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Title: "Slander in an allow'd fool": Twelfth Night's crisis of the aristocracy. (Shakespeare's play)
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Abstract: The plot of William Shakespeare's play 'Twelfth Night' revolves around the transgression of boundaries between male and female, master and servant and most importantly, aristocrats and commoners. Although the play is set in a time where puritan social conventions and aristocratic values were dominant, it decrees that insubordination, cross-dressing and other similar pursuits are intrinsically linked with unmasking ands marriage. In addition, its less than ideal ending is characterized by the lack of an ordered closure.

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In Twelfth Night demarcations between male and female, master and servant, libertine and moralist come into festive--and not so festive--collision. Typical readings of the play have focused on its misrule and topsy-turvy as serving ultimately to reaffirm the dominant, aristocratic values against which the ostensible "puritan," Malvolio, stands as a scorn-worthy scapegoat.(1) By this reasoning, the play may be seen as a comedy in which insubordination, cross-dressing, and unruly "license" are, in the final analysis, contained in the rites of unmasking and marriage. The play's notably troubled closure--Malvolio's vow of revenge, the Captain's imprisonment, and Feste's strangely inappropriate closing dirge--has been given its due only insofar as it contributes to the comedy's "dark outline."(2) But the problem of closure also aligns Twelfth Night with Hamlet and King Lear, plays in which the apparent "restoration of order" is countered by the excesses of precedent disorder that have been repressed, perhaps, but not entirely effaced.(3) If in

Twelfth Night the aristocratic order is ostensibly reasserted in the pairings of Orsino/Viola and Oliva/Sebastian, the refusal of the play's closing to recuperate two of its most disorderly subjects--Malvolio and Feste--suggests rather less than a wholesale endorsement of the privileges of rank and hierarchy. For by mockingly disclosing the mutability and contingency of social rank, Twelfth Night demystifies one of Elizabethan authority's central political fictions. In the process, the play tests the precarious limits of theatrical "license," as festivity itself exceeds the containment of mere "fantasy inversion" to take on a markedly historical, even contestatory dimension.

Elizabethan and Jacobean culture is commonly characterized by an overwhelming obsession with "good order and obedience." Copious propaganda exhorted a minutely classified, divinely ordained social hierarchy:

Everye degre of people in theyr vocation, callyng, and office hath appointed to them, theyr duty and ordre. Some are in hyghe degree, some in lowe, some kynges and prynces, some inferiors and subjectes, priestes, and layemenne, Maysters and Servauntes, Fathers and chyldren, husbandes and wives, riche and poore, and everyone hath nede of other: so that in all thynges is to be lauded and praysed the goodly order of god, wythoute the whiche, no house, no citie, no commonwealth can continue and indure or laste.(4)

Yet Keith Wrightson has suggested that the promulgators of this rigidly organic paradigm "knew very well that it was an ideal, an aspiration," a response to increased opportunities for social mobility rather than a reflection of universal belief or practice.(5) As Wrightson has demonstrated, while the foremost status of the titular nobility remained a constant, there was notable slippage throughout the entire social hierarchy between supposedly rigid "degrees of people":

gentle status itself could be achieved as well as inherited; by obtaining a university degree, by appointment to governmental or military office, or by any man who "can live without manuell labour, and thereto is able and will beare the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman."(6)

The Elizabethan propensity for classifying and even legislating (e.g., via sumptuary laws) a fixed and self-evident social hierarchy was belied by actual

social practice; under James the First, rampant title-mongering would further erode the primacy of blood and birth as sole determinants of social rank.(7) Jacobean indiscretions aside, the official propaganda chiefly served the interests of the uppermost social echelon, not the least of which was a crown intent on absolutism but without a standing militia to enforce it. For the primacy of blood, after all, lay at the core of the divine-right ideology so dear to both Elizabeth and James.

