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WHAT SHE WILLS: FEMALE DESIRE AS A DRIVING FORCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

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WHAT SHE WILLS: female desire as a driving force in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

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To Time, who did most of the untangling, not I.

Some knots were too hard for me t'untie.

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ABSTRACT

In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, desire manifests itself almost like a force of nature, sweeping over characters and swallowing them up. This thesis, anchored by both Jacques Lacan's theories of desire and René Girard's mimetic theory, takes advantage of studies of early modern English society as well as their gendered practices to assess the ways through which the expression of desire carried out by the female characters in *Twelfth Night* sets plot and characters alike in motion. Desire, in this master's thesis, is read not as solely consequential of other characters' erotic appeal, but as resulting from the active intersection of elements including the character's subjectivity, social context, and interactions with other characters throughout the play. Instead of having Viola, Olivia and Maria relegated to the margins, this thesis proposes a departure from female desire as that which drives the whole plot and pushes male and female characters alike.

Keywords: Female Character; Theory of Desire; Twelfth Night; William Shakespeare.

RESUMO

Em *Noite de Reis*, de William Shakespeare, o desejo se manifesta quase como uma força da natureza, varrendo os personagens e engolindo-os ao longo da narrativa. Ancorada tanto pelas teorias do desejo de Jacques Lacan quanto pela teoria mimética de René Girard, esta pesquisa vale-se também de estudos da sociedade inglesa do século XVI para avaliar o modo pelo qual a expressão do desejo das personagens femininas de *Noite de Reis* coloca o enredo e os personagens em movimento. O desejo, nesta dissertação, é lido não como mera consequência do apelo erótico de outros personagens, mas como resultado da intersecção ativa de elementos como a subjetividade da personagem analisada, o contexto social e suas interações com outros personagens ao longo da peça. Em vez de ter Viola, Olívia e Maria relegadas às margens, esta dissertação propõe o desejo feminino como aquilo que impulsiona todo o enredo e personagens tanto masculinos quanto femininos.

Palavras-chave: Noite de Reis; Personagens femininas; Teoria do Desejo; William Shakespeare.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that
the will is infinite and the execution confined, that
the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.
(Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.2.81)

In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, desire manifests itself almost like a force of nature, sweeping over characters and swallowing them up in a sort of midsummer madness that blooms as one of the play's main themes. Be it through Antonio's recognition of the ravaging force of desire that, "more sharp than filèd steel" (3.3.5) [1], does spur him forth; be it through Orsino's description of his own desires as "fell and cruel hounds" (1.1.23) that pursue him, the feeling of movement associated with the expression of a character's desire recurs in *Twelfth Night* and hints at its relevance to the play's structure. This combination of movement and desire, however, appears not only through the lines that compose this comedy, but mainly through the way the only three female characters present in the play — Viola, Olivia and Maria — have their desire constantly setting the plot in motion.

Twelfth Night or What You Will, written by Shakespeare by the end of the Elizabethan period, brings to the stage themes of mistaken identities, love triangles, folly ambitions, and madness alongside the constant paralleling of the expression of

[1] Unless stated otherwise, all citations of the works of Shakespeare throughout this master's thesis refer to the version of *Twelfth Night* provided by The Folger Shakespeare, ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, online at https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/read. Access on: 23 Aug. 2024.

both male and female desire. The comedy centers around the love triangle established in its first act: Viola, who separates from her twin brother in a shipwreck, disguises herself as Cesario in order to serve Duke Orsino, who, in turn, is madly in love with Countess Olivia. In the process of wooing Olivia in place of her master, Viola comes to love Orsino while becoming Olivia's object of desire. Meanwhile, Maria, Olivia's lady-in-waiting, devises a plot to trick Malvolio, a steward in the same house. Elements of both comedy and tragedy mark the closure of this play that stages desire, agency, and social mobility according to one's gender.

These three elements have long been eluding late-twentieth century[2] researchers interested in aspects of gender roles as well as of sexual orientation in order to unveil further the intricacies of this comedy. In *Twelfth Night*, desire not only moves plot and characters forward, but, in a dual dynamic, also shapes and produces language while having this very language constantly producing desire itself (Stanivukovic 131; Van Pelt 95). In this sense, duke Orsino's famous opening lines seamlessly introduce the theme that sets the tone for the remainder of the play: "If music be the food of love, play on, / Give me excess of it, that surfeiting / The appetite may sicken and so die" (1.1.1-3). The duke evokes music in hopes that the oversupply of it may help him overcome his own desire. What we witness, however, is Orsino falling deeper into the fantasies his own discourse builds around his idea of what loving someone entails. David Schalkwyk, in "Is Love an Emotion? Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Antony and Cleopatra*", argues that the duke's "musings follow the contours not only of his desire, but also of his desire for

[2] Although discussions on gendered agency and desire in Shakespeare's works can be found even before that time, works such as Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, published in 1975 and considered the first book of feminist Shakespeare criticism (Novy 5), Coppélia Kahn's *Man's Estate*, published in 1981, as well as *The Woman's Part*, published in 1980 and edited by Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Neely, opened up new possibilities of debate among scholars.

or against desire itself" (105), embodying his discourse with the hesitating excess that constantly permeates his self-indulgent expression of erotic desire in the play.

It is the duke's speech that presents the theme of desire in *Twelfth Night*, and it is also through speech that Viola, dressed as Cesario, reaches and elicits the expression of both Olivia's and Orsino's erotic desires. Stephen Greenblatt, in "Fiction and Friction", expands this reading by stating that erotic desire, in Shakespeare's works, seems to originate first from "the wantonness of language" (89), or verbal wit, and that "dallying with words is the principal Shakespearean representation of erotic heat" (90), which, still according to the author, would explain why most of Shakespeare's plots would offer occasions for verbal dispute between lovers-to-be. Thus, it is a good strategy to depart from the language used by *Twelfth Night*'s female characters in order to assess desire and how its manifestation may drive the plot of this comedy forward.

Language, or the cleverness of its uses, is so ingrained in the expression of desire that all the instances in which Sir Toby demonstrates his appreciation for Maria come as a consequence of her competent uses of language while devising her plot against Malvolio, and while mocking other characters. Viola's plain language, according to John W. Draper, in *Twelfth Night of Shakespeare's Audience*, establishes a clear foil to the duke's lyrical luxuriance (140), as his embellished way of professing an inconstant love grants Viola's crispier vows of affection a sense of sincerity and, as I discuss in the second chapter, a break from the Petrarchan approach to which Olivia had been used. The countess, naturally, is not exempt of this process: her attempts to hide her overgrowing love for Cesario are clearly seen through the silences and figments of broken language (Stanivukovic

138) that escape her while she is still dealing with the process of balancing erotic desire and the losses that motivate her mourning.

William Thomas Maccary, in *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy*, tackles this specific connection between Olivia's mourning and the manifestation of her desire. This book brings a range of contributions to the psychoanalytical reading of Shakespeare's works, and, in the chapter dedicated to *Twelfth Night*, the author analyzes how desire connects itself to melancholy, narcissism and mourning. When referring to Olivia's process of falling in love with Cesario, for example, Maccary suggests that the countess displays the usual pattern of someone who, having lost their object of desire, redirects the energy previously used in this dynamic to another object — Cesario, as he is "precisely the brother she has lost" (184). This detail brings a narcissistic longing to Olivia's manifestation of desire, as "brotherly love", the author argues, is nothing more than "libidinal investment of the self in the sibling of the opposite sex" (184). The loss of her brother, however tragic, is precisely what allows Olivia to taste the autonomy often reserved to men alone. Orphaned and single, even if Olivia has to deal with the pressure of an impending marriage, she still is the sole head of her household as well as the sole administrator of her fortune. Her desire, as I discuss in the third chapter, interacts precisely with this specificity of her character while intersectionally dealing with circumstances of gender and of social status in early modern England.

The possible imbalance between gender performance and desire in this play is discussed by Dympna Callaghan in her introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. Viola, while disguised as a young male, is able to occupy, both physically and socially, the traditional male role of a page to the duke of Illyria. It is

due to this performance of another gender, the author argues, that Viola is able to navigate through places a woman would not be able to. One of this book's chapters, "Gender, Class, and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Twelfth Night",* written by Mihoko Suzuki, expands this reading and discusses how all women in *Twelfth Night* are able to fulfill their initial objectives in the play (157), be it related to marriage, to finding those who were lost, to revenge or to social ascension; whereas the same cannot be said about men, who either become frustrated or acquiescent to female desire.

On this possibility of fulfilling one's initial objective, Greenblatt, in "Fiction and Friction", argues that Viola is the only character that actually secures what she "consciously sets out to get in the play" (70), establishing a foil to Olivia's arc. Greenblatt explains that "only by not getting what she wants has Olivia been able to get what she wants and, more important, to want what she gets" (71). This wordplay, as contradictory as it may seem at first, offers a good summary of the route taken by Olivia's desire in *Twelfth Night*: Cesario, whom she first desires, is not exactly what she expects him to be, and it is only after marrying Cesario's twin brother that Olivia is able to come to terms with her actual object of desire. In assuming that Viola is the only character to get what she consciously pursues in the play, however, Greenblatt seems to have forgotten Maria's decision to teach Malvolio a lesson: "(…) For Monsieur Malvolio, let me / alone with him. If I do not gull him into a nayword / and make him a common recreation, do not think I / have wit enough to lie straight in my bed." (2.3.133-136). Olivia's lady-in-waiting not only succeeds in gulling the steward, but, according to John W. Draper, she is also successful in consciously currying favor and paving her way to an advantageous marriage with the only eligible bachelor at hand.

In Viola's case, however, it is important to note how it is only under the adoption of a male gender expression that she is able to "acquire [the kind of] agency given to Early Modern men" (Preeshl 66) and to succeed in the endeavor she first sets out to pursue. This momentary power that a female character can enjoy while cross-dressing as a man is described as a common occurrence by David Cressy in "Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England". According to the author, "female dramatic characters who dress as men are usually presented as admirable, resourceful, and effective" (452) in English Renaissance drama; whereas the same cannot be said about male characters who cross-dress as female characters. Those, the author argues, are commonly "rendered as comic or ridiculous, their circumstances degraded and their manhood diminished" (452), and that no reflection on gender structures that suppress women's expression is usually incited. Female cross-dressed characters in Elizabethan drama, however, find in their male disguises plenty of opportunities not only to express themselves in ways that, as women, they would not be able to, but also to foreground the limitations that chain the expression of female desire to the limits of their socially gendered bodies.

As Viola's disguise empowers the character to occupy social spaces commonly reserved for men, Laurie E. Osborne, in "Amity, twinning and comic closure in *Twelfth Night*", observes that Cesario's speeches carry a pattern of constantly "revealing Viola's femaleness and desires" (102) throughout the play. While speaking to Olivia, in Act 3, Viola professes under the identity of Cesario "I am not what I am" (3.1.148) in reference to the male identity she has been presenting. Moreover, she adds, in the same conversation, that "I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth / And that no woman has, nor never none / Shall

mistress be of it, save I alone" (3.1.166-168), using the singular first-person pronoun, "I", to indicate that she would be the only *woman* to possess her own heart, exposing the gender she assumes to herself even in disguise. This behavior points out to the understanding of her condition as a mixed blessing when it comes to promoting her agency: playing the part of Cesario allows Viola to approach Orsino and to work under him, at the same time it restricts her to a relationship of male amity with the duke.

Every instance of desire in this play, according to David Schalkwyk, in *Shakespeare, Love and Service*, "is intertwined with the circumstances of service within the early modern noble household" (122). Viola/Cesario's status as Orsino's servant is what enables her to get close to him and to develop her own feelings for the duke. Her status as a mere page is, then, part of the allure that feeds Olivia's feelings for Cesario and, likewise, appeals to that which she lacks and fuels her desire. Schalkwyk further elaborates on this aspect of love and desire in *Twelfth Night* arguing that even Maria's marriage, at the end of the play, is performed thanks to Sir Toby's "pattern of reciprocating service" (122) as a recompense for the ploy she devised to trick Malvolio.

This argument fuels the relevance of studying desire in *Twelfth Night* under the scope of both gender performance and of social status, as Viola, Olivia and Maria, the three female characters in this play with a name, are able to see their objects-of-desire close to being attained while navigating through different standings. For all of them, rank and service shape and play a crucial role in achieving the marriage that marks the closure of most Shakespearean comedies — a preponderant element when thinking about societal desire. Despite their successful "inter-class" marriage, we should not forget that, in these three

situations, it was the higher-status subject the one proposing their union. Sonia Massai, in her sourcebook *William Shakespeare's* Twelfth Night, discusses how the second act of the play introduces the logic of class (or status) as a "formidable barrier that makes the counter-flow of desire from male servant to mistress the target of harsh mockery and denigration" (165), while the opposite does not seem to happen. Malvolio's longing for Olivia is punished as it reveals a movement of a lower-class subject desiring an upper position, but, with Orsino, Olivia and Toby, what is presented is an upper-class character allowing a lower-class subject to step into their realm.

Although Orsino is the one holding the highest title of the play — that of a duke —, it is relevant for this master's thesis to note that Olivia, a countess, is the one reigning over most characters' destiny in *Twelfth Night*. John Draper, in *Twelfth Night of Shakespeare's Audience*, points out that her influence is not limited to the characters that reside in her own state (190). Besides Maria, Malvolio, Feste and Sir Toby, Olivia's decisions drastically affect the path traversed by Viola, Sebastian, Sir Andrew and even by Orsino. Olivia's web of influence is so extensive that the author goes as far as naming her the heroine of this play, contradicting the general consensus that holds Viola in this very position. The countess's importance, he writes, "is evidenced in the dialogue, in the plot construction, in the early actors who played the part, and in Shakespeare's treatment of his source" (169). Being an orphaned single woman that detains a large amount of wealth, Olivia is confined to the expectation of a good marriage at the same time she is free to choose a husband of her own liking without the need of an input of her male guardian. Maria and Viola, Draper emphasizes throughout his book, cannot enjoy such freedom, as marriage, for these two ladies of lower status, is synonymous with survival.

The relevance of these characters' status to the play's motion is further explored in "Rethinking Sexuality and Class in *Twelfth Night*", as Nancy Lindheim challenges the traditional reading of Maria as a "scheming female underclass" by bringing up the social elements that mediate her relationship with Olivia, the one she serves, and with Sir Toby, Olivia's relative to whom she marries. Nancy argues that Maria's social position in this play "is no more disabling than Cesario's as the Count's page" (707), and that reading her both as a gentlewoman and as a companion to the countess may alter the positive light under which her social ascension — through marriage — has been read thus far. That is because Sir Toby's own position in the countess's house is far from being stable; therefore, Maria's ending, in terms of fulfillment, highly depends on the reader's understanding of Sir Toby's ending. That concept may allow us to establish parallels to both Viola's and Olivia's movements towards marriage at the end of *Twelfth Night*, and how each is deeply affected by the ranking they occupy in relation to the characters they marry.

Finally, desire as a driving force in Shakespeare's plays is thoroughly dissected by Gillian Knoll in *Conceiving desire in Lyly and Shakespeare: Metaphor, Cognition and Eros.* Her second chapter presents a plethora of possible readings on the relevance of desire in both tragedies and comedies, being it either a turbulent force that may drive characters forward, as we see in abundance not only in *Twelfth Night*, but also in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream;* or a paralyzing tension that prevents characters from operating or accepting changes, such as in *Hamlet* or as in *Othello.* This contrastive force, for Knoll, is what makes desire such a relevant topic to be discussed in Shakespeare's plays, as "many of Shakespeare's erotic metaphors draw from the domains of both stillness and

motion, which often converge at the height of desire" (Knoll 69). Desire through metaphors of either movement or stillness is also discussed by Terry Eagleton, in his book titled *William Shakespeare*. Eagleton discusses not only the way desire may paralyze one's body, but also how it has in itself the "promiscuity of language" (20), as desire shifts from one object-of-desire to another and exposes how provisional the obsession one might deem as eternal may be. Furthermore, Eagleton discusses how the chaotic energy brought forth by erotic desire may find in the process of marriage an opportunity to reorganize the discourse of desire itself, thus, as it happens in *Twelfth Night*, bringing closure to most comedies.

