

# ‘Anything that’s mended is but patched’

## —— Fortune and Forbearance in Shakespeare’s

### *Twelfth Night* ——

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[...] blest are those  
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled  
That they are not a pipe for fortune’s finger  
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart’s core [...].<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Shipwrecks and Storms

Both *Twelfth Night* and Dante’s *Commedia* begin with a shipwreck, and I would like to use this apparently inconsequential observation to draw connections of image and theme between these two great works of European literature, separated by almost three centuries.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the shipwreck, whether literal or metaphorical, occurs before the story proper gets under way, and is in fact its precondition, the crisis that engenders a tale which is in essence a survivor narrative. Or at least this is how things look before we learn that Viola was not the only twin who swam to shore, any more than Dante is the only soul who might hope for redemption.

Shakespeare’s play begins in a state of inertia from which we are only released in the second scene by Viola’s escape from drowning. The cloying sentiment of Orsino’s court is banished by the invigorating presence of the play’s heroine. The suggestion that he set out on a hunting expedition only prompts Orsino to further indulge his emotions by imagining himself

an Actaeon to Olivia's Diana. Any possibility of action here is stifled in an atmosphere of languorous melancholy, and the love-sick Duke of Illyria can resolve to move no further afield than the 'sweet beds of flowers [...] canopied with bowers' (I, i, 40–41). Where Orsino and his unrequiting love interest, Olivia, are characterized by their aversions, as they refuse either to hunt or be wooed, Viola, already the victim of one violent event, initiates the play's action. Her question about her whereabouts—'What country, friends, is this? (I, ii, 1)—implies that in the normal course of events, they would not have found themselves on the shore of Illyria. There is, after all, a war going on, for all that Orsino displays none of the urgency one might expect of a commander-in-chief at such a time. Without the wreck of Viola's ship, then, there would be no reason for what will prove to be her highly disruptive presence in the ducal court of Illyria. The storm is the primal genetic event in the wake of which Viola's tale unfolds.

Many people who have never read Dante's *Commedia* will know nonetheless that its opening lines recount how the protagonist comes to his senses to find himself lost in a dark wood. This is the *in medias res* opening of the epic journey. Less familiar, however, is the subsequent metaphor of disorientation that follows, where Dante imagines himself to be like a man who has escaped drowning and now turns back to gaze at the sea that almost claimed his life.

E come quei che con lena affannata,  
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,  
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,  
così l'anima mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,  
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo  
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.<sup>3</sup>

Like one who with laboured breath,  
emerging from the sea onto the shore,  
turns to the perilous waters and stares,  
so my mind, still in flight,  
turned back to gaze on the strait  
never before traversed by a living soul.<sup>4</sup>

(*Inferno* I, 22–27)

There is no explicit mention here of a shipwreck, or even of a storm, but it is hard to imagine how, without some such sequence of events, the man on the beach would have been compelled to swim for his life. In Dante's day, as much as in Shakespeare's, sea voyages were perilous. And because storms at sea were both unpredictable and likely to have life-changing effects they became, in the literary imagination, to be associated with fate, and particularly with dramatic shifts in fortune.

Another of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest*, also begins with a shipwreck, even if the storm, which in this instance occurs on stage, is a work of artifice, an illusion engineered by a

magician. Conventionally an engine of fortune, the storm here is a device wielded with intention in order to achieve specific ends, to restore the fortunes of Prospero and his daughter. The threat of nautical catastrophe hangs over a third of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice*. Antonio's ability to repay the three thousand ducats he owes Shylock depends on whether his ships return safely to port, and the plot pivots on the misapprehension that 'not one vessel' of the fleet has managed to 'scape the dreadful touch / Of merchant-marring rocks' (III, ii, 275–276). Again, the storm is the principal agent of the protagonist's destiny, a symbol of the frailty of human beings in the face of events beyond their control.<sup>5</sup>

In the light of all this it seems interesting that in Latin and old Italian the noun 'fortuna' could signify 'storm'. A striking example is to be found in the prophecy of earthly renewal which concludes the twenty-seventh canto of the *Paradiso*.

Ma prima che gennaio tutto si sverni  
 per la centesima ch'è là giù negletta,  
 raggeran sì questi cerchi superni  
 che la fortuna che tanta s'aspetta,  
 le poppe volgerà u' son le prore,  
 sì che la classe correrà diretta;  
 e vero frutto verrà dopo'l fiore.

But before all of January is unwintered,  
 due to the hundredth part of a day ignored below,  
 the influence of these lofty spheres will so ray down,  
 that the long-awaited storm  
 will spin sterns around to where prows are now,  
 so the fleet will sail a straight course;  
 and true fruit will follow the flower.

(*Paradiso* XXVII, 142–147)

Beatrice is alluding here to the well-known miscalculation whereby the Julian calendar added some twelve minutes to the year, with the consequence that the beginning of the year advanced by about one day every century, and would, without the Gregorian reform, eventually have pushed January into the spring. It is unclear whether the rhetorical effect intended is one of litotes, of an ironical understatement, implying that the cataclysmic moment of redress is imminent, or whether, in a more temperate tone, Beatrice wishes rather simply to aver that within the grand scheme of history the world in which humanity has been led astray will one day be set to rights. The word 'fortuna' has been read as 'good fortune'. Yet, as at least one critic has noted, in the context of the nautical metaphor which immediately follows, the meteorological interpretation seems the most plausible.<sup>6</sup> The storm, as it violently turns ships around, is a metaphor for the convulsions visited upon humanity by fortune. The notion of turning, though not perhaps one we would readily associate with a storm, is crucial and was,

of course, the central idea at work in the traditional image of Fortune's wheel. What makes the storm at sea so potent a metaphor is that it represents an overwhelming and unpredictable force, upending the world.

