

About This Volume

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This volume, like all the others in the Critical Insights series, is divided into several distinct sections. It begins with several introductory essays (including this one), then presents four contextual essays, then offers ten individual “critical readings,” and finally concludes with various “resources” designed to supply readers with further historical and bibliographical information. The volume next offers biographies of the editor and contributors and finally concludes with a comprehensive index of names, titles, and topics.

The present volume opens with an introductory essay by Nicolas Tredell, a distinguished British scholar, who examines Shakespeare’s comedy *Twelfth Night* in terms of several different kinds of characters who appear within the play. These include women, tricksters, clod-poles, gulls, clowns, and lovers. In particular, Tredell’s essay “explores key elements of humor and pathos in *Twelfth Night* as they emerge in its specific words, actions and situations and feed into its overall themes.” He first focuses on the play’s “wit and wordplay, as exemplified in the initial duel of wit and words between Maria and Feste, which Maria wins” and then goes on “to consider the kinship between the Fool and the Trickster” before finally exploring “pathos in the play as evoked through the figures of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Malvolio, Antonio, and Feste.”

Tredell’s essay is followed by a deliberately brief biography of Shakespeare by the volume editor.

Critical Contexts

The “Critical Contexts” section offers four different *kinds* of essays: one discussing the play in historical terms; a second surveying some of the critical responses the drama has elicited; a third presenting a very specific “critical lens” useful in examining the work; and fourth and finally, an essay comparing and contrasting *Twelfth Night* with

two other dramas by Shakespeare. The “historical” essay in this case is by Christopher Baker, who discusses several different filmed versions of the play, beginning in 1910 and ending in 2013. Baker concludes that the six important films he surveys “demonstrate that *Twelfth Night* is a play of contrasting currents that flow from the church year’s celebration itself, for the event of Twelfth Night is a time of festivity as well as the regrettable finale of Christmas joy. Both moods,” he continues, “are held in tension by the play: Illyria as a land of marriages and reunion as well as dark rooms and shipwrecks.” He thinks the play evokes “the pleasure of the present moment with ‘ginger hot i’ the mouth” (2.3.121-22) over against Feste’s reminder that “Youth’s a stuff will not endure” (2.3.53) as well as “the spirit of *carpe diem* contending with the gloom of *memento mori*. Which of these poles of experience is dominant in the play is,” according to Baker, “a conundrum Shakespeare leaves to his audiences and players to answer.” It is a play of “What You Will,” inviting new and creative replies to its own question: “What country, friends, is this?” (1.2.1).

In a survey of a different sort—this time offering an overview of various distinctive critical readings of the play—Melissa Anderson reports on the contents of a recent collection of essays edited by James Schiffer, which she says offers “a variety of contemporary critical perspectives on *Twelfth Night* and its production history.” She asserts that these essays, “whether delving deep into the history of specific words, philosophies, and knowledge in Shakespeare’s period, or examining recent innovative performances of his play,” all “demonstrate the variety of interpretation and experiences to which the play and its productions lend themselves.” Anderson finds that the “individual essays are organized in a logical order that allows themes such as masculinity or the existence of Illyria in the Renaissance imagination to be followed from one essay to another” but notes that although “the essays were collected in 2011, the theme of transgender identities is conspicuously absent even in essays that examine the work of gender in the play closely.” But she concludes that although the “exploration of productions of the play outside England is confined to Europe,” the “breadth and depth of the

The perennial appeal of *Twelfth Night* is rooted in its full array of the plot devices typical of many of Shakespeare's comedies: confused twins, ring giving, disguising, mistaken identity, a shipwreck in a strange land, a forged letter, the reunion of separated siblings, the verbal antics of a clown, a story ending in marriages. These features can also be mingled with a comic judgment upon the extreme attitudes of certain characters—in this play notably Olivia's pompous steward Malvolio (who, she says, is "sick of ill-will" [1. 5. 93])—figures whose behavior is unsociable enough to demand they undergo a punitive and possibly rehabilitating trick. Orsino, the duke of Illyria (where twins Viola and Sebastian have been shipwrecked and separated) is in his own way as subject to an exaggerated outlook as Malvolio, being enthralled by the excessive passions of love he feels for the countess Olivia who disdains his affection, herself immured in mourning for seven long years over the death of her brother. But Viola quickly punctures her excessive sorrow, saying, "I see you what you are; you are too proud" (1.5.251). Permeating the whole play is Shakespeare's concern for characters who must overcome such skewed outlooks to find and enjoy a healthy love, one that transcends gender or social rank, enabling them to flourish in the company of each other rather than languish in the solitude of their personal egoisms. Unlike his tragedies, in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and his other romantic comedies conflicts are resolved without the theatrical reality of death, and characters are typically returned to more fulfilling, socially harmonious lives in the communal world of the play.