The reading process I employ throughout this master's thesis is supported mainly by the intersection between the psychoanalytic tradition and literary theory. The choice for a psychoanalytical approach goes along with Ignês Sodré's argument that psychoanalysis encompasses a process of "listening to, thinking about, and commenting on a particular form of narrative" (1) that does not aim to find a definite solution to a riddle. In the author's words, "if we tried to set in stone the Truth about past experience — to choose one particular 'plot' as the absolute definitive one — we would be impoverishing our patient — robbing him of the richness of his inner world" (109). Likewise, the process of close reading that I adopt for this master's thesis follows the post-structuralist logic of multiplying meanings and defying the argument of a single, stable truth present in a text — the very patient that should not be robbed of its richness. Instead, I depart from the understanding that the arguments here presented are a result of interactions between the reader's subjectivity, the dialogue with other authors, the dramatic text, as well as the ever-shifting network of meanings that circulate within one's social, cultural and historical context.

Approaching Shakespeare's works through the lenses of psychoanalysis, however, is far from novel: since its conception with Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalytical field has placed the Bard's tragedies as pivotal to the formulation of its theories. Even nowadays, after more than 120 years since its publication, it is still hard to disassociate Hamlet from the Oedipal complex argued by Ernest Jones and published in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). So, it should come as no surprise when Peter Hildebrand, in "Psychoanalysis and theatre", finds the possibility of discussing *Twelfth Night* through the lenses of psychoanalysis a compelling endeavor. Even if not actually engaging with Lacan's specific theory, Hildebrand offers a set of assessments that showcase the way the psychoanalytical approach contributes to the expansion of meanings found in a literary work. Hildebrand's reading that Olivia's mourning is an element that enables Orsino's desire for something that is simultaneously (un)attainable, for example, converges with Lacan's writings on the (im)possible fulfillment of one's lack. Not only that, his focus on the multiple patterns of triangulation found throughout the play allows us to invite Girard's mimetic theory to interact with the psychoanalytical field as a means of expanding the meanings found when reading desire in *Twelfth Night.*

This thesis, however, sets itself apart from the works introduced in this literary review not only by putting the spotlight on female characters and their specific uses of language, but mainly by reading a concept of desire that embraces both Jacques Lacan and René Girard's main propositions. Desire, in this master's thesis, is read not as solely consequential of other characters' erotic appeal, but as resulting from the active intersection of elements such as the character's subjectivity, social context, and interactions with other characters throughout the

play. Instead of having Viola, Olivia and Maria relegated to the margins, I propose a departure from female desire as that which drives the whole plot and pushes male and female characters alike.

In order to assess desire, the first chapter of this work introduces and discusses the aspects of Jacques Lacan's and René Girard's theories that compose the concept of desire that guides the reading of *Twelfth Night*. A qualitative approach through the review of these two theorists' works ignites the process of materializing the abstractness of desire: while Lacan's theory implicates a continuous force that drives one to pursue something, Girard's theory brings a fixed structure that allows us to zoom in on a three-character specific dynamic revolving around the process of imitation, rivalry and violence. In his *Theater of Envy*, Girard proposes a set of different ways through which his theories might be applied to the reading of Shakespeare's works, including *Twelfth Night*, but since it relegates most female characters to the role of supporters of male-centered erotic fantasies, I willingly exclude it from my theoretical framework. Instead, I focus on how both Lacan and Girard's central theories shed light on an act of desiring that is shaped by the social constructs that affect both the selection of an imitative prototype, and the projection of a particular fantasy unto another object.

The definition established in the first chapter delineates the framework used to the subsequent reading of how desire drives female characters and the plot of *Twelfth Night* alike. Chapters two, three and four focus each on one specific character from the play. Viola's chapter, for instance, discusses the textual evidence–found throughout the comedy that supports the idea of a desire that points toward the re-establishment of a lost balance. Aspects of gender, cross-dressing, courtly love and narcissism are discussed alongside Viola's expression of

desire, not forgetting the relevance of the character to the whole structuring of the comedy and its expectations as a dramatic genre.

Chapter three focuses on Olivia's character, bringing about a discussion on mourning, Petrarchism, expectations about marriage in early modern England, and women's rights to property at that time. The countess's desire is close-read through her longing for autonomy — having authority as a means of chasing the fulfillment of that desire. This approach allows the reading of her rejection of Duke Orsino's advances from a place of recognition of her idolization and consequential silencing through his discourse.

Chapter four wraps up the character-specific section with Maria, the only female servant in *Twelfth Night*. Even with a minor role, Maria shares with Viola the burden of shaping the structure of the comedy through the pursuit of her desire, which, in a sense, allows her to take over the role of a dramatist of sorts. The expulsion of a scapegoat that, for Northrop Frye, was more often than not a necessary event to the closing of Shakespeare's comedies is discussed in this chapter alongside the specificities Maria faces by being both a servant in a noble household and a single "masterless" woman.

These three chapters approach each character in the context of historical studies about early modern English society. This road was taken not only because *Twelfth Night* evokes in its text a series of anecdotes, names, ballads, words, jokes and assumptions tied to the context of its production, but mainly because *Twelfth Night* was primarily conceived as a text for performance — and, thanks to John Manningham's diary (1602-1603), we know it was performed. The understanding that *Twelfth Night* was composed for the brevity of each of its performances over the 17th-century stage allows us to infer that many of what, today, we may call

"blanks" found throughout the text could have been easily fulfilled by the knowledge that specific audience of Shakespeare's plays had at the time of *Twelfth Night*'s first performances. Much like Louis Montrose wrote, we can have no expectation of there ever having "a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question" (781), but by taking what is available of the historical context into account we can, at least, partly glimpse at the social context that is both responsible for the composition of the text and that is discursively constructed by Shakespeare's words.

Thus, the historical context that is taken into account while reading Viola, Olivia and Maria multiplies even further the meanings possible to be found in the reading of *Twelfth Night*. The social expectations around women at that time certainly circulate around the constraints each of these characters face throughout the story, but, more than that, these expectations give depth to what motivates each of their desire. After all, the particularized access to the Symbolic Order specific to their context is, without doubt, crucial to the processing of their desire.

To conclude, the last chapter of this master's thesis goes over the way each character's desire sets the plot of *Twelfth Night* in motion. By summarizing what has been discussed so far, this closing part reinforces the relevance of Viola, Olivia and Maria to the development of the main argument of this comedy while having them placed at the center of the reading process. By focusing on the expression of their desire, I hope that this research may motivate new readings of Shakespeare's female characters as self-contained paper beings rather than mere devices for the advancement of a male-centered plot.

CHAPTER 1

Desire as a Driving Force

My desire,

More sharp than filèd steel, did spur me forth;

(*Twelfth Night* 3.3.5-6)

Before delving into *Twelfth Night*, I will chart the concept of desire that I will use throughout this master's thesis. In the quest for visualizing the abstractedness of desire, both Jacques Lacan and René Girard bring, each in their own fashion, compelling contributions that have been continuously expanding the range of possible readings of works of literature. Not only do these French authors depart from literary works to hone their theories, but their writings also allow us to assess the central mechanism that propels people and characters alike to act on the world and transform it.

While Lacan's desire invokes a continuous force that drives someone to pursue something, Girard's mimetic desire focuses on the social and collaborative aspect of this concept, highlighting imitation as a means through which we shape our approach to the desired object. Together, both theories form a well-rounded approach to the expression of desire that sets the plot of *Twelfth Night* in motion. In this chapter, I start with Lacan's theory of desire before moving to Girard's own writings on the theme. The chapter closes with a concise reading of both theories side by side.

Lacan's theory of desire

Jacques Lacan's contributions to the psychoanalytic field have left an undeniable mark in the realm of literary theory and criticism. His considerations on the interplay between the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real changed the way we approach language and human experience through works of literature, opening up a myriad of readings possible to be found in Shakespeare's plays. Lacan's seminar on *Hamlet*, later published under the title "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*"[3], for example, introduces the logic of the desire of the Other[4], questioning Freud's ubiquitous Oedipal interpretation, while introducing the ways through which language operates one's psyche. His writings on the mourning process, the structuring of the unconscious, and the intricacies of desire, including concepts such as the *objet petit a,* shall be explored here as a first step to unveiling the role of female desire in *Twelfth Night*.

Prior to the exploration of desire in itself, the distinction between the concept of desire and that of a biological need should be clarified. Unlike needs, which comprise our biological instincts, desire, as a mechanism of the unconscious constructed by language, cannot ever be fulfilled. One may satiate bodily needs, such as hunger or thirst, but desire remains as that constant feeling of void that propels us to try our hand at filling it — only to fail again and again. Desire, Lacan explains in his *Écrits*, is "neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for

[3] Lacan, Jacques, et al. "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet." *Yale French Studies,* vol. 55, no. 56, 1977, pp. 11-52.

[4] In his early works, Lacan borrows the term "other" from Friedrich Hegel's works and it simply refers to the "other person". From his second seminar onwards, however, Lacan introduces the distinction between the "other", also known as the "little other", and the "Other", also called "Big Other". The Other with capital "O" refers to language and law, and, as long as it is particularized to a subject, it can also be read as the Symbolic Order in itself. The "other" with no capitalization, however, refers to a reflection or projection of the ego that is inscribed into the Imaginary Order. As we cannot reach other people's true subjectivity, it is through the little other that we realize them (*Seminar II* 244). To avoid confusion, whenever referring to the "other person", as seen through the realization of one's ego, I will specifically employ the term "little other".

love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second" (580). The essence of desire, thus, can be found when one's needs are articulated and satisfied, but the pressure of an insatiable demand is still ringing within oneself.

Desire emerges from the process of entering into the Symbolic, a concept that roughly points us out to the collection of signs and practices that comprises the social order. One of the three orders central to Lacan's theories, the Symbolic is essentially a linguistic dimension that should not be confused with language in itself. It is "the realm of culture as opposed to the imaginary order of nature" (Evans 204) that mediates the empirical world and makes it possible for it to be represented in language. The Symbolic order, Lewis Kirshner explains, "creates a break from the biological real, capturing and restructuring the experience of life through mediating symbols" (86). This process, of course, cannot capture the totality of one's lived experience, and something is always lost in this act of translation. Entering the Symbolic order, thus, means severing our connections with the Real[5], acquiring language, and conforming "to the rules, customs, norms, standards, practices, laws and prohibitions of society" (Downs, *Theory* par.9). This process allows us to understand our first negative: the "no"[6] that emerges from the

[5] The Lacanian Real is well exemplified by Žižek when he says that "the Lacanian difference between reality and real repeats the Kantian difference between what is possible (what falls within the frame of possible experience, what can be imagined as an object of intuition), and between what, although not logically impossible, nevertheless can never become an object of experience: the "real" designates this uncanny intermediate domain of what "exists," sometimes even necessarily exists, in the sense of logical construction, yet can never become part of what we experience as reality" (259). The Real found in Lacan's later works refers to all that which is not possible to be articulated and, in some instances, may shatter the meanings found in the Symbolic order.

[6] Lacan uses the concept of "Name-of-the-father" to refer to the symbolic authority that exercises some level of control over not only our desire, but over our own language. In his *Écrits*, Lacan writes, "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (230).

Symbolic and bars us from the state of full satisfaction that we believe to have once fully enjoyed — our *jouissance*.

This barring, Todd McGowan explains, happens because "enjoyment represents a danger to the very logic upon which every social order constitutes itself, and the social order must try to ward off this danger" (13). Overindulgence of any kind does bring disruption to the social dynamic insofar as it prevents the subject from adhering to the law and limitations that regulate our life in society. That, however, does not mean that the barred subject would simply give up that pre-symbolic state of satisfaction, but, rather, it is the void that comes to inhabit one's existence precisely what allows her or him to emerge as a desiring subject. If, on the one hand, the lack brought forth by this castration, by this process of entering the Symbolic Order, is fantasized by the desiring subject as a gap possible to be fulfilled, on the other hand, it is this search for fulfillment that fuels desire.

Desire, thus, is what one gets in the impossibility of ever attaining one's lost *jouissance*. In striving to fulfill the void inherent to all subjects that have crossed the threshold of the Symbolic order, the *objet petit a*[7] (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 263) emerges. This central concept in the understanding of desire is a substitute for whatever was lost in one's process of becoming a subject — of being castrated. To illustrate this concept, Lacan, in his *Seminar XI*, introduces the sentence: *"*I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you — the *objet petit a* — I mutilate you*"* (268). This sentence introduces one main aspect that should be kept in mind: the *objet petit a* is not the object-of-desire of the desiring subject. In

[7] The *objet petit a*, also called *objet a* or object-cause of desire, postulated by Jacques Lacan in his psychoanalytic theory, does not stand for a real object, rather it appears as a constitutive lack born out of our insertion into the symbolic order, which, in turn, transforms us into desiring subjects. The *objet petit a*, Downs writes, "is the positional void where one's *jouissance* used to be" (*Lacan's concept*, par. 17).

saying, “I love you”, we tackle the desired object only as a means of attaining that which we lack, the “something in you” that we actually desire. In *Sex and the Failed Absolute,* Slavoj Žižek introduces the *objet petit a* as “an object which emerges as the remainder of the very operation of castration, an object which fills in the lack opened up by castration, an object which is nothing but his lack itself acquiring a positive form” (232). *Objet petit a* is not, again, a materialized object. It is, in short, a supporter of desire and a highlighter of the characteristics we may (un)consciously be pursuing. This object’s emergence and immediate lack fuel the constant feeling that something is missing in one’s life and, when it comes to relationships, it highlights whatever feature, condition or disposition the other might have that sparks the desire related to one’s lack.

In understanding the logic of the interaction of *objet petit a* with one’s manifestation of desire, we are able to move towards the understanding of a desire that is backed up by the fantasies that the desiring subject builds around her or his own mental representation of the desired thing or being. Bruce Fink, in *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*, offers up a clear explanation of this dynamic:

> Desire thus is not so much drawn toward an object (Desire → Object) as elicited by a certain characteristic that can sometimes be read into a particular love object: desire is pushed not pulled (Cause → Desire). For a while, that object is seen as "containing" the cause, as "having" the trait or feature that incites this analysand's desire. At a certain point, however, the cause is abruptly subtracted from the object and the object promptly abandoned. (51)

That means that the cause of desire will never lie in the object being desired, and that illusion of it being the cause is only temporary. An object, whatever it may be, is not able to elicit desire in another subject, since this process is related to one's own subjectivity rather than to an object's set of characteristics. Staged through fantasy[8], the *objet petit a,* which is the actual cause of desire (Lacan, *Seminar X* 101)[9], acts as a searchlight that is able to spot, or to highlight, the aspects of an object that may appeal to one's lack and, therefore, to one's desire. That is the process through which it supports desire, and that is also the reason why it is able to jump from object to object while appealing to the same structure of desire.

Changing objects of desire relates either to a shift in the meanings that round the subject, or to glimpsing at the (im)possibility of fulfilling one's desire. Getting too close to achieving something "makes desire slip from one object to another, and the object that we are about to possess, has to be rejected. Such refusal allows fixation to move onto another object" (Azari 12), thus pressing us to move forward in the direction of our next object-of-desire. The "desire desires desire" appears under this logic of constant self-reproduction:

[8] Fantasy, in Lacan's lexicon, suggests the setting in which the *objet petit a* can be properly placed while mediating its relation to the subject. Bruce Fink explains that "when analysands recount fantasies to their analyst, they are informing the analyst about the way in which they want to be related to object a, in other words, the way they would like to be positioned with respect to the Other's desire" (*Lacanian Subject* 60), meaning that the staging of fantasy offers an (im)possible way out of the vicious cycle of desire.

[9] In the eight chapter of the *Seminar X*, "Cause of Desire", Lacan introduces his discussion about the nature of *objet a* with this paragraph that, side by side with Bruce Fink's quotation presented in the last page, helps us grasp the nature of this concept: "To set our target, I shall say that the object a - which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire — is to be conceived of as the cause of desire. To take up my earlier metaphor, the object lies behind desire" (101).

