Studies in English, New Series

Volume 11 *Volumes 11-12* Article 20

1993

"Conceal me what I am": Reading the Second Scene of Twelfth Night

Stephen Ratcliffe
Mills College

"CONCEAL ME WHAT I AM": READING THE SECOND SCENE OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Stephen Ratcliffe

Mills College

I take as my starting point the moment in the second scene of *Twelfth Night* when Viola, finding herself alone in the world, turns to her friend the Captain and says, *Conceal me what I am.* The line is central not only to a play filled with characters whose true identities are concealed from each other and from themselves but to Shakespeare himself, the writer about whose life we know so very little, whose "negative capability" enabled him to conceal and project his identity (in words) into the hundreds of characters whose words—his words—compose his plays. What Viola wants to be concealed in this case is her gender, the hidden form of her female private parts which biologically determine the nature of the self she projects to the world. But even as *Conceal me what I am* informs us of Viola's plan to hide her sexuality from a threatening world, it also (and simultaneously) enacts the disguise of the identity that *Conceal me* calls for, in that the subject (Viola) that *me* refers to is itself disguised in the words *what I am*—a literal reconfiguration of the person whose sign is *me*—words which in effect double, by echoing the idea of, the word *me*.

This paper focuses on the Act 1 Scene 2 of *Twelfth Night*, a play composed of lines as simply complex as *Conceal me what I am*, whose words enact—which is to say imagine, embody, perform—what those words themselves talk about. My assumption is that what makes *Twelfth Night* a great work of literature is not its large-scale and recognizably humane thematic concerns—"the saturnalian reversal of social roles," in C. L. Barber's classic formulation, or "the pattern...of separation from and reunion with the family" in Coppélia Kahn's psychological reading[1]—but the incredibly dense surface texture of its language, a surface composed of what I want to call private meanings—meanings embedded and concealed at the microtonal level of language itself, meanings whose multiplicity of rhyme-like echoes and doublings take place literally at every point.

The analysis that follows proposes to demonstrate the possibility of a reading that pays a great deal of attention to precisely the kinds of things that aren't ordinarily noticed by readers and audiences—and aren't talked about by literary critics. It means to slow down our experience of the play, both as text (on the page) and as performance (on stage), in order to range around in the materiality of its words, as if chronology—moving from start to finish *in time*—were no longer the central fact of

our experience of a literary work. Reading as closely as may be possible, it means to examine how the play's words work to make meanings in interaction with each other as elements of a language whose surface may be conceived as extending in all dimensions, spatial as well as temporal; as if the multiple linkages that could take place between one part and another might be perceived (by the reader, by the audience) in the instant of knowing the text itself, in the dynamics of whose operation each part functions in multiple systems of order simultaneously.

My reading thus proposes to be an instance of the kind of reading that names the possibilities of language itself, how words connect horizontally—across time and space—as well as vertically to establish ranges of meanings whose directions cross and recross, intersect, diverge, coalesce and split apart, neither simple nor simply interpretable by the critic whose reading would make the text stand as evidence of his or her "reading." It has no object other than to describe what takes place in our experience of reading—or listening to—the play *slowed down* to a speed that would permit the mind to pause, consider, wonder, wander and digress. The play I am reading here is therefore, admittedly, not the play the audience is watching but an idea of that play, or as I prefer to think of it, that ideal play—the one Shakespeare wrote, discovered here as if for the first time in an archeology of meanings many of which appear to have no particular "significance:" which is itself significant so to speak, since the density of continuously unfolding atomic effects—effects that call little or no attention to themselves (*Conceal me what I am*)—is precisely what makes Shakespeare's plays so good.

The reading I propose is intentionally myopic, a gradual step by step (line by line) movement through the scene that prefers being lost in the details of the passage to constructing larger ideas about the passage or its themes. Meaning to be a model of reading as it might be, it means as well to identify what previous criticism has thought (or not thought) to overlook—those instances of meaning between the words themselves, "private" in the sense that they are discrete, imperceptible, intimate, *not* "public," as often as not ordinary—and all the more effective for that reason. Public meaning can be paraphrased out of context, comprehended independently of the text it assumes to understand; private meaning can be identified only by describing, in language necessarily less elegant than that of its subject's, depending for its direction on the movement of the text it follows from line to line—the space occupied by the line (and by each word within that line)

simultaneously a moment of time comprised of sub-moments (words, syllables, phonemes, "silence") each of which registers potentially multiple instances of significance (and/or insignificance) which the commentary upon private meaning would enter and unfold. The entrance into the text can be made at any point, from which, if one is persistent, every point can be reached: the whole of the text is hardly the point, after all, since to arrive at the whole will necessarily be to lose contact (as if by summary dismissal) with the parts that draw us to the text in the first place: parts the analysis of which can show us how the body (of the text) articulates itself independently of whatever we think to say about it, the reader in this case named as one who would simply anatomize (in writing) the facts (in words) of that body: the suggestion of its sound as thought, shape, rhythm, image, tone—or syntax (grammar) in which those elements echo and cohere; so that structures that may be described (the writing of this reading) will be seen to swerve and repeat and overlap, *Conceal*[ing] *me* from *what I am* only in so far as words may be taken as enactments of the world that the play's words perform.

Viola's question in line 1 asks for us what we ourselves ask: *What country, friends, is this?* The first scene has just ended with Orsino's call for his household to go away before him *to sweet beds of flowers*, an exit cue that serves to send us both out of doors—into nature—and back to bed, in his case, a bed *canopied with bow'rs* suggestive of the green world where love, at least in dream, might take place. (Notice that Orsino's proclaimed destination was not one bed but *beds*, a plural that suggests both the multiple locations of places the expectant lover might lie and the series of rests (encounters) he desires to enjoy there, and one that will itself be echoed in Feste's final song, when he sings of the time *when I came unto my beds* —again plural, as if one could lie in two places at once, or one place again and again.) Viola's question to the Captain thus serves as a kind of link from the first scene to the second: where Orsino leaves the first scene on his way out, Viola, his future wife, begins the second scene outdoors, asking where she is. The fact that she doesn't know where she is suggests that she is a stranger here, someone who has just arrived. As such, the audience's possibly first impression upon seeing Viola walk on stage—that she is Olivia, the woman who has been the subject of conversation in the preceding scene—will immediately be upset by the words she first speaks. This can't be Olivia, though she appears to be as young and as beautiful as the woman Orsino desires must be, because she doesn't seem to know where she is. At the same time, because the scene has

changed, we cannot be sure that this isn't Olivia, who has already been linked to the ocean by her salt tears, and who may now be entering with men clearly dressed as sailors. And as we soon discover, this woman too has lost a brother, making her a kind of second Olivia—Olivia's sister, or twin. Notice that we don't yet know Viola's name, and will not hear that name spoken until Sebastian first says it says it in Act 5 (*Thrice welcome, drowned Viola!*); we will hear instead her assumed name, Cesario, the name of her other identity as Orsino's man servant, linking her in ways the play links her throughout both to Orsino, whom she desires, and to Olivia, who desires her (and whose name, though we haven't yet heard it spoken, is—like Malvolio's—her name's twin). Viola and Olivia are also linked by the fact that Olivia will later ask *What's he at the gate, cousin* (1.5.111-12), changing both the terms of the question Viola asks here from geographic place to person and the person(s) addressed from *friends* to *cousin*; and that Viola/Cesario in that scene has become the person *at the gate*, just as Olivia, who in the extremity of her mourning is in some sense "ill," becomes the country (Illyria) whose name now answers the question Viola poses.

The first two words of the Captain's answer to Viola's question, *This is Illyria, Lady*, completes a perfectly commonplace chiasmus (*is this?/ This is*) that will be echoed later by Feste's empty-sounding but thematically significant quip, *That that is is* (4.2.14). The string of various short *i* sounds in the first four syllables of this line, added to the two short *i*'s in the last two syllables of the preceding line (making a string of six syllables chiming in assonance) takes part in another pattern that couples terms of address (*friends/Lady*) around the phonetically—and syntactically-coupled word string, *is this? This is Illyria*. The insistence of the short *i* sound works in effect as a kind of runway upon which the ear is made to approach, take in and continue beyond the name of the country that answers Viola's opening question, a country(side) that is, as Orsino's closing lines of scene 1 suggest, landscaped with *sweet beds of flowers* and *canopied bow'rs*. Illyria is, as the notes tell us, "on the east coast of the Adriatic (*Pelican*), "what is now Yugoslavia" (*Arden*); its first syllable is also, crucially, *Ill-*, an echo both phonetically and substantively of Orsino's appetite for the music and love which *may sicken and so die*, as well as phonetic echo of Olivia's own name—place name and condition of its inhabitants resonating in ways that extend to every surface of the fabric that has begun to be unfolded.

