

“There’s something in’t that is deceivable” :
“Present mirth” and “what’s to come”
In *Twelfth Night*

by

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The title of Shakespeare’s most mature comedy, **Twelfth Night** or **What You Will** gives no clue to its content. “Twelfth Night”, the conclusion of the Christmas Feast, may have been chosen because this was the time of the play’s very first recorded performance in 1601¹. **What You Will** was the title of a later comedy by John Marston². But Shakespeare’s titles are occasionally irrelevant and although a great deal of scholarly energy has been expended in discussions of these alternatives, the results are not critically helpful. In any case, comedies are not to be satisfactorily described through their titles.. **As You Like It** and **Much Ado About Nothing**—are equally poor guides and in fact **What You Will** and **As You Like It** appear to carry the same import, inviting the audience to judge. **Much Ado** with its three connected plots, is certainly about “something”, for even if the first two may be thought trivial, the third, about the courtship of Beatrice and Benedick, is not. When Charles I was a boy, he retitled the play “Benedick and Beatrice”, indicating the part of it that interested him most³.

Twelfth Night’s subject is, however, easily settled upon. Comedy as Shakespeare conceived it is always⁴ about love, with marriage as a desirable end, so that illicit love, self-love, more than one love and unnatural attachments become barriers to this accepted state of bliss. **Twelfth Night** makes comedy out of the force of passion, especially when it is directed at the wrong object, thus creating absurd situations which bring about deadlock or threaten chaos. The morality of the playwright’s comedies emerges indirectly, since the disappearance of chaos produces the order which makes suitable marriage possible. True love prevails, false love is banished. But Shakespeare’s dictum, put into the mouth of Theseus in **A Midsummer Night’s Dream** :

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend.

More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact.

(op. cit., V, i, 4-8)

is a comment on the difficulties which lovers cannot help making for themselves, for they are dominated by fancy and share the "seething brains" of madmen.

Written shortly before **Hamlet**⁵, **Twelfth Night** represents a change from the innocuous world of Bottom's dream or the escapism of the Forest of Arden. The melancholy of Hamlet is beginning to make itself felt in **Twelfth Night**, although Orsino's affliction is not fatal. "Twelfth Night" is the last night of the Feast of the Epiphany, when the revels and over-indulgences are ended and people are brought back to clarity of vision, to face the vicissitudes of a new year. Perhaps this was why Shakespeare settled on the title on the ground that it was as good as any other. The play could be made "what you will" or what you want, with all its possible accompanying surprises. One can never tell how one's desires may be realised. He was dramatising a timeless period, a stage in life recognisable only in retrospect and never to be recaptured.

The action of this play begins, flourishes and ends in music. Orsino, Duke of Illyria (a name suggestive of delirium and the rapturous condition of ecstasy felt by passionate lovers), is a self-concerned melancholic who is first discovered solacing himself with music. One can hear the "strains" (melodies) and "falls" (embellishments)⁶ of the viols and virginals of the Elizabethan court consort as he speaks the well-known opening lines :

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again, it had a dying fall :
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour

(I, i, 1-7)

but, before his encouraging observation is complete, he is already noting the drooping of his spirits :

'Tis not so sweet now as it was before
he sighs, denoting the abrupt collapse of his ecstasy into a typically romantic depression, produced by excess of emotion. Love at its most passionate is fleeting, quickly touched by reality and sustained by fancy for a short time only⁷.

The trio, love, food and music are brought together in Act I, scenes i–iii, through the actions of Orsino (whose name means “bear”, a ravenous, clumsy beast). His music is a static well of emotion and when Curio asks him if he wants to hunt the hart, a symbol both of light-footedness and hopeless passion, he envisions his own transformation into a hart though it is soon evident that this is mere license. Orsino must have been a recognisable type on the Elizabethan stage, a “drop-out” unfitted for conventional activity because of an over-elaborate humanistic education. Holofernes in **Love’s Labour’s Lost** is his prototype and this satirical tilt at impractical intellectualism comes out again and again in Shakespeare, in the soliloquys of Hamlet, for example. In **Twelfth Night** it is most directly shown up through Malvolio, whose cold logic does not save him from disaster.

