds crime to vices we have found amusing.<sup>74</sup> The meanness of the language startles us into confronting his action as theft; it will recur in the insults with which Sir Toby severs their ostensible friendship. Yet the force of moral judgment does not seriously damage Sir Toby until he orchestrates Malvolio's punishment. As an audience out to enjoy a comedy, we are necessarily well disposed to cakes and ale (though less ale would be more acceptable). Sir Toby, in greater measure than Feste, has been the bringer of carnival fun.<sup>75</sup>

The unsavoury side of Sir Toby – his willingness to 'property' others (4.2.94) – is of course manifested notably by imprisoning Malvolio in a dark room, by his expectation that the steward's anguish at being treated like a madman will yield him and his friends pleasure. His scheme is proposed as an example of excess that purges itself (to evoke Hollander's formulation):

Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound. My niece is already in the belief that he's mad: we may carry it thus for our pleasure, and his penance, till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him ... (3.4.136–40)

But we discover that even Sir Toby's fear of angering Olivia – 'I would we were well rid of this knavery' – does not cause him to terminate the 'sport' (4.2.69–73).<sup>76</sup> The question of judgment is most pressing here. Shakespeare's audience cannot have been impervious to Malvolio's vulnerability or mental pain; Fabian warns that they will make him mad indeed (3.4.134). Our modern tendency to internalize Malvolio's situation, however – to imagine what it feels like to be sane and have all one's words twisted by authority – must make the scene more shocking than their experience of it. The Oxford editors argue persuasively that Malvolio's incarceration is staged for minimum impact by having him heard but not seen. And we are simply more sensitive about mental illness than were Elizabethans, who notoriously used inmates of Bedlam for wedding entertainment. Neverthe-

74 Sir Toby is fully capable of judging his own actions. At the end of the scene he assesses Cesario's 'betrayal' of Antonio as cowardly and dishonest: 'his dishonesty appears in his leaving his friend here in necessity, and denying him' (3.4.395–98).

75 Though he is not himself aware of the spirit of Twelfth Night, as Feste is. See the telling interchange about dying quoted later in this essay.

76 Fabian's echo of this, 'sportful malice' (5.1.364), is no more attractive, though it opens the question whether revenge is a suitable response (365).



less, I think we are meant to be disturbed. Maria's casual indifference to Fabian's caution about driving the steward mad – 'The house will be the quieter' (1.3.5) she says – indicates something has gone wrong. The original gulling of Malvolio was her plan (and a marvellous comic device it is), but here she succumbs to the lack of limit and control that she earlier censured in Sir Toby's revelry.

Shakespeare has diluted the dark snobbery present in Sir Toby's animus. He adds motives that do not rely on social degree to the 'consanguinity' that spurs the knight to respond with imagined acts of violence to Malvolio's fantasy life as either Olivia's husband or Count Malvolio. The strongest motive, temperamental antipathy, is signalled prominently in early scenes where Sir Toby's hijinks (1.3) are juxtaposed to Malvolio's uncharitable and cutting remarks to Feste (1.5.71–75). It is memorably expressed as a standoff: 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' (2.3.114–15). Jealousy is also probable. Olivia's statement of Malvolio's 'value' to her – 'I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry' (3.4.62–63)<sup>77</sup> – can imply his calculable worth as a steward. Malvolio has assumed the financial, manorial counselling that would normally fall to an older male relative who lived with his unguarded 'niece.' In spite of choosing to consider care an enemy to life (1.3.2–3), the 'uncle' may still resent the man who fills the void he leaves. Since Sir Toby's only security lies in kinship, Malvolio's actual status as a gentleman would be strictly irrelevant, incapable of allaying the animosity he feels.