The opening of Viola's next speech, *And what should I do in Illyria?* is again a "what" question, one that links her in different ways both to Orsino and to Olivia. Her question echoes Orsino's question and response to Curio's question in 1.1 (*Will you go hunt, my Lord?/ What, Curio?...why, so I do...*); it also repeats Orsino's question, posed through his emissary Valentine, to Olivia, who, Valentine reports, has indeed determined what *she* will do in Illyria (*she will veiled walk,/ And water once a day her chamber round/ With eye offending brine*). As the second half of its title suggests, what one should (or will) "do" in Illyria is in some sense the play's central question, the question each of its characters is asking—how to *hunt the hart, season/ A dead brother's love, serve this Duke, be Count Malvolia,* or *drink as long as there is passage in my throat and drink in Illyria.*

The casual-sounding tone of Viola's initial response to the Captain suddenly shifts in the next line, *My brother he is in Elysium,* whose completion of an artfully rhyme-like coupling of locations—*Illyria/Elysium,* this place of delirious illness opposed but simultaneously connected to that heavenly place—answers the question she has just asked by implying another question: "Since my brother is dead, what does it matter where I am or what I do?" Viola's actions in Illyria will indeed be limited by the loss of her brother, as are Olivia's, whose attachment (in mourning) to her brother takes precedence over whatever romantic affection she might form for one who loves her.

But whereas one should take comfort in the fact that one's loved ones are, if dead, at least in heaven (as Feste's catechism in 1.5 proves that Olivia is a fool for mourning the brother she believes is in heaven), Viola turns instead to the more immediate glimmer of hope: *Perchance he is not drowned.* The kind of cameleon-like changeableness we have just seen in Orsino's mind in its shifting from desire to surfeit—*Give me excess* ...to *Enough, no more* ...—is replayed here in reverse order, the fatigue and hopelessness attending Viola's realization that her brother is dead changing suddenly into its opposite in the hope that perhaps her brother is *not* dead. She doesn't say "dead," of course, but *drowned,* which echoes the image in Orsino's opening speech of the sea (or sea of love), in whose capacity things (in this case a loved brother's body) may enter and be received. And if there is some hope he may still be alive, who better to ask (in her third "what" question in four lines) but the sailor who might have seen him.

The repetition of the word *perchance* in the Captain's reply, *It is perhance that you yourself were saved,* links Viola's happy escape from a near-drowning we don't yet know about with her brother's possible

escape from a similar fate. It also participates in a chiasmic sequence (*Perchance he is/ It is perchance*) whose incidental shifting of terms (*he...It*) leads to a significant shifting of further terms (*he* becomes *you yourself, drowned* becomes *saved*). Notice that we do not notice that other terms (and sounds) in these two lines, also incidently, both do and do not shift: *you* (meaning "sailors") becomes *you* (meaning Viola) who is "saved."

Metrically irregular, Viola's next line—*O my poor brother, and so perchance may he be*—divides itself into two unequal halves that are at once pulled together phonetically (by the *o* sounds in *O* and *so*, *m* sounds in *my* and *may*, and *p*-plus-vowel-*r* sounds in *poor* and *per-*) and split apart by their apparently contradictory substance and tone: *O my poor brother*, by itself, leads to total despair; *and so perchance may he be* opens itself up to the hope that Viola was not the only one to have escaped drowning.

The first words of the Captain's response in line 8, *True, madam; and, to comfort you with chance*, seems on the surface straightforward enough: Viola's brother may indeed also have been saved. But what exactly does his *True, madam* respond to—the hope registered in Viola's *and so perchance may he be*, or, conversely, her exclamation of despair in *O my poor brother*? (If the latter, the Captain seems to confirm that Viola's brother has indeed been drowned.) As the line continues, the phonetic links provided by the conjunction (the words *madam; and* are triply tied, by *m/n*, short *a* and *d* sounds) extend to the last syllable of the line (*chance*) which recurs here for the third time in three lines: *perchance...perchance...chance. And* is itself given metrical weight, after the trochaic reversal of the first foot followed by strong caesura

/ x | x /
True, mad | *am; and*),

that emphasis linking it to the assertion of (favorable) chance that will provide the *comfort* Viola desires.

The Captain begins his narrative in line 9, *Assure yourself, after our ship did split*, by repeating himself in several ways at once: *Assure you-* echoes the syntax and idea of *comfort you* (8); vowel-plus-*r* sounds recur in *-sure*, *your-*, *-ter*, and *our*, and short *i*, *d/t* and *s* sounds in *ship did split*. Divided by these sound patterns, the line itself splits into two unequal halves, the first informed by an internal shift in pronouns (the second person *yourself* changes to the first person plural *our*) which

echoes grammatically the logic of the second: what the line "says" and what the line "does" rhyme. Notice also the rhyme-like logics by which *yourself* is coupled to *our ship*, and the way that *our ship did split* echoes the division of *yourself*—the dynamics whereby a shifting of pronouns (*yourself, after our*) creates a division of the whole self, the interactions of whose parts constitutes exactly such a division.

Line 10, *When you, and those poor number saved with you,* which is also split apart rhythmically by the caesura after *you*, is simultaneously pulled together at its extremities by the anaphora-like pairing of *When you...with you*. The time sense introduced by the preceding line's *after* is repeated here in *When*, making it at once more emphatic and less certain: *When* after the break-up of the ship did the event the Captain is about to narrate take place? The focus on time in the Captain's story amounts to suspense, any delay in the relation of which increases—by adding words to—that effect. The time it takes to tell the story seems also to be extended by the Captain's language, which continues to digress: *poor number* repeats, with variation, Viola's *poor brother* in line 7; *saved with you* echoes in reverse the Captains's previous *you...saved* in line 6. Notice also that the shift in grammar, from the plural (*those*) to singular (*number*) saved, registers a shift in Viola's expectation: if more than one person has been rescued, there is a chance her brother was among *those...saved*; but if the number was indeed *poor* (meager) his chances for survival must proportionately shrink.

The potential reversal of fortune enacted in line 10 is reenacted in line 11, *Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother*, in the logic by which *Hung on* suggests being hanged (killed). The shift by which *our ship* (9) here changes to *our...boat* imagines the splitting up of one vessel into smaller parts of itself, though *boat* at the same time, especially one that is *driving*, seems to contradict what we know to be true: that the ship did in fact break apart. If it is *driving*, as this story itself drives forward, it must be because of the wind (so a storm); those in the story, those hearing it in Illyria (on stage) and those in the audience witness to its telling (on stage or, as readers, on the page) are carried forward through the line, which closes what had been opened in the previous line's *When* clause: then [implied] *I saw your brother.* But at the same time as this clause drives the action of the Captain's story forward, it digresses both grammatically—in the pronouns (*our...your*) that reverse the order of the same two pronouns two lines before (*your-...our*)—and substantively—in the several logics by which *your brother* rehears (or mishears) *poor number* (10), *poor brother* (7)

and *my brother* (4). As for the comma after *brother*, the eye sees (and ear hears) more delay: the inevitable suspension (of time and space) registered by the line break is extended further, that is, as if to insist that the meaning of what the Captain saw (*your brother*) will not and cannot be known any time soon. Everything in this play in fact has to do with delay—the suspension imagined in *Hung on our driving boat*—which at every level and in every dimension amounts in effect to the play's denial of—or refusal to arrive at—closure.

Line 12, *Most provident in peril, bind himself* again divides itself at the comma, the appositive phrase separating subject from predicate, both halves linked across the caesura by multiple likenesses of sound: *p/b* plosives in *provident, peril, bind*; vowel-plus-*n*-plus-*d/t* in *provident* and *bind*; vowel-plus-*l* in *peril* and *himself*. *Provident* by itself suggests both seeing forward—moving as the Captain's story moves, though it in fact is looking back to actions that have already taken place—and, more distantly, the foresight of divinity whose care serves to protect one in situations as perilous as the sinking of a ship. The brother's action, *bind*[ing] *himself*, makes no clear sense at this point—more suspense, extended delay: what exactly did the Captain see?

Line 13, (*Courage and hope both teaching him the practice*) furthers that delay, the parenthesis an audience will not see (no matter how effective the actor's voice in registering its interruption) leading us to hear—or mishear, momentarily—*Courage* and *hope* as the second and third members in a list of objects bound by the brother, beginning with *himself*. It thereby makes these two abstractions concrete—things, like *himself*, that can be tied up—which the line's substance implies as well, in effect personifying both *Courage* and *hope* as figures capable of *teaching* the brother something. The word *both* operates in two systems at once here, one completed and the other not: it links *Courage* and *hope* together and simultaneously suggests that they both *teach....him the practice* and [blank]: conjunction and verb missing, and not to be supplied, the expectation of closure in this frame of reference, as elsewhere throughout the play on all levels, denied.

