

Shakespeare Association of America Meeting 2022

Virtual Seminar: *Twelfth Night* (group II)

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"thou shalt hold the opinion of Pythagoras" The Ordeal of Malvolio as an Orphic Initiation Rite

Malvolio's ordeal in the cell in Act IV Scene 2 is often a controversial scene. It can seem unnecessarily harsh when looked at with our 21st century sensibilities but there may be a deeper meaning to it that would have been understood by Shakespeare's audiences as the echo of an esoteric initiation rite or *katabasis*.

It is not unusual for productions to cut lines, and the dialogue between Feste and Malvolio in the cell can seem nonsensical and needlessly cruel without context. Often that scene gets heavily edited in performance. However, like much of Shakespeare's work, there are layers of meaning that can be discovered in Act IV Scene 2. To find those layers will take us through the conflict between Orphic asceticism and Dionysian hedonism, Mozart's Magic Flute, the role of Fools in Late Antiquity, and the beliefs of the Ancient Greek Pythagoreans and their similarities to 16th century Puritans.

Sidney J Fox, *Twelfth Night* – The World Turned Upside Down

“When that I was a little tiny boy ... the wind and the rain a long time ago the world begun”

“Soule of the Age! ... Not of an age but for All Time!” - Reversing the Two Opening scenes gentles all the characters

“I am all the daughters of my father’s house, And all the brothers too”

Sweet Swan of Avon! ... To make those flights upon the Thames, that so did take Eliza and our James!

Self-love and the world turned upside down are consistent themes of the *Twelfth Night* festivities from which the play takes its name – why so much of the background global imagery in the play can be traced back to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where the stories of Narcissus, Echo, and Actaeon are pervasively embedded in Ovid’s Book III. *Twelfth Night* is Shakespeare’s last play in which this mode is dominant. Viola’s name appears in the actual dialog in three instances, in succession, all at the very close “thrice welcome drowned *Viola*”. She never changes back into women’s garb, and so remains Cesario as she exits.

When that I was a little tiny boy ... the wind and the rain a long time ago the world begun fitting close to the playwright’s and his Eliza’s world, her reign, his life, having been born in 1564, just 5 years after she assumed her queendom, now two years before its end?

Marinela Golemi “What country, friends, is this?": *Twelfth Night* Returns to Illyria

This essay focuses on the 2018 Albanian adaptation of *Twelfth Night* (*Nata e Dymbëdhjetë*), which was an intercultural collaboration between American director Justin Anderson and

Albanian artistic director Jonida Beqo. The production capitalizes on the geographical association of *Twelfth Night*'s Illyrian setting with modern day Albania to promote an Albanian cultural reading that celebrates intercultural exchange between local and global Shakespeares, myths, and cultures, while also highlighting the intracultural tensions produced by the Albanianization of *Twelfth Night*. Specifically, I argue that gender as a central theme of the play is embodied through traditional Albanian folk music and customary Albanian fashion from various regions of Albania in order to foster intracultural exchange between Northern and Southern Albanians. Thus, the production redefines gender and ethnicity palimpsestically while also emphasizing a patriarchal and heteronormative society as it reinforces the status quo of locally acceptable representations of Albanian masculinity and sexuality. The ambivalence that the production portrays toward gender and same sex relationships replicates Albania's desire to join the EU while also maintaining a historically rooted (Illyrian), cultural identity that is unique but still benefits from globalization. Ultimately, I contend that non-Anglophone adaptations are palimpsestic as they synthesize Shakespeare's global authority unto a local place and culture to produce new folds of meaning. Consequently, this palimpsestic process of simultaneously localizing Shakespeare's Illyria and globalizing Albania's Shakespeare through *Twelfth Night* accentuates the glocal nature of non-Anglophone adaptations. Thereby, a glocal reading of the Albanian *Twelfth Night* demonstrates that the Illyrian identities of the characters coexist as both Albanian, English, European, non-European, Western, non-Western, South and North Albanian, antiquated and modern, and fictional and non-fictional. By its collaborative nature, this production is glocal, and therefore, resists any one-sided "either-or" interpretation and offers a different model for Shakespeare adaptation.

Huw Griffiths, 'The afterlives of a queer pirate: reading Antonio in early modernity'

my desire / More sharp than filèd steel
(*Twelfth Night*, 3.3.4-5)

In adapting earlier plays that garner emotional weight from passionate friendship, Restoration and eighteenth-century productions frequently evince a proto-homophobic response in their aversion to the language of classical friendship that is such a crucial part of the early period's conception of gender relations. This paper considers the queer persistence of one character and his impassioned language of same-sex desire. Antonio, in *Twelfth Night* with his powerful expressions of love for Sebastian ("my desire / More sharp than filèd steel") remains unchanged in eighteenth-century performance practice until 1791 when Drury Lane performances finally start to excise those lines. This paper considers the implications of this queer persistence for our understanding of the history – and historiography – of same-sex love and desire.

Fran Helphinstine, 'Transforming the Role of Malvolio to Entertain Audiences with Comic Vignettes and Musical Interludes'

The call for papers for this seminar on *Twelfth Night* emphasizes new approaches. . . one being performance history. Many recent stage portrayals of *Twelfth Night* by-pass Malvolio's vow for personal revenge on members of Olivia's household (5.1.400), the contrast of Orsino's desire for personal revenge on Antonio for his service in a past political sea fight against Orsino's galleys (3.3.28), and Feste's commentary that friends abuse one by praise and enemies profit one in the knowledge of oneself (5.1.15-18).

