I hope you enjoyed *Twelfth Night*. When compared with some of the other plays we read this semester, it's light, frothy fun. In fact, it's been described as a "bagatelle," which means "an unimportant or insignificant thing; a trifle." When standing next to Shakespeare's great tragedies, or even a lesser tragedy like *Titus Andronicus*, this might seem to be true, but comedy for fun's sake is nothing to be sniffed at.

Tradition tells us that fledgling lawyers of the Middle Temple commissioned Shakespeare to write the play for their Twelfth Night festivities. Twelfth Night is the last night of the twelve days of Christmas--January 5/6. January 6th is the Feast of Epiphany, traditionally when the Wise Men appeared to visit the baby Jesus. Through the late Middle Ages and during Shakespeare's time, this was a day of frivolity. A time when everything was turned topsy-turvy, with traditional social roles and behavior temporarily suspended. So while the title of the play may seem to be a strange one, telling us nothing of the plot, in a way it does.

Misrule reigns in Illyria. Lots of deceptions, lots of things turned on their head. And while for the most part, things are light and playful, there seems to be an underlying message given to us by Feste, the Clown.

And Illyria is an important setting for the play. As Jennifer Wallace explains in her essay, "A (Hi)Story Of Illyria(*)," "Throughout history, little has been known about the land of Illyria. `As "savages" or "barbarians" on the northern periphery of the classical world', the historian John Wilkes writes, `even today the Illyrians barely make footnotes in most versions of ancient history, and more often than not they are simply ignored.' Shut in by mountains, north of the better-known Greece and covering roughly the area of modern-day Albania, Macedonia, and Bosnia, Illyria has remained a closed world to outsiders, dismissed as barbarian in ancient times and remembered in more recent centuries only as an unexplored outpost of the Ottoman or Hapsburg Empires. As a result, Illyria has become a place of mystery, the site of myth and legend as much as of historical civilization-building or baffles, a by-word for the realm of the imagination. Oscar Wilde summed up the popular association of Illyria with fiction when, in a review of an amateur production of *Twelfth Night*, he wrote with characteristic succinctness: `Where there is no illusion there is no Illyria.'"

She argues that Illyria has long had mythical associations as a borderland between the known and unknown worlds, a liminal place where fact and fiction blend, beginning with the ancient Greeks. Illyria is often portrayed as opposed to Greece. So by choosing this setting, Shakespeare was setting his audience up for something magical, mythical, and something that ignores the rules of convention.

The first mention of the play comes in the diary of John Manningham, a barrister of the Middle Temple: "At our feast wee had a play called "Twelue Night, or What you Will," much like the Commedy of Errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practice in it to make the Steward beleeve his Lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparaile, &c., and then when he came to practice making him beleeue they tooke him to be mad."

Twelfth Night was first published in the First Folio, where it is found as the 13th of the 14 comedies (*Winter's Tale* being the 14th). However, *Twelfth Night* traditionally has been considered the last comedy written by Shakespeare. The text in the First Folio is essentially errorless.

"According to Professor Leslie Hotson, *Twelfth Night* was one of four plays given at Christmas, 1600/1, during court at Whitehall, and played by the Chamberlain's Men. According to Hotson, it was Professor J.W. Draper who first recognized that *Twelfth Night* was played on January 6, 1600/1, for the occasion of the visit to Queen Elizabeth's court by Orsino, Duke of Bracciano (recalling that the Duke, Orsino, was one of the main characters featured in the play)." (Davis)

As Allshakespeare.com tells us: *Twelfth Night; or What You Will* was composed … in either 1600 or 1601 as the last of his three "mature comedies" (the other two *being Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*). Like his early comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* or *The Taming of the Shrew* for instance, *Twelfth Night* is essentially a celebration of romantic love and can be viewed as a traditional romantic comedy. The play has many of the elements common to Elizabethan romantic comedy, including the devices of mistaken identity, separated twins, and gender-crossing disguise, and its plot revolves around overcoming obstacles to "true" love. And, like other representatives of the genre, *Twelfth Night* also features a subplot in which a self-inflated "sour" or "blocking" character, the steward Malvolio, is brought to his knees through a trick orchestrated by a ribald if also self-inflated character in the person of Sir Toby Belch.