Although the sense of line 14, *To a strong mast that liv'd upon the sea*, links it back to the end of line 12 (*bind himself ...To a strong mast*), an audience who won't see the close of the parenthesis, even though it hears some pause (depending on the actor's intonation) after *practice*, will be momentarily led to connect *practice/ To a strong mast that liv'd*—a linkage the short *a* sounds in *practice, mast* and *that* and the short *i* sounds in *practice* and *liv'd* persuades us, even though the

grammar and logic of that statement don't make sense. At the same time, this mistaken unfolding of the Captain's story *does* make sense: as we wait for the still missing (and never to appear) second verb whose presence is implied in *both teaching*, (mis)hear the brother *bind himself, Courage and hope*, and again (mis)hear this pair of personifications *teaching him the practice/ To a strong mast*, we are led to experience a literal enactment of the gap between events in the world and events in words—whose multiple interactions may be thus easily fused. In any case, the image of the brother binding himself to a mast binds him also to Odysseus, whose story thus fuses with this one. The dimensions of his narrative suddenly expanding, the Captain becomes a second Homer, each tellers of a sea adventure whose protagonist ties himself—or in Odysseus' case, is tied by his men—to a mast in order to escape certain *peril*, which leads one to ask: who are the sirens of *Twelfth Night* —Olivia/Viola?—and where (and from where) is this brother sailing?

Whereas Odysseus' mast was still fixed to his ship, the brother's *liv'd upon the sea/ Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back*—the Captain's story suddenly shifting to another classical myth, the story of the poet Arion, who with his music charms the dolphin that later, when he is thrown overboard by pirates, saves him from drowning (Ovid's *Fasti*, 2.79-118). And whereas the echo of Odysseus in the preceding line may be heard or not, the now-literary Captain's explicit reference to a legendary Greek poet can't be mistaken: following this parallel, one is led to wonder if this brother too is escaping from pirates—both yes and no, as it turns out, since Sebastian comes ashore with Antonio, his friend the pirate, from whose company he spends considerable energy attempting to escape. Notice how Arion is joined to the dolphin not only by myth but, loosely, by the vowel-plus-*n* sound in *Arion...on...dolphin's*, and how the logic (and sound) of *mast...upon...sea* is both continued and discontinued in the logic of *Arion on the dolphin's back.*

Line 16, *I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves* continues to shift frames of reference, in ways that both widen the gap between the story that is told and the events it reports and effectively undermine the claim that his story will be a "comfort" to Viola, since the Captain's grammatical slip suggests that he (rather than the brother) was the one who rode like Arion on the dolphin's back. While *I saw him* here echoes, with variation, *I saw your brother* in line 11, the action seen in each case is remarkably different: in one, the brother binds himself to a *mast that liv'd upon the sea* (presumably saving him); in the other, he

hold[s] *acquaintance with the waves*—a description whose sense of intimacy between the person and water might well be taken as a sign that he was not "saved" but indeed drowned. (Compare Gertrude's account of Ophelia, who in drowning appears similarly—and curiously—at home in the water:

> Her clothes spread wide,
> And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up;
> Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and endued
> Unto that element. But long it could not be
> Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
> Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
> To muddy death. [4.7.150-58]

Like line 16, which leaves the brother suspended on (or in) the water, hardly "saved" even if not yet "drowned" (notice that *hold acquaintance with the waves* suggests a kind of speaking, or conversation—as in holding forth—that seems to go on and on), the Captain's speech ends inconclusively in line 17: *So long as I could see*. The end of the story determines what we know of the action it unfolds, action whose resolution is—crucially—not included in the story. What is missing is exactly what Viola needs most to know, not what happened up through this point (what the Captain saw *So long as* [he] *could see*) but what happened next, what apparently he did not see. Still, in telling the story in the first place, the Captain of course means to offer Viola the hope that her brother may well have been "saved"; also wanting to convey that possibility, but at the same time constructing a story of suspense created by literally shifting frames of reference, delay and the refusal of closure, Shakespeare in turn means us to expect that this brother will probably turn up later in the play.

Viola in response—*For saying so, there's gold*—becomes a reader (or better, member of the audience), whose interpretation of the story (a reading) ascribes to it the happy ending she so much wants. Her payment to the Captain—does she throw him a coin from her purse? where did she get it?—echoes in reverse the *debt of love* that Orsino says Olivia pays to *her* bother (1.1.35), the economic transaction arising in one case from the grief that he is dead, and in the other from the mirror-like opposite hope that he is still alive. The logic by which the Captain's telling of his story leads to Viola's giving him her gold is itself enacted literally, in the recurrance of *so* (*So long as I could see/*

For saying so) and, more particularly, in the phonetic linking of vowel-plus-*r* and long *o* sounds in both halves of the telling/paying equation (*For...so, there's gold*). Notice that it isn't what he saw that warrants her reward but what he says—the fact of putting into words, no matter how far that language may be from the event, counting in this case for everything one can hope for.

Only six syllables long, line 18 has created a space (in the silence of its "missing" syllables) not only for the action of Viola's tossing or handing the Captain her gold but for her thoughts to move to the next step—*Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope*—which as it turns out is backward. In thinking of *Mine own escape* from the sea she remembers the past, a memory that immediately moves through the present into a future in which she imagines her brother will still be alive. The long *o* sounds in the line separate and at the same time link together in a chain each of these temporal stages: *Mine own escape* (what happened in the past) *unfoldeth* (memory replaying it in the present) *to my hope* (for what she wants to know with certainty in the future).

The sense of direction implicit in the words *unfoldeth to my hope* (concrete "action" leading to abstract "position") continues in the opening word of line 20, *Whereto thy speech serves for authority*, which suggests both place and, in its repeated preposition *to*, the act of getting there. What happens from this point forward, however, shifts the idea from a focus on *hope* (that Viola's brother *has* escaped and *is* alive) to a focus on the Captain's story (which may or may not be understood to confirm these possibilities, depending on one's "reading" of his *speech*). The word *speech* itself operates in at least two logics at once, denoting both the Captain's narrative account of what he saw and, stepping outside of the fiction of the play, the actor who plays the Captain's delivery of that "speech." Moving—again with double logic—forward in both these directions simultaneously, the word *authority* means to convey both the Captain's credibility as a witness to recent events on the high seas and Shakespeare's own absent presence—the identity behind, and responsible for, all of these speeches.

A sentence that has begun two lines earlier concludes in line 21, *The like of him. Know'st thou this country?*, with a phrase whose meaning would be completely obscure were it not for the fact that we are persuaded that we understand exactly what the words mean: just as Viola has escaped, so she hopes has her brother. The construction in which *The like of him* is taken as an ellipsis for "the same thing that happened to me will have happened to him"—where *him* is the same *him* the Captain saw *hold*[ing] *acquaintance with the waves* (16)—

stretches the imagination's capacity to shape, and conceive the meaning of, words in ways analogous to the way in which Viola allows herself to believe her brother was saved even though the Captain has explicitly *not* confirmed that fact. Her readiness to believe what she wants to believe is reflected in, and perceived because of, our own readiness to believe we understand the sense of something that does not literally make sense. Like Arion on the dolphin's back, both the character and her audience are led to experience a possibility beyond the limits of what one would have thought, without these words, would be possible. Having made that leap of faith, satisfying herself that what at the start of this scene she had not dared to hope for (her brother's escape) has indeed occured, she returns literally to the start of the scene: *Know'st thou this country?*

In answering "yes"—*Ay, madam, well, for I was bred and born*—the Captain's *Ay* in line 22 sounds again (with different sense) five syllables later in the first person pronoun *I*, a rhyme-like pulling together and pushing apart that is reenacted (with different terms) in the alliterative and logical coupling of *bred* and *born*. The line's substance looks back in time to two different events, the first—his conception, nine months earlier than the second, his birth—one the Captain could not himself have witnessed. Notice that *well*, which registers the extent of his knowledge, is linked by short *e* to *bred* (itself linked by consonance and logic to *born*), which registers the source of that knowledge. Still, one thinks to ask, how does he know where his parents conceived him, and what does that have to do with his knowledge of *this country*?

The operation of a logic by which the first three words of line 23, *Not three hours from this very place*, are taken to measure both time and space—"less than three hours (but more than two)" *and* "the distance equal to less than three hours"—leads to a separate logic by which *this very place* is taken to mean two different measures of space—"this country" (which it echoes from line 21) and "this piece of ground upon which we are standing." At the same time, *place* at the end of the line also implies the present tense—the place where we are standing *now*—which retroactively turns the Captain's claim that he was *bred* and *born* three hours from now into mere, if only momentary, lunacy.