One of the main values in *Twelfth Night* is wit.<sup>78</sup> For Sir Toby it is a redeeming one. Wit can explain much about him, whether the word designates intelligence or verbal cleverness. It offers a reason other than cynicism or folly for his marrying Maria: who could be more suitable for him than 'as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria' (1.5.27)? Feste acts as a kind of touchstone in the play: shared wit promotes the easy camaraderie with him that contributes to our estimation of Sir Toby, much as Olivia's willingness to be catechized by the Fool colours our evaluation of her. Wit also saves Sir Toby from charges that he tries to manipulate Olivia into marrying Sir Andrew. He is unquestionably intelligent enough to know that she will have no part of an obvious and universally recognized dolt. His sole plan is for Sir Andrew to finance their good times until he has been milked dry. We are of course aware that this is an indefensible basis for friendship. But Sir Andrew is so exquisitely stupid, so much a gull waiting for a knave to come along, that we are likely to feel that if it were

<sup>77</sup> Extravagant monetary valuations of others are characteristic of the play: Maria's jest is worth Fabian's pension and Sir Toby's expectations of a dowry; Olivia's estate is merely 'dirty lands' to Orsino.

<sup>78</sup> See the excellent discussion in Hutson.

not Sir Toby it would be someone less entertaining and less willing to let Sir Andrew enjoy a share in his own income before the money runs out. (Stealing Sir Andrew's horse, like the imprisonment of Malvolio, becomes the point at which a plan we accede to goes sour. Excess can be excess, then, not merely the tipping point for beneficial purging.) Sir Andrew is offstage and insulted at the end; our sympathy for him is without surprise or indignation. Deprived of the illusion that he is a valued member of their society, how can he stay? Sir Toby's absence from the final moments, on the other hand, is more open to interpretation and perhaps hope. He has irrevocably broken with his (still affluent) drinking companion, calling him 'An ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull' (5.1.204-5); he is forced to recognize in an irresponsible doctor his own besetting fault by suffering the pain it causes: 'I hate a drunken rogue' (199); and he has married Maria, a union earlier conceivable only 'if Sir Toby would leave drinking' (1.5.26). The three actions together allow us to think that Sir Toby will indeed 'convert,' a path which Falstaff before him constantly vows to undertake. We register Falstaff's promise as an ongoing joke, yet Shakespeare's theatre accepted fifth-act conversions more readily than does ours (Edmund is a signal example). Sir Toby's circumstances, intelligence, and wit might then encourage us to think that it can happen. Or at least freely to entertain the prospect for the sake of the comic ending. If *Twelfth Night* as a festival suggests a time of folly and disguise that must come to an end, drunkenness can be the mask that Sir Toby will discard.<sup>79</sup>

Maria herself has become an obstacle to seeing their union as a positive contribution to the play's comic ending. Critical response to her in our age is rather puzzling. Analysis is generally issue-based, yet where one might expect sympathy for a woman of wit and perceptiveness who is trapped in the narrow choices offered by her society, one finds instead cynicism that interprets her marriage as a triumph of the scheming female underclass.<sup>80</sup> This interpretation derives from a misunderstanding of the nature of domestic service in the milieu Shakespeare presumably depicts, and from a misreading, I think, of Maria as well.

Riche's story takes place in urban Constantinople; Shakespeare's deliberate resetting the action on country estates gives the play a different and probably fairly specific social milieu.<sup>81</sup> The context is the noble household, perhaps in the 1580s, perhaps closer to 1600. Some earlier protocols were loosened in the late Tudor period, but as Mark Girouard tells us in *Life in the English Country House*, until the early seventeenth cen-

79 Salingar perceptively calls the subplot a Feast of Fools (209), connecting it with folly itself: 'the first offspring of Folly, according to Erasmus, are Drunkenness, Ignorance and Self-Love' (224n30).

80 Such assessments are offered, e.g., by Draper, Krieger, Barton, Burnett, Mallin, Coddon, and in milder form by Schalkwyk, who better gauges the social structure.