"But unlike his early comedies, Shakespeare also strikes some discordant notes in *Twelfth Night*, including a conception of love and other themes that are not part of the conventional romantic comedy formula. Thus, for example, the subject of insanity surfaces as a salient theme and as a force within the plot. Indeed, while *Twelfth Night* concludes with tandem weddings, Shakespeare also speaks about the madness of love. "

Before we look at the play, there are a few more serious bits I' d like you to think about.

Note the satire of Puritanism, personified by Malvolio. The Puritans, a group who wanted to "purify" the Church of England from its pre-Reformation trappings, were just starting to grow in power in England at this time. And they weren' t overly popular, especially with the theater-going crowd as they thought theater was something sinful. (One of the first things they did when they came to power in 1649 was to close the theaters.) At this point, though, the Puritans are still figures of fun. In another 20 years, things would be shifting slightly, but for now, we could make fun of them.

A word on Malvolio: This is from Davis' s article, but I thought it was interesting:

"Anne Barton makes the remarkable statement in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, "As for Malvolio, to identify him with a real person and suggest that this is the key to the character is to limit his function and impact and sadly to inhibit that complexity of response which an audience normally feels towards him in the theater."

"Isn't that profound?

“Leslie Hotson, in his *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, makes a good case for Malvolio being a characterization of Sir William Knollys. Knollys was a Puritan, and he was enamored with and "gulled" by Mary Fitton, a lady-in-waiting of Queen Elizabeth--hence, we have the reference in the play to "Mistress Mall," which was a nickname for Mary. Mary Fitton became pregnant by the young William Herbert (who later became the Earl of Pembroke), causing her to be banished from court by the Queen. Therefore, in the play, we have "are they to take dust like Mistress Mall's picture?" Hotson points out that "Malvolio" could be read as "Malvoglio," which means "I want Mall." And Knollys was the Earl of Branbury, a Puritan place famous for "cakes and ale," also referred to in the play. Edward Holmes considers Malvolio to be a composite of both Hatton and Knollys. … Although Malvolio's part is generally considered to be secondary to the main theme of the play, even Manningham, who first described the play, commented mostly on the escapade with the trick played on Malvolio. Malvolio's characterization and mistreatment clearly represent two of the main foci in the play.”

All this is rather interesting trivia, is Malvolio based on someone or not, but it does point to his importance in the play. The subplot is not only interesting, it’s rather harsh. Malvolio isn’t the nicest person, but it’s a rotten trick they play on him. Joel Fineman wrote that Malvolio "plays the role of the outsider whose unhappiness is the measure of comic spirit, the alternative to comedy that makes us value the comic all the more"

Edward Cahill writes of the play, “The origins of the main plot in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night have been traced to a cluster of earlier comedies and their derivatives; however, the subplot, involving Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and their "gull," Malvolio, was entirely Shakespeare's invention.(1) Like the main story, the Malvolio subplot also involves comic "errors," disguise and performance, and the pursuit of marriage. It similarly explores the themes of identity, desire, and the confusion of both. In fact, the "gulling" of Malvolio and Sir Toby's debauched revelry literalize the "misrule" of the main story. But the subplot does not resolve itself as neatly as the main plot does; indeed, it fails to resolve itself at all. It might be supposed, then, that Shakespeare sought to counter the easy connubial resolutions inherent in his sources with something more problematic, thereby adding to the comic ending of the play something of a tragic one.”

He later writes: “Malvolio's sin is not only his alienating behavior toward others in the household, but also both the inappropriate desire to marry his mistress and rise in social rank and the sin of "self-love." The punishment for such sins, as he discovers, is severe. By comparison, the desiring characters of the main story, confused though they may be, commit no wrong and receive no punishment. The narcissism of Orsino and Olivia, while potent, is less overt or perhaps an allowed vice of the aristocracy. Likewise, while pursuing Orsino in conscious disguise, Viola goes safely, if miraculously, undetected. Although the plights of the characters of the main story do suggest the precariousness and risk inherent in the confusion of identity and desire, which will be the locus and necessary prescription of the Malvolio subplot, these characters are nonetheless successful. Ultimately, for Viola, Sebastian, Olivia, and Orsino, "what you will" is an invitation to comic possibility; for Malvolio, however, it is an invitation to personal tragedy.”

This is an interesting point, and may point to an answer as to why Malvolio is so harshly treated. I think the fact that he was a Puritan had something to do with it as well. Religious minorities--puritans and Catholics--were both illegal and figures of fun.

