

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Laughter in *Twelfth Night* and Beyond: Affect and Genre in Early Modern Comedy

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In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602), Maria writes a mock letter that is designed to make fun of Malvolio's vices of arrogance and self-love. When Malvolio does follow Maria's ridiculous instructions in the letter and appears smiling, in yellow-stockings and cross-gartered, she triumphs and invites her co-conspirators to share in the joke thus:

If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourselves into stitches, follow me. Yon gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado, for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings. (3.2.64–69).¹

Maria advertises the effect of her mock letter on Malvolio by highlighting the prodigious amount of laughter it will produce. If her co-conspirators want to feel the 'spleen' she offers, or the flow of pleasurable emotions associated with amusement;² if they want to 'laugh [themselves] into stitches', or experience laughter so violent that they will feel stabs of pain, then they should see Malvolio 'in yellow stockings'. Maria's call to Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian foregrounds the laughter on offer, in its most overwhelming degree, as the primary payback of watching Malvolio make a fool of himself. Similarly, Sir Toby calls the others to keep laughing at Malvolio until their joke gets 'tired out of breath' (3.4.134). While one might happily think of Maria and Sir Toby's invitation to more and more laughter in the style of 'the more, the merrier', early modern audiences would have felt either discomfort at the intemperance and sensuality of

¹ All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, ed. by Keir Elam (London: Cengage Learning, 2008).

² *OED* 'spleen' n., 8a.

the characters' passionate engagement, or, more likely, they would have enjoyed Malvolio's humiliation with the distinct sense that their own laughter might compromise their status as reasonable human beings in control of their sensual emotions. *Twelfth Night* vividly dramatizes the stakes of evoking laughter in the early modern period through the structure of its double plot: the subplot parodies the predominant humanist technique of using laughter to purge social vices, even as the main plot frames this experience as all too English, too bodily and potentially anarchic. The tension between these two plots — the hilarious subplot with Malvolio and the improbable plot centered on 'cross wooing' and set in mysterious Illyria — has a distinctly national character that hitherto has not been noticed by critics.³ In contrast to the critical tendency to conflate the two plots as if they refer to the same national reality or propose a unified vision of England, this essay suggests that the lines of division between the English and the foreigners are clearly demarcated and meaningful for the play as a whole.⁴

The subplot with Malvolio, I argue, is based on the humanist strategy of using the bodily pleasure of laughter in order to teach social lessons and improve the audience's behavior. Early modern theoreticians of laughter, learned writers like Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, Thomas Wilson, and Baldessar Castiglione, universally advised their readers and audiences to refrain from laughing too much and giving in to the pleasure of laughter at the cost of social 'profit'. Blending Christian morality with humanist ideals and the humoral view of passions as chaotic and potentially ungovernable, humanist writers urged poets to restrain and temper audience passions by directing them to socially useful goals. For instance, in Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, the 'Comic' and the 'Satiric' poetry seem to blend together, as ridicule and display of social vices characterize both.⁵ If the Comic poet displays 'the common errors of our life' in the 'most ridiculous and scornful manner', the Satiric poet likewise 'sportingly never leaveth until he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed to laugh at himself, which he cannot avoid,

³ The phrase 'cross wooing' derives from Ben Jonson's definition of comedy in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), where he opposes the comedy centered on 'cross wooing' and other improbable plot complications to his own kind of comedy focused on exposing abuses of his time. See lines 3. 6. 169–174 in Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, in *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. by G. A. Wilkes, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981–82), vol. I, pp. 275–411. On the contradictions between Shakespearean way of writing plays and Jonsonian focus on social critique, see also Ben Jonson's Prologue to *Every Man In His Humour* (1598) in the same edition, vol. 1, pp. 183–84.

⁴ The critical tendency to conflate the two plots is evident in almost all discussions of the play's setting. See, for instance, in Patricia Parker, 'Was Illyria as Mysterious and Foreign as We Think?', in *The Mysterious and the Foreign in Early Modern England*, ed. by Helen Ostovich, Mary V. Silcox and Graham Roebuck (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 209–34 (p. 209); and Catherine Lisak, 'Domesticating strangeness in *Twelfth Night*', in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, ed. by James Schiffer (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 167–84 (p. 179).

⁵ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)*, 3rd edn, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. by R. W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 97–98.

without avoiding the folly'.⁶ In both the Satiric and the Comic poetry, the pleasure of laughter is ideally harnessed towards the goal of castigating social vices. Shakespeare's comic subplot, I argue, both replays and parodies the predominant humanist, Christian, and humoral strictures against the pleasure of laughter that postulated that laughter should only be used to ridicule social vices. Written in the aftermath of the Bishops' Ban of 1599 and as the Poets' War was winding down to its close, *Twelfth Night* seems skeptical of the power of railing to achieve social good or eradicate the vices the railing aims to purge. Malvolio is unrepentant and, moreover, vindictive, while the revelers themselves seem to have lost all purpose in Malvolio's humiliation by the end of the play. However, the fact that a Jonsonian plot is included in the play at all, and that it clearly aims to dazzle and entertain audiences, indicates that Shakespeare appreciated the pleasure of ridicule and its connection to Englishness and embodiment.⁷ Straddling classical culture and the English present, the play seems only partially invested in the alternative set of ideals of manly valor, gentility, and courtly love exemplified in the play's Illyrian/Italian protagonists. As in a hall of mirrors, a trope that is so important to the play about identical twins, the play allows us to see English and classical ideals as reflected in one another. The characters' merciless laughter at Malvolio's vices is thus a type of citation — a complex tribute to Jonsonian theatrical satire and the transference of railing from page to stage in the aftermath of the Bishops' Ban. *Twelfth Night* pays tribute to the popularity of satire in the late sixteenth century, but it also gestures towards a different affective framework, in which, instead of purging, emotions could be used to forge new affective identities.

Historical research into early modern emotions, in particular those emotions that are tied to the production of laughter, reveals an affective framework very different from our own and begs the question as to how we factor in the early modern understanding of laughter and its significance into our reading of early modern comedy and comic moments in drama. In this essay I attempt to combine two fruitful strands of scholarship, historical phenomenology, more recently expanded into a larger field of affect studies, and the post-new historicist scholarship on form and genre, in order to show how forms of early modern comedy are grounded in historically specific ideas about emotion.⁸ Critics have long noticed that the subplot with Malvolio seems reminiscent of

⁶ Sidney, pp. 97, 98.