81 *Gl' Ingannati* is set in urban Modena, and its servants reflect Roman comedy.

ture, even new households of any pretension followed medieval models, in which a large male entourage took care of the military, administrative, and purchasing functions of the household (82). What this meant, contrary to Victorian or Hollywood practice, was the virtual absence of female servants even for purely domestic duties. All cooking, cleaning, and waiting chores were performed by males. The Earl of Derby in the 1580s had a household varying from 115 to 140 people (exclusive of family), of whom only three to six were women (Girouard, 82). The account of quarterly wages for Wollaton in 1572 registers nine women, including Lady Willoughby herself, a lady-in-waiting, and another gentlewoman.<sup>82</sup> A noble mistress's personal servants were likely to be gentle in degree or higher: 'the ladies of the lady' might be her social equals or nearly so (Mertes, 58). Gentlewomen functioned most often as companions, since mistresses were both isolated and restricted in their movements (Friedman, 47). Even personal care fell to gentlewomen or young girls of rank: Viscountess Montagu (1538–1608), herself the daughter of a baron and granddaughter of an earl, served the Countess of Bedford from the age of thirteen to sixteen, apparently on occasion emptying her chamber pot.<sup>83</sup> Mertes notes the term 'chambermaid' has no particular duties ascribed to it before about 1600, registering only the place of service. For Samuel Pepys in the 1660s it comes to signify a less prestigious but still not menial kind of service.<sup>84</sup>

Smaller country and urban households must have had a different configuration. Fewer servants meant each did more kinds of work. And with no prestige to be garnered, the servants there were likely to be young women.<sup>85</sup> Ordinances in many small cities required females who were 'at their own hand' to be incarcerated in bridewells until they obtained service. Even young women who lived with their mothers could be deemed at risk.<sup>86</sup> The stereotypes available to us in Overbury's Chambermaid and in characters populating later Jacobean drama<sup>87</sup> presumably refer to this group of women, clearly commoners, who become progressively more pre-

82 Friedman, 45–46. The nursery and dairy could be female provinces. The number of males in the 1570s ranged from forty-five to fifty (41). The household described by R.B. (c 1605) contained two hundred persons, fewer than twelve of them women (Friedman, 46; dating, Girouard, 320).

83 Recorded by her biographer: Richard Smith, 11. As late as 1615, a niece of John Holles, eventually the first Earl of Clare, was serving as only the 'second woman' to Frances Howard, Countess of Hertford (*Letters* 1:71–72). Qtd by Stirn, 121.

84 Earle, 220–29. Pepys thought the position of chambermaid to his wife was suitable for his own sister Pall.

85 See Girouard on women servants becoming more prevalent in the seventeenth century for this reason, though he is talking of aristocratic houses (142).

86 Griffiths, esp 380–82. The risk was presumably prostitution. In addition to domestic service, these women might find employment doing laundry, sewing, brewing, or selling ale.

87 See the discussion in Burnett, 129–44.

valent in all households during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a subcategory of misogynist literature, satires concerning maidservants have for their major topics sexual scheming and desire for marriage. In them the maidservant's body is either a tool for advancement or an invitation to be attacked.

It is clear that Maria is not designed in the Overburian mould. She may as an attendant take care of Olivia's veils and transmit warnings against disorderly behaviour, but she neither manipulates her mistress through gossip nor projects vulnerability. She is no one's sex object. Sir Andrew's attempt to 'accost' her only sets up the display of her wit that Sir Toby presumably intended to provoke. Sir Toby calls her 'the littlest wren' and 'beagle'; she must have been played by a noticeably small boy, though the character is a woman rather than a teenager.<sup>88</sup> Far from being nubile or flirtatious, Maria is admired as Penthesilea, another jest considering her size, but one that conveys the way she stands apart from (and above) other women.

That she is also referred to as 'wench' may lead us to wonder about her social position,<sup>89</sup> but the term is best understood, I think, in relation to Sir Toby's own characterization. Aside from one patent misapplication (arising from Sir Andrew's ignorance of Penthesilea?) the speaker is always Sir Toby and the word often indicates the dynamic underlying their attraction. Elsewhere, for example, he calls her 'little villain,' but in the next breath 'my metal of India,' or pure gold (2.5.13–14). 'Wench' functions, I think, as a kind of self-protection that allows Sir Toby to distance himself from his emotions. If he plans to marry at all, his circumstances require a rich widow. Maria's perceptiveness and wit drive him to other thoughts: 'I could marry this wench for this device. ... And ask no other dowry with her but such another jest' (2.5.182–85). As a 'confession,' the remark is masked by seeming to match Fabian's extravagant but empty claim about forgoing a pension from the Sophy. But Sir Andrew's fatuous adoption of each of Sir Toby's remarks – 'So could I too'; 'Nor I neither' – pushes them towards

