

William Shakespeare: Twelfth Night: Or What You Will

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***Chapter Name :William Shakespeare: Twelfth Night: Or
What You Will***

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The Author

To the student of English literature, and indeed of any literature, the name William Shakespeare needs no introduction. Shakespeare's fame is unmatched in the literary sphere, and Shakespeare is a culture industry by himself. Millions flock to Shakespeare's birthplace and the scenes of his life and Stratford-upon-Avon each year. While some critics continue to maintain that the fuzzy details of his actual life prevent us from knowing for certain whether the historical Shakespeare really wrote the plays we ascribe to him, it really matters little to the discourse of Shakespearean drama, the beauty and longevity of the plays, their role in shaping English as a language, and their impact and influence in the history of drama. Shakespeare's other works, his sonnets and longer poems, share in the mystique of this creative genius. There will be few who are familiar with the English language but have not come across a Shakespeare phrase. Thus his biographical details, despite their importance in generating the aura of this figure, are less important than the actual works ascribed to him, and the period and historical conditions in which they were produced.¹

Shakespeare wrote nearly forty plays, out of which a majority are comedies/romances and the rest are tragedies and history plays. His tragedies are usually regarded as the better part of his output, particularly the quartet *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1603-1604), *King Lear* (1605-1606) and *Macbeth* (1605-1606), all written and performed at the beginning of the seventeenth century. *Twelfth Night* (1600-1601) was written and performed in the same period as *Hamlet*, making a seamless connection between tragedy and comedy.

¹ Students interested in pursuing biographical and historical details about Shakespeare may consult: a) Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), and b) Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004). For a humorous take on the idea of a Shakespeare biography, see Clarke, Graham, *W. Shakespeare, Gent: His Actual Nottebooke* (Kent: Ebenezer Press, 1992)

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(Twelfth Night: First Folio cover,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:FirstFolioTwelfthNight.jpg>)

While the chronology of Shakespeare's plays is subject to controversy as well, one can note the fact that this seamless further emphasizes the fact that authorial biography, from which one might draw some corresponding pattern, is unreliable and unnecessary in the case of Shakespeare. Moreover, within most Shakespearean comedies lies the underpinning of tragedy (identified as problem plays), and vice versa, while the late comedies or "romances" as they are often called, with their darker tone, are even more ambiguous, the only difference is the happy ending. That said there are notable similarities between the works themselves, many of which are regarded as conventions of Elizabethan/Renaissance drama, and many of which are internal to the plays themselves, and some of these will be explored later in this paper.

The Renaissance

The Renaissance as a cultural phenomenon looms large as a phenomenon on Western intellectual history, and there is a staggering amount of scholarship available on the Renaissance. While students are advised to consult the general bibliography for more pursuing some of these leads, this brief introduction will serve to highlight some of the salient aspect of the phenomenon that are useful for an understanding of *Twelfth Night*.



The Raphael – The School of Athens

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sanzio_01.jpg)

Renaissance (from the French, meaning rebirth) is regarded by many scholars and in traditional appraisals as a turning point in the emergence of modernity, where the alignment with antiquity and the emergence of new political and social classes, fuelled a movement away from the theological to the secular. It is undoubtedly true that the influence of the Church, with its hold on knowledge and science in the Middle Ages, lessened around the 13th-14th centuries, and the patterns of bourgeois feudalism became

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increasingly visible. A number of factors, shifting patterns of trade, the Black Death,² the effect of the crusades, the printing press, all contributed to this shift of power. Moreover, much of this process happened over centuries, and did not herald an abrupt transition from one episteme to another, and scholars such as Raymond Schwab have even argued that the final phase of the Renaissance was the Oriental Renaissance, or discovery of the classical Sanskrit world by orientalist scholars – in the 19th century! Thus the idea of a pure rediscovery, fuelled internally by a rediscovery of texts, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. However, the gradual cultural shift can hardly be mistaken – in particular the emergence of new forms of art and science, many of which were influenced by the works of antiquity. Renaissance art is a category unto itself, with innovations ranging from the aesthetic, such as the use of perspective, chiaroscuro, and realism to the thematic, such as the return to pagan mythology, Neoplatonic thrust, and the secularization of the divine.