But Cahill argues that “Maria calls him [Malvolio] ‘a kind of puritan’ (2.3.139), not because she thinks he is an actual puritan, but because he is like one in his hypocritical, self-absorbed pomposity. The designation, as Shakespeare used it, had no narrowly defined religious or political connotation. One historian notes, of the puritan designation in pre-Revolutionary English [he is referring to the English Civil War of 1642] writing: ‘There were many Malvolios. Contemporary references to puritan hypocrisy are frequent, and they usually refer to the combination of godly phrases with economic or other less noble motives’ ([Christopher] Hill [*in Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*.]) Here, Toby and Maria insinuate the hypocritical righteousness of Malvolio's pretending to protect Olivia from Toby's debauchery while simultaneously entertaining sexual and matrimonial thoughts about her.”

More Cahill: “The final act of Twelfth Night elicits an unavoidable feeling that the unlikely, last-minute marriages and the somewhat abrupt conclusion of theplay rely on a kind of fairytale artifice, while summarily dismissing these important questions.(23) The vulnerabilities and tragic possibilities of Viola's, Sebastian's, Olivia's, and Orsino's quests for love and selfhood seem to have been displaced onto Malvolio, whose quests for the very same things are failed ones. His particular position of ambiguous authority, his own social inferiority, his faltering ego (perhaps his emerging modern "self," divided and doubtful), all contribute to making him a very convenient scapegoat. For, ultimately, as the receptacle for the play's unwanted tragic potential, the Malvolio subplot makes comedy possible for the main plot.

“Yet it is part of Shakespeare's genius in Twelfth Night to make this displacement incomplete, thereby linking plot and subplot even more closely. When in the final scene Malvolio declares, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.378), we ought not take his meaning lightly. His true revenge, we might say, is his refusal to allow the main plot to be completely resolved before the end of the play. Having jailed the captain who aided Viola with her disguise and held her clothes in the interim, Malvolio keeps Viola from donning her"maiden weeds" (5.1.255) and thereby properly accepting Orsino as her husband. Moreover, Viola says to her brother, Sebastian, "Do not embrace me, till each circumstance,/Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump/That I am Viola"(5.1.2251-253). As long as Viola remains in disguise, the "misrule" of the main plot is never set straight.(24) Of course, neither is the subplot. When Malvolio enters to announce the wrong that he believes Olivia has done him, she responds with the assurance that he will have justice; but this too must wait until she knows the "grounds and authors" (5.1.353) of the gulling. After Malvolio's angry exit, Orsino selfishly commands Fabian, "Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace; he hath not told us of the captain yet" (5.1.380-381). But neither Malvolio nor anyone else comes to finish the unfinished story.”

Karin S. Codden has noted that, “The deflation of Malvolio's ambition to wed into the aristocracy is countered by the marriage of Olivia's uncle to her serving-woman,” which is an interesting point, but it devalues Maria’s position. Maria is not quite a servant. She’s a paid companion. In 1.5.162, Olivia says, “Call in my gentlewoman.” She wouldn’t have called a servant a gentlewoman. This is a position that usually went to poor daughters of good family. So in reality, Sir Toby wasn’t marrying “down” to the servant level. He was marrying a poor woman, but he was poor himself. He relied on his niece’s money

And then there’s Feste, who tells a truth: Life is full of sadness. The best years of life are short. Events are cruel. And other people are cruel. In such a world, it is your DUTY to find and cherish whatever real happiness you can. During this time, an official Fool was one who was given license

to speak the truth. Most times, literary Fools are the wise men in a play. Think of the Fool in Lear, for example. Feste in many ways, does speak the truth when it needs to be heard.

Take, for example, this early exchange with Olivia (1.5.65-71):

CLOWN Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?

OLIVIA Good Fool, for my brother's death.

CLOWN I think his soul is in hell, madonna.

OLIVIA I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLOWN The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen.

Feste makes his point--that Olivia' s mourning is excessive--and even she allows, "There is no slander in an allow'd fool" (1.5.94).

And while Feste, or the Clown, as he is variously called, often illustrates the truth, he is also part of the play' s transgressing. As Codden notes, "But Sir Toby's marriage is not the play's sole--or most significant--offstage social transgression. Feste's first appearance in 1.5 aligns the clown with insubordination, with the equivocal boundaries between licensed and unlicensed foolery.

