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Author(s): Joan Hartwig

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FESTE'S "WHIRLIGIG" AND THE COMIC PROVIDENCE OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*

BY JOAN HARTWIG

Shakespeare's plays frequently counterpose the powers of human and of suprahuman will, and the antithesis usually generates a definition of natures, both human and suprahuman. These definitions vary, however, according to the play. For instance, Hamlet's "providence" does not seem the same as the darker, equivocating power that encourages Macbeth to pit his will against a larger order; and these controls differ from Diana and Apollo in the later plays, *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. Furthermore, Hamlet's submission and Macbeth's submission to non-human controls (if indeed they do submit their individual wills) cannot be understood as the same action or even to imply the same kind of human vision.

Many of the conflicts of *Twelfth Night* seem to be concerned with the contest between human will and suprahuman control; yet, the latter manifests itself in various ways and is called different names by the characters themselves.¹ As each contest between the human will and another designer works itself out, the involved characters recognize that their will is fulfilled, but not according to their planning. The individual's will is finally secondary to a design that benevolently, but unpredictably, accords with what he truly desires.² For example, when Olivia, at the end of Act I, implores Fate to accord with her will in allowing her love for Cesario to flourish, she has no idea that her will must be circumvented for her own happiness. Yet the substitution of Sebastian for Cesario in her love fulfills her wishes more appropriately than

¹ Viola's Captain calls this power "chance" (I. ii. 6, 8); Viola submits herself to "Time" (I. ii. 60; II. ii. 39); Olivia and Sebastian refer to "Fate" (I. v. 296; II. i. 4); Malvolio speaks of Jove's control (II. v. 158, 164; III. iv. 68-77); and the forged letter names "the stars," "the Fates," and "Fortune" (II. v. 131-146). Citations of the plays are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1969).

² S. Nagarajan, "'What You Will': A Suggestion," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 10 (1959), 61-67, employs Thomistic categories to discuss the function of human will in the play.

her own design could have done. Inversely, when Duke Orsino says in the opening scene that he expects to replace Olivia's brother in her "debt of love," he doesn't realize that literally he will become her "brother" (I.i.34-40). As the closing moments of the play bring Olivia and the Duke together on the stage for the only time, she says to him, "think me as well a sister as a wife" (V.i.307); and the Duke responds in kind: "Madam, I am most apt t' embrace your offer," and a bit later, "Meantime, sweet sister, / We will not part from hence" (V.i.310, 373-74). The Duke had not understood the literal force of his prediction, but his early statement of his hope plants a subtle suggestion for the audience. When the play's action accords with Duke Orsino's "will," the discrepancy between intention and fulfillment is a delightful irony which points again to the fact that "what you will" may be realized, but under conditions which the human will cannot manipulate. Orsino's desire to love and be loved, on the other hand, is fulfilled by his fancy's true queen, Viola, more appropriately than his design for Olivia would have allowed.

The one character whose true desires are not fulfilled in the play is Malvolio. His hope to gain Olivia in marriage results in public humiliation at the hands of Feste, who takes obvious satisfaction in being able to throw Malvolio's former haughty words back at him under their new context of Malvolio's demonstrated foolishness:

Why, 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them.' I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir; but that's all one. 'By the Lord, fool, I am not mad!' But do you remember, 'Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal? An you smile not, he's gagged'? And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges. (V.i.360-66)

Feste's assertion that the "whirligig of time" has brought this revenge upon Malvolio neglects the fact that Maria has been the instigator and Feste the enforcer of the plot to harass Malvolio. Time's design, insofar as Malvolio is concerned, depends upon Maria's and Feste's will, which differs significantly from a central point that the main plot makes—that human will is not the controller of events. The characters in the main plot learn from the play's confusing action that human designs are frequently inadequate for securing "what you will," and that a design outside

their control brings fulfillment in unexpected ways. Feste's fallacy, of course, makes the results of the subplot *seem* to be the same as the results of the main plot, but Time's revenges on Malvolio are primarily human revenges, and this particular measure for measure is thoroughly within human control.³ Feste's justice allows no mitigation for missing the mark in human action; and the incipient cruelty that his precise justice manifests is felt, apparently, by other characters in the play.

