Shakespeare Association of America Meeting 2022

Virtual Seminar: *Twelfth Night* (group I)

Nicholas Bellinson

"An apple cleft in two…": song structure in *Twelfth Night* (V.i.223)

When Sebastian and Cesario finally appear on stage together, Antonio conjures up a striking image to express his double vision: "How have you made division of yourself?/An apple cleft in two is not more twin/Than these two creatures." (V.i.222-224). These three lines encapsulate one of the play's central erotic problems, namely the tension between (on one hand) the kind of reproduction that proceeds by division and results in perfect copies and (on the other hand) the sexual fruitfulness that is revealed by the opening of the apple. The image of the cloven apple also helps us to consider the relation of halves to each other, and to the whole, in the case of Feste's two love-songs. "O mistress mine" (II.iii) and "Come away, come away death" are (in different ways) divided into opposing voices which illustrate the same erotic tension. Here, however, the androgynous figure of Cesario appears as a mediating singer who can manage both parts, and whose sexual fluidity connects the halves of the song. In sum, this paper will use Antonio's comparison to suggest – very briefly! – the ways in which the parts of these songs fit together and form a whole.

Michael Benitez

Viola's "[K]not": "I am not what I am" (3.1.132), or Being Queer in *Twelfth Night*

Seizing on Shakespeare's confounding line from *Twelfth Night*, "I am not what I am," this essay names that verbalization a *dis-articulation*, theorizing it as a discombobulating mode of doing and undoing. As a self-cancelling tautology, that line expresses the limitations of the first-person subject, and this problematic of the "I" is what Viola consistently represents. Contextualizing that paradoxical line, which arises during a perplexing and flirtatious exchange between Olivia and the cross-dressed Viola, further evinces how dis-articulation works in relation to the play's messy erotic economy: attraction for someone is based on who the other is *not*, which inevitably invites chaotic, unbridled desire. Thus, "I am not what I am" exposes the vexing nature of any declared state of "being," a queer quality that it shares with the play's troubling of gender and sex. In fact, Viola's cross-dressing, a visual integral to the play's homoerotic potential, has thus far been tokenized by many critics as the play's epicenter of queer energy. Here I want to extend that queerness to a broader conceptual and rhetorical trend, one rooted in dis-articulating wordplay: Viola speaks queerly, and her words are just as vital to the queer mechanics of the play as the gender and erotic fluidity instigated by her disguise. While Viola's speech consistently problematizes any definitive gender identity for her character, it also speaks to the uncertainty of *any* identity. Close readings of Viola's baffling encounters with other characters—and even with herself through soliloquy—demonstrate how this identity crisis is rooted in dis-articulating wordplay, which unleashes the queer spirit of an incoherent, fragmented subjectivity. Accordingly, the play queers any stable sense of "being," selfhood, or subjectivity, and this essay explores how the play revels in the ongoing indeterminacy of "being."

Kyle DiRoberto

Wherein the Pregnant Enemy does much: Puritan Subversion and the Scapegoating of Feminine Agency in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* or *What you Will.*

This paper examines the conservative elements of Viola/Cesario's soliloquy, which constructs cross-dressing as "wickedness" and same-sex trouble as Satanic feminine agency—"Wherein the pregnant enemy does much"—arguing that *Twelfth Night* reflects both the anti-theatrical rhetoric of Puritans and, conversely, the hypocrisy-alleging, anti-Puritan rhetoric of popular writers. In this way, the play exposes the Puritan opposition to cross-dressing as primarily antifeminist. It suggests early modern awareness of the importance of gender to the obfuscation of class anxiety and, ultimately, contributes to the deconstruction of feminine agency as dangerous. In fact, it shifts the focus of cross-dressing from a misogynistic emphasis on gender and agency to the consumer capitalism associated with Puritanism in the early modern period. The play replicates the intertextual battle between the Puritan and anti-Puritan factions of its era. By replicating this discourse, it allows audiences to experience the hypocrisy of the social-climbing Puritan individual, who constructs feminine and lower-class appetitive liberty as dangerous, resolving the anxiety around new restrictive economic realities by scapegoating the self-serving, social-climbing individual instead of the self-preserving feminine gendered (i.e., bodily) subject. In this way, the play critiques social change. This paper notes similarities between Shakespeare's theatrical representations of feminine agency in *Twelfth Night* and Lodge's *Rosalynde,* and it looks at the places where the play echoes the anti-Feminist rhetoric of Puritan prose romances/pastorals, which it argues include Sidney's *Arcadia,* Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* and Riche's *Apollonius and Silla*.