RENAISSANCE ART

The break between Renaissance and medieval art is immediately noticeable. While the term immediately recalls Italian art, the changing styles of the Renaissance had an impact across Europe. Treatises such as *De Pictura (On Painting, 1435)* by Leon Battista Alberti, which emphasised perspective and proportion, and *Libro De Pittura (Treatise on Painting)* by Leonardo da Vinci, which emphasised realism and scientific observation, were highly influential in creating the Renaissance aesthetic. In terms of content, Greek and Roman mythology was reintroduced in the domain of high art. As art became fashionable and a symbol of power and prestige, wealthy patrons such as the Medici family commissioned many of the foremost artists of the period, from Botticelli to Michelangelo, to create art and architecture on a scale that reflected their status. Renaissance literature, likewise, drew upon classical or pagan subjects extensively, and Shakespeare himself often chose classical motifs and subjects. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, he uses the Diana and Actaeon myth as well as Plato's theory of forms.

² A succinct introduction to the contributions of Black Death to the zeitgeist may be found in Frederick F. Cartwright and Michael D. Biddiss, "The Black Death" in *Disease and History* (New York: Dorset Press, 1972. 29-53). Barry Unsworth's novel, *Morality Play* (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Company, 1995), a historical murder mystery set in the period, although a novel, is worth reading for both its depiction of the impact of Black Death on 14th century England, changing class structure, as well as the shift from medieval drama to Renaissance drama.

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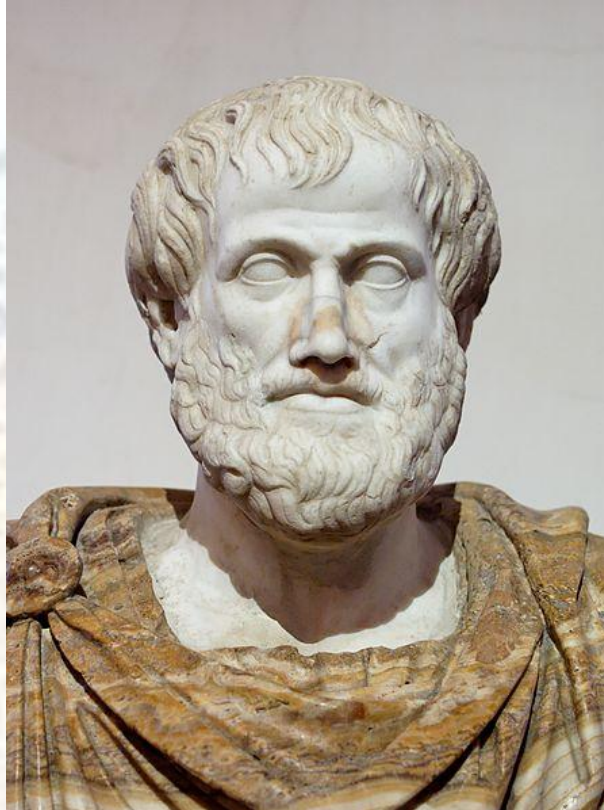
Titian, "Death of Actaeon" (1559 – 75) (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Actaeon.jpg>)

New architectural concepts flourished alongside the new artistic sensibility, as the wealthy aristocracy and nobility became more involved in the ideals of the Renaissance. In music, the shift from *ars antiqua* to *ars nova*, which had begun in the medieval period itself, became more pronounced and noticeable, new instruments such as the violin and the guitar came into being and secular songs, much of it influenced by medieval chansons and courtly love, became increasingly common. In drama for instance, literary historians often argue that a new form of drama, influenced as much by Aristotle's poetics as by Seneca, as much by Platonic philosophy as by the paganism implied by it, emerged in this period.

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THE EMERGENCE OF RENAISSANCE DRAMA

