TWELFTH NIGHT

ON STAGE

Although *Twelfth Night* has almost always been popular on stage, many theatrical producers in past years have treated the play as though its stage popularity had to be achieved in defiance of the text rather than through it. Not until recently have they trusted the play to conjure up its own sense of magic and imagination; too often they have relied, counterproductively, on excessively detailed realism instead of theatrical evocation. This literalized and revisionistic approach dominated much of the play's stage history during the Restoration and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, despite evidence that *Twelfth Night* (presumably as Shakespeare wrote it) was very popular in his own day and for some time after. Following his death the play was staged at court in 1618 and 1622, and, along with *Much Ado About Nothing*, it was identified by the poet Leonard Digges in 1640 as still among Shakespeare's most popular dramas. Digges suggested one important reason for this popularity when he commented that crowds were filling the theater "To hear *Malvolio*, that cross-gartered gull." Digges's observation also points to a distortion that would occur in subsequent productions of *Twelfth Night*: the play would become a vehicle for lead actors and actresses in a few key roles at the expense of the play as a whole. Revision of this sort was common in the Restoration and eighteenth century, whereas scenic overemphasis came to be a predictable feature of much nineteenth-century production.

The diarist Samuel Pepys saw a version of *Twelfth Night* on three occasions in the 1660s and thought it "a silly play." What Pepys objected to can perhaps be surmised from Charles

Burnaby's adaptation in 1703, called *Love Betrayed, or the Agreeable Disappointment*, in which Burnaby undertook to "improve" the play with the kind of symmetry and neoclassical unity that he seemingly felt it lacked. In this version, produced at the theater in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, Malvolio, having been merged with the character of Sir Andrew, is tricked into fighting an abortive comic duel with the disguised Viola, whom he believes to be his rival for the love of Olivia. Maria becomes two characters, one an old servant in love with Sir Toby and the other a confidante of Olivia. Sebastian is provided with a wisecracking servant. The characters are all renamed, and only some fifty-eight lines of Shakespeare's text (including "If music be the food of love, play on") remain intact. The major effect of Burnaby's revision is to reduce the number of subplots and to bring to the foreground the opposition of Malvolio and Viola. Malvolio is no longer the focus of a separate comic plot but at the center of the play, where, audiences obviously felt, he belonged.

Something more like Shakespeare's original of *Twelfth Night* did return in 1741, to the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, evidently at the actor Charles Macklin's instigation (and with Macklin as Malvolio), and enjoyed during the next century a number of popular runs. John Henderson and John Philip Kemble, among others, took the part of Malvolio, while Hannah Pritchard, Peg Woffington, Dorothea Jordan (paired with her brother, George Bland, as Sebastian), Sarah Siddons, and Helen Faucit played Viola. Feste's concluding song, customarily absent throughout the eighteenth century, was finally restored in 1799. Nevertheless, adaptation continued to be a major factor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions of the play. Songs were frequently added. Frederic Reynolds produced an operatic version in 1820 at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, with an overture compiled from various composers including Thomas Morley, Thomas Ravenscroft, and Mozart. "Full many a glorious morning" was introduced from the sonnets, "Even as the sun" from *Venus and Adonis*, "Orpheus with his lute" from *Henry VIII*, and "Come unto these yellow sands" from *The Tempest*, all set off

by elegant scenery in what was supposed to be the style of the architect and set designer Inigo Jones.

Even when Shakespeare's text was treated with more respect, the emphasis on lead actors and actresses remained an unavoidable feature of nineteenth-century production. At the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1846, Charlotte and Susan Cushman, famous for their epicene *Romeo and Juliet*, starred as Viola and Olivia and made their pairing the center of the theatrical experience. When Samuel Phelps produced the play at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1848 and again in 1857, he gave prominence to his own portrayal of Malvolio as a grave and self-important Spanish grandee. In 1849, at the Theatre Royal, Marylebone, Cora Mowatt and Fanny Vining (who, like the Cushmans, had done an epicene *Romeo and Juliet*) emulated their predecessors by pairing themselves in the roles of Olivia and Viola.