Loreen L. Giese 'Suiting Herself: Olivia's Mourning Attire'
"Give me my veil; come throw it o'er my face" (1.5.161)

The agency of the female dramatic figures in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* continues to attract scholarly comment. In regard to Olivia, scholars often note how her proposed mourning ritual serves her own interests. Yet, while the clothing of Viola is central to many analyses of her agency, the apparel of Olivia in her mourning ritual has yet to receive—as far as I have been able to determine—critical attention with respect to her agency. While scholars comment generally on how Olivia uses her veil to serve her own ends, a fuller discussion of Olivia's attire while in mourning in light of contemporary prescriptions provides further evidence of her agency and points to the significance of her specific clothing as well. This paper historicizes two aspects of her attire in the play—style and kind—with respect to contemporary sartorial prescriptions for mourning. These two aspects alone underscore the extent to which she appropriates this rite's requirement for her own use and further highlight the complicated cultural space in which the play locates Olivia.

Katherine Hennessey
'More puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog' (4.2.40-41):
Occluded Orientalisms in *Twelfth Night* and *The Speaker's Progress*

This paper explores the allusions to Egypt and Egyptians in Acts 4 and 5 of *Twelfth Night*, and argues that British-Kuwaiti author Sulayman Al Bassam strategically responds to the occluded Orientalism of those references in his play *The Speaker's Progress: A Play in the Shadow of Revolution.* Written in 2011, in the midst of the tumult and revolutionary fervor of the "Arab Spring" demonstrations, *The Speaker's Progress* stages scenes from *Twelfth Night* as fragments of a classic Arabic-language film from a bygone era whose cultural

achievements are classified as decadent and corrupt by the totalitarian regime that has since seized power. That regime has assigned a select group of its citizens the task of reconstructing the lost fragments of the play, in order to conclusively illustrate its insidious decadence. Yet in carrying out this task, the citizens rediscover the subversive and liberating potential of performance; in one key moment, a member of the troupe dresses in drag as the great Egyptian singer Um Kulthoum, and uses one of her famous love songs as a revolutionary *cri de coeur*. Al Bassam's play uses the dark undercurrents of Shakespeare's play as a metaphor for the clash between the Arab Spring's would-be revolutionaries and the reactionary regimes that they were trying to topple, and in the process redefines Shakespeare's Egyptian references.

Mark Houlahan '*For what saies Quinapalus?'*

John Manningham, the first person to report a performance of *Twelfth Night* (Feb 2, 1602), also began the discussion of the play's sources. Scholars since then have linked the play to a network of sixteenth century plays and prose fictions in Italian, French and Latin. How much of these Shakespeare had read, seen or heard tell of we cannot say.

This paper traces some (potential) threads from these sources, in particular those underpinning the flight of the twins and their arrival in Illyria. In several sources the disasters of war have dispersed the family. The play chooses not to directly represent this but the violence of war (by land and sea) erupts at key points in the action. When Viola and Sebastian finally meet in Act V they experience a combination of grief, trauma and relief. Two refugees finally arriving, alive, at a safe haven, is the emotional centre of the play; though in live performance and other adaptations this is often downplayed.