> Desire remains unnamable and always reproduces itself in different guises, because Lacan's desire essentially aims at its own re-appropriation and reproduction. The subject is unable to give its own desire a name, for the subject doesn't know the name of unconscious desire. Here desire functions the way a drive does by seeking its goal, but it has no aim. Once desire is temporarily quenched, it immediately slides into another desire. The endless chain of objects, with the help of fantasy, co-ordinates the operation of desire in an open system of deferral. In any case, in order to sustain itself, desire must produce the lack that causes it. (Azari 11)

Not to be confused with the *objet petit a*, the object-of-desire is the thing, being or idea onto which we fixate our desire as a means of getting closer to achieving that unfulfillable promise of pre-Symbolic fulfillment. Shakespeare's *Sonnet 129* brings a straightforward explanation for this idea: "Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream" (line 12). The anticipation of desire fuels desire, but attaining its transitory object does not bring the everlasting joy we presumed. Following this logic, Ehsan Azari calls the Lacanian desire a "motor of demands" (12), which is always prompting subjects to move forward, to choose another object, to fulfill that void obtained in the process of castration, of entering the symbolic order.

Another aspect of desire that should be taken into consideration is Lacan's postulation that the subject's desire is the desire of the Other. In French, *désir de l'Autre*, the concept brings about a duality: a desire that can be translated both as the "desire *of* the Other", meaning that one desires what the Other desires, and as a "desire *for* the Other", or that one desires to be desired by the Other, to accommodate to the Other's demands and to occupy the role of an object-of-desire.

As I will later discuss with regard to René Girard, in Lacan, the desiring subject is also unaware of what she or he must desire. The lack that emerges from castration points out to the necessity of desiring something, but what that "something" entails is a different matter. That is when the Other (*Autre*), also known as the big Other, comes onto the stage. In his sixth *Seminar*, Lacan explains that the "Other's desire is fundamentally articulated and structured in the subject's relation to speech — in other words, in disconnecting from everything that has to do with mere survival" (480). Hence, the Other, not to be confused with "the other person", can be understood as the unconscious mediated by law, language, societal customs — that which is inscribed in the Symbolic order.

Our desire, Dino Felluga explains, "is never properly our own, but is created through fantasies that are caught up in cultural ideologies rather than material sexuality" (par. 2). A subject's desire is not autonomous, in the literal sense, but a product of one's interactions with the Symbolic order, with the particular fantasies and meanings and customs with which one might have interacted throughout life: in short, "it is only in and through the Other, to whom I am linked in a relation of symbolic interchange, that I am able to announce to myself my own desire" (Boothby 119). The desire one is able to announce verbally, however, must always be understood as that transitory desire: that which fixates itself on an object-of-desire and that abandons it as soon as it is reached.

Besides desiring what the Other desires, Lacan's desire also entails that possibility of a subject that, through fantasy, seeks to be desired by the Other. Fink elucidates this process with a short passage: "What I want, as a subject, is recognition by the Other, and this recognition takes the form of being wanted: I want to be wanted. In order to be wanted, I try to figure out what the Other wants

so I can try to be it and thereby be wanted. I desire the Other's desire for me." (*Lacan to the Letter* 119). This "trying to figure out" is exactly what evokes the fantasy that supports desire and that comes from the Other insofar it is particularized according to each subject's chain of signifiers[10]. The Other's desire, as an abstraction of the object-of-desire, is, to subjects, always a product of their own interpretation — a product of their own fantasies.

One last concept that relates to the logic of desire, and that will prove invaluable in the analysis of *Twelfth Night*, is that of "mourning". Lacan discusses this concept in his analysis of *Hamlet* in "Desire and Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet", revealing how, in the process of mourning, one strives to deal with the sudden gap caused by the loss of someone / something: "The work of mourning is first of all performed to satisfy the disorder that is produced by the inadequacy of signifying elements to cope with the hole that has been created in existence" (38). In losing something / someone, the subject loses not only an object structured in fantasy but also her or his place as the object of the Other that she or he had previously occupied. Lacanian mourning, Darian Leader discusses, "is a question of the constitution of the object, and hence of a re-establishment of the subject's relation to the object in phantasy" (63). Mourning comes, then, as the process of accepting this lack or absence and of redirecting the energy once directed to these now lost objects to new objects. Unlike melancholia, which indicates a subject "that

[10] Dylan Evans, in his *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* provides a concise definition for Lacan's concept of chain of signifiers and its relation to one's desire: "It is in 1957 that Lacan introduces the term 'signifying chain' to refer to a series of SIGNIFIERS which are linked together. A signifying chain can never be complete, since it is always possible to add another signifier to it, ad infinitum, in a way which expresses the eternal nature of desire; for this reason, desire is metonymic. The chain is also metonymic in the production of meaning; signification is not present at any one point in the chain, but rather meaning 'insists' in the movement from one signifier to another" (190).

remains stuck in the position of loss and deploration" (Rebate 56), mourning brings forth a new beginning, as we will soon see with *Twelfth Night's* Olivia.

Girard's mimetic theory of desire

While not taking language in itself as a central point to his theories, René Girard anchors most of his writings on the analysis of Shakespeare's works, modern European novels, and Biblical passages as a means of unveiling what he believes to be human nature. Girard's main theories may be divided into three segments: first, the mimetic theory of desire, which is directly related to the literary field; second, the scapegoat mechanism that regulates the violence that emerges from the mimetic desire, which relates to the cultural anthropology field; third, the Gospel revelation as a means of exposing the scapegoat mechanism, mostly related to the theological field. Whereas the scapegoat mechanism is strongly associated with the mimetic theory, to analyze the expression of desire in *Twelfth Night*, I shall focus on Girard's writings on both desire and on the violence that emerges from this process of imitating a chosen model.

For Girard, the borders that separate the "I" and the "you" are constantly threatened by the process of mimesis: the "I" may become the "you" in this game of imitation, blurring the divisions that once made them different. Mimetic desire lays down the foundation for this process, as it is in the movement of selecting models and imitating their desire that we may find ourselves imitating the other as well. Chris Fleming explains that this concept of mimesis introduced in the works of Girard "involves not simply representation and other forms of cultural memory – it incorporates acts of and intentions towards acquisition" (10). A mimesis that is intrinsically related to the process of acquisition or, as Girard calls it, *mimésis*

d'appropriation, underlines not only human behavior, but, for the French author, it also explains the endemic violence that permeates the history of mankind.

This violence appears when two beings that are close enough compete for one single object of interest. The mimetic desire, as per Girard's explanation, starts with the selection of a model or mediator (M). The subject (S), in selecting a model, imitates her or his desire, focusing on the object (O) that the model also appears to desire. The triangulation of desire (Fig. 1.), as proposed by Girard in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, assumes the shape of an isosceles, establishing a structure in which "desire always increases in intensity as the mediator approaches the desiring subject" (83). As the participants (M, S and O) move closer to one another, "the directions become more precise; 'metaphyseal virtue' increases and the object becomes 'irreplaceable'" (Girard, *Deceit* 84), thus increasing both the violence against the model (M) and the eagerness of the subject (S) to possess the object (O). Girard's theory focuses on the movement of assuming models, mimicking their desires and rivaling with them as a means of achieving the fulfillment we assume they enjoy.

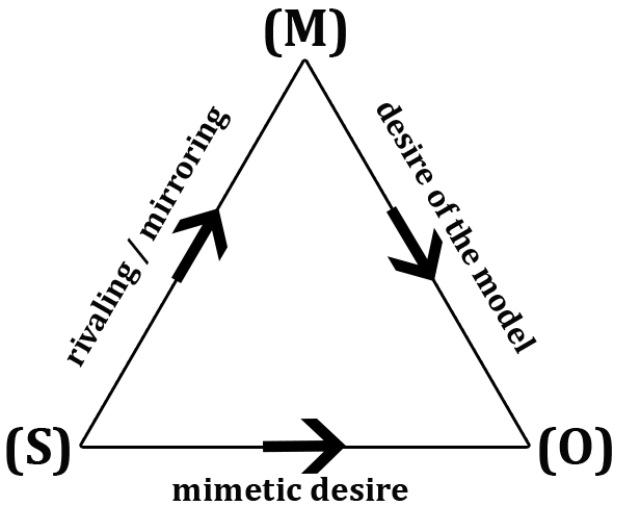

Figure 1. Triangulation of Desire.

Desire, in this context, is not the same as one's needs or, as Kirwan calls it, "appetites" (14). Needs or appetites emerge from biological instances, whereas desire appears as a result of culture, as a result of the observation of others around us. Whereas this pattern of observing and imitating models is evident in children, in adults, Girard notes in his book *Violence and the Sacred*, it is virtually the same. The only difference being the fear that adults may harbor concerning their own incompleteness: instead of being an imitator, a man prefers "to offer himself as a model to others; he invariably falls back on the formula, 'Imitate me!' in order to conceal his own lack of originality" (146). This impulse, however, brings us to a contradiction: If one is to be imitated (M), their object of desire (O) would surely fall under the radar of the desiring subject (S), thus bringing violence and the possibility of losing their own object to another individual.

That, however, is not the only contradiction in the complex process of desiring. Selecting a model and pursuing an object in Girard throw us into the eternal chase theorized by Lacan. The "universal frustration" (48) Girard writes about in "The passionate oxymoron in *Romeo and Juliet*" does not leave us, desiring subjects, even as we triumph in a battle for the shared object of desire. For Girard, as soon as the spoils of this fray are secured, we lose interest, as the chosen model is no longer to be imitated due to her or his defeat. As "the only objects that remain permanently desirable are inaccessible objects, the ones designated by models too powerful to be vanquished" (49), we must both seek the model and distance ourselves from the it and, consequently, from the object of interest in order to avoid the debilitating frustration that accompanies the act of desiring.

The role of the model that occupies the tip of the triangle of desire (Fig. 1.) is not limited to flesh beings in our world. As Kirwan notes, one of Girard's first examples of the mimetic theory of desire is the selection of Amadis of Gaul (M) by Don Quixote (S) as a model. In Cervantes' novel, Amadis is a fictional character that, in Don Quixote's eyes, displays the most excellent qualities (O) of a knight errant. In imitating Amadis, Don Quixote can hope to achieve his very qualities — to confuse the "I" and the "you" aforementioned — while taking advantage of the fact that, while a fictional character that inhabits a literary world, Amadis would never cross paths with him, making it very hard for violence to emerge between the model and the desiring subject. Following that logic, the selection of a model may very well allow the subject to select from close friends to inanimate beings as long as there is the presupposition of an object being desired.

Whereas the nature of the model will be discussed further in the next section, as I introduce Lacan's concept of fantasy, the nature of the object in the triangulation of desire will be discussed here. For Girard, the object of desire (O) is not limited to a material item such as a car, a jewel or, as is preponderant in *Twelfth Night*, a lover. As Kirwan discusses in *Discovering Girard*, the desiring subject could also direct her or his desire towards "the search for a quasi-transcendent state of well-being, of fulfillment, of self-actualisation" (22). Much as Don Quixote did when selecting Amadis of Gaul as his model, one may also select an object that has to do with the state of "being" something as opposed to "owning" something.

Not only that, here, as in Lacan, the object is never stable. Reaching the object does not mean reaching fulfillment, but it does mean that the selection of a new model / object will take place, shifting the attention of the desiring subject

toward another object. Objects of desire are never predetermined; rather, they are conditioned by culture and the set of values that round the subject. As the prestige of the model is engrained within the object, it confers it an illusory value that transfigures the object (Girard, *Deceit* 17) in a way that it is only visible to the one desiring it.

Although Girard's mimetic desire may focus on aspects of imitation and violence, it does not reduce desiring subjects to savage beings of brutality: we imitate others because we do not know what to desire ourselves. The chosen model, deemed as somewhat superior, is the map to our own betterment. As Wolfgang Palaver points out in *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, Girard's intention is "simply to highlight a central dimension of human nature—mimetic desire—which can help to better explain man's propensity for crisis and conflict" (38). For Girard, desire, thus, is an essential element in the construction of self: through observation, and consequential violence, we aspire to the elevated position of models while taking others as our models. Desire, in the end, places us onto the futile quest for overcoming the need for a desire in itself.

Converging paths: desire and mimesis

The exact point into which Lacan's and Girard's theories of desire seem to converge appears through the process of desiring the desire of another person. Moreover, "for both thinkers, desire is an expression of an absence of self-sufficiency in the subject" (Strączek 252). Whereas in Lacan the whole process of desiring something or someone has to do with the realm of both language and the unconscious, in Girard, this dynamic involves the selection of a model and its imitation within the framework of one's social context — an act possible to be

consciously articulated in language as previously exemplified with the help of Don Quixote.

Girard's triangulation of desire backs up the process of reading the violence that emerges from Orsino's presupposition that his own page covets Olivia, his object-of-desire, but it does fail to provide sufficient framework to understand the reason as to why Olivia tolerates exchanging Viola for her brother Sebastian. Lacan's concept of a Symbolic order that mediates the fantasies built around the desired object, however, enlightens this dynamic when it welcomes the presence of the *objet petit a* in the equation of desire. Following this train of thought, Olivia does not desire one specific person, but something else (related to her primordial lack) that is also possible to obtain through Sebastian. Not only that, Lacan's writings add a new layer to Girard's triangulation when it brings to light that the other being is always fantasized with the elements that circulate in the Symbolic order. As we are not able to access one another's subjectivity, we can only choose models that have been thoroughly built within the frameworks of our unconscious, with the images we have at our disposal. In merging these two authors, we have a subject (S) that chooses a model (M) that is actually made out from the presuppositions we have as to what configures that model, that other. This movement removes the source of desire that, in Girard, is in the model and places it back in Lacan's Other, as any model exists only within the projections of our mental representations supported by the meanings to which we have access.

Going back to the example of Don Quixote quoted by Girard in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* we see a character that is able to articulate in language his own desire within the triangulation: "In the same way Amadis was the pole, the star, the sun, for brave and amorous knights, and we others who fight under the banner of

love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry" (1). However, as Lacan proposes a desire that is, first of all, unconscious, I take, for this research, the enunciation of desire as an element within the chronology of desire that traces the subject back to her or his primordial lack and to Lacan's *objet petit a*. Desires that are explicitly presented in language, as seen in Don Quixote, are always that type of fleeting desire that jumps from object to object, tracing a map of desire that, when read as a whole, could give the analyst (or, in my case, the reader) insight as to what supports the core of the desiring subject. In *Twelfth Night*, characters often enunciate their object-of-desire, but these are simply ephemeral objects-of-desire, not desire that stems from a primordial lack. Thus, in Girard's triangulation, the position of the object is always taken by that object-of-desire, and desire itself can only be read beneath the patterns that emerge from the lines that connect each corner of the triangle.

I propose this dialogue between Lacan and Girard so that the former's triangulation supports the selection of a specific object-of-desire at the end of one's chain of previously selected and discarded objects. This selection, read through Lacan's theory of desire, is always framed by the subject's particularized access to the Symbolic Order, following her or his fantasies in the shaping of the object. I contend that the process of imitation within the triangulation described by Girard undergoes the same principles that guide the selection of an object — that is to say that the very mechanism of selecting a model is already conducted under the influence of the *objet petit a* as it highlights aspects of an object-of-desire that appeal to one's lack. On this account, when a character from *Twelfth Night* such as Maria, for instance, takes Malvolio as her model, we witness a process that already

relates to her lack and, consequently, to her desire. Her presupposition of Malvolio's desire as well as the violent rivalry that follows are both mediated by her fantasy before it can constitute Girard's triangle.

Violence and rivalry are not the focus of Lacan's theory of desire, but in his early seminars, it is possible to find references to a process of imitation that follows the mirror stage and that bears some similarities to Girard's proposal previously discussed:

> The subject's desire can only be confirmed in this relation through a competition, through an absolute rivalry with the other, in view of the object towards which it is directed. And each time we get close, in a given subject, to this primitive alienation, the most radical aggression arises — the desire for the disappearance of the other in so far as he supports the subject's desire. (*Seminar I* 170)

The logic of rivalry and the consequential violence that emerges from it elucidate the dynamics established between some characters in *Twelfth Night,* especially when thinking about Maria and Malvolio, Aguecheek and Cesario, and Orsino and Viola. For Lacan, what interrupts the cycle of violence that arises from this rivalry is precisely the mediation of recognition, "Without which every human function would simply exhaust itself in the unspecified wish for the destruction of the other as such." (*Seminar I* 171) for Girard, the violence that emerges from the mimetic desire and escalates to a crisis can only be stopped through the scapegoat mechanism (Kirwan 49).