⁷ On Shakespeare's use of railing language, see Maria Prendergast, *Railing, Reviling and Invective in English Literary Culture, 1588–1617: The Anti-Poetics of Theater and Print* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), especially pp. 103–44. For another view of *Twelfth Night*'s relation to the Poets' War, see James P. Bednarz's *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 175–202, where Bednarz argues that Malvolio is Shakespeare's satire on Ben Jonson's self-love.

⁸ For post-new historicism scholarship that relates literary form to passion, see Katherine Bootle Attie, 'Passion Turned to Prettiness: Rhyme or Reason in Hamlet', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.3 (2012), pp. 393–423; Jean Feerick, 'Tragicomic Transformations: Passion, Politics, and the "Art to Turn" in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 19 (2009) < <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-19/feerflet.html> > [accessed 12

the Jonsonian model of comic satires, popularized in *Every Man In His Humour* (1598) and *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), whereas the love plot centered on cross-wooing, Viola's acting, and the improbable appearance of Sebastian borrows from a very different tradition, which, as John Manningham was first to identify, borrows from *Menaechmi* by Plautus and the Italian *Inganni*. John Manningham's 1602 diary entry first identified the play through the structure of its plot versus subplot. Manningham implicitly privileges the comic subplot with Malvolio when he approvingly notes that it was a 'good practice in it [the play] to make the steward believe his Lady widowe was in Love with him' and then summarizing the subplot in detail.⁹ In contrast, Manningham processes the romantic plot only through its resemblance to its predecessors, noting that it is 'much like the commedy of errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni'.¹⁰ Clearly, the ingenious impersonation of Viola and the love longing of Orsino for Olivia had a mostly literary quality for Manningham, whereas the impact of the Malvolio joke is described as something striking and immediate, worth summarizing as a kind of 'news'. Continuing Manningham's inquiry into plot and subplot, this essay considers the geohumoral and national tension between the emphatically English subplot and the vaguely Italian, much more classical love story.

Early modern emotions or the 'passions' are a relatively well-researched topic in early modern studies, having gained momentum through the field-building work of Gail Kern Paster in *The Body Embarrassed* (1993), *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (2004), and the collection of essays, *Reading the Early Modern Passions* (2004).¹¹ Historical phenomenology, a critical framework that aims to recover and reconstruct early modern experience of the world, attempts to alienate such basic concepts as one's body or what counts as 'loud' or 'green' and draws our attention to historically 'other' ways of inhabiting the world.¹² Thus, for example, Bruce Smith reconstructs the typical 'soundscape' of early modern

August 2013]; and Rory Gregory Lukins, 'The Ethics of Form: Politics, Passion, and Genre Formation in the English Renaissance', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2012; available from UMI Dissertations Publishing). On early modern laughter, see Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) and Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁹ Quoted in Keir Elam, 'Introduction', in Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3–4.

¹¹ See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1993), the same author's *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹² Bruce Smith re-reads 'green' phenomenologically in his essay 'Hearing Green', in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, ed. by Paster and others, pp. 147–168. For a range of essays on historical phenomenology, see the following special journal issues: Kevin Curran and James Kearney, eds., 'Shakespeare and Phenomenology', *Criticism*, 54.3 (2012) and David McInnis and Brett Hirsch, eds., 'Embodying Shakespeare', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 19 (2009) <<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-19/si-19toc.htm>>.

environment and argues for a different order of hearing made possible by the differently textured environment.¹³ Similarly, the work of Gail Kern Paster and Mary Floyd-Wilson, among others, has shown how early moderns understood emotion as inseparable from physical substance and interpreted statements such as ‘the heat of passion’ literally rather than metaphorically. In recovering the historical understanding of laughter as an embodied experience associated with particular types of people, I am drawing on this rich model of imagining the world as early moderns would have done.¹⁴ In addition, I am borrowing part of my methodology from what has in recent years gained currency as ‘affect studies’. In contrast to historical phenomenology, affect studies is much more openly political while its broader theorization of emotion as integral to social and political life influences a wide range of fields, from studies focused on medieval materiality to the affective strategies of G. W. Bush and to the problem of ‘gay shame’ in queer communities.¹⁵ The openness, so to speak, of affect studies to a wide range of topics stems from its re-theorization of emotion as ‘affect’ — in contrast to the implication of the human in ‘emotion’, ‘affect’ simply refers to ‘forces of encounter’ through which both living and non-living entities transform and change one another.¹⁶ Erin Hurley and Sara Warner cogently describe the critical stakes of affect studies thus: ‘This paradigm shift [the turn to affect] represents the desire to carve out some conceptual space for aspects of human motivation and behavior that are not tethered to consciousness, cognitive processes, and rationality, to validate physical and social dynamics that are inchoate and unpredictable, and to explore impulses and responses that social conventions shape but do not circumscribe.’¹⁷

Thus, my aim in the essay is to preserve the phenomenological focus on uncovering the historical attitudes to emotion while at the same showing how the early modern ‘passion’ was no less capacious and productive a concept than the more modern ‘affect’. In the course of the essay, I show how early moderns were ‘affect theorists’, or, more accurately, ‘passion theorists’ themselves and sought various ways to make passions socially and politically important. In other words, if the concept of ‘affect’ in affect studies is often ahistorical, simply ‘a force of

¹³ See Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-factor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ I am especially indebted to the foundational study that relates early modern ‘passion’ to acting, Joseph Roach’s *The Player’s Passion* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985). For a response to Roach, see Paul Menzer, ‘The Actor’s Inhibition: Early Modern Acting and the Rhetoric of Restraint’, *Renaissance Drama*, New Series 35 (2006), pp. 83–111.

¹⁵ Carolyn Dinshaw uses ‘affect’ to construct communities across time in her book, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1999). For a range of essays using ‘affect’ as a common rubric, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 2.

¹⁷ Erin Hurley and Sarah Warner, ‘Special Section: “Affect/Performance/Politics”’, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 26.2 (2012), pp. 99–108 (pp. 99–100).

encounter' that pertains to all living and non-living things, I attend specifically to the historical assumptions about the ways that emotions, or as early moderns understood it, 'passions', can and cannot engage the bodies of audiences and of actors. What we get then is 'passion theory', an early modern theorization of the social and political effects of emotion in the context of theater. Using 'emotion' and 'passion' interchangeably throughout the essay, I seek to re-define our current attitudes to emotion by looking at it through the prism of early modern understanding of emotion as 'passion'. I first summarize early modern attitudes to laughter and then show how this understanding helps generate the two very different plots of *Twelfth Night*.