Viola, a name suggesting a musical instrument, a viol or lute, which may be bowed or plucked, also confirms the atmosphere of the prologue to this comedy ... her music is in contrast to Orsino’s ... it is not static but active. Her simile comparing her missing brother Sebastian to “Arion on the dolphin’s back” (I,ii,15) is one subtle reminder and in scene iv Orsino describes her voice as “thy small pipe ... shrill and sound” (32–3)⁸. The action becomes much more lively after her entrance in scene ii. Orsino’s inward-looking mood is left behind and her dialogue with the sea-captain promises action. It is to be noted how much conversation moves the plot in this play, especially in the first two acts, when the relationships between characters are being established ... in I, v and II, iv, for example. In I, v we meet Malvolio for the first time ... his insulting talk to the Clown, to whom he refers as “a barren rascal” (82) gives the former a clear motive to revenge. II, iv revives the atmosphere with which the play opens, with the Duke calling for music .. “that old and antic song we heard last night” (3). The Clown is not there to perform and so the Duke and Viola discuss love against a musical accompaniment, the tune without the words. Later, the Clown is brought in to sing it:⁹

Come away, come away death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid

a dual reminder that life is fleeting and that the Duke’s dying of love is an ironic human condition¹⁰. Orsino fails to understand this and the irony in the Clown’s brief speech which follows :

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the
tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for
thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of
such constancy put to sea, that their business

might be everything, and their intent everywhere,
for that's it that always makes a good voyage of
nothing.

(II,iv,73-79)

In the scene preceding the Clown had explored the character of love in a song.

What is love ? 'Tis not hereafter,
Present mirth hath present laughter :
What's to come is still unsure
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty :
Youth's a stuff will not endure

(II,iii,48-53)¹¹

He alone sees that time is of the essence ... "in delay there lies no plenty" ... so, "gather ye rosebuds" is his mildly ironic advice, born of the Fool's wisdom. He recommends action, not thought. Hamlet was to be trapped in procrastination, inhibited from acting by too much pondering on the nature of things but Feste's audience, the truly foolish Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, for whom life is purely material and sensual, do not allow reason to trouble them.

The protagonists in **Twelfth Night** are all on the threshold, or approaching it – reluctant to perceive reality, they hold back, preferring to take refuge in a world of fancy. One of the meanings of the word **fancy**, now obsolete, was "love" and it is in this interpretation that Orsino uses it both in his opening speech :

So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical

(I,i,14-15)¹²

and in his closing one, addressing Cesario-Viola and calling her "Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen" (V,i,387). Under the domination of fancy, he is in love with the idea of being in love, rather than with a real woman. Olivia sets off his hopeless passion at first sight :

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

(*ibid.* , 19-23)

he tells Curio when the latter asks him if he will go hunt the hart – a common poetical symbol of hopeless passion, depending on an obvious play on words, and originating in a story from Ovid.

Olivia's bout of self-indulgence is another form of false love, but, like Orsino, she cannot see her own errors. She has taken the veil, and vowed to sequester herself for seven years to preserve the love which her dead brother bore towards her ... "a debt of love" ... as the Duke calls it, which

Hath killed the flock of all affections else
That live in her; when liver, brain and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd
Her sweet perfections with one self king.

(*ibid.*, 36–9)

He lives in fond hope of being this same "king" and his "love-thoughts" are intensified by erotic imaginings, which the final lines clearly imply.

Viola is the most complex character. When she becomes Cesario, she is not what she seems¹³. Her pursuit of Orsino is calculated and she is prepared to await results :

... for I can sing,
And speak to him in many sorts of music,
That will allow me very worth his service,
What else may hap, to time I will commit;
Only shape thou my silence to my wit

(*ibid.*,iii,57–61)

she tells the Captain who agrees to aid her deception. Viola's complexity is not confined to her transvestitism. She keeps her own counsel and is obviously efficient since we soon learn that she has been in the Duke's service for only three days and is already much favoured. She asks Valentine if their master is inconstant in his favours and his remarks on entry (*ibid.*iv,11–14) inform the audience that he has already told his new page all about his love for Olivia. But in line 42 of the same scene, we are told that her aim is to marry him. She is hunting Orsino as persistently as he hunts Olivia, but with much greater skill.