When Olivia and her company hear Malvolio's case, she responds with compassion: "Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee! . . . He hath been most notoriously abused" (V.i.359, 368). Duke Orsino, upon hearing Malvolio's letter of explanation, comments, "This savors not much of distraction" (V.i.304). And even Sir Toby has become uneasy about the harsh treatment of Malvolio in the imprisonment scene: "I would we were well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were; for I am now so far in offense with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport to the upshot" (IV.ii.66-70). Actually, to place the responses into this sequence reverses the play's order; and we should consider the fact that Shakespeare builds *toward* a compassionate comment, with Olivia's statement climaxing an unwillingness to condone the actions of Feste and Maria in gulling Malvolio—at least in its last phase. Feste's exact form of justice without mercy has always characterized revenge, and even the word "revenge" is stressed by several of the characters in the subplot. When Maria voices her apparently spontaneous plot to gull Malvolio, she says:

The devil a Puritan that he is . . . the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (II.iii.134-40)

Maria's successful implementation of her "revenge" elicits Sir Toby's total admiration. At the end of II.v, he exclaims, "I could marry this wench for this device" (168), and when Maria appears soon thereafter, he asks, "Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?"

³ Notice the similarity between Feste's description of events and Iago's prediction as he encourages Roderigo to join him in his revenge against Othello: "There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered" (I.iii.366). Iago implies that he is merely an agent bringing about time's inevitable retributions.

(174). The battlefield image of the victor and the victim is mock-heroic, of course; but in the final scene Fabian testifies to its literal fruition: “ Maria writ / The letter, at Sir Toby’s great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her ” (V.i.352-54). Sir Toby’s submission to Maria’s will is a comic parallel for two actions: the pairing off of lovers, and the submission of the individual’s will to a design other than his own. Yet the inclusion of a parodic version of marriage-harmony in the subplot does not fully ease the discomfort of the subplot’s conclusion. Fabian tries to smooth it away when he suggests that the “ sportful malice ” of gulling Malvolio “ may rather pluck on laughter than revenge ” (V.i.355-58).⁴ Neither Feste nor Malvolio seems to be convinced, however. Feste’s “ whirligig of time brings in his revenges,” and Malvolio quits the stage with, “ I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” (V.i.366-67). The forgiveness that should conclude the comic pattern is “ notoriously ” missing from the subplot and cannot be absorbed successfully by the Duke’s line, “ Pursue him and entreat him to a peace.” Malvolio seems unlikely to return. The major differences between the subplot and the main plot is clearest at this dramatic moment: revenge is a human action that destroys; love, graced by the sanction of a higher providence, creates a “ golden time.”

Feste’s “ whirligig ” seems to be a parody of Fortune’s wheel in its inevitable turning, particularly with its suggestions of giddy swiftness and change.⁵ It provides a perfect image for the wild but symmetrical comic conclusion of the play’s action. Feste’s speech which includes it gives the appearance of completion to a mad cycle of events over which no human had much control. Only in Malvolio’s case was human control of events evident. In her forged letter, Maria caters to Malvolio’s “ will ” and, by encouraging him to accept his own interpretation of circumstances as his desire dictates,⁶ she leads him not only into foolishness, but also

⁴ Fabian’s participation in the gulling of Malvolio has a vengeful motive, because, as he says to Sir Toby, Malvolio has at some previous time “ brought me out o’ favor with my lady about a bear-baiting here ” (II. v. 4-7).

⁵ The *OED* cites Feste’s line as an example under “ circling course, revolution (of time or events),” but other uses of the term cited there are also important in the force of the word in *Twelfth Night*: “ whirligig ” is the name of various toys which are whirled, twirled, or spun around; the term was also used to signify “ an instrument of punishment ”; and the word suggests fickleness, inconstancy, giddiness, or flightiness.

⁶ Maria indicates her “ foreknowledge ” of Malvolio’s certain response (II. iii. 137-40), and Malvolio’s comments fulfill her prediction (II. v. 110-12, 150-52).

into a defense of his sanity. The discrepancy between Malvolio's assumption that fortune is leading him on his way and the fact that Maria is in charge of his fate manifests itself clearly in the juxtaposition of her directions to the revelers (as she leaves the stage) with Malvolio's lines as he enters:

MARIA Get ye all three into the box tree. . . . Observe him, for the love of mockery; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close, in the name of jesting. [*The others hide.*] Lie thou there [*throws down a letter*]; for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling. *Exit.*

Enter Malvolio.