The theater, of course, already occupied the most equivocal of situations toward the aristocratic and nonaristocratic, even antiaristocratic factions. As Michael Bristol has remarked, "The social position of the players and of their work was based on two contradictory presuppositions--that they were engaged in a business or industry, and that they were engaged in 'service' to their aristocratic patrons."(8) Government licensing and courtly patronage do not necessarily imply the theater's ideological alignment with the court, especially given the apparent, remarkable social heterogeneity of Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. Comedy in particular tended to foster heterogeneity, as Robert Weimann has noted:

In matters of social custom and dramatic taste there was as yet no clear division between the rural plebs and the London middle classes. This meant that there was little difference between the middle class and the plebeian reception of the Morris dance, the jig, clowning, and the like. The middle strata of these craftsmen and the more wealthy dealers and retailers enjoyed these entertainments just as did the lower strata, the laborer, carriers, servants.(9)

Similarly, the very nature of theatrical representation defied "official" positions on rank and degree, as common players personated princes, male actors "boyed" females.(10) If Malvolio, like such antitheatrical polemicists as Phillip Stubbes, disapproves of festive misrule in principle, the government's regulation of the theater testifies to its own anxieties about the drama's potential to produce (and reproduce) fictions contesting Tudor and Stuart official ideologies. The theater, like the "all-licens'd fool," was to an extent authorized to enact a degree of insubordination, apparently on the thought that it would thus function as a sort of safety valve for discontent that might otherwise seek less indirect forms of expression. But as Natalie Zemon Davis has argued, festive misrule need not be conceived as either wholly

contestatory or wholly conservative:

It is an exaggeration to view the carnival and Misrule as merely a "safety valve," as merely a primitive, prepolitical form of recreation. . . . the structure of the carnival form can evolve so that it can act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to that existing order.(11)

My suggestion, then, is that Twelfth Night pointedly reinforces neither aristocratic nor anticourt values; rather, by exploding the kinds of social classifications propounded by contemporary theorists into a multiplicity of slippery, contingent positions, the play subversively confounds holiday and history, festive "license" and contestation. Officially controlled by the government and increasingly subjected to virulent antitheatrical attacks, the theater was positioned as much in a site of limited resistance as of limited allegiance. The opening--and closing--resistance of Feste the clown to narrative recuperation suggests not only the possibility of theatrical evasion of order, but also a material if limited autonomy from the institutional structures seemingly acknowledged in the reversions of the young nobles and the overreaching Malvolio to their proper places and degrees.

Lawrence Stone's argument for a "crisis of the aristocracy" as a major precipitant of the 1642 revolution has been roundly criticized by a number of social historians.(12) It has been suggested, for example, that radical social change in seventeenth-century England was due more to the emergence of landed and professional "middle classes" than to a decline in the aristocracy's prestige.(13) Yet without asserting a direct causality between aristocratic excesses and the development of a revolutionary movement, it seems clear that the nobility's profligate expenditures and conspicuous consumption served to weaken the aristocracy both economically and in terms of popular perception.(14) The latter is evidenced in mocking gallows derision throughout Jacobean tragedy; Shakespeare's Lear and Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy offer bitter critiques of courtly extravagances. Even so worldly a blade as John Harington remarked upon the libertinism of the Jacobean court, where

those, whom I never coud get to taste good liquor, now follow the fashion and wallow in beastly delights. The Ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication. . . . I do often say (but not aloud) that the Danes have again conquered the Britains, for I see no man, or woman either,

that can now command himself or herself.(15)

But the court of James Stuart hardly introduced excess into the early modern English aristocracy. Twelfth Night, with its elaborate imagery of appetite and satiety, seems to draw upon contemporary notions, by no means hyperbolic, about the consumption habits of an aristocratic household. In fact, the supposed "morality of indulgence" John Hollander attributes to aristocratic excess and satiety in the play becomes a bit incongruous in light of Stone's catalogues of noble gluttony.(16) According to Stone, even conservative, prudent Lord Burghley indulged in the extravagant gormandizing of aristocratic "festive" entertainments:

The |pounds~363 |Burghley~ spent on a feast to the French Commissioners in 1581 might perhaps be explained on grounds of public policy. But what are we to make of the |pounds~629 spent in three days' junketing at the marriage of his daughter a year later? At this vast party there were consumed, among other things, about 1,000 gallons of wine, 6 veals, 26 deer, 15 pigs, 14 sheep, 16 lambs, 4 kids, 6 hares, 36 swans, 2 storks, 41 turkeys, over 370 poultry, 49 curlews, 135 mallards, 354 teals, 1,049 plovers, 124 knotts, 280 stints, 109 pheasants, 277 partridges, 615 cocks, 485 snipe, 840 larks, 21 gulls, 71 rabbits, 21 pigeons, and 2 sturgeons.(17)