## 2. Fortune and Character

The most sustained treatment of Fortune in either of the poets under consideration is a passage from the seventh canto of the *Inferno*. Dante has just witnessed the punishment suffered by the avaricious and the prodigal, and when Virgil refers in passing to 'i ben che son commessi a la fortuna' (line 62) ('worldly goods entrusted to fortune'), the pilgrim invites him to expand:

Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende,  
fece li cieli e diè lor chi conduce  
sì, ch'ogne parte ad ogne parte splende,  
distribuendo igualmente la luce.  
Similmente a li splendor mondani  
ordinò general ministra e duce  
che permutasse a tempo li ben vani  
di gente in gente e d'uno in altro sangue,  
oltre la difension d'i senni umani;  
per ch'una gente impera e l'altra langue,  
seguendo lo giudicio di costei,  
che è occulto come in erba l'angue.

Vostro saver non ha contasto a lei:  
questa provvede, giudica, e persegue  
suo regno come il loro li altri dèi.

Le sue permutazion non hanno triegue:  
necessità la fa esser veloce;  
sì spesso vien chi vicenda consegue.

He whose wisdom transcends all,  
made the heavens and gave to each a guide  
so that every region shone over every other  
with evenly distributed light.

Similarly for earthly splendors  
he appointed a universal minister and ruler  
to impose timely redistributions of material goods  
from one race to another and from clan to clan  
against which no human cunning could shield;  
so that one nation holds sway while others are in decline,  
according to her judgment  
which lies hidden from view like a snake in the grass.

Your minds are no match for her:  
she foresees, judges and acts,  
administering her realm as the other gods theirs.  
She rings her changes relentlessly:

necessity makes her actions swift;  
so we often see men rise or fall.

(*Inferno* VII, 73–90)

The changes wrought by Fortune, then, are ‘occult’ in the sense that they are inscrutable, impenetrable to human intellects.<sup>7</sup> A similar understanding lies behind the opening scene of *The Tempest*, where the exasperated Boatswain cries, ‘What cares these roarers for the name of king?’ (I, i, 14), a profoundly rational observation that the storm pays scant regard to the privileges of social class. Ariel’s tempest is a leveler, reducing all men to equals in the face of its brute power, and in its aftermath, the play will toy with anarchy as a prince is enslaved and a servant launches a murderous bid to become king. Fortune’s principal role, as she turns her wheel, is to produce change, to elevate some and to demote others. Our status as ranked social beings lies wholly in her hands.<sup>8</sup> And clearly, this is how Malvolio sees things at the centre of *Twelfth Night*. ‘’Tis but fortune, all is fortune’ (II, v, 17), he muses, so establishing for the audience his vulnerability with regard to the deception about to be played upon him.

The theme of Fortune furnishes the gulling episode with its metaphysical backcloth. In his imagined conversation with Sir Toby, Malvolio’s fantasy is predicated on an implausibly propitious turn of the wheel: ‘my fortunes having cast me on your niece give me this prerogative of speech’ (lines 53–54).<sup>9</sup> To this must be added the forged letter’s references to the stars (‘In my stars I am above thee’) and the Fates (‘Thy Fates open their hands’), and to the pseudo-Olivia’s identification of herself as ‘The Fortunate-Unhappy’ (106–117). Still more striking is Malvolio’s jubilant and repeated recognition of his debt to a benign providence: ‘I thank my stars [...] Jove and my stars be praised!’ (124–126). It is a sentiment reiterated in the scene which functions as the sequel to that in the garden, where, in soliloquy again, Malvolio repeats himself within the space of a few lines, commenting, ‘but it is Jove’s doing, and Jove make me thankful. [...] Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked’ (III, iv, 58–64). Yet, of course, it is precisely in this faith in the permutability of human destinies that his downfall lies, and the play strives to show us that there are alternatives to Malvolio’s deference to Fortune, and not only through the mockery to which Olivia’s steward is subjected at the hands of Toby and Maria.

The word ‘fortune’, it seems opportune to note here, can signify both the divine agency that constantly redistributes material wealth and also the riches themselves, as when we say, for instance, that something is ‘worth a fortune’. Of course, the object of Fortune’s manipulations might also be more broadly defined to include attributes such as talents, good health or life itself. But it is chiefly social status, and the money and property that are its trappings, that are most often associated with the changes wrought by the goddess. Thus, Orsino can say,

Tell her my love, more noble than the world,

Prizes not quantity of dirty lands.  
The parts that fortune hath bestowed upon her  
Tell her, I hold as giddily as fortune.  
But 'tis that miracle and queen of gems  
That nature pranks her in attracts my soul.

(II, iv, 81–86)

What Fortune bestows is wealth. Beauty, on the other hand, is a gift of Nature. What Malvolio desires of fortune is the social status that marriage to Olivia would confer. And Orsino's 'giddy' indicates how unpredictable changes in status can be. When Viola reveals to Olivia that her 'parentage' is 'Above my fortunes' (I, v, 210–211, and repeated by Olivia in her soliloquy at 223–224), the simple preposition implies an image of the wheel that has carried her downwards from the more elevated position she once enjoyed.

