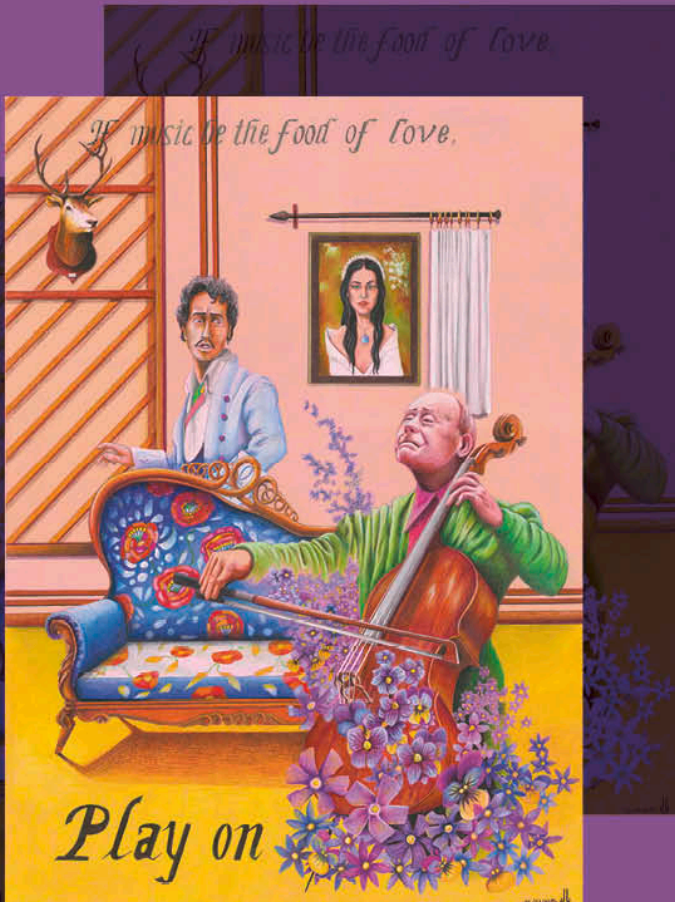


**Agrégation**

**ANGLAIS**

William Shakespeare

# *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*



Sous la direction de :  
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ellipses

## Introduction

*Twelfth Night, Or What You Will* eludes confinement to any single place, mood or form. Ever the embodiment of irreverence, Sir Toby bristles at the suggestion that he might “confine” himself (1.3.9) and tether his boundless spirit. Despite its festive associations, this is truly a play for all seasons. The seemingly elusive title carries an assertive whimsy: in *Twelfth Night*, “fancy is *always* in play”<sup>1</sup> (B. Smith 2011, 78). As with so many of Shakespeare’s plays, it is up to the audience, the reader and the producer to chart their own course through this last happy comedy, even if Shakespeare provides the map. The very timing of Orsino’s final line – “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen” (5.1.381) swiftly followed by Feste’s song (and dance?), “When that I was a little tiny boy” – “serves as a cue to the spectator-listeners that fancy [imagination] is precisely what is now required from them” (B. Smith 2011, 76). *Twelfth Night* engages the feelings and imaginative processes that culminate in a moment of clarity and precision — enabling the perceptive mind to “shoot a more original line”<sup>2</sup>.

Arguably, if the play were to be viewed from a single perspective, the notion that might best encapsulate this multifarious and unique experience is “strange”. After reading the hoax letter, Malvolio decides to adopt what he believes to be a new stance, declaring, “I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings” (2.5.166). Here “strange” means “distant, aloof” (*OED* “strange”, 6.a; Elam, 248), but it also foreshadows his own estrangement as he dons his “outlandish” (*OED*, 1a-b) attire, “not catching the irony that acting like a stranger to his fellows will make him look all the stranger to them” (B. Smith 2011, 78). This is echoed in Maria’s comment: “He’s coming, madam, but in a very strange manner.” (3.4.8) Feste, who mistakenly thinks he is dealing with Cesario putting on an act, loses patience and asks Sebastian to drop his aloofness and “formality” (*OED* “strangeness”, 2.a): “I prithee now ungird thy strangeness” (4.1.14). Here again, strangeness is linked to attire (a costume or mask). Then there is Antonio, caught in the confusion and imbroglio, who believes he is speaking to Sebastian. Cesario cannot account (*OED* “strange”, 10.a) for his

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1. The italics are mine.

