



Shakespeare Critical Anthology: Comedy

AS and A Level English Literature

The Pearson Edexcel AS and A level English Literature Shakespeare Critical Anthology can be used to prepare for Component 1 of your assessment

Pearson Edexcel GCE English Literature

Component 1a: Drama

Shakespeare Critical Anthology: Comedy

For use with:

A level English Literature (9ET0) Component 1a – Drama (Shakespeare)

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- 2 François Laroque, 'Shakespeare's Festive Comedies', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Vol. III*, ed. R. Dutton & J. E. Howard, Blackwell 2003
- 3 R. W. Maslen, 'Introduction: Shakespeare's Comic Timing', in *Shakespeare and Comedy, Arden Critical Companions* Thomson 2004
- 4 Walter Kerr, 'The Comic Incongruity', in *Tragedy and Comedy*, Simon & Schuster 1967

Section B: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- 1 Kiernan Ryan, in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, Palgrave Macmillan 2009
- 2 Stephen Fender, in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Edward Arnold 1968
- 3 C. L. Barber, in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, Princeton University Press 1972

Section C: *Measure for Measure*

- 1 Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'The Text and Early Performances', in *The Shakespeare Handbooks: Measure for Measure*, Palgrave Macmillan 2007
- 2 Philip Brockbank, 'The Theatre of God's Judgements', in *On Shakespeare*, Basil Blackwell 1989
- 3 Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'Introduction to *Measure for Measure*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. S. Greenblatt, Norton 2008

Section D: *The Taming of the Shrew*

- 1 Karen Newman, 'Renaissance Family Politics and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*', in *Renaissance Historicism*, ed. A. Kinney and D. Collins, University of Massachusetts Press 1987
- 2 Ann Thompson, 'Introduction', in *The Taming of the Shrew*, CUP 1984
- 3 Catherine Bates, 'Love and courtship', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Comedies*, CUP 2002

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- 1 David Bevington, '*Twelfth Night*; or, *What You Will*', in *Shakespeare*, Blackwell 2002
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- 3 Michael Shapiro, 'Anxieties of Intimacy: *Twelfth Night*', in *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, University of Michigan Press 1995

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Section A: Comedy | |
| 1 Marriage in Shakespeare's comedies | 6 |
| 2 The festive tradition | 8 |
| 3 The resilience of comic drama as an evolving form | 10 |
| 4 The features of comedy | 12 |
| Section B: <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> | |
| 1 Undermining authority | 14 |
| 2 Relationship between the mechanicals and the main comedy | 16 |
| 3 The play within a play and its actors | 19 |
| Section C: <i>Measure for Measure</i> | |
| 1 <i>Measure for Measure</i> and the politics of the time | 21 |
| 2 The Duke's manipulation of events in <i>Measure for Measure</i> | 23 |
| 3 <i>Measure for Measure</i> and sexual morals | 25 |
| Section D: <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> | |
| 1 Kate and the politics of the family | 28 |
| 2 Stage interpretations of <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> | 30 |
| 3 Love and courtship | 32 |
| Section E: <i>Twelfth Night</i> | |
| 1 Malvolio, puritanism and festivity | 34 |
| 2 Feasting, indulgence and the humours | 37 |
| 3 Gender and theatricality in <i>Twelfth Night</i> | 39 |

The Edexcel Shakespeare Critical Anthology

Introduction

At the heart of Edexcel's A level Literature specification is the literary text. Teachers and academics tell us that, above all, A level should encourage you to read and re-read your literary texts and to know them well. They also want students to read widely, deeply and independently to secure informed views about these texts. Reading critically means not just having opinions, but seeing that other readers might think differently.

This collection of critical passages is designed to extend and illuminate your reading of your set Shakespeare play. It results from our extensive research to understand what teachers and university English departments really believe are the most important skills and knowledge for students of literature at A level. The critical views contained here will offer you a range of perspectives on tragedy, as well as three specific passages on your chosen Shakespeare play. In total you will have seven passages that are relevant to your A level Shakespeare text (Component 1 – Drama).

The texts have been selected to give you a taste of high-quality writing by literary critics about a text that you should know well. They have been chosen by academics at one of the leading university English departments in the country, University College London, led by Professor John Mullan. Teachers may wish to supplement them with other passages of criticism that they think are illuminating, but this is not essential. We hope that your own critical writing style will be enriched by reading, and sometimes grappling with, these tightly crafted pieces by skilled literary thinkers. The arguments posed will enable you to consider the views of others and form, and perhaps re-assess, your own readings of your studied Shakespeare play.

So how might you use literary criticism within A level Literature? This will vary from student to student, depending on your developing skills in the subject. There is no expectation for you to pepper your own responses to Shakespeare with quotations from this anthology, or to ensure that a set percentage of your essay references this material. The intention is that your own responses to Shakespeare's writing will be enriched by considering the range of viewpoints offered here. Think of reading this criticism as rather like having a conversation; we offer each of these perspectives not as 'the answer' to reading Shakespeare, but merely as another reading of the text for you to engage with. You may find that some of the critics do not seem to agree with each other.

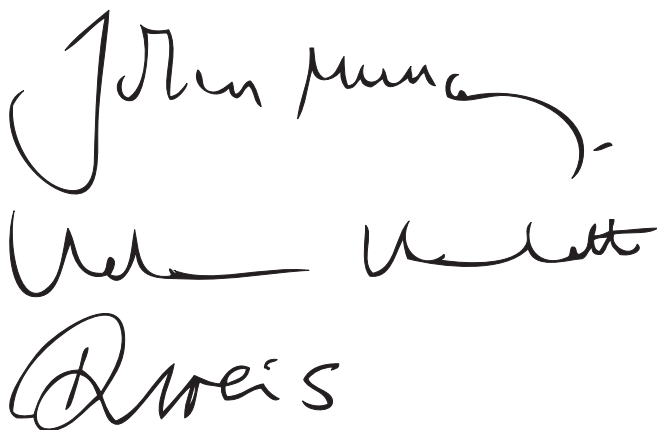
All of the points below are valuable ways of using the extended reading offered in this collection – during class discussion, in personal essays, or ultimately in your examination responses:

- Understand the interpretation being put forward about the literary text(s).
- Compare the critic's position with your own reading of the text (or indeed that of another critic or a member of your class). Identify any points of connection or difference.
- Agree with the point made. Identify further evidence in Shakespeare's text to extend it.
- Disagree with the critic's position. Identify evidence in Shakespeare's text that might support your opposing argument.
- Refine the critic's position. Identify one element that you can support and another that you would prefer to refine and qualify with evidence from the text.
- Select particular quotations that support or contrast with your own reading of the text to strengthen your discussion or literary essay.

Remember that, for all today's students, with ready access to the internet, the issue of plagiarism is an important one. You can, and should, draw on both the literary text and your wider reading to craft your own arguments. However, once you use others' words, or specific ideas, you must acknowledge them by use of a footnote or bracketed reference within your text. While Shakespeare borrowed many of his stories from other writers, academic essay-writing must be your own!

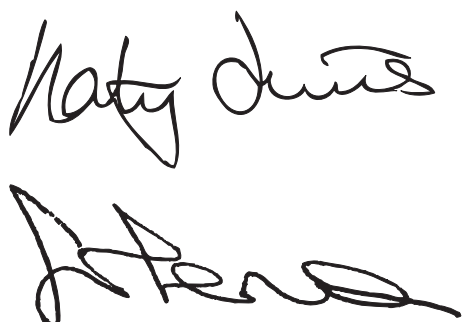
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Professor John Mullan, Professor Helen Hackett and Professor René Weis

The image shows three handwritten signatures stacked vertically. The top signature is 'John Mullan', the middle one is 'Helen Hackett', and the bottom one is 'René Weis'.

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Katy Lewis, Esther Menon

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Section A: Comedy

1 Marriage in Shakespeare's comedies

Hopkins points out that marriage is central to Shakespearean comedy, which emphasises social bonds and continuity (unlike tragedy, which focuses on the individual and shows worlds torn apart). Marriage is the expected ending towards which Shakespearean comedy seems to tend, yet at the same time Shakespeare frequently disrupts this expectation.

The most outstanding feature of Shakespearean comedy is its **pervading** obsession with marriage. In many instances single or multiple marriages are used to provide comic closure, as in *As You Like It* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which four couples marry or are expected to marry, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*, in each of which three couples marry, and *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in each of which two couples marry. In other examples the very fact of marriage is used as the mainspring of the comedy, as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where the very title of the play indicates the importance of marriage, or, to a lesser extent, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, in each of which a marital relationship plays a central part. Indeed, marriage is so central a topic in Shakespearean comedy that it is the presence of marriages in their plots which has problematised the genre classifications of both the late romances and the two 'dark' comedies, *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, and which provides the main justification for whatever claim they are accorded to be treated as comedies. We know, moreover, that many of Shakespeare's comedies bear clear marks of having been written expressly for performance as part of the celebrations surrounding the **solemnisation** of actual marriages, so that the connection would have been still more obvious to their original audiences.

But for all that the plays can indeed be grouped together with reasonable accuracy into these broad classifications, to do so obscures both some significant and some interesting differences between them, and also the problematic ways in which marriage is generally treated in these plays. For one thing, despite the traditional view that marriage provides comic closure, this is, in fact, very rarely achieved. The idea is of course drawn on – the audience is repeatedly encouraged to expect that the proceedings will be appropriately closed with a wedding – but these expectations are then either disappointed, or gratified in such a way that the spectator will be forced to question both the meaning of the events he or she has witnessed and also the assumptions underlying his or her response to the events.

Marriage is appropriate as a provider of closure for comedy because it focuses primarily on the experience of the group, as opposed to the individualist, isolationist emphasis of tragedy. The tragic hero lives and dies a fundamentally lonely figure, traumatically separated from his God, his society and his surroundings. Marriage both counters this element of separation by showing

Glossary

pervading spreading throughout; here, constant

solemnisation celebration, observation or performance of marriage rites

humans in a relationship which is, in theory at least, one of indissoluble bonding, and also holds out the promise of renewed life in the birth of offspring (referred to both in the words of the marriage ceremony and in Elizabethan wedding customs, and assumed to be the inevitable product of all heterosexual intercourse)...