If music be the food of love, play on, indeed; Orsino's elaborate tropes of appetite and satiety might well have prompted a subversive laughter, given the mind-boggling extravagances of the Elizabethan aristocrat's table. On the other hand, certain factions were less likely to find such gluttony a laughing matter in the inflation- and famine-plagued 1590s. For the commoner and particularly the poor, the 1590s were years of economic hardship and deprivation. Four consecutive failed harvests between 1594 and 1597 contributed to rampant food shortages;(18) authorities greatly feared the possibility of large-scale social disorder, and in fact, a number of food riots occurred in both the countryside and London.(19) As Buchanan Sharp has shown, the privileged were frequently the focus of the rioters' deepest resentments: "The poor of Somerset who in 1596 seized a load of cheese were reported to be animated by a hatred of all gentlemen because they believed 'that the rich men had gotten all into their hands, and will starve the poor.'"(20) Civil discontent over food shortages bore the threat of an attack on the entire social order, as the Privy Council itself recognized.(21)

Indeed, in the aftermath of the abortive Oxfordshire Rising of 1596, Attorney-General Coke insisted that "|t~he real purpose of Bartholomew Stere |one of the Oxfordshire conspirators~ was 'to kill the gentlemen of that countrie and to take the spoile of them, affirming that the commons, long sithens in Spaine did rise and kill all the gentlemen in Spain and sithens that time have lyved merrily there.'"(22) Thus historicized, Twelfth Night's mockery of noble excesses may be seen as homologous to the rather less playful sentiments of another Oxfordshire conspirator, James Bradshaw, who asked "Whether there were not certaine good fellowes in Witney that wold ryse & knock down the gentlemen & riche men that take in the comons, and made corne so deare?"(23)

It is worth noting, however, that the play's lone vocal critic of profligacy, Malvolio, is held up to even greater derision than the extravagant nobles. As Elliot Krieger has noted, Malvolio "actually threatens the social order much less than he seems to. . . . |H~e has the greatest respect for all the accoutrements of aristocratic rank."(24) Malvolio, "sick of self-love,"(25) covets the very privilege he seems to criticize, as is borne out by his desire to transcend his social rank by marrying Olivia. Far from a radical social critic, Malvolio is more reminiscent of the antitheatricalists(26) who lambasted playgoers for their own variety of moral gluttony. Phillip Stubbes claimed that playgoers "are alwaies eating, & neuer satisfied; euer seeing, & neuer contented; continualie hearing, & neuer wearied; they are greedie of wickednes."(27) That Malvolio's threat of revenge troubles the play's comic ending suggests less an endorsement of the legitimacy of his grievances than an ironic acknowledgment of the strident persistence of antitheatricalism.

Orsino's opening trope, then--

If music be the food of love, play on, Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, The appetite may sicken, and so die

(I.i.1-3)

--lends to his lyric self-indulgence a material marker of social privilege and its excesses. It serves to yoke together the amorous appetites of the relatively decorous Orsino and the more grotesque, "carnivalesque" appetites of Sir Toby Belch.(28) For Sir Toby is, of course, the play's most

comical--and most pointed--travesty of aristocratic self-indulgence. His revels are informed by the popular tradition of "seasonal misrule," a tradition already suspect for its violations of class and gender boundaries.(29) Sir Toby cavorts not only with his fellow titled tosspot Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but also with his social inferiors--Feste, Fabian, and Maria, the last of whom he marries.(30) The deflation of Malvolio's ambition to wed into the aristocracy is countered by the marriage of Olivia's uncle to her serving-woman. The play's fantasy transgressions typical of festive misrule--Olivia's infatuation with a disguised woman, "Cesario's" with Orsino--are ostensibly contained as gender stability is restored. Like Malvolio's vow of revenge, however, Sir Toby's offstage marriage to Maria is a reminder of the instability of rank and order that persists outside the world of the play. Far from being merely a temporary and cathartic release from social order, festivity intervenes to alter that order. Sir Toby's marriage to Maria makes explicit the identification of festivity with social fluidity, despite the play's apparent recuperation of transvestism and homoerotic desire.

But Sir Toby's marriage is not the play's sole--or most significant--offstage social transgression. Feste's first appearance in I.v. 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.