Early Modern Laughter

The main sources on the status of laughter in early modern England were twofold: first, writings on the body derived from Galen's theory of humours and, second, discussions of laughter in classical philosophy and rhetoric, especially in Plato and Aristotle and the rhetorical guides of Cicero and Quintilian. Contemporary texts such as Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in General* (1604) freely mixed medical opinion with philosophical thought and contemporary examples, thereby producing a theory of laughter that was more an amalgam of learned opinion than an original theory of how laughter works.¹⁸ The most comprehensive representative of early modern views on laughter is Laurent Joubert's *Treatise on Laughter (Traité Du Ris)*.¹⁹ This physiological treatise by a prominent French doctor was first published in Latin in France (1560), then translated into French (1579) and also circulated in England.²⁰ Although the work was known in England, its representative status lies less in its direct influence on English contemporaries than in the fact that it combines ideas on laughter strewn across a variety of English texts and articulates a common classical framework widely shared by Joubert's English contemporaries.²¹ Joubert's view that laughter proceeds from ugliness even as it gives us pleasure is especially paradigmatic, since it essentially compresses the classical ideas of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Joubert writes:

¹⁸ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. by William Webster Newbould (New York: Garland, 1986).

¹⁹ Laurent Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, trans. and ed. by Gregory Rocher (Alabama: Alabama University Press, 1980).

²⁰ See Gregory Rocher, 'Introduction', in Joubert, pp. ix–xv.

²¹ Timothy Bright, Joubert's English contemporary, directly refers to Joubert's treatise. See his 1586 text *A Treatise of Melancholy* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), p. 52. On the status of comic emotions in the classical period, see Ghose, pp. 56–63, and Dana LaCourse Munteanu, 'Comic Emotions: Shamelessness and Envy (Schadenfreude); Moderate Emotion', in *Emotion, Genre and Gender in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by Dana LaCourse Munteanu (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), pp. 89–113.

For laughable matter gives us pleasure and sadness: pleasure in that we find it unworthy of pity, and that there is no harm done, nor evil that we consider of consequence. The heart therefore rejoices over it, and expands just as it does in real joy. There is also sadness, because all laughable matter comes from ugliness and impropriety: the heart, upset over such unseemliness, and as if feeling pain, shrinks and tightens.²²

We can observe several things from this modeling of laughter. First, Joubert's word-choice 'the heart rejoices' or 'the heart, upset over such unseemliness...shrinks' is not metaphorical, but as Paster and others have demonstrated is meant literally. Early moderns conceived of the body more as a set of organs than as a unified organism, and they attributed agency, desire, and responsibility to individual bodily organs. Laughter, like most other passions, was widely believed to originate in the heart, the organ responsible for sensual desire and natural appetites, including passions.²³ In early modern physiology, passions occupied a subordinate position in relation to reason, but in the words of Gail Kern Paster, 'the opposition [between reason and passions] was hardly equal....Reason [...] is forever on the defensive, forever seeking domestic peace through appeasement, at times yielding basely to the importunities of passion and sense'.²⁴ Edward Reynolds provides a classic view of passions as beneficial provided they are bound by reason and the logic of temperance: 'as long as they [passions] serve onely to drive forward, but not to drowne Vertue; as long as they keepe their dependence on Reason, and run onely in that Channell wherewith they are thereby bounded', they have a good effect on humanity.²⁵ In practice, however, passions were rarely thought to stay within the bounds of reason, and they are often identified with disease and judged essentially anarchic and unbound. F. N. Coeffeteau, whose treatise *A Table of Humane Passions* was translated into English in 1621, more decisively defines passions as 'infirmities' of the soul.²⁶ There is thus a close link between laughter and embodiment since giving in to one's passions was interpreted as giving in to the demands of one's body at the cost of listening to the higher realm of reason.

Second, Joubert underlines the precarious nature of laughter — its positive impact as a source of joy and vitality for the heart and, at the same time, its origin in impropriety and ugliness and the resulting pain it gives to the person. In the Galenic model of the humoral body, which early

²² Joubert, p. 44.

²³ On this point, see Joubert, p. 36 and Wright, p. 114.

²⁴ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 11.

²⁵ Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (London: 1640; repr. Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1971), p. 60. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Nicholas Coeffeteau, *A table of humane passions with their causes and effects, Translated into English by Edw. Grimston Sergiant at Armes* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1621), 5473 (STC 2nd edn.), p. 18.

moderns inherited from ancient Greece, joy is a source of heat and vitality for the body because it expands the heart and issues forth a great quantity of vital spirits, the early modern intermediaries between the body and the soul, which assure the body's continuing life and energy. Accordingly, the Induction to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592) advertises the effect of 'mirth and merriment' as that 'which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life' (Induction.2.131).²⁷

But if the positive function of laughter is to bring joy and vitality to the human body, its joy is always basely material and, moreover, evoked by representations of ugliness and impropriety on stage. Even in the more positive evaluations of laughter, its joy is considered transitory and merely refreshing, or calculatingly strategic and really evoked for some other purposes, such as education or persuasion. For instance, in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560), Thomas Wilson advises rhetoricians to use laughter strategically — in order to 'quicken these heavy-loaded wits of ours, and much to cherish these our lumpish and unwieldy natures', so that the audience would be better prepared for the finer points of rhetoric.²⁸ Wilson's reference to the human body as a 'heavy-load' for the wit, or intellect, as well as 'lumpish' and 'unwieldy' to move by reason, unless one uses laughter, discloses an early modern dialectic between the weight of the material body, refreshed and revitalized by laughter, and the higher demands of one's intellect, which is the real subject of rhetorical persuasion. Likewise, in the quote above Joubert describes the joy and sadness of laughter as in some way false and unreal when contrasted to the emotions of real joy and real pain: during laughter the heart 'expands *just as it does in real joy*' and '*as if feeling pain*, shrinks and tightens'.²⁹ Joubert's qualification of laughter stems from his conviction that the subject of laughter is necessarily trivial — in other words, bodily pleasure and 'serious' questions, such as morality and politics, could not be combined.