Interpreting the phrase *this very place* to mean not the ground under her feet but the political state, Viola's question in line 24, *Who governs here?*, effectively stops the shifting of scales implicit in the preceding line. The silence at the end of her question, an empty space

where six syllables would have sounded were not the line metrically irregular, may be heard as a kind of drum-roll (or absence of it) leading up to the introduction of the name of the man who will soon become her husband.

The first four syllables of line 25, *A noble duke, in nature as in name,* answer—metrically as well as logically—the only four syllables of the preceding line, and echo as well a significant—and unnoticed—strand of Viola's preceding question: *Know'st thou this count-?* What follows may in turn be said to echo the silence of expectation implied by the missing six syllables of line 24: *nature* and *name,* words that are linked together not only by vowel and consonant sounds but by the logic of their relation to the word *noble,* reconstruct the blank space that is as yet unfilled in Viola's knowledge of Orsino.

What is his name? Viola asks in line 26 (her third question in as many lines), these four syllables in effect repeating the four-syllable "who" question of line 24. The echo of sound and substance continues, after the line stops, in the silence that again fills out the absence of syllables at the end of the line. Once the sound of the question stops, no sound takes over, occupying (as measure) the duration of a line whose extension into silence delays an answer to *What is his name,* thereby building (again the silent drum-roll) suspense.

The play's first one-word line, *Orsino,* repeats the first name under "Names of the Actors" (which an audience will not yet have heard), where it was followed by his official title: *Orsino, Duke of Illyria.* No title amplifies the name here—preceding lines have in effect already delivered the information—only the three-syllable word, *Orsino,* whose presence carries sufficient weight to hold down, single-handedly so to speak, the entire line. Orsino's reputation, as delivered by this and the preceding line, seems more impressive indeed than the character who presents himself on stage, the character the play *shows* us: the Orsino imagined by the Captain's naming of him here—the *one self king* (1.1.40) he sees in himself, whom soon enough Viola herself will see and bow to—looms larger by far than the figure in 1.1. who, like Proust, can hardly get out of bed.[2]

Echoing exactly the Captain's naming of Orsino, Viola's response in line 28, *Orsino! I have heard my father name him,* in turn leads backward in time to her memory of her father's original naming. The word *Orsino* here completes a pattern of linked identities in which the first words in two consecutive lines (*Orsino/Orsino*) are identical both to each other and to the idea of the last words in the two preceding lines (*name/name*) which are themselves identical; notice, too, that the word

name, which occurs three times in four lines, functions differently in each line: in the Captain's *A noble duke, in nature as in name*, the word *name* connotes Orsino's privileged social rank, his fame and reputation; in Viola's *What is his name*, it denotes the designation by which that person is known; in her *I have heard my father name him*, it names the action of her father naming Orsino. This literal doubling of the spoken name (*Orsino/Orsino!*) followed by an implied tripling of that name—which isn't in fact sounded and isn't heard by an audience, though Viola says that she herself has heard it—repeats with variations the kinds of doubling and tripling of elements that gives shape and texture to the surface of the play at virtually every point: the build-up of Viola's questions about Orsino interspersed with the Captain's answers, for instance, in *Know'st thou this country?...Who governs here?...What is his name?*

Her father's naming of Orsino is extended, and complicated, by Viola's recollection in line 29 that *He was a bachelor then.* Momentarily ambigious, *He* refers as easily to the father—which doesn't make sense, in that Viola would not have been *bred and born* yet, and so couldn't then have heard him speaking—as to Orsino: the grammatical bonding of the father with Orsino provides a foundation upon which the patriarch's choice of a suitable husband for his daughter can take place. Never stated as such, the appearance of Orsino in her father's thoughts—echoed by his sounding of Orsino's name—has set into motion (even before the play begins) that generic and engendering drive toward the inevitable, multiple couplings of both language (enacted throughout the play) and marriage (to be enacted after the play ends).

Amplifying the desire the young woman has implicitly—and yet unknowingly—felt since *then*, the metrically-dictated voicing of silence after Viola's recollection (six or seven syllables, depending upon the actor's slurring or articulation of *bach-e-lor*) leads to the Captain's confirmation in line 30 of what she hopes—but doesn't know she hopes—is true: *And so is now, or was so very late*—a line that echoes the line it responds to in a multitude of ways. Temporally (and grammatically), *was* is answered by *is*, *then* by *now*; logically, *a bachelor* is both identical and not identical to *so*. Within the line itself the linkage of sequential alternate conjunctions (*And ...or*) alternates with both the chiasmic linkage of *so is...was so*—compare Feste's *Nothing that is so is so* (4.1.8) and *That that is is* (4.2.11)—and the temporal linkage of *now...very late*, which itself completes a construction in these two lines of three distinct, non-sequential time

frames: the distant past (*then*, when Viola heard her father speak), the present (*now*), the recent past (*very late*—meaning not "after" or "toward the end" but, as an ellipsis for *lately*, "not long since").

Line 31, *For but a month ago I went from hence*, continues the train of thought he has just begun by repeating both the idea of time (*very late* becomes *a month ago*) and the sequence of sounds (vowel-plus-*r*, schwa, long *o*) in the syllables that convey that idea: *or was so.../ For but a month ago*. The conjunction *For* at the beginning of the line, here meaning "because" (the OED cites *Othello* 3.4.161: "They are jealious for they're jealious"), as in Viola's *For saying so* (18) and the Captain's *For I was bred and born* (22), followed by a *but* which functions here not as the fourth conjunction in less than two lines (*And, or, For, but*) but adverbially, meaning "only," as in Orsino's *To pay this debt of love but to a brother* (1.1.35), mirrors a similarly knotted conjunction at the end of the line, where *went from hence* couples together the past tense of the verb "go" followed by a preposition, here used to specify the starting point in a spacial movement, followed by the effectively redundant adverb *hence*, which echoes the sound of *went* and the logic of *from*, meaning "from here, from this place" (the OED cites *Richard II* 3.3.6: "Richard, not farre from hence, hath hid his head"), thus in effect repeating—at once expanding and condensing—the Captain's account of his birth *Not three hours' travel from this very place* (23).

Calling no attention to itself, the word *then* in line 32, *And then 'twas fresh in murmur (as you know,* complicates the sequential linkage of time frames (present, recent past, distant past) by repeating the sound but not the logic of *then* in line 29 (distant past); it also participates in what has become a phonetically linked pattern of alternating short *e* syllables (*went...hence/... then...fresh*); and momentarily at least seems to participate as well in what the conjunction *And* promises will be a linked series of first person pronoun subject-verb constructions—*I went.../ And then* [I saw, heard, conquered, etc.] which does not materialize, *then* instead followed by a new subject (third person pronoun *'t* whose verb, *was*, resounds the *was* of line 30, whose subject (understood) was *He*. Similarly, and equally not noticed, the phrase *fresh in murmur* echoes the Captain's earlier phrase *noble...in name*. The opening of a parenthesis (visible to the reader but inaudible on stage) which the end of the line leaves open—the metrically emphatic long *o* of *know* echoing a series of *o* sounds extending back through five lines: *Orsino, Orsino, so, so, ago*—encloses in the *as* clause a

logic that misleads us to believe that Viola herself already knows the substance of the rumor.

Line 33, *What great ones do, the less will prattle of*), which closes the parenthesis, demands that we readjust our understanding of the sense of the previous line: knowing in fact nothing of what *was fresh in murmur*, Viola knows instead *What great ones do*. Again, momentarily misled by an absent but implied "that" preceding *What*, our sense of the *as* clause begun in line 32 must shift when we hear *the less will prattle of*, whose completion of a pair of ideational rhymes—*great ones* opposed to *the less*, *do* opposed to *prattle* (which itself echoes the idea of *murmur*)—forces us to hear the implied "that" (in front of *What)* we did not hear, a "that" whose absent presence causes what is now closed inside of the parenthesis to mean what it suddenly comes to mean.

Line 34, *That he did seek the love of fair Olivia*, delivers the substance of the *murmur* the Captain himself (one of *the less*) now *prattle*[s] *of*. The silent demonstrative pronoun ("that") implied at the start of line 31 is sounded here in the relative pronoun *That*, whose presence in effect doubly reiterates what we didn't hear ("that") in what we did (*What*). Following the multiple echoes of *great ones* in *he* and *do* in *did*, the verb plus its object makes specific what it is that *great ones do*, in this case *seek the love of fair Olivia*—an act the audience (though not yet Viola) has already witnessed Orsino engaged in.