2. I am quoting Dr Bradman in Noël Coward’s *Blithe Spirit* (1941), Act 1, scene 2.

reasoning, having circulated outside his story altogether. Cesario attributes his “strange speech” to a “disturbance of mind or feelings” (“distraction” *OED* n.4) verging madness (*OED* n.5): “But in conclusion put strange speech on me. / I know not what ’twas but distraction.” (5.1.63-4). This “confusion of affairs” (“distraction” *OED* n.3b) creates miscommunication that diminishes Sebastian in the eyes of Antonio and, to a certain extent, Cesario in the eyes of Orsino. Sebastian is made to feel alienated even by Olivia’s gaze, interpreting her bemusement upon realising she has betrothed a stranger as anger: “You throw a strange regard upon me” (5.1.208). Elam notes that “strange regard” means “a distant look” (338). It could be argued that the phrase functions as a hypallage, with “strange” reflecting the profound amazement Olivia feels at the sight of “One face, one voice, one habit and two persons.” (5.1.212) Here, “strange” connotes something “abnormal, or exceptional to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment” (*OED*, 10.a). Olivia tries to make sense of her perception, commenting on what seems to be a trick of perspective<sup>1</sup>. For Olivia the spectacle can only be understood as an anamorphic experience, until further on it translates as “a sublime delirium of desire” (Elam, 115) when she gasps “Most wonderful!” (5.1.221).

The uncouthness of Illyria, its culture and its inhabitants falls under the notion of strangeness, often carrying darker undertones. Orsino’s head servant, Valentine, feels unnerved and threatened by the ease with which Cesario integrates so well that he has become Orsino’s favourite: “He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.” (1.4.3-4) In her study on “Forms of Otherness in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*”, Lea Puljcan-Juric argues that Orsino professes savage attacks against Olivia, whose “dirty lands” (2.4.82) he “stands to appropriate (and feels he must deny)” (Puljcan-Juric, 192). By contrast, a well-meaning Antonio warns Sebastian about his status as someone unfamiliar (“skill-less”, 3.3.9) with his surroundings. He defines a “stranger” (or foreigner) as someone who is “[u]nguided and unfriended” (3.3.10). Towards such newcomers, Illyria can adopt a “[r]ough and unhospitable” comportment (3.3.11).

Sebastian offers an alternative perspective on strangeness and foreignness. He tells Antonio that “My determinate voyage is mere extravagancy.” (2.1.10-11) He is referring to his errancy and his status as a wanderer (“extravagancy”,

1. See François Laroque, “Avant-garde et avant-scène: les étranges perspectives d’Hans Holbein et William Shakespeare”, *Interfaces. Image-Texte-Language* No. 13 (1998): 9-27.

*OED* 1, first occurrence; Elam, 205). The root word *vagor* (“to wander” in Latin) from *vagus* (“wave”) also reflects his identity as a character that has been brought to the shores of Illyria by the waves: “I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves / So long as I could see.” (1.2.15-16) What characterises the stranger is both their aimless trajectory and their capacity to cross the seas to thrive (“extra-”) rather than survive, much like the traders, adventurers, and immigrants who reached foreign shores by riding the waves.