Such an emphasis on continuity is undoubtedly present in much of Shakespeare's work. It can be traced explicitly through the first 18 of his sonnets, and it can also be detected in Oberon's blessing of the bridal bed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and in Rosalind's reference to Orlando, almost as soon as she sees him, as 'my child's father'. It is also possible to discern in Shakespeare's comedies clear signs of the **conservatism** which is so often felt to flourish in comedy: the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may flee from Athens at the outset of the play in rebellion against the **patriarchal order** articulated by Theseus and Egeus, but they do so only to find themselves in a wood ruled by a patriarch just as powerful (a point neatly made by the theatrical tradition of using the actor who plays Theseus to double Oberon), and at the end of the play the two couples willingly return to the society from which they had fled to take their allotted parts as leading members of it and, no doubt, to assist in its perpetuation. In similar fashion, Rosalind, Celia, Oliver and Orlando return from the Forest of Arden, where they had so briefly glimpsed a world in which traditional gender roles could be reversed and the patriarchal system of property division overturned by Oliver's **renunciation** of his **patrimony** in favour of Orlando, to take their places in the hierarchy of the court; and in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* the excursion into the forest of Valentine, Proteus, Silvia and Julia merely enables them to return to the city properly established as clearly defined couples. In *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*, worlds may be broken and assumptions overturned; in the comic universe, however, the world not only remains fundamentally the same, but is indeed reinforced by the reaffirmation of that most basic of all props of social and patriarchal order, marriage.

Although these elements of conservatism may doubtless be traced, other factors, far more radical, are also at work. It is noteworthy that although single or multiple marriages are almost invariably the obvious goal of Shakespearean comedy and are clearly signalled from the outset ... this expected **telos** is only very rarely attained within the confines of the play itself ... There was of course no theoretical prescription that all comedies should end thus – indeed, comedy in general lacked a theory such as that supplied by **Aristotle** for tragedy – but there was nevertheless a growing tradition which established marriage as the goal at least of romantic comedy. That tradition Shakespeare habitually disrupts.

From Lisa Hopkins, 'Marriage as Comic Closure', 1998.

conservatism preservation of traditions

patriarchal order social organisation in which a man is the head of a tribe or family and the history of the family is traced through the male line

renunciation formal declaration giving up past beliefs or behaviours

patrimony inheritance

telos ultimate purpose

Aristotle Greek philosopher who in 335BC wrote the *Poetics*, one of the first works of dramatic theory, which describes the essential features of drama, in particular tragedy

2 The festive tradition

This extract describes how Shakespeare's comedies bring to mind mirth and freedom by drawing on festive traditions. For Shakespeare's first audiences, holidays and carnival periods were times when rules were broken and social hierarchies were disrupted; the comedies celebrate such temporary breaking of the rules, while affirming community in their use of music and dance.

At a time when Puritan ministers and pamphleteers repeatedly attacked the abuses and excesses of “**papist**” rejoicings and popular festivals that were taken to be pagan remnants and forms of superstitious or **licentious idolatry**, Shakespeare stood in the defense of “old holiday pastimes,” as these seemed to him to anchor his plays deeply in local tradition while allowing him a measure of flexibility as well as a world of phrases, images, and symbols, all chiming together to create a tightly woven network of associations and resonances. In his festive, green-world comedies and later romances, he chose festivity and mirth rather than the city intrigue and comical satire advocated by his colleague and rival **Ben Jonson**.

Shakespeare's festive comedies revel in a carnival spirit of liberty and irreverence. They sanction sexual desire to be crowned and licensed by **companionate** marriage and they praise the wisdom of folly, as constancy and happiness are ultimately proved right once the young lovers are allowed to leave the labyrinth of errors, tricks, or illusions that have been wrought upon them.

Songs, music, and lyrics are particularly important in Shakespeare's festive comedies. They are there to entertain the audience, but also to contribute to the general mirth and to the dancing spirits that accompany the rites of love and restore harmony like some final, almost impossible miracle. **Contrariwise**, Jonson's comical satires or Shakespeare's subplots that take up the tricks of humours and the cruel games of deception and exposure – illustrated in the conflicts between Shylock and Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* or between Sir Toby, Feste, and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* – insist on **dissonance** and **cacophony** or on men who have no music in them. *As You Like It* presents the character-singer Amiens who, though he is shivering with cold, sings

Glossary

“papist” usually disparaging term used during the Reformation for Roman Catholics
licentious idolatry worshipping or celebrating an image of a god (people who worshipped such images were seen by some Protestants as weak-minded or having loose morals)

Ben Jonson dramatist (1572–1637) writing at the time of Shakespeare

companionate harmonious; based on love and compatibility

Contrariwise On the other hand

dissonance lack of agreement; sounds or elements that do not go well together

cacophony term used in music or language to describe noises that are unharmonious or out of place

the “green holly,” repeating that “this life is most jolly” (2.7.175–94). To C. L. Barber “the songs evoke the daily enjoyments and the daily community out of which special festive occasions were shaped up. And so they provide for the conclusion of the comedy what marriage usually provides: an expression of the going-on power of life” (Barber 1959: 118). This evocation of the “daily enjoyments of the daily community” does indeed seem to tie in with **Christopher Sly’s “comonty,”** i.e., with the special, subtle, unmistakable festive note which it is otherwise so difficult to isolate and define. Yet, for Philip Edwards, the festive comedies do not really end in clarification and in a resolution of the contrary forces of holiday and everyday: “A strong magic is created: and it is questioned” (Edwards 1968: 70). This shows that one cannot do away with the basic discrepancy between ritual and reality and it is also meant to remind the spectator–reader of Shakespeare’s festive comedies that it is quite necessary to reestablish a critical perspective after enjoying the sweet impossibilities of romance.

From François Laroque, ‘Shakespeare’s Festive Comedies’, 2003.

Christopher Sly’s “comonty” mispronunciation of ‘comedy’, from the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*; Sly is a drunken tinker who is tricked into believing he is an aristocrat after a lord and his servants switch his clothes while he is asleep.

3 The resilience of comic drama as an evolving form

Maslen asserts that comedy, unlike tragedy, was concerned with the lower social orders, and gave them a voice in ways that were sometimes challenging or subversive. He also suggests that the flexibility and adaptability of comedy contributed to its survival in the face of attempts at repression.

Comedy was the dramatic form that dealt with commoners – all those below the level of the aristocracy – ‘never meddling with any Princes matters nor such high personages, but commonly of marchants, souldiers, artificers, good honest housholders, and also of unthrifty youthes, yong damsels, old nurses, bawds, brokers, ruffians and parasites’, as the courtier-critic **George Puttenham** put it in 1589. The genre concerned itself, in fact, with the social stratum occupied by the actors themselves, giving it a voice and placing it at the centre of the action at a time when it had few opportunities to articulate its concerns at the highest level of political life.

No wonder, then, that the Elizabethans saw comedy as having been subject to the suspicion of rulers from ancient times to the present. Tragedy made tyrants weep and change their ways: **Sir Philip Sidney** tells the story of the murderous dictator Alexander Phraeus, whose willingness to ‘make matters for tragedies’ did not prevent him from weeping at a tragedy on stage. Comedy, on the other hand, made tyrants uncomfortable and roused them to rage. The often-reprinted collection of historical poems *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) includes the tale of the poet Collingborne, who was put to death for writing a comic **lampoon** about that most notorious of English tyrants, Richard III. Tragedy dealt with times that were safely past, granted neatness and closure by being incorporated into the narrative of history: Puttenham explains that the ancient tragedians reprehended the vices of princes ‘after their deaths when the posteritie stood no more in dread of them’. Comedy, by contrast, dealt with the dangerous present, whose inhabitants have an awkward propensity for taking **umbrage** and seeking revenge. For this reason, Puttenham tells us, the ancient comic playwrights ‘were enforced for feare of quarell and blame to disguise their players with strange apparell, and by colouring their faces and carying hatts and capps of diverse fashions to make them selves lesse knownen’. It seemed inevitable, then, that censorship should have hounded comedy from generation to generation, first struggling in vain to prescribe limits to

Glossary

George Puttenham critic (1529–90) who wrote *The Arte of English Poesie* in 1589, outlining the history of poetry and explaining the literary devices poets use

Sir Philip Sidney highly educated writer (1552–86) of poetry and prose at the court of Elizabeth I; quotation comes from his *Apology for Poetry*, in which he discusses the moral usefulness of poetry and drama

lampoon satire written against a person or an idea

umbrage offence

its licence, then giving up in despair and banning it from the stage as an offence against law and order. Only comedy's extraordinary flexibility – its capacity to reinvent itself repeatedly in response to new developments – had enabled it to survive its own indiscretions through so many centuries of **vilification** and belittlement.

The notion of comedy as a uniquely flexible medium, adapting itself with chameleon promptness to every innovation, was authorized for the Elizabethans by the Roman poet **Horace**, whose *Art of Poetry* ... was the single most important source for theoretical thinking about poetry and drama in the early modern period. The *Art* is filled with the sense that imaginative writing changes with the changing times, from its diction to its metre and form. Poetry mimics, in fact, the mutations of the natural world: the transformations that accompany the seasons, the alterations in a man's body and mind that come with advancing years. But Horace also implies that comedy in particular has changed as a result of pressure from outraged governments, whether in ancient Greece or in Italy. In each of its new incarnations comedy begins with grand promises to restrain its **ebullience** within permitted bounds, but ends by demonstrating its resistance to any form of containment, kicking over the traces and running riot for a time before being crushed beneath the weight of authoritarian retribution.