Twelfth Night does not call for the spectacular effects of battle sieges and royal pageantry that gave such impressive scope to the epic productions of the history plays by Charles Kean and others (as, for example, in Kean's *King John*), but theater managers who were insistent on visual opulence soon found a way to dress *Twelfth Night* in the splendor they wished to emphasize. Kean opened at the Princess's Theatre in 1850 with *Twelfth Night* and performed it some forty times, bestowing upon the play every realistic scenic device known to nineteenth-century theater. Henry Irving chose for his 1884 production, at the Lyceum Theatre, London, a Venetian setting in the age of Queen Elizabeth. Orsino's palace and Olivia's scarcely less palatial villa were sumptuously Palladian in decor, while the art of landscape gardening, as a contemporary observer marveled, appeared "to have reached a very high pitch of excellence." Olivia's house featured an adjoining cloister. No less impressive were the depictions of the seacoast, the courtyard and terrace of Olivia's house, the road near Olivia's house, and the dungeon for Malvolio. Ellen Terry played a spritely Viola opposite Irving's sentimental Malvolio, and although the

performance was not a success, it was not for lack of handsome scene design.

In 1894, not to be outdone, producer Augustin Daly, at his Daly's Theatre in London, began with an exciting storm scene worthy of *The Tempest*. Unexpectedly, Daly showed his audiences the landing of Sebastian and Antonio rather than that of Viola and the Captain, which allowed the production's star, Ada Rehan (Viola), to enter more impressively in the next scene. The rearrangement also made possible the employment of an elaborate set for the Duke's palace. So elaborate was this set that, in order to keep it in use for a continuous stretch of dramatic action, Daly ran together Act 1, scene 1 (showing Orsino's love melancholy), with Act 1, scene 4 (in which Viola as Cesario is dispatched to Olivia), before making the cumbersome shift to Olivia's house. Once there, Daly devised another long composite scene, in which Toby and Andrew carouse (1.3), Olivia receives Viola-Cesario (1.5), and Malvolio returns the ring to Viola-Cesario (2.2). Music was prominent throughout the production. During its first scene, for instance, on the seacoast after the storm happy villagers sang "Come unto these yellow sands" from *The Tempest*; other songs were introduced into the scenes at Olivia's house. Moonlight beamed onto the set as Orsino's minstrels sang "Who is Olivia?" (taken from "Who is Sylvia?" in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) set to music by Franz Schubert. Rehan, the scenery, and the music made the play a great success; it ran for 119 performances.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *Twelfth Night*, at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1901, achieved a kind of pinnacle in the verisimilar staging of *Twelfth Night*. His set for Olivia's house featured a terrace that extended to the extreme back of the stage and a garden complete with real grass, fountains, pathways, and descending steps. It was, according to an eyewitness report, literally an Italian garden, going beyond anything hitherto seen in beauty and realistic illusion. As in Daly's production, the set was so nearly immovable that scenes had to be rearranged extensively, even to the point of staging in Olivia's garden some dramatic material that properly belonged at Orsino's court or elsewhere. Tree also

focused, in traditional nineteenth-century fashion, on the leading characters, playing Malvolio himself to the Viola of Lily Brayton.

Nonetheless, a major new direction was at hand. Already, in 1895, *Twelfth Night* had become the first of the revivals by actor-manager William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society, who staged it once at Burlington Hall, Savile Row, and again at St. George's Hall. Featuring Elizabethan costumes, a stage bare of scenery, and a single ten-minute intermission, the production tried to approximate the conditions of Shakespeare's own theater. Two years later, in a production in the Hall of the Middle Temple (one of the Inns of Court, where young men studied law in London), Poel sought to produce the play as it might have been done at Shakespeare's Blackfriars Theatre. A table and chair were the only props on the raised platform stage, which was surrounded by halberdiers (guards); costumes were based on the dress of the Elizabethan court, and the songs were, wherever possible, given their original settings and played on sixteenth-century instruments.