She starts by meeting Olivia, ostensibly to carry out the Duke's instructions and act as a surrogate lover. Her persistence is shown by her refusal to be put off by Malvolio. Her dialogue with Olivia is a masterpiece of equivocation – she tells the truth in such a way as to be consistently misunderstood. "I am not that I play" she explains (*ibid.*v,185) and when Olivia replies to her "But you should pity me" (280) with "You might do much" the audience realises that she (*i.e.* Olivia) has rejected Orsino and wants Cesario–Viola¹⁴. Her pretence that the latter has left a ring behind, which concludes Act I, makes her emotional state even clearer. Viola instantly understands the import of the ring

She loves me, sure; the cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger.

(II,ii,21–2)

and later goes off into a soliloquy on the “frailty, thy name is woman” theme prominent in **Hamlet**, but expressed from a feminine point of view :

Also, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be

(*ibid.*, 30–31)

though the irony of her disguised condition overwhelms her :

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

(*ibid.*39–40)

However, one does not feel that she will be defeated by this awkward situation. She is one of Shakespeare’s most competent heroines, more feminine than Portia perhaps, but just as well fitted to play the male role for her own advantage. Just as she tells Olivia the truth about herself, so does she try out her logic on the Duke. He calls woman’s love “appetite” and Cesario–Viola replies ambiguously :

In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship

(*ibid.*,iv,107–110)

but he is unable to grasp what she is really saying, though she goes on to elaborate and gives him every chance of interpretation.

Olivia is no more capable than he of penetrating Viola’s mystery. “I am not what I am”, (III,i,143) and the ensuing conversation leaves the countess none the wiser ... the audience is in the secret and can smile at both her and the Duke who are blinded by their passion. Cesario–Viola purveys words adroitly and misleads as she sees fit. In the final Act of the play, the Duke admits that she told him the truth about herself :

Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never should’st love woman like to me

(V,i,265–6)

but Olivia is given no concluding observations of this kind. Her attentions are fully occupied with Malvolio and she is happy to accept the unexpected outcome

of events. She has found a husband even though he is not the one she thought she wanted. Her retreat from the world is ended and she returns to as much reality as is possible for her: she had asked Sebastian "Would'st thou be rul'd by me :?" (IV,i,63) and, he agrees, though the irony of this is not to be realised until the subterfuges have all been abandoned and Sebastian becomes Olivia's husband and though even at this late stage in the action the confusion of identities is kept up for the benefit of the audience.

Maria, Olivia's waiting-gentlewoman, is the spring of the sub-plot, the comic action involving Malvolio with her mistress. She is portrayed as a jester, intelligent, quick-witted and a match for the Clown, with whom she holds her own in I, v and for Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, whom she leads in the Malvolio plot. She sums up Malvolio's character accurately and designs and executes a practical joke of the most suitable kind, guaranteed to bring about precisely the result which follows. In III,iii she describes his absurd behaviour gleefully :

He does obey every point of the letter
that I dropped to betray him : he does
smile his face into more lines than is
in the new map with the augmentation of the
Indies :

(74-7)

and Sir Toby, impressed by her skill as a "gull-catcher" (she even imitates Olivia's handwriting convincingly) considers her a good marriage-prospect and indeed he does marry her for that reason (V,i,361-3). Her last ploy is to disguise the Clown as Sir Topas the curate, who visits Malvolio in prison. Her motive is the traditional one of revenge on "Puritans," of whom she regards Malvolio as a prime example, though her chief dislike is centred on his being

a time-pleaser¹⁵, an effectioned ass that
cons state without book, and utters it by
great swarths; the best persuaded of himself,
so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies,
that it is his grounds of faith that all that
look on him love him : and on that vice in him
will my revenge find notable cause to work

(II,iii,147-53)

reinforcing Sir Toby's irritated query earlier in the same scene, when he demands of Malvolio :

Art any more than a steward ? Dost thou think
because thou art virtuous, there shall be no
more cakes and ale ?

