

guide to doctrine and behavior. It is a misconstrued letter, after all, that does the presumptuous steward in.<sup>2</sup> However astute he may be about "matters of state" when other people are around, Malvolio in private stands as signal proof of Ulysses' observation that "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin" (*Troules and Cressida* 3.3.169). "By my life, this is my lady's hand," Malvolio exclaims as he takes the letter in hand. He uses an exegete's ingenuity to spell out just which of her body parts best serves his purposes: "These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's; and thus makes she her great P's" (2.5.71-72). So far, so funny. More problematic, to some viewers' eyes at least, is the extremity to which Maria and her cohorts carry their revenge when they lock Malvolio up and try to convince him he is mad. Also troubling to many viewers is Malvolio's refusal of community in the play's last scene. He stalks off swearing, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.355). In historical hindsight, it is a chilling moment. Forty years after the first recorded performance of *Twelfth Night*, the likes of Malvolio succeeded in having the theaters closed and the actors dispersed to more godly ways of making a living.

One group of Puritan dissenters may have left for New England, but during the first decades of the seventeenth century the sect exerted increasing political force at home in England. A number of factors besides the appeal of their doctrine combined to augment their strength, not the least of which was the perfect fit between successful business practices and Puritan principles of literacy, hard work, self-discipline, and strong families. At least as they are portrayed onstage in plays of the early seventeenth century, Puritans are almost always successful merchants. To playwrights they constituted a recognized type, ripe for ridicule. Thanks to the Puritans' devotion to the written word, such stereotypes did not go unchallenged. The number of books published by Puritan writers was huge, as we have seen already with William Prynne and William Perkins. Among these books are renowned expositions of Puritan doctrine that help us appreciate the excesses of caricatures like Malvolio. The selections that follow begin with a representative stereotype, the character of "A Puritan" printed in later editions of Sir Thomas Overbury's poem *A Wife*. To the social frame set in place in Chapter 5, further selections then add three more frames — religious, economic, and political — for locating puritanism in the culture of early modern England and Malvolio in the design of *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>2</sup> On this point, see Simmons, "A Source for Shakespeare's Malvolio."

#### → SIR THOMAS OVERBURY

### *From A Wife . . . Whereunto Are Added Many Witty Characters*

1614

One of the distinctive genres of the early seventeenth century was books of characters, collections of brief verbal descriptions (usually five hundred words or less) of recognized social types. In their reduction of human complexities to a few quick strokes of the pen, such descriptions would be called caricatures today. The seventeenth-century term *character* plays on the original sense of the word as a written sign (from the Greek *charassein*, to make sharp or engrave) whereby a person might be known. Our more abstract sense of *character* has lost this metonymy. In seventeenth-century character books, Puritans make a regular appearance alongside stage-players. Among the most pointed characters of a Puritan is one added to the fifth edition of Sir Thomas Overbury's *A Wife . . . Whereunto Are Added Many Witty Characters and Conceited News, Written by Himself and Other Learned Gentlemen His Friends* (1614). Although it is questionable whether "A Puritan" is by Overbury or by one of his friends, the point of view from which the caricature is drawn is pointedly that of a learned gentleman who sets himself up as the opposite of a Puritan. After taking a degree at Oxford in 1598, Sir Thomas Overbury (1581-1613) studied law at the Middle Temple. His literary talents were approved by no less a critic than Ben Jonson, but Overbury's main ambitions were political. Having served for a time as an ambassador, he ended his political career — and his life — by openly opposing the marriage of Robert Carr, one of James I's favorites, to Lady Frances Howard. To a gentleman like Overbury, "A Puritan" is perversity personified. Whatever most men approve, a Puritan condemns.

#### A PURITAN

Is a diseased piece of Apocrypha,<sup>1</sup> bind him to the Bible, and he corrupts the whole text; ignorance, and fat feed, are his founders, his nurses, railings, rabbis, and round breeches:<sup>2</sup> his life is but a borrowed blast of wind; for between two religions, as between two doors, he is ever whistling. Truly whose child he is, is yet unknown; for willingly his faith allows no father, only thus far his pedigree is found, Bragger and he flourished about a time first; his fiery zeal keeps him continual costive,<sup>3</sup> which withers him into his

<sup>1</sup> Apocrypha: non-canonical books of the Bible. <sup>2</sup> round breeches: priests. <sup>3</sup> costive: constipated.