In the spirit of Poel's reforms, the twentieth century has generally turned against the excesses of nineteenth-century verisimilar staging. The anti-illusionism implicit in Poel's attempts to restore Elizabethan staging practices was successfully translated into a more modern idiom in a swift-moving ensemble production directed by Harley Granville-Barker at London's Savoy Theatre in 1912, and then in a performance on an apron stage (i.e., a stage thrust out in front of the proscenium) directed by Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1913, which was revived in 1916 with an uncut text. Since then the play has had its share of new settings and adaptations, including a rock musical version called *Your Own Thing* (1968), but on the whole, of all Shakespeare's comedies *Twelfth Night* seems the least in need of being made "relevant." Allowed to speak for itself, the play has had memorable theatrical triumphs. Tyrone Guthrie's London production at the Old Vic in 1937 successfully doubled Jessica Tandy as Viola and Sebastian and had Laurence Olivier as Toby and Alec Guinness as Andrew Aguecheek. In

1954 the play again graced the Old Vic, directed by Denis Carey, with Claire Bloom as an energetic, almost ferocious Viola and Richard Burton as Toby. A year later, John Gielgud directed Vivien Leigh as Viola and Olivier as Malvolio at Stratford-upon-Avon. John Barton's 1969 Stratford-upon-Avon production was movingly autumnal, dominated by Emrys James's melancholy Feste.

Elizabethan costuming, which was used in Barton's production, seems admirably suited to the play's winsome blend of satire and foolery about love; on stage the play seems quintessentially of Shakespeare's age and yet timeless. It can fully employ the talents of repertory companies expert in ensemble work and willing to distribute the acting honors beyond the roles of Viola, Toby, and Feste. It is a favorite of amateurs, and acts well out-of-doors. It has become a staple of summer festivals at Stratford, in Canada, at Ashland, in Oregon, and many others, where a sturdy and rollicking performance can be counted on to pack the house. New interpretation is usually a matter not of a wholly new or of an anachronistic setting but of nuance, as in the 1969 Barton production when Malvolio, played by Donald Sinden, coming onstage in Act 3, scene 4, stopped to correct the sundial by consulting his pocket watch; the gratuitous officiousness of the gesture was comically eloquent.

The play's wonderful mix of easy physical comedy and affecting emotional complexity has made it a continuing favorite on the stage. Indeed, perhaps surprisingly, it is the play most performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company over the last fifty years. A wonderful production for them in 1987, directed by Bill Alexander, explored the pathos behind the comedy, with Antony Sher's Malvolio actually driven mad by Maria's trick and Harriet Walter's Viola poignant in her vulnerability. Set on a Greek island, with whitewashed houses and colorful native costumes, this was a rich ensemble production in which every actor revealed the combination of frailty and folly that make up the character. David Bradley's mournful Andrew Aguecheek was regularly singled out in these terms for his performance in which, as *The Guardian* said, he looked "like a spaniel who has been out too long in the rain." In a revealing contrast, in 1998 the play was staged at New York's Lincoln Center as a star vehicle, with Helen Hunt as Viola, Kyra Sedgwick as Olivia, and Paul Rudd as Orsino. Predictably, the play never fully came together; reviewers were unified in their praise of Bob Crowley's watery set but divided about which, if any, star fulfilled the production's promise. It was the play's comic plot that best succeeded on stage, with Philip Bosco's Malvolio, Brian Murray's Sir Toby, Max Wright's Andrew Aguecheek, and Amy Hill's Maria taking (and giving) exceptional pleasure in their plotting while providing a touching glimpse of the sadness of their own situations.

