

Leh 352: Scenes from the History of Gender:

Lecture on Module 8: Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*, Acts 1, 2 & 3

This lecture is about the characters, actions, and issues raised by Acts 1, 2 and 3, of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which many critics now consider to be his great treatment of gender (superior to his *Romeo and Juliet*). I partially summarize each scene. As you view this lecture's treatment of a scene in *Twelfth Night*, read the scene in the Folger edition or in a modern translation:

<https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/twelfthnight/>. Use this translation when needed (if you read it only, at least you'll get the crucial plot). Watching a performance is also required, for this module and/or the next one, when we finish the play. The best is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Cfn5CSuGX4&t=1659s> (\$10; \$4 to rent); the second best online performance is free but with ads: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VuuPhAp-ig>.

(This lecture takes clips from these performances, which interpret the play.)



Shakespeare (1564 -1616)

The first several scenes introduce us to groups of main characters and to the play's major plot. Note: the best videos version (with Helena Bonham Carter) begins by combining a few scenes of the play. And videos cut words and set the play in different eras and places.

Act 1, Scene 1 of *Twelfth Night*

Duke Orsino has been obsessively in love with Countess Olivia, who rejects him. He doesn't give up. He may have courted Olivia in person but now sends noble servants to court her, but she does not allow them in. Orsino is a prince and Olivia is a princess. The audience is encouraged to believe that there will be a fairytale ending: the prince will marry the princess, and they'll live happily ever after. That does not happen: the play overturns our expectations.

In the first speech of the play, Orsino uses music and food imagery to analyze love. He compares the "spirit of love" to music and food: "If music be the food of love, play on." As the music begins, he explores his feelings of love. Orsino is an interesting construction of masculinity: strong, yet sensitive and interested in discussing emotions, the arts, and romance with Cesario. Orsino is also self-involved and hardheaded. The play may both satirize and praise him. Let's watch a solo performance of Orsino's speech, which would usually begin the play (but here it is performed as a monologue):

Act 1, Scene 2 of *Twelfth Night*

In Act 1, scene 2 (or 1.2), Viola and the ship's captain have been shipwrecked and washed up on the shore of Illyria (an ancient country north of Greece). She fears her twin brother, Sebastian, has drowned. Afterward, to survive as a woman in a foreign land, Viola disguises herself as a young man, taking the name "Cesario," which allows her to get a position in Duke Orsino's court. Viola says in this scene that she'll disguise herself as a eunuch (a castrated man), but in fact this will not be the case, since in her disguise as Cesario, she will act as a man who is not castrated and who is expected to marry in the future. After this scene, no other mention is made of this eunuch idea, which is a puzzle to critics (some think it is a mistake).



Shipwrecked Viola washed up on the shore of Illyria (1.2) from one of the required video versions.

Act 1, Scene 3 of *Twelfth Night*



Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria
(in one movie version)



Feste (in another version)

In Act 1, scene 3 (or 1.3), we are introduced to Countess Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby, who likes to drink, party and live off of Olivia's wealth. ("Sir" means he's a knight, an honor for a service to or for paying off a prince.) Toby will marry Maria (a noble servant woman of Olivia) and parties with Sir Andrew (a foolish knight, who is tricked into believing he has a chance with Olivia, and who buys the alcohol.) Toby, Maria, Andrew, and Feste (the jester/musician who's called "fool" but isn't one) are enemies of the serious estate manager Malvolio, a no-fun Puritan: an extreme Protestant. Should you live for today and enjoy yourself (like Toby, Andrew and Feste)? Or should you be serious, hardworking, and live for tomorrow (perhaps for heaven) like Malvolio? Unlike the main plot, this subplot focuses more on enjoyment versus seriousness than on love (the connection may be that love is said to *non-serious*),



Malvolio (in the latter version)s

Act 1, Scene 4 of *Twelfth Night*

In scene 4 of Act 1, Viola, who has disguised herself as a man named Cesario, has become a noble servant of Duke Orsino. Cesario/Viola also has quickly become Orsino's best friend. Orsino notes how much "Cesario" resembles a young woman, which was thought to be natural for a beautiful young man (note that this is similar to Greco-Roman discourses that we studied). For some reason, Orsino believes that Cesario's beauty and feminine looks will help Cesario to gain entry to Olivia, who has been turning away Orsino's other servants.