From R. W. Maslen, 'Introduction: Shakespeare's Comic Timing', 2004.

vilification abusive language in speech or writing

Horace Roman poet (65–8BC) who wrote *Ars Poetica* in 19BC, offering advice to poets on how to write poetry and drama

ebullience enthusiasm or excitement

4 The features of comedy

Contrasting tragedy and comedy, Kerr tries to define some of the essential qualities of comedy (whether Shakespearean or not). Comedy reminds us of the indignities and physical limitations of life, especially at the moments when human beings have the highest ideas about themselves. It shows us that we think our freedom is greater than it truly is.

Tragedy makes a great curved arc into the heavens, sometimes falling short of its sought goal like a Roman candle exploded too soon, sometimes crowning the universe and then vanishing “God knows where” in a burst of glory. Comedy never leaves the ground.

Its vision is not low. Squatting on the ground, it does not look downward to concentrate upon a universe that is either anthill or dungheap. It is not, as the **inchoate** notes left us in the name of **Aristotle** would have it, concerned with creatures “beneath us.” Its glance is not superior but leveling.

Comedy cocks an eye upward at the very same man who is straining to **divinize** himself and notices that he is packing a little extra weight. Though he is on his way to infinity, he has a ham sandwich in his pocket and a bandage on one big toe. Man may free himself of the earth, but – as things stand just now – he carries a little bit of the earth with him wherever he goes, and so he must carry whatever is required to nourish or soothe it. He must render unto matter the things that are matter’s. He can free himself of God but not of the need for a haircut.

King of infinite space, man is in fact bounded in a nutshell, and while the physical reality of the nutshell does not deny man his intellectual and spiritual mobility it does constitute baggage, baggage for which no other porter can be found. The baggage is heavy and in some measure humiliating. A bishop should not have to go to the bathroom. A weightless astronaut in space should not have to worry about making an appointment with his dentist. An ambassador busy on an important mission for his country should not have to pause over his scheduled appointments and soberly reshuffle a few to leave time for sex. The situation in each case is more than inconvenient; it is preposterous.

But that is the basic joke, the one **incongruity** upon which all other incongruities rest. That a being so entirely free should be so little free is absurd. That a creature capable of **transcending** himself

Glossary

inchoate basic, undeveloped, rudimentary

Aristotle Greek philosopher (384–322BC) who wrote *Poetics* in 335BC; an influential text in the Renaissance, it is viewed as the first work of literary theory and criticism

divinize make holy or godlike

incongruity situations or elements that do not fit together

transcending rising above one’s capabilities; often used to describe someone moving from the material world to another life

should at the same time be incapable of controlling himself is hilarious. Hilarity is a gasp, a shock, a shriek of disbelief at what is plainly evident. There the creature is, and the creature cannot be. "He's impossible," we say of a fool who has made us laugh, as we wipe away our tears. We do often cry when we laugh.

We cry because the **disparity** is unthinkable, and we laugh because there is no other thing we can do about it. Laughter always erupts precisely as the situation becomes hopeless: nothing in the world now can stop the old lady in the wheel chair from crashing into the wall, **Charley's Aunt** doesn't realize he has lost his skirts and is going to be found out, the cabin is slipping over the cliff. Or, in James Agee's much-quoted example, "Laurel and Hardy are trying to move a piano across a narrow suspension bridge. The bridge is slung over a sickening chasm, between a couple of Alps. Midway they meet a gorilla."

In tragedy there is always hope, up to the last minute and beyond it, some kind of hope; we rarely laugh. We are serious so long as there is a way out. Comedy occurs when there is no way out. A popular cartoon of recent years shows two starved, bearded, manacled men at the base of a towering room. Thirty feet above the chains that bind them is a barred window too small for either to pass through. There is nothing else in the chamber. One of the gaunt men is saying to the other, "Now, here's my plan ..."

The men have hope, and we know better, and that is comedy. Comedy depends upon tragedy, because it would have no disparity with which to shock us, it could not say how preposterous man is, if tragedy did not first and fully display man's extraordinary freedoms. Comedy listens, nods, does not deny. In the end, it simply points. It points to the thousand ways in which the admittedly free man is not free. It keeps an echo of freedom about, because if it did not there would be no joke; in the cartoon the bearded man's freedom to plan is the echo. But its own province is the province of chains; it spends its hours counting – blandly, almost without comment – the manacles that cannot be got rid of. It walks through a world paved with flypaper.

Tragedy speaks always of freedom. Comedy will speak of nothing but limitation.

From Walter Kerr, 'The Comic Incongruity', 1967.

disparity inequality or difference

Charley's Aunt farce written by Brandon Thomas and performed in 1892; the premise is that a man dresses up as 'Charley's Aunt' in order to act as a female chaperone so his two friends can socialise with two single women

Section B:

A Midsummer Night's Dream

1 Undermining authority

Ryan discusses how the play mocks or undermines the authority of those who wield worldly power in Athens. He encourages us to see how Shakespeare's very ordering of the play's scenes produces what he calls its 'levelling effects'. Thus Titania's comic romance with Bottom is placed at the play's heart, and thus the performance by the mechanicals of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' finally steals the show from the noble characters.

Having decreed that 'in the temple by and by with us/These couples shall eternally be knit' (IV.i.179—80), Theseus exits from Act IV on lines that have the distinct ring of a closing couplet: 'Away with us to Athens. Three and three,/We'll hold a feast in great solemnity' (IV.i.183-4). There, as far as the love-plot is concerned, the comedy might well conclude, since no further dramatic action is required to complete it, once the Athenian aristocrats have left the stage. The one remaining expectation to be satisfied is the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' before Theseus and his bride, and to house this Shakespeare manufactures an entire fifth act, which serves no further narrative purpose. The subtler purposes it does serve deserve detailed explication in due course; the broad point to note here is the way Act V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is hijacked by the 'hempen homespuns' (III.i.71), whose farcical reminder of the tragedy of this comedy might have been becomes the focus of the Athenian court's nuptial festivities. The vulgar, parodic jig that normally followed a performance in the Elizabethan public theatre invades, in effect, the play proper and colonizes the finale usually reserved for resolving the noble protagonists' plight. As a consequence, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* culminates in a comic turn that allows 'Hard-handed men that work in Athens' (V.i.72) to steal the show from the nobility in the final act, relegating them to the role of bystanders, heckling from the sidelines. The carping and quipping at the mechanicals' expense may take its toll on our affectionate empathy with their efforts. But the derision they attract from their on-stage audience is not merely offset, but arguably outweighed, but Shakespeare's decision to contrive an extraneous last act governed by their 'tragical mirth' (V.i.57).

The annexation of Act V to mount the mechanicals' unwitting spoof is the climax of a process of sly usurpation, which is all the more effective for being inconspicuous. Disregarding the further

Glossary

parodic mimicking serious dance in a ridiculous way

Elizabethan in the time of Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558 to 1603

Protagonists the main characters

carping criticising

derision contempt and mockery

usurpation a takeover of power from rightful rulers lists or tables

subdivisions some modern editors see fit to add, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* consists of only seven scenes, fewer than any other Shakespeare play: two in Athens, three in the wood, and then two back in Athens again. The Athenian scenes frame the scenes of erotic mayhem in the wood, which are internally framed in turn by the casting scene for Quince and company that precedes them and the reunion of Bottom with his troupe that concludes them. This double frame throws into relief the fact that Bottom's dalliance with Titania in Act III is the centrepiece of the comedy. The play's scenic structure is symmetrically designed to converge on the moment when a common working man is wooed by a queen and transformed into a 'gentleman' (III.i.156) who takes her adoration in his stride, while a queen is reduced to a tradesman's concubine and her royal spouse is cuckolded, albeit with his own consent, by a cloth-maker: 'Who would give a bird the lie,' asks Bottom, just before Titania addresses him, 'though he cry "Cuckoo" never so?' (III.i.128-9).

The significance of this incongruous coupling is magnified by its strategic placement at the pivotal point of the comedy. A comparable effect is achieved by the order in which the scenes are arranged. The long central sequence that begins in Act II, Scene ii, when Titania lies down to sleep, and closes with Bottom's awakening at the end of Act IV, Scene I, constitutes a virtually continuous action on stage. That this movement culminates in Bottom's waking up to muse on his 'most rare vision' (IV.i.202), rather than in the waking of Titania by Oberon or the waking of the lovers by Theseus, speaks volumes about the devious architecture of the play. By reversing the expected order of the scenes and crowning the sequence with 'Bottom's Dream', Shakespeare covertly inverts the hierarchy that prevails in the workaday world, just as he does by handing Act V over to the mechanicals and by making Bottom's liaison with royalty the highpoint of the whole comedy. The ruler of fairyland may despise the star of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' as a 'hateful fool' (IV.i.48), and the ruler of Athens may scoff at the 'tedious brief scene' (V.i.56) the craftsmen lay on 'To ease the anguish of a torturing hour' (V.i.37). But the format orchestration of the play holds 'sweet bully Bottom' (IV.ii.18) and the 'palpable-gross play' (V.i.360) performed by his 'crew of patched' (III.ii.9) in higher esteem.

From Kiernan Ryan, in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, 2009.

dalliance flirtation, romantic playfulness

concubine mistress

cuckolded a man is 'cuckolded' when his wife is sexually unfaithful to him

workaday ordinary, everyday

2 Relationship between the mechanicals and the main comedy

Fender explores ways in which the subplot of the mechanicals interacts with the major imaginative themes of the main love-and-marriage comedy of the play. He suggests that the mechanicals' rehearsals and their burlesque of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' invite us to compare their misuses of words and meanings with the lovers' language after they have reached the 'wood near Athens'; the lovers need to discover a language appropriate to their new experiences once they have left the stiff 'civility' of Athens.