(sc.cit.113-5)¹⁶

This is one of the best-known quotations from the play and it states the fundamental opposition between warmth and coldness; the bibulous Sir Toby and his scatter-brained companion Sir Andrew are contrasted with the humourless, ambitious Malvolio, a symbol of restriction and frowning superiority. How far Shakespeare intended to create sympathy for Malvolio is not to be known, but a modern audience probably feels more than did the Elizabethan, for whom his tight-laced integrity held fewer attractions. His personal habits are irritating and his social attitudes condescending—he describes Sir Toby's group as "the lighter people" (V,i,338).

Olivia shows some slight sympathy for him :

Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee : (368)

is not so harsh, since "fool" is here a compassionate expression, meaning "fellow" though it also carries the connotation of "dupe" or "mark", and it has to be remembered that it was Olivia who first criticised Malvolio, when he attacked the Clown in her presence :

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with
a distempered appetite (I,v,89-90)

and who goes on to defend the professional fool or jester, a class of which Malvolio disapproves¹⁷. Of easy-going tradition he is contemptuous. His dislike of music and song, his mincing speech and prim mannerisms are all sources of offence to his enemies. Maria's joke goes to the heart of this inward-looking arrogance, the self-love which bars him from self-criticism. He is shamed, called mad, put in prison, learns how he has been tricked but gains nothing from the experience. His exit line in V,i,377 :

I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you :

and Olivia's comment

He hath been most notoriously abus'd

gives the Duke cause to make amends – "Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace" is his command to Fabian but the audience is left with the uneasy situation as it stands.

Malvolio feels justified in seeking revenge – as a comic figure he is right on the edge of tragedy and, many critics perceive something of him in Hamlet – the intellectualism, the posturing and the inability to communicate. But Malvolio, unlike Hamlet, thinks that he understands his fellows. Ironically, of the two women he thinks love him one, Maria, despises him while the other, Olivia, regards him as a gentleman in her service. He is loved by neither, nor by Sir Toby and his group – in fact, they each hate him. Only the Clown gives a specific reason for his part in the humiliation of Malvolio – the others reject the man not because he does not regard them as congenial but because he goes so far as to say so and to set himself above them :

You are idle, shallow things, I am not of your element

(III,iv,124–5)

is his self-delusion for he is seen to be brought down to earth even more violently than his incarceration in prison can do. At this stage in the action, he does not realise the exact nature of the conspiracy against him and can still maintain his poise, even in the “dark room and bound” as Sir Toby directs.

Although Malvolio is a minor character in **Twelfth Night** in terms of the play’s dramatic pattern, it is impossible to conceive of it without him and he represents rather more than his absurdities suggest for it is through him and the Clown that the comedy is made to reveal its darker side¹⁸. Malvolio is robbed of the one thing he values most, his own dignity. Self-love is his undoing and opens him to the schemes of Maria and the vengeance of Sir Toby so that he is stripped bare, and turned into a human soul disrobed. His parting shot suggests the quarry at bay, the image is of the hounds who have been eluded and cheated of their prey, the outsider without supporters. “I’ll be reveng’d” makes a stronger impression on the audience than the Duke’s gesture of amends to which Fabian’s earlier confession looks forward :

How with a sportful malice it was follow’d
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge,
If that the injuries be justly weigh’d
That have on both sides pass’d

(V,i,3647)

It is Fabian whom the Duke sends after Malvolio – the other authors of the plot are then conspicuously absent and one does not feel that they would care one way or the other about the steward’s hurt feelings¹⁹.