(I.v.1-5)

As has been frequently noted, Feste's entrance is marked by an emphatic lacuna;(31) his introduction is colored not only by the unauthorized absence from Olivia's household, but also by his defiant resistance ("Let her hang me") to Maria's interrogations about his whereabouts, even under the threat of hanging or unemployment. The clown's unlicensed insubordination lies less in the nature of his absence than in his refusal to represent a "subjectivity" to

his interrogator. This is not to claim that Feste's uncooperation is akin to Hamlet's "I have that within which passes show" (I.ii.85), but rather, that theatricality constitutes a site of evasion from subjectification, i.e., the strategies of surveillance and interrogation that comprise, as Michel Foucault has written, "a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement . . . a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship."(32) An actor does not speak a "self"--he impersonates; his social identity is not metaphysical but infinitely manipulable, as was recognized, however disapprovingly, by the theater's critics. For

unlike the consecrated minister of God's word or the political orator, an actor is a man whose public utterance does not represent what he feels or thinks, although it is said with full conviction and the sound of authority. An actor is not just someone whose speech is "dissembling": the deeper problem is that he is most valued for his ability to dissemble convincingly.(33)

That virtually the first thing we learn about Feste is that he has been somewhere offstage, outside of representation and vigilance, suggests not a Derridean aporia so much as the theater's potential to exceed its carefully, officially delimited boundaries, to collapse the distinction between "festivity" and history. As Bristol notes of Feste, "|the clown~ traverses the boundary between a represented world and the here-and-now world he shares with the audience."(34) Earlier clowns like Richard Tarlton commonly interacted directly with the audience as well as with other characters in the play;(35) though Feste embodies the sophistication and intellectualism of the later Elizabethan jester, he is as much of the world outside the play as of the fictive world within.

Despite its comic word-play, Feste's exchange with Maria has somewhat grave undertones. The threat of hanging seems hyperbolic, though as Maria notes, "to be turned away" would be "as good as a hanging" (I.v.18); a fool without a post would be "voiceless," indeed. The refusal of interrogation risks a coerced expulsion from discourse entirely. The Elizabethan theater, like Feste testing the limits of licensed foolery, was subject to an authority that could--and occasionally, did--impose silence. But also like Feste, the theater deftly confounds the boundaries between festive misrule and unruly license. Not the least of the Elizabethan clown's functions is to mediate between audience and play; with Feste, the mediation takes on, however playfully, a

dimension of conspiracy.

Upon Olivia's appearance, the clown launches into what is ostensibly the licensed insubordination allowed his function by his patroness and superior. Feste's witty impertinence reestablishes his "allow'd," public role as jester. Though he effectively proves her a fool, Olivia concedes, "There is no slander in an allow'd fool" (I.v.94). Yet because Feste's cheeky demonstration of his mistress's foolishness has been preceded by his unlicensed absence, Olivia's authority here seems superfluous, even specious, as though Feste is but humoring her by playing the prescribed role of servant. Typically mistrustful of festive insubordination and frivolity, Malvolio, rather than Olivia, takes offense at the fool's impudence. But Olivia's rejoinder--"O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite" (lines 90-91)--tacitly accuses the steward of the very ills he claims to disdain. For Malvolio's "self-love" is pointedly not the absence of appetite but merely a "distempered" one. That Olivia's reprimand of Malvolio is shortly followed by the reappearance of Sir Toby "in the third degree of drink" (line 136) marks a less festive variety of inversion: Malvolio is not so much the antithesis of Sir Toby as he is the reversed mirror-image.

Feste, then, is far more than merely the "spirit of festivity"; he is also an ironic commentator upon the discrepancies between aristocratic myth and the material circumstances that contradict it. The clown's consistent gulling of his social superiors has been frequently noted,(36) but it is a mistake to view Feste as simply a protocapitalist "service professional."(37) The emphasis on payment serves to remind the spectator that this is not the mythic, feudal world of loyal, ideal service, "The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed!"(38) but rather one in which festivity itself is purchased at the same outlandishly inflated rate that swells Orsino's plaints of love or Olivia's grandiloquent self-denial. The contrast between the bawdy knights' boisterous entreaties for a song and the melancholy "O Mistress Mine" with which the clown responds points up the distance between mythic carpe diem romance and the almost indiscriminate, self-indulgent appetites that govern not only Sir Toby and Sir Andrew but Orsino and Malvolio as well. Hollander's suggestion that the song is a reflection upon the various lovers' romantic foibles(39) does not take into account either the inappropriate audience or the closing allusion to an uncertain future outside of the festive present: "Youth's a stuff will not

endure" (II.iii.53). Twelfth Night's nominal situation in a particular, finite time not only evokes traditional, popular festivity organized around the church calendar;(40) it also foregrounds the play's precarious temporality. The Epiphany functions as a temporal trope much as the Forest of Arden, in As You Like It, functions as a spatial one: the time of carefree, aristocratic festivity is gone, and between nostalgia for an idealized past and uncertainty about the historical time beyond holiday is the tenuous and hence ironic celebration of the present.