Asking her seventh question in fourteen lines (five of them beginning with *What*), Viola's *What's she?* in response to the Captain participates in both a chiasmic pattern involving "what" questions and names—*What's his name?/ Orsino...Olivia/ What's she?*—and an alternating pattern involving *That* and *What* beginning with the (implied) [That] at the start of line 33—[That] *What...That...What. What*, the interrogative pronoun equivalent to "who" (OED cites *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.2.62, "What is he, Biondello?" and *Othello* 1.1.94, Brabantio: "What are you?" Roderigo: "My name is Roderigo"), seeks to identify the person who is about to become both her rival and suitor by focusing upon her position or function, thereby echoing Viola's earlier question about herself: *And what should I do in Illyria?* Again, the metrically-dictated silence at the end of the line—an open space greater than either the one following Viola's *What's his name?* (which will in turn be echoed in Olivia's question about Viola/Cesario in 1.5.112: *What is he at the gate?*) or the Captain's one-word answer, *Orsino*—stands for what is not known about Olivia (and what indeed cannot be known).

The Captain identifies Olivia in line 36, *A virtuous maid, daughter of a count*, in four distinct frames of reference: moral (she is *virtuous*), sexual (she is a virgin, a *maid*), familial (she is a *daughter*), and social (her father is a *count*). Having already called Orsino a *noble duke*, the Captain's naming of Olivia in these terms connects her to Orsino, through the pairing of *virtuous/noble*, who, through the pairing of *count/duke*, is in turn connected to her father. Since Orsino is himself called *Count* elsewhere in the play, and since Orsino seems to be considerably older than Olivia—see the exchange between Sir Andrew and Sir Toby:

> Andrew: The Count himself here hard by woos her.
> Toby: She'll none o' th' Count. She'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit; I have heard her swear 't. (1.3.96-99)

—the line momentarily seems to suggest that Olivia is Orsino's daughter—a suggestion which retroactively makes Orsino's behavior in the first scene appear to be even more perverse than it did, and which the first scene itself works to discount. (Notice that Olivia's father the *count*, and through him Olivia herself, is also linked to the *country* [21] where each of them lives.)

Moving time not only forward but back, the relative clause that begins line 37, *That did some twelvemonth since, then leaving her*, leads to an unfinished adverbial clause whose action in the present tense (*leaving her*) reenacts the already completed action (the father's death) of the preceding clause. The coupling of *since, then* around the comma does something of the same thing: the missing but understood present implied by *since*, meaning "ago" or "before now," opposes the past tense made explicit in *then*, i.e. twelve months ago. This potential confusion of temporal frameworks is further extended in the multiple ways that *twelvemonth* echoes the play's title, *Twelfth Night* —by number (noun/adjective), by units of time (thirty nights/one night)— suggesting for a moment significance, both to the time of the father's death and to the play's title, which the play itself does not expand upon.

The adverbial clause left open at the end of line 37 is completed in line 38, *In the protection of his son, her brother*, which will sound grammatically complete (finished) on stage even though it ends with a comma. The sense of this line forces us to readjust our understanding of the sense of the previous line—the father's *leaving her* not simply a case of abandoning her (disappearing) when he died but of making sure that she would be cared for by the male child, according to the

patriarchal codes of the family. The structure of that family is represented here in both what the words say and what they do: the father who *died* (the mother is already "missing") *leaving her/ In the protection of his son* both has and has not "left" her, in that although he is in fact dead he has passed his power and authority on to the son, *her brother*, who becomes, as his heir, the new head of the family. The rhyme-like coupling of *his son, her brother* condenses as well as complicates this same triangular configuration: *his* being the father, *her* his daughter, *son* (and her brother), *brother* (and his son).

As the Captain's narrative of events in Olivia's family during the past year continues into line 39, *Who shortly also died; for whose dear love*, we are again forced to readjust our understanding of what we have just understood. As soon as Olivia's father leaves her (37), she is left in the care of her brother (38), who *shortly also* leaves her. The two deaths, first of the father and then of the brother who has become a surrogate father, are linked both as events and by the grammar of the relative pronouns *That* and *Who*, whose simultaneous likeness and difference is in turn replayed in the rhyme-like echo of *Who* and *whose*, each of which participates as terms in a phonetic chiasmus involving the *or* sounds of *shortly* and *for*: *Who shortly...for whose. Shortly*, meaning "soon" (a short amount of time), itself echoes in reverse the length of time during which the Captain could follow Viola's brother's survival at sea—*So long as I could see* (17)—an echo whose language links the two brothers together in a different and more crucial opposition: one brother is perhaps still alive and the other surely is not.

Unnoticed and insignificant connections between the two brothers extend into line 40, *They say, she hath abjured the sight*, by means of a number of echoes whose presence enacts on the surface of the language what the language itself works to convey: these two brothers are *not* related, never met, never will meet—and yet, we cannot quite keep them separated in our minds. Just as the Captain's account of his seeing Viola's brother alive on the high seas leads her to respond by paying him *For saying so* (18), so his account of Olivia's response to her brother's death leads to different but related forms of saying and (not) seeing: according to what *They* (those who *murmur* and *prattle*) say, Olivia has *abjured...sight.*

Metrically irregular, line 41 is the play's first divided line:

> And company of men.
> O that I served that lady.[3]

Its two halves, split between two speakers, are linked together by rhyme (*company...lady*) and to variously contradictory logics, the first presenting a woman who has turned away from *men*, the second presenting a woman (who will be dressed as a man) who would turn toward *that* same *lady* (notice the rhyming likeness and unlikeness of *that* and *that* in the second half of the line). The configurations of gender and number represented in *men* (plural) and *lady* (singular) maps out the play's dramatic action at least as far as Olivia is concerned: Orsino, Andrew, Malvolio and Sebastian—as well as, in different ways, Valentine, Cesario, Sir Toby, Fabian and Feste—comprise a literally theatrical *company of men* who press upon her their disparate, and sometimes desparate, desires.

Viola's expression of desire for what amounts to security in line 42, *And might not be delivered to the world,* echoes the preceding line not only syntactically—the conjunction *And* is followed by a missing but understood *O that I* which resounds the explicit *O that I* of line 41—but phonetically—the scrambling of short *e-r-l-d* sounds that link *delivered* and *world* echo those same sounds variously scrambled in *served* and *lady*—and logically—the expression of her desire *not to be delivered to the world* formulates in reverse her desire to *serve that lady.* The suggestion of sexual service that hovers in the distance behind the sense of servitude in the previous line (and that will reappear later in the play more insistently, in the closure of what Malvolio believes is Olivia's declaration of love and proposal for marriage: *She that will alter services with thee*) resurfaces—again in the distance—in the suggestions of birth implicit in *delivered to the world*: it is as if Viola's wish to serve Olivia represents her subliminal desire not to be born—as if she would reenter the womb of the mother who is missing, and for whom the virgin Olivia now comes momentarily to stand as surrogate, there to remain un*delivered* at least until her circumstances change.

That time arrives in line 43, *Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,* which works to define the conditions under which Viola will be willing to enter the world on her own. The active agency of the first person, in whose power it lies to make her *own occasion mellow*, reflects an equal but opposite passivity of the person who would previously not be turned out into the world. The suggestion in *mellow* of juicy ripeness as in fruit (OED cites *Coriolanus* 4.4.100: "As Hercules did Shake downe Mellow Fruite") extends the image of female pregnancy introduced, equally unobtrusively, in the preceding two lines,

an extension amplified by the word *made*, which echoes the Captain's reference to the virgin Olivia as *A virtuous maid* (36).

Regardless of the punctuation at the end of line 43—despite the Arden's note to the contrary, the comma proposed by Hammer eliminates the Folio's potential sense of *mellow* as a transitive verb whose object is yet to be supplied—line 44 may be read either as an appositive to the *mellow* (adjective) *occasion* that Viola hopes to realize in the future, or as the future result that she herself will bring about by making her *own occasion mellow* (i.e., "impart ripeness to") *What mine estate is.* Although *What* functions in both cases as a relative pronoun (OED cites "Venus and Adonis," 88: "So offers she to giue what she did craue"), in the first it refers to a potential future occasion that will be parallel to her former *estate* (position) as the daughter of her father, Sebastian of Messaline, and in the second it stands for the present unhappy *estate* she hopes to improve, one that has nothing necessarily to do with her past life. The Captain's reference to the nature of Viola's past, present and/or future *estate* (notice that *estate* as a past position reappears at the end of the play in the fifth line of Feste's song, *But when I came to man's estate*) in the second half of line 44, *That were hard to compass,* begins by completing an echo in reverse of the progression from *That* to *What* as the first words in lines 33-34. The circularity of this chiasmus (*That...What...What...That*) incidentally complements the word *compass*, whose potential suggestions of circularity are outweighted by its explicit meaning here: "to achieve (an end or object aimed at)" (OED cites this line from Shakespeare as an example). Notice, finally, as further incidental linkage between this and the preceding line, the rhyme-like opposition of *mellow* (soft) and *hard*, the logic of which means to suggest that Viola's immediate wishes will be difficult to satisfy.

