

RSC

TWELFTH
NIGHT



William
Shakespeare

Edited by Jonathan Bate
and Eric Rasmussen



The RSC Shakespeare

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Introduction by Jonathan Bate



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INTRODUCTION

"HOW HAVE YOU MADE DIVISION OF YOURSELF?"

"What is love?" asks Feste the clown in one of his songs. It is a very old question. One of the most influential answers to it comes from ancient Greece in the imaginary voice of the comic dramatist Aristophanes in Plato's dialogue called the *Symposium*. Love, says Aristophanes, is a quest, a journey in search of our lost other half.

The idea is explained by way of a story about human origins. Originally there were not two sexes but three—male, female, and a mixture of the two called androgynous. Furthermore, the original humans were round, with four hands, four feet, and two faces. Humankind then began to have presumptuous ambitions. We rose up against the Olympian gods. Zeus therefore decided to weaken us by cutting us in two, "like an apple halved for pickling." So now we have two legs, two arms, one face, and the sensation that we are only half ourselves. We yearn and wander, hoping that one day we will find the other half that is literally our soul mate. If the original whole of which you are a half was male, your desire will be for another male (as seems to be the case with Antonio in this play—and Orsino when he falls for "Cesario"?); if female, another female (Olivia desiring the disguised Viola?). These two orientations are what we now call homosexual.

Only if your original was androgynous will you be drawn to the opposite sex, as Viola is to Orsino—and Sir Toby, who has the play's largest role, to Maria. When one of us meets his or her other half, "the actual half of himself," then, the *Symposium* explains, "the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and one will not wish to be out of the other's sight even for a moment: these are the people who pass their whole lives together, and yet they could not explain what they desire of one another."

A myth of this kind is a piece of storytelling that answers to a profound and enduring human belief: that we are somehow incomplete

without love, without a partner. And that in an ideal world we would all have exactly the right partner. We know viscerally that desire and reproduction are forever bound to conjunction and splitting: two people join as one in the act of love; we are made out of a mixture of X and Y chromosomes, of male seed and female egg, of two distinct genetic lines.

If love is a quest for an idealized version of our own selves, it is easy to understand our fascination with twins. They seem to be the living embodiment of the single self split in two; the extreme case of conjoined twins vividly conjures up the *Symposium's* tale of the original human as an unhalved apple. At the same time, a certain anxiety has always been attached to the phenomenon of twins. In ancient Greece it was assumed that a woman who bore twins must have been impregnated by two different men. Some mythical twins represent idealized unity—as with Castor and Pollux, the “gemini” or heavenly twins who symbolize perfect friendship—but others represent opposition or splitting. A nymph in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* has twins fathered by Apollo, god of music and light, and Mercury, god of theft and shady dealings; a pair of girl twins in Edmund Spenser’s epic romance of Shakespeare’s time, *The Faerie Queene*, respectively embody chastity and eroticism; in another of Ovid’s poems, the *Fasti*, a girl called Lara is raped by Mercury and bears the Lares Compitales, who become guardians of the crossroads. These twins become symbolic of how the story of our lives is made of a perpetual sequence of choices, as alternative ways open before us.

Perhaps the most potent of all narratives about twins are those in which a brother and sister are separated soon after birth, meet when they are grown up and fall passionately and unashamedly in love with each other: Siegmund and Sieglinde, as portrayed in Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, might be considered Western culture’s highest exemplar of the motif. Brother–sister incest was sometimes explored in the Renaissance theater—most notably in John Ford’s darkly brilliant *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*—but Shakespeare steered away from this dangerous matter. His way of recreating the *Symposium's* originary androgyne was by cross-dressing Viola as “Cesario,” the lovely boy actor with whom both man and woman, both Orsino and Olivia, fall in love. Puns on “woman’s part” and “small pipe” (meaning both

voice and male sexual organ) leave no doubt that alluring androgyny is implied here:

For they shall yet belie thy happy years,
That say thou art a man: Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious, thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