Apron, or thrust, stages and quick-paced productions of recent years have enabled actors to stage *Twelfth Night* much as it must have been performed in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The scene of eavesdropping on Malvolio (2.5), for instance, requires only that the actors playing Sir Toby and his below-stairs companions hide themselves where their antics can be visible to spectators during the reading of the letter; on Shakespeare's stage, the pillars would have been especially convenient for such a purpose. When they performed the play at Middle Temple Hall, in February of 1602, as John Manningham's diary tells us, the actors would have had the magnificent screen with its two arched doorways and other architectural features in which to hide from Malvolio or, later, for use as a makeshift prison in which to incarcerate him.

Indeed in February 2002, the Globe Theatre Company recreated that first recorded performance at the Middle Temple (and then restaged it that summer at the Globe). Using the Great Hall, the company mounted an all-male version of the play, directed by Tim Carroll, with Eddie Redmayne as Viola, Mark Rylance as Olivia, Peter Hamilton Dyer as Feste, Oliver Cotton as Malvolio, Ian Talbot as Sir Toby Belch, and Terence Maynard as Orsino. But although the performance successfully demonstrated the flexibility of the playing space, it also raised some doubts about the experiment itself. As is often the case

with Globe productions, the performance veered between an impressive effort to explore Shakespeare's original theatrical conditions and a kind of Disney World kitsch. Upon arrival, each spectator was presented with a cardboard box containing Elizabethan snacks: ginger and prunes on a stick, an "aniseed cracknel," and a "manchet" (a bread roll of some sort). The audience was then directed toward the great hall itself, where Elizabethan music was playing and mulled wine was served. While these references to the Elizabethan past were interesting, in fact they worked to undo the very illusion they were meant to create, for, whatever the experience at the Middle Temple was for Elizabethans, it was not a self-conscious anachronism. The production itself impressively exploited the theatrical potential of the hall, but only Redmayne's Viola and Rylance's Olivia seemed dramatically worthy of the experiment. The two performances were arranged in counterpoint: Redmayne's unselfconscious and restrained, Rylance's exaggerated and parodic, suggesting that Olivia's femininity was no less constructed than Viola's male disguise.

One innovation, however, worked especially well, and clarified something essential about the play. On the way into the hall, the audience had to pass through the dressing room, where it saw actors readying themselves for the night's performance, applying their makeup and lacing their Elizabethan costumes. From the moment you entered the theater, then, you were in a world of illusion. At every level the play resists the literalization of Illyria. The world in which *Twelfth Night* is located is, or should be, one of theatrical imagination. Illyria is above all a place of the artist's creation, his play world, his theater. *Twelfth Night* frequently calls attention to its self-reflexive quality, as when Fabian says of Malvolio's comic discomfiture, "If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" (3.4.129–30). Shakespeare's play revels in this paradox of illusion, making improbable fiction wholly convincing and defying the more ordinary conventions by which dramatic art is made to appear "real."

TWELFTH NIGHT ON SCREEN

Shakespeare could not, of course, have imagined a world in which people would see performances of his plays projected onto large or small screens rather than acted live in theaters, but that has become the case. In the more than one hundred years since the first film of a Shakespeare play was made (in 1899, an excerpt from Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of *King John*), the screen has become Shakespeare's proper medium no less than the stage or the printed page. If Shakespeare's works are undisputedly literary classics and staples of our theatrical repertories, they have also inescapably become a part of the modern age's love affair with film. In a movie theater, on a television screen, or on a DVD player, Shakespeare's plays live for us, and thereby reach audiences much greater than those that fill our theaters.

It is, however, a development not always welcomed. Some critics complain that Shakespeare on screen is different from (and worse than) Shakespeare in the theater. Certainly it is a distinct experience to see a play in a darkened movie theater with actors larger than life. It is different, too, to see it on a television screen with actors smaller than they are in life, and where the experience of play watching is inevitably more private than in any theater.

But there are obvious advantages as well. On screen, performances are preserved and allowed easily to circulate. If films of Shakespeare may sometimes lack the exhilarating provisionality of live theater, they gain the not insignificant benefit of easy accessibility. In a town without a theater company one can see a Shakespeare play virtually at will. Some newly filmed