MALVOLIO 'Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she [Olivia] did affect me. (II.v.13-22)

The gulling of Malvolio which follows is hilariously funny, partly because Malvolio brings it all on himself. Even before he finds the letter, his assumptions of rank and his plans for putting Sir Toby in his place elicit volatile responses from the box tree. And after he finds the forged letter, Malvolio's self-aggrandizing interpretations of the often cryptic statements evoke howls of glee mixed with the already disdainful laughter. The comedy of this scene is simple in its objective exploitation of Malvolio's self-love, and Malvolio becomes an appropriately comic butt. The audience's hilarity is probably more controlled than Sir Toby's and the box tree audience's excessive laughter; still, we are united in laughing at Malvolio's foolishness. And when Malvolio appears in his yellow stockings and cross-garters, the visual comedy encourages a total release in the fun of the game—Malvolio is gulled and we need not feel the least bit guilty, because he is marvelously unaware of his own foolishness. Oblivious to any reality but his own, Malvolio thinks he is irresistibly appealing with his repugnant dress and his continuous smiles—so contrary to his usual solemnity—and Olivia concludes that he has gone mad. “Why, this is very midsummer madness,” she says, and, then, as she is leaving to receive Cesario, she commends Malvolio to Maria's care.⁷

⁷ Olivia has drawn a similar conclusion about herself in the opening lines of this scene: “I am as mad as he, / If sad and merry madness equal be” (III. iv. 13-14). Because Olivia concurs with Maria in classifying Malvolio's peculiar behavior as “madness,” she inadvertently begets the subplotters plan for imprisoning Malvolio. We have Rosalind's word for it in *As You Like It* that the typical treatment for lunatics in the sixteenth century was imprisonment:

Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. Where's my cousin Toby? Let some of my people have a special care of him. I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry. (III.iv.55-58)

Malvolio misconstrues Olivia's generous concern as amorous passion and he thanks Jove for contriving circumstances so appropriately:

I have limed her; but it is Jove's doing, and Jove make me thankful. . . . Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes. Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked. (III.iv.68-77)

Malvolio's scrupulous praise of a higher designer than himself is a parodic echo of Olivia's earlier submission to Fate after she has begun to love Cesario: "What is decreed must be—and be this so!" (I.v.297). The impulses underlying Malvolio's speech (and to some extent, Olivia's speech as well) exert opposite pulls: Malvolio wants to attribute control of circumstances to Jove at the same time he wants divine identity. He attempts to simulate foreknowledge through predictive assertion: "Nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes." As long as events are in the hands of a non-human control, man cannot destroy or divert the predetermined order. But Malvolio cannot foresee the vindictive wit of Maria (often pronounced "Moriah"), nor can Olivia foresee the necessary substitution of Sebastian for Viola-Cesario. Each must learn that he, like the characters he wishes to control, is subject to an unpredictable will not his own. Precisely at this moment—when the character is forced to see a discrepancy between what he "wills" and what "is"—the possibility that he is mad confronts him.

Feste seems to adopt the disguise of Sir Topas to convince Malvolio that he is mad,⁸ and the imprisonment scene evokes a

Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too. (III.ii.376-80)

⁸ Cf. Julian Markels, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy: *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*," in *Shakespeare 400*, ed. James G. McManaway (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), pp. 85-86, for a similar observation. Feste makes evident his assumption that Malvolio is "possessed" by associating carnal sexual interests with Malvolio's request that Sir Topas "go to my lady" (cf. Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night* [New York: Macmillan, 1954], pp. 108-09). Feste replies:

Out, hyperbolic fiend! How vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies? (IV.ii.25-26)

different response than the letter that exploits Malvolio by encouraging him to wear yellow stockings and cross-garters. In the earlier phase of the gulling, Malvolio is a comic butt after the fashion of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, unaware of his foolishness; however, imprisoned, Malvolio is a helpless victim, fully aware that he is being abused. With Olivia, his extraordinary costume and perpetual smiles make him a visible clown, and, as a result, he even seems good-humored. But with Maria and Feste in the imprisonment scene, he is not visible; we only hear him and his protestations of abuse. These different visual presentations produce a notable difference in comic effect because visual comedy often changes a serious tone in the dialogue.⁹

In the imprisonment scene, Sir Topas keeps insisting that things are not as Malvolio perceives them; but Malvolio refuses to admit a discrepancy between what he perceives and reality. Accordingly, Malvolio insists that he is not mad.

Malvolio within.

MALVOLIO Who calls there?

CLOWN Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic. . . .