William and Ann Shakespeare's twins, Judith and Hamnet (alternatively spelled Hamlet), were born in February 1585. Their father's fascination with the dramatic possibilities of double selves is apparent from his early *Comedy of Errors*, where he adapted a classical story about separated male twins and mistaken identity, but complicated it by giving the brothers servants who are also identical twins. Then in the summer of 1596, the eleven-year-old Hamnet died. Shakespeare had lost his only son and Judith would be forever bereft of her second self. Though we should always be wary of inferring authorial autobiography from the words of fictional characters in a play, there is an inescapable poignancy to the images of loss in *Twelfth Night*: when Feste sings of sad cypress ("Come away, death") or Viola alludes to a funeral monument, it is tempting to think of Shakespeare's own lost boy. Olivia mourns a brother, while Viola assumes that hers has been drowned. When she takes a male disguise and "becomes" Cesario, it is as if she impersonates her own opposite-sex twin: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too." She herself explains that the lost Sebastian is the model for her performance of male behavior ("For him I imitate").

The principal source of *Twelfth Night*'s tale of siblings lost and found, and of a cross-dressed servant sent to woo on behalf of a master whom she loves herself, was a novella by Barnaby Riche called "Apollonius and Silla." There the brother and sister who are the originals for Viola and Sebastian are not twins but "the one of them was so like the other in countenance and favour that there was no man able to discern the one from the other by their faces, saving by their apparel, the one being a man, the other a woman." Critics sometimes express puzzlement that Shakespeare makes so much of the resemblance

between Viola and Sebastian, given his presumed personal knowledge that boy-girl twins are not identical. In modern terminology, it is generally accepted that monozygotic fertilization is always same sex (in fact, recent research has shown that in certain rare cases of genetic abnormality it is possible to have boy-girl monozygotic twins). But Riche's original premise reveals the absurdity of this criticism of the plot: siblings don't even have to be twins to look remarkably alike.

One of the greatest challenges for a writer is to imagine what it would be like to be a member of the opposite sex. The particular demand faced by Shakespeare and the boy actors who played his women's parts was to get beyond the age's conventions of proper female behavior, which commended silence and submissiveness. "Cesario" is partly a device to give Viola an active voice, to enable her to break the shackles of passivity. But the lovely combination of quick-witted facility, wonder, and vulnerability with which she slots into her impersonation is something more than a reaction to social convention or codes of propriety. In terms of the play's imaginary world, Viola plays Cesario so effectively because of her prior knowledge and love of Sebastian—this is what allows the otherwise implausible conceit of Olivia's marrying Sebastian in the belief that he is Cesario. In terms of the play's creative origin, it is tempting to speculate that the germ was sown by Shakespeare's observation of the intuitive understanding between his twins as they learned to speak and to play together.

Shakespearean comedy often imagines a journey from the secure womb of the family to a world of shipwreck and isolation, and thence to the bond of marriage. The characters lose themselves to find themselves. Broken families are restored in the same instant that new families are anticipated through the pronouncement of love vows. The climax of *Twelfth Night* is one of the great reunion scenes, as the parted twins are joined:

ORSINO One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not!

...

ANTONIO How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures. . . .

The language is richly suggestive of one made two and two made one, of the cleft apple from the *Symposium's* myth of origins, and of the workings of nature combined with the trick of art (a "perspective" was a distorting glass that created the optical illusion of one picture appearing as two). In a single action, brother and sister find both each other and their object of desire.

And yet. The peculiar poignancy of *Twelfth Night* comes from the sense that there are many losses even in this moment of wonder. Antonio, who has been like a brother and even a lover to Sebastian, is left alone. Malvolio has been humiliated just a little too far. The union of Sir Toby and Maria leaves Sir Andrew isolated—he was adored once, too, but we cannot imagine that he will be again. And Feste is there to sing another sad song of time and change. Above all, Cesario is no more: Orsino closes the dialogue by addressing Viola by her boy-name one final time before she assumes her female garb and becomes his "fancy's queen." But "fancy's queen" is the very language of that shallow courtly love with which Orsino had tried to woo Olivia: the language that Cesario cast off when he/she began speaking in his/her own voice. In the closing moments of the play, Viola does seem to revert to the silence and passivity of orthodox female behavior.