The other crucial notion to emerge from the treatment of the Fortune theme in the episode of the forged letter is to be found in the clause that has become proverbial: 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em' (II, v, 107–108). Besides confirming how well Maria has grasped the object of Malvolio's desire, these words also offer a tripartite definition of the different ways in which Fortune can impinge upon our lives. The verb 'thrust' corresponds to the 'cast' of line 53 that expressed Malvolio's sense of his own passivity in being subject to a force beyond his control. On the other hand, the author of the letter also allows that social status can be actively 'achieved', that we can be the agents of our own fortune. It is to such a conviction that Sir Toby appeals in his efforts to goad Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario to a duel: 'build me thy fortunes upon the basis of valour' (III, ii, 22).

That Fortune is to be one of Shakespeare's concerns in the play is hinted at early on with the entrance of Viola as a victim of shipwreck apparently spared the fate of her less fortunate brother. Her hope that Sebastian has survived the storm—'Perchance he is not drowned'—meets with this sobering, but not intentionally unkind, rejoinder from the Captain: 'It is perchance that you yourself were saved'. Clearly, the phlegmatic sailor would prefer that Viola focused on her own good fortune and tried to come to terms with the fact that there is generally only so much good luck to go round. By echoing Viola's 'perchance', he implies that by the law of probability her own survival has made that of her brother less likely. She will have none of this, however, and in the following line rejects the Captain's conception of the Fates rationing good fortune as she reclaims the 'perchance' on behalf of her brother. For if she has been 'saved', she reasons, then 'so perchance may he be'. At this point, the Captain yields to Viola's optimism, resolving to 'comfort [her] with chance' as he recounts how he saw Sebastian 'most provident in peril' tie himself to a mast and ride the waves (I, ii, 5–17).<sup>10</sup>

As Feste points out, this is a world in which words can be appropriated and, like a 'cheveril glove', turned inside out by those with the wit to do so (III, i, 8–9). The reversals undergone

by the 'perchance' in the dialogue between Viola and the Captain, besides being emblematic of the differences in their temperaments, are an early instance of the kind of semantic lability diagnosed by Feste. Undoubtedly, though, the most telling inversion of a 'perchance' is that accomplished by Olivia, where, as she dismisses Cesario, she both categorically denies that there can be any point in further overtures from Orsino while also providing his messenger with a pretext to return nonetheless:

Get you to your lord:  
I cannot love him. Let him send no more,  
Unless, perchance, you come to me again,  
To tell me how he takes it. Fare you well.

(I, v, 213–216)

Her 'perchance' is ironic insofar as it seeks to disguise the degree to which she has resolved impulsively not to leave things to chance, but to take matters in hand by inviting Cesario to bring her a report of Orsino's reaction. Indeed, a few moments of introspection will lead her to redouble her efforts to influence the course of events as she sends Malvolio after Cesario with a ring, an unmistakable token of her affection. Almost in confirmation of what Feste will later have to say about words becoming 'very rascals' (III, i, 15), the Act concludes with a statement about Fortune that is fascinating in its ambivalence and duplicity.

Fate, show thy force. Ourselves we do not owe.  
What is decreed must be, and be this so.

(I, v, 245–246)

For the 'force' we have seen at work is, and we suspect will continue to be, Olivia's as much as Fate's. Despite her declaration to the contrary, the countess has displayed remarkable self-possession, and her 'be this so', as it expresses her desire to shape her own destiny, seems entirely characteristic. A more modern idiom would perhaps set Olivia down as one of the play's more 'proactive' characters. Her refusal to passively accept her destiny is, of course, apparent in her rejection of the eminently eligible Orsino, but also manifested in her behaviour towards the object of her desire. We hear her, for instance, calculating out loud how best to 'buy' Cesario's affections:

I have sent after him: he says he'll come.  
How shall I feast him? What bestow of him?  
For youth is bought more oft than begged or borrowed.

(III, iv, 1–3)

The confession, immediately following these lines, that she ‘speaks too loud’ is an acknowledgement that, as a woman, her guile puts her at risk of appearing unseemly. However much the appeal of Olivia’s character might lie in her not needing encouragement, she does in fact receive some, in the counsel that forms the central dramatic moment of her first encounter with Feste. There is, her errant fool impresses on her, ‘no true cuckold but calamity’ (I, v, 37–38). In other words, no one should be expected to remain faithfully wedded to a state of grief as Olivia, having decided to immure herself for seven years in mourning for her dead brother, has vowed to do. Quick to heed Feste’s counsel, the youthful countess will, by the end of the scene, have discarded her veil in the presence of Cesario.

Viola’s relationship to Fortune is more ambivalent.<sup>11</sup> When she declares, ‘Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!’ (II, ii, 13), she is recognizing that her disguise has produced unforeseen effects over which she has no control. At the same time, if the storm of Fortune is the play’s genetic metaphor, then Viola’s refusal to ‘hoist sail’ and her insistence that she will ‘hull here a little longer’ (I, v, 147–148), as she resists Maria’s attempts to curtail her audience with Olivia, are crucial signs of her determination to steer the ship of her own destiny.<sup>12</sup> And we could say the same in this scene of Olivia, who, in this regard, will become a natural foil to the guileless Sebastian.

At his first appearance, Viola’s twin brother presents himself as something of a fatalist, as he warns Antonio that his misfortune might be contagious: ‘My stars shine darkly over me; the malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours’ (II, 1, 2–3). And one might expect of a man whose stars were dark, he is also directionless, confessing that his ‘determinate voyage is mere extravagancy’ (line 7). An aimless wanderer, he ascribes all agency either to Fortune or to other people rather than assuming any himself. Acknowledging his debt to his rescuer, he remarks that ‘if the heavens had been pleased’, he would have drowned with his sister, but Antonio ‘altered that’ (lines 12–13). On finding himself engaged to Olivia, he surrenders to an onrush of events he cannot begin to understand.