The International Movie Database (IMDb) currently lists 19 filmed versions (not counting animations) of *Twelfth Night* since its first screen appearance in 1910. This amounts to about one filmed adaptation every six years for over a century, a remarkable feat of theatrical longevity that is quite likely to continue. This essay offers

brief critical considerations of a representative variety of these productions (listed by director and year, including films of some staged versions) as a way of demonstrating the vitality of the play and the creativity that numerous actors and directors have brought to their renditions of it.

Eugene Mullin and Charles Kent (1910)

Film historian Robert Hamilton Ball notes that between 1908 and 1911 “almost fifty new productions of Shakespeare were on the screen in America” and Europe (Ball 38), owing to producers’ need for new storylines to film and the fact that Shakespeare was a respected author of works conveniently in the public domain. In 1910, the Vitagraph Company of America released a one-reel, 11-minute short film of *Twelfth Night* (available on YouTube). “Originally of 970 feet it has dwindled to 743; there is no title; parts are missing at the beginning, the ending, and no doubt elsewhere, and the sequences are not always in the proper order” (Ball 56). Co-directed by Eugene Mullin and Charles Kent, the film starred Julia Swayne Gordon as Olivia, Charles Kent as Malvolio, Florence Turner as Viola, and Tefft Johnson as Orsino. Ten title-cards highlight the film, starting with the rescue of Sebastian. The opening shipwreck, in which an actual beached ship is seen offshore as Sebastian (played by Edith Story) is pulled from the surf, was likely filmed “somewhere on the coast of Brooklyn,” perhaps Bayshore (Ball 314). Other cards note the loves of Orsino for Olivia and Olivia for Viola in disguise (Cesario is not named); the forged letter of Maria (Marin Sais), Sir Toby Belch (William Humphrey), and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (James Young); and the angry departure of Malvolio as the true lovers unite at the end. No effort is made to capture any of Shakespeare’s witty dialogue.

The film’s stage flats and props are ornate and lush, with gilded furniture, abundant scenery foliage, and even a glimmering pool in the background of Olivia’s palace. The costuming is rich and Elizabethan to the hilt: doublet and hose plus ruffed collars for Orsino’s courtiers and velvet gowns with gauzy veils for Olivia’s ladies-in-waiting. Florence Turner is a sprightly, energetic Viola who

Twelfth Night: Recent Critical Perspectives

Melissa Anderson

Introduction

Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays, edited by James Schiffer and first published in 2011, is the most recent book-length collection of essays by contemporary Shakespeare scholars devoted to *Twelfth Night*. Part of Routledge's Shakespeare Criticism series, which aims to bring together exceptional works from leading scholars representing multiple critical approaches, the volume explores critical reception and performance history, historical and cultural context, and readings of the play through various critical lenses. The introductory essay by Schiffer sets the stage for the following essays with the history of performance and criticism of this beloved comedy.

Noting that the complicated double plot of the play has influenced interpretations both on the stage and by critics and precludes any "unanimous criticism on the genre of the work as a whole or about how the two strands of action affect and reflect one another" (2), Schiffer mentions the publication history, sources, and first performances before delving into four hundred years of criticism and performance. Early appreciation of Malvolio's comic downfall led to virtual neglect of the play from critics and companies when tastes ran more to Shakespeare's tragedies than to his comedies. Nineteenth-century interpretations of the play, influenced by the critical trends of the day, explored the more tragic aspects of the primary characters while performances often emphasized song and spectacle. Twentieth-century interpretations focused on that noted duality of the play while also recognizing the significance of the ensemble on the play's impact. Character studies have been common in the critical history of the work, and debates over the ending persist throughout the history of the play's reception. Postmodern critics have employed psychoanalytic, new historicist, and post-structuralist criticism in their interpretations and have suggested readings that recognize same-sex desire and the influence of class.