88 The age of many characters is a problem: Draper plausibly suggests mid-twenties for Maria; Sir Toby seems 'older,' but as someone's younger brother, might be less than thirty-five. The Duke (Count) might be anywhere from twenty-three to thirty; Olivia (contrary to many estimates that are mistakenly coloured by 'widowhood') is probably, like Viola and Sebastian, no more than eighteen. (Pyrocles, in the revised *Arcadia*, is bumped from sixteen to eighteen years old, and is still thought suitable for female disguise. The 'mature' Pamela is seventeen.) Actual figures for first marriages in the early seventeenth century were twenty-three and a half for women, twenty-six and a half for men (Laslett, 82–83). There is not much difference between gentry and commoners.

89 Twice in 2.3 Sir Toby expects Maria to bring him wine: at line 14, he calls to her offstage: 'Marian, I say, a stoup of wine!' She doesn't appear until line 73, probably empty-handed, to reprimand him for caterwauling. The request for wine is repeated at line 119, when Malvolio intervenes (addressing Maria with the formal 'you') and implies that she need not obey Sir Toby.

being real statements by contrast. When Maria re-enters, Sir Toby takes refuge in exaggerating the reversal of power relations produced by his attraction: 'Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?' ... 'Shall I play my freedom at tray-trip, and become thy bond slave?' (188, 190–91). Maria's response is merely to ignore or deflect comments about their relationship, as she does also with Feste at 1.5.28. The knight's feigned submission is not a sign of her 'dominance,' but of a mutual (adult) confidence that licenses their banter, or at least permits him to feel he will not be taken literally.<sup>90</sup>

For Sir Toby the obstacle to his union with Maria is more likely her lack of wealth than her social rank. She is a gentlewoman. Her position with Olivia is no more disabling than Cesario's as the Count's page or 'serving-man' (3.2.5). We note that Sir Toby himself pronounces him a young gentleman of good capacity and breeding (3.4.186–87), and that his status as gentleman is sufficient in a countess's eyes to make him an acceptable husband. Mertes allows us to think that Maria has special importance as Olivia's gentlewoman: 'since the household was a very much a male environment, noble women depended ... upon their personal servants for companionship.'<sup>91</sup> Shakespeare does not make a point of Maria's role as confidante (as he does Nerissa's or even Emilia's), but it is a reasonable inference from what we know of Olivia's circumstances: she has spent several months withdrawn from society to mourn her only brother, whose death followed soon after their father's. Sir Toby is often drunk; Malvolio is sensible but dour; Feste's role as a professional fool prevents much straight conversation. I have suggested that Valentine's extravagant picture of Olivia watering her garden with tears was mediated by Maria's own invention: their shared wit and the image of the two women unravelling the mystery of their similar handwriting – 'on a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands' (2.3.160–62) – promotes a sense of consonance if not intimacy. The elegance of her handwriting no less than the mistaking of her prose for Olivia's signifies her gentility.<sup>92</sup> Thus when Cesario first approaches Maria and Olivia, their dress and manner do not

90 The bantering quality of their relationship is sharpest at the outset when they discuss Sir Andrew (1.3); in other places they are no Beatrice and Benedict. Burnett seizes on these 2.5 speeches (and the reference to Penthesilea) as indications that Maria is a 'particularly dominant presence ... [who] will rule as a wife as she did as a servant' (142). She usurps Olivia's and Malvolio's role, turning class and gender boundaries upside-down (142). He indignantly contrasts her actions with Malvolio's: 'a woman servant is applauded for a slow accumulation of power, but a steward is crushed for his more impatient attempts to establish himself.' Mallin attributes to both the goal of ascending in rank through aristocratic marriage; they are locked in a struggle for social mobility and favour from Olivia (186).