What relish is in this? How runs the stream?  
Or I am mad, or else this is a dream.  
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep.  
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!

(IV, i, 47–50)

The fluvial metaphor of the ‘stream’ of events leads Sebastian to the mythological river, incomprehension giving way to a wish that reason itself be drowned as the mind sinks into an oneiric stare of oblivion. To borrow the figurative language he employs here, Sebastian is the character in the play most inclined to ‘go with the flow’.<sup>13</sup> Even in his propensity to weep, or at least to speak of his tears, he becomes associated with the flowing of water. He reveals to Antonio that Viola ‘is drowned already, sir, with salt water, though I seem to drown her

remembrance again with more' (II, i, 20–21), and then only a few lines later once again confesses that 'I am yet so near the manners of my mother that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me' (27–28). On the twins' reunion, it is Sebastian's readiness to weep that make these lines some of the most moving in the play:

Were you a woman, as the rest goes even,  
I should my tears let fall upon your cheek,  
And say 'Thrice-welcome, drownèd Viola!

(V, i, 225–227)

It seems entirely natural for him to speak of all that has befallen him as 'this accident and flood of fortune' (IV, iii, 11). Indeed, if water is the play's element, its movement the central metaphor for the actions of Fortune, Sebastian seems, from the moment we first hear of him, to be heroically at home in that element, for the Captain recalls how he saw him 'like Arion on the dolphin's back, / [...] hold acquaintance with the waves' (I, ii, 15–16).<sup>14</sup> And while Sebastian goes with the flow, it is Olivia who directs the course of the stream that carries him away with her. The theme of fortune is thus also one in which we see the play's exploration of gender categories. While the watery Sebastian seems always 'near the manners of [his] mother', it is Olivia who offers constancy with her managerial competence, the 'smooth, discreet and stable bearing' (IV, iii, 19) with which she administers her household affairs.

For all her adaptability in the face of adversity, Viola also evinces a surprising passivity in her surrender to fortune, a surrender she speaks of repeatedly in terms of deferring to time. Thus in her first scene, she will announce, 'What else may hap, to time I will commit' (I, ii, 62). And later, as she begins to grasp how much trouble her disguise has caused, she declares,

O time, thou must untangle this, not I.  
It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.

(II, ii, 35–36)

Much is said throughout the play about time and aging. The 'gather ye rosebuds' topos which first appears in Feste's admonition to Olivia that 'beauty's a flower' (I, 5, 38) is reiterated in Act II in his lament, this time set to music, that 'In delay there lies no plenty', for 'Youth's a stuff will not endure' (II, 3, 37–39), the joke being, in most productions, that Sir Toby and Andrew Aguecheek are already old enough to know this for themselves. Viola, as one critic has suggested, may seem to 'trust in time'.<sup>15</sup> But she, too, is far from immune from the *carpe diem* anxiety, concurring with Orsino when, in a characteristically courtly idiom, he urges Cesario to remember that

[...] women are as roses, whose fair flower

Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

(II, iv, 40–41)

Expressions of anxiety at wasting time are also uttered by several other characters. We probably feel inclined to agree with the censure Malvolio imagines addressing to Sir Toby: ‘Besides, you waste the treasure of your time with a foolish knight’ (II, v, 59). The knight in question is also rebuked for his use of time when Fabian suggests that he has not responded swiftly enough to the challenge laid down by Cesario: ‘The double gilt of this opportunity you let time wash off’ (III, ii, 16–17). Even Olivia, always reckoned the most youthful of the play’s *dramatis personae*, can say, ‘The clock upbraids me with the waste of time’ (III, i, 110).<sup>16</sup> The final word on time, though, belongs to Feste, where he confronts Malvolio with the truth that ‘thus the whirligig of time / brings in his revenges’ (V, i, 358–359). With a proper understanding of the significance of time comes an appreciation of how, because all actions have consequences, we are always to some degree the architects of our own fortunes.

### 3. Constancy and Forbearance

Orsino is characterized by his adamant refusal to accept Olivia’s rejection. As the play’s second line suggests, with its two synonyms of ‘excess’ and ‘surfeiting’, the Duke of Illyria is not given to compromise. He imagines what it would be like to be loved by Olivia, disinclined to entertain the possibility that anyone might love both a lover and a brother at the same time.

How will she love when the rich golden shaft  
Hath killed the flock of all affections else  
That live in her [...].

(I, i, 36–38)

Like Romeo, who is ‘wedded to calamity’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, iii, 3), Orsino embraces extremes.<sup>17</sup> With what appears to be a similar intensity of spirit, Olivia too enters the play in thrall to an image of herself devoted to an impossible ideal of love. Her temperament, though, is more pliable, and she quickly comes round to appreciate the wisdom of Feste’s aphorism that ‘there is no true cuckold but calamity’ (I, v, 37–38). While the fool urges moderation, Orsino’s self-indulgence leads him to disregard the need for limits. Thus he instructs Cesario to ‘be clamorous and leap all civil bounds’ (I, iv, 20) in pressing his master’s suit to Olivia. And in this respect, Orsino can be paired with Sir Toby, whose dedication to a dissolute lifestyle is as single-minded as the Duke’s obsession with Olivia, and prompts Maria to attempt, in vain, to draw some boundaries: ‘you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order’ (I, iii, 6). Malvolio, too, in his puritan rejection of pleasure is no less extreme.