Obsessive interest in sexual lust seems to have been a commonplace shorthand to indicate madness for Renaissance dramatists: for examples, see Ophelia's mad songs in *Hamlet* (IV.v); Edgar's speech to King Lear as poor Tom o' Bedlam (III.iv.); and the masque of madmen in *The Duchess of Malfi* (IV.ii.). Feste is also following Vice's typical role of teasing and tormenting the Devil when he berates Malvolio, who (Feste asserts) is possessed by the fiend—a point that Feste's song at the end of IV.ii reiterates.

⁹ The two productions of *Twelfth Night* that I have seen both chose to emphasize visual comedy. One was the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance at Stratford-Upon-Avon in August 1971. During the scene, Malvolio kept popping his head up through a left-front trap door, and Feste responded with a swift stomp of his foot, closing the trap according to his whim. In this case, Malvolio was not allowed to see Feste, but the audience was allowed to see Malvolio. A performance in the fall of 1971, by Florida's Asolo Theater, had Feste roll onstage a wheeled cage with a small barred window on the upper left, covered by a flap. A sign reading "Beware the Lunatic" covered most of the visible side of the cage and evoked a large laugh from the audience. Throughout the scene, Feste was able to lift or lower the flap covering the bars, so that Malvolio was exposed to the audience and to Feste according to Feste's whim. In both of these instances, the visual comedy was heightened at the expense of the text and its suggested visual effects: Malvolio neither sees anyone nor is seen by anyone in the darkness of his prison. An illustration of this scene from Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709 shows Malvolio separated from the others by a center stage partition, which would allow the audience to witness both situations simultaneously. This is closer to stage directions in the text, but, of course, would not have been probable for Shakespeare's staging of the scene. See "Plate 9 (c)," W. Moelwyn Merchant, *Shakespeare and the Artist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), between pp. 48, 49.

MALVOLIO Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness.

CLOWN Fie, thou dishonest Satan. I call thee by the most modest terms, for I am one of those gentle ones that will use the devil himself with courtesy. Say'st thou that house is dark?

MALVOLIO As hell, Sir Topas.

CLOWN Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony; and yet complainest thou of obstruction?

MALVOLIO I am not mad, Sir Topas. I say to you this house is dark.

CLOWN Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

MALVOLIO I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are. (IV.ii.20-48)

In the darkness of his prison, Malvolio literally is unable to see, and Feste makes the most of the symbolic implications of Malvolio's blindness. The audience perceives with Feste that the house is not dark (that hypothetical Globe audience would have been able to see the literal daylight in the playhouse), yet the audience also knows that Malvolio is being "abused" because he cannot see the light. The audience is therefore led to a double awareness of values in this scene: we are able to absorb the emblematic significance of Malvolio's separation from good-humored sanity and to know at the same time that Malvolio is not mad in the literal way that Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby insist. Although the literal action engenders the emblematic awareness, the literal action does not necessarily support the emblematic meaning. This pull in two opposite directions occurs simultaneously and places the audience in a slightly uncomfortable position. We prefer to move in one direction or in the other. Yet it seems that here Shakespeare asks us to forgo the either-or alternatives and to hold contradictory impressions together. Malvolio cannot be dismissed as a simple comic butt when his trial in the dark has such severe implications.¹⁰

¹⁰ The problem of whether to sympathize with or to reject and ridicule Malvolio

The ambiguities of his situation are clear to everyone except Malvolio, but he rigidly maintains his single point of view. Because he refuses to allow more than his own narrowed focus, he is *emblematically* an appropriate butt for the harsh comic action that blots out his power to see as well as to act. He must ultimately depend upon the fool to bring him “ink, paper, and light” so that he may extricate himself from his prison, a situation which would have seemed to Malvolio earlier in the play “mad” indeed. Feste thus does force Malvolio to act against his will in submitting to the fool, but Malvolio fails to change his attitudes.¹¹ Malvolio remains a literalist—Feste’s visual disguise is for the audience so that we can see as well as hear the ambiguities of his performance, a point that Maria brings into focus when she says “Thou mightest have done this without thy beard and gown. He sees thee not” (IV.ii.63-64).

In the very next scene, Sebastian presents a contrast which delineates even more clearly the narrowness of Malvolio’s response to an uncontrollable situation. Sebastian, too, confronts the possibility that he is mad: his situation in Illyria is anything but under his control.