Malvolio Deceived: Early Illustrations of the Letter and Stocking Scenes in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

Jordan Bailey

Twelfth Night has long been one of the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies, and the episode in which Malvolio, the vain and self-important steward, is tricked into thinking that Countess Olivia, his employer, has fallen in love with him, has long been one of the most popular moments in the play. The same is true of the subsequent scene in which Malvolio appears before the countess, tricked out in cross-gartered yellow stockings (a style and color she detests) and trying to court her when she is still in mourning for her dead brother. Both the letter scene and the yellow-stockings episode provide plenty of opportunities for laughter, especially when they are performed on stage rather than merely read. Thus, it is not surprising that these scenes were often illustrated in various editions of Shakespeare published in the nineteenth-century, an era that produced some of the most important illustrated editions of his works.¹

The first of these two episodes occurs in act 2, scene 5 of the play. By this point in the drama, Malvolio has aroused the combined wrath of Maria (one of the countess's servants), Sir Toby Belch (the countess's ne'er-do-well drunken uncle), and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (the hapless, ridiculous knight who hopes to marry the countess). Maria, who was especially offended by Malvolio's recent high-handed treatment of her and the two knights, has concocted a mysterious love letter, written in a convincing imitation of the countess's hand and professing the countess's supposed infatuation with Malvolio. Maria leaves the letter in a place where Malvolio is sure to find it, and she plants Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian (a friend of theirs who also has reason to despise Malvolio) in a garden so they can watch the unsuspecting steward read the letter and interpret its hidden meanings. Vain as he is, he of course elaborately interprets it as a clear indication that the countess is smitten with him. On stage, this episode usually arouses great laughs. Nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century illustra-

tors did their best to convey the comedy of the scene through their drawings. Some of these drawings are well known and frequently reproduced. Others, like the ones examined here, are not.

The 1904 Cassell “Leopold” Edition

The “Leopold” edition published in 1904 by Cassell and Company, for instance, includes a black-and-white drawing of this episode that clearly features all four main characters—Malvolio, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian. Malvolio is on the right side of the drawing, while the trio of male witnesses is on the left, hidden among some tall shrubs. Malvolio has no idea he is being watched and listened to. He holds the letter in his right hand and seems to be gesturing with his left (see fig. 1). A quotation from the play, printed directly be-



“By my life, this is my lady’s hand” Figure 1. From the 1904 Cassell “Leopold” edition.

Chronology of William Shakespeare's Life

1564 William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April, 1564. He is baptized in the local church on April 26. His date of birth is usually assumed to have been April 23. His parents are John and Mary Shakespeare. John is a successful glove-maker who, in the years preceding and following William's birth, is a respected member of the local government, although later he suffers financial and social reversals. In addition to giving birth to William, Mary bears seven other children. William almost certainly attends the local grammar school.

1582 William marries Anne Hathaway, daughter of a prominent local farmer. Anne is three months pregnant at the time of the wedding and eight years older than William. In 1583, Anne gives birth to a daughter (Susanna). In 1585, the couple has twins (Hamnet and Judith). Hamnet dies in 1596.

1585–92 Details of Shakespeare's life during this period are unclear and have been the subject of much speculation. One legend (now widely doubted) suggests that he had to leave Stratford to escape the law after he allegedly poached deer from the property of a prominent local landowner. Other writers have speculated that during his time in Stratford Shakespeare may have worked for a lawyer and/or may have taught school. Some recent scholars have suggested that during part of this period Shakespeare may have been living, teaching, and (as an amateur) acting while part of the household of a prominent Catholic family in Lancashire. Numerous other theories abound concerning these "lost years." The idea that Shakespeare taught in some capacity seems plausible to many.

1592 An allusion this year by the London writer Robert Greene seems to mock Shakespeare as an "Upstart Crow" and implies that by this time Shakespeare was living in London, acting in plays, and writing blank verse, presumably for