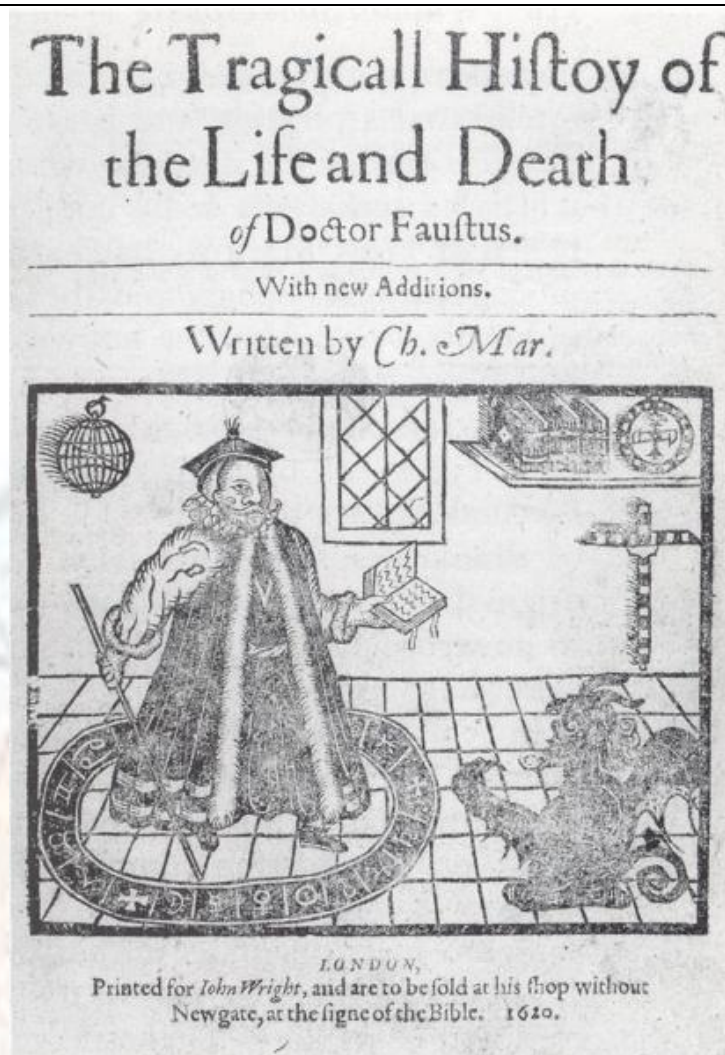
Aristotle's *Poetics* (~350 BC) perhaps the most well-known theory of tragedy in the history of the art, as well as other classical treatises on poetry such as Horace's *Ars Poetica* (19 BC), were influential in raising the stature of dramatic arts in the



Bust of Aristotle Renaissance.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aristotle_Altemps_Inv8575.jpg)

The availability of Greek and Latin drama, such as the revenge tragedies of Seneca, led to a revival of forms that had been dormant since antiquity. However, there was a significant amount of dramatic production in the medieval period and early Renaissance, such as the morality and the mystery plays, which continued to influence later Renaissance drama. The influence of morality plays and psychomachia on Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*,



Christopher Marlowe – Doctor Faustus, 1620 edition
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Faustus-tragedy.gif>)

first performed in 1592 is easily noticeable. The alternation of comic scenes with more serious scenes in Renaissance drama, in both comedy and tragedy, including the drama of Shakespeare, borrows from the conventions of early drama. While these plays often had secular subjects, and did not always need a moral, they operated within the theological episteme of the period. The spectacle of death is an important part of medieval drama, and thus the cycle of life which is portrayed in the play appears marginalia seen against the eternity of death, or as a brief dream, however pleasant. Undoubtedly influenced by the Black Death and its aftermath, this theme became a recurrent feature of drama in the Renaissance, including comedy. Thus while tragedy, often sought to soften the gloom at the end of the play, comedy went for the exact opposite effect. This is noticeable for instance in Prospero's final words in *The Tempest*, Puck's song in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Feste's parting song in *Twelfth Night*.

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From the somewhat limited forms of medieval pageant drama, morality and mystery plays to the drama of the Shakespeare and Moliere is a noticeable shift indeed. Renaissance English Drama reflects a complex exchange between form, language and history: public perhaps like no other time in the centuries before, yet elaborate and stylised in a manner quite unlike its medieval predecessors, the moralities and the mysteries, becoming a theatrical event that appealed to a chunk of the population who were not literate enough for the written text, but whose participation in public life became increasingly relevant. Centred largely in and around London, with troupes and companies patronized by members of the aristocracy, Renaissance drama was both spectacle and political commentary, both radical and conformist. ³Shakespeare's plays, including *Twelfth Night*, are no exception.

England moreover serves as a special case even within the Renaissance. Here, the break from the Church was even more direct, as Henry VIII, the father of Queen Elizabeth, broke away from the Church in 1534.