This is the air; that is the glorious sun;
 This pearl she gave me, I do feel’t and see’t;
 And *though* ’tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
 Yet ’tis not madness. . . .
 For *though* my soul disputes well with my sense
 That this may be some error, *but* no madness,
 Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
 So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
 That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
 And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
 To any other trust *but* that I am mad,
 Or *else* the lady’s mad. (IV.iii.1-16: my italics)

is an old one. Charles Lamb probably opened this Pandora’s box when he praised Malvolio as what Lamb thought he should have been—“brave, honourable, accomplished”: from “On Some of the Old Actors,” *The London Magazine*, 1822, reprinted in *Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night*, ed. Leonard F. Dean and James A. S. McPeck (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965), p. 150. Many arguments have been advanced against Malvolio’s “humanity” as realized in the play. Two of the more interesting are by S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London: Kings and Staples, 1944), pp. 77-78, and Barbara K. Lewalski, “Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*,” *Shakespeare Studies*, 1 (1965), 168-81.

¹¹ Julian Markels, “Shakespeare’s Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy,” p. 84, and Barbara Lewalski, “Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*,” discuss the regenerative potentials of madness. Both discussions are pertinent to the emblematic values presented in this scene.

Sebastian's pile of contrasting conjunctions ("though," "yet," "but") underlines his hesitance to form a final judgment, unlike Malvolio, whose point of view never changes despite the onslaught of unmanageable circumstances. The contradictions of his sensory perceptions lead Sebastian to a state of "wonder" in which he is able to suspend reason and delay judgment, and this signifies a flexibility of perception which Malvolio cannot attain. Malvolio is not stirred by the discrepancies of experience to consider that appearances may not be reality; but Sebastian can appreciate the undefinable workings of a power beyond the evident. Sebastian's ability to sense the "wonder" in a world where cause and effect have been severed gives him a stature that Malvolio cannot achieve.¹² Yet the difference between them is due to the source of their manipulation as well as to their response. Sebastian is manipulated by Fate or by Fortune; Malvolio, by Maria and Feste. Human manipulators parody suprahuman control and because they do, Maria and Feste define both levels of action.

Feste, Maria, and Sir Toby are all in a set and predictable world of sporting gullery, and the rules for their games are known. Feste's "whirligig" associates Time with a toy (perhaps even with an instrument of torture) and limits Time to human terms of punishment. On the other hand, the Time that Viola addresses does untie her problematic knot of disguise. Feste's attribution of revenge to this "whirligig of Time" points up the difference between the two controls. The whirligig becomes a parodic substitute for the larger providence that other characters talk about under other titles: Time, Jove, Fate, Fortune, or Chance. Significantly, Malvolio's humiliation is the only humanly designed action that fulfills itself as planned. The subplot performs its parody in many other ways,¹³ but in Feste's summary "whirligig" it displays the double vision that Shakespearean parody typically provides. The foibles of the romantics in Illyria are seen in their reduced terms through Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew, but the limitations of the parodic characters also heighten by contrast the expansive and expanding world of the play. Love, not revenge, is celebrated.

But even Feste's whirligig takes another spin and does not stop

¹² Cf. Harold Jenkins, "Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*," in *Shakespeare: The Comedies*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 76.

¹³ L. G. Salingar discusses some of the other parodic functions of the subplot in "The Design of *Twelfth Night*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 9 (1958), 119-39.

at revenge: in the play's final song the playwright extends an embrace to his audience. Feste's song creates an ambiguity of perspective which fuses the actual world with an ideal one: "the rain it raineth every day" is hardly the world described by the play. Romantic Illyria seems to have little to do with such realistic intrusions. Yet, the recognition of continuous rain is in itself an excess—it does not rain every day in the actual world, at least not in the same place.¹⁴ Thus, the pessimistic excess of the song balances the optimistic excesses of the romance world of Illyria; neither excess accurately reflects the actual world. Despite the apparent progress the song describes of a man's growing from infancy to maturity and to old age, it remains something of an enigma.¹⁵ The ambiguities of the first four stanzas build to a contrast of direct statements in the final stanza.

A great while ago the world begun,
 With hey, ho, the wind and the rain;
 But that's all one, our play is done,
 And we'll strive to please you every day.