This mechanism refers to the process of directing all the violence to one single victim, re-uniting all those who have been competing for the same object-of-desire unto a harmonious, however enraged, mob. The sacrifice of the chosen victim, then, allows for the reestablishment of social order. Although on a smaller scale, in *Twelfth Night* we do have both situations: a violent act that stops in face of the need for recognition, in the case of Sebastian and Toby towards Olivia, and the choosing of a scapegoat, in the case of Malvolio, whose suffering allows for the reestablishment of the order Maria, Sir Toby, Fabian and the Fool see disturbed. Thus, for this master's thesis, whereas the violence that emerges from the approximation of the desiring subjects that share the same object-of-desire is taken into consideration, this very violence is not thought to be appeased in only one way. Neither the search for recognition, the use of the scapegoat mechanism, nor the reordering of the Imaginary order, as it happens with Orsino and Viola, shall be analyzed as the single viable option to appeasing violence within the dynamic of desire.

In this master's thesis, desire is presented as a continuous force supported by the *objet petit a.* Meanwhile, the process of selecting one's object-of-desire, which is also backed up by the presence of the *objet petit a*, is read through the mimetic triangulation, encompassing the process of imitation, rivalry and violence inherent to it. The writings of both Lacan and Girard, in dialogue, offer a multidimensional aspect to the reading of desire in *Twelfth Night*, tackling a concept that departs simultaneously from the specificities of each character and from the social dynamics that stage the manifestation of desire.

CHAPTER 2

Viola: from page-boy to mistress of Illyria

I am all the daughters of my father's house,

And all the brothers, too—

(*Twelfth Night* 2.4.132-33)

When, like the Roman goddess of love, desire and beauty, Viola emerges from the foams of the sea into the foreign land of Illyria, the character, whose name would not be pronounced until the last scene of *Twelfth Night*, finds herself estranged from her twin brother, Sebastian. The shipwreck that precedes the beginning of the play is not shown but mentioned by the captain that helps Viola out of the sea with his driving boat (1.2.12). Now in dry lands, Viola's first lines are inquiries about the nature of Illyria and about her own destiny: "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother, he is in Elysium. / Perchance he is not drowned." (1.2.3-5). This last line, supported by the captain's analogy of Sebastian as Herodotus's Arion[11] — whom saved himself from drowning in the sea by riding on a dolphin's back —, is the spark of hope that motivates Viola to take her next steps.

Holding onto the possibility of her brother's survival, Viola does not mirror countess Olivia's state of mourning briefly mentioned by the captain. The disorder to be produced by the sudden loss of Sebastian and, simultaneously, by Viola's own

[11] Arion is a character in one of Herodotus' stories from *The Histories*. After jumping into the sea to save himself from sailors he had hired, Arion, a famous musician, is seen riding the back of a dolphin towards dry lands. The captain in *Twelfth Night* describes the scene to Viola while making a reference to this short story, "like Arion on the dolphin's back, / I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves" (1.2.16-17). This simile introduces another layer onto Sebastian's and Viola's character as the latter explains that she is able not only to sing, but also to "speak to [the duke] in many sorts of music" (1.2.61), much like Arion was. That is when she adopts the male identity of Cesario – whom, she herself will later affirm, is an imitation of her brother's character.

role in Sebastian's life is avoided thanks to the Captain's words of reassurance. Evading the need of redirecting the energy usually directed at her own brother, Viola is quick to change her focus and to assess the possibility of finding work while hiding her own condition as an orphaned noble lady. After learning that her only choice would be to serve the duke of Illyria, Orsino, Viola asks the captain to hide her:

> VIOLA. I prithee—and I'll pay thee bounteously—
> Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
> For such disguise as haply shall become
> The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke (1.2.55-58)

Her intent, expressed both as the possibility of finding her missing brother and of serving the duke as a means to that first objective, here allows us for more than one reading that certainly can coexist within the text. First, if the intent is to find Sebastian, saying that her disguise shall become its form allows us to read it as being a first step to mimicking Sebastian — to finding him, even if within herself. Later in the play this idea will appear conspicuously, but, for now, it is not far-fetched to assume that Viola is imitating her brother in order to produce the disguise of a man. Following this logic, even the adoption of the name "Cesario" is not without cause. Sebastian's name comes from "Sebastos", a Greek honorific used to refer to the Roman title of "Augustus", which was given to Rome's first emperor, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (63 BC – 14 AD). The adoption of the name "Cesario", derived from "Caesar", thus reinforces the argument that Viola has her own brother as a model throughout the play. Moreover, as a noble lady, her

familiarity with male figures would be rather limited to those of her household, so having her brother as the model through which her temporary male identity as Cesario is shaped is not a surprise.

This process of imitation, however, does not immediately put Viola / Sebastian within Girard's triangulation of desire. Viola is not choosing Sebastian as a model the same way Don Quixote chose Amadis de Gaula in Cervantes' novel. Viola, as far as we can tell in her first scene, is not imitating Sebastian's desire or pursuing his object-of-desire, whatever these may be at this point. The process of imitation depicted here is much closer to that of an actress that prepares herself for a role through the observation of those who bear the characteristics she shall perform.

Second, if her intent is to serve duke Orsino, her disguise becoming its form allows us to read her transformation as a means to best serve her soon-to-be master. In the first scene of *Twelfth Night*, we discover that Orsino's best aspiration is to be in love[12], so, in serving the duke to her fullest, Viola, even as Cesario, inadvertently opens up the possibility of becoming the vessel that shall allow Orsino to keep on sustaining his own aspiration. Moreover, the name "Viola", already points us out to the musicality of her entire being[13], something with which Orsino is very well acquainted: "If music be the food of love, play on" (1.1.1). Viola

[12] The famous opening lines of *Twelfth Night*, "If music be the food of love, play on. / Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die." (1.1.1-3), are often taken as reference to Orsino being struck with melancholy as a result of his unrequited love for Olivia.

[13] Viola could be a reduction of "viola da gamba", or viol, a European instrument extremely popular during English Renaissance and Baroque periods. While this possibility does add to the motif of music that permeates *Twelfth Night*, the word Viola could also come from the flower "violet". Coincidentally, or not, Orsino also mentions that very flower in his first scene: "That strain again! It had a dying fall. / O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound / That breathes upon a bank of violets, / Stealing and giving odor." (1.1.4-7). Violets, as recurrent as they are in Shakespeare's works, are used by Orsino to illustrate the pleasant effect the music had been having on him up to that point. The pleasure of the music is straight up compared to the pleasure of the flower's smell. Both meanings contribute to our understanding of Viola's role when she is later placed as Orsino's object-of-desire.

not only speaks in music (1.2.61) but is music herself. Her appearance in the second act seems to follow exactly what Orsino had demanded at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, and, while being music, Viola, as Cesario, feeds not only Orsino's, but also other characters' feelings of love.

These, of course, do not point us to Viola's own object-of-desire yet, but it does give some clues to the relationship she will later develop with Orsino. In this first act, we learn of her will to survive in foreign lands and to be reunited with her lost brother, but it is still too early in the play to pinpoint the presence of that specific desire that will act as a continuous motor of demands. The scene that inaugurates Viola's role in *Twelfth Night* brings but a shadow of the desire that blooms in the scenes to come. Evoking yet another similarity to Venus, but now framed like that of Botticelli's[14], Viola ends this second scene with an image that is not shown in the text but is later referenced in the closing act of this play: the Captain — now her aid[15] — brings the clothes Viola wears as a disguise to both welcome and dress that newly-borne figure that emerged from the sea, much like the Horae that dress Venus in the painting. Thus, the identity of Cesario is fashioned, summoning to the stage the Greek goddess's own traits: love, desire, personal prosperity and victory, which will later draw the comedic closure of *Twelfth Night*.

Act 1, scene 4: materializing desire

Viola's first appearance as Cesario takes place at duke Orsino's court. Stage directions introduce her entrance in man's attire right before Valentine addresses

[14] Botticelli, Sandro. *The Birth of Venus*. 1484–1486, Uffizi Gallery, Italy.
[15] Viola asks the Captain, "I prithee—and I'll pay thee bounteously— / Conceal me what I am, and be my aid" (1.2.55-56). In the last scene of *Twelfth Night*, Viola, again, explains that "The Captain that did bring me first on shore / Hath my maid's garments" (5.1.287-288).

her. The courtier expresses his displeasure with the intimacy Orsino has been showing his new page-boy despite knowing him for only three days:

> VALENTINE. If the Duke continue these favors towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.
>
> VIOLA. You either fear his humor or my negligence, that you call in question the continuance of his love. Is he inconstant, sir, in his favors?
>
> VALENTINE. No, believe me. (1.4.1-8)

Whether Valentine's[16] answer is ironic or reveals his blissful ignorance about his lord's temper is just one of the many double *entendres* that adds onto the comedic aspect of the play.

Beyond its comedic value, however, that brief exchange establishes the duality of constancy / inconstancy, mentioned by Viola[17] and, previously, by Orsino, as a motif in *Twelfth Night*. This dynamic directs us not only to the core of Orsino's character, but, mainly, to that which Viola desires. Her entrance as Cesario

[16] While it is not my objective to dwell on Shakespeare's choice of names for this particular play, it is still relevant to notice how the name "Valentine" not only refers to the celebration of courtly love, previously referenced in Shakespeare's other plays such as *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, but it also refers us back to the recursively pairing of "Valentine" with a character of inconstant temper. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio's brother is named Valentine, as is Proteus' best friend in *The Two Gentleman of Verona.* Valentine's presence in this first scene in which Viola and Orsino interact foreshadows both their impending marriage and Orsino's temper.

[17] From this scene until the end of the play, Viola will always be dressed and addressed as Cesario by the other characters, save for her last dialogue. For a comfortable reading, in this master's thesis I will favour the use of female pronouns whenever Viola's name is in use, and male pronouns whenever Cesario is the name being used. For this master's thesis, I depart from the reading that Viola's gender is consistently female and that the male alias of Cesario is only a temporary measure adopted for survival, not a gender she performs due to self-identification.

introduces a sense of disruption made palpable through the changes Orsino's and, later, Olivia's households shall face. Simultaneously, it is evident that Viola's desire lingers around the possibility of retrieving that which she lost while reestablishing the order her own existence as Cesario seems to deny.

As Orsino reenters the stage, his first action is to call upon Cesario and instruct him on his role in wooing countess Olivia. Other attendants have failed in this job, but Orsino is certain that his page's youth and temperament will be enough to convince the countess to come out of her metaphorical cloister. The dialogue that follows introduces a sense of hesitancy in Viola that is not shown in her first appearance and, by the end of this scene, it becomes clear that this hesitancy is but an expression of the feelings she, herself, has been harboring for the duke.

ORSINO. Be not denied access. Stand at her doors
And tell them, there thy fixèd foot shall grow
Till thou have audience.
VIOLA. Sure, my noble lord,
If she be so abandoned to her sorrow
As it is spoke, she never will admit me. (1.4.17-22)

(…)

ORSINO. Be clamorous and leap all civil bounds
Rather than make unprofited return.
VIOLA. Say I do speak with her, my lord, what then? (1.4.23-25)

(…)

ORSINO. She will attend it better in thy youth

Than in a nuncio's of more grave aspect.

VIOLA. I think not so, my lord. (1.4.29-31)

Viola is torn between the duty to which she, as Cesario, is bound, "Sure, my noble lord" (1.4.20), and the romantic feelings she, later in this scene, confesses experiencing. This game of agreeing to Orsino's demands while posing an obstacle is just one consequence of the contradictions that pile around the expression of her desire: as a man, she is not allowed to marry Orsino, and as a woman, she would not be able to forge the bond both of them seem now to sustain. To add to the pile, what Orsino asks of her is precisely to take on the role of a cupid and convince Olivia to marry him — an irony that tinges Viola's internal conflicts throughout the play.

Orsino, up until the end of their discussion, does not cede to his page's stubbornness, validating Valentine's first affirmation that the duke is, indeed, someone constant or, at least, persistent in his affections. It is useful to remember, however, that Orsino's infatuation with Viola-as-Cesario, and the unclasp of "the book even of [his] secret soul" (1.4.15) happen within the span of only three days, changing the whole organization of his court. Ultimately, Orsino convinces Viola not because of his insistence, but because his last lines address exactly what she has been hoping to hear:

ORSINO. Prosper well in this

And thou shalt live as freely as thy lord,

To call his fortunes thine. (1.4.40-42)

Orsino's promise of reward sounds, in these lines, much like a marriage proposal. Through which other way would Viola literally be able to "call his fortunes [hers]" but through a formal marriage? The word "fortune" here simultaneously evokes the mental image of Orsino's wealth — in the sense that he would be paying her handsomely —, and of his own fate. To share one's fate, to go through the same joys and pains, to live and die the same way; all these ideas point us to the logic of sharing one's life side by side, much like a marriage of companionship. But, as in Orsino's case that role is not open for a man, Viola's only choice is to resign: "Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife." (1.4.45-46).

At this point it is safe to say that Viola's object-of-desire first appears in the figure of Orsino. Something *in* him, as Lacan would say, rather than him, specifically, appeals to her unconscious desire to the point that, in the span of three days, she already contemplates the possibility of becoming his wife. Marriage, the pinnacle of social order, stability and conformity now motivates her quest alongside that of finding her lost brother, Sebastian. The fantasy of balance that Viola may build around the possibility of marrying the duke she projects seems to inhabit the "something more than you" (*Seminar XI* 268) that Lacan mentions as that which calls our attention to our objects-of-desire.

The chronology of Viola's desire, as seen up to this second scene, also shares the structure of Shakespeare's comedic plays the same way it introduces chaos only to bring order at its closure. As Northrop Frye writes, Shakespeare's comedies tend to close with a "rebirth" (24) of the society previously usurped by the festive atmosphere and humorous individuals that inhabit it. This return to the old normal society, or, rather, to the way things should have been, according to the audience's own expectations, is this very sense of order that had been temporarily disrupted

by chaos. It is only through the chaos of the shipwreck, the chaos of possibly losing her brother, and the chaos of having to dress up as a male servant while foregoing her identity that Viola is able to come to covet a marriage that reorders the disruption she both causes and faces in *Twelfth Night*.

This duality is also present at the core of the Lacanian desire: as something that is born out of a lack that cannot ever be fulfilled and, still, pushes us to pursue its own fulfillment, Viola's desire for stability is born out of a chaos that, until the last scene, is never truly reorganized. Still, she pursues this order while leaving a trail of disorder behind her. The Lacanian desire, it is worth noting, is something impossible to be articulated in language. So, for that reason, whenever Viola's (and, in the following chapters, Olivia's as well as Maria's) desire is mentioned as being for something — as in the argument that Viola's desire is for balance, for example —, it ultimately refers to the direction towards which their desire points us. It refers to the convergence of elements that have been being pronounced, targeted and articulated by the characters up to the point of the analysis, forming a sort of chronology or a map through which we can identify the objects of desire, the patterns of desire and, finally, the expression of desire. In short, when Viola's desire for balance is mentioned, it indicates that the map of her desire introduces a certain pattern that reveals the centrality of balance to its foundation. It is as if, unconsciously, Viola's *objet petit a* is always highlighting balance as that one element within other objects that would be able to fulfill her unfulfillable lack.

Moreover, in assuming the dramatic structure of the traditional Shakespearean comedy, Viola's desire not only sets the plot in motion, but also highlights the conventional elements found in this genre: the happy ending, the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian values, mistaken identities, and

separation and reconciliation. Through this logic, *Twelfth Night* is, after all, the materialization of Viola's desire.