Perhaps we can best explore the process by which Athenian civility becomes irrelevant in the face of new experience by looking first at the subplot of the mechanicals' play. It is clearly bound up with the plot of the lovers. The mechanicals' first rehearsal comes just after Hermia and Lysander outline the **paradoxes** of 'true' love and decide to run away together; their second rehearsal, which culminates in Bottom's 'translation', follows directly after the first transformation among the lovers, in which Lysander is made to shift his attentions from Hermia to Helena. The mechanicals' problems with their impending production get more confusing as the perplexing events in the main plot occur more frequently. The mechanicals' plot is, of course, a kind of parody of the lovers', and this is to say that the two lines of action look at first very different – even opposite – then gradually begin to display certain similarities, so that one becomes a kind of comment on the other. At first sight, for example, their 'lamentable comedy', with its violence and its unhappy ending, seems very different from the courtiers' own action, yet it serves to remind the audience of dangers implicit in the lovers' behaviour. There is potential violence, even death, in the Athenians' love affairs too, and if we ignore this fact, we miss much of the ironic tension – and ultimately the meaning – of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Again, the mechanicals are putting on a play, and the Athenian lovers are engaged in 'real life', yet Puck calls the courtiers' antics a 'fond pageant', and they seem to assume new identities in the wood as freely as actors do on the stage:

Hate me? Wherefore? O me, what news, my love?

Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander? (III.2)

The most persistent joke within the mechanicals' plot itself is that their cultural background, having denied them the experience of romantic love and the terminology to deal with it, suits them badly to performing *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Yet the Athenian lovers are as badly suited to their environment in the wood, and they too find their language unequal to describing what is happening to them.

The mechanicals demonstrate their unsuitability to the task of producing *Pyramus and Thisbe* in a number of ways. They misuse the high terms of melodrama; they have an excessively literal approach to the business of dramatic illusion. Their casting is haphazard: Flute is made to play

Glossary

paradoxes contradictions; puzzles

Thisbe even though he has 'a beard coming' and – presumably – a voice changing; Bottom, gleefully disregarding any trace of casting propriety, offers himself for any role – human or animal, male or female, lover or tyrant. All this makes for a number of jokes within the scenes concerned (the best being, perhaps, that of the biter bit, when Bottom gets more than he bargains for in the way of masks to assume), yet it has a more serious side in the wider context of the play as a whole. The disorder and **impropriety** of the mechanicals fit well into a setting in which the Queen of the Fairies turns against her husband, two women forget their life-long friendship to compete aggressively for one man, and two men try to carve each other up in the darkness.

The mechanicals even provide a humorous echo of the lovers' linguistic tangles. In the last hundred lines or so of I.1 the lovers express their bewilderment about love through a number of paradoxes. Here, for example, the two women discuss Demetrius:

Hermia: *I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.*

Helena: *O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!*

Hermia: *I give him curses, yet he gives me love.*

Helena: *O that my prayers could such affection move!*

Hermia: *The more I hate, the more he follows me.*

Helena: *The more I love, the more he hateth me.*

The paradoxes arranged **antiphonally** express the lovers' feeling that things are exactly the opposite of what they ought to be. Shakespeare echoes comically this sense of the inversion of the natural order when in the next scene he makes Bottom say exactly the opposite of what he means: 'generally' for 'severally', 'aggravate' for 'moderate', 'obscenely' for 'seemly'. The mechanicals too have their paradox and oxymoron: the play is called *The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe*; Bottom claims he can speak Thisbe's part in 'a monstrous little voice' and 'roar you as gently as any sucking dove' if he plays the lion. This is important because the audience comes to chart the progress or regress of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in terms of how appropriate their language is to their experience. The linguistic jokes in the comic underplot, while being funny in themselves, serve to keep our attention fixed on the kind of language all the characters speak, and possibly even to provide an oblique comment on the language of the lovers specifically. Even some apparently small details in the mechanicals' plot are important. The mechanicals are very preoccupied, for example, with the lion. Won't it frighten the ladies of the court? Shouldn't they devise some way of reminding the ladies that the lion is only make-believe?

Bottom: *Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck, and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect: 'Ladies', or 'Fair ladies—I would wish you', or 'I would request you', or 'I would entreat you—not to fear, not to tremble. My life for yours: if you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life.'* (III.1)

This all adds to the local joke of how unsuited they are to the craft they are trying to practise, but when set against the wider context of the larger plot, in which Bottom, transformed into an

impropriety vulgarity; rudeness

antiphonally singing or speaking in turns

animal, will inspire love – not fear– on the part of the most delicate 'lady' of all, it becomes an ironic comment on the play's action. Bottom's elaborate courtesies, his exaggerated respect for the ladies' sensibilities, remind the audience of a world very different from that of the wood, and help us to measure the distance the characters have come from that world; unknown to Bottom the civilities for which he has such concern have been overturned:

Demetrius: *I'll run from thee and hide me in the brakes,
 And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.*

Helena: *The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
 Run when you will. The story shall be changed:
 Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;
 The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
 Makes speed to catch the tiger—bootless speed,
 When cowardice pursues, and valour flies. (II.1)*

And Helena, far from being frightened of wild animals, thinks of herself as frightening them away:

*No, no—I am as ugly as a bear;
For beasts that meet me run away for fear. (II.2)*

Of course she does not mean it literally, but Shakespeare seems to have a purpose in making her express her preoccupation in precisely these terms.

From Stephen Fender, in *Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1968.

3 The play within a play and its actors

Barber's influential book showed how Shakespearean comedy draws on the temporary social inversions that were integral to traditions of holiday and festival. Here he discusses the absurd yet touching literal-mindedness of the mechanicals in their approach to drama, and Shakespeare's skill in presenting different levels of drama in the play-within-a-play. He compares the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' with the bride-ale show at Kenilworth, a traditional folk-drama presented before Elizabeth I by local Warwickshire people during her summer progress of 1575.

The difference between art and life is also what the clowns forget in their **parlous** fear lest "the ladies be afeared of the lion" and the killing. Bottom's solution is to tell the ladies in plain language that fiction is not fact:

Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not kill'd indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them that I Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear. (III.i.18–23)

Now this expresses Bottom's vanity, too. But producers and actors, bent on showing "character," can lose the structural, ironic point if they let the lines get lost in Bottom's strutting. What the clowns forget, having "never labour'd in their minds till now," is that a killing or a lion in a play, however plausibly presented, is a mental event. Because, like children, they do not discriminate between imaginary and real events, they are literal about fiction. But they are not *unimaginative*: on the contrary they embody the stage of mental development before the discipline of facts has curbed the tendency to equate what is "in" the mind with what is "outside" it. They apply to drama the same sort of mentality that supports superstition – it is in keeping that the frightening sort of folk beliefs about changelings are for them an accepted part of life: "Out of doubt he is transported." Because this uncritical imaginativeness is the **protoplasm** from which all art develops, the clowns are as delightful and stimulating as they are ridiculous. Even while we are laughing at them, we **recover** sympathetically the power of fantasy enjoyed by children, who, like Bottom, can be anything, a train, an Indian or a lion.

In the performance of *Pyramus and Thisby*, Shakespeare captures the naïveté of folk dramatics and makes it serve his controlling purpose as a final variant of **imaginative aberration**. The story from **Ovid**, appropriate for a **burlesque** in an Ovidian play, is scarcely the kind of thing the simple

Glossary

parlous perilous; excessive

protoplasm living contents of a cell; here, life source

recover get back; rediscover

imaginative aberration something that has been made up and is beyond what is normal or expected

Ovid Roman poet (43–17BC) who wrote a number of collections of love poems

burlesque satire that uses caricature

Section B: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

people would have presented in life; but their method and spirit in putting it on, and the spirit in which the noble company take it, are not unlike what is suggested by Laneham's account of the bride-ale show at Kenilworth. "If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves," Theseus observes of the Athenian artisans, "they may pass for excellent men" (V.i.218). The comedy of the piece centers not so much on what is acted in it as in the continual failure to translate actor into character. Shakespeare's skill is devoted to keeping both the players and their would-be play before us at the same time, so that we watch, not Pyramus alone, nor Bottom alone, but Bottom "in Pyramus," the fact of the one doing violence to the fiction of the other.

From C.L. Barber, in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, 1972. (First published as same in 1959).

Section C: *Measure for Measure*

1 *Measure for Measure* and the politics of the time

Hampton-Reeves sets Measure for Measure in the context of the recent accession of King James I, with attendant anxieties about regime change and the maintenance of order. He highlights the different performance venues for the play in Jacobean London: the hierarchically ordered space of the court, and the more open space of the Globe, a commercial playhouse catering to a popular audience. He finds the diverse interests of the play's audiences reflected in the debates within the play about whether strong government is beneficial or oppressive.

Measure for Measure was, like all of Shakespeare's plays, written for performance, but the circumstances of its performance was highly unusual. The play is tightly bound up with the cultural politics of 1604, the year when James I formally took his throne (having inherited it the previous year from his cousin Elizabeth). James was already King of Scotland, so his political views were well known, and many are reflected in *Measure for Measure*. He was certainly in the audience when the King's Men performed it at court during the Christmas festivities of 1604. However, the play was not written to simply flatter one man. It had been in the King's Men's repertoire for some months and was probably first staged in April that year at the Globe playhouse in Southwark.

Measure for Measure balances these different audience positions without ever resolving them. The play moves between the two different worlds of court and city, between the high culture of dukes and the low culture of prostitutes, pimps and thieves. In both worlds, we see characters fretting about the nature of authority and suffering when authority is misapplied. It is no coincidence that Shakespeare and his company also moved between those worlds, playing in the city's 'red light' district most of the time but also playing at court when summoned. Those in the audience at the court were invited to see in the play's representation of justice a mirror for themselves. However, Shakespeare's city audiences were much more sceptical about authority. They would have found common cause with the play's rogues and **rakes**, for whom the sudden imposition of strict law is a nuisance and, in one case, nearly a tragedy.

The two principal theatrical spaces for which Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure* were strikingly different. At court, the actors played at one end of a hall. If in attendance, the King was the most important participant, to some extent the main audience, and in many respects a more important spectacle than the show itself. The actor-audience dynamic closely resembled the ritual

Glossary

rake man, usually of high birth, known for his womanising and gambling

relationship between monarch and subject: the actors faced their audience and projected to them. The theatrical dynamics at the Globe were quite different. Plays were performed in the open air. Through a simple payment system, audiences were **socially stratified**, with the more wealthy patrons on sheltered benches and those who either couldn't or wouldn't pay more than a penny standing in the open area in front of the stage, the pit. A large thrust stage brought the action right into the audience and an actor could address their audience from three different sides, encouraging an intimacy between actors and audiences quite different to that at court...