MARIA. Nay, either tell me where thou hast been, or I will open my lips so wide as a bristle may enter, in way of thy excuse: my lady will hang thee for thy absence.

CLOWN. Let her hang me: he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours.

(1.5.1-5)

Cahill on Feste: "The underlying darkness of the play is finally, if ambiguously, played out by Feste, the last character on the stage. As the mediator between the play's two plots, Feste seems to be privileged with the wisdom that each plot holds for the other. Part of that wisdom, suggested by his name, is that the revelry and "misrule" of the Twelfth Night celebration are a natural and necessary part of life. From the perspective of modern psychology, we may add that experimentation and confusion are normal aspects of identity development. Feste's second and more ominous truth, however, is that "anything that's mended is but patched" (1.5.47-48): that although the comic fictions of life may conceal tragic possibility, they do not eliminate it. His final song, which comically describes the passage from boyhood into manhood, leaves the play with an ambivalence that points to King Lear, whose clown shares Feste's refrain.(25) The concluding lines of the song are as abrupt and apparently unresolved as the play itself:A great while ago the world begun, With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain, But that's all one, our play is done, And we'll strive to please you everyday. (5.1.405-408)"

But let' s look at the entire song that ends the play:

Clown

[Sings]

When that I was and a little tiny boy,

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

A foolish thing was but a toy,

For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate,

With hey, ho, & c.

'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,

For the rain, & c.

But when I came, alas! to wive,

With hey, ho, & c.

By swaggering could I never thrive,

For the rain, & c.

But when I came unto my beds,

With hey, ho, & c.

With toss-pots still had drunken heads,

For the rain, & c.

A great while ago the world begun,

With hey, ho, & c.

But that's all one, our play is done,

And we'll strive to please you every day.

Olivia is also an odd character. In mourning for her brother, she has sworn off men for seven years. She's being pursued by Orsino, and she wants nothing to do with him. Yet as soon as she sees his messenger, Cesario, she's in love! When she discovers that Cesario is really Viola, she immediately transfers her "love" to Viola's twin, Sebastian, who marries her out of hand, not even sure who she is! Yes, we are in La La Land, but he did get a nasty bump to the head when he was shipwrecked. I'm sure that explains it all. Seriously, it's Twelfth Night, so we suspend all rules of logic and just go along for the ride.

Cahill has noted: "It is significant that the characters in *Twelfth Night* acknowledge the falseness that is common to their society and the different levels of identity that are possible (personal and social, inward and outward, ontologically "fixed" and performative). Consistently, almost habitually, they express a conscious awareness "that nature with a beauteous wall/Doth oft close in pollution" (1.2.48-49). Although this was a commonplace of Renaissance, and specifically Shakespearean, speech, as in the "fair cruel" of the Sonnets, the language of *Twelfth Night* is charged with a distinctive anxiety about the potential for being deceived. For example, Olivia knows that one might easily be taken in by appearances, for the speeches of suitors are "like to be feigned" (1.5.196), and "the eye is too great a flatterer for the mind" (1.5.309). Olivia's visual fixations, indicative of her own narcissism, initially cause her to fall in love with Viola/Cesario (and later

enable her to switch to Sebastian in Act 5 without a second thought). Perhaps it is because Olivia is self-conscious of her own falseness that she is so wary of it in others."

Orsino is another character who is self-absorbed. His first lines, very famous ones at that, tell us this:

DUKE ORSINO 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! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.

He tells us that he's in love with Olivia, but the man just does not give up. She continually rejects him, and he continually goes after her. In today's parlance, he'd be a stalker!

He seems to know himself, when he says to Viola, not ironically,

For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are. (2.4.32-35)

But then in that same act, he goes on to say this, which frankly, has always annoyed me:

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much; they lack retention
Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,

That suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt;
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much: make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia. (2.4.94-104)

Just a word now about Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Both are upper class figures, being Sirs, but both are stupid drunks, Sir Andrew slightly more stupid as he is duped by Sir Toby, who keeps him around for his wallet. Sir Andrew wants to pay court to Olivia, and Sir Toby is pretending to support the match in order to keep Sir Andrew around.

Sir Toby may be a clown figure, but there' s a bit of romance in him as well. We definitely see the flirting between him and Maria, and of course, she ends up married to him.

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