Act 1, scene 5: shaping disguise

As the last scene of the first act begins, readers are introduced to Malvolio, the countess's loyal steward that, much like Viola, places his own master as his object-of-desire. Malvolio, however, follows a kind of self-serving path entirely opposite to that of Viola, thus providing the perfect foil character for the heroine. Furthermore, it is also Malvolio the only one, after Orsino, that accounts for the cracks in Viola's disguise: while Maria calls Viola a "fair young man" (1.5.101), Malvolio describes her as

> MALVOLIO. Not yet old enough for a man, nor young
> enough for a boy—as a squash is before 'tis a
> peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis
> with him in standing water, between boy and man. (1.5.155-158)

Between boy and man, Viola is neither, and Malvolio recognizes that[18]. Viola's act of dissembling is not as natural as Feste's, the Fool, who, in the closing Acts, is able to put on a disguise and to instantly transform into Sir Thopas, the curate. Viola's

[18] Malvolio's lines also reference Ovid's Narcissus, "he seemde to stande beetwene the state of man and Lad" (Ovid 3.438), which foreshadows Viola's refusal of Olivia's affection the same way Narcissus refused everyone else's affections. Narcissus only being able to love himself hints to us at two different layers of meanings: Malvolio, the one who can actually only love himself, accuses Viola of being what, in reality, he is. At the same time, that Viola's disguise takes the form of her intent and that she is, as Cesario, assuming some of Orsino's own characteristics, allow us to read their relationship as that of Narcissus and his own reflection.

transformation seems to happen gradually as mentions of her non-masculine traits become scarcer. As beings of language, it is through other people's perceptions and descriptions that Cesario's limited subjectivity is also built.

This process, of course, relates not only to the dramatic irony that builds the comicality of her journey as Cesario, but also to Viola's own disguise shaping itself after an intent that is also gradually becoming clear. If, at first, Viola's main objective seems to be her reunion with Sebastian, her brother, by now it has already been overpowered by the possibility of marrying Orsino. To accomplish that, however, she needs to fulfill the task with which she was entrusted by the duke. As she enters Olivia's garden to do so, Viola is quick to confess the contradictory nature of her being there: "I swear that I am not that I play" (1.5.181). She is not Cesario, she is not a man, she is not an actor[19], she is not the one who bears the feelings she is there to proclaim and, likewise, even if she plays Orsino's part as the bearer of his affections, she is not the duke. From this scene onwards, however, we begin to see the practical Viola slowly revealing some of the characteristics Orsino displays in his first appearance: someone able to love with devotion (as he believes to be able to do), someone able to materialize courtly love through well-penned verses (albeit Viola's are much less impersonal than Orsino's), and someone that is a victim of the most elementary Petrarchan trope of the frustrated lover, as Orsino is in his pursuit of Olivia.

As Viola's part progresses, we get more hints of her devotion both to the role of Cesario and to her own feelings of love. Right before the willow-cabin

[19] Right before that confession, Olivia asks her if she is a professional actor. Viola's answer hints to the understanding that, as a woman, she could not be an actor, as that role, by law, was reserved for men.

speech begins, Viola reacts to Olivia's refusal of Orsino by placing herself in her master's stead:

> VIOLA. If I did love you in my master's flame,
> With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life,
> In your denial I would find no sense.
> I would not understand it. (1.5.266-269)

As her disguise may not raise further suspicion in terms of her physical appearance, Viola's feelings as a woman still seem to overflow through the cracks of Cesario's impersonation. What she does not understand is not restricted to her placing herself in Orsino's shoes, but, mainly, to her placing herself in Olivia's position as Orsino's object-of-desire. As that is what Viola currently pursues, she is unable to grasp how Olivia, the one who has exactly what she desires, could deny it.

Her emotionally charged words, as Mary Kietzman suggests, deliver "the thoughts and feelings of the occluded Viola" (267), and give birth to one of the most famous speeches of the play. The text of *Twelfth Night* is not clear as to whether that specific part is an improvisation prompted by Viola's surfacing emotions or part of the text she claims to have memorized. However, as her whole intonation embodies an intensity not shown before, and as her choice of words points out to themes of loyalty, devotion and liberation, it is easy to accept that the whole scene is a raw outburst of the feelings Viola not only harbors for Orsino, but, as his object-of-desire, would also yearn to receive. Frank E. Halliday does not stop at the idea of that speech being a kind of confession, but he goes as far as describing it as a slow building up of a climax that ends with Viola's cries: "Viola

describes the depth and constancy of her own love for Orsino in terms of his love for Olivia; it is the music of the nightingale, all the liquids welling up to the climax of 'Olivia'" (123). Going back to the beginning of the speech, the image of a willow, a symbol frequently used by Shakespeare to imply an unrequited love[20], already inaugurates the possibility of finding, in Viola's words, her own ordeal:

> VIOLA. Make me a willow cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house,
> Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night,
> Hallow your name to the reverberate hills
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth
> But you should pity me. (1.5.271-279)

If the reference to a "willow cabin at one's gate" invokes the idea of an unrequited lover that is both determined and patient enough to plant oneself outside the loved being's door until a positive answer is given, the idea of "calling upon one's soul within the house" reinforces the idea that the lover's soul and heart were already surrendered to the object of her / his affection. This active instance of stationing outside the lover's house to exert pressure and prove one's dedication contrasts with Orsino's impersonal attitude to courting. What Viola suggests is what she is

[20] Besides *Twelfth Night*, the willow as a symbol of the grief felt by unrequited love, appears in Desdemona's famous "willow song", in *Othello*, in Ophelia's drowning description, in *Hamlet*, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in *Henry V*I Part 3, and in a song in *The Two Noble Kinsman.*

already doing: knowing that her love is, right now, unrequited, she is literally stationed inside Orsino's house, waiting for her opportunity, as she will later confirm in the speech in which she compares herself to "*Patience,* on a *monument*, / smiling at grief." (2.5.126-127). There's no doubt that her soul, like her heart, are both set on Orsino, as she ends up confessing by the end of her last scene, and will again at the end of the following scene in which she participates.

The "loyal cantons" in the following lines remind us that loyalty is appreciated not only in the process of courting, but it is also the highest proof of devotion a servant could offer. While working under Orsino, Viola proves again and again that she is willing to die a thousand times (5.1.136) in order to demonstrate that unswerving loyalty that crowns her character. Since she assumed the role of a page-boy, it is clear that she is, through her service, "writing loyal cantons of contemned love", as her role as a wooer for the man she herself desires is a "barful strife" (1.1.41) she still diligently takes on.

The fifth and sixth lines of this speech reference Echo, a creature from Ovid's myth of Narcissus that could only repeat the last words previously said by someone else. This goes along Malvolio's first description of Viola as being "between boy and man" (1.5.158), which promptly attaches to her the image of Narcissus, the androgynous creature who could only love himself. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection, being, first, attracted to the echoes of his own voice. Orsino, in a similar fashion, is thoroughly concentrated on himself instead of Olivia as his object-of-desire, always adding an unreasonably high sense of importance to his status as a lover. Thus, stablishing both Orsino and Viola as parallels to Narcissus and Echo raises the possibility of reading in Viola's unrequited suffering these "echoes" of Orsino. Viola's falling for

an impossible love, suffering for it, grieving and, finally, dedicating herself to Orsino's whims, make for a metaphorical hallowing of Orsino through Viola's echoes of his parts with which he is so obsessed. Her being called a "Narcissus" of sorts is the consequence of her reflecting the actual Narcissist[21] in this play.

Viola's speech, then, as a raw outburst of the feelings she has been concealing, narrates her own efforts to reach Orsino's heart. Following Girard's triangulation, when placing herself in Orsino's (M) stead[22], Viola, as Cesario (S), speaks as if she could imitate her master's desire (D). Her master, a narcissist, could only direct love at himself, so, it is not a surprise that, in this process, instead of imitating his supposed love for Olivia, what Viola comes to imitate is his desire for himself (D). Thus, her "what I would do if I loved you" directed at Olivia actually encompasses a "what I do, since I love him" directed at Orsino. The climax that follows her speech is but a consequence of the building up of the momentum through the confession of her devotion.

Act 2, scene 2: desire, thou art a wickedness

Viola's first scene in the second act is a continuation of her last appearance at Olivia's gardens. While going back from her failed attempt at charming the countess in Orsino's stead, Viola is intercepted by Malvolio. The proud steward is following his mistress's orders and returns a ring that was never Viola's. She

[21] For Lacan, narcissism is "the erotic attraction to the SPECULAR IMAGE" (Evans 124), or, in simple terms, the erotic attraction one would feel for her / his own reflection, be it literally in a mirror, be it but an image one sustains of oneself in the imaginary order. Coincidentally, for the pathological narcissist, the fantasy image of the ideal object of desire coincides with the fantasy image the narcissistic sustains of herself / himself. Evans explains that, for Lacan, narcissism brings a dual possibility of being erotic and aggressive at the same time: "It is erotic, as the myth of Narcissus shows, since the subject is strongly attracted to the gestalt that is his image. It is aggressive, since the wholeness of the specular image contrasts with the uncoordinated disunity of the subject's real body, and thus seems to threaten the subject with disintegration." (Evans 124). That specific trait of aggressiveness is later shown to manifest in Orsino's behavior.

[22] That is, again, the practice of echoing Orsino.

gracefully accepts, although we cannot assert for sure whether she is simply humoring Olivia's ploy or snatching another opportunity of fulfilling the duke's orders. Either way, the acceptance of the ring provides the occasion for Viola to acknowledge Olivia's infatuation: "She loves me, sure! The cunning of her passion / Invites me in this churlish messenger" (2.2.22-23); and she moves on to her first soliloquy in this play.

As soon as she is able to forego Cesario's identity and recover her own voice, Viola, now all by herself, wonders at the effectiveness of her own device: "Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much" (2.2.27-28). This, as Keir Elam notes, is the first instance of a heroine, in Shakespeare, questioning the "moral validity of her cross-dressing" (2010). Viola is so stunned at the impact of her impersonation of Cesario that she, through the "pregnant enemy", compares her transvestism to Satan's own act of disguise in the *Book of Genesis*:

> VIOLA. I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
> Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
> Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
> Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
> How easy is it for the proper false
> In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
> Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
> For such as we are made of, such we be. (2.2.25-32)

The imagery that this passage evokes is rather compelling: much like Satan, the "pregnant enemy", Viola, in her disguise, tempts a woman to taste something

forbidden. As same-sex erotic relationships were illegal at the time this play was written, Olivia's unsuspected desire for Viola could very much threaten social order and dissolve the seeming "Eden" in which she has been living as a rich orphaned bachelorette.

The "proper false" that she mentions refers back to her own disguise: the handsome, "proper", liar that has just settled in Olivia's waxen heart. But when Viola employs the third person of the plural, "we", she reclaims her real gender and posits herself alongside Olivia. She recognizes that, as a man, she is just like the devil that brings chaos in, but, as a woman, she is the very victim of a fate that made her, like Eve, susceptible to the gulling of the false. She does not blame Olivia, but both fate and herself, for the conundrum the mix of desire and her disguise has just created.

Relevant to the reading of Viola's desire as well is the repeated reference to the logic of fate or, rather, to the natural order[23]. In this short soliloquy we find Viola not only acquiescing to some sort of natural prearrangement of her condition as a woman, but also to the possibility of leaving to time the resolution of the chaos she has been causing as Cesario: "O Time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie." (2.2.40-41). Viola's desire for order, for reorganization, for a time before the chaos ensued through the disappearance of her brother and her subsequent disguising as a man, does not clash with the movement of either

[23] Northrop Frye describes the natural order found in Shakespeare's plays as "the data of the human situation, the conditions man accepts by getting born" (258). The natural order, he explains, is made of two levels: the lower level, which includes the "law of the jungle", and the higher level, that includes the Christian Paradise. Thus, the notion of civilization, education, law and social discipline, although contrasting with the "law of the jungle" is also natural to man through the higher level of natural order. Viola, through her desire for social order, fits in this higher sphere of nature that places her closer to heaven than to whatever hell to which her disguise could bring her.

the Wheel of Fortune[24] or the natural order. Quite the opposite: as Shakespeare's comedies tend to go from chaos to order, her desire seems to follow exactly what is preordained for her both at a fictional and structural level. Unlike most tragic heroes, Viola's will does not go against any power higher than hers, nor does it force her to question her validity as a desiring subject, but, instead, what she wills matches so well with the higher order of nature that it allows her to trust fate, or fortune, to lend her a helping hand to the fulfillment of her desire.

Act 2, scene 4: they lack retention

Viola's last scene in the second act introduces an intimate exchange between her and duke Orsino on the matters of love and gendered desire. As Orsino maintains his role as a Petrarchan lover[25], bathing himself in the topos of excessive longing and grief, Viola makes a veiled confession of her feelings for her master. Although Viola has not mentioned Sebastian, her brother, in her last scenes, by the end of this short exchange we are able to glimpse at the uncertainties she harbors about his survival. It is a quick reminder that their reunion is one of the vital pieces needed for the return of the order that Viola envisions.

But, before that, as the scene starts, Orsino sets the tone of their conversation with a request for the tune of "Come away, come away, death" — a piece of music about a man that wants to die due to his unrequited love, matching both his and Viola's hopelessness at that time. In his questioning about Viola's (as

[24] The concept of the Wheel of Fortune, or *Rota Fortunae*, provides the cycles of prosperity and decline through one's life. According to Frye, the wheel is an inescapable item "rotated by the energy and ambition of man, which, however gigantic, can never get above a certain point, and consequently has to sink again" (258). Although a tragic symbol, the wheel, in *Twelfth Night,* governs the narrative of Malvolio, a character that foils Viola's desire for social order. The wheel, Frye explains, is fueled by one's own will and ambitions.

[25] On the topos of excessiveness as a Petrarchan motif in Elizabethan drama and poetry, see Vuillemin.

Cesario) love life, Orsino finds an opportunity to lecture her about the differences found between male and female desire:

> ORSINO. For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
> Than women's are. (2.4.37-40)

Orsino's lines contradict his own argument that lovers, like himself, are "Unstaid and skittish in all motions else, / Save in the constant image of the creature / That is beloved." (2.4.20-22). But what he does not fail to grasp is the logic that desire, apart from the condition of a lover, is something unstable, wavering and, as Lacan posits, it prompts us to jump from object to object in order to make (im)possible its own fulfillment.

The variable of gender he brings into his discourse, however, is, more often than not, contradicted by both his actions and musings. As Orsino advises Viola to be careful with women's heart "lack [of] retention" (2.4.106) in the matters of love and desire, it is useful to remember that Viola is the one character that does not change her mind, even when under the prospect of her own death (5.1.135-136). Orsino's flickering, however, is noticeable from the very first scene to the last one, when, under the same breath, he is able to change his sworn devotion from Olivia to Viola. Still, Viola's efforts to question Orsino's views on female desire as well as the constant veiled confessions she makes in the course of this scene, are only possible due to the temporary male gender she performs under the guise of Cesario.

In Illyria, a fictitious society where romantic engagement is mainly ruled by the doctrines of courtly love[26], gender is a decisive variable in the expression of self and of one's own will. As desire, in the Lacanian sense, is something we are not able fully to represent in language, what characters are actually able to express is their own limited conception of what they think they desire. That often materializes through the naming of their current object-of-desire, while the actual desire can be read — taking into account that, in this context, we are not dealing with flesh, but paper beings bound to the dramatic structure in which they are inscribed — through the patterned trail their *objet petit a* leaves when one's interest jumps from one object to another. One's use of language, the only means through which we may, effectively, glimpse at the character's expression of desire, is thoroughly shaped by gender in the sense that it is governed by the Symbolic Order or, put simply, by the social expectations that govern men's and women's behaviors in that specific society: which brings us back to the rules of courtly love.

Men, in the literary tradition inherited by Shakespeare, had an active role in the courtly pursuit of their *madonna*: they were expected to elevate their object of adoration, a woman, through constant praising of her unparalleled beauty. The logic of service, or better, of love-service, became a prominent idea in the rules of courtly love. Men should devote themselves to their idols even if the only reward is scorn. The sonnets of Petrarch, which can be seen as a clear influence in the shaping of Orsino, exude "adoration of the loved one, an adoration which makes her the centre of all earthly beauty and relates all creation to her. She is the spirit of man's constant longing" (Pearson 252). By the time Edmund Spenser published

[26] An extensive discussion of courtly love and its genealogy up to Shakespeare's time can be found in Douglas Henry Cherry's *The Courtly Love Theme in Shakespeare's Plays*. The author traces back Shakespeare's idea of courtly love as something derived from the treatment Edmund Spenser, Chaucer, Baldassare Castiglione and Philip Sidney gave to the matter.

his sonnet cycle, *Amoretti,* in 1595, courtly love had evolved to a personal endeavor for displaying "gentlemanly conduct, refined manners, intellect, and a high moral purpose" (Cherry 49), making a full-circle in returning men's efforts to their self-fashioning enterprise while having their ladies as their medium.