Given the theory that laughter is pleasurable without being important, it was a common precept that the emotions evoked in laughter should be carefully monitored, in order to remain 'light' and equidistant both from pity and condemnation.³⁰ Diverse writers, from the vehement anti-theatrical critic Stephen Gosson to the distinguished Philip Sidney and playwrights such as Ben Jonson and Thomas Heywood, articulated the widespread belief that laughter in comedy is an experience that always threatens to become too powerful, too embodied, and too pleasurable. For

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 159–229.

²⁸ Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. by Peter Medine (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 47.

²⁹ Joubert, p. 44. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Ghose, pp. 56–60.

instance, Stephen Gosson writes that the kind of people who laugh at comedies are ‘the worst sort of people’ who are ‘caried away with every rumor, and so easily corrupted, that in the Theaters they generally take up a wonderfull laughter, and shout altogether with one voice’ (184).³¹ In his critique, Gosson singles out loud laughter and imagines the audience as one organism that ‘shout[s] altogether with one voice’. In contrast to smiling, laughter is loud and vocal, and according to Andrew Gurr it is one of the ways that crowds asserted their presence, physicality, and togetherness during performance. In his section on ‘auditorium behavior’, Gurr lists laughter together with other kinds of physical response, such as clapping, talking, hissing, stamping, and even throwing objects at the players.³² If Gosson is notorious in his unrestrained critique of theater, comedy’s defenders are only slightly more tolerant of audience laughter. In *An Apology for Poetry*, Philip Sidney ties audience laughter to the purpose of education, claiming that it is wrong to evoke ‘laughter only’, without that ‘delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy’.³³ Another humanist apologist for comedy, Thomas Heywood does not mention laughter, but overall gives the same account as Sidney, that comedy should be a source of education, moral reform, and moderate refreshment for the mind.³⁴

In this context, *Twelfth Night* replicates the humanist organization of comedy in the subplot as it ties the revelers’ laughter to the purgation of Malvolio’s vices. Ostensibly, Sir Toby and Maria’s laughter is directed against Malvolio’s intolerance of festivity, his self-love, and overweening ambition. At the same time, however, the comedy tests the limits of humanist theatrical education by making Malvolio unrepentant in the end and the revelers more concerned with their self-entertainment than with the educational goal of comedy — the purge of Malvolio’s vices. Writing in relation to Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s comedy *The Captain* (1612), Jeremy Lopez has argued that this comedy constructs a merry world where ‘there is no action, once done, that cannot be undone’;³⁵ he therefore sees the moments of potential crisis in the play as places where the play ‘mocks’ theater audiences for believing in the possibility of tragedy and for ‘failing to keep up’ with the play’s comedic conventions.³⁶ Borrowing Lopez’s valuable analysis of genre, I see the Malvolio plot as doing the reverse: it separates passion from its comedic framework, showing instead how the characters’ laughter at Malvolio exceeds the limits

³¹ Stephen Gosson, ‘Playes Confuted in five Actions’, in *The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes*, ed. by W. C. Hazlitt (London: Burt Franklin, 1869), pp. 157–218.

³² Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 51.

³³ Sidney, p. 112.

³⁴ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612; repr. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 54.

³⁵ Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 181.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

prescribed to it by humanist ideology. Unmoored from the educational framework advocated by Philip Sidney in *The Apology for Poetry* and Ben Jonson in his theatrical prologues, this loud laughter labels Sir Toby and Sir Andrew as emphatically English and excessively embodied, but it also implicitly ridicules the classical values of melancholy and refinement as embodied by the characters in the Italian/Illyrian main plot. The loud laughter in the English subplot thus competes with the refined passions of the Italian/Illyrian lovers.

Humanist Heritage and the Moderation of Passions

At the outset of their trick Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste think of their deception of Malvolio both as revenge, in the sense of the proper distribution of justice, and an independent source of pleasure that will be enjoyable beyond being merely useful. So Maria outlines the terms of her plan thus: ‘it is his [Malvolio’s] grounds of faith that all that look on him love him, and on that vice in him will my revenge notable cause to work’ (2.3.146–148). Thus, the obvious motivating factor for the ‘revenge’ on Malvolio is his ‘vice’ of self-love, as it is perceived by Maria and others. At the same time, however, the revenge is also called ‘a device’, ‘sport royal’ and ‘my physic [that] will work on him’ (2.3.157, 167, 167–8). While the initial designation of the deception as ‘revenge’ might simply suggest the intentions of vengeance and retribution, the other terms reveal Maria and Sir Toby’s understanding of the mock letter as a more complex phenomenon: it is also ‘a contrivance’, ‘an ingenious or clever expedient’,³⁷ a great ‘diversion, entertainment, fun’;³⁸ and a type of medicine or ‘physic’ that will ‘work’ on Malvolio in order to finally cure him of his ‘vice’ of self-love, here figured as a form of disease.

Structurally, the joke on Malvolio replicates the typical design for comedy advocated by early modern humanists; writers such as Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, or Thomas Heywood wanted to use and direct the pleasure of laughter against social vices. Laughter at follies is essential to Jonsonian comedy since it is part of the humanist educational process, which leads the audience from scornful laughter to rejection of these vices and individual reform. As Jonson writes in the Prologue to *Volpone* (1606), ‘In all his poems still hath been this measure, / To mix profit with your pleasure’ (Prologue.7–8).³⁹ Similarly, Philip Sidney is willing to defend laughter in comedy only if it serves the ‘profit’ of audience education and reform. In the *Apology*’s section on tragicomedy, Sidney objects to the comic part, which is ‘indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter, and

³⁷ *OED* ‘device’ n., 6.

³⁸ *OED* ‘sport’ n.1, 1.1a.