Let's now watch the video clip on the next slide to view this action. (Unlike the first video clip, this one is in a theatrical setting. Note that the following video clip, like some others, is taken from YouTube. It should play only a short part of the play, but if you click on the bar at the bottom of the screen, you'll move you out of this slideshow/lecture.)

Act 1, Scene 5 (Part 1)

Countess Olivia appreciates Feste (the court entertainer and musician who's called "fool" because he may make silly jokes, but he really isn't a *fool* in our sense of the word). Olivia was angry when Feste was absent for days. She took him back into her household (where he is a professional *fool*: an entertainer) when he amused her in Act 1, scene 5 with a philosophic joke.

Feste asks Olivia, why does she mourn? Olivia answers, "Good fool, for my brother's death". He asks: Where is her brother? She responds, "in heaven, fool." (She seems pissed and now may call him *fool* in the negative sense.) Feste then asks: Why is she mourning for her brother, if he's in heaven?

Olivia is very amused by Feste's philosophic joke, which asks: Why do Christians mourn for loved ones whom they believe are in heaven?

Malvolio then insults Feste. Let's now watch this.

Act 1, Scene 5 (Part 2)

Later in 1.5, Cesario/Viola gains access to Countess Olivia. Cesario tells Olivia how much Orsino loves her. But Olivia insists that she cannot love Orsino in return. Olivia asks Cesario how *he* (who's really a she) would court her, and Cesario gives a passionate speech: Cesario would build a willow cabin outside of Olivia's gate and call to *his* soul within the house, implying Olivia is *his* soul. Olivia is falling for Cesario, which leads her to ask Cesario about his social status (status was important even in love and was openly discussed, unlike today, when we pretend love has nothing to do with status or money). Cesario says *he* is a gentleman (a nobleman), which reassures Olivia that *he* is not a mere commoner. Olivia tells *him* that she cannot love Orsino, but that Cesario can return to tell her how Orsino "takes it." She offers Cesario money, but *he* is too noble to accept and leaves. Olivia takes a ring from her finger and lies: she tells her head servant Malvolio that Cesario has given her the ring, and to return it to Cesario. Why do you think Olivia fell for Cesario? His/her eloquent speech? Because he/she is not powerful like Orsino, who might control her? Is it his/her beautiful or effeminate looks? Homoeroticism? Something else? A combination of things? Or is desire totally mysterious? Is it irrational but understandable (as Freud suggested)?

Act 2, Scene 1 (2.1) of *Twelfth Night*

In Act 2, scene 1 Sebastian appears. He's the twin brother of Viola whom she has dressed herself to resemble (which will cause funny and interesting misunderstandings). Sebastian has not drowned, as Viola still fears. Instead, he was saved from drowning by Antonio, who has fallen in love with him. Sebastian is thankful and very fond of Antonio (but the exact nature of his feelings is not clear). At the end of the scene, after Sebastian leaves, Antonio tells us that he "adores" Sebastian. On the other side of this courtship, Sebastian likes Antonio, who has saved his life. But it is not clear how homoerotically inclined Sebastian is.

A few critics say Antonio is *gay*, since he speaks and acts lovingly towards Sebastian. The play, however, was written before the words "gay" and "homosexual" were invented and before *homosexuality* was established as a cultural *identity category*. As we shall see, the major characters -- Orsino, Viola, and Olivia -- may not fit into our modern categories. Perhaps, it may be best to say that Antonio is very *homoerotically inclined*. A *sexual inclination* may be clear before the construction of the binary system of *sexual identity categories* (*homosexuality / heterosexuality*), which Foucault argued began in the 1900s. Of course, *homoeroticism* always existed, as did same-sex intercourse.



Antonio and Sebastian

Act 2, Scene 2 (2.2) of *Twelfth Night*

In 2.2, Malvolio brings a ring to Cesario/Viola, which Malvolio thinks Cesario/Viola tried to force on Olivia. This is not true: Olivia gave Malvolio her own ring and said that it came from Orsino (through Cesario). That Olivia is lying leads Cesario/Viola to realize that Olivia has fallen in love with him/her. Now she/he sees that there is a love triangle or what I called a love circle. He/she says: “My master loves her [Olivia] dearly, / And I, poor monster, fond [dote] as much on him [Orsino], / And she [Olivia], mistaken, seems to dote on me. / What will become of this?”