Sir Thomas Overbury, *A Wife . . . Whereunto Are Added Many Witty Characters* (London: Lawrence Lisle, 1614), F1-F1v.

own translation, and till he eat a schoolman,<sup>4</sup> he is hidebound; he ever prays against non-residents,<sup>5</sup> but is himself the greatest discontinuer, for he never keeps near his text: anything that the law allows, but marriage and March beer,<sup>6</sup> he murmurs at: what it disallows, and holds dangerous, makes him a discipline. Where the gate stands open, he is ever seeking a stile: and where his learning ought to climb, he creeps through; give him advice, you run into "traditions," and urge a modest course, he cries out "councils."<sup>7</sup> His greatest care, is to condemn obedience, his last care to serve God, handsomely and cleanly. He is now become so cross a kind of teaching, that should the Church enjoin clean shirts, he wore lousy;<sup>8</sup> more sense than single prayers is not his, nor more in those, than still the same petitions; from which he either fears a learned faith, or doubts God understands not at first hearing. Show him a ring, he runs back like a bear; and hates square dealing as allied to caps. A pair of organs blow him out o' the parish, and are the only glisters<sup>9</sup> to cool him. Where the meat is best, there he confutes most; for his arguing is but the efficacy of his eating, good bits he holds breeds good positions, and the Pope he best concludes against in plum broth.<sup>10</sup> He is often drunk, but not as we are, temporally, nor can his sleep then cure him, for the fumes of his ambition make his very soul reel, and that small beer that should allay him (silence) keeps him more surfeited, and makes his heat break out in private houses. Women and lawyers are his best disciples, the one next fruit, longs for forbidden doctrine, the other to maintain forbidden titles, both which he sows amongst them. Honest he dare not be, for that loves order; yet if he can be brought to ceremony, and made but master of it, he is converted.

<sup>4</sup> schoolman: medieval scholastic. <sup>5</sup> non-residents: priests who do not live in the parishes to which they are assigned, but pass the duties to others. <sup>6</sup> March beer: strong ale. <sup>7</sup> "councils": legislative sessions at which issues of doctrine are decided. <sup>8</sup> lousy: full of vermin, dirty. <sup>9</sup> glisters pipes: clyster pipes, enemas. <sup>10</sup> plum broth: thick soup made with beef and fruits, traditionally a Christmas dish.

## Religion

WILLIAM BRADSHAW

### From English Puritanism

1605

The counter to caricatures like that in Overbury's *A Wife* came from Puritans themselves. William Bradshaw (1571–1618) was in a good position to write such a book, since he was moderate in his religious views and counted among his friends and admirers prominent authorities within the Church of England, such as Joseph Hall (1574–1656), an emissary of King James, bishop of first Exeter and then Norwich, and the originator of the character book in English. Bradshaw's *English Puritanism*, published anonymously in Holland in 1605, was reissued in a Latin translation in 1610 and was republished in English in 1640 and 1641, just as Puritan forces were on the verge of taking over the government of England. The very first words in Bradshaw's treatise are an acknowledgment that the written word of God stands as the ultimate authority over all religious practices. On the subject of church government, however, Bradshaw does not cite scripture. He believes in local government by congregations themselves, but defers to duly constituted civil authority. Hence the moderateness of Bradshaw's position and his success as an apologist for Puritan doctrine on forms of worship. Several of Bradshaw's points of doctrine bear on Matvolio's case: Puritans, says Bradshaw, abhor idolatrous rites and ceremonies (of which Twelfth Night customs were, in many people's eyes, an example), refuse to allow their tithes money to be used to maintain the lavish display of their social superiors in religious ceremonies, insist that "interpreting the written word of God" is the most important function of a pastor or minister, maintain that tradesmen and craftsmen have more right to be church leaders than "persons both ignorant of religion and all good letters," and believe that in judging a person's behavior judicial authorities should not "proceed to molest any man upon secret suggestions, private suspicion, or uncertain fame" or "scorn, deride, taunt, and revile him with odious and contumelious speeches."

To the indifferent<sup>1</sup> reader:

It cannot be unknown unto them that know anything that those Christians in this realm which are called by the odious and vile name of Puritans, are accused by the prelates to the king's majesty and the state to maintain

<sup>1</sup> indifferent: unprejudiced.

William Bradshaw, *English Puritanism* (1605), ed. Lawrence A. Sasek, in *Images of English Puritanism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 81–94.