Because these spaces and audiences were so familiar, *Measure for Measure* was able to address them directly. Shakespeare had good reason to be strategic. The year 1604 was an anxious one because it was the first proper year of a new regime. *Measure for Measure* is, on one level, a play about succession management. For at least a decade before this, Shakespeare and his contemporaries had worried endlessly about what would happen to the country (and to their positions, their wealth, and so on) when the childless Elizabeth died, an event which could have come at any time. So destabilizing was this anxiety that Elizabeth outlawed any talk of it. Yet people always talk when a new regime is coming and the literature of these years is thick with the horrors of civil war. Shakespeare himself wrote seven plays about English civil war in almost as many years. A violent political struggle was a real possibility, especially in a country still stalked by the spectre of religious radicalism and still looked upon as a rogue state ripe for invasion by its neighbours. In the event, James's accession went very smoothly and his formal entry into London through its city gates in 1604 was a memorable event. Shakespeare was part of the spectacle and he recalled it in the closing scene of *Measure for Measure*, which is based around the triumphant return of the Duke of Vienna through its city gates. Nevertheless, doubts and worries lingered. *Measure for Measure* is a product of that moment and seems to be a different play depending on which audience one imagines watching it. It is a strong affirmation of the importance of good governance for a court audience, and a cynical satire about the inconvenience of over-zealous authoritarianism for a city audience. Both plays exist in the same text, measure for measure.

From Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'The Text and Early Performances', 2007.

socially stratified segregated according to social class or rank

2 The Duke's manipulation of events in *Measure for Measure*

Brockbank tackles the Duke's manipulativenness, which has disturbed readers and audiences of the play. He argues that the Duke becomes an extension of the playwright, and he enables a theatrical solution to problems that may not have been soluble in life. We should not resent his tricks, for they are beneficial to the other characters and to us as we watch or read the play.

Any account of the divine and human comedy of *Measure for Measure* must recognize that, when in Act III, sc. i. 1. 150, the Duke comes forward in his disguise as friar, the action changes its mode, its conventions, its perspective; verse gives place to prose; and intrigue, leisured and measured, displaces the tensions and *agons* of the first movement. The aesthetic shock is considerable. We pass from Shakespeare's poetry at its most urgent and exploratory to the easy lies and evasions of the Duke's 'crafty' talk; from Claudio's keenly apprehended terror of death to the Duke's apparently facile reassurances...

But the change of style is one for which Shakespeare has made very careful provision by keeping the Duke on stage as spectator to the intimate events. The Duke's lies are white lies, meant to save the situation for the time being. But they also carry some of the play's truths. 'He hath made an assay of her virtue to practice his judgement with the disposition of natures', is not true of Angelo about Isabella, but it is true of the Duke about Angelo, and of Shakespeare about both Angelo and Isabella. He is, of course, the romantic playwright, using Romance tricks to recover order from human disarray. But even as theatre-goers we may continue to see the Duke as we see the friars of the earlier plays, as the sum of the many well-meaning devices that people employ in order to save each other from the consequences of crime, passion and folly.

The ugly predicament created by Angelo compels the Duke to enter into an imperfectly convincing conspiracy of creative deception with Isabella and Mariana. In doing so he may be said, like Shakespeare, to be finding a theatrical solution to an otherwise insoluble human problem. It is as if he invents the moated grange, the character of Mariana and Angelo's pre-contract of marriage with her, for their existence could not have been disclosed under the conventions operating at the start of the play without the Duke appearing a calculating manipulator. As it is, 'Craft against vice



Glossary

agons contests; disputes

I must apply' is neither a proclamation of **omnipotence** nor an elementary confession of human opportunism.

The craft is as much the playwright's as his character's, and in the last act it is deployed with great skill. The theatrical solution which the playwright finds for the human problem is not arbitrary (much less so than the text from Romans 9:15 would warrant); it keeps in touch with all the human values and **verities** exhibited in the play – justice, mercy, chastity and love, with the necessary vindications and qualifications. 'The "resolution of the plot", is ballet-like in its patterned formality and masterly in stagecraft.' says F. R. Leavis. Shakespeare is taking advantage of the range of conventions which the Jacobean theatre used in **masque** to **allegorize** the elusive ways of the gods. Isabella's version of the human spectacle becomes Shakespeare's:

*But man, proud man,
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep.*

(II. ii. 117–22)

The fantastical Duke is a trickster too, and Shakespeare a trickster, but the tricks are played to a saving purpose, with all the resourcefulness of the old Romance tales and of the theatre.

From Philip Brockbank, 'The Theatre of God's Judgements', 1989.

omnipotence holding supreme power

verities truths

masque 16th/17th century form of court entertainment with music, dancing and dialogue

allegorize illustrate a deeper meaning through symbolism

3 *Measure for Measure* and sexual morals

Maus finds in Measure for Measure debates about sexual behaviour, and about how far the state should intervene in it, that have resonance for both Shakespeare's age and our own. Angelo is aroused by Isabella's purity; having been committed to virtue, he pursues vice with equal commitment. Isabella's choice between her brother's death and her own chastity is a dilemma no less difficult according to the moral codes of Shakespeare's time than it is now.

Courts administered by the Church of England prosecuted many sexual infractions: among them fathering or giving birth to a bastard, committing adultery or bigamy, deserting a spouse, **reneging** on a wedding engagement, or groundlessly accusing others of such transgressions. Convicted individuals could be fined, whipped, displayed in the marketplace, or made to announce their sins in church...

Underlying such proceedings was the assumption, as in *Measure for Measure*, that morality could and should be legislated; that the sexual conduct of individuals was the business of the entire community...

In *Measure for Measure*, the repeated characterization of Angelo as "precise" associates him with the rigorists of Shakespeare's time; and since Viennese justice treats Claudio more strictly than it does professionals in the sex trade, the question of what constitutes adequate severity is certainly at issue. Perhaps, then, the play comprises Shakespeare's reflection on an issue of contemporary concern: what would happen if, as some argued, sexual misconduct could be punished with death? At the same time, Shakespeare carefully distinguishes the world of his play from seventeenth-century England, most obviously by making Vienna a Catholic city peopled with the nuns and friars who had been eliminated from Protestant England over half a century earlier. For despite obvious connections between *Measure for Measure* and some of the issues of its own day, Shakespeare's play hardly constitutes a clear policy recommendation. He is more deeply attentive to general issues about the often-vexed relationship between civic life and human passion, and between religious commitment and the conduct of **secular** affairs. What happens to individuals and a community when sexuality is viewed as **transgressive**, when it becomes the subject of public discipline? Is it possible or advisable to regulate sexual behavior through the courts? How do religious convictions affect the experience of sexual desire? These concerns resonate in an era like our own, characterized by a lack of consensus in religion and in sexual **mores**, by widespread transformations in the institution of marriage, and by debates over the extent to which the state ought to monitor the sexual behavior of citizens.



Glossary

reneging going back on a promise

secular non-religious

transgressive going beyond acceptable boundaries of taste or behaviour

mores habits

In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo's disastrous career suggests one possible effect of strict sexual self-denial: that the habits of restraint can themselves provoke sexual excitement. Rigid and self-righteous, Angelo seems not to have experienced the violence of desire until Isabella's first visit on behalf of her brother awakens his appetite:

*What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine?
The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?
Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do, as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season.* (2.2.167–72)

Like Claudio, Angelo thinks of passion in terms of death and decay, but the resemblance between the two men ends there. Angelo imagines himself as tainted meat rotting all the faster under the very sun that gives life to innocent, lovely things. What ought to improve Angelo – his keen appreciation for the presence of virtue – makes him worse.

Angelo is sexually aroused by prohibition. Mariana loves him, and his relationship with her breaches no social norms; he discards her. Isabella is ostentatiously pristine, and her nun's habit marks her as taboo; he finds her irresistible. In order to extract pleasure from the encounter, however, Angelo must force himself to remain aware of the principles he attempts so flagrantly to violate. If he rationalized his behavior or blamed it on Isabella, he would lose the nearly sensual luxury of self-hatred. Therefore the lucidity with which Angelo analyzes his own motives leads not to penitence but to an increasing moral recklessness. His inclination to categorize all sexual conduct as transgressive actually makes his offense easier to commit. Propositioning Isabella in their second meeting together, he tells her: "I have begun, / And now I give my sensual race the rein" (2.4.159–60). Angelo explains why he cannot govern himself with the same image the Duke used to underscore the necessity of control. Once embarked on the "sensual race," he imagines, there is no alternative to utter abandon.

For Isabella, however, sleeping with Angelo is out of the question. Some modern critics have found her defiance heroic, others chilling or selfish. Doubtless in Shakespeare's time, she elicited a similarly mixed response. Shakespeare alters his source story considerably to expand Isabella's role and specify its implications more exactly. In Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, the sister has no plans to enter a convent, and she eventually goes to bed with the deputy in order to save her brother's life. For Isabella, by contrast, virginity is a principled choice, not an accident of youth. The vow of lifelong, religiously dedicated chastity she plans to take is a matter about which Shakespeare's contemporaries had conflicting feelings. One effect of England's break with the Catholic Church had been a spectacular change in official attitudes toward celibacy. While Catholics honored sexual renunciation and demanded that their clergy remain chaste, Protestants discouraged veneration of the Virgin Mary, abolished convents and monasteries, and urged clergy to marry. Despite these alterations, however, a powerful appreciation for virginity and belief in its semimagical powers persisted in Reformation England, cut loose from its explicitly religious moorings. The effect of Shakespeare's innovations on Whetstone, then, is both to heighten the ambivalence of the story and to focus the moral spotlight on Isabella's convictions and the choices that follow from them.