³⁹ Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, in *Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques*, 2nd edn, ed. by Richard Harp (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 3–111. All subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition.

nothing else'.⁴⁰ In contrast, he speaks approvingly of the satiric poet who 'sportingly never leaveth until he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed to laugh at himself, which he cannot avoid, without avoiding the folly....'.⁴¹ In the humanist theory of comedy, laughter is a strategic device used by the playwright to 'capture' the audience into enjoyment and from hence lead them into 'profit' or useful behavior. Along similar lines, in *The Schoolmaster* (1570), a handbook of humanist education, Roger Ascham argues that a schoolmaster should not use fear, but gently direct the scholar's interest to learning, for profit is greatest when it is combined with pleasure. For instance, the schoolmaster must encourage the student by using praise, by employing the 'best allurements [he] can' in order to foster questions, and by following the Ascham's own 'lively and perfect' method for teaching the often tedious subject of grammar.⁴² As in Jonson and Sidney, student's 'discreet' enjoyment forms the basis of Ascham's educational principles.⁴³

By devising a plot that aims to expose Malvolio to public laughter and thus teach him a lesson, Maria and others follow a typical method of humanist education: they envision the comedy as an experience of pleasure and ridicule and their collective laughter as a tool that brings about Malvolio's humiliation and possible 'cure'. The same vocabulary of 'physic', 'cure' and 'restorative', as in Maria's reference to her joke as 'my physic', frequently appears in Jonson's comedies, where humoral characters are 'sick' of self-love or other character vices, while laughter and public humiliation serve as purgatives of individual diseases.⁴⁴ But if Maria's statement refers to the curative properties of her joke, Fabian's exclamation, 'What dish o'poison has she dressed him [Malvolio]!' reveals the thin line separating Maria's 'physic' from 'poison' and the bitter-sweet aftertaste of humanist comedy (2.5.111). In the context of the humanist valorization of laughter as an effective tool of ridicule, *Twelfth Night* both replicates and critiques humanist comedy in its subplot with Malvolio. Sympathy with Malvolio, especially by the end of the play, is not just a modern phenomenon, since the characters from the main plot

⁴⁰ Sidney, p. 112.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 97.

⁴² Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. by Lawrence V Ryan (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 16.

⁴³ On humanist belief in the educational potential of theater, see William West's *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Jonson's poetic declarations in his Prologues to *The Alchemist* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*. See also Sidney, p. 95, where Sidney compares poetry to pleasant 'physic'. For Shakespeare's indebtedness to Jonson's comedy of humours, see James Schiffer, 'Introduction. Taking the Long View: *Twelfth Night* Criticism and Performance', in Schiffer, pp. 1–44 (p. 9); Jason Scott-Warren, 'When Theatres were Bear-Gardens; or, What's at Stake in the Comedy of Humours', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54.1 (2003), pp. 63–82; Paul Mueschke and Jeannette Fleischer, 'Jonsonian Elements in the Comic Underplot of *Twelfth Night*', *PMLA*, 48.3 (Sept. 1993), pp. 722–40; Harry Levin, 'The Underplot of *Twelfth Night*', in *Twelfth Night: Critical Essays*, ed. by Stanley Wells (New York: Garland, 1986), pp. 161–169. Unlike these readings, I see Shakespeare's relation to Jonson in terms of affective difference in their plots, not simply in terms of literary borrowing and influence.

also condemn the ‘abuse’ of Malvolio (5.1.372). So Olivia does not see the plot as comedic despite Fabian’s humanist appeal for the value of punitive comedy. Fabian says:

How with a sportful malice it [the deception] was followed
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge,
If that the injuries be justly weighed
That have on both sides passed.
(5.1.359–362).

He effectively asks Olivia to join in the rank of audience members and laugh at Malvolio the way the characters in the subplot as well as audience members in the theater may have laughed. He thinks of laughter in the context of a system of justice and punishment — ‘if that the injuries be justly weighed’, it would be found that Malvolio has offended more and therefore deserves to be laughed at.

The role of the ideal humanist audience is thus similar to that of a judge, whose laughter is tempered with reason and the knowledge of right and wrong. Given the humanist emphasis on judgment and reason, it is a curious and telling phenomenon that humanist comedies often end in court. Starting with Ben Jonson’s *Every Man In His Humour* (1598), in which Justice Clement evaluates each character’s grievances, and through *Volpone* (1606), in which the main character is publicly tried for his practical ‘jokes’ on others, humanist comedies envision audiences who relate to the play not by trying on the characters’ passions, but by evaluating them as if from a distance and only selecting those which are worth imitating. The Malvolio plot, however, undermines this idealized view of passions by insisting on their infectious and intensely pleasurable nature. Early in the play, Maria advises Sir Toby to ‘confine yourself within the modest limits of order’, to which Sir Toby rebelliously and drunkenly replies, ‘Confine? I’ll confine myself no finer than I am. / These clothes are good enough to drink in, and so be these boots too. An they be not, let them hang themselves in their own straps!’ (1.3.7–12). This lack of ‘confinement’ rings throughout Sir Toby’s actions, including his self-indulgence in laughter, a form of bodily pleasure that is comparable to his indulgence in drinking. The subplot shows the pleasure of laughter to be infectious and addictive, spreading from a person to a trio, to a group, and perhaps to the whole theater audience joining the on-stage characters in their laughter and entertainment. The ‘disaster’, so to speak, to which Jeremy Lopez alludes in his study of comedy’s generic closeness to tragedy, is not avoided in this perversely humanist comedy that lets the onstage revelers laugh at Malvolio and Sir Andrew to their utter pleasure. At one point in the game, Fabian exclaims in disbelief, ‘If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it

as an improbable fiction' (3.4.123–24). He sees Malvolio acting as a 'sir of note' and haughtily saying to Maria and Sir Toby: 'Go hang yourself, all. You are idle shallow things; I am not of your element' (3.4.119–120). Malvolio is so completely invested in the contents of Maria's letter that Fabian finds it almost unbelievable. His comment, of course, brings the meta-theatricality of the moment into focus and underlines the artificiality of the joke's success — its unbelievably perfect realization, which lets the revelers enjoy Malvolio's humiliation to the fullest and capitalize on the device of dramatic irony. 'Look at him; he is funny!' — the revelers seem to say as they implicitly invite audiences to laugh with them.

The figure of the audience is key to understanding how humanist writers like Jonson imagined the routes of emotional transmission from the stage and out in the world.⁴⁵ Contrary to the modern tendency to believe, for example, that we should empathize with characters and events on stage, Philip Sidney, Thomas Heywood, and Ben Jonson had a very ambivalent attitude to passion, especially to laughter in a comedy. The ideal audience member is not the one who gives himself away to the influence of theatrical passion, but the one who tempers his passions with reason and is able to judge, rather than simply laugh at the performed events. Indeed, in humanist discussion of comedy, pleasurable laughter is often configured as a 'bait', a sort of give-away to the audience that needs to combine 'pleasure' with 'profit' in order to learn from comedy. Both Ben Jonson and Philip Sidney inveigh against loud audience laughter in connection with physical comedy on stage. In the Prologue to *Volpone*, Jonson writes:

Yet thus much I can give you as a token
Of his play's worth, no eggs are broken.
No fierce cuftards with fierce teeth affrighted
Wherewith your rout are so delighted.
(Prologue.19–22).