As reviews of several productions of *Twelfth Night* since the Shakespeare 400th Birthday Celebration in 2016 reveal, cabaret, or live entertainment, has become more important than fidelity to Shakespeare's plot or themes. The fourth wall is removed to include audience participation. As Sean Holmes, director of *Slight*, says, music is integral for setting the tone and atmosphere of each scene." One song will be experimental jazz, another will be thrash metal or folky, and another will be this strange kind of trip hop reggae. Likewise, pop culture lyrics such as "Mad World" and "Love is a Losing Game" set the mood more immediately than Shakespearean lyrics as does visual humor that replaces Shakespeare's comic lines. Shakespeare's court jester Feste characterized as both a witty and wise person who illustrates the merry, festive themes of *Twelfth Night* becomes a current entertainment venue emcee. Recent performances attempt to transfer Malvolio's anger at the cruel tricks played on him by Fabian (Feste), Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria to audience members who had laughed with them during their cruelty when he speaks his final line "I'll be revenged on the lot of you." Directors seem to now fear Shakespeare's insights and mastery of the English language will no longer attract audiences addicted to movies and television dramas

Gwilym Jones 'Sayst thou that house is dark?' (4.2.33)

I'm choosing this line to hang my contribution on because I want to dwell on the nightness and the darkness of *Twelfth Night*. We are accustomed to thinking of it as a play situated near the end of things: the last of a particular sort of Shakespeare's comedies, for example, or the final years of Elizabeth's reign. Even the play's title denotes a kind of closing, of the Christmas season. Through these commonplaces, we have come to accept *Twelfth Night* as a play of lateness, finality and melancholy death. But it is also a play that might be found towards beginnings: of Shakespeare starting to think seriously about indoor performance, for example. One such beginning is wider, and belongs more broadly to drama at the turn of the century. Here, then, I want to consider the play as one example of what Craig Koslofsky has called 'nocturnalization,...the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night.'

Natasha Korda

"What employment have we here? [*Takes up the letter.*]" (2.5.[73]):

Editorial Employments in *Twelfth Night*, or *What You Will*

Twelfth Night, or *What You Will* is structured around a series of staged encounters with letters "employed" as performance scripts, including Orsino's "poetical" (1.5.[180]) missive to Olivia, which Cesario takes "great pains to con" (1.5.[162]) and deliver; the "obscure epistles of love" (2.3.[143]) penned by Maria in her mistress's hand as a love-script for Malvolio; Sir Andrew's letter challenging Cesario to a duel (prompted, performed, and purloined by Sir Toby [3.2, 3.4]); and Malvolio's letter of complaint to Olivia, read aloud madly by Feste and then soberly by Fabian (5.1.[281, 290-98]). In each case, the encounter in question underscores the peculiar plasticity of performance texts, diverting the straightforward trajectory of the letter's delivery, while also producing its efficacy as a dramatic event. These textual encounters are clearly metatheatrical in that they foreground what happens in the play—to the degree that anything does—as a series of recitations or staged readings that flower before our eyes into full-fledged (and seemingly improvised) dramatic performances. Yet they are also meta-critical and even meta-editorial in that they are punctuated by interpretive acts of commentary and critique, explication and emendation, which shape the movement from page to stage and back again, transforming the epistle's

delivery into a kind of Moebius strip or circuit between text and performance that has no clear beginning or end.

Jennifer Lewin, ‘Teaching Her the Practice: Some Thoughts on Memory and Desire in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* 1.2’

Act 1 scene 2 of *Twelfth Night* opens with a disoriented Viola, just after shipwreck, querying those around her regarding their collective whereabouts. The scene’s compact and lyrical exchange between her and the sea captain culminates in her formulating a plan for survival. In so doing, Viola transforms from a twin sister mourning her brother’s loss into an intensely determined, grateful, and clever character. In parallel, the captain reveals himself to be skilled at combining information about Illyria with memorable eloquence. The present paper focuses on this scene

Sarah Wall-Randell, “If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction” (3.4.123-24): *Twelfth Night* and “Original Practices,” 2002-2022

The 2002/2012 Globe Theatre “original practices” production of *Twelfth Night* (directed by Tim Carroll and starring Mark Rylance) drew extraordinarily laudatory reviews from critics in both London and New York, and lives on in its video form as a teaching tool. Looking back at this performance from the present day, this essay sets out to understand what qualities of the production led to its rapturous reception, and to ask whether it holds up 20 years after its debut. In the intervening time, scholars of early modern trans studies have begun to develop a critique of performance practices around Shakespeare’s cross-dressing comedies; this essay mobilizes that critique to ask whether the paradoxical “artificial realism” praised by so many critics in the play’s comic portrayal of women by male actors is actually built in part in transphobic and/or homophobic tropes codified in the last several decades. This question might lead, I suggest, to a larger investigation of “original practices” theatre-making, and whether it risks reinscribing destructive modern stereotypes even as it attempts to connect unobstructedly to the past. While the pursuit of “original practices” has less energy and influence in the UK and international sphere of Shakespeare and early modern drama production now relative to 2002, the larger dynamics of cultural heritage and historicity around Shakespeare performance endure; understanding what we mean by “historical accuracy” with regard to Shakespeare and what happens when we seek it, remains important.

ⁱ All references to the play are to my newly edited draft copy of the Norton Critical Edition of William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (under contract); bracketed line numbers correspond to the Norton 3rd edition; all other references to Shakespeare are to this edition.