Isabella believes that she would damn herself by sleeping with Angelo.

*Better it were a brother died at once
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.* (2.4.107–9)

Is she right? St. Augustine, the most influential Christian writer on sexual morality, insists that since sin is a property of the will, not a physical state, persons who are forced to perform sexual acts are blameless. If chastity is a state of mind, then the fate of Isabella's body is possibly independent of, and irrelevant to, the fate of her soul. Perhaps, in fact, by acquiescing to Angelo, Isabella would perform an act of charity, generously sacrificing her own preferences for Claudio's benefit. On the other hand, female "virtue" has traditionally been defined in physical as well as mental terms, so that chastity, the spiritual attitude, is hard to separate from virginity, the bodily condition. Moreover, Isabella is not exactly a rape victim; she must, as Angelo says, "fit her consent" to his proposal. Does that consent, however reluctant, contaminate her with his sin? Quite possibly. Would it permanently unsuit her for her religious vocation? Quite possibly. Clearly it is reasonable, then, for Isabella to be cautious; and no one, says Augustine, is obliged to put him- or herself in eternal peril merely in order to save the life of another person.

From Katherine Eisaman Maus, 'Introduction' *Measure for Measure*, 2008. (First published as same in 1997).

Section D: *The Taming of the Shrew*

1 Kate and the politics of the family

This extract traces Kate's shrewishness to her status as an 'orphan' in the play. As well as being motherless, she is also effectively without a father, because Baptista repeatedly rejects her in favour of her sister Bianca. He treats her as a mere commodity in a marriage trade. She is transferred to her husband by her father, and fights back through language by out-punning her husband.

At 2.1, in the spat between Bianca and Kate, the relationship between silence and women's place in the marriage market is made clear. Kate questions Bianca about her suitors, inquiring as to her preferences. Some critics have read her questions and her abuse of Bianca (in less than thirty lines, Kate binds her sister's hands behind her back, strikes her and chases after her calling for revenge) as revealing her secret desire for marriage and for the praise and recognition afforded her sister. Kate's behavior may invite such an interpretation, but another view persistently presents itself as well. In her questions and badgering, Kate makes clear the relationship between Bianca's sweet **sobriety** and her success with men. Kate's abuse may begin as a jest, but her feelings are aroused to a different and more serious pitch when her father enters, taking as usual Bianca's part against her sister. Baptista emphasizes both Bianca's silence, "When did she cross thee with a bitter word?" and Katherine's link with the devil, "thou hilding of a devilish spirit" (2.1.28, 26). We should bear in mind here Underdown's observation that shrewishness is a class as well as gender issue – that women "lacking in the protection of a family ... were the most common offenders."* Kate is motherless, and to some degree fatherless as well, for Baptista consistently rejects her and favors her obedient sister. Kate's threat which follows, "Her silence flouts me, and I'll be reveng'd" (2.1.29) is truer than we have heretofore recognized, for it is that silence which has insured Bianca's place in the male economy of desire and exchange to which Kate pointedly refers in her last lines:

*What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
I must dance barefoot on her wedding day,
And, for your love to her lead apes in hell.* (2.1.31–4)

Here we recognize the relationship between father and husband, in which woman is the mediating third term, a treasure the exchange of which assures **patriarchal hegemony**. Throughout the play Bianca is a treasure, a jewel, an object of desire and possession. Although much has been made

Glossary

sobriety seriousness; moderation

patriarchal hegemony dominance of the male line of inheritance

of the animal analogies between Kate and beasts, the metaphorical death of the courtly imagery associated with Bianca has been ignored as too conventional, if not natural, to warrant comment. What seems at issue here is not so much Kate's lack of a husband, or indeed her desire for a marriage partner, but rather her distaste at those folk customs which make her otherness, her place outside that patriarchal system, a public fact, a spectacle for all to see and mock.

In the battle of words between Kate and Petruchio at 2.1.182ff., it is Kate who gets the best of her suitor. She takes the lead through puns which allow her to criticize Petruchio and the patriarchal system of wooing and marriage. Her sexual puns make explicit to the audience not so much her secret preoccupation with sex and marriage, but what is implicit in Petruchio's wooing – that marriage is a sexual exchange in which women are exploited for their use-value as producers. Significantly, Petruchio's language is linguistically similar to Kate's in its puns and wordplay. He also presents her, as many commentators have noted, with an imagined vision which makes her conform to the very order against which she rebels – he makes her a Bianca with words, shaping an identity for her which confirms the social expectations of the sex/gender system which informs the play. Their wooing can be interestingly compared with the next scene, also a wooing, between Bianca and her two suitors. Far from the imaginative use of language and linguistic play we find in Kate, Bianca repeats **verbatim** the Latin words Lucentio "construes" to reveal his identity and his love. Her revelation of her feelings through a repetition of the Latin lines he quotes from **Ovid** are as close as possible to the silence we have come to expect from her.

From Karen Newman, 'Renaissance Family Politics and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*', 1987. (First published as same in 1986).

verbatim word for word

Ovid Roman poet (43–17BC) who wrote a number of collections of love poems

*D. E. Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 120

2 Stage interpretations of *The Taming of the Shrew*

*Thompson describes how interpretation of *The Taming of the Shrew* in performance has varied widely. Some productions have suggested that Katherine falls in love with Petruchio during the wooing scene; some have played her final speech as playfully ironic, others as bitterly sarcastic, others again as bleakly mechanical. Thompson discusses how stage interpretations change according to the shifting social conditions of their times.*

As in earlier centuries, the play is still ‘softened’ by careful, but by now more subtle, adjustments in the wooing scene and the last scene. Twentieth-century actresses restricted to the authentic text in the wooing scene have often motivated Katherine by making it abundantly obvious that she falls in love with Petruchio at first sight. Sometimes, however, it has been difficult for reviewers to agree on whether this happened or not. Janet Suzman’s 1967 performance, for example, was apparently ambiguous in this scene, with some reviewers convinced that she was attracted to Petruchio from the beginning but others claiming that love blossomed out of initial **antipathy**. If Kate does fall in love in the wooing scene (2.1), the director and actress can achieve the same effect as earlier generations achieved by **interpolating** lines; it may undermine the tension of the next two acts but it helps to make the taming process more tolerable for the audience. At the same time, it has often seemed necessary for Katherine to undercut her speech in the last scene in some way. When Mary Pickford played the part in the 1929 film version of the play (the first sound film of any of Shakespeare’s plays) we are told that ‘the spirit of Katherine’s famous advice to wives was contradicted with an expressive wink’, beginning (apparently) a new tradition of ironic or ambiguous performances. These could be executed with varying degrees of good humour: when Sian Phillips played the role in 1960 ‘her delivery of the concluding sermon on how good wives should submit to their husbands was made with tongue slightly in cheek’, a limited qualification of a basically generous submission, but when Joan Plowright played it in 1972 one reviewer commented

I certainly didn’t believe a word of it [the final speech] when uttered by Joan Plowright with a slightly sarcastic inflection to her voice which undermines totally any possible virtue the entire exercise might have had – that the two in the end find real love and understanding.

The **nadir** of bitterness and resentment was perhaps reached in Paola Dionisotti’s performance in 1978:

Kate’s famous speech ... is delivered in a spiritless, unreal voice and received without much appreciation by the men, and with smouldering resentment by the women. The main feeling is of shame – and that the systematic deformation of Kate’s character (the deformity of submission on top of spite) is being revenged in the weariness and boredom of the men. When Petruchio says ‘we’ll to bed’ it sounds as if they have been married for years. It is an interesting and courageous (not to say feminist) way to interpret the play.

Glossary

antipathy intense dislike

interpolating inserting or adding

nadir lowest point

This was another time when the critics disagreed. Michael Billington wrote that Dionisotti delivered the speech ‘with a tart, stabbing irony’ (*The Guardian*, 5 May 1978), but I saw this production three times myself and agree with the *TLS* reviewer, Lorna Sage, that the tone was ‘spiritless’ and ‘unreal’. Many reviewers felt on this occasion that it might have been more logical not to present Shakespeare’s text at all (one review was headlined ‘The Shaming of the True’), but to put on an adaptation such as that of Charles Marowitz (1975), in which the text is cut, rearranged and interspersed with scenes from a modern courtship in order to transform it into a treatise on sadism and brainwashing. In this version Petruchio drives Katherina mad and finally rapes her. She enters in the last scene wearing ‘a shapeless institutional-like garment’ and delivers her speech ‘mechanically’ and as if she has ‘learnt it by rote’.

Of course not all modern Katherinas have been bitter, but it has often seemed the case that a straightforward and apparently sincere delivery of the final speech has provoked as much topical thoughtfulness in reviewers (and presumably audiences) as the more subversive mode. Barbara Jefford apparently ‘comes as near as any Katherina ever will to making the final **abject** speech of the changed shrew sound plausible’, while Jane Lapotaire ‘gives the speech full value, touches us deeply, and leaves us to sort out our feelings about **women’s lib** as best we may’. Vanessa Redgrave’s performance seems to have been a complex one, enabling one reviewer to remark

The delicious touch of irony which she adds to this speech amplifies the suggestion that she submits to Petruchio, not because woman must submit to man as her natural master, but because she loves him.

Another critic thought, however, that ‘she shows us a woman discovering that the delivery of a grovelling and submissive speech can actually give her a special new sensual kick’. Obviously the interpretation of this speech can lie as much in the mind of the reviewer as in the intention of the director or the performance of the actress.

Thus throughout its stage history *The Taming of the Shrew* has probably received fewer completely straight performances than any other Shakespearean play of comparable popularity on the stage. The apparently unrelieved ethic of male supremacy has proved unpalatable, and generation after generation of producers and directors have altered and adapted the text in more or less flagrant ways in order to soften the ending. Of course, responses to the play are bound to be affected by the status of women in society at any given time and by the way that status is perceived by both men and women. Reading through the reviews, one sees the play acting as a kind of litmus paper, picking up worried and embarrassed reactions from men who were probably just as committed to male supremacy as they take the play’s hero to be but whose methods of oppressing their women were less obvious and more socially acceptable. Productions of the play have frequently attracted whatever thoughts were in the air on the perennially topical subjects of violence and sexual politics, and this tendency can hardly fail to increase in our own time. The play may indeed become less popular on the stage than it has been in previous centuries as it becomes, rightly, more and more difficult to put on productions of it which are simply rollicking good fun.