The Clown expresses melancholy in song and takes part in the practical joke²⁰. His grudge against Malvolio and his shrewd understanding of human

nature, based on observation and experience, make him the most dangerous of the conspirators. As Viola says of him :

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
And to do that well, craves a kind of wit :
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons and the time,
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art :

(III,i,61-7)

In the end it is Malvolio who becomes the fool – the Clown regards him as “mad”, has him shut away in the dark, like a devil from Hell in the old miracle plays. The Clown has the last laugh and, like Malvolio, he ends with nothing – the other principals all get a prize of some sort but for these two only isolation remains. At the conclusion of Act V, all leave the stage except the Clown, who ends the drama with a song on the ages of Man, grounded in a metaphor of falling rain, another of those water images which recur throughout, though most of these have to do with the sea, with salt water, suggesting salt tears, the romantic joy in grief which shields the individual from a realisation of life's brevity. The Clown's final song states it plainly and tries to indicate that some purposeful pattern must surely underlie human action, though it is not given to us to know its true nature.

Reference has been made to affinities between **Twelfth Night** and **Hamlet**. These are numerous, not only in the atmosphere of melancholy with which both romantic plots are tinged but also in more precisely defined similarities of incident and expression. For example, Sir Andrew Aguecheek asks, in response to Sir Toby's “**Pourquoi**, my dear knight ?”

What is **pourquoi** ? Do, or not do ? I would have
bestowed that time in the tongues that I have
in fencing, dancing and bear-baiting, O, had I
but followed the arts;

(I,iii,90-3)

a comic parallel with Hamlet's “To be, or not to be” soliloquy and his obsessive intellectualism. Again, there is Viola's comment, cited previously, on the liability of her sex to be deceived by handsome and deceitful men which, as we have remarked, suggests Hamlet's “Frailty, thy name is woman” complaint, though in

this case he is talking about Ophelia whereas Viola is thinking of Olivia whose love longings have to be regarded ironically by the audience, since they are based on a mistake.

The Duke's

If ever thou shalt love,
In the sweet pangs of it remember me :

(II,iv,15-6)

is echoed by the Ghost of Hamlet's father on the battlements of Elsinore :

If thou didst ever thy dear father love ..
Revenge his foul and unnatural murder

(Hamlet, I,v,23-5)

and the final "Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me" before he vanishes.

Sebastian's soliloquy at the start of IV,iii on the question of whether he is mad or not recalls his earlier question :

Or I am mad, or else this is a dream

(Twelfth Night, IV,i,60)

and in this same scene Malvolio is imprisoned because he is thought to be mad. This theme of comic madness, induced by unaccountable happenings or errors in judgment is darkened in **Hamlet**, in which the question of whether the hero is actually mad or only "mad in craft" becomes central.

Again, the comic duel in III,iv of **Twelfth Night**, a parody on the battle between sexes, becomes a battle to the death in the final scene of **Hamlet**. In both comic and serious conflicts the action is controlled by irony—in the first the irony lies in the fact that Sir Andrew thinks he is fighting with a man, said by Sir Toby to be "a very devil", whereas his rival is really a girl, Viola. She, on her part, believes Sir Andrew to be, in Fabian's words, "the most skilful, bloody and fatal opposite that you could possibly have found in any part of Illyria" (sc.cit, 27-3). In **Hamlet** the irony is tragic, since the duel seems to be sport to Hamlet, whereas for his adversary Laertes it is a killing-match.

But the most frequently-cited resemblance is that of Malvolio to Hamlet, though Malvolio is not a leader in the action of **Twelfth Night** and initiates nothing, being under orders all the time. Hamlet resists control and debates with himself as to the source of mastery of his own fate. So what is it that brings these two dissimilar characters together? What springs to mind most immediately is this imputed madness but whereas Malvolio is definitely not mad

and lands in prison as the result of a trick, Hamlet may be, at least part of the time, as he himself observes :

I am but mad north–north–west; when the wind is
southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw

(II,ii,383–4)

and, equally detached, before the duel he makes formal apology to Laertes :

That might your nature, honour and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness

(V,ii,229–30)

from which it is possible to conclude that his “madness” was under the domination of reason except for brief moments of passion and was originally conceived as a device to help him gain his own ends. Malvolio cannot understand the reasons for his own predicament, and keeps asserting his sanity to the Clown, Feste,²¹ who keeps baiting him :

Clown. But tell me true, are you
not mad indeed ? Or do you but counterfeit ?

Mal. Believe me, I am not, I tell thee true.