The diagnosis delivered by Olivia that Malvolio is 'sick of self-love' (I, v, 67), could, of course, be equally well applied to Orsino.<sup>18</sup>

These attitudes, as Tony Tanner suggests, might be thought of as examples of 'bad constancy', and the play explores how this differs from another kind of constancy.<sup>19</sup> Were Malvolio simply a puritan it would be bad enough, but, Maria opines, his real vice is that he shows no lasting attachment to any set of principles: 'The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser' (II, iii, 111). Worse still perhaps is Orsino's inability even to arrive at a consistent assessment of how constant he is. He claims at first to be like 'all true lovers' in being

Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,  
Save in the constant image of the creature  
That is beloved [...].

(II, iv, 15–18)

But then promptly confesses that

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,  
Than women's are.

(II, iv, 34–36)

Orsino's analysis of himself as inconstant will be echoed by Feste at lines 74–77, where he likens the Duke's mind to 'changeable taffeta' and opals, for the colour of both shot silk and the iridescent gem will constantly change under the play of light. 'I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere', Feste mockingly declares, meaning that Orsino puts him in mind of a trader who cannot decide what goods to load onto his ship. The Fool's assessment is followed by an exchange between Orsino and Viola in which the play's heroine shows herself to be an exemplar of the moral virtue of constancy. She gives an account of a 'sister' who, unable to confess her love, suffered in silence.

[...] She never told her love,  
But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,  
And with a green and yellow melancholy  
She sat like patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief.

(II, iv, 113–118)

Although she has actively assumed her role as Cesario and in that masculine guise becomes the engine of the play's action, she is also a patient Griselda figure, a model of emotional restraint that contrasts sharply with the bacchanalian Sir Toby and the self-indulgent Orsino. When, at last, she is liberated from the constraints that have compelled her to suppress her feelings, she observes that she has nevertheless given expression to her devotion.

And all those swearings keep as true in soul  
As doth that orbèd continent the fire  
That severs day from night

(V, i, 256–258)

The image of the sun here becomes a symbol of Viola's constancy and stands in contrast to that which Orsino, in his Actaeon guise, most fears—Diana, goddess of the moon, associated with change and inconstancy.

That constancy in the play is associated with moral sanity is suggested by Malvolio's desperate invitation to Sir Topas to put his rationality to the test 'in any constant question' (IV, ii, 35). It can perhaps best be thought of in terms of the maintenance of a certain kind of equilibrium: keeping one's cool, as Olivia manages to do in the face of Orsino's romantic excesses. When, at their first face-to-face encounter, Orsino questions if she can be 'Still so cruel', she replies that she is 'Still so constant' (V, i, 98–99). The Duke's exasperated 'What, to perverseness?' (line 100) reveals more about the workings of his own heart than it does of Olivia's, for it is Orsino who appears perverse in his obsession, his refusal to abandon his 'old tune' (line 95), as Olivia dismissively labels his outpouring of devotion. In Orsino's eyes, Olivia is 'the marble-breasted tyrant' (line 112). Yet his image is in fact a projection of his own obduracy, a state of mind which is an inversion of the watery flow embodied by Sebastian.

One might be tempted to suggest that Feste, apparently having no particular investment in the affections of other people, can well afford to display the kind of equanimity that sets him apart from Orsino, Malvolio or Sir Toby. Yet, as he makes his first entrance, he is compelled by Maria to contemplate the possibility of a very real downturn in his fortunes as she warns him he will be 'hanged' for his long absence. The Fool, however, seems resigned to his fate, declaring, 'he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours' (I, v, 4–5), a quip explained to the audience as an allusion to 'the wars'. Being hanged offers the advantage of no longer needing to fear death on the battlefield. Maria persists, however, remarking that if it is not exactly a hanging that is on the cards, he can at least expect 'to be turned away', which would be 'as good as a hanging' (14–15). Her point, presumably, is that for Feste to be expelled from Olivia's household would mean an end to his livelihood. Still undaunted, the fool declares that, 'Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage, and, for turning away, let

summer bear it out' (16–17). This gallows humour is all good entertainment. Yet, coming as it does after an almost excruciating demonstration of Orsino's dogged refusal to see things for what they are, his blind faith in the 'fixèd foot' of his own obstinacy and the unmistakable worth of his 'secret soul' (I, iv, 12–15), Feste's adoption of an ironic distance from the vicissitudes of his own life becomes a significant element in the overall pattern of the play's meanings. And if there is a coherent train of thought in all of this, perhaps it can be most clearly discerned a few moments later in the lecture Feste addresses to Olivia:

Anything that's mended is but patched: virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin,  
and sin that amends is but patched with virtue. If that this simple syllogism will serve, so.  
If it will not, what remedy?

(I, v, 35–37)

This, then, is a philosophy against absolutes, an exhortation to accept things as they are and to acknowledge that they can never be entirely as one might wish. To denounce something that is mended as being 'patched' is to concede that nothing can be fully restored. Seven years of weeping will not bring a dead brother back to life. There is no escaping the march of time, and beauty will fade as surely as flowers wilt. Feste's view of life, then, seems to be characterized by an uncompromising realism, as when he cautions Orsino that 'pleasure will be paid, one time or another' (II, iv, 72).