REFORMATION

The English Reformation is part of a larger movement in religious reformation in Europe, which was primarily a response to corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation, whose beginning is dated to 1517 when Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five



³ For a discussion of the Elizabethan court and its politics, see related VLE material by Pamela Anwer, “Antony and Cleopatra: William Shakespeare” (<http://vle.du.ac.in/mod/book/view.php?id=8764>)

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Lucas Cranach - Martin Luther as a monk with tonsure
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Luther_with_tonsure.gif)

theses on the door of the Wittenberg church, attacked Church traditions such as papal indulgences. Protestant reformers such as John Calvin spoke of a direct communion between man and god, eliminating the need for middlemen such as Churchmen, and advanced a doctrine of predestination, emphasising personal salvation through faith, and the dignity of labour. This was further aided by different translations of the Bible into the vernacular tongues, and new technologies such as the printing press made the transfer of ideas possible. In England however, despite the break from the Catholic Church under Henry VIII over his wish to annul marriage to Catherine of Aragon, which the Church denied due to conflicting political interests, the reformation did not lead to any immediate or complete shift to Protestantism. Indeed, the wave of Counter-Reformation, initiated by the Roman Catholic Church among others who were more amiable towards the Pope, When Elizabeth came to power in 1558, she adopted a broad policy of religious tolerance, with the exception of Roman Catholics on the one hand and radical reformists on the other, who were identified as Puritans. While the Puritans had often been the subject of ridicule in Elizabethan drama, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, which established the naval supremacy of England and destroyed chances of a Catholic restoration, further strengthened the religious position of the Crown, and increased animosity towards the Puritans, who were seen to be opposed to all happiness and celebration. However, dissension remained within the country, leading to the Civil War of 1642-1651, when the reformers briefly assumed power. .Perhaps the most famous group of Puritan exiles, the Pilgrim Fathers, fled England and sailed for America. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio is often targeted for his perceived Puritanism.

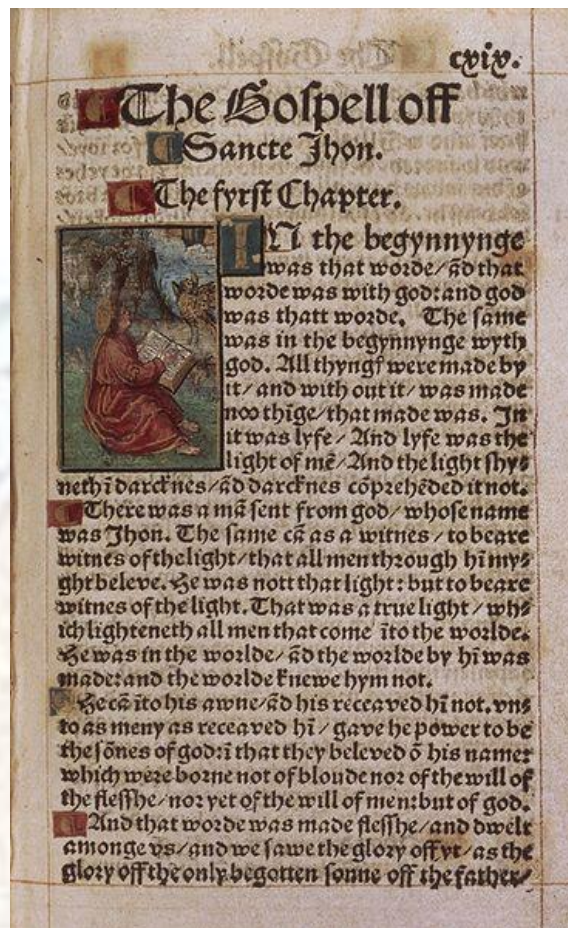
The revived Church of England, with the King himself as Supreme Head (under the Act of Supremacy, 1534), paved the way for the English reformation, the translation of the Bible into an authoritative English versions, and the rise of England itself over the course of the Renaissance into a naval and imperial power.