(The video clip on the following slide, #18, covers Act 2, scene 2, and then Act 2, scene 1, that is, it reverse orders the order of the scenes. And it cuts some of these scenes.)

Act 2 Scene 3 (2.3) of *Twelfth Night*

In Act 2, Scene 3, Sir Toby drinks, sings and parties with Sir Andrew and Feste. Andrew reveals that he is a dummy, a real fool -- unlike clever Feste who is only called "fool", because he's a professional entertainer: a court jester and a musician. Malvolio interrupts the party and tells Toby to quiet down and that Countess Olivia, who is the head of the household and who owns the estate, does not like the disorder. Malvolio threatens Toby: If he wishes to remain in Olivia's house, he needs to act orderly. Malvolio is associated with orderliness and industriousness. The great sociologist Max Weber associated this orderly type of person with Protestantism and enterprise in the expression "the Protestant work ethic." (Especially because Protestant lands started the industrial revolution, while Catholic ones were more traditional.) Maria says Malvolio is a "Puritan" (an extreme Protestant) or an opportunist ("time-pleaser"). She has a plan to trick Malvolio and make him a laughing stock (the butt of a practical joke).

Act 2, Scene 4 (2.4) of *Twelfth Night*

In Act 2, scene 4, Orsino is further impressed by Cesario/Viola, who argues that women can love and feel as much as and as deeply as men. The friendship and intimacy Orsino feels for Cesario is developing and deepening (which helps to explain why Orsino marries her when at the play's end he discovers Cesario is really Viola in disguise. And it raises gendered questions about love and friendship.) Previously, Orsino noted how Cesario resembled a woman or girl, but this was considered normal for a young man before he grew a beard. As in the ancient world, during the Renaissance (when Shakespeare lived) young men and adolescent boys were often also considered beautiful, as young women and girls often are. So, there may be nothing strange about people noting Cesario's effeminate looks and voice. Nevertheless, there seems to be homoerotic overtones to this relationship. Renaissance views on gender are different than modern views and different than ancient ones. But there are some similarities between Renaissance views and ancient ones, and other similarities with modern ones. Now let's watch a video clip of the conversation between Orsino and Cesario.

Act 2, Scene 5 (2.5) of *Twelfth Night*

Malvolio (who manages Olivia's estate) finds a letter that he thinks Countess Olivia has written, telling him that she loves him. But the letter is a trick, written by Maria (Olivia's noble serving lady) in order to make Malvolio appear to be a fool, thus entertaining Sir Toby (who will marry Maria for this). The letter contains the memorable line "Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them." (It also contains the nonsense letters MOAI, which Malvolio tries to decipher, but there is no answer to this riddle.) In the end, the letter tricks Malvolio into believing that Countess Olivia loves him and will marry him, thereby thrusting "greatness ... upon" him. In this way, Maria allows Toby to get revenge on Malvolio. And Toby and others are also getting a lot of laughs out of seeing Malvolio made a fool. Let's now watch the practical joke that is played on Malvolio by Maria, and enjoyed by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian (a servant who, like Feste and Sir Toby, has a grudge against Malvolio because his reputation with Countess Olivia was damaged by Malvolio).

Act 3, Scene 1 (3.1) of *Twelfth Night*



Feste and Cesario/Viola

Scene 1 of Act 3 opens with Feste impressing Viola with his ability to play with words. (Feste puns on “lives by” which could mean *makes a living by* or *lives near*). Note that Viola (and Orsino) also could be eloquent. An excellent linguistic ability also is related to love: Olivia may fall for Cesario at least partly because of his(her) impressive speech. Clever *repartee* or conversation often is part of falling in love in romantic plays, novels, and perhaps real life.

Then the scene shifts to the main plot. Olivia confesses her love for Cesario/Viola who rejects her. Cesario/Viola also admits that “I am not what I am”, indicating a central theme of this play that raises various types of issues of identity: sexual and gender identity, social-class identity, and personal identity: the identical siblings may share an identity. (The video clip in the next slide begins at 3.1.96, or line 96, in the Folger edition, near this in other editions, with Olivia saying “Give me your hand sir”.)