To some degree, the sentiments expressed by Feste and Viola, their sense of the need for some kind of moral constancy as Fortune turns her wheel, might be seen as reflecting the Stoic thought known to Shakespeare's contemporaries principally through the works of Seneca. The Stoic 'man of virtue' (*vir virtutis*) was one who had learned to control the passions, so as to 'avoid unnecessarily subjecting himself to fortune'.<sup>20</sup> Naturally, as a dramatist, Shakespeare was drawn to create characters who were overwhelmed by turns of fate. Yet stoic figures do appear in his works as foils against which the passions of his tragic heroes play out. Thus, Hamlet extols the fortitude of Horatio, believing him to have been

As one in suffering all, that suffers nothing,  
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hath ta'en with equal thanks [...]

(*Hamlet*, III, ii, 5153)

In not being 'a pipe for Fortune's finger' (line 55), Horatio was all that Hamlet is unable to be.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Feste's Song

The play ends with Feste's song, each verse of which describes a period in a man's life. How this song might relate to the rest of the play, for which to some extent it must serve as an epilogue, is an interesting question. On the one hand, the Fool's theme here is time, something that he has often spoken of throughout the play, as we have seen, most especially in his admonitions about the transience of youth. The arc of time outlined by Feste's song is one in which life becomes progressively harder. For the child, being foolish is nothing to worry about, but in the world of adults people learn to distrust fools. With a wife come responsibilities and a man can no longer get by just by 'swaggering'. Now he must work, and will continue to have to do so, it can be assumed, until he is too old any longer to get out of bed. But even then, there is no rest to be had since drink has given him a permanent headache. Time does indeed bring in his revenges, and chief among them is old age. There is no getting away from the rain. It rains every day, and every day the cycle of life from birth to death continues. The life that is fed by the rain will always surround us. We cannot escape the passing of time.<sup>22</sup> As the final verse implies, the world has always been so and is unlikely to change.

A great while ago the world begun,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day.

(*Twelfth Night*, V, i, 387–390)

Hence we must seek some kind of accommodation with the cruelties of time, and this too is a question of our relation to fortune.<sup>23</sup> This much is clear from the missing verse of Feste's song, sung for the benefit of King Lear on the heath.

He that has and a little tiny wit,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
Must make content with his fortunes fit,  
Though the rain it raineth every day.

(*King Lear*, III, ii, 73–76)

We must content ourselves with our lot in life since most of us, as Feste emphasizes, lack the wit to control our own destinies, for 'Foolery [...] does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere' (*Twelfth Night*, III, i, 27).



But there is something else in the final verse of Feste's song. Life may be hard, and has been since the world began, but in the theatre 'that's all one' (V, i, 389). On one level, perhaps, this simply means that none of the anxieties about time and fortune seem to matter if you've just seen a play like *Twelfth Night*. In the theatre, can we forget the hardships of life and the pressures of time. The only people who we can be sure will 'strive to please' us are the actors on the stage. At the same time, there is a strand of thought in the play which is all about the therapeutic benefits of acting and playing roles. As in his tragedies, Shakespeare gives us characters who play themselves to excess. His plays invite us to see the dangers of being able to play just one self, the risk of becoming an overambitious king, or one 'more sinned against than sinning' (*King Lear*, III, ii, 57), or a jealous husband, of being, as Orsino puts it at the end of the play's first scene, 'one self king' (I, i, 40).<sup>24</sup>

'That that is, is', says Feste to Malvolio (IV, ii, 10), in what appears to be a statement of resignation, an acceptance of the hand that Fortune has dealt. Yet the irony is that Feste, disguised as the prelate Sir Topas, is not what he is. The difference, then, between Malvolio and Feste is not that the steward subscribes to a dynamic vision of reality in which social rank is in flux and the Fool believes that the world is static. Malvolio only takes an interest in Fortune insofar as he is flattered by the possibility of his own ascent. But more than this, his excessive self-love prevents him from stepping out of himself, while Feste is able to assume, temporarily, the role of another, to wear the mask of a different self, to act and play a part.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, when Feste pronounces his aphorism he is at more than one remove from his own voice. For he claims to be citing 'the old hermit of Prague', and since the sage himself 'never saw pen and ink', the words he spoke to 'a niece of King Gorboduc' must have been transcribed in a text written by someone else, have become part of another's voice. Feste is already by profession a man playing a role given that, as the wisest figure on stage, he is patently no fool. And now here he is playing the part of a priest citing the words of another religious figure filtered through the voice of a witness. To this we might add that Feste the character is being played by an actor, originally Robert Armin, who joined the company of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599, and for whom the role was written.<sup>26</sup>

If what Feste really means is 'that that is, is not', then his words are also an echo of Viola's 'I am not that I play' (I, v, 135–136) and 'I am not what I am' (III, i, 122), both addressed to Olivia. One needs a role, to be sure, but to remain sane one also needs a certain distance from that role, an irony like that displayed by Viola in her first scene with Olivia. An actor must know how to improvise out of her text, much as a drowning man might find a floating mast upon which to ride the waves of Fortune's storm, as if on the back of a dolphin. Viola's constancy is achieved through her balancing of two opposed roles, and lies in her ability to say that, yes, my other clothes are somewhere or other, and I can put them back on if you need me to, but this is also me. The point is not, of course, that we should cultivate transvestism, but

that we should avoid becoming so obsessively attached to a singular vision of the self that we drown in self-love, like Narcissus. And this, in essence, is the distinction between the tragic and comic modes. As Jonathan Bate notes, the play's heroine is 'the opposite of a self-lover'. Indeed, as she imagines herself setting in motion 'the babbling gossip of the air' (I, v, 206), she becomes an Echo-figure, speaking 'in the voice of the desiring woman whom Narcissus neglected'.<sup>27</sup>