(IV,ii,117–9)

To suggest that Malvolio, puffed up with pride, can be “counterfeiting” is a mockery born of a deep dislike, amounting almost to hate, for that is what the Clown really feels for the man who described him to Olivia as “a barren rascal”. The Clown is motivated by revenge and is eventually seen to get it, when he reiterates those same words as he reveals his part in the plot to the humiliated steward :

I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas,
sir, but that’s all one. ‘By the Lord, fool, I am not
mad. ‘But do you remember, ‘Madam, why laugh you at
such a barren rascal, and you smile not, he’s gagged’ ?
And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges,

(V,i,37–6)

Malvolio’s parting shot only serves to emphasise his impotence. It pulls him into the dramatic tradition of the revenger, but what form could this revenge take ? His record in the play does not suggest great skill at anything other than verbal exchanges and there he is outclassed by the Clown, Maria and even by Sir Toby. His threat, like himself stripped of his customary pomposity, is an empty one and Olivia’s “He hath been most notoriously abus’d (378) is not entirely

sympathetic. The Duke's order to Fabian which follows is perfunctory. Malvolio at the last does not count for very much in the lady's court.²²

Hamlet as a "revenger" is no last-minute threatener – although he may take his time to reach his objective, it is as the instrument of retribution that he is presented in the first Act.

Haste me to know't, that I with wings
as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
May sweep to my revenge

(*ibid.*,29–31)

However, the Prince's opposite number in **Twelfth Night** is not so much Malvolio as the Clown, Feste, whose conduct and conclusion of his vendetta are resolute and for his victim, serious. Hamlet himself plays the clown when it suits him, and his fool's wit is a match for Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and a puzzle to Claudius. Malvolio despises Feste and ridicules him together with his profession; in the end, the tables are completely turned and it is Malvolio who bears the ridicule, though Feste's triumph is sinister when it is finally revealed, .. clown or no clown, he is not a fellow to be insulted with impunity²³. He is not present when Maria hatches her plot, so cannot be directly associated with the composition of the letter sent to Malvolio, though he is familiar with its content. However, he readily obeys her instruction to disguise himself in order to deceive the steward in prison. There he introduces himself as "Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic" (IV,ii,22), calls the latter "madman" and pretends to humour him.

But **Twelfth Night** is essentially a romantic love-story and it is a problem of dramatic presentation as to how much buffoonery is to be given prominence. Malvolio's fall is mostly comic, since he is an insignificant personage in the first instance and only the Clown is more important in terms of critical interpretation. He stands as a witness to and commentator on the coming change, the inevitable concomitant of youth's fading, the thrusting-on of man's responsibilities and the weakening of romantic illusion, a recurrent process in the cycle which has been going on since the beginning of time.

NOTES

* All quotations and textual references to **Twelfth Night** relate to the Arden edition, ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (2nd edn revised, London 1977).

1. cf. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., **Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare** (London 1957–75 8 vols), II, 269 and see Arden edn., introd. xxvi *et seq.*
2. Printed 1607 but probably written at least five years earlier and thus not much later than **Twelfth Night**. See Arden edn., introd. xxxiii–v.
3. He wrote “Malvolio” on his copy of **Twelfth Night**
4. Or nearly always .. his comedies record a progress towards maturity, of which harmonious sexual relationship within marriage is considered a natural and desirable end – the antithesis of the “courtly love” ideal, which implied adultery.
5. No external evidence exists as to the date of its first composition and it is argued by musicologists and others that Shakespeare continued to revise the text until 1606. **Hamlet** was recorded by the Stationers on 26 July, 1602 but this was probably not the first version. The First Quarto represents the final version, dated 1603–4. (Summed up in Hardin Craig, **Shakespeare** (Glenview, Illinois 1958) 707–8).
6. cf. **OED** (Revised edn. 1970), **strains** (X, 1064 III, 11/12); **fall** (IV, 36/10).
7. In line 9 the pulse of the verse quickens as blank verse takes over from the elegant conventional imagery which merely describes his feelings. He embodies *tham* in the metaphor of the sea to which he likens the spirit of love. (9–14) Compare Berowne’s attitude to love in **Love’s Labour’s Lost**. It is for him a revitalising force, not an enervating one.
8. The fact that Viola’s part was taken by a boy with voice unbroken must have strengthened the irony for the first audiences.
9. In the original version of the play, Viola sang **Come Away Death**, given to the Clown in a later revision: cf. F.W. Sternfeld, **Shakespeare’s Use of Music** (London 1963: 2nd impression revised 1967), 172–3.
10. **Cypress** – lawn, a fine linen or cotton fabric. Cypress branches were a symbol of mourning, so that the allusion here is doubled also.
11. Frederick Turner, **Shakespeare and the Nature of Time** (Oxford 1971), chapters 4 & 5 examines the implications of time in **Twelfth Night** and **Hamlet**.