As Feste willingly joins Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for a merry round, he playfully reminds the latter that his own cooperation in the song entails a transgression of rank: "'Hold thy peace, then, knave,' knight? I shall be constrained in it to call thee knave, knight" (II.iii.66-67); Feste subtly remarks upon the knights' complicity in the deconstruction of social order. Akin to government licensing of the theater, the nobles' authorization of "benign" festive subversion enables the terms by which institutional authority may be mocked and questioned. The ostensibly vast social distinction between gentleman and common player is elided. Just as Feste has previously "proven" Olivia a fool, his observation that Sir Toby is "in admirable fooling" (line 81) places his social superior in the role of servant, jester, player--the very kind of class "mingle-mangle" so mistrusted by the antitheatricalists.(41) Interestingly, it is Malvolio who scolds the revelers for their violation of good order:

My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an ale-house of my lady's house, that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?

(II.iii.84-93)

Malvolio objects to the revelry explicitly on grounds of its disorderliness of "place, persons, |and~ time"; once more, the critic of aristocratic "uncivil rule" is the play's most vehement proponent of a stable, orderly social structure. But Sir Toby, thus chided for transgression of his degree, picks up the gauntlet with a peculiarly bitter rejoinder to Malvolio: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no

more cakes and ale?" (lines 113-15). The question, of course, is rhetorical, though like Malvolio's threat of revenge, in retrospect rather eerily prophetic.

There is some suggestion, once again, that the festive interval--as interval--itself is already anachronistic, that the revels have, if not ended, become embedded in historical rather than holiday matters. Orsino, in II.iv once more caught in the throes of a language of amorous appetite, requests "that old and antic song" (line 3) performed the night before. Curio's response to this is, interestingly, the first and only time Olivia's clown is named, and, additionally, given a history: he is "a fool that the Lady Olivia's father took much delight in" (lines 11-12). The introduction of Feste's name in this context seems appropriate; for the festivity with which Orsino identifies him is indeed a thing of the past, when festive rites were bound up in a popular, material marking of time:

Mark it, Cesario, it |the song~ 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: it is silly sooth, And dallies with the innocence of love, Like the old age.

(lines 43-48)

Given Orsino's own penchant for florid, hyperbolic love talk, his paean to the "silly" song is noteworthy. And yet the song, when it does come, seems less a rustic lay than a pensive Elizabethan lyric telling of a lady's disdain and a "dying," unrequited lover's lonely fate. Like "O Mistress Mine," "Come Away, Death" is touched by Petrarchan conventions of female resistance and frustrated male desire. The song's melancholy, along with its identification with an idealized past, contrasts strikingly with the language of self-indulgent appetite and desire that characterizes its context. The sad song is unsuited to its setting, but not solely because of the play's comic aims. It is a performance whose signification has been rendered specious by the play's own ironization of desire; the song, like the one preceding, is merely the "food of love" for the nobleman's appetite. Indeed, Orsino follows with two more elaborate speeches of quantification and appetite to "Cesario," in blatant contradiction of his prior homage to the simplicity of the old love song. The disembodied metaphoric trappings of Petrarchan love become in

Twelfth Night parodically reconstituted as crassly material, even gluttonous.