Thus the status of the stranger is perhaps best analysed through the twins themselves. Viola/Cesario/Sebastian land on Illyria and traverse its households as strangers with a potential impetus for strategically modifying outlandish behaviour. When Olivia flouts the social expectations of a hostess by hiding behind a mask (or veil) to receive her visitor, she is castigated by Cesario – “The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I learned from my entertainment” (1.5.208-9) – and reminded of her domestic duty: “Good madam, let me see your face” (1.5.233). Yet, “[repositioning the play in [the Adriatic] cultural context” and “present[ing] us with new modes for thinking about Olivia’s comportment”, Puljcan-Juric shows how Olivia’s veil and her communication with the outside world through messengers resemble the Illyrian *parlatorio*, where veiled women lived enclosed and communicated with family and friends through intermediaries – a practice Shakespeare was familiar with, as the exchange between Isabella (a novice nun) and Lucio illustrates in *Measure for Measure*, Act 1, scene 4; Puljcan-Juric 191 and 197). There are “multiple codes” involved in “domesticating strangeness” – “its rules, customs, prejudices, or hostilities” (Lisak, 169). But significantly, “*Twelfth Night* makes it the stranger’s prerogative to expose strangeness within the host community by showing that misrule resides not outside the gates but within the home.” (Lisak, 171) As incivility escalates in Act 3, Viola/Cesario assesses the domestic situation, discovering it is, indeed, as “[r]ough and inhospitable” as Antonio had warned Sebastian it might become. “This is as uncivil as strange” (3.4.257) is a phrase that equates the repulsion of violence with the allure of extravagance. The irony is that it falls to the stranger to open a dialogue around the “strange” behaviour of Illyrians, who are caught between the domestic unrest of a well-known country and alien exoticism. While “Viola may begin her career in Illyria as an outsider and an intruder,” she “swiftly shifts the spotlight of strangeness onto Illyria in such a way that her ‘foreignness’ ultimately acts as a dramatic ploy, requiring that ‘the question of identity [be] put not to the foreigner but by the foreigner’ (Wilson 2005, 8).” (Lisak, 168) Thus, it may be argued that

Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* “emancipates foreignness from strangeness” by ironically setting the play in a foreign land. As a consequence, “[F]oreignness no longer systematically carries with it the idea of strangeness any more than strangeness systematically implies foreignness [...]. As this last of the romantic and festive comedies unfolds, its spectators are made to feel foreign, estranged, or strange, for the play continually challenges their sense of what it means to be human.” (Lisak, 181)

Strangeness permeates the play much like the themes of twinning, errancy and music. Orsino’s comment about “that old antic song we heard last night” (2.4.3) suggests that the music was as strange, fantastical and wild as Hamlet’s antic disposition (*Hamlet*, 1.5.170; Elam, 226). This characterisation plunges music into the realm of the clownish or even the grotesque, prompting Orsino to seek Cesario’s opinion on what he makes of it all. Ultimately, though Orsino seeks Cesario’s thoughts on music, Viola/Cesario is not alone in offering insight into his relation with music – a relationship, argues Lea Puljcan-Juric, “denoting the vocal and instrumental sounds that he savors as well as the rhetorical flourish of his amorous speeches.” (Puljcan-Juric, 193) Commenting on Olivia’s use of the word “howling” (5.1.106) to his face, Puljcan-Juric argues that the term itself “condenses widespread associations with the musical expression of the ‘Other,’ and compels us to ask how music, which assumes a range of literal and figurative meanings, functions politically in this highly musical play” (193). From the strange to the fantastical, from otherness to the profound, and from the visual arts to music and innovative stage productions, this volume explores the experience of estrangement that emerges when the veil of the familiar is lifted. The fall of the mask only to reveal another beneath becomes the rule of performance – both within the play and in the world beyond.