What is going through her imaginary heart at this moment? Even as Sebastian and Orsino are found, Cesario is lost. Could Viola be saying goodbye to the feigned twin into which she has made herself?

The name "Cesario" suggests untimely birth—as in "Cesarean section," a baby "from his mother's womb untimely ripped"—but the character undergoes an untimely death. A few months before starting the comedy of *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare completed his deeply meditated tragedy of *Hamlet*. There are unfathomable cross-currents at work here: in creating and destroying Cesario, perhaps Shakespeare too is saying a goodbye. To his own Hamnet. Viola is diminished when bereaved of her invented second self. Was this Shakespeare's delayed response to poor Judith's desolation on the loss of her twin?

In preparing to direct the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2009, Gregory Doran, himself a twin, noticed a coincidence neglected by nearly all the legion of Shakespeare's biographers and

critics. Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare were baptized on 2 February, the feast of Candlemas (which celebrates the presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem—a fitting moment for the baptism of a treasured first son). And it was on that very same festival day seventeen years later, 2 February, Candlemas, that *Twelfth Night* was performed (the earliest performance of which we have a record) before the law students of the Middle Temple in 1602. Malvolio describes Cesario/Viola as “Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy. As a squash is before ’tis a peascod, or a codling when ’tis almost an apple: ’tis with him in standing water, between boy and man.” On 2 February 1602, Judith was in standing water between girl and woman. By turning Viola into Cesario and allowing Sebastian to return from the devouring sea of death, Shakespeare allowed himself the consoling fantasy of a seventeenth birthday reunion for his own separated twins.

THE FOUNTAIN OF SELF-LOVE

A more immediate occasion for the play’s meditations on love and identity seems to have been Shakespeare’s friendly rivalry with Ben Jonson. Shakespeare had been writing courtship comedies for many years when Jonson came onto the theatrical scene at the end of the 1590s with a more hard-edged satirical vein of drama that tapped into the psychology of “humours”—the idea that aberrant behavior (which is readily comic and worthy of satire) could be attributed to an excess of a particular passion or obsession or to temperamental imbalance (too much choler or melancholy). Jonson seems to have fallen out with Shakespeare’s acting company early in the new century. At this time he wrote a play called *The Fountain of Self-Love, or Cynthia’s Revels* for the Children of Her Majesty’s Chapel, the “boy-actors” company that, to judge from a famous piece of dialogue in *Hamlet*, was perceived by Shakespeare and his fellows as something of a threat to their own prestige. Jonson’s double title was innovative and not a little pretentious: Shakespeare may well have been mocking it with *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (his only double title). In pricking the bubble of inflated language, as he habitually does, Feste may be glancing at Jonson’s verbosity. “I might say ‘element,’ but the

word is over-worn": "element" is a key word in Jonson's humoral lexicon. And again, in response to Antonio's "I prithee vent thy folly somewhere else," Feste says "Vent my folly! He has heard that word of some great man and now applies it to a fool. Vent my folly!" Since *The Fountain of Self-Love* contains such phrases as "vent thy passion" and "vent the Etna of his fires," "some great man" might almost be Jonson.

The fountain in Jonson's play is that of Narcissus, who drowned while trying to kiss his own reflection. Shakespeare's Illyria is also a place of self-love. Yellow-stockinged Malvolio in particular is a Narcissus figure, but there is also a certain vanity about Orsino as he plays the role of the courtly lover. Viola, by contrast, is the opposite of a self-lover. She comes back from drowning and speaks in the voice of the desiring woman whom Narcissus neglected:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house,
Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night,
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me!