From Ann Thompson, ‘Introduction’ *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1984.

abject wretched; hopeless

women’s lib shorthand for Women’s Liberation, or Feminism

3 Love and courtship

In the course of a longer argument about the uses of art in Shakespeare's comedies, Bates likens Kate's willingness to play along with Petruchio to the audience's willingness to play along with Shakespeare's comic art. Kate gives in to her husband's artfulness just as we give in to the playwright's. When we realise this we can see the appropriateness of Christopher Sly being tricked into believing an illusion in the play's Induction.

The Taming of the Shrew poses the problem of art's relation to life and love's relation to art still more pointedly. In this play, Kate embodies the shrewish female who was enshrined in **jest-books**, ballads, sermons, folktales, and a well-populated **misogynistic** tradition. Petruchio steps in as the master analyst who dedicates himself to her cure. But his method is unorthodox, for he meets her supposed madness with a contrived madness of his own, one which vies to outbid her with a violence and unpredictability that is more than a match for her. Petruchio's **idiosyncratic**, **adversarial**, and bizarre behaviour is quite as bad as hers, particularly during the Rabelaisian wedding scene, which is reported to us by one of the appalled guests (3.2 150-83). But the play draws an important distinction between the two. While Kate's madness is presented as emotional, subjective, and involved, Petruchio's, by contrast, is ironic, objective, and detached. If Kate is genuinely disorderly, Petruchio is disorderly by design. Petruchio's madness is crafty and methodical, and motivated all along by "meaning" (3.2 124). Petruchio's techniques are denounced by the play's **patriarchal** community for only as long as they believe his behaviour and Kate's to be the same. No sooner are the effects of his therapy made visible – in the miraculously pliant Kate- than the community takes him back into its bosom and rewards him handsomely for his pains. Baptista doubles the dowry settled on the newly reformed bride.

Petruchio does not rest until he has transformed his future wife into the woman designed, patented, and approved of by the patriarchal society he represents, a Kate "Conformable as other household Kates" (2.1.278). There is no question, however, of Shakespeare leaving the matter there. For all the submission of this particular bride (a matter, in any case, notoriously open to question), the battle between man and woman is by no means over. When Petruchio sends his wife to fetch the other newly-weds, her sister Bianca and the Widow, Kate returns to report that they will not come to their husbands because "They sit conferring by the parlour fire" (5.2.102). A **recalcitrant** and unsupervised female language continues to persist even after the apparent success

Glossary

jest-books collections of jokes and comic tales that were popular in

misogynistic scorning or hating women

idiosyncratic eccentric

adversarial taking the opposite opinion to someone else

patriarchal based on rule by men

recalcitrant disobedient, resisting constraint

of Petruchio's taming methods- a secretive and vaguely **insurrectionary** discourse going on behind the scenes which clearly identifies Bianca and the Widow and the play's two new shrews. With its proliferation rather than elimination of disorderly women, and with Hortensio, recent recruit to the "taming-school" (4.2.54), ready to take up where Petruchio left off, Shakespeare's play announces a resigned return back to the beginning.

Shakespeare emphasizes the circularity of his plot, moreover, by running rings around the play's various audiences. There are two scenes in Act 4 (3 and 5) in which Petruchio famously forces Kate to abide by a world of his own devising- a world in which, at his whim, the morning is the afternoon, the sun the moon, or an old man a budding young virgin- for "It shall be what a' clock I say it is" (4.3.195). Kate eventually **capitulates**- "The God be blest, it is the blessed sun,/But sun it is not, when you say it is not;/And the moon change even as your mind./What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,/And so it shall be so for Katherine" (4.5.18-22). At this point, as Hortensio observes, "the field is won" (4.5.23). The prerogative to conjure out of thin air a place, a time, a person's identity or gender is, of course, that of the playwright. It is the playwright who can, at the stroke of a pen, convert the bare boards of the stage into the vasty fields of France simply by asking his audience to "suppose" it so (*Henry V*, Prologue, 19). When Petruchio invites Kate to imagine that the sun is the moon and so forth he is doing no more nor less than the tricky Lord who lays on "*The Taming of the Shrew*" in order to beguile the drunken Christopher Sly, and no more nor less, of course, than Shakespeare himself, who is all the while busy urging us to suspend our disbelief and enter into the theatrical illusion of his Padua.

With the moral laws governing human sexuality temporarily suspended during courtship, the **aesthetic** laws governing art and illusion neatly step in to take their place. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare makes the comparison between the two more pointedly than ever. A man orders his woman exactly as the artist would order his material. Here love's labours are won in the same way that an audience is won, the implication being that the success or failure of the one necessarily dictates the success or failure of the other. If Petruchio fails to win Kate by asking her to "suppose" what he asks her to, then, by the same token, the play must fail too: the audience will resist as Kate resists. If, on the other hand, *The Taming of the Shrew* succeeds in captivating its audience, or at least in making them enjoy the show, then it legitimates the most violent, **coercive**, not to say outrageously sexist behaviour. The difficulty of resolving this notoriously contentious play is entirely of its own, quite deliberate making, for never so wittingly has love been made the victim of arts' success.

From Catherine Bates, 'Love and courtship', 2002.

insurrectionary rebellious

capitulates surrenders, gives in

aesthetic to do with how a beautiful work of art or literature should be made

coercive bullying

Section E: *Twelfth Night*

1 Malvolio, puritanism and festivity

Bevington finds in Twelfth Night a central opposition: on the one hand stand puritanism, abstinence and repression, as personified by Malvolio; and on the other stand festivity and pleasure, as represented by Sir Toby and Feste. Part of the context for this debate in Shakespeare's time was the hostility of Puritans to the theatre. Malvolio's own hypocrisy creates the theatrical opportunity to bring him down.

'If this were played upon a stage, now', comments Fabian, 'I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.' The very unbelievability of Malvolio's infatuation is part of what makes it so richly enjoyable.

Malvolio is a well-suited target for satire – indeed, just about the most pointed satire that Shakespeare ever wrote, other than in *Troilus and Cressida* – because he is an enemy of merriment and hence a foe of the kind of theatre that *Twelfth Night* represents. Malvolio believes in **sobriety**. That is presumably why the Countess Olivia retains him as her chief steward; he helps maintain the **decorum** that belongs to a house in mourning for the death of the Countess's brother. He tries to suppress the noisy merrymaking of Toby, Andrew, and Feste by inquiring in acid tones if they intend to make 'an alehouse of my lady's house' with their catches and their quaffing of much liquor. He has a point, surely, for the party has lasted into the wee hours of the morning; at the end of the scene (2.3), Toby concludes that 'Tis too late to go to bed now', and so he and Andrew resolve to warm up some more imported Spanish wine. Even Maria, no friend of Malvolio's and quite devoted to Toby, tries to warn them that their **caterwauling** is sure to awaken Olivia and prompt her to commission Malvolio to turn them all out of doors. Toby is an **impecunious** relative of Olivia's and a kind of **Falstaffian moocher** whose continued presence in the house is a drain on Olivia's patience and her pocketbook.

Malvolio's sober-sided performance of duty would be acceptable as a counterweight to Toby and Andrew's excessive merriment were it not for the fact that Malvolio is a hypocrite. Secretly he longs for the pleasures of this world and for the authority to control others, both of which can be best attained by his becoming 'Count Malvolio'. He fantasizes about sharing Olivia's daybed and, even more than that, about putting Toby and Andrew in their place. He is vulnerable to Maria's

Glossary

sobriety clean living; living seriously and without excess

decorum correct behaviour; propriety

caterwauling shrieking and yowling like a cat

impecunious penniless

Falstaffian displaying the attributes of

Falstaff, a drunkard, coward and shameless boaster from Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

moocher someone who constantly borrows money and relies on others to support them

social aspiration wanting to rise above your social rank or class

scheme of the planted letter, supposedly written by Olivia, because Malvolio has long dreamed of being her favourite. What might otherwise be entrapment is justified, according to the satirical code governing this part of the play, by the fact that Malvolio is drawn into a 'crime' of **social aspiration** in which he is an active participant. Malvolio brings his downfall on himself, albeit with the eager assistance of those who hate him for being a killjoy.

Maria describes Malvolio as sometimes 'a kind of puritan'. Nowhere else does Shakespeare use this term (though Angelo's being 'precise' in *Measure for Measure* hints at a similar inclination), and seldom if ever does Shakespeare take such potent aim at a topical target. When challenged for her reasons in saying 'puritan', Maria backs off and settles for declaring that Malvolio is a 'time-pleaser' and 'affectioned ass' who is far too well 'persuaded of himself'. Still, the word 'puritan' has been thrown up for consideration. Is Malvolio a puritan? Only, it seems, to the extent that puritans too are likely to be hypocrites of this sort. Maria draws back from labelling puritans generally in this way, but issues an implicit warning: if any puritans are like Malvolio, they deserve to be outwitted and humiliated. **Puritanism** was a hot-button issue when Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* around 1600–2. Some reformers were vociferous in their opposition to the theatre, so much so that the authorities in London (where the longing for religious reform was particularly strong) took every excuse they could find to close down the playhouses. Playwrights like Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker were soon to spice up their plays with openly satirical sketches of puritan hypocrites ... Shakespeare, with characteristic tact, avoids any wholesale **indictment** of puritanism. At the same time, he sounds a warning that has a direct bearing on the world of the theatre. If Malvolio is hostile to the liberation of the human spirit that theatre can help celebrate and enhance, then there is no room for him in the concluding harmonies of this play.