Similarly, Feste's refusal, to Viola, of the "licensed" title of fool, and his claim that he is, rather, Olivia's "corrupter of words" (III.i.36-37), acknowledge the degeneration of language, the discrepancy between the anachronistic idiom of lyric love and the actual amorous discourses marked by consumption and excess. As Terry Eagleton has observed, "What has discredited language in Feste's view is commerce, the breaking of bonds. . . . Bonds--written commercial contracts--have rendered signs valueless, since too often they are not backed up by the physical actions they promise."(42) Feste is Olivia's "corrupter of words," but after the fact: language is no more innocent than love. Feste's corruption of language, however, is of a different and more equivocal variety than Orsino's or Malvolio's, for he consistently takes the words of his noble superiors--much as he does their money--and destabilizes them, exposing the semiotic and political slipperiness of ostensibly stable categories and values. Thus he responds to Viola's characterization of him as "a merry fellow, |who~ car'st for nothing" (III.i.26-27) with what may seem like an inexplicably surly rejoinder: "Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do not care for you" (lines 27-28). Like Orsino before her, Viola attempts to constitute Feste as merely the embodiment of the mirthful court jester, the abstract spirit of song and festivity. But the clown, as in his initial exchange with Maria, at once resists the fixity of his prescribed role and pointedly refuses to invest "corrupt" words with any kind of truth value. What that "something" may be for which he cares is less significant than the refusal of explication.

When Feste accepts Viola's money, he also accepts his function as servant, but not without a saucy allusion to her complicity in the crassest variety of commerce: "I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus" (III.i.51). Pandarus, of course, evokes the activity for which Orsino has engaged "Cesario"; like Feste, Viola is playing the role of servant, and her actual social superiority is undercut by the clown's suggestion of a kind of material equivalence between them. Viola apparently recognizes her error in labeling Feste merely a merry madcap, and characterizes him as, like herself, one playing a part:

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. For folly that he wisely shows is fit; But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

(lines 60-68)

This speech is commonly taken as the playwright's homage to the art of theater, or even as a tribute to Robert Armin.(43) But while it is an oversimplification to read Feste's function as strictly metadramatic, Viola's words indeed testify to the "labour" and intellection of playing, as if to counter antitheatricalist accusations of wantonness and idleness. Indeed, one of Armin's own Quips upon Questions articulates a similar theme:

True it is, he playes the Foole indeed; But in the Play he playes it as he must: Yet when the play is ended, then his speed Is better than the pleasure of thy trust. For he shall have what thou that time has spent, Playing the foole, thy folly to consent.

He playes the Wise man then, and not the Foole, That wisely for his lyving so can do; So doth the Carpenter with his sharpe tool, Cut his owne finger oft, yet lives by't to. He is a foole to cut his limbe say I But not so with his toole to live thereby.(44)

The notion of fooling as professional, intellectual labor at once responds to and significantly revises such suspicions as those of Stephen Gosson regarding the actor's equivocal identity: "There is more in |Players~ than we perceive."(45) The comic actor is thus transformed from diabolically Protean hypocrite to expertly skilled craftsman, a keen observer of social practices shrewd enough to play fool "for his lyving."

In fact, Feste corrupts words chiefly to expose the corruption of others by them, and for them. To this extent, the clown embodies the instructive model of comedy extolled by Thomas Heywood in An Apologie for Actors (1612):

And what is then the subject of this harmlesse mirth? either in the shape of a clowne to shew others their slovenly and unhandsome behaviour, that they may reforme that simplicity in themselves which others make their sport, lest they

happen to become the like subject of generall scorne to an auditory; else it intreates of love, deriding foolish inamorates, who spend their ages, their spirits, nay themselves, in the servile and ridiculous imployments of their mistresses.(46)

In IV.ii, wherein "Sir Topas" interrogates Malvolio, Feste both exemplifies and parodies the didactic dimension of foolery. Again, the scene owes a debt to the festive tradition of "misrule," in which, as Stuart Clark has noted, typically "clerical parodies of divine service substituted the profane for the sacred, and low for high office."(47) But Feste is doing more than mocking Malvolio with his travesty of a Puritan curate. With his emphatic, ludicrous "testing" of Malvolio's sanity, Feste parodies the discourse of interrogation he has himself consistently eluded. The clown uses the guise of authority to mock authority, a strategy manifest not only in "Sir Topas's" worrying of the "madman," but also in Feste's assumption of the voices of both the curate and the servant: "Maintain no words with him, good fellow!--Who, I, sir? not I, sir! God buy you, good Sir Topas!--Marry, amen!--I will, sir, I will" (lines 102-105). As Maria has pointed out, the clown's costume is superfluous (lines 64-65); language itself enables dissemblance. In theater, subjectivity is no more than a habit that aptly is put on. Feste's trick question to Malvolio--"But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit?" (lines 117-18)--mockingly discloses the equivocal nature of playing itself. Neither madness nor sanity has any ontological status in the realm of theatricality, for the "counterfeit" is at once as true--and as false--as the thing itself. Stable distinctions between licensed and unlicensed foolery, then, are radically problematic, Heywood's "harmlesse mirth" perhaps not as socially benign as the term suggests.