As intimated by the "reverberate hills" and the echo effect "'Olivia! O," the "babbling gossip of the air" alludes to the mythological figure of Echo, who pined away as a result of her unrequited love for Narcissus.

Jonsonian comedy is peopled by narcissists. *Twelfth Night* responds with an astonishing exploration of the relationship between knowledge of self and sympathy for others—which we might call "echoing"—in the composition of human identity. "I am not what I am"; "Be that thou know'st thou art"; "I swear I am not that I play"; "Ourselves we do not owe"; "Nothing that is so is so"; "You shall from this time be / Your master's mistress." These paradoxes and promises are the word-music of Illyria that "gives a very echo to the seat / Where love is throned."

MASTER-MISTRESS

The play begins with what sounds very like a fifteen-line unrhymed sonnet, spoken in the voice of an archetypal Renaissance lover, an aficionado of the great Italian poet Petrarch's sonnets in praise of his lovely but unobtainable Laura. This kind of love thrives on unrequitedness. The poet-lover uses imagery of music and the sea, of food, of rising and falling. Such language is typical of the vogue for sonneteering in the 1590s: every self-respecting Elizabethan poet had a sheaf of sonnets to his or her name. Like the conventional sonneteers, Orsino alludes to figures from classical mythology, in his case Ovid's Actaeon hunted down by the dogs of his own desire for lovely but chaste Diana. When Olivia appears, Orsino says that "heaven walks on earth," which is just what an orthodox sonneteer would say. He revels in the "sovereign cruelty" of his stony lady, as all Petrarchan lovers do.

But he is then thrown by the beauty of a lovely boy. The audience, however, knows that Cesario is really Viola, a girl in disguise, and that the body parts so lovingly blazoned by Orsino really are the "woman's part"—except they are not, since (at least the majority of) the audience also knows that Viola is a part written for a boy actor. "Thou dost speak masterly" says Orsino in response to Cesario's eloquence. In so doing, he allows himself to become the master mastered by the servingman. Or rather the boy. Or is that the girl? Or the boy actor?

Orsino claims that a woman's love is of less value than a man's because it is driven solely by "appetite," which may be sated, whereas his capacity for desire is infinite:

There is no woman's sides
 Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
 As love doth give my heart, no woman's heart
 So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.
 Alas, their love may be called appetite,
 No motion of the liver, but the palate,
 That suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt.
 But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
 And can digest as much. . . .

Here he again resembles a sonneteer, whose love is limitless because it is defined by being unrequited. And when he reappears at the end of the play, Orsino duly speaks another of his fifteen-line sonnets, this one ending with the most hackneyed rhyme in the sonneteer's repertoire:

Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
 Like to th'Egyptian thief at point of death,
 Kill what I love? — a savage jealousy
 That sometimes savours nobly. But hear me this:
 Since you to non-regardance cast my faith,
 And that I partly know the instrument
 That screws me from my true place in your favour,
 Live you the marble-breasted tyrant still.
 But this your minion, whom I know you love,
 And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly,
 Him will I tear out of that cruel eye,
 Where he sits crownèd in his master's spite.
 Come, boy, with me. My thoughts are ripe in mischief:
 I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
 To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

But then he discovers that Cesario is really Viola and he is able to resolve the tension—which is also the tension of Shakespeare's sonnets—between love for a lovely boy and desire for a woman:

Your master quits you. And for your service done him,
 So much against the mettle of your sex,
 So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
 And since you called me master for so long,
 Here is my hand. You shall from this time be
 Your master's mistress.