Feste, as Malvolio's **nemesis** and opposite number, is the **apostle** of merriment. Olivia's presumed reason for keeping Feste around as her fool is that she wishes to be cheered up from time to time, just as she also prefers at other times to be watched over by the melancholy Malvolio. Feste's **gnomic** advice to Olivia, when it is his turn, is that she give up her self-willed mourning for a dead brother in favour of a full participation in life's joys; her brother is in heaven, and she is still on earth, where she has an obligation to be happy. Feste's songs celebrate the age-old notion of seizing the moment of pleasure while one is still young:

*What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present love hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty.
Then come and kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth's a stuff will not endure.* (2.3.47–52)

Puritanism ideology of 16th/17th century Protestant movement which believed that God should be worshipped without excessive ceremony and that followers should obey strict moral principles

indictment condemnation

nemesis arch-enemy (named after spirit of divine retribution in Greek mythology)

apostle supporter

gnomic wise-sounding; pithy; aphoristic

This is the gospel of innocent hedonism that often takes the name of **Epicureanism**, though Epicurus' thought is much more complex than a simple urging to seize the moment of pleasure. At any rate, the battle is joined between Lent and Carnival in this play, and Carnival consistently wins the contest for our hearts. Toby's **riposte** to Malvolio, when he is attempting to break up their late-night party, has become famous, if only through the title of Somerset Maugham's novel, *Cakes and Ale*. 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' The point is well taken. Malvolio has a right to be 'virtuous' (translate here as self-righteous) himself, but he has no right to impose his sense of moral propriety on others. If he is a moral censor, then he is too like those who keep trying to close down the London theatres, and were also hostile to maypoles, village fairs, and the church-ales or festive gatherings at churches that Toby may be referring to. The only way to respond to such would-be **arbiters** of personal behaviour is to lay a trap for them made out of their own vulnerability to self-regard and a secret, hypocritical longing for the very pleasures they would deny to others.

Malvolio is harshly handled in this unusually satirical play, so much so that he is able to cry, with understandable feeling, 'Madam, you have done me wrong, / Notorious wrong'. He is blaming the wrong person, mainly, but Olivia has **countenanced** the imprisonment of her steward because she has feared for his sanity. Her response to his outburst is properly gracious and generous; using his very words, she allows that Malvolio 'hath been most notoriously abused', and no doubt agrees with Orsino that Malvolio should be pursued and entreated 'to a peace'. Whether Malvolio can be placated, however, remains doubtful. His warning shot as he stalks away is that 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you'. He cannot have known, of course, that puritan reformers would close all English theatres in 1640, at the outbreak of war between militant reformers and supporters of the monarch and the Established Church. Still, Malvolio certainly did know that the opponents of revelry had means at their disposal to close the theatres in the 1600s when plague or other extraordinary conditions prevailed. *Twelfth Night* comes close to being militant in its defence of merrymaking. Shakespeare's theatre could not afford to let the killjoy challenge go unanswered.

From David Bevington, *'Twelfth Night; or, What you Will'*, 2002.

Epicureanism system of beliefs based on the writings of the philosopher Epicurus, who wrote primarily about gaining pleasure by modest living and tranquillity

riposte swift, often witty response

arbiter judge or mediator in a dispute

countenanced permitted

2 Feasting, indulgence and the humours

Twelfth Night starts and ends with music. Hollander argues that its music dovetails with its festive character of indulgence, even overindulgence. There is so much food and partying in the play that its outsider, the spoilsport Malvolio, is said by Hollander to suffer from 'moral indigestion'. While the play's use of moods, such as melancholy, is indebted to Elizabethan commonplace ideas about 'humours', its title, which evokes the Feast of Epiphany, leads us to expect revelry.

Full of games, revels and tricks, and disguises, it is an **Epiphany** play, a ritualized Twelfth Night festivity in itself, but it is much more than this: the play gives us an analysis, as well as a representation, of feasting. It develops an ethic of indulgence based on the notion that the personality of any individual is a function not of the static proportions of the humors within him, but of the dynamic appetites that may more purposefully, as well as more pragmatically, be said to govern his behavior. Superficially close to the comedy of humors in the **characterological** extremes of its *dramatis personae*, the play nevertheless seems almost intent on destroying the whole theory of comedy and of morality entailed by the comedy of humors.

The nature of a revel is disclosed in the first scene. The materials are to be music, food and drink, and love. The basic action of both festivity in general, and of the play itself, is declared to be that of so **surfeiting** the appetite that it will sicken and die, leaving fulfilled the tempered, harmonious self. The movement of the whole play is that of a party, from appetite, through the direction of that appetite outward toward something, to **satiation**, and eventually to the condition when, as the Duke hopes for Olivia, 'liver, brain and heart / These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and filled / Her sweet perfections with one self king'. The 'one self king' is the final harmonious state to be achieved by each reveller, but it is also, in both the Duke's and Olivia's case, Cesario, who kills 'the flock of all affections else' that live in them, and who is shown forth in a literal epiphany in the last act.



Glossary

Epiphany Christian feast day, celebrated on 6th January, the 'Twelfth Night' after Christmas

characterological studying characters and their differences

dramatis personae Latin term for the list of characters in a play

surfeiting overindulging

satiation filled to excess, beyond the point of satisfaction

The Duke's opening speech describes both the action of feasting, and his own abundant, **ursine**, romantic temperament. But it also contains within it an emblematic representation of the action of surfeiting:

*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.* (1 i 1–8)

The one personage in the play who remains in a melancholy humor is the one person who is outside the revels and cannot be affected by them. Olivia's rebuke cuts to the heart of his nature: 'You are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite.' Suffering from a kind of moral indigestion, Malvolio's true character is revealed in his **involted**, Puritanic sensibility that allows of no appetites directed outward. His rhetoric is full of the Devil; it is full of humors and elements as well. No other character tends to mention these save in jest, for it is only Malvolio who believes in them. Yet real, exterior fluids of all kinds, wine, tears, sea-water, urine, and finally the rain of inevitability bathe the whole world of Illyria, in constant reference throughout the play.

From John Hollander, 'The Role of Music in *Twelfth Night*', 1956.

ursine bear-like, from *ursus*, the Latin for bear
involted inward-looking

3 Gender and theatricality in *Twelfth Night*

Shapiro demonstrates how in the final scene of the play Orsino partly acknowledges that Viola is a woman but also continues to address her as a man, harking back to their homoerotic intimacy as shown earlier in the play. Shapiro suggests that in the Elizabethan playhouse, where boys would have played both Viola/Cesario and Olivia, this moment would have undercut the conventional comic ending of heterosexual marriage, and would also have playfully highlighted the illusionism of theatre.

Turning to Olivia, the page explains himself in couplets that are the most direct sentiments Viola has uttered about Orsino since the brief soliloquy following their first meeting:

*After him I love
More than I love these eyes, more than my life,
More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife.*
(ll. 134–36)

Accentuated by rhyme, these impassioned speeches articulate in public the nature of the relationship Orsino and Viola have played out in and between the lines of their intimate scenes together. As John Russell Brown has noted, Orsino's agonized sense of betrayal arises more from the loss of Cesario than from the loss of Olivia, a reaction that permits the audience to accept his love for Viola when her true sex is revealed.

Even after that revelation, Orsino twice refers to her as if she were male. On the theatrical level she still was and always would be male, but on another level Orsino wants to establish continuity with their earlier moments of intimacy:

*Duke. Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.
Vio. And all those sayings will I over swear,
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orb'd continent the fire
That severs day from night.
Duke. Give me thy hand,
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.* (V.i.267–73)

A few lines later, he speaks to her in her female identity, and then offers his own hand ("Here is my hand") to "your master's mistress" (ll. 325–26). Orsino ends the scene by announcing that "a solemn combination shall be made / Of our dear souls" (ll. 383–84) and turns once more to his beloved:

*Cesario, come—
For so you shall be while you are a man;
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.*
(ll. 385–88)

Although using the page's name may represent a wish to retain the relationship with his male servant, the final couplet restates the desire to see Viola dressed "in her woman's weeds" and



can therefore define Orsino's final attitude more as impatience or relief than as uncertainty or disappointment about her gender.

Whether Viola removes a hat or releases bound-up hair, ... she remains in male attire despite her **resumption** of female identity and the performer's resumption of whatever mannerisms, if any in this case, were used to signify it. Her page's **apparel** may in fact now accentuate her feminine identity, but Orsino's comment on the gender specificity of her clothing and his use of the name Cesario, whatever his own attitude, underscored the presence of the boy actor for the audience.

Such **reflexive allusion** to the actor's maleness generated emotional crosscurrents counter to the play's drive toward heterosexual union. This prospect is always potentially present in the world of the playhouse when heterosexual intimacy is portrayed by an all-male company, but usually remains dormant unless something reflexive – like continued verbal reference to the abandoned but still visible cross-gender disguise – calls attention to the principle of layers of gender identity and so keeps spectators alert to *all* of the layers involved.

In modern productions, the allusions to Viola's male identity are comic rather than reflexive or **metatheatrical** and the marriages that end the play seem "natural"; that is, the genders of the characters match those of the performers. But in the original production, these final allusions to the male component of Viola's identity actually underscored the existence of another level of pretense, in which the two brides-to-be in the play were young male actors. Calling attention to that pretense, which the audience had thought it had agreed to accept without question, now threatened to undercut the conventional ending in heterosexual union. For some spectators, the play's exposure of its own artificiality might even have implied another and very different ending based on the gender of the actors, and perhaps on suspicions that boy actors served as **catamites** within all-male companies. For other spectators, the stress on the play-boy's presence simply demonstrated with more explicitness than usual what they "always knew" a play to be – a theatrical illusion they had paid to see and could see again, along with others like it, whenever they sought diversion from "the wind and the rain."

From Michael Shapiro, 'Anxieties of Intimacy: *Twelfth Night*', 1995.

Glossary

resumption beginning again

apparel clothing

reflexive allusion self-conscious or knowing reference

metatheatrical term used in the study of Shakespeare to refer to references to play-acting within the play

catamites sexual partners

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