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Bible translations into English have a long history. The 14th century *Wyclif Bible*, named after John Wycliffe, is the most famous and the most complete of these early translations, although in terms of religious importance, the *Tyndale Bible* in the early 16th century, which was an important part of the reformation, challenging the authority of Catholic doctrine, is the most important. Elizabeth I also authorised Bible translations, and the attempts of the Tudors and the Stuart King James I culminated in the

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authorized *King James Bible* of 1611. The Bible was an important institution for monarchs who ruled by Divine Right, and control of interpretation was central to their legitimacy. This became even more with the Reformation challenge to authority.



Frontispiece of the Gospel of St. John from the Tyndale Bible

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tyndale Bible - Gospel of John.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tyndale_Bible_-_Gospel_of_John.jpg)

Even as England consolidated itself against its counterparts in Europe via a monarchy, agrarian England transformed into early modern England, trade flourished, internal religious strife increased, and social mobility piggybacked on humanism and the fissures between the Church and the State.

HUMANISM

Renaissance humanism, a philosophical position that derived its origins in the rediscovery of the classics, sought to enhance the dignity of man. While it was not in the main anti-religious, its deification of the human subject made it the target of both reformists, who emphasized human sinfulness that made divine grace the only path to salvation, and the Church, which did not value the pagan element in Renaissance humanism nor its perorations on the importance of the human in the divine scheme of things. Humanists advocated a study of the classics as the path to the realization of full

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human potential. Renaissance neoplatonists such as Marsilio Ficino, Lorenzo Valla, Gianozzo Manetti, Erasmus, Pico della Mirandola, and others, saw human excellence as a continual quest, borrowing the concept of the great chain of Being which saw a continuity between all living things from the beasts to the angels. Many of these thinkers tried to balance the Christian faith with this notion of the infinite potential for excellence. Nicholas of Cusa for instance, who was himself a devout Christian, used the language of mathematics in his work *De Docta Ignorantia*:

*"For the intellect is to truth as [an inscribed] polygon is to [the inscribing] circle. The more angles the inscribed polygon has the more similar it is to the circle. However, even if the number of its angles is increased ad infinitum, the polygon never becomes equal [to the circle] unless it is resolved into an identity with the circle. Hence, regarding truth, it is evident that we do not know anything other than the following: viz., that we know truth not to be precisely comprehensible as it is."*⁴

Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the dignity of man*, likewise, spoke of man as the chameleon, who could both ascend to the level of the angels and descend to the level of the beasts – the choice was given to man. The relation between the macrocosm and the microcosm, that is, the larger world and cosmic order and the individual human, was gradually redefined in Renaissance cosmology to the point where the individual was no longer seen to be at the mercy of the stars, but was himself an agent who could redefine the cosmic order. The relationship of the inscribed polygon to the inscribing circle described by Cusanus is most easily recognizable in Leonardo's sketch drawing upon Vitruvius, which measured ideal human proportion as much as it displayed the confidence of the Renaissance man.

Humanism was perhaps the most important influence on the Italian Renaissance, and its impact was wide ranging. It paved the way for secular art and literature, and the newfound confidence in the secular realm was essential for the development of sciences. Renaissance humanist ideals deeply affected Renaissance drama, including the works of Shakespeare.

⁴ Hopkins, Jasper. *Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance: A translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*. Second Edition. Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1990. Online Edition. <<http://jasper-hopkins.info/>>. 8.

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Twelfth Night: Some notes on the play

Twelfth Night has many typical characteristics of a Shakespearean comedy: mistaken identity, malcontents set against the fools, men and women in disguise, and the narrative ending in multiple weddings. The subtitle of the play, "What You Will" is of special importance – it suggests both randomness and possibilities of transgression.

WHAT YOU WILL

Twelfth Night is based around the twelve nights festival, which begin on Christmas day and end 12 days later. These twelve days of intense merrymaking owes its origins to the Roman festival Saturnalia, which celebrated a return to the Golden age of the Roman god Saturn. The festival was seen as a time of role reversals, in which all that bound the order of humans in subsequent ages were to be overturned. In the general carnival atmosphere, fools became kings and kings became fools, licentiousness, gambling and drunken revelry were allowed. The Germanic festival Yule was a similar festival. This was adopted in Christianity as the twelve days celebrations, which had a similar role. The festival was often led by a Lord of Misrule. Other than the Shakespeare play, another

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famous literary representation may be found in the opening scenes of Victor Hugo's classic novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831). The subtitle of Shakespeare's play, "what you will," reflects this carnival spirit of the twelve nights festival, where anything goes – temporarily.