The first section of this volume, titled “A natural perspective, that is and is not’ (5.1.213): perspectives in play and *mundus inversus*”, explores how perspective and visual art shape audience perception through distortions that translate dramatic inversions and textual paradoxes. The second section, “I do not now fool myself to let imagination jade me” (2.5.159-160): the double-edged power of imagination”, navigates the complex and vexatious questions of imagination, fancy, fantasy and thought. A third section, entitled “‘It is too hard a knot for me t’untie’ (2.3.41): the Trouble with gender”, focuses on the challenges of gender identity and troubles engendered by a sense of otherness. The last section, “[P]lay on’ (1.1.1): music as a power play and staging innovations”, maps the outlandish productions that *Twelfth Night*

has inspired, particularly at the Comédie-Française, with a special focus on Ostermeier's 2018 production and his powerful use of music in collaboration with composer Nil Ostendorf.

### **I. “A natural perspective, that is and is not” (5.1.213): perspectives in play and *mundus inversus***

Jean-Louis Claret opens this volume with an essay entitled “Les mondes opposés dans *Twelfth Night* de Shakespeare et *Le Combat de Carnaval et Carême* de Pieter Bruegel l’Ancien”, which examines the contrasting worlds that Viola and Sebastian encounter upon setting foot in Illyria, through the lens of Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s painting, *The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (1559). This comparative approach contributes to an ongoing scholarly dialogue between word and image. Claret’s line of inquiry diverges from the traditional optics of interdisciplinary criticism, which typically favours Italian Renaissance painting and emblem books when exploring the intersection between Shakespeare’s theatre and visual art<sup>1</sup>. Instead, Claret aligns with scholars like Anthony J. Lewis, who re-examines Viola/Cesario’s “Patience on a monument” (2.4.114) by highlighting the significance of the 1557 engraving, *Patientia*, based on a drawing by Bruegel the Elder. This engraving, accompanied by the caption “*Patientia est malorum quae aut inferuntur aut accident, cum aequanimate perlatio* (‘Patience is the tranquil endurance of evils that assail you through malice or through accident’)” (Lewis, 109), serves as a discursive tool that deepens our understanding of the play’s theme of contending with misrule. By reading the play against the backdrop of Flemish phantasmagoria, Claret offers a fresh perspective on the tensions between the predominantly male world of the bearish Duke Orsino and the female-dominated court of Olivia. Worlds do not remain isolated in *Twelfth Night*; even Olivia and Orsino, despite their thwarted love, eventually come together (5.1.93) in a space that is neither here nor there – a space that only theatre can conjure. Opposing worlds overlap, much like the faces of Viola and Sebastian when they are together on stage.

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1. See, for instance, Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 264, and Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Bruegel's painting depicts a carnival scene filled with excess and topsyturvyness. Revellers hobble, dance in a Carole, gamble and drink from mugs, while also surrounding and mingling with the pious – ministers entering the public square in an orderly line and black-veiled nuns pouring out of a grey-stone church. Claret explores how parodic reversals enable a similar convergence of opposing values in *Twelfth Night*, where opportunism and lust muddy the waters of true love and faith. Sir Toby, for instance, justifies his declaration of love to Maria as a reward for her Machiavellian scheme to trap Malvolio into believing Olivia loves him through a letter (5.1.357-8). He points to Malvolio, the devout character whose cold faith and mask of virtue conceals the burning ambitions of a social climber. Maria's hoax aims to call out the true nature of this killjoy (2.3.128-33). As Claret notes, what is on display is the cruelty of fools whose antics serve the cause of truth. The "lewd and hypocritical" (Elam, 236) Malvolio, as "sometimes [...] a kind of Puritan" (2.3.136), is subjected to the pillory of humiliation, a fate symbolised by the yellow colour of his stockings.