91 Mertes, 43. Orsino, since his court is presented without any context of administrative or military labour, seems to use personal servants (gentlemen) for companionship.

92 See Magnusson, ch 2, on gentle servants.

sharply distinguish them: 'The honourable lady of the house, which is she?' (1.5.169).<sup>93</sup>

I stress the status of Maria as a gentlewoman and companion to Olivia because it recasts our assessment of what it means for her to marry Sir Toby at the end of the play. (I must say I don't think Shakespeare encourages this kind of 'narrative' speculation, but my discussion hopes to counter predictions that Sir Toby will be henpecked.) If they remain on the estate – and there is no evidence for supposing Sir Toby has the means to set up his own household – she will continue as Olivia's companion, though perhaps sharing less intimacy because Olivia will have both a delightful husband and a 'sister' who lives nearby. Maria's status will indeed now depend on Sir Toby, but in that ambience it will be on his sobriety more than his rank. Critics often write as though the marriage were a triumph for Maria, yet it must present a greater risk. Will a drunken Sir Toby always be 'welcome?' (2.3.95ff). It is a risk we are (provisionally) willing for her to take. If the final scene renders the dominantly happy ending I have been arguing for, we have accepted the play's hints both to suspend disbelief at Sir Toby's giving up excessive drink and to recognize the union of these two witty, clever, and perceptive people as a kind of companionate marriage.

Feste's final song, with its rain that raineth every day, counterbalances the sunshine of Orsino's projected 'golden time.' Here too I find many critical responses exaggerate the effect of its gloom. The Fool's function in the play is worth noting. I think older readings that connect him with time and revelry, with 'Twelfth Night' itself, are the most fruitful. (Since he has no strong social or sexual identification, he has not figured much in recent discussions.) By the spirit of Twelfth Night one means of course the simultaneous awareness of appropriate revelry (as the final night of the long Christmas celebration) and its ending (as the *final* night of the holiday). Death and time, the two forces that signal this change, are Feste's constant themes. One of his songs tells of a man conventionally determined to kill himself over an unhappy love; another is a *carpe diem* warning to a lovely young woman. To the irresponsibility of Sir Toby's merrymaking – his assertion (in song) '*But I will never die*' – Feste brings the cold light of day: '*Sir Toby, there you lie*' (2.3.107–8). He is a *memento mori* that is not a death's head but a clown, one who alternates shrewd or melancholy sense with gibberish.

The play's main plot is divided from its subplot less by social stratification than by the operation of time: a golden time when 'what you will' can

93 The Oxford editors, Roger Warren and Stanley Wells, posit a slew of veiled ladies-in-waiting (among the 'attendants' who must be there to 'take the fool away' [1.5.36]). But these attendants are likely, given the discussion above and their being addressed as 'fellows' (37), to be male.

be realized is balanced against a more ordinary time in which actions have consequences. Significantly, Viola is indeed spared the consequences of her disguise by a 'Time' that unties the knot. But the subplot has all along unfolded under the aegis of more ordinary (sometimes arbitrary) cause and effect: Feste is threatened with being turned out, Sir Toby with overstepping the boundary of Olivia's capacious tolerance. Malvolio is incarcerated for his fantasies and self-righteousness. Outside the subplot, Antonio (whose past may include piracy) and Viola's captain are caught up in the processes of law. While the main plot is not undermined by this material, we are made aware that its elegant poise is fragile. Feste's final song insists on that awareness, daring to present a palpably darker version of subplot time. It is not about growing up and not notably about reality;<sup>94</sup> it describes a particular life pattern in which time effects only negative changes, in which 'what you will' (thought of as choice rather than desire) has been suspended. Something too dark is set against something too bright. Its refrain, 'The rain it raineth every day,' tells us that the song does not in fact depict ordinary reality. Even in England, it doesn't rain every day. Moreover, an audience enjoying the two-hour traffic of this stage in an open theatre might well know that pleasures are available in spite of the drizzle.

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94 Barton, e.g., calls it 'reality,' Coddon 'history.'

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