It must also be remembered that *Twelfth Night*, like other works of Shakespeare, is based on works by others, in this case, Matteo Bandello, whose stories inspired three other Shakespeare plays, as well as other adaptations of the Bandello story.

The central sources of comedy in *Twelfth Night* are a series of inversions and doublings. Inversions refer to those elements in the play that generate humour by de-familiarizing the familiar by inverting our relation with it, thus highlighting the underlying assumptions behind that familiarity. Doubling is its counterpart; through doubling distance between the familiar and the unfamiliar is exorcised. Language for instance, as a system of signs, is something that we are familiar with, both in the langue and the parole, which makes communication possible. Language carries with it the burden of discourse, of idiomatic usage, and what is felt becomes circumscribed by the language of its expression. Yet, by itself, there is no inherent necessity for this relation; the word and what it is supposed to refer to be may uncoupled and reattached to some other referent. Idiomatic usage may be questioned and inverted, and metaphors may be literalized. Inversion and transformation of language is a central concern in *Twelfth Night*. Notice the first lines in Act III, Scene I

VIOLA Save thee, friend, and thy music: dost thou live by thy tabour?

FESTE No, sir, I live by the church.

VIOLA Art thou a churchman?

FESTE No such matter, sir: I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church.

VIOLA So thou mayst say, the king lies by a beggar, if a beggar dwell near him; or,

the church stands by thy tabour, if thy tabour stand by the church.

FESTE You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit: how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!

VIOLA Nay, that's certain; they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.

FESTE I would, therefore, my sister had had no name, sir.

VIOLA Why, man?

FESTE Why, sir, her name's a word; and to dally with that word might make my sister

Wanton. But indeed words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them.

VIOLA Thy reason, man?

FESTE Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words; and words are grown so false,

I am loath to prove reason with them.

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All characters in the play rely on language as a tool for expressing their feelings, yet it is the inherent impossibility of fixing meaning, of making language transparent and unambiguous, that allows characters to assume different subject positions in social situations. Yet, language is only one of those relations that are inverted in the play. The play also relies on inversions of class and gender relations, and many of these are linked through language. It is thus this play in language, at the once the ability of language to communicate one meaning while carrying other meanings, that makes it possible for Viola to speak enigmatically about her gender to different characters, or for her to be able to express her love for Orsino within the same codes of courtly love, without giving away her secret. Indeed, if there is one discourse that permeates the play and its many courtships, it is courtly love.

COURTLY LOVE POETRY

The influence of Renaissance humanism and Neoplatonism on courtly love poetry can hardly be underestimated. Drawing upon a longstanding tradition originating in Plato's symposium, Renaissance discourse on love and desire, be it in Baldassare Castiglione's discussion on love in the more practice oriented *The Book of the Courtier*, in the poetry of Petrarch and Dante Alighieri, in the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, extended the concept of the chain of being from the divine to the particular in love. Leone Ebreo (Judah Leon Abravanel), in *Dialoghi d'amore*, an influential early 16th century treatise on the subject, writes:

Love is of two varieties: one is engendered by desire or sensuous appetite – a man may love a woman, that is because he desires her. This kind of love is not perfect; it derives from an inconstant and vicious source: desire...But the other love generates desire of the beloved, rather than the other way around. In fact, we first love perfectly, on this second kind of love, and then the strength of that love makes us desire spiritual and bodily union with the beloved. Thus the first kind of love is the child of desire, while the second is the true begetter of desire. Now when this love obtains the gratification of its desire, it does not therefore come to an end, although the desire and appetite may do so, for the removal of an effect does not bring about the removal of the cause.⁵

The "courtly" aspect of courtly love came from its links to medieval feudalism, where the relation between the knight and the lady (usually the wife of the Feudal lord), a relation which demanded both service and distance, found its way into medieval literature and songs. A lot of these influences were Arabic in origin, not least because most Hellenic manuscripts, including the works of Plato and Aristotle, had been preserved by Arabic scholars in the medieval period. The crusades had brought the Christian world and the Islamic world in conflict but also in cultural contact.

⁵ Ebreo, Leone. "On Love and Desire." *Renaissance Philosophy volume 1: The Italian Philosophers: Selected Readings from Petrarch to Bruno*. Ed. and Trans. Arturo B. Fallico and Herman Shapiro. New York: The Modern Library, 1967. 218.