Claret argues that the painted image may be understood as a counterpoint to the theatre and shows how pictoriality delves into the heart of the highly visual art of theatre. In fact, both art forms contain pathways that allow for shifts from one mode to another through mechanisms such as *mundus inversus* and mirroring, underscoring the permeability of both worlds. His study sheds light on the play's intricate representation of impulses that are both divisive and unifying, continually overstepping the boundaries they ostensibly uphold. A particular emphasis is placed on the figure of the professional fool, Feste, who navigates with clear-sightedness between wisdom and folly, embodying a character shaped by license and *gravitas*. In Bruegel's *tableau*, the fool's costume is a study in contrast that resonates with the themes of opposition and inversion found in *Twelfth Night*. In the painting, the fool wears a costume split down the middle, with one half a design of yellow and green stripes and the other, plain red. Claret suggests this may serve as a potential pictorial prototype for Feste. Claret concludes that if *Twelfth Night* is a comedy that oscillates between opposition and reversibility, there are darker undertones to Malvolio's vow as he looks back in anger at what has been played out. Just as the audience and the characters involved in this cruel game were rooting for Malvolio to get his comeuppance and that would be the end of that story, Malvolio declares, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.371) foreshadowing a sequel to this masquerade. Claret envisions this new episode

as one that would impose a different truth whereby the restoration of social norms comes at the cost of genuine feelings. His analysis of the play reveals that theatrical spaces are extremely malleable in symbolism and exhibit a resilience so broad that they allow spectators to mentally construct an image as varied as “a doublet of changeable taffeta” (2.4.74).

Bruegel’s painting captures the transition from Shrove Tuesday to Lent, the forty-day period leading up to Easter. Similarly, *Twelfth Night* is a festive play (C.L. Barber). The title references the eve of Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas, marking the end of a season that began with All Hallows’ Eve (the evening before All Saints’ Day) when a King of Misrule was appointed to preside over the festivities. The period when the temporary subversion of social order could be joyfully enacted draws to an end. As we enter the final day of celebration, a sense of melancholy takes hold. *Twelfth Night* is a play of transience, where the lingering joy of revelry is gradually overshadowed by the inevitable return to a more prosaic routine. The indulgent excesses of the season are poised to recede into memory, joining the ethereal ghost of Christmas past. As Bruce Smith remarks, “For viewers today, time in *Twelfth Night* is likely to be even more elusive than place.” (2001, 149)

## **II. “I do not now fool myself to let imagination jade me” (2.5.159-160): the double-edged power of imagination**

“The early modern imagination”, remarks Deanna Smid, “is not simply a term, but it is part of an immense web of interactions between aspects of Renaissance medical knowledge, philosophy and literature, Christian practice, and social and political mores.” (Smid, 3) Understanding imagination as it operates in *Twelfth Night* is also an exercise in understanding what a historical reading entails. In *The Reality of the Historical Past*, Paul Ricœur calls history “The Analogue”, that is, neither the Same nor the Other. Rather, it denotes “the Similar” that is, “a resemblance between relations rather than between simple terms.” (Ricœur, 25) The multiplicity of terms used in the play to denote imagination (fancy, fantasy, thought, and so on) and the words coupled with the notion of fancy (fool, true, shapes, and so on) introduce connotations that in gist are either cautious or enthusiastic (depending on where they see imagination



taking root<sup>1</sup>, or on if they perceive imagination as some intermediate state, “a place where things are perpetually in a state of becoming” (B. Smith 2011, 70). Such a view is perhaps best illustrated by The Tower of Edmund Spenser’s Castle of Alma, which consists of three chambers dedicated to the future, present and past respectively, the first chamber being assigned to *Phantastes* (*The Faerie Queene*, 2.9.50). When Bruce Smith observes that “Viola and Sebastian are not just objects of other people’s imagination; they indulge imagination themselves” (B. Smith 2011, 75), he invites us to consider the play’s intricate treatment of imagination. Two essays attend to this inquiry.