Calling the audience a 'rout', a denigrating term for a crowd and for a pack of animals, Jonson imagines the physical pleasure of laughter turning the audience into a beast. He refers to breaking eggs and jumping into a pie, clown routines that for Jonson represent the descent into unmediated bodily pleasure and are characteristic of the most unrefined kind of audiences. Likewise, in the *Apology for Poetry*, referred to earlier, Sidney criticizes comedies that evoke

⁴⁵ It is worth clarifying that my essay studies an implied or ideal audience as imagined by the play itself. It proposes a vision of the 'audience' as constructed by the playwright's text, from the site of production as it were. For a different take on the 'audience', see Charles Whitney's *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), which explores how actual audiences appropriated and re-imagined literary texts.

laughter based on ‘wanton sinfulness and lustful love’, ‘scurrility unworthy of any chaste years’ and an ‘extreme show of doltishness’.⁴⁶ In his defense of the ‘right’ kind of comedy, Sidney differentiates between ‘laughter’ and ‘delight’, arguing that ‘the whole tract of a comedy should be full of delight ... But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong, for though laughter may come with delight, yet comes it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter (but well may one thing breed both together)’.⁴⁷ Although Sidney keeps ‘laughter’ as a permissible emotional experience that may come with comedy, he clearly prefers ‘delight’, which for him means a superior experience that is in touch with the ‘real’ values of life, such as virtue and good life.

Humanist writers of the period between late sixteenth and beginning of seventeenth century generally have a vexed relationship to laughter: its pleasure is too bodily, too fluid and exceptionally hard to control. The main justification for laughter — that it provides ‘honest mirth’ and allows the audience to revive their bodies after labor — could not really justify instances of unrestrained bodily pleasure, such as Maria and Sir Toby’s invitation to laugh and keep laughing at Malvolio. Their loud and unrestrained laughter contradicts the early modern amalgam of humoral, Christian, and classical precepts, which underpinned humanist defenses of comedy as educational and only moderately/usefully funny. By replaying the classic humanist plot of a gull being laughed at by a group of clever characters, the Malvolio plot parodies the humanist insistence on the productive use of bodily pleasure, showing instead how laughter easily becomes contagious and uncontrollable. In contrast to the humanist insistence on the regulation of passions and the restraint of bodily pleasure, the subplot configures ‘passion’ as exactly this sign of excess or a form of bodily abundance that would not be kept at bay. So the play first introduces Sir Toby’s merriment in the context of Olivia’s displeasure with his night-time reveling; the picture that the revelers represent is a classic type of fun that in the period was believed to corrupt a person and turn him or her into a beast-like creature. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are up in the middle of the night, drinking, singing songs, and generally disregarding all social norms. In a suggestive exchange, Sir Toby asks Sir Andrew, ‘Does not our life consist of the four elements?’, to which Sir Andrew replies, ‘Faith, so they say, but I think it rather consists of eating and drinking’. Sir Toby then concludes, ‘Thou’rt a scholar; let us therefore eat and drink’ (2.3.9–13). The short dialogue functions as an ironic catechism, which inverts traditional values of Christianity and social responsibility and proposes a self-satisfied life of eating and drinking.

⁴⁶ Sidney, p. 112.

⁴⁷ Sidney, p. 112.

It is also no coincidence that Malvolio hopes to insult the three men by comparing them to working-class people. He addresses the riotous trio, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste, thus: ‘Have you no wit, manners nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house that ye squeak out your coziers’ catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice?’ (2.3.86–89). This type of merriment, Malvolio insinuates, is appropriate only for ‘tinkers’ and ‘coziers’, people who mend pots and shoes, and it should be practiced in an ‘alehouse’, commonly perceived as a low-class location. Although Sir Andrew and Sir Toby are knights and Feste is a professional clown serving a gentlewoman, their position is implicitly compromised by their association with riotous behavior and financial profligacy.⁴⁸ While the play ends up humiliating Malvolio, it never fully acquits the revelers from their identification with drunken ‘tinkers’ and ‘coziers’. The peculiarly English names of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek further separate them from the rest of the community and function as diagnoses of their diseases in the manner of Jonson’s comedy of humours. Keir Elam notes that Toby is ‘typical English name, diminutive of the biblical Tobias’ while his last name is indicative of his lack of social decorum. Andrew was also a common English as well as Scottish name while his last name, Aguecheek, refers to Sir Andrew’s pale skin, a popular sign for cowardice in humoral discourse.⁴⁹

Thus, Sir Toby and Maria’s powerful laughter at Malvolio — their ability to make an authority figure ridiculous through jest — comes with an implicit cost of being thought disobedient, excessive, or even ‘barbarous’ by the characters in the main plot and partly by the play itself.⁵⁰ The exquisite pleasure of their plot, masterfully orchestrated by Maria and further abetted by Sir Toby and Feste, is confined by the logic of humoral excess, which in the period associated excessive laughter with marginality and emphatic embodiment. Continuing the play’s connection between Sir Toby’s laughter and bodily excess, Thomas Dekker, for instance, imagines a would-be gallant as a person distinguished by his excessive laughter. In his mock city-guide *The Gull’s Hornbook* (1609), Dekker ironically advises a would-be gallant ‘to laugh aloud in the midst of the most serious and saddest scene of the terriblest tragedy’ and generally talk and laugh during the performance, disregarding the action on stage — ‘for by talking and laughing, like a ploughman in a morris, you heap Pelion upon Ossa, glory upon glory’.⁵¹ Dekker’s comparison is suggestive because it associates foolish audience laughter with the country and its rustic

⁴⁸ As has been remarked upon by critics, Feste gradually separates himself from the rest of the riotous company. For example, he is absent from the scene portraying the humiliation of Malvolio when the latter is reading Maria’s fake letter and he is also substituted by Fabian during Sir Toby’s pairing of Sir Andrew against Cesario.

⁴⁹ Keir Elam, ‘List of Roles’, in Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, p. 158, fn. 11.

⁵⁰ Olivia refers to Sir Toby’s behavior as ‘barbarous’ in 4. 1. 46–48.