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As a poetry of distance, courtly love was celebrated in medieval songs of the troubadours. It had certain fixed conventions, which was more a series of arguments through which distance and lack of consummation could be generalized into an ideal type of love which led to the spiritual development of the lover, including the development of chivalry. The object of the knight's affection was not the primary concern of courtly love, fidelity towards the lady however, was absolutely crucial.

In Renaissance English poetry, particularly the poetry written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, courtly love poetry such as those of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney, thrived in the relationships between the unmarried Queen and her courtiers. Among other things, courtly love poetry maintained the cult of Elizabeth. Most of the principal characters in *Twelfth Night* use the language of courtly love, with the exception of Feste, who satirises it.

An import in the Renaissance, courtly love is a discourse of stylized language, of class and social hierarchy, and gender at the intersection of the two. The discourse captures the relation between an unattainable love-object, who does not speak, and the desiring subject, who generates the language of love and desire.⁶ The sonnet and the lyric, stylized forms of literary expression, were common vehicles of expressing this sentiment. This relation between the object and the subject, be it in the discourse of romantic love or in the Neoplatonic philosophy of the period, usually gave the position of the speaking subject to the male and the object to the female. Although there were female troubairitz, such as Countess Beatriz de Dia, whose Occitan song "A Chantar Mer"⁷ is perhaps the most famous example, the form was predominantly one which predominantly emphasised male subjectivity and powerlessness against the elevated yet mute female subject.⁸

Listen to a modern rendition: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BizT7CyZ2jo>

It is against this general position that the inversion of gender relations in *Twelfth Night* may be placed; for while Orsino's desire for Olivia, expressed in the vocabulary of courtly love is satirized, the real subject positions in the play in the dynamic of desire are occupied by the women: Olivia in her love for Cesario and Viola in her love for Orsino (it

⁶ For a discussion of this figure, and the vocabulary of love, see Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2002.

⁷ "La Domna Ditz: Liner Notes" to *La Domna Ditz: Songs of the Trobairitz*. Source: http://squarenote.org/LaDomnaDitz_liner_notes.pdf. Accessed 6 April 2014.

⁸ My analysis borrows partly from Slavoj Žižek's analysis of the phenomenon: "Courtly Love, or Woman as Thing", in *Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 2005. 89-112)

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is also to be noted that in both cases, the homoerotic seems to be the threat that destabilizes the dynamic).

DUKE ORSINO Thou dost speak masterly: My life upon't, young though thou art,
thine eye
Hath stay'd upon some favour that it loves:
Hath it not, boy?
VIOLA A little, by your favour.
DUKE ORSINO What kind of woman is't?
VIOLA Of your complexion.
DUKE ORSINO She is not worth thee, then. What years, i' faith?
VIOLA About your years, my lord.
DUKE ORSINO Too old by heaven...

Indeed, passion or love in the play, as sentiments experienced and expressed by the two women, take place in secret and in asides. For instance, Viola as Cesario can express the Duke's love to Olivia as the Duke's emissary, employing the language of courtly love, but not to the Duke himself; hers, as female desire, must be a discourse of unrequited love, hidden in plain sight. *Twelfth Night* thus inverts the conventions of courtly love, but it does so by separating the stylization of love in the vocabulary of courtly love while, paradoxically, rescuing the subject position therein. One can compare Shakespeare's sonnet 130, which similarly derives its force through a series of inversions, but in which the volta embraces the sentiment and subject position of the lover, while excising the vocabulary of their expression:

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As she belied with false compare.*

It must also be remembered that courtly love is also emblematic of class and social hierarchies of the period. Distance between the object and the subject, literal or metaphorical, is a statement of power and hierarchy. The verbalization of that distance is necessary to restore power to the subject – it is in fact the only source of its power. Thus

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Orsino's failure to court Olivia leads him to the paradox of courtly love: the object of desire is both elevated above the norm, and then derided and diminished through a failure to submit to the lover.