In line 45, the Captain's reason for believing that *serv*[ing] *that lady* may be *hard to compass,/ Because she will admit no kind of suit,* presupposes a rather surprising familiarity on his part with what one might assume to be Olivia's private affairs. Orsino himself has only just learned that Valentine, whom he has sent to woo Olivia for him, *might not be admitted* into her presence; that the Captain himself now repeats what we have already been led to suspect—and himself echoes (in *admit*) the language of the gentleman who first delivers this news—works to move the plot forward by moving it back. At the same time, by informing Viola of Olivia's will to *admit no kind of suit* (not even, he implies, Viola's), the Captain also leads us to expect that Viola's

kind of suit, in whatever form it might take (say, for instance, dressed as Cesario), may prove an exception to the rule.

The double negative that opens line 46, *No, not the Duke's*, intensifies Olivia's apparent resolve to isolate herself from the world around her. *No* in this line repeats the sound (but not the sense) of *no* in the previous line's *no kind of suit*, a phrase that is itself echoed logically and phonetically in the word *Duke's*, whose *kind of suit* is among those Olivia refuses to *admit*.

The metrically-dictated silence that follows the final four-syllable line of the Captain's speech, *No, not the Duke's*, effectively divides the scene into two unequal "halves," what precedes it working primarily to establish context and what follows to set the play's action in motion. Viola's response to the Captain, in what turns out to be the scene's longest speech, begins in line 47 by paying direct attention to the person she has been speaking and listening to throughout the scene: *There is a fair behavior in thee, captain.* In context of a scene in which every speech so far functions as a logical response to the speech before it, the absence of apparent connection between the Captain's account of Olivia's unwillingness to receive visitors and Viola's sudden notice of the Captain's *fair behavior*—a compliment as unexpected as it is apparently unprovoked—itself sounds like something of a "suit" aimed at bringing about some as yet undisclosed end. Since that is in fact the case, as the rest of Viola's elaborate speech will make clear, we learn in retrospect that the six syllables worth of silence that concluded the Captain's metrically foreshortened last line created the space in which Viola's thinking conceived of the plan she has begun to lay out here.

The subordinate clause that begins in line 48, *And though that nature with a beauteous wall*, is linked to what precedes it in several ways at once. Phonetically, the conjunction *And* which eventually proves to join the two parts of the compound sentence (*There is.../ And.../ I will believe*)—but which sounds at least momentarily as if it may connect the preceding line's object with other objects still to come—elongates the vowel-plus-*n* sound in the second syllable of *Captain*. Similarly, the long *a*-plus-vowel-*r* sound in *behavior* is replayed in *nature*, whose vowel-plus-*r* pattern itself echoes the complex of like sounds that knits together the first half of line 47: *There...fair behavior*. Logically, the idea of external appearance conveyed by *beauteous wall* echoes that same idea conveyed in *fair behavior*, the abstractness of whose noun (which earns glosses in the Pelican, Arden and Riverside editions) is grounded in the concreteness of *wall*, connoting here not part of a building but a person's outward features.

The opposition between exterior and interior continues into line 49, *Doth oft close in pollution, yet in thee*, whose focus on what is *close*[d] *in* reverses the previous line's focus on the *wall* that does the enclosing. The word *pollution* rhymes with the word *beauteous*—phonetic twins, grammatical counterparts, diametrically opposed in the logic of aesthetics that Viola's speech is built upon—and echoes backward and forward through the whole of a play permeated with images of contamination and disease.

The adverbial phrase begun and left hanging at the end of line 49 leads in line 50 to the expected but still missing second stage of the compound sentence first signaled by *And* in line 48: *I will believe thou hast a mind that suits*. Even though the idea of a clearly internal *mind* continues the idea of *close*[d] *in pollution,* the syntactic construction of a speech punctuated by *though* and *yet* lets us know, even before saying so, that the Captain's *mind* is not, like other things hidden by beautiful exteriors, defiled. At the same time, the interiority implicit in the word *mind* begins to be externalized as the line continues—*a mind that suits*—where the multiple meanings of the word *suits*—momentarily a noun, which could be the subject of a relative clause begun with *that*, as well as the verb it eventually proves to be—suggests a variety of outward things (clothing, armor, etc.), as in Viola's line at 5.1.226 in reference to her brother Sebastian's clothing, *So went he suited to his watery grave*. As both noun and verb, the word *suits* also repeats *suit* in the same metrical position of line 45, its exclusively nominal meaning there—a petition or wooing—momentarily as pertinent here as the meaning that will emerge: to agree or be consonant with (OED cites *As You Like It* 2.7.81: "He...That...therein suites His folly to the mettle of my speech" and *Hamlet* 3.2.19: "Sute the Action to the Word, the Word to the Action").

What follows *that suits* in line 51, *With this thy fair and outward character*, completes the sentence Viola has been spinning with echoes that resound multiple strands in this and previous speeches. To begin with, *this* participates in a four-word sequence (*that suits/ With this*) counterpointing one pronoun against the other—a kind of grammatical first cousin—through which *this* plays off various occurences of *that* in lines 48, 44, 41, 37 and 34. What follows *With this, Thy fair and outward character*, redefines *this* in terms that double what has already been spoken in other words, expanding the idea of external beauty conveyed both in *fair behavior* (whose adjective it repeats) and in *beauteous wall* (whose preceding *with* this *With* also repeats). The Captain's *character*, meaning here his *outside* (looks or features)

behavior, stands metonymically for what is inside—what can't be seen because it isn't physical—his moral "character" (OED cites these two lines as example).

The beginning of Viola's next sentence in line 52, *I prithee (and I'll pay thee bounteously)*, leans forward only long enough to get started, at which point it circles back (in parenthesis) to rephrase what it has only just now commenced. *I'll pay thee* expands the sound and concept of *I prithee* (itself a shortened form of "pray thee"), turning its request into a promise for recompense if the request—for what?—is granted. In offering the Captain money, Viola repeats her gesture of line 18 (*For saying so, there's gold*), except that there Viola's payment follows the Captain's delivery of verbal goods whereas here those goods, if they are verbal, haven't yet been named; the former instance thus presents an economy in which performance precedes reward, the latter one in which payment is promised (as incentive) *before* the completion of whatever it means to pay for. The word *bounteously*, suggesting both Viola's largess and her wealth (one measure of her former *estate*, and linked oppositionally to ideas implicit in, though extraneous to, *my poor brother*), echoes something of the logic and some of the sound of *beauteous*, and not incidentally contains two of the four long *e* sounds that—along with patterns in long *i*, *th*, and *p*—give this line its wealth of phonetic coherence.

Having been delayed (by a parenthesis), Viola's *Conceal me what I am, and be my aid* in line 53 amounts to a proposal that the Captain join her in a conspiracy, one whose form if not substance will be echoed later in the play in Maria's plan to ghostwrite a letter in Olivia's hand, the identity of whose true author—the *me* that is *what I am*—is in this case Viola's true *character*, the inside that can't be seen because it will be hidden by a suit of male clothes. Were that interior *what I am*—which echoes Viola's question about Olivia in line 35, *What's she?*—hidden by the female clothing that suits it, it still would not be seen: what Viola "is," her sexual identity, has in fact already been concealed on Shakespeare's stage by the female clothing the male actor wears; it will continue to be concealed until the play's last scene, where, claiming the sex opposite to the one she appears to proclaim, she reveals her true identity verbally though not physically—that physical disclosure scheduled to be performed only after the play has ended, when she promises to reappear in her female clothes which, we assume, she will later remove before joining Orsino in bed.