Not surprisingly, the play's final act, with its various unmaskings and revelations, yet falls short of the thorough restoration of order that the plot and genre seem to dictate. V.i begins with an almost uncanny echo of I.v, as Fabian beseeches the clown to show him Malvolio's letter, only to be enigmatically refused (lines 1-6). Feste's resistance to Fabian's entreaty is narratively inexplicable, since the latter has been in on the trick all along and the former at least attempts to read the letter publicly. Feste's refusal appears motivated simply by a characteristic deflection of interrogation for its own sake. But it is also in the last act that Feste is silenced, as Olivia objects to his "mad" reading of Malvolio's letter, despite his protests, and

orders Fabian to deliver the missive instead. It is a significant moment, not the least because Olivia, the clown's employer, here disdains his foolery on grounds that its theatricality is an apparent obstacle to discerning the truth. This momentary suppression of theatricality serves to refigure--temporarily, at any rate--the intractable lines of social hierarchy heretofore overturned by playing. Malvolio, upon appearing, issues a proclamation whose very tenor is one of "unseemly" entitlement: "Madam, you have done me wrong. Notorious wrong" (lines 327-28). But the ensuing explanation merely reiterates the steward's subordinate position, as Olivia remarks, "Alas, poor fool, how they have baffled thee!" (line 368). Malvolio, the overreacher, is now reduced to the lowly status of one whose function he has previously scorned, as Feste promptly reminds him, concluding "thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges" (lines 375-76). But just as Feste has taken his cue to speak from Olivia's epithet "poor fool," so does Malvolio take his from the clown's gloating last words. "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you(!)" Malvolio warns (line 378), the "whole pack" evidently including not only the pranksters (the two chiefest of whom--Sir Toby and Maria--are not present) but the nobles as well. The so-called "festive comedy" concludes rather ominously; if indeed "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," it is difficult to dismiss Malvolio's parting threat as merely one sour note troubling an otherwise stable social hierarchy.

Significantly, the clown's closing song seems to take its uncertain, melancholy tone not from the promised (though deferred) wedding and "golden time" of Orsino's last speech, but from the bitter note of Malvolio's final words. Far from heralding a "golden time," a term that itself evokes the pastoral myths of idyllic, benevolent relations between masters and servants,(48) the haunting song marks the end of holiday time and takes the play back into history, into materiality. Not just the wind and rain, but their inexorability against the festive vices of lust and drunkenness, the harshness of "man's estate" wherein gates are shut against foolery, call attention to the illusory nature of comic resolution and to the uncertain world to which actor and spectator alike must return. The final line, "And we'll strive to please you every day" (line 407), is a reminder that playing itself, while trafficking in illusion, is historically embedded, materially reproducible in time and space, and thus vulnerable as well to "wind and rain," to the threats that escape narrative closure. But like Malvolio's threat, Feste too is outside the narrative here, his song not mediated by the

now-vanished illusory world of Illyria. It is a moment that keenly demonstrates Weimann's assertion that "the comic actor . . . does not merely play to the audience: to a certain degree he still plays with the audience."(49) If Malvolio's evasion of closure deflates the ideal of a "golden time," Feste's signifies a resonant deconstruction of the boundaries between festivity and history. He stands as an emblem of the theater's capacity to intervene in lived experience. This gesture of self-licensed foolery figures the theater's testimonial to a limited institutional autonomy, even while the melancholy song discloses the material terms of those limitations.(50)

NOTES

1 See, e.g., John Hollander, "Twelfth Night and the Morality of Indulgence," in Modern Shakespearean Criticism: Essays on Style, Dramaturgy, and the Major Plays, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970), pp. 228-41.

2 The phrase is C.L. Barber's. See Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 259.

3 For a consideration of the problematics of disorder and closure in Hamlet, see my essay "'Suche Strange Desygns': Madness, Subjectivity, and Treason in Hamlet and Elizabethan Culture," Renaissance Drama n.s. 20 (1989): 51-76.