During their first conversation, Olivia asks Viola, in jest, if she is a 'comedian' (I, v, 134). Although she answers in the negative, she also adds, as we have seen, that 'I am not that I play'. One aspect of her role-playing that often escapes the notice of critics is that, as Tony Tanner observes, it is unmotivated. In the earlier comedies upon which Shakespeare drew for his plot, the heroine invariably assumes a disguise in order to serve or be in close proximity to the man she desires. But Viola resolves to dress as a man before she has met Orsino. In the scene in which we first see her, stranded in Illyria 'without a role', Viola 'gives no clear reason for assuming male disguise'. Tanner suggests that perhaps Barber's sense that Viola is motivated simply by a 'festive pleasure in transvestism' is more or less on the right lines.<sup>28</sup> What seems to matter most about Viola, then, is her willingness to become an actor, to embrace an identity that is composed at least in part by 'echoes' of other people's voices. On such a view, a belief in an originary wholeness of the self is a delusion that produces a sterile narcissism.<sup>29</sup> The mind, rather, constantly mends itself by borrowing from other selves, and so recognizes and embraces itself, to borrow Feste's metaphor, as 'patched'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, III, ii, 53–58. Shakespeare's plays are cited throughout from William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> On shipwreck as a 'signature theme' in Petrarch, see Theodore J. Cachey, Jr., 'From Shipwreck to Port: Rvf 189 and the Making of the *Canzoniere*', *Modern Language Notes*, 120, no. 1 (January 2005), pp. 30–49.

<sup>3</sup> The *Comedy* is quoted here from *La 'Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67). The translation is my own.

<sup>4</sup> The translations of the *Commedia* given here, in which an effort has been made to adhere as closely as possible to the syntax and diction of Dante's Italian, are my own but often rely on the following published editions: Dante Alighieri, *The 'Divine Comedy'*, trans. with an introduction, notes and commentary by Mark Musa, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); and Dante Alighieri, *The 'Divine Comedy'*, trans. and ed. by Robin Kirkpatrick, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 2006–2007).

<sup>5</sup> On the use of seafaring as a metaphor for risk-taking in trade, see Anne-Kathrin Marquardt, "'Bearing the Adventure of the Seas": Seafaring and the Figure of the Merchant in the Early Modern Imagination', in *Real and Imaginary Travels: 16th–18th Centuries*, ed. by Anne Bandry-Scubbi and Rémi Vuillemin (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2015), pp. 113–127 (p. 115): 'Seafaring, and the risk it entails is connected with the idea of submitting to God's Providence'. Marquardt cites an early seventeenth-century discussion of bankruptcy in which 'a depiction of the merchant as a "pilot" of the seas of "adversity" clearly emphasises the connection between seafaring and risk-taking [...]' (p. 115), and refers also to an image from a book of emblems published in 1586 of a 'personified Occasion with the usual attributes of Fortune [...] the goddess precariously balanced on her wheel, which floats on a tempestuous sea where two ships sail' (p. 118). For Petrarch's use of 'navigatio' and the dangers of the sea voyage as a metaphor for the precarious nature of human existence in preference to the traditional Boethian figure of Fortune turning her wheel, see Ilaria Tufano, "'Nec fatum nec fortuna". La posizione di Petrarca', in *Fortuna. Atti del quinto Colloquio internazionale di Letteratura italiana, Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, Napoli, 2–3 maggio 2013*, ed. by Silvia Zoppi Garampi (Rome: Salerno,

2016), pp. 109–127 (pp. 121–122).

<sup>6</sup> See the note to lines 145–147 in Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–1997), III, p. 762.

<sup>7</sup> On Fortune in Dante, see Vincenzo Cioffari, *The Conception of Fortune and Fate in the Works of Dante* (Cambridge, MA: Dante Society of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940); Gianluigi Toja, 'La Fortuna', *Studi danteschi*, 42 (1965), pp. 247–260; and for a perceptive analysis of this passage in particular, Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 108–114.

<sup>8</sup> On Shakespeare's own pursuit of higher social status, especially as evidenced by Heather Wolfe's recent archival discoveries relating to the playwright's efforts to be granted the right to use a coat-of-arms, see Jennifer Schuessler, 'Shakespeare, Hungering for Status', *New York Times*, June 30 2016, section C, p. 1 (New York edition).

<sup>9</sup> Mario DiGangi, 'The Social Relations of Shakespeare's Comic Households', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Volume III: The Comedies*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 90–113, argues that *Twelfth Night* displays a 'socially conservative bias' and always respects 'status boundaries' (p. 110).

<sup>10</sup> This is perhaps the first intimation in the play that we are in what Robert Miola calls 'the more or less providential world of Renaissance comedy [...] where tempests are kind and salt waves fresh in love'. See Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Miola, op. cit., p. 52, sees in Viola 'a unique and delicate balance between activity and passivity'.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Twelfth Night, or What You Will: Introduction', in *Complete Works*, pp. 645–649, points out that, at the end of the play, 'Viola does seem to revert to the silence and passivity of orthodox female behaviour' (p. 647).

<sup>13</sup> See Tony Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, with a Foreword by Stephen Heath (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap / Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 241.

<sup>14</sup> Tanner, op. cit., p. 231, sees *Twelfth Night* as 'one of the most watery of Shakespeare's plays' and discusses how the presence of the sea at both the literal and figurative levels leaves us with the impression that the play 'is awash with liquidity' (pp. 236–238).

<sup>15</sup> Miola, op. cit., p. 61: '[...] Viola is a romance heroine who acts and who trusts in time'.