Line 54, which follows the second of Viola's two requests, *be my aid/ For such disguise as haply shall become*, reconstructs the logic of

transformation in terms that begin to spell out how it might be accomplished—how Viola's *me*, which has already become *what I am*, might be *concealed*. The idea of *conceal*ment by means of *disguise* is performed phonetically in the chiasmus by which the *com/n*-plus-long *e* sounds of *conceal* are reversed in the long *e*-plus-*com/n* sounds of *become*, whose sense suggests the act of transformation set in motion by *disguise*. At the same time, the ambivalence of *disguise*—not only a noun but, momentarily, the third in a series of imperatives begun with its logical and grammatical twin, *conceal*, a sense that makes *such* function as a pronoun referring to the act of *conceal*[ing] *me*—imagines grammatically the dynamics by which one's interior identity can be changed by a change of external appearance. From its two-part title onward, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* is indeed full of such doubling: of the twins Viola and Sebastian who look alike but are different; of characters who, by means of *such disguise*, exchange one *outward character* for another (Viola/Cesario, Malvolio as steward/courtly lover, Feste/Sir Topas); of Maria's handwriting (its characters) which presents itself as Olivia's; of words themselves that shift and slip and won't hold still, words that *haply shall become* other words as if by chance, making a world in which *Illyria* becomes *Elysium* and where, as Feste later says, *nothing that is so is so*.

Momentarily possible at the end of line 54, the sense of *become* as an intransitive verb ("*such disguise* as shall come about") is exploded by what happens in line 55: *The form of my intent. I'll serve this Duke*. The presence of the object *form*, which retroactively makes *become* transitive, causes its meaning to shift—demonstrating in effect the process by which one identity can "become" another—from a logic of completed action to a pair of complexly similar yet different logics, both of which echo elements already central to the passage: "*such disguise* as shall be appropriate to (i.e. "suit") *the form of my intent;*" "*such disguise* as shall be equal to (i.e. be "made"/"maid" into) *the form of my intent*." *The form* thus operates in two separate but simultaneous systems of meaning, both as the external physical feature (the *disguise* itself) whose *outward character* will hide *what I am*, and as the interior scheme or thought (the *intent*) whose strategy involves the use of *disguise*. In either case, Viola's *intent* (*I'll serve this Duke*) suggests, in its rhyme-like reversal of her previous intent (*O that I served that lady*), how unstable she is, how shifting her mind, and thus how like both of the Illyrians she would serve—both Olivia, who is willing to marry either her or her brother, and Orsino, whom Feste would dress in *a doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is very opal*

(2.4.73-74). Notice that of the fifty-six potential meanings of *serve* listed in the OED, the sexual sense ("to gratify, furnish means for satisfying desire," for which OED cites *Lear* 3.4.89: "A Seruingman...that seru'd the Lust of my Mistris heart") is particularly pertinent here: after having served him as the man Cesario, Viola will ultimately serve Orsino as a woman—as his *mistress and his fancy's queen* (5.1.377); at the same time, as Cesario, she becomes the man Olivia most wants to be serviced by, "her" signature on Maria's letter to Malvolio notwithstanding (*She that would alter services with thee* [2.5.145]).

Reflecting her growing confidence in the play she now constructs, the rhetoric of Viola's speech shifts from vulnerable request (*I prithee...be my aid*) to assertive command in line 56: *Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.* The imperative force of *Thou shalt present*, whose verb's potential function as the future tense of *present* links it in series with the verb of the preceding sentence (*'ll serve*), counteracts the generic assumption that eunuchs, as castrated males, are more like women than men—and thus are neither forceful nor assertive. The meaning of *present* in this context, not only to offer to sight or observation (OED cites *Tempest* 5.1.85: "I will discase me, and my selfe present As I was sometime Millaine") opposes it to *intent* in the previous line, whose sound it echoes, the logic of which suggests interior purpose or design, things that cannot be seen in themselves, only in their effects. The visible effect of Viola's hidden *intent*—her *disguise...form...as an eunuch*—acts retroactively to define what it is that must be concealed strictly in terms of its gender: Viola's *me what I am* thus becomes her sexual identity, the female body which *disguised* and *presented* will appear to have what she herself will later call *A little thing* [that] *would make me tell them how much I lack of a man* (3.4.82-83).

The value of the economic incentive that Viola has already promised the Captain for his *aid/ For such disguise* (*I'll pay thee bounteously*) appears to diminish in the first half of line 57, where the subjunctive mood of the verb implies both that *It may* and *may* [not] *be worth thy pains. For I can sing* seems at this point to present the reason Viola has said what she has just said, as if somehow to justify the price she is prepared to pay the Captain for his help, or to play down the trouble (and what sounds like the physical suffering) he may experience if he decides to help, or both. In so far as Viola's assertion of her ability to sing also looks backward beyond *It may be worth thy pains*, whose apparent uncertainty it casually works to reverse, to the

characteristic ability of eunichs to sing at a higher pitch than ordinary men, it also effectively erases (by ignoring, as she herself will forget) her pledge, no matter how tentative, to pay the Captain for his help.

The placement of the comma after *sing*, which increases the duration of the pause between line 57 and line 58, *And speak to him in many sorts of music*, in which the verb *speak*—conceptually and grammatically (by means of the conjunction *And*) linked to *sing*—coupled with *music* assumes for itelf a portion of the meaning already pertinent to *sing*. Before we hear the word *music*, however, *speak to him in many sorts of* appears to be following Viola's thought as it makes its way toward some still to be completed idea having to do with speaking (*many sorts of* language, for instance, as Sir Toby will later boast that Andrew *speaks three or four languages word for word* [1.3.24]); the sound of *music*, literally and substantively, not only echoes the sound of the *eunuch* who will make it but derails the logic of the line we thought we were hearing, forcing it to circle back upon itself to the sound of *sing*ing whose *music* she has claimed as hers. Locating in effect the range of Viola's vocal cords, finally, the word *music* completes a series of complexly related terms according to which Viola, the Captain and Orsino are paired together in ways that not only give Viola access to the man she will eventually be paired with in marriage but make her into the music-making instrument her name implies she is: *Thou shalt present me...to him; I can...speak to him...music.*

Although an audience never hears any of the *many sorts of music* Viola announces she can *speak*—at no point during the play does she sing a song or play an instrument—we do in fact hear the "music" she and every character speaks throughout *Twelfth Night*, a music of words and parts of words connected to one another by sound (echo) in a network of music-like relationships, more often than not completely incidental, such as the ones heard (or not heard) in line 59, *That will allow me very worth his service*, where *very worth* echoes the sounds of *many sorts* in the same metrical position of the previous line; where *worth* itself duplicates the sound (but not sense) of *worth* in line 57; where *allow* continues a pattern in the *ou* dipthong of *Thou* (56), *bounteously* (52) and *outward* (51); and where *service* replays, with significant variation, the sound as well as sense of *serve* (55) and *serve* (41). With the microtonal elements that compose its sound working to establish its phonetic coherence as a line—*th* in *That* and *worth*, *l* in *will allow*, *w* in *will* and *worth*, *s* in *his service*, long *e* in *me very*, vowel-plus-*r* in *very worth* and *service*—this conclusion of Viola's

sentence also works to persuade us that it makes not only musical but substantive sense. In fact it does not make sense, as the notes on this line in every modern edition of *Twelfth Night* attest; that is to say, we are led to believe that we understand the words *That will allow me very worth his service* because those words sound good together—sound as if they can be understood. Editors who gloss *allow* as "prove" (Arden) or "cause me to be considered" (Pelican), or the whole line as "cause me to be acknowledged as worthy to serve him" (Riverside), are responding to the line's apparent lack of meaning, a substantive incoherence that paraphrase attempts to bridge as the gap between what the words seem to be saying and what they do say: namely, the fact that *I can sing* and/or *speak...music...will allow me...his service*. Used reflexively, as here, *allow* means "permit me to indulge in" (OED cites *Lear* 3.7.107: "His roguish madness Allows itself to anything"), which suggests not only that Viola, whose ability to make music makes her worthy, will serve Orsino but that she, who is herself worth serving, will be serviced by him. Both members of the relationship perform twin functions—each one a master and each a servant, each a provider of services (in all senses) rendered and each a receiver.