*Faire, if you expect admiring,
Sweet, if you prouoke desiring,
Grace deere loue with kind requiting.
Fond, but if thy sight be blindnes,
False if thou affect vnkindnes,
Flie both loue and loues delighting.
Then when hope is lost and loue is scorned,
Ile bury my desires, and quench the fires that euer yet in
vaine haue burned.* (Thomas Campion "Faire, if you expect admiring",
1601)

Creating obstacles, speaking of prohibitions and constantly highlighting the lack of consummation is the strategy employed by the male subject to retain power: distance is power because the pain of love becomes the pleasure of its expression.⁹

Yet this very masochism underscores the lack of social mobility. In this play, Olivia's love for Cesario (though gentle born) is seen to be a step down the social ladder (3.1.137). Even though the atmosphere of the *Twelfth Night*, with its premise of inversions in the festival of misrule, seems to warrant a degree of social mobility, Malvolio's quest for that mobility is the sour note of the plot. Malvolio dreams of being a count through his marriage to Olivia, but he becomes the object of ridicule by others in the play. His pretensions make him the target of their ire, and his "midsummer madness" is kept in check by keeping him locked up till the other plots can be resolved and order restored.

Malvolio's incarceration is a double of yet another incarceration in the plot, that of Antonio, who mistakes one twin for the other and is deemed to be mad by his arresting officers. Indeed, the play offers several such examples of doubling, not only at the level of content but also at the level of structure. Phrases are repeated, similar stories are played out by different characters. For instance, both Viola and Olivia hide their true selves to deal with the grief of their brother's loss, Olivia in her veil and Viola in her male clothing, Act 1.2 is doubled in Act 2.1, and so on. These doublings are not inversions,

⁹ For a discussion of the relation between masochism and subjectivity, see Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty" (trans. Jean McNeil) in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 2006). See also Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Volume 1), ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 2000)

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but serve as commentaries on the way in which the tragic may seep into the comic: humour is a double edged sword, and the comic mode does not negate the existence of darker, threatening possibilities. In this, *Twelfth Night* shares with other Shakespeare's comedies such as *As You Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure*, all of which rely on disguise and mistaken identity for humour – the first two also feature cross-dressing.

Transgressive act within the Coercive system

The Brazilian director Augusto Boal, whose concepts of the theatre of the oppressed has had an enormous influence on modern dramatic practice, calls Aristotelian tragedy "coercive" in that the appeal of the system lies in its ability to purge negative emotions and effectively silence rebellion and ensure conformity.¹⁰ The Bakhtinian notion of the carnival, which is applied to the notion of comedy as a space where the world, temporarily, is turned on its head, or where the rules of the real world seem to be less important, ultimately produces a tragic sense of a world in which hierarchy only exists to be restored.¹¹ Within this framework, the sense of chaotic release experienced through the different kinds of inversions that the play employs are less pertinent to actual social change. The true potential of transgression lies in the generic¹² boundaries that transgressions redraw: they do not portend a definitive social change but signal ruptures within the current one. Comedy thus acts as a tactic within the overall system, rather than as a strategy, it is a statement of how power is negotiated in the social system between those who seem to have it and those who seem disempowered.¹³

Conclusion

Twelfth Night, although a brilliant play, does not break new ground in Shakespearean drama, and in popularity ranks well below many other plays by Shakespeare. One reason

¹⁰ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. 1-50.

¹¹ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Midland/Indian University Press, 1984. 1-58. For a study of Shakespeare's plays in the light of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, see *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Ronald Knowles. London: Macmillan Press, 1998. The collection looks at both tragedies and comedies, and highlights the connection that I make here between tragedy and comedy.

¹² For this qualified use of genre, I draw upon the insights of rhetorical genre criticism, in particular, Carolyn Miller, "Genre as social action." (*Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Volume 70, Issue 2, 1984. 151-167.)

¹³ For the distinction between strategy and tactic, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (California: University of California Press, 1988. 15.) For a general discussion on the strategies of power in the Renaissance, see Jonathan Dollimore "Introduction: Shakespeare, cultural materialism and the new historicism," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (2nd edition) edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

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for this neglect could be that the period in which the play was written, saw Shakespeare produce his great tragedies, and the other plays of the period get dwarfed in comparison. Thus, despite a rich performance history on stage, the play has seen few adaptations for the screen. Other than a few television adaptations, the most recent film adaptations are *She's The Man* (2006) directed by Andy Fickman, and the 1996 film version directed by Trevor Nunn. Both adaptations have been modernised and reimagined.



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