The first line of this stanza seems to imply that the world has its own, independent design;¹⁶ and it also suggests that man's actions must take their place and find meaning within this larger and older pattern. The specific meaning of that larger design, however, remains concealed within the previous ambiguities of Feste's song. His philosophic pretensions to explain that design are comically vague and he knows it. He tosses them aside to speak directly to the audience: "But that's all one, our play is done." This is the same phrase Feste uses with Malvolio in his summary speech in Act V: "I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas,

¹⁴ Joseph H. Summers makes a similar point, "The Masks of *Twelfth Night*," *The University of Kansas City Review*, 22 (1955), 31. In contrast, the song becomes an appropriate description of the play's world in *King Lear* (III.ii.64-77).

¹⁵ I disagree with John A. Hart's opinion that Feste's song "is not hard to fathom": "Foolery Shines Everywhere: The Fool's Function in the Romantic Comedies," *Starre of Poets, Carnegie Series in English*, 10 (Pittsburg: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1966), p. 47. Hart's own reading of the song's "general meaning" differs in several major points from other readings. One of the most generally held readings is by John Weiss, *Wit, Humour, and Shakespeare* (Boston, 1876), p. 204. It is impossible to list every variant, but worth noting by contrast is Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, pp. 168-71, who centers his discussion of the song on the sexual innuendoes that proceed from reading "thing" as male genitalia.

¹⁶ Leslie Hotson, *ibid.*, p. 171, n. 2, points out that this line "recalls the Elizabethan euphemism for coition, 'To dance The Beginning of the World!'" Without discounting that allusion, I suggest that a much more general pattern of action is implied.

sir; but that's all one." In both cases, Feste avoids an explanation.

Turning to the audience and shattering the dramatic illusion is typical in epilogues, but Feste's inclusion of the audience into his consciousness of the play as a metaphor for actual experience has a special significance here. Throughout *Twelfth Night*, Feste has engaged various characters in dialogues of self-determination. In one game of wit, he points out that Olivia is a fool "to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (I.v.65-66). By his irrefutable logic, he wins Olivia's favor and her tacit agreement that her mourning has been overdone. The Duke also is subject to Feste's evaluation in two scenes. Following his performance, upon the Duke's request, of a sad song of unrequited love, Feste leaves a paradoxical benediction:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere; for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (II.iv.72-77)

And later, when the Duke is approaching Olivia's house, Feste encounters him with one of his typically unique and audaciously applied truisms:

DUKE I know thee well. How dost thou, my good fellow?

CLOWN Truly, sir, the better for my foes, and the worse for my friends.

DUKE Just the contrary: the better for thy friends.

CLOWN No, sir, the worse.

DUKE How can that be?

CLOWN Marry, sir, they praise me and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused; so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why then, the worse for my friends, and the better for my foes. (V.i.9-20)

The Duke has in fact lacked some knowledge of himself, and Feste's pointed remark makes it clear that he is using his role as fool to point up the true foolishness of others. In the prison scene with Malvolio, Feste provides a confusing game of switching identities from the Clown to Sir Topas. In each situation, Feste provides the other person with a different perspective for seeing

himself. Thus, it is more than merely appropriate that at the end of the play Feste engages the audience in its own definition of self. By asking them to look at their participation in the dramatic illusion, Feste is requesting them to recognize their own desire for humanly willed happiness.¹⁷

The playwright, like the comic providence in the play, has understood “what we will” and has led us to a pleasurable fulfillment of our desires, but in ways which we could not have foreseen or controlled. The substitution of the final line, “And we’ll strive to please you every day,” for the refrain, “For the rain it raineth every day,” is a crucial change. Like the incremental repetition in the folk ballad, this pessimistic refrain has built a dynamic tension which is released in the recognition that the play is an actual experience in the lives of the audience, even though it is enacted in an imagined world. The players, and the playwright who arranges them, are engaged in an ongoing effort to please the audience. The providential design remains incomplete within the play’s action and only promises a “golden time”; similarly, the playwright promises further delightful experiences for his audience. The subplot’s action, on the other hand, is limited within the framework of revenge: the revenge of the subplot characters elicits Malvolio’s cry for revenge.

Malvolio is the only one who refuses to see himself in a subservient position to a larger design. And possibly because that design is too small, we cannot feel that his abuse and final exclusion from the happy community of lovers and friends allows the golden time to be fulfilled within the play. Feste’s manipulation of Malvolio resembles the playwright’s manipulation of his audience’s will, but in such a reduced way that we cannot avoid seeing the difference between merely human revenge and the larger benevolence that controls the play’s design.

University of Kentucky

¹⁷ Cf. Joseph Summers, “The Masks of *Twelfth Night*,” pp. 31-32.