Whereas women were placed in an elevated position of being adored, their role in this medieval-inherited approach to courting was mostly passive. As Burns argues, it is "men's feelings that are expressed and men's prowess and social standing that are at stake as men practice and profess the art of love" (23). Women were expected to reward service with love, but were not encouraged to do as Olivia does and actually "degrade" themselves to the role of the pursuer. A great number of literary productions centered on the idea of courtly love tended to occlude women as desiring beings[27] and placed them as receptacles of men's affections. The lady, Burns explains, "reputed to have ultimate control over her suitor's well-being, his life, and even his death actually derives little power, authority, or material gain from this glorified position" (24), and that is apparent when we isolate the way Olivia's constant refusal of Orsino's advances falls on deaf ears.

But, taking Viola's standpoint, the imbalance between male and female expression of desire in a society specifically governed by the paradigms of courtly love materializes itself in the liberties she earns while assuming a male disguise. As Viola, or better yet, as a woman of lesser standing disguised as a servant, she can neither actively pursue her current object-of-desire nor can she take on the role of

[27] Burns comments on alternatives to this kind of production, focusing on works penned by women troubadours and poets found in French literary tradition. As the author concludes that "polarized gender positions do not constitute the only options available to the medieval reader or to us as inheritors of the courtly tradition" (50), it is relevant to point out that Shakespeare's main sources, as indicated by Cherry (50), already toyed with the medieval conventions that used to rule female and male characters in their pursuit of either love or self-satisfaction.

the courtly lover and write her own "loyal cantons of contemnèd love" for Orsino, the duke of Illyria. Here, gender and social standing, intersectionally, play their part in setting what is deemed as an appropriate behavior for both parties. As Cesario, however, Viola has the opportunity of not only forming a bond of intimate friendship with Orsino, but she is also able to withhold the role of an idol set for adoration. As Nancy Lindheim puts it, while as Cesario, Viola is "subservient and always at hand, a constant companion whose company is never tiresome, whose interest in music and things 'poetical' (1.5.196) matches [Orsino's interest]" (686). In short, as Cesario, Viola is not silenced the same way Olivia is when she is made the target of Orsino's courtly adoration.

Still on this subject, Orsino is quick to support his previous argument (2.4.37-40) about there being notable differences between men and women's display of passion:

> ORSINO. There is no woman's sides
>
> Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
>
> As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
>
> So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.
>
> Alas, their love may be called appetite,
>
> No motion of the liver but the palate,
>
> That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt; (2.4.103-109)

Calling women's love an "appetite" that derives from the palate makes their desire sound like something capricious, or easily satiable, rather than noble like the love

that springs from the liver[28]. As Orsino refuses to listen to Olivia's negatives to his pleas, "I cannot be so answered" (2.5.97), he is unable to even conceive that she (or any women, truthfully) might have an attitude that is different from that which he believes to be the norm. As a devoted Petrarchan, Orsino subscribes to the idea that, as a man, his is the role of the pursuer, as seen from his allusions to him being made king (1.1.38) of his beloved's emotions, and to Olivia being shot by an arrow (1.1.34) before falling for him.

Viola, of course, questions his pre-conceived notions regarding women's affections: "they are as true of heart as we" (2.4.117), and takes the opportunity to narrate the story of a supposed sister as a means of both making a case for her rebuttal and finding an opportunity to confess stealthily her torment:

> VIOLA. 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? (2.5.122-127)

Concealment, like vermin, would eat her from inside out, and that brings to the conversation not only the subject of women's constancy (previously questioned by Orsino), but also the matter of women's silence in the process of courtship. Viola paints her sister, who is, indeed, herself, as the melancholic lover — a role Orsino

[28] By the time this play was written, the liver was considered the organ that governed feelings of passion and love. A liver with blood deficiency, for instance, would not allow for the proper deliverance of these feelings. In his first act, Orsino lists the three noblest organs: "when liver, brain, and heart, / These sovereign thrones," (1.5.39-40).

believes to be exclusive to men, and that, surely, adds on to the Narcissistic dynamic that crowns their relationship up to this point. But, by the end of her speech, Viola pokes at Orsino's Petrarchan inclinations when she adds in reproach: "We men may say more, swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows but little in our love" (2.5.128-130). For Viola, men may be eager to express their perceived desire in grandeur, as we often see in literary productions focused on courtly love, but that expression often does not translate into action. One could bring to this discussion the correlation between the lack of action and the impossibility of fulfilling one's desire (Azari 12), and how this aspect is quite central to the logic of courtly love (Cherry 6), but more immediate to this master's thesis is the understanding that Viola is aware of the imbalance in the expression, or even in the pursuit, of desire when considering one's gender.

The irony of the order to which Viola's desire points us, is that, for its achievement, she has to, first, engage in a reversal of roles that would allow her to bypass the dynamics of courtly love that govern her gender. Viola has to be a man in order to approach Orsino and deepen their relationship without being silenced. If she were to first approach him in female attire, as expected in normal circumstances, Orsino would probably repeat what he does to Olivia: he would place Viola in the position of the beloved idol, refuse to listen to whatever she said, and ignore all the astounding characteristics she is able to display while disguised as a man in favor of her beauty. Even more ironic is that, although the rules of courtly love are part of what hinders her actions as a woman, it is the exact notion of love-service, another vital part of courtly love, which legitimizes the marriage that, by the end of the play, brings her closer to the order she desires.

Act 3, scenes 1 and 4: towards balance

In the third act, scene 4 is a direct continuation of scene 1, and both serve as a prelude to Sebastian's scenes that shall follow. Viola's interactions with Feste, the fool, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Olivia in scene 1 set the stage for Sebastian's interactions with these very characters and his own wedding with the countess. Thus, these scenes will bear better fruit when later read with Olivia as the focal point, rather than with Viola, as I do now.

However, there are some specific interactions in both scenes that can be discussed in regard to Viola's desire without getting too deep into Olivia's part. The first one being right after Olivia's confession of love, as Viola refuses her advances and provides more proof that her "make me a willow cabin" speech merely holds Olivia as a proxy:

> VIOLA. By innocence I swear, and by my youth,
> I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
> And that no woman has; nor never none
> Shall mistress be of it, save I alone. (3.1.165-168)

The last two lines denounce the gender she hides and reaffirms her undeniable lack of interest in having a romantic relationship with Olivia or, at that moment, with women in general. Contrary to Orsino's views, Viola is, after all, constant in her affections: "I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth" (3.1.166), allowing no other to sway her away from what she has been pursuing since the beginning of the play.

More than that, the possibility of being mistress of herself, as Alison Findlay explains, "denotes agency on the part of Shakespeare's female characters" (272). She reminds us that, in regard to Viola, "command over where to give her love represents the only area of control that remains to her" (272), as all other aspects of her identity has to be foregone for Cesario to rise. Again, where Viola's wills are concerned, her actions keep on directing the play toward the reorganization of the chaos she instilled with her disguise. Her desire, manifested through the reunion with her brother, through the marriage with Orsino, or even through the service she provides as go-between the duke and the countess, points out to the logic of balance or to the restitution of the ideal society she loses in the shipwreck.

The second instance worth mentioning happens by the end of the fourth scene, when Antonio, a close friend of Sebastian, confuses Viola with her own brother. She, then, reacts in an aside:

> VIOLA. He named Sebastian. I my brother know
> Yet living in my glass. Even such and so
> In favor was my brother, and he went
> Still in this fashion, color, ornament,
> For him I imitate. O, if it prove,
> Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love!

As Viola admits that Sebastian has been living in her "glass", it is safe to assume that her disguise also takes the role of a preserver of sorts. The topos of preservation, as an act of allowing something, or someone, to outlive their own allotted time, is commonplace in Shakespeare's poetry and drama. One famous

example is Horatio's role of recounting the tragedy that has befallen the Danish court in *Hamlet*. His survival by the end of the play, and his willingness to retell what he has just witnessed, allow the story to survive and to pass on even after the deaths of those in court. Likewise, Viola's disguise preserves Sebastian's memory and presence in the eventuality of his death, and, in her specific case, the disguise that preserves her brother also preserves her status before the shipwreck: which, in short, conceals that which she has lost and maintains a temporary balance that allows her to pursue her desire.

Act 5, scene 1: re-arranging chaos

The last act of Shakespeare's comedies is often reserved to the rearranging of a temporarily disarranged society. As Northrop Frye writes, comic resolution comes as an "individual release which is also a social reconciliation. The normal individual is freed from the bonds of a humorous society, and a normal society is freed from the bonds imposed on it by humorous individuals" (6). The comic resolution of *Twelfth Night* would raise the opportunity for Viola to be freed from the madness that populates Illyria and also, from her own disguise, which contributes to the madness that engulfs Illyria. Illyria, in turn, would be free from those that bring madness into it, and back to a state before madness would have settled in. Viola, as I have been continuously arguing, aims for this resolution since the very first act. Her whole desire revolves around the logic of order and balance as it materializes itself through *Twelfth Night*'s dramatic structure.

The only scene of the last act brings us, then, a resolution to Viola's woes: she not only finds her brother again, but she also manages to solve her conflict with Olivia and to exchange promises of a future wedding with duke Orsino, as she

intended. The process, however, is not as smooth as it may sound. As Olivia gets back on stage and declares her love for Cesario, Orsino, still unaware of Viola's identity, throws himself into a fit of rage:

> ORSINO. But this your minion, whom I know you love,
> And whom, by heaven I swear, I tender dearly,
> Him will I tear out of that cruel eye
> Where he sits crownèd in his master's spite.—
> Come, boy, with me. My thoughts are ripe in
> mischief.
> I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love
> To spite a raven's heart within a dove. (5.1.127-134)

His threats to Viola come right after his suggestion that he would kill Olivia for yet another refusal, and as Orsino redirects his anger to his pageboy we have a taste of Girard's writings on the violence that may arise when two desiring subjects covet the same object.

For Orsino, who does not know that Cesario is but a disguise, the triangulation of desire holds true: Cesario takes after him and ends up enchanting that which he thinks he has been coveting. As Orsino is not aware of his own narcissistic[29] inclination, his only certainty is that Cesario, who has proved to have so much in common with him, must be after Olivia. As Girard explains in his *Violence and the Sacred*, whenever the desiring subject "sees himself closest to the supreme goal, he comes into violent conflict with a rival" (148). Orsino finds, at

[29] It is important to add that the concept of Narcissism, as we know it, would only be coined in 1910 with Sigmund Freud's writings.

least, an opportunity to speak face to face with Olivia, but it is too late, as she has already proven to be infatuated with Cesario. That proximity to losing his supposed object-of-desire makes his instability even more evident and, still quoting Girard, "he convinces himself that the violence itself is the most distinctive attribute of this supreme goal" (148).

As Orsino oscillates between hurting Olivia and hurting Cesario, it becomes clear how both characters participate in Orsino's quest for self-fulfillment: Olivia, as an idol painted under the logic of courtly love, serves as a means for him to talk repeatedly about his own condition as a lover; and Cesario, drawn as a kind of echo of his narcissistic musings, allows him to stare at his own reflection in a movement of self-gratification[30]. Cesario is, after all, someone whom he "tended dearly" and, much like the biblical recounting of Abraham[31], he is the loved lamb Orsino would sacrifice to appease not God, but his own self.

For Viola, however, the prospect of being sacrificed by Orsino is not as dreadful as one might expect. As she eloquently answers Orsino's threat to kill her, "And I, most jocund, apt, and willingly, / To do you rest a thousand deaths would die" (5.1.135-136), we are reminded that the courtly tradition into which she is inserted posits self-sacrifice as the ultimate proof of devotion. Love-service, in this case taken into extremes, humbles her to the point that the prospect of marrying Orsino is but a fair reward to be received. Following the trail of her desire for

[30] The deliberate use of the word "minion", which bore homoerotic connotations (Elam 330) by that time, multiplies the readings of Cesario being part of this game of narcissistic desire that Orsino seems to sustain.

[31] "And he said, Take now thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains, which I will show thee." (Geneva Bible, Gen. 22.2). Abraham later tells Isaac that God would "provide him a lamb for a burnt offering" (Geneva Bible, Gen. 22.8), with the lamb being the Son he cherished.

balance, death would solve the chaos she has been instilling while keeping its realization impossible, as per usual.

For Girard, being a victim of the violence born out of the triangulation comes as a double-edged sword:

> The victim of this violence both adores and detests it. He strives to master it by means of a mimetic counterviolence and measures his own stature in proportion to his failure. If by chance, however, he actually succeeds in asserting his mastery over the model, the latter's prestige vanishes. (*Violence and the Sacred* 148)

Viola, in this situation, faces a conundrum: the object-of-desire she pursues and the model she imitates are the same, and succeeding in the violent conflict would mean to succeed in destroying that which she adores. Keeping Lacan in mind, we know that the *objet petit a* would simply jump from one object to another after the mourning period necessary to this process, but this movement would demand a certain conscience and control over the process of desiring that we always lack when inserted in its logics. The triangulation (Figure 2) in which Viola (S) is truly inserted would only spark violence under the possibility that she could pose a threat of usurping Orsino's self (O) from himself (M), which, maybe, could happen if taking Olivia from him meant taking his role as a lover (an essential part of his personality in *Twelfth Night*) from himself.

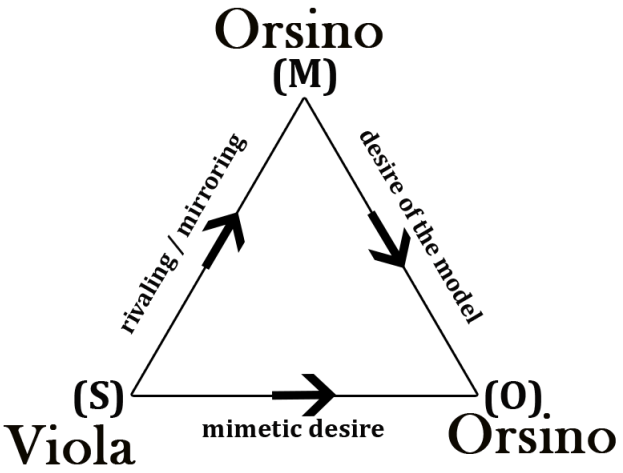

Figure 2. Triangulation of Viola's desire.

But physical violence never really ensues between the trio. As Viola offers herself for sacrifice, Olivia interrupts the act and prompts a confession of love for her master:

> VIOLA. After him I love
>
> More than I love these eyes, more than my life,
>
> More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife.
>
> If I do feign, you witnesses above,
>
> Punish my life for tainting of my love. (5.1.138-142)

Her listing of assets, which include her eyes, her life and an impossible wife, foils Olivia's ironic blazon[32] in the first act and reverts the expected use of this poetic form to maximize the effect of her confession of love. Commonplace in the courtly love tradition, the blazon introduces the process of disjointing one's body parts

[32] In his chapter dedicated to the blazon, Jordan Kistler explains that the conventional form of this device uses a form of list to compare "the beloved woman's body parts to natural objects, like the rose, or objects of great value, like gold or pearls. Petrarch also establishes the conventional parts described in the blazon: eyes, lips, teeth, cheeks, hair, and brow" (94).

and virtues and, under the Lacanian tradition, it also "enacts another mirror stage[33]" (Williams 45) for the one being disjointed. Viola's use of this poetic device at this point of the story, and while at that, dressed as Cesario, ignites the process of undressing the disguise she has been sustaining. Through language, she (re)narrates the self she has been narrating under the guise of Cesario and puts her body and soul[34] through the process of re-identification with her identity as Viola. If the parallel with Narcissus earlier suggested by Malvolio were but a reference to her androgynous appearance, Viola's disassembling is closer to Echo's reveal of her true nature than that of Narcissus's drowning.

Orsino's rejection of Viola in that same scene, however, is not far from the actual drowning, as he, in a sense, rejects the projection she has been providing with the disguise she now dissects. As Orsino gives up on an integral part of his self and prepares to leave the stage, Sebastian enters and halts his actions, providing an opportunity for Viola to reclaim her identity. As all characters express their amazement at seeing what first seems to be two Cesarios side by side, the name "Viola" is first pronounced in *Twelfth Night* alongside Viola's public confirmation that what she wears, is but a false disguise:

VIOLA. If nothing lets to make us happy both

But this my masculine usurped attire,

[33] Grant Williams posits that the process of dismembering and building the ideal woman in the conventional blazon brings about the portrayal of "a flawless object of desire in an effort to unify and purify the subject's own vagrant desires into a single form. Enacting a version of the mirror stage, the blazon makes visible and controllable male identity and male desire in an inverted fashion, bearing witness to the narcissistic structure behind courtly love" (46). In Viola's case, the dismembering is of her own disguise, which allows her to rebuild the identity she has been hiding. In his speech, she dismembers Cesario in order to give rise to her explicit love for Orsino, an asset she, as Viola, will then publicly incorporate.