If Orsino is the conventional Elizabethan sonneteer, Olivia is parodist of the genre. The sonneteer customarily enumerates his lady's beautiful body parts, one by one in that device known as the "blazon." Olivia enumerates her own: "I will give out divers schedules of my

beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will: as, *item*, two lips, indifferent red: *item*, two grey eyes, with lids to them: *item*, one neck, one chin and so forth." But then love—for Cesario—catches up on her and she finds herself deploying the blazon in all seriousness: "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit, / Do give thee five-fold blazon." She begins to wish that "the master were the man"—or the man her master. Viola, meanwhile, gains a voice by becoming Cesario. In the sonnet form, the object of desire is just that, an object. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola, desired by both man and woman, is a feeling subject. Vulnerable, and thus forced to become an actor ("I am not that I play"), she soon finds herself in the situation of desiring the man she has been sent to persuade to love someone else—an analogous twist to that of Shakespeare's sonnets, which begin with the speaker persuading the fair youth to marry, then dissolve into the speaker's own love for the youth.

Sonnet 20 startlingly begins "A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted / Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion." There is only one other phrase in the literature of the age that may be readily compared with the coinage "master-mistress": Orsino's "Your master's mistress." Perhaps as good an answer as any to the hoary old question of the identity of the lovely youth to whom the bulk of Shakespeare's sonnets are addressed is "a figure who resembles Cesario."

Twelfth Night is an extraordinary exploration of the permutations of desire or, to use the terminology of an Elizabethan admirer of Shakespeare called Francis Meres, of "the perplexities of love." Both Orsino and Olivia love Viola in her disguise as Cesario. Viola loves, and wins, Orsino, while Olivia has to settle for Sebastian. Orsino insists on continuing to call Viola Cesario even after he knows that she is a woman. Sebastian is puzzled, though grateful, to find himself whisked to the altar by the wealthy and beautiful Olivia, but he cannot have had time to fall in love with her. The person who really loves him is Antonio, who reminds him that for three months, "No interim, not a minute's vacancy, / Both day and night did we keep company." He follows his beloved despite the risk to his own life: "But come what may, I do adore thee so, / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go." Like a sonneteer, he speaks of being spurred on by his

“desire, / More sharp than filed steel” and, again, of paying “devotion” to “his image, which methought did promise / Most venerable worth.” He is rewarded for his devotion by being left alone and melancholy, again in the exact manner of a sonneteer turned away by his frosty mistress. It is very easy to imagine Antonio going away at the end of *Twelfth Night* and writing something on the following lines, addressed to Sebastian:

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow:
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense.
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.

This is actually the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnets (in Sonnet 94) as he finds himself rejected by the fair youth or the lovely boy. In so many of the plays it is Shakespeare's chilly, self-controlled young men—Prince Hal in *Henry IV*, Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well*—who take, who are the lords and owners of their faces. His open hearted women—Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Innogen in *Cymbeline*, Viola above all—are never like this. They *do* do the things they most do show. They move others but they are never stone themselves, unless men turn them to coldness. His women give—of their selves, their wit, and their courage. And that is why his women's parts, even though written for boys, have been great gifts to actresses down the ages.

ABOUT THE TEXT

Shakespeare endures through history. He illuminates later times as well as his own. He helps us to understand the human condition. But he cannot do this without a good text of the plays. Without editions there would be no Shakespeare. That is why every twenty years or so throughout the last three centuries there has been a major new edition of his complete works. One aspect of editing is the process of keeping the texts up to date—modernizing the spelling, punctuation, and typography (though not, of course, the actual words), providing explanatory notes in the light of changing educational practices (a generation ago, most of Shakespeare's classical and biblical allusions could be assumed to be generally understood, but now they can't).

Because Shakespeare did not personally oversee the publication of his plays, with some plays there are major editorial difficulties. Decisions have to be made as to the relative authority of the early printed editions, the pocket format "quartos" published in Shakespeare's lifetime, and the elaborately produced "First Folio" text of 1623, the original "Complete Works" prepared for the press after his death by Shakespeare's fellow actors, the people who knew the plays better than anyone else. *Twelfth Night*, however, exists only in a Folio text that is exceptionally well printed. It is one of the few Shakespeare plays where there is hardly any textual difficulty or controversy.

The following notes highlight various aspects of the editorial process and indicate conventions used in the text of this edition:

Lists of Parts are supplied in the First Folio for only six plays, not including *Twelfth Night*, so the list here is editorially supplied. Capitals indicate that part of the name which is used for speech headings in the script (thus "SIR TOBY Belch, Olivia's kinsman").

Locations are provided by the Folio for only two plays, of which *Twelfth Night* is not one. Eighteenth-century editors, working in an

age of elaborately realistic stage sets, were the first to provide detailed locations ("**another part of the town**"). Given that Shakespeare wrote for a bare stage and often an imprecise sense of place, we have relegated locations to the explanatory notes at the foot of the page, where they are given at the beginning of each scene where the imaginary location is different from the one before. In the case of *Twelfth Night*, the entire action is set in Illyria, on the eastern Adriatic coast, and moves principally between the households of Duke Orsino and Countess Olivia.

Act and Scene Divisions were provided in the Folio in a much more thoroughgoing way than in the Quartos. Sometimes, however, they were erroneous or omitted; corrections and additions supplied by editorial tradition are indicated by square brackets. Five-act division is based on a classical model, and act breaks provided the opportunity to replace the candles in the indoor Blackfriars playhouse which the King's Men used after 1608, but Shakespeare did not necessarily think in terms of a five-part structure of dramatic composition. The Folio convention is that a scene ends when the stage is empty. Nowadays, partly under the influence of film, we tend to consider a scene to be a dramatic unit that ends with either a change of imaginary location or a significant passage of time within the narrative. Shakespeare's fluidity of composition accords well with this convention, so in addition to act and scene numbers we provide a **running scene** count in the right margin at the beginning of each new scene, in the typeface used for editorial directions. Where there is a scene break caused by a momentary bare stage, but the location does not change and extra time does not pass, we use the convention **running scene continues**. There is inevitably a degree of editorial judgment in making such calls, but the system is very valuable in suggesting the pace of the plays.

Speakers' Names are often inconsistent in Folio. We have regularized speech headings, but retained an element of deliberate inconsistency in entry directions, in order to give the flavor of Folio. Thus **FESTE** is always so-called in his speech headings, but is generally "*Clown*" in entry directions.

Verse is indicated by lines that do not run to the right margin and by capitalization of each line. The Folio printers sometimes set verse as prose, and vice versa (either out of misunderstanding or for reasons of space). We have silently corrected in such cases, although in some instances there is ambiguity, in which case we have leaned toward the preservation of Folio layout. Folio sometimes uses contraction (“turnd” rather than “turned”) to indicate whether or not the final “-ed” of a past participle is sounded, an area where there is variation for the sake of the five-beat iambic pentameter rhythm. We use the convention of a grave accent to indicate sounding (thus “turnèd” would be two syllables), but would urge actors not to overstress. In cases where one speaker ends with a verse half line and the next begins with the other half of the pentameter, editors since the late eighteenth century have indented the second line. We have abandoned this convention, since the Folio does not use it, nor did actors’ cues in the Shakespearean theater. An exception is made when the second speaker actively interrupts or completes the first speaker’s sentence.

Spelling is modernized, but older forms are very occasionally maintained where necessary for rhythm or aural effect.

Punctuation in Shakespeare’s time was as much rhetorical as grammatical. “Colon” was originally a term for a unit of thought in an argument. The semicolon was a new unit of punctuation (some of the Quartos lack them altogether). We have modernized punctuation throughout, but have given more weight to Folio punctuation than many editors, since, though not Shakespearean, it reflects the usage of his period. In particular, we have used the colon far more than many editors: it is exceptionally useful as a way of indicating how many Shakespearean speeches unfold clause by clause in a developing argument that gives the illusion of enacting the process of thinking in the moment. We have also kept in mind the origin of punctuation in classical times as a way of assisting the actor and orator: the comma suggests the briefest of pauses for breath, the colon a middling one, and a full stop or period a longer pause. Semicolons, by contrast, belong to an era of punctuation that was only just coming in during Shakespeare’s time and that is coming to an end now: we