In her essay, “Fantasy and Imagination in *Twelfth Night*”, Claire Guéron remarks that the pivotal shift in mood also translates the transition “from miracle to magic” (Cooper, 128), again heralded in the title. *Twelfth Night* references the Virgin Birth and the Incarnation, serving as an entry point into a more theologically neutral romance narrative, a secularised form of the miracle tale at a time when miracles were becoming a thing of the past in Protestant England. She explores *Twelfth Night*’s sustained integration of romance conventions with realistic and even topical features. There are recognisable elements of romance, such as the miraculous survival and reunion of the twins, but the supernatural has been left aside, as the play “rationalises” romance by grounding its wonder in real-world phenomena. Pearls, jewels, and comparisons to the “music of the spheres” imbue the mundane with enchantment, merging fantasy with reality. From the Virgin Birth, Guéron shifts to the concept of “maternal impression”, which posits that a mother’s imagination can influence the physical traits of her unborn child. The idea is signaled by Orsino’s reference to “th’Egyptian thief” (5.1.114). This leads her to analyse female creativity in *Twelfth Night*. There’s Olivia, for instance, grieving for her brother, who uses her imagination to “create” a man for herself based on the Viola/Cesario personal. She ultimately moulds Sebastian into this fantasy. There’s the wax seal, as well, that convinces Malvolio of the letter’s authenticity and allusions to folk beliefs, such as bears licking their cubs into shape.

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1. The more enthusiastic approach to imagination may be found in Edward Reynolds’ *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (written circa 1620; published 1640): “the Imagination is a a Facultie boundlesse, and impatient of any imposed limits, save those which it selfe maketh” (D4v). A more cautious approach was formulated by Thomas Wright, a Jesuit influenced by Augustine, in *The Passions of the Minde*, London: V[alentine] S[jimmes] for W[alter] B[urre], 1601. See CHAP. III “Of Selfe-love, or Amor Proprius”: “Selfe-love vpstarts [...] will in no case obay reason, but allured with the baite of pleasure and sensuality, proclaimeth warres and rebellion against prudence”, p. 24.

One last time, the time of the play, “the willing suspension of disbelief” can hold sway. This universal aesthetic experience allows the audience to navigate the boundaries between reality and imagination<sup>1</sup>. Guéron explores the polysemy of the word “imagination”, showing how the notion ranges in meaning in the play. It can first signify “fancy” (2.5.39-40) – itself conveying the layered sense of “love” and “delusional *fantasy*” (from the Greek *phantasia*, “imagination”). Imagination also denotes “foolish hope” (2.5.160). A third meaning is “mental image” – that is, either a “personified imagination” or “the inner counterpart of a real – albeit absent – person.” (3.4.372-3) As Guéron remarks, “[t]he two types of imagination contrasted in *Twelfth Night* reflect early modern ambivalence about the imagination, along with conflicting understandings of its relation to fantasy.” The ambivalence is rooted in a classical tradition headed by Aristotle and Galen, who “defined imagination as the mind’s ability to transform sense perceptions into inner images.” Guéron also anchors her study in the early modern representation of how imagination was processed, involving three chambers of the brain: common sense, reason and memory. In Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, this allegorical model of the brain, called *Phantastes*, conflates the idea of a “baseless image” and a prophetic perception between fantasy and sense perception (a distinction that was downplayed by Johannes Kepler). Significantly, imagination is related to melancholy, and Spenser conveys the baleful and perverse effect of “oblique Saturne” upon *Phantastes*’s life.

Amongst them all sate he, which wonned there,  
 That hight *Phantastes* by his nature trew;  
 A man of yeares yet fresh, as mote appere,  
 Of swarth complexion, and of crabbed hew,  
 That him full of melancholy did shew;  
 Bent hollow beetle browes, sharpe staring eyes,  
 That mad or foolish seemd: one by his vew  
 Mote deeme him borne with ill disposed skyes,  
 When oblique *Saturne* sate in the house of agonies.

(Book 2, Canto 9, Stanza 52)

1. Suspension of disbelief is a phrase coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The idea is that the reader or audience can willingly set aside scepticism and embrace imaginative engagement with a fictional world. As Coleridge explains, “In this idea originated the plan of the “Lyrical Ballads;” in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” *Biographica Literaria* [1817], 1983, Vol. vii, p. 208.