Having imagined (out loud) what her potential future relationship with Orsino might be like, line 60 follows Viola's thinking back to the present moment, where her anxiety about the future and inability to determine it any further lead her toward what amounts to a kind of passive resignation: *What else may hap, to time I will commit.* Completing another instance of the casual pattern in which *That* and *What* alternate as the first words of successive lines—a pattern that has already appeared, with variation of the demonstrative pronoun *This* for *That*, in the first three lines of the scene (*What...This...And what*), in lines 33-35 (*What...That...What*), and in the two half-lines that make up line 44 (*What...That*)—*What* at the start of this line links it to *That* at the start of the previous line; Viola's confident mapping out of a future time in one line thus gives way here to her turning *What else may hap* in the future over to time—as she does at the end of 2.2. when she says, *O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; It is too hard a knot for me t' untie*. The relationship between Viola and time here—as agents linked both by their ability to determine the future and to be determined by it, as the substance of the line implies that Viola will be, and as the first six syllables of the line momentarily imply that time will be: *What else may hap to time*—thus echoes Viola's outline of the simultaneously reciprocal and hierarchical relationship (in terms of *service*) between herself and Orsino: in one case the person has the

power to make things happen, in the other things happen (to that person) by chance. At the same time, the idea of chance or fortune (good or bad) implicit in *hap* (OED cites *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.4.107: "Hap what hap may, Ile roundly goe about her") followed by *to time*—a sense pertinent as well to *haply* followed by *shall become* in line 54, which is itself preceded by a *what* in line 53—echoes the idea and sound of *perchance* ("perhaps") in line 7 and *chance* itself in line 8; but whereas in that case *chance* is represented as the Captain's story about seeing her brother at sea, a story that means *to comfort* Viola's anxiety over her brother's fate (in the past), *chance* is represented here as *What else may hap* to Viola herself (in the future), whose anxiety over her own fate leads her to find whatever comfort she can by placing her trust in—and *commit*ting herself *to—time*. Time indeed, from the first two words of its title to the last word of Feste's song at the end (*day*), is what drives *Twelfth Night* to be the play that it is, a play in which every word is in motion so to speak in time, the past (and future) literally sounded in a continuously present moment whose surface is the sound of words sounding themselves.

Turning her attention once again to the Captain, line 61 concludes what has become the scene's longest speech by demanding in effect an end to speaking: *Only shape thou thy silence to my wit.* What Viola here calls *wit* not only names but determines the value and source (her own intelligence) of the play she has just proposed, a plan that begins by asking the Captain to *conceal* her and ends with the *silence* she would have him *shape*. As if to counter its call for silence, the line's sounds cause it to participate in a number of remarkable—and remarkably inaudible—patterns: the sound of *wit* links it to the sound of *commit* in the preceding line, completing a rhyme couplet that is itself linked to similar short *i* sounds in *service* and *music* at the end of the two previous lines, making the end of the speech into a kind of A'A'AA rhyming quatrain; the successive long *i* sounds in *thy silence* repeat a similar pattern in *time I* in the middle of the preceding line; and the sound of *sh*-plus-*thou* in *shape thou* reverses the order of the same sounds in *Thou shalt* in line 56. Notice also the complex permutation by which Viola's act of *speak*[ing] *to him* becomes here the Captain's act of *shap*[ing]...*silence* not only to *my wit* but, by implication, *to him*. Paradoxically, to *shape...silence* in this context implies that the Captain both will and will not speak: whatever he says to Orsino will be motivated by his part in a conspiracy whose purpose is to make Orsino believe that Viola is *an eunuch*; what he will not say—will keep silent about—is the truth of what and what she really is.

The Captain's witty response in line 62 to Viola's call for *silence shape*[d] *to my wit* registers how quickly he has caught on to her plan, and how willing he is to play his part in it: *Be you his eunuch, and your mute I'll be.* The ostentatiously artful symmetry of sound and logic—long *u* in *you, eunuch* and *mute*; *Be you* paired chiastically against *I'll be*; *his eunuch* opposed to, and simultaneously made possible by, *your mute*—works not only to convey the Captain's ability to think on his feet (judging from this line, he will prove to be a good accomplice) but to set up the end of the scene: resonating like a coda in music, the words we hear the Captain say at this point let us know he is about to stop speaking. As it turns out, the Captain does take on the *shape* of *silence*, in that after this scene he literally disappears from the play. (Viola speaks of him twice in the last scene—*I'll bring you to a captain in this town,/ Where lie my maiden weeds* (246-47); *The captain that did bring me first on shore/ Hath my maid's garments* (266-67)—but we do not actually see him again, unless, and I am speculating now, the actor who plays the Captain were also to play the part of Antonio—himself a sea captain, himself a companion and accomplice to Viola's own double, Sebastian.) At the same time, the Captain's literal *silence* from this point onward not only performs the part he has promised to play here—*your mute I'll be*—but, as a kind of counter-performance, echoes the absence of any sign, either from Viola or from the characters she meets, that she plays the *eunuch* the Captain says she will be.

The Captain having taken what amounts to a vow of silence in *your mute I'll be*, line 63 immediately appears to promise that he will break that promise—and gladly be punished for it: *When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes not see.* That is to say, the force of the adverbial *When* clause by itself implies that the real question for Viola is not whether he will talk but how soon; at the same time, the *When/then* construction clearly means to assert that he will not reveal her secret (OED cites this line as an example of *blab*)—the threat of blindness acting as a form of deterrent against his saying what he has vowed not to say. The rhyme couplet completed by *see* thus constructs a complex relationship between not only sound and silence and sight and blindness but master and servant as well; as long as the Captain serves Viola as *your mute*, he will be able to see; as soon as he betrays her authority by speaking, he will not see. Framed in terms of the politics of gender, Viola's false identity as a man will be maintained only if the Captain submits to her command by remaining silent; asserting himself *When* his *tongue blabs*, her female identity (and

consequent vulnerability) will be exposed. And though such speculation may indeed by moot, since this line is the Captain's last in the play—his physical presence literally erased after this scene, it is curious to note that his absence is filled by another character (Malvolio) whose *tongue blabs* and whose *eyes*, when he is locked away in what he calls *hideous darkness*, do *not see*.

His couplet having sounded, finally, like the end of the scene—we hear closure not only in the *be/see* rhyme pair, which extends a series of couplets in lines 58-59 (*music/service*) and 60-61 (*commit/wit*), but in the phonetic and logical coherences within the line of short *e* sounds (*When...then let*) and long *i* sounds (*my...mine eyes*)—the Captain listens to Viola's last line, *I thank thee. Lead me on.* Coupled to the preceding line by a two-syllable chiastic rhyming of long *e* and schwa-plus-*n* sounds in *me on* and *not see*, it is actually a half-line composed of two sentences that are themselves linked together logically and phonetically, the long *e* sounds in *thee. Lead me* coupling the two characters across the break after the period in an action that propels them off stage—the soon to be male *eunuch* commanding her *mute* to go forward into the metrically-dictated silence at the end of the line, a *silence* in whose space (or *shape*) one person can literally *lead* the other (his master/mistress) out of the scene.

The reader who has been patient enough to follow my reading of this scene could, as I could, continue reading *Twelfth Night*, discovering more of what it is that I have tried to describe here: that the words of the play in interaction with one another set off charges of meaning whose resonance back and forth across the surface of the text constructs a work that is, as Pound would say, "charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree"; that the play's meaning, private in that it doesn't obviously declare itself but is rather embedded in (above and below) the landscape of language itself, takes place continuously throughout the play; that the play's twins, Viola and Sebastian, are represented literally (from moment to moment) at almost every point—in the doubling of *me* with *what I am* in line 53, for instance, to return to my beginning, two identities that both are and are not the same. *Twelfth Night*, a play that begins with separations and ends with (re)unions (brother with sister, man with wife), is a play *about* doubling and echoes, a play whose language is charged throughout with the dynamics of attraction and opposition, unity and division, among a multitude of linguistic "twins" whose effect is to perform (*in* words) the play its players (actors *and* words) perform.

NOTES

All references are to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York, 1977).

[1]C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, 1959), p.245; Coppélia Kahn, "The Providential Tempest and the Shakespearean Family," *Representing Shakespeare* (Baltimore, 1980), p. 218.

[2]Readers have speculated about the presence and significance of the name Orsino in this play since 1896, when G. Sarrazin first connected *Twelfth Night* to Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano, a 28-year old nobleman described in one contemporary account as "a very courtlike and compleat gentleman" who visited Elizabeth's court in early 1601. Leslie Hotson's *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (1954) makes that visit the cornerstone of his theory that the play was first performed before Elizabeth and Orsino on 6 January 1601. While there is clear evidence that a play was performed at court on that night (Orsino, in a letter to his wife, describes "a mingled comedy, with pieces of music and dances [*una commedia mescolata, con musiche e balli*]" [Hotson, p.202] and Lord Hunsdon, the patron of Shakespeare's company, writes a memo calling for a play "that may be more pleasing to her majestie" [Hotson, p. 180-181]), most scholars believe that the play was written somewhat later, probably toward the end of 1601. It is hard to imagine, for one thing, that the portrayal of Orsino would have been pleasing to the Queen or to her guest of honor. See J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik's "Introduction" to the Arden edition, pp. xxvi-xxxv, for a full account of the problems of dating.

[3]Hammer's emendation of the line, adopted by the Arden and Riverside editions, exchanges *company* for *sight* in line 40 and vice versa, which regularizes the meter in both lines 40 and 41 and "intensifies Olivia's seclusion" (Arden note).