12. cf. **OED**, IV,61,8B gives love, or amorous inclinations. The word was first used as a synonym for "imagination" and developed an independent meaning in the 18th century though a clear distinction was not drawn before Coleridge explained it in **Biographia Literaria** (1817)
13. M.C. Bradbrook points out that because she and her twin Sebastian are not of the same sex this has a different effect on the audience from that caused by the two sets of male twins in **The Comedy of Errors**. Note that Orsino continues to call her Cesario right to the end of the play (V,i,384). She has tried to copy and replace her lost brother. Like Rosalind in **As You Like It** she contrives in fantasy to woo Orsino but her adopted **persona**, Cesario, is real, unlike Rosalind's Ganymede who has no actual existence. Shakespeare was to repeat the double disguise device in **Cymbeline**. Cf. Bradbrook, **Shakespeare, the Poet in His World** (London 1978), 145-7.
14. "pity" is here used in the courtly sense of a mistress's mercy on her abject suitor, enslaved by his emotions and bound to obey her.
15. "time-pleaser" denotes Malvolio's obsession with his future status. He is never content with the present time so that "present laughter" is denied him.
16. The "cakes and ale" imagery suggests the holiday mood of which the Clown is an essential part and to which Malvolio is hostile (cf. Patrick Swinden, **An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies** (London 1973)). 132-4.
17. cf. n.16
18. One source of the comic in this play lies in the character of Malvolio, who illustrates the tendency of inflexibility collapsed to evoke laughter, as Bergson postulated in his **Essay on Laughter**. cf. Hobbes' theory that laughter is the result of a "sudden glory", related to a feeling of superiority, a notion which also became the basis of Hegel's speculations on the nature of the comic.
19. The more dignified Malvolio is made when he first enters at I, v,304, to which the impression of him as unpleasant to the disguised Viola when he "returns" Olivia's ring in II,ii is soon added, the more the audience is prepared for the eventual fall of this conceited underling, in V,i. His other appearances - when he berates Sir Toby and the others for making a nocturnal disturbance, his private remarks overheard **en cachette** in II,v, both before and after he has found the letter, - the absurd spectacle of him in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, smiling at his mistress, and his incarceration in prison - show him with his own dignity intact. The audience may share the amusement of the others all this time but it is only

when Malvolio himself learns from Olivia, Fabian and more harshly from the Clown that he has been “gulled” that his disintegration takes place. This occurs very rapidly so that the high and mighty is soon transformed into the abject. Malvolio is a shallow creature of props, precise speech, affected phrases and sober attire – all of which are eliminated at the end when, absurdly garbed, he can do no more than utter an impotent threat and take himself off from public gaze.

20. He is of the same stuff as Lear’s Fool who sings a snatch of his cryptic final song (**King Lear**, III,iii,74)
21. The Clown’s name is given only once in the play (II,iv,II), spoken by Curio, though the single reference has stuck and provides him with a more distinct personality.
22. How seriously the audience regards his threat may be largely a matter of the individual actor’s interpretation. The part can so easily be played mainly “for laughs” and the mock–tragic effect thereby reduced or a note of real poignancy may be injected into Malvolio’s final moments on the stage.
23. The essence of clowning is often thought of as teetering on the very edge of disaster rather than collapsing into ruins because of incompetence. But this Clown is not funny – his use of language is rapier–like, and suggests one facet of Hamlet.