[34] "The light of the body is the eye: if then thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be light." (*Geneva Bible*, Matt. 6.22-23)

> Do not embrace me till each circumstance
> Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump
> That I am Viola; (5.1.261-265)

The confirmation present in "That I am Viola" follows after a series of lines in which she provides proof of her identity through shared memories of her childhood with her brother. Referring to herself in the third person, Viola uses language to narrate, and, thus, to rebuild herself after dissembling Cesario: "And died that day when Viola from her birth / Had numbered thirteen years" (5.1.256-257). As she claims that further witnesses would prove her being Viola, "That I am Viola; which to confirm, / I'll bring you to a captain in this town," (5.1.265-266), we may notice that what she is doing up to this moment is to resort to past articulations of her identity to reclaim that which she lost. All the elements that Viola uses to re-fashion herself come from a time before the events that inaugurate the play: she identifies herself through characteristics of her late father, her childhood, her late place of residence and her family.

This movement matches the shades of Viola's desire: to find balance again, to go back before the time when chaos ensued, to retrieve what was lost, to reorganize what she has been disorganizing, and, as her desire materializes the comic structure of *Twelfth Night*, to free society from madness and to be freed from that very madness herself. By undressing her identity as Cesario and by reclaiming the Viola she was, this balance to which her desire always points us draws closer to her grasp. Her next movement is to supply the "Viola" she just rebuilt with the narratives that have been Cesario's as she answers Orsino's question on whether she, as Viola and not as Cesario, does love him:

VIOLA. And all those sayings will I overswear,
And all those swearings keep as true in soul
As doth that orbèd continent the fire
That severs day from night. (5.1.281-284)

As the play draws to a close, however, we never actually see Viola back in her "women's weeds" (5.1.269), as Orsino says. The prison of the sea captain that has been holding her garments since the first act withholds her complete transformation, leaving Viola with her identity only partially reclaimed. As she still dwells in Cesario's skin, Orsino proposes to his now "pagegirl" after Olivia pleads him to give up on marrying with her:

ORSINO. *[To Viola]* Your master quits you; and for your
service done him,
So much against the mettle of your sex,
So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
And since you called me "master" for so long,
Here is my hand. You shall from this time be
Your master's mistress. (5.1.337-343)

This proposal, which does not configure a proper marriage yet, takes us back to the logic of courtly love and to the recompense of service as a valid process of courtship in that society. What Orsino does here is to recognize Viola's service throughout the play in one last inversion: briefly assuming the role of the lady that

is often idolized by the troubadour, Orsino rewards the constancy, dedication and devotion Viola has shown by granting her exactly what he proposes in their first act together. Through marriage, Viola is to "live as freely as [her] lord, / To call his fortunes [hers]" (1.4.41-42) and, most importantly, to solve the knots she pleads time to untie in one of her soliloquies.

With Sebastian back, Viola does not need a guardian to manage her life as an unmarried woman anymore. She is not completely orphaned and, after this proposal, the homoerotic dynamic partly stablished by her disguise is also solved. With her estate reestablished, with no further confusion about her identity, and with all bachelorettes in *Twelfth Night* now either married or engaged, social balance is reestablished. Malvolio, the proud steward, leaves the stage in this last act as the *pharmakos*[35] that is usually extirped from a comic society before its recovery. Viola's desire for order has now all needed pieces in place for its fulfillment, but, as with human beings, the contentment of desire is something that is always beyond our grasp, the play ends with no textual evidence that her desire is ever fulfilled.

Orsino's last words remind us that even if Viola did reclaim her name, thanks to the ruse with the captain, she is, in part, still Cesario:

> ORSINO. Cesario, come,
>
> For so you shall be while you are a man.
>
> But when in other habits you are seen,
>
> Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen. (5.1.408-411)

[35] A human scapegoat used as a sacrifice to purify a city or a community. "[The pharmakos] is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes, (…). He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence" (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 41).

Going back to the myth of Narcissus, Viola's condition as man, albeit limited, might remind us of the moment Ovid's Narcissus discovers Echo's true nature and rejects her. Still in men's clothes, Viola, with Cesario's image, keeps on echoing Orsino's self and, unlike echo, has not shown herself entirely yet. This, and her excuse not to get any women's clothes, but only those guarded by the captain, can be read as the postponement of the promised *jouissance* the fulfillment of her desire would bring.

From Viola's point of view, *Twelfth Night* ends with a promise. Her desire is within her grasp, but her hand halts. By fully becoming Viola again, she experiences a temporary satisfaction, but, as we know, the impossibility of ever being satisfied raises new obstacles. As Viola is but a paper being, her desire, and the language she uses to narrate it, are constrained by the first and last acts of the play. We do not read of her realization, but we do witness the convergence of both the dramatic structure and the inner elements of the play towards balance. The language she uses and the objects-of-desire she narrates throughout *Twelfth Night* leave the trail of a desire that can be summarized as the rejection of chaos and the search for stability within society. The impossible realization of Viola's desire, however, lies in our own condition as subjects inserted into the domain of language: there is no balance possible to be found within our existence as long as we pursue the satisfaction of an unquenchable lack. In the end, Viola fulfills her role as the Venus that comes out of the foam of Illyria's sea and facilitates for both Olivia's and Orsino's love-life to prosper. Her actions, her words and even her reversals and questioning of the stablished order contribute to the order all of Shakespeare's comic plays favor in their last act. As its heroine, Viola and her desire are, after all, the spine of *Twelfth Night*.

CHAPTER 3

Olivia: from mourning to betrothal

She'll not match above

her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit. I have

heard her swear 't.

(*Twelfth Night* 1.3.107-109)

Shakespeare's great tragic heroes often share the privilege of being discussed, introduced and anticipated by other characters prior to their grand entrance. In *Twelfth Night*, although Viola is the one usually read as the heroine, Olivia is the one to arrive only after enough momentum is built up on the stage. The countess of Illyria, much like the heroes of those tragedies, also seems to sit at the center of the play's plot: in a literal sense, her residence is the backdrop of more than half of the characters' dilemma, as well as the place where everyone converges to meet their comic ending. In a figurative sense, Olivia sits at the heart of a carefully woven web that intertwines most, if not all, subplots of *Twelfth Night*.

Despite her privileged position both as a countess and as a core character in the play, Olivia is rarely taken as a central object of research. Her desire is frequently read either as a mere mirror of Orsino's own melancholia, or as a homoerotic expression consequent of Viola's cross-dressed body on stage, but not as a manifestation that takes her own character and context as points of departure. In Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory*, for instance, Olivia's desire is discussed alongside Phoebe's, from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and it is taken as a consequence of the cross-dressed characters' discourse (43). Douglas Parker, in

"Shakespeare's Female Twins in *Twelfth Night*", opens up his article by recognizing the number of times that Olivia has been discussed as a double of Orsino rather than a character in her own right. However, even as he acknowledges Olivia's erasure and promises to "try to redeem Olivia from the critical slander she has suffered" (24), his movement to describe Olivia and Viola as "identical characters" (25) in several moments of the play ends up erasing the particularities that make the countess a singular character in *Twelfth Night*.

As Viola's desire points out to a constant search for balance, Olivia's desire, I argue, departs from a logic of maintenance of her seemingly temporary autonomy. Viola starts the play by losing her brother and ends it by finding not only the one she deems lost, but also a prospective husband: her five-act-long instability ends as she overcomes the state of disarray into which the loss of Sebastian first sends her. By the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia also has to deal with the loss of a brother, but, opposite to Viola, there is no deliberate effort of overcoming the orphaned state into which she was thrown. Without a father and a brother, Olivia is expected to contract matrimony, but in doing so, and especially with the duke, she would be relinquishing the autonomy she currently enjoys. By the time *Twelfth Night* was written, women, in the words of Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, "acknowledged that the powers granted them by their husbands were privileges to be negotiated, not rights to be defended" (135).

Negotiating power with Orsino, the one who confesses his aspiration to fulfill Olivia's "sweet perfections with one self king" (1.1.40), would undoubtedly prove a challenge. Still, the first mention of her name comes right from the beginning of the play through Orsino's juxtaposition of the countess and the

Roman goddess Diana depicted in the myth of Diana and Actaeon[36], in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

> ORSINO. O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
> Methought she purged the air of pestilence.
> That instant was I turned into a hart,
> And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
> E'er since pursue me. (1.2.20-24)

Past the irony of Orsino himself recognizing his narcissism through the image of his own desires pursuing him, the reference to Diana invokes a set of meanings that circulated during the Renaissance: not only beautiful and chaste, the goddess, as well as Olivia, is "reputedly hostile to men" (Findlay 105). While this passage is but a reinforcement of Orsino's traditional take on courtly love through the cult of a chaste muse, it nevertheless introduces Olivia's stance of rejecting Orsino's advances.

Just as one of the duke's servants enters his lord's chambers, we learn of Olivia's device to reject further the wooers that were being sent to her house:

> VALENTINE. So please my lord, I might not be admitted,
> But from her handmaid do return this answer:
> The element itself, till seven years' heat,

[36] In the *Metamorphoses*, Actaeon approaches the goddess Diana while she is nude and bathing in the company of her nymphs. Scared, she splashes water on Actaeon, who promptly transforms into a hart. He flees and ends up being killed by his own hunting hounds. The process of "purging the air of pestilence" that he describes works as a parallel to the bathing of Diana while also making a reference to the air refreshers used during the plague.

> Shall not behold her face at ample view,
> But like a cloistress she will veilèd walk,
> And water once a day her chamber round
> With eye-offending brine—all this to season
> A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
> And lasting in her sad remembrance. (1.1.26-34)

Valentine paints Olivia as a lady so devoted to the memory of her brother that she would resort to living in seclusion and immersing herself in melancholy so as not to make light of his recent passing. However, instead of repelling the duke, Valentine's description ends up flaring Orsino's devotion — "O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame" (1.1.35) —, speaking straight to his Petrarchan inclinations. By denying Valentine's admittance and making herself unattainable through the excuse of mourning, Olivia, as Joan Hall writes *in Sexual Desire and Romantic Love in Shakespeare*, inadvertently rekindles Orsino's desire. Olivia's indirect rejection allows her to fulfill the role of an (im)possible object-of-desire that exists within Orsino's discourse, fueling the motor of demands that allows for her maintenance in that position.

The countess's performance of a mourning state, however useful in repelling the duke, shall not be discarded as a mere mechanism of protection. Even if throughout the text we might not find much evidence of Olivia's grief being as deep as per Valentine's description, it shall still be taken as a relevant device to both the individualization of the character and the reading of her desire. That is due mainly to Olivia being the only character to undergo the process of mourning throughout the play; a process understood by Lacan as a "re-establishment of the

subject's relation to the object in phantasy" (Leader 63) and, thus, a process that redirects one's energy to new structures of meaning.

For Lacan, "the work of mourning presents itself first of all as a palliative for (. . .) the chaos that ensues owing to the inability of all signifying elements to deal with the hole in existence that has been created by someone's death" (*Seminar VI*, 399). Departing from the perspective of the loss of an object — Olivia's brother, in this context —, what happens is that the hole also manifests itself via the constitution of the subject through the Other. The process of mourning comes, then, as a means of identification of the subject "with the lost object in order to regain access to its own narcissistic image reflected from the mirror situated in the place of the Other" (Brenner 143). Leon Brenner explains that, for Lacan,

> the person lost and then mourned is not necessarily a person whom the subject loves, it is a person who is considered to love the subject; that is, it is a person who holds a special part in their heart *for* the subject as desired or, in other words, functions as the cause of its desire. (140)

By losing her brother, Olivia loses the role she believes to retain in relation to the deceased one[37], all the while getting the fulfillment of her desire for autonomy closer to her grasp. Olivia's exclamation, "A sister! You are she" (5.1.344), directed at Viola in *Twelfth Night*'s last scene, illustrates this process of reorganization of the chaos caused by the loss of her role as a sister. In her egoic constitution, by assimilating Viola as her sister, Olivia also becomes a "sister of" someone once

[37] Leon Brenner gives an enlightening example of this process through *Hamlet*: "when Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave to hold her once again in his arms, he is mourning not her but the loss of his narcissistic image reflected in her eyes" (143).

again. I will come back to this argument when discussing the acceptance of Sebastian in place of Viola / Cesario in Olivia's pursuit of her object-of-desire.

For now, it should be noted that, whether her mourning process is mocked, questioned, or taken as an exaggerated performance of grief made only to avoid the duke, it still is part of the chronology of her desire within *Twelfth Night*. As there is textual evidence of her recent loss (1.2.37-40)[38], and as it is a recurring theme in all scenes up to Olivia's entrance (1.1.33; 1.2.35; 1.3.2; 1.4.21; 1.5.65;), it is not far-fetched to assume that the mourning process, or at least the disarrangement of signifiers, casts at least a shadow over her discourse. Olivia mistaking Sebastian for an acquiescing version of Cesario by the end of the play offers up an opportunity for Olivia herself to marry both under the terms of her own desire and to end the mourning process by re-establishing the narcissistic image that previously had her as a "sister of" someone else.

Act 1, scene 3: terms of desire

After learning that Olivia, due to the death of her father and brother, "hath abjured the sight / And company of men" (1.3.41-42), we find out, in the third scene, of her conditions to marriage. In one of his exchanges with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Sir Toby explains:

> SIR 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. Tut, there's life in 't, man. (1.3.107-109)

[38] The Captain describes Olivia to Viola: "A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count/ That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her / In the protection of his son, her brother, / Who shortly also died," (1.2.37-40).

Although delivered through a reported speech, these lines introduce one of the core aspects to the reading of Olivia's desire. Her not matching with anyone who could be richer, older and smarter than herself dims the possibility of marrying a man who might also exert any kind of authority over her — an argument supported by Olivia's later exclamation of "Would thou 'dst be ruled by / me!" (4.1.67-68) that accompanies her marriage proposal to Sebastian.

Mihoko Suzuki goes a step further by claiming that Olivia "jealously guards her independence" (156) through the refusal of both Orsino's and Andrew's advances throughout the play. By remaining single, Olivia puts her social status at stake for the benefit of preserving "the anomalous position of independence from patriarchal control which she enjoys through the deaths of her father and brother" (Suzuki 156). This independence is not only in terms of her personal life, but also in terms of the management of her rights and wealth: by the time *Twelfth Night* was written, the system of coverture was already well established in England, meaning that, through marriage, a woman's legal rights and properties were transferred to her husband.

In "Women in the Age of Shakespeare", Theresa Kemp explains the status of "*femme covert"* women obtained through marriage:

> As *femme covert* ("covered woman"), wives were prohibited from owning property or entering into legal agreements; with few exceptions, a married woman had no legal existence apart from her husband. Unless determined otherwise by premarital legal documents, a woman's personal property (her clothing, jewels, and so on) became her husband's property upon

> marriage. If a woman owned land, or real property, the use and profits of it came into the husband's control, although usually he could not sell or alienate its use without her consent. (42)

If, through the death of both her brother and father, Olivia acquires the possibility of governing her own household, through marriage, she would have to give up this autonomy to her husband. As a *femme sole*[39], a condition that was assured to last as long as she denied the presence of men, Olivia is able to hold property, to manage her estate and wealth, and to make contracts in her own name.

Remaining single was not as unusual as we tend to believe. During Shakespeare's time, only about one third of adult women were married at one time (Erickson 100; Korda 139). Even if marriage was expected, "women who had sufficient means to maintain their livelihood (. . .) on occasion found support from families to remain unmarried if they desired" (Kemp 36). That seems to be Olivia's case, since she not only offers to cover up the costs of Viola's wedding (5.1.335), but she also affords to marry someone poorer than her during a time that the groom's marriage portion had to be ideally equivalent to that of the bride (Erickson 97). But that does not mean that single women were not, in the words of Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson, considered anomalies in their societies. Going past being named the derogatory "Old Maid", being considered "masterless women" and being forced to serve due to the Statute of Artificers[40], single women

[39] A *femme sole*, according to Theresa Kemp, "does not simply indicate an unmarried rather than married woman. While many women who were *femme sole* were previously unmarried or presently widowed, some married women took on the legal status of *femme sole* for a variety of reasons" (21), including the possibility of, through the authorization of their husbands, conducting business.