⁵¹ Thomas Dekker, *The Gull’s Hornbook*, ed. by R. B. McKerrow (London: De La More Press Quartos, 1904), pp. 52–53.

representative, a ploughman. In theatrical context, ‘loud laughter’ is frequently associated with clown performances, bawdy comedies, and low-class, uneducated audiences who care about nothing but entertainment. Andrew Gurr writes: ‘[John] Lyly’s prologues written in the 1580s for boy plays at the first Blackfriars and Paul’s more than once express the hope that the gentlemanly audience in the halls would react with “soft smiling, not loude laughing,” or at worst would be too courteous to hiss. These were evidently common reactions elsewhere’.⁵²

Insofar as the comic subplot connects laughter with excessive embodiment and peculiar Englishness (as embodied in the characters of Sir Toby Belch and Andrew Aguecheek), it participates in the humanist and humoral tradition of defining laughter in relation to bodily excess. However, the play’s denigration of laughter is far from complete, for even as the play reflects English merriment through the prism of Italian/Illyrian gentility, it also allows Sir Toby Belch to exorcise Malvolio and administer a blistering critique of classical culture. Critics such as James P. Bendarz and Ivo Kamps have noticed that Malvolio can be read as a distorted version of Orsino and that Sir Toby’s exorcism of Malvolio’s ‘madness’ represents in part the subplot’s attack on the virtues of melancholy, fancy, and imagination so important to the romantic plot. So, Ivo Kamps has argued that the main difference between Malvolio and Orsino is merely ‘one of class. Orsino is the aristocrat whose melancholy love makes him appear fashionable, sensitive, and profound, whereas Malvolio is a commoner who must out of his mind to court someone above his station’.⁵³ Whereas Kamps sees Malvolio as a sort of early modern proto-capitalist who yearns to rise above his station, I see the play’s different treatment of Orsino and Malvolio as a symptom of its unreconciled division between the values of classical culture and those of the English present. For even as the play makes fun of Malvolio’s melancholy and his pretensions to gentility, it also valorizes the culture of refinement, gentility, and introspection, which is only partly discredited by Orsino’s desire for ‘excess’ and Olivia’s subtle parody of Cesario as a melancholy lover. In the last section, I demonstrate the new affective logic in the play’s main plot and the challenge it presents to the hilarious, embodied, and emphatically English laughter in the subplot.

⁵² Gurr, p. 52.

⁵³ Ivo Kamps, ‘Madness and Social Mobility in *Twelfth Night*’, in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, ed. by James Schiffer (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 229–44 (p. 236).

The Italian/Illyrian Love Plot and the Figure of Passionate “Translation”

Scholars have debated the extent to which Illyria, the location of the play, evokes a real location for early moderns or denotes a more imaginative space suggested by the word-play illyrium/delirium and the characters’ repeated reference to their experience in Illyria as a dream or mere illusion. While the bibliographic search by scholars like Patricia Parker and Elizabeth Pentland has unearthed a substantial amount of information about Illyria that would have been available to early moderns, *Twelfth Night* arguably makes sparing use of the specificity of the country where the events take place.⁵⁴ Illyria, or as it was also called at the time Sclavonia (modern-day Serbia), figures in the play only weakly; most notably, there is a typical association of Illyria with piracy, dangerous shores and shipwreck, possibly a hint at Illyria’s turbulent history as a Turkish province in Malvolio turning ‘heathen, a very renegado’ (3.2.59–60) or being castrated (the letters C-U-T in Maria’s letter) and the echo of the famous independent queen of Illyria Teuta in Olivia’s rule over her household. Despite the specificity of these references, attempts to distinguish the Italian ‘foreigners’ Viola and Sebastian from the ‘native’ Illyrians, Orsino and Olivia, have been largely unsuccessful. So, in an article set out to explore the relations between the foreigners and the natives, Lisack concludes that the play ‘emancipates foreignness from strangeness’ as it allows the ‘intruder’ Viola to quickly integrate herself into the new place and lets Olivia and Orsino’s idiosyncrasies, not Viola’s newcomer status, occupy the focus of the plot.⁵⁵ The main lines of national division, I argue, are not between Italians and Illyrians, but between the English characters and their Italian/Illyrian counterparts. In contrast to the emphatically English Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the other characters seem to inhabit a different world of Illyria/Italy and also have predominantly Italian names, Orsino, Viola, Olivia, Feste, Malvolio, Fabian, and Curio, and two names that recall figures from Roman history; ‘Sebastian’ refers to the third-century Roman saint pierced by the arrows, while ‘Cesario’ echoes Caesar, the Roman emperor.⁵⁶ Moreover, Viola and Sebastian are much more like Orsino and Olivia, as the same ties of gentility and graceful speaking make the two groups immediately recognizable to each other. By the end of her first meeting with Viola, Olivia readily believes in the veracity of Viola’s statement, ‘I am a gentleman’ (1.5.271) while upon seeing Sebastian, Orsino immediately reassures Olivia, ‘Be not amazed, right noble is his blood’ (5.1.260).

⁵⁴ For comments on Illyria, see Elam, ‘Introduction’, pp. 68–77; Parker; and Elizabeth Pentland, ‘Beyond the “Lyric” in Illyricum: Some Early Modern Backgrounds to *Twelfth Night*’, in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Schiffer, pp. 149–167.

⁵⁵ Lisack, p. 178.

⁵⁶ Elam, pp. 157–59.

The different character of the romantic plot lies in the fact that it revises the humoral and humanist perception of passion as a potential threat of disease and as a characteristic quality of the marginal members of society whose intemperate bodies easily give in to sensuality and passions. Instead of the humanist insistence on the moderation of passions or their productive re-tooling, the romantic plot imagines a world where passions are radically beneficial and mutually constituted. When Cesario complains to Orsino of her ‘concealed’ love, she gives us the image of ‘disease’ that cannot be cured simply with the humanist tactic of purging passions. In response to Orsino’s ‘And what’s her history [in reference to Cesario’s fictional sister]?’ Cesario replies:

A blank, my lord. 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. Was not this love indeed?