Catherine Lisak 'Now, sir, thought is free.' (1.3.67) Imagination, Free Thought, or What You Will in *Twelfth Night*

'Now, sir, thought is free' (1.3.67). Commentators often gloss this line as meaning 'I can think whatever I like' (Vaughan & Vaughan 231). The purpose of this investigation is to show that the defence of free thought in Maria's speech represents only part of the meaning implied by the commonplace aphorism. I argue that it can also be read as a statement in defence of the power of imagination that allows us to think the impossible. I also show that the variation in meaning of the phrase is intricately related to viewership and audience reception. I therefore explore the ways 'thought is free' is performed in *Twelfth Night*, not only by Maria but also by most other protagonists in the play, and analyse how these different interpretations reflect the mind-sets and quarrels of the period.

Margaret Maurer
"How will this fadge?" (*Twelfth Night* 2.2.30)

Ovid's story of the metamorphosis of Iphis in book 9 of *Metamorphoses* could have been the inspiration of Shakespeare to plot his play *Twelfth Night* so that a single player can impersonate both Cesario and Sebastian until the meeting of those two characters in the play's last scene. Iphis is born a girl but raised as a boy until a planned marriage with the maiden Ianthe provokes the crisis that is resolved by her being change into a boy. The plot of

the first seven scenes of the play establishes the player's duality, and the play's language in 1.2, 2.2, and 2.4 (the ones discussed in this brief essay), alludes to it.

Holly Pickett "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3.112-13): Ingestion as a Moral and Religious Act in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

What is the relationship between (religious) virtue and ingestion in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*? Concentrating on several appetite-related lines, this paper will argue that the play presents the audience with several forms of what we might today called "disordered eating" and offers a caution about the ways in which a moral or religious narrative can be used to justify an insalubrious or "distempered appetite" (1.5.87) that actually stems from undo self-regard (the "sick"ness of "self-love") (1.5.86). Orsino's opening metaphor's recommendation of "surfeiting" as a cure for lovesickness would have been objectional from both a medical and a religious standpoint, calling the authenticity of his love for Olivia into question (1.1.2). Moreover, by reading accusations about Malvolio's appetite by Olivia and Toby in concert with one another, the play calls into question the virtue of Malvolio's—and by extension, Puritanism's—asceticism. Both Orsino's imagined overindulgence and Malvolio's self-denial then, emerge as forms of disordered and vicious patterns of consumption.

Jade Standing "Betake you to your gard" (3.4.192): Viola plays a prize

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the worlds of the London Masters of Defence and the Lord Chamberlain's Men collide. Historically, martial spaces intruded on theatrical spaces when a student of defence played a prize, that is, took part in a scheduled examination of his martial training. Playhouses were often rented to stage these prizes, which attracted large audiences and sometimes resulted in higher takings than a play. While the crossover of martial and theatrical spaces is well documented, much remains to be discovered about potential physical, intellectual, and customary crossovers.

My paper draws attention to a key line in *Twelfth Night*: Sir Toby advising Viola, "Betake you to your gard" (3.4.192). The guard is a resting pose assumed by a combatant prior to action or in between actions. Forms of guards varied in accordance with different types of weapons and different traditional influences, so "your gard," raises implicit questions about the guard that Viola assumes. If guards signify readiness to action and acquired knowledge, it makes a difference whether the director has the actor stand with sword resting on the left hand side of the body, point up, true edge outward, in a highly maneuverable position sometimes referred to in Italian longsword systems as *posta di donna sinestre* (left lady's guard), or with sword extended from the body at shoulder height, point forward, true edge inward, in a more aggressive attitude referred to in the Bolognese traditions of sword or rapier play as *guardia di facia* (face guard), or in a position that is no recognizable guard at all and is only legitimized by Toby's having prompted it.

"Betake you to your gard" is a line that communicates some compelling assumptions about knowledge: that Viola carries a sword and therefore should know how to use one; that the audience will recognize the physical terminology of the guard, and laugh if she cannot form one, or more interestingly, know how to read the particular guard she adopts. And it figuratively reflects Viola's ongoing stance of self-preservation and readiness to play: for a prize, for the audience, to progress, and to belong.