<sup>16</sup> John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 177, notes that Olivia's 'contempt' for time changes to 'concern'.

<sup>17</sup> Peter G. Philiass, *Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies: The Development of Their Form and Meaning* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), regards Malvolio, with his 'extreme and humorless self-love', as standing 'for an extreme view' (p. 262), and argues that Viola's 'generous and self-sacrificing love of Orsino may be said to represent the opposite extreme' (p. 267). The play, he concludes, 'dramatizes the concept of proportion and moderation' (p. 269). Philiass cites Morris P. Tilley, 'The Organic Unity of *Twelfth Night*', *PMLA*, 39 (1914), pp. 550–566 (pp. 550–551), who saw the play as 'a philosophical defence of a moderate indulgence in pleasure, in opposition on the one hand to an extreme hostility to pleasure and on the other hand to an extreme self-indulgence'.

<sup>18</sup> On Orsino's self-absorption, his obsessive interest in himself as a lover, see for example, Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Comic Sequence* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1979), p. 92: 'Orsino, it is made clear, is not in love with a woman, but with love [...]'; and Robert Ornstein, *Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery* (Newark: University of Delaware Press / London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 159: '[...] Orsino is unmoved by Olivia's repeated denials because she does not seem to exist for him except as a projection of his literary fantasy of love'.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, op. cit., pp. 238–239: 'To define true constancy turns out to be one of the concerns of the play' (p. 238).

<sup>20</sup> Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 167. A slightly earlier, equally indispensable, discussion of this topic can be found in Charles Martindale and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 165–189 (Chapter 5: 'Shakespeare's Stoicism'), who state that 'Shakespeare's familiarity with some of the principal tenets of Stoicism cannot be in doubt' (p. 166) and that knowledge of Stoic philosophy in the Renaissance derived not only from Seneca but also from 'Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Diogenes Laertius, Boethius and others' (p. 168). Their chapter explores 'Shakespeare's use of one Stoic commonplace—that the

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good man is the constant man—to try to demonstrate the dramatic power which Shakespeare draws from his “ideas” (p. 167).

<sup>21</sup> Burrow, *op. cit.*, p. 168. Martindale and Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 166, write that ‘Horatio is clearly presented as a Stoic foil to the prince, even if some of his later actions are unstoical in practice’. Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 39, notes that Seneca ‘is identified with the idea of constancy as a heroic virtue, and with the image of the *sapiens*, the Stoic hero-sage—courageous, passionless, immovably enduring in adversity, demonstrating his superiority to fortune by resolute death or suicide. It is an ideal of which Shakespeare and his Roman heroes are very conscious’ (from Chapter 3: ‘Seneca and the Stoic Hero’, pp. 38–62). See also Benjamin Boyce, ‘The Stoic *Consolatio* and Shakespeare’, *PMLA*, 64, no. 4 (September 1949), pp. 771–780; Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (Pennsylvania State University / Folcroft Press, 1970); and Gordon Hartford, ‘Stoicism in Shakespeare’, *English Studies in Africa*, 36 (1993), pp. 1–15.

<sup>22</sup> Penny Gay, ‘Twelfth Night: “The Babbling Gossip of the Air”’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works*, pp. 429–446, suggests that the repetition of the second and fourth lines in each verse of Feste’s song evokes ‘some sort of existential treadmill’ (p. 439).

<sup>23</sup> See the reading of the song in Philias, *op. cit.*, p. 278: ‘Whether in childhood, adulthood, or old age, we find that certain things are constant; they have not changed and we cannot change them [...] “A great while ago the world began” and its laws, which are but the laws of nature, cannot change to accommodate some strange caprice or posturing. The individual [...] must become part of society, must be integrated into it’.

<sup>24</sup> For a useful critique of the argument that Shakespeare invariably ‘admires adaptability, because he “rewards” comic heroines, who disguise themselves and are generally resourceful, and punishes rigidity in tragic heroes’, see Martindale and Martindale, *op. cit.*, pp. 172–173.

<sup>25</sup> On Feste as an actor, see Miola, *op. cit.*, p. 46: ‘Feste, even more so than Viola, has the ability to act, to lose one self (but not one’s self) and become another [...]’. Compare, too, the fascinating analysis in Gay, *op. cit.*, p. 441, of Feste’s relationship to place: ‘[...] *Twelfth Night*’s clown is a vagabond, a wanderer [...] He is equally at home in Olivia’s or Orsino’s household, yet lives in neither [...] Feste is thus not “placed” in the *locus*, and this fact paradoxically gives him a subversive power which he signals through his characteristic word-play [...]’.

<sup>26</sup> See David Carnegie and Mark Houlahan, ‘Twelfth Night: Introduction’, *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, §87.

<sup>27</sup> Bate, ‘Introduction’, p. 648. On the Narcissus theme, see also Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–234.

<sup>28</sup> See Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 227–228; and Cesar Lombardi Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its relation to Social Custom*, with a new Foreward by Stephen Greenblatt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> Miola, *op. cit.*, p. 49, comments that the ‘rigidity of self and self-image’ seen in Olivia and Orsino, but also in the minor characters Malvolio, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, is something ‘the play consistently tries to break down’. And in this process, Viola is a key figure in being ‘witty enough to wear a mask but wise enough to remain distinct from it. Unlike many others, Viola self-consciously plays a comic role, one she will step out of in due time’. Her ‘attitude towards acting’ is ambivalent insofar as she is ‘at times a nervous actress [...] (who) doubts her own ability’ and wears a disguise which is often ‘transparent’ (p. 53).

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