(2.4.110–115)

On one hand, Cesario’s ‘disease’ bears some similarity to Jonson’s portrayal of passions in *Every Man in His Humour*, which sets out to show the extremity of men’s passions and thus cure the audience of the like abuses. Like one of the humoral characters, Cesario similarly complains of the overabundance of passions that find no outlet. And he/she also mixes the psychological and the physiological by figuring her concealed love in natural terms; the comparison between concealment and ‘a worm i’th’bud’ that ‘feeds’ on Viola’s cheek portrays unrequited love as an organic process of internal disease, parasitism, and possible death. At the same time, the passage is framed as an implicit appeal to Orsino to recognize Cesario’s feelings and thus stop the seemingly inevitable cycle of consumption. Thus, in revision to humanist perception of the workings of passion and disease, Cesario’s cure lies not in the attempt to control or moderate her passions, but in Orsino’s reciprocal love. The episode points to the larger tendency of the main plot to celebrate passion as beneficial, radically transformative, and mutually constituted.

In place of the humanist ‘judges’ as audience members, the utopian main plot imagines audience members who let themselves be ‘translated’ into the characters they see on stage. A famous case of Shakespearean comic ‘translation’ occurs, of course, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where a fellow actor sees Bottom transformed into an ass and exclaims, ‘Thou art translated!’ (3.1.105).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Greenblatt and others, pp. 839–97. All subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition.

In the early modern period, ‘translation’ meant not only rendering something into another language, but also and primarily, ‘transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another’.⁵⁸ Bottom’s parodic ‘translation’ into an ass arguably reveals an essential part of his identity: it reveals his affinity with an ass as part of his ‘rude mechanical’ nature, but it also demonstrates his ability to be transformed and experience visions close to the divine. The ambiguity of Bottom’s ‘translation’, both valorized and ridiculed in *Dream*, resonates with the romantic characters’ ‘translation’ in the love plot of *Twelfth Night*. *Twelfth Night* retains the ambiguity bestowed on the transformative power of imagination in *Dream*, for even as the English Sir Toby Belch and Maria mercilessly ridicule Malvolio’s ‘imagination’, Cesario and Olivia carry themselves beyond their former identities with the power of their passions.

The centerpiece of the new affective framework lies in the first encounter between Cesario and Olivia. At the start of the meeting, Cesario struggles to keep close to the ‘script’ of his message and simply adhere to the conventions of praising one’s beloved. He begins with a conventionally hyperbolic tribute to Olivia’s beauty as ‘Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty’, but then comically breaks off in order to verify whether she is indeed ‘the lady of the house’ (1.5.165–66). On her part, Olivia tests Cesario by subtly ridiculing the love conventions and probing the sincerity of his passion. She teases Cesario’s desire to follow his ‘script’ by asking, ‘Are you a comedian?’ (1.5.177) and when he again resolves to go on ‘with my speech in your praise’, Olivia ironically comments, ‘Come to what is important in’t — I forgive you the praise’ (1.5.184–88). The dialogue thus alternates between Cesario’s half-hearted attempts to follow the Petrarchan conventions of romantic love and Olivia’s ironic detachment and ridicule. In the manner of Thisbe’s mangled praise of Pyramus from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* — ‘These lily lips, / This cherry nose, / These yellow cowslip cheeks...’ (5.1.317–322) — Olivia likewise ridicules the conventional blazon in her response to Cesario: ‘O sir, I will not be so hard-hearted. I will give out diverse schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will, as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin and so forth’ (1.5.236–240). By substituting the indifference of a legal catalogue in place of the love blazon, she points out the indifference and mechanicity inherent in the love convention itself.

But the surprising outcome of the meeting is that Cesario ‘passes’ the test of Olivia’s ridicule: he impersonates a lover so convincingly that it looks as though he becomes the part he is acting instead of merely rehearsing the studied lines. In a series of powerful moves, he demands to remain alone with Olivia; he wants to see her face, a request which Olivia points out is ‘out of

⁵⁸ *OED* ‘translation’ n., I.1.a.

your text' (1.5.225), and by the end of the dialogue, he shifts to the personal pronoun 'I', completely subsuming Orsino's identity in his own execution of the role. Orsino's passion becomes Cesario's own, as he exclaims, '[I would] Make me a willow cabin at your gate / And call upon my soul within the house; / Write loyal cantons of contemned love / And sing them loud even in the dead of night; ... / O, you should not rest ... / But you should pity me' (1.5.260–268). Love songs, sleepless nights, and complete devotion to one's beloved — on one side, Cesario's love is expressed in conventional Petrarchan terms, but, on the other, what is striking in this speech is the power of his passion and its ability to be transferred from Orsino to Cesario to Olivia and perhaps to theater audiences too. This scene marks an important change from the way passion is handled in humanist comedy because in contrast to its derisive laughter and the demand for excessive passions to be purged, the main plot models a different affective framework for the play's theater audiences — it invites audience participation in the passions felt by the characters, so they too can be translated and reconstituted into 'other' bodies, unknown even to themselves. Passion, a much maligned force, especially in the context of theater, thus becomes an avenue of freedom, the force which theater uses to move its audience beyond the limits of individual embodiment and humoral psychology.

The rift between the two worlds of Illyria/Italy and England is also a temporal split between 'old and antic' melancholy and 'present laughter'. In their excesses, Orsino and Sir Toby Belch embody the distance of the contemporary English world from its classical heritage — the geohumoral association of melancholy with wisdom and its inverse positioning of the English people as too embodied and prone to passionate excess. As a nation that, at least in its grandiose moments, attempted to model itself on the culture of classical Greece, the English people had a pervasive sense of their belatedness in relation to the 'golden age' of antiquity. Mary Floyd-Wilson argues that 'In both imaginative and non-imaginative literature, late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English writers struggle to stabilize and rehabilitate their northern identity [as physically strong, but lacking in wit]'.⁵⁹ In their initial seclusion, melancholy, and unfulfilled love, Olivia, Orsino, and Viola/Cesario embody the emotional traits traditionally associated with a culture of refinement and gentility that is only partially accessible to the English. Juliana Schiesari has persuasively written about the Renaissance cultural status of melancholy as the ultimate upper-class characteristic and a fashionable pretense imported from Italy.⁶⁰ Thus, on one hand, *Twelfth Night* conveys an enduring sense of Englishness as an undesirable characteristic associated with foolishness and embodiment. But on the other, the play revises this sense of

⁵⁹ Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁶⁰ See Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

geohumoral inferiority by comically ‘expelling’ the melancholy of Malvolio and by imagining routes of emotional transmission that are not limited by the logic of humoral excess. Far from following the humanist precept on the moderation of passions, the subplot invites audiences to laugh and keep laughing at Malvolio, while the main plot insists on the virtue of passionate ‘translation’ as the preferred method of audience participation.