[40] As women from higher standing were exempt from the Statute of Artificers, "the part of the statute specifically relating to women provided local officials the right to compel all unmarried women between the ages of twelve and forty to "live in service," regardless of whether they were able to earn a sustainable living wage independently" (Kemp 37).

still enjoyed more freedom and autonomy had them any success with their business. As Mendelson and Crawford explain, “if a single woman succeeded financially, she achieved a measure of independence greater than that enjoyed by her married counterpart. (. . .) A number of women who had choices preferred to remain unmarried" (169-170), thus the life without a man could very well fit Olivia, had she a preference for it.

That, however, does not seem to be the case with the countess. Considering that she is a central character in a comedy, marriage by the end of the play is not only expected, but a given. The spirit of joy that accompanies the emergence of a new society by the end of a comedy, as Northrop Frye puts it, frequently demands “some kind of party or festive ritual” (*Anatomy* 163), namely a wedding. Still, even if one decides to ignore the comic structure of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia herself never explicitly rejects the notion of marriage, even while refusing Orsino. This refusal and her demanding a lesser husband can be read through her awareness of the transference of female autonomy through marriage as well as the social expectations that surrounded it. By choosing someone inferior in all aspects to her, Olivia would be able to keep the upper hand during the negotiation of her marriage settlement. A person devoid of wit and power proves to be the perfect match for someone with the intent of keeping one’s own autonomy intact even through the crippling conditions of a marriage.

Following this trail left by Sir Toby regarding Olivia’s demands, I argue that the pattern of her actions and discourses is always pointing towards the desire for the maintenance of her present autonomy. Olivia does not show any particular sign of pursuing absolute power, but she is often against the possibility of having to yield to another men’s authority. Throughout the reading of the following scenes, I

shall focus on Olivia's own words and actions and the ways through which they corroborate the safeguarding of her own autonomy.

Act 1, scene 5: desire aflame

If Olivia's disposition to safeguard her own autonomy relates to her awareness (even if not in absolute measure) of the control men exercised over women's identity after marriage, it is rather ironic that her character is solely built through the words of men prior to her own entrance. Following the same pattern in which Othello's identity is first shaped through Iago's slandering of him in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Olivia's character is fashioned through distorted descriptions provided by Orsino, Valentine, Toby and the Captain. Olivia has nothing of the melancholic character they describe in the first scenes, and the mourning narrated as if an inseparable part of her being is nowhere to be found after this first act.

While this movement helps building up the expectation for the countess's entrance, it also hints at the impossibility of ever achieving that which Olivia seems to desire. If not for Orsino's idolization and consequent silencing of Olivia as an independent being, the Captain's description of the countess places her as a virtuous maid "daughter of a count" (1.2.37) and as a pious sister devoted to the memory of her lost brother (1.2.39-42) — two instances in which men are the referential point. Moreover, Sir Toby's complaints about Olivia's refusal to marry also direct us back to the structural control men exert over women: "What a plague means my niece to take the death / of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to / life" (1.3.1-3). Toby's interest lies in the possibility of matching Sir Andrew

with his niece and, then, of gaining access to her fortune through the knight's rights as a husband.

Olivia's entrance by the end of the first act, however, introduces a character altogether different from that described in the course of the scenes. Her first lines allow her to incorporate the role of the head of the household as she commands her attendants to take Feste away and as she reprimands Malvolio for his ill-temperament. Rather than a meek lady taken aback by the death of her relatives, Olivia enters the stage with a dignified air, allowing, with good disposition, the fool to mend his own "dishonesty" — as she calls it.

Olivia's effort to avoid Orsino and his entourage corroborates Valentine's claims that it has been impossible even to glimpse at the countess: after Maria announces the arrival of a young gentleman, Olivia asks Malvolio to send him away: "Go you, / Malvolio. If it be a suit from the Count, I am sick, / or not at home; what you will, to dismiss it" (1.5.106-108). However, after hearing of the young man's determination, the following dialogue ensues between the countess and her steward:

> OLIVIA. Tell him he shall not speak with me.
>
> MALVOLIO. Has been told so, and he says he'll stand at
> your door like a sheriff's post and be the supporter
> to a bench, but he'll speak with you.
>
> OLIVIA. What kind o' man is he?
>
> MALVOLIO. Why, of mankind.
>
> OLIVIA. What manner of man?
>
> MALVOLIO. Of very ill manner. He'll speak with you,

will you or no.

OLIVIA. Of what personage and years is he?

MALVOLIO. Not yet old enough for a man, nor young
enough for a boy—as a squash is before 'tis a
peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis
with him in standing water, between boy and man.
He is very well-favored, and he speaks very shrewishly.
One would think his mother's milk were
scarce out of him.

OLIVIA. Let him approach. Call in my gentlewoman. (1.5.144-162)

These lines have been the source of much speculation about Olivia's interest in Viola as Cesario. Loreen Giese, in *Courtships, marriage customs, and Shakespeare's comedies,* argues that Olivia's admittance of Viola happens "because this messenger specifically acknowledges Olivia's position in relation to his" (71), since Malvolio delivers the young page's suggestion that he would stand either as a sheriff's post or as a supporter to a bench — both positions indicating some kind of submission. I agree with Giese's line of argument and add that the page being quite young, as per Malvolio's description, contributes to Olivia allowing him entrance, seeing that his inexperience would make it even easier for her to outsmart his arguments in favour of Orsino's account.

Being young, without the element of submission, is not enough for Viola's entry into Olivia's household. Before Malvolio's report of Viola's willingness to be the support to a bench, the messenger has already been described as being a "young gentleman" (1.5.98) and a "fair young man" (1.5.101) twice by Maria and a

"young fellow" (15.137) by Malvolio himself. None of these instances, however, sufficed to convince Olivia. It is only after she is sure that this messenger would not pose a threat to her authority that the countess allows him to approach her.

As Viola recites her "well penned" (1.5.72) speech, Olivia shows clear signs of impatience towards the courtly model employed by the page. Her "Come to what is important in't. I forgive you / the praise" (1.5.190-191) comes after Viola's promise of flattery — a gesture Olivia readily deems empty (1.5.194). Perhaps one of the most straightforward displays of Olivia's rejection of the Petrarchan tradition embraced by the duke is her appropriation of the blazon to make an inventory of her own assets:

> OLIVIA. (. . .) I will give
> out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be
> inventoried and every particle and utensil labeled
> to my will: as, *item*, two lips indifferent red; *item*,
> two gray eyes with lids to them; *item*, one neck, one
> chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise
> me? (1.5.243-249)

Rather than emphasize her own beauty, her list of perfectly ordinary parts of the body brings a morbid overtone to the inventorying usually employed by Petrarchan enthusiasts. Through her *contreblazon*, Olivia plays with this verbal dismemberment of women as a means of overturning a poetic device well-known by both the duke and his messengers, disarming Viola before she is even able to try a technique already too familiar to the countess.

Instead of making her beauty immortal through song, like Petrarch vowed to do for his beloved, Olivia suggests the use of a will to officialize the distribution of what Petrarchan poets would deem precious: physical assets. The hint of bored predictability found in "Were you sent hither to praise / me?" communicates Olivia's disbelief in such tradition, echoing the dissident female voices already present in earlier English poems that would take on Petrarchan devices[41]. By raising her doubts about this manner of flattery, however, Olivia ends up participating in the Petrarchan tradition that established in England around the time of *Twelfth Night's* first performance. As Heather Dubrow explains, under English Petrarchism, poems often "permit female speech only to counter it: the woman makes a point, variously expressed in direct or indirect discourse, and the poet then devotes the sonnet to rebutting her argument" (89). To put it simply, Olivia questions and subverts the Petrarchism found in Orsino's suit without breaking free from its tradition. Similarly, she questions and challenges the expectations around an ideal marriage[42] while also complying with its general structure.

Viola's continuous flattery and confidence even while countering Olivia also plays into the English Petrarchan tradition. Still, the countess makes a conscious effort to subdue the page's insistence, not allowing the defeat of her argument, as it

[41] One most notable example can be found in Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* LXXV, published at least 5 years before the first performance of *Twelfth Night*. When the female voice introduces her questioning, "'Vain man,' said she, 'that dost in vain assay, / A mortal thing so to immortalize" (lines 5-6), she, through a common anti-Petrarchan argument, allows for the poetic voice to build up his poetic argument.

[42] The dominant ideology from Shakespeare's time dictated that an ideal marriage would circulate around the idea of companionship, bringing the logic of "equality" as facilitator to that process. Kemp explains that "proponents of the dominant ideology in favor of marriage also frequently invoke the language of 'equality in marriage', but we must be careful to understand that by 'equality' they usually are referring to similarities in age, social standing, and intelligence, not an equality of power after marriage" (40). Olivia breaks with this tradition when suggesting a match that should be lesser than her in every aspect.

often happens in Petrarchan sonnets. Colin Symes, editor of *Twelfth Night*'s Collins Classics edition, notes that Olivia's choice of words reduces Viola's initial "eloquence to the dreary level of a sermon" (58), allowing her to get the upper hand in their verbal dispute. Viola's insistence ends up revealing that Olivia has been long prepared to answer each and any effort of wooing her through the usual Petrarchan style. Under this circumstance, it is not too far-fetched to assume that Olivia grants Viola entrance with the main purpose of disarming a page too young to win against her — a movement that would allow her to assert her authority as well as her stance on Orsino's courting game.

Olivia's behavior, however, finds a drastic change when Viola abandons the memorized speech and falls prey to what seems to be an outburst of her hidden emotions. As previously discussed, these emotions, manifested through the willow cabin speech, can be read as an overflowing of what Viola feels for Orsino, but as Olivia is unaware of that feeling, she might as well take the whole speech as a statement of Viola's own disposition to submission in the matters of love.

Viola's sudden declaration bears no hint of the possessiveness Orsino weaves into his love discourse: rather than becoming king of Olivia's sovereign thrones (1.1.39-40), Viola proposes a place of patient subordination that agrees with her own way of loving the duke himself. In front of Olivia, Viola describes the loyalty of a dedicated servant that acts on her love but waits for her master to grace her efforts:

> VIOLA. Make me a willow cabin at your gate
>
> And call upon my soul within the house,
>
> Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love

> And sing them loud even in the dead of night,
> Hallow your name to the reverberate hills
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth
> But you should pity me. (1.5.271-279)

This speech was already dissected in the previous chapter, but there is yet another aspect to consider when reading it from Olivia's standpoint. As the myth of Echo and Narcissus is frequent in English Petrarchan tradition, when Viola suggests that she would cry Olivia's name to have it echoed, we witness the cross-dressed page relinquish any trace of narcissism that could frame his devotion. There is no Viola standing above Olivia in this speech, as there is no trace of Viola being echoed by the Nymph. What Olivia hears is that her name would be the one triumphing and, unlike both Narcissus and Orsino, what Viola sees in her reflection is not herself, but the other she would come to love.

Viola's selfless submission speaks straight to Olivia's lack, and it is no surprise that the page comes to occupy the role of the countess's object-of-desire after this speech. If Olivia's desire is always pointing toward the securing of her autonomy as well as toward the assertion of her authority, her *objet petit a,* highlighting the aspects that support the realization of her desire, allows her to see in Viola the possibility of fulfillment. By following the willow cabin speech with both "What is your parentage?" (1.5.281) and "Get you to your lord. / I cannot love him. Let him send no more— / Unless perchance you come to me again" (1.5.284-286), Olivia makes it clear that there is a sudden change in the way she feels about

the page. Her transformation is so noticeable that Viola even comments on the way "(. . .) her eyes had lost her tongue, / For she did speak in starts distractedly" (2.2.20-21).

As Viola leaves the stage, Olivia succumbs to the dismemberment she just mocked: "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit / Do give thee fivefold blazon" (1.5.297-298). Instead of focusing only on physical attributes, her list introduces the elements of "actions" and "spirit" in a movement that goes from the parts to the whole. Olivia is not specifically interested in Viola's appearance, but in the whole set she presents through her speech — the tongue, through which Viola conveys the selfless devotion that fits Olivia's desire to rule; the face and limbs, which both Orsino and Malvolio comments on as being meek, thus, incapable of overpowering her; the actions of a persistent lover that earlier identified herself within the role of a supporter; and finally, the spirit she just reveals not only through her outburst, but also in the devotion she shows toward her master after refusing money and reminding Olivia of her duty: "My master, not myself, lacks recompense" (1.5.290).

All these elements, combined, make Viola the one match capable of satisfying Olivia's pre-requisites in marriage, and her being below in degree, estate and years only add to the list of benefits. Olivia recognizes the page's potential, and when she employs a ruse to arrange another meeting with Viola, what we witness is a second figurative promise of marriage in *Twelfth Night.* The first one, from Orsino, stems from his "To call his fortunes thine. (1.4.42)" discourse explained in the previous chapter. The second, now coming from Olivia, happens when she asks Malvolio to deliver Viola a ring:

OLIVIA. Run after that same peevish messenger,
The County's man. He left this ring behind him,
Would I or not. Tell him I'll none of it.
She hands him a ring.
Desire him not to flatter with his lord,
Nor hold him up with hopes. I am not for him.
If that the youth will come this way tomorrow,
I'll give him reasons for 't. Hie thee, Malvolio. (1.5.307-313)

Rings, according to Giese, "were the third most common gift prior to marriage" (91) in Early Modern England, losing only to money — which Olivia did offer Viola — and items of clothing or personal accessories. While accepting or not the ring did not weigh much in the decision to marry, it was still part of the courtship customs of that time. The delivery of the ring catalyzes Viola's understanding of Olivia's romantic feelings and, by the end of the following act, allows her to realize the conundrum into which she has been just thrown.

Act 3, scenes 1 and 4: the (im)possibility of desire

Knowing that Olivia's desire points in the direction of safeguarding her autonomy and of ascertaining her authority, and that Viola, as Cesario, is her object-of-desire for most of *Twelfth Night*, I trace Girard's triangulation backwards to single out the model she takes in this process: if authority is the one thing Olivia is after as a means of securing her autonomy, the one character who holds it with no drawbacks is Orsino, the duke of Illyria. Autonomy, in the hands of the duke, appears not only through his title and gender, but also in the way he is free to

pursue whom he says to love without detriment to his position. But Orsino is only able to stand as a ruler because there are those who obey his commands while recognizing his authority. When Viola reinforces her role as a servant to Orsino and rejects Olivia's proposal, she highlights not only her loyalty but the fact that Orsino does have what Olivia lacks: authority, autonomy and, consequently, Viola's submission.

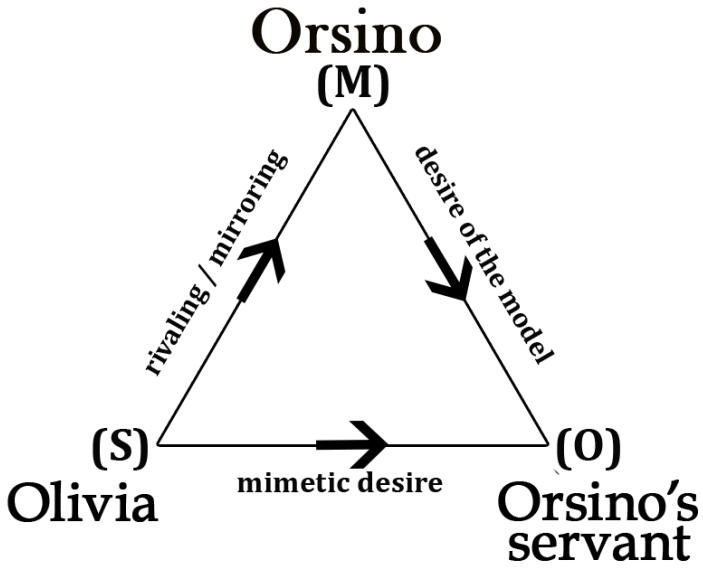