4 From Homily on Obedience (1559), quoted in Elizabethan Backgrounds: Historical Documents of the Age of Elizabeth I, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), p. 60.

5 Keith Wrightson, English Society, 1580-1680 (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 19.

6 Wrightson, p. 20.

7 See Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, abridged edn. (New York: Galaxy, 1967), pp. 37-61.

8 Michael Bristol, Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authoritarian Renaissance England (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 112.

9 Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 185.

10 For an insightful discussion of Renaissance theatrical transvestism, see Jyotsna Singh, "Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," Renaissance Drama n.s. 20 (1989): 99-122.

11 Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 122-23.

12 Stone essentially defends his thesis in a later essay, "The Bourgeois Revolution of Seventeenth-Century England Revisited," Past and Present 109 (November 1985): 44-54.

13 See, e.g., D.M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors, 1547-1603 (London: Longman, 1983), p. 76; Derek Hirst, Authority and Conflict: England, 1603-1638 (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 13.

14 Stone, pp. 249-67.

15 John Harington, Nugae Antiquae, vol. 2 (1779; rprt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), pp. 126-27, 130.

16 See note 1.

17 Stone, p. 256.

18 Buchanan Sharp, In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and the Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 17; see also Palliser, pp. 27-28.

19 John Walter, "A 'Rising of the People'? The Oxfordshire Rising of 1596," Past and Present 107 (May 1985): 90-143.

20 Sharp, p. 36.

21 Walter, pp. 96-99.

22 Sharp, p. 39.

23 Quoted in Walter, p. 99.

24 Elliot Krieger, A Marxist Study of Shakespeare's Comedies (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), p. 129.

25 William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Arden edn., ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), I.v.90. Further references will be to this edition and included in the text.

26 I am deliberately avoiding the term "puritan" in reference to Malvolio, not only because I do not believe he is explicitly a satirical Puritan in the sense, e.g., of Jonson's Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, but also because, as Palliser observes, "'Puritan' has proven almost impossible to define, both at the time and since, and some historians are now tempted to abandon the term altogether" (p. 347; see also pp. 346-51).

27 Quoted in Weimann, p. 171.

28 Cf. Terry Eagleton: "Like Falstaff |Sir Toby~ . . . is a rampant hedonist, complacently anchored in his body, falling at once 'beyond' the symbolic order of society in his verbal anarchy, and 'below' it in his carnivalesque refusal to submit his body to social control" (William Shakespeare |London: Basil Blackwell, 1986~, p. 32).

29 On "seasonal misrule," see Stuart Clark, "Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft," Past and Present 87 (May 1980): 98-127.

30 Ralph Berry remarks that Maria's exact social status is somewhat unclear, though he observes that other characters frequently address her as a menial servant (Shakespeare and Social Class |Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988~, pp. 70-71).

31 I still think that C.L. Barber says it best: "the fool in Twelfth Night has been over the garden wall into some such world as the Vienna of Measure for Measure. He never tells where he has been, gives no details. But he has an air of knowing more of life than anyone else--too much, in fact".

32 Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 61-62.

33 Bristol, p. 113.

34 Bristol, p. 140.

35 See Weimann, p. 213.

36 Eagleton, pp. 28-29; Krieger, p. 116.

37 The term may be found in Berry, p. 74.

38 William Shakespeare, As You Like It, The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), II.iii.57-58.

39 Hollander, p. 237.

40 On the relation of festivity and the old church calendar, see Leah S. Marcus, The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 1.

41 See Weimann, pp. 23-25; Marcus, p. 27.

42 Eagleton, p. 28.

43 The suggestion that the speech may refer specifically to Armin may be found in the Arden Edition of Twelfth Night, p. 27, nn. 61-69.

44 In Robert Armin, The Collected Works (New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972).

45 Stephen Gosson, The Schoole of Abuse (1579; rprt. London: The Shakespeare

Society, 1841), p. 27.

46 Thomas Heywood, An Apologie For Actors (1612; rprt. London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841), p. 54.

47 Clark, p. 101.

48 On the pastoral and its mythologizing of master-servant relations, see Louis A. Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of shepheardes' and the Pastoral of Power," ELR 10, 2 (Spring 1980): 153-82 (see esp. pp. 157-59).

49 Weimann, p. 257.

50 I would like to thank Don Wayne and Louis Montrose for their generous suggestions.

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