Cesario/Viola and Olivia

Act 3, Scene 2 (3.2) of *Twelfth Night*

Another practical joke begins: Sir Andrew and Cesario/Viola are tricked into believing that the other person wishes to duel, and each is convinced that the other person is a skillful and deadly opponent. Andrew is a fool and therefore a coward. Later in this duel (in 3.4), there is a suggestion that because Cesario is actually a woman (Viola), he/she must also be cowardly. Viola says “A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man” (3.4.314-316). The “little thing” that she “lacks of a man” is sly reference to a penis: in other words she does not have “balls”



Duel between Cesario and Andrew

or courage because she's woman. This is intended to be funny, but you might consider it a misogynist joke. The attempt to scare Cesario/Viola into fighting a duel with Andrew seems to make fun of a woman, suggesting that women lack physical courage. Since the duel in these scenes (3.2 and 3.4) is a minor subplot, I will not dwell on it.

Act 3, Scene 3 (3.3) of *Twelfth Night*

Antonio tells Sebastian that he (Antonio) is in danger, because in the past he fought with Duke Orsino's naval forces on the sea. Antonio badly injured a sailor of Orsino's and refused to return what he pirated, unlike Antonio's colleagues in this adventure who repaid Orsino what they took from him. For this reason, Antonio says that he will not accompany Sebastian as he explores Orsino's town. Antonio gives Sebastian his purse (his money) just in case Sebastian sees anything that he may wish to buy, which is another indication of Antonio's love for Sebastian. They plan to meet later at an Inn called the "Elephant". Does this scene indicate Antonio's homoerotic love for Sebastian? And what type of construction of masculinity is Antonio? He is homoerotically inclined and also a powerful man. We might say in this scene and in another one (when he saves Cesario in a duel), Antonio fights "like a man." And yet some might call him "gay". The Renaissance culture did not construct masculinity as we do. It is not clear how exactly they did construct "a real man," so to speak.

Act 3, Scene 4 (3.4) of *Twelfth Night*

Malvolio follows the directions in the letter that he thinks was written by Olivia but which was forged by Maria. In a previous video clip (slide # 23), we have seen that in 2.5 Maria has planted this letter that instructs Malvolio to wear a ridiculous costume (yellow cross garters) and to act in a silly manner (to always smile). He does so, making Olivia believe that he has gone crazy. Not realizing that they are enemies of Malvolio, Olivia tells Toby and Feste to take care of him. In the video clip in the next slide, we see that Maria has made Malvolio look absurd and crazy in front of Countess



Yellow Cross garters

Olivia, who is Malvolio's "boss" and whom Malvolio wishes to marry. This is revenge, a payback, and part of the war between Malvolio, who represents seriousness and order (see slides 9 & 19), and the characters who like to party and live for today (Toby, Feste, Maria). This action takes place in the first half of Act 3, scene 4. (The rest of the scene will be discussed in slide 30, after the video clip.)

Act 3, Scene 4 (3.4) of *Twelfth Night* (Continued)

The previous slide has a video clip for the first part of 3.4 (when Malvolio is made to look foolish and crazy in front of Countess Olivia). The second part of 3.4 involves another practical joke, which began in Act 3, scene 2 (see slide 26): Sir Toby tries to make the cowardly Sir Andrew duel Cesario (who's really Viola). Sir Andrew and Cesario/Viola are made to fear each other and are not able to get out of dueling at first. Eventually, Andrew gives away his horse to try end the quarrel.

The duel is ended when Antonio enters and saves Cesario/Viola. Antonio has mistaken Cesario (who is really Viola) for her/his twin brother Sebastian (whom Antonio loves). Officers arrive and arrest Antonio (for having fought Orsino's navy; see slide 27). Antonio asks Cesario/Viola (whom he thinks he is Sebastian), to return the purse he had given *him*, but in fact he gave the purse to Sebastian. (In jail you needed money.) The officers take away Antonio. Toby realizes the fun can go on and tells Andrew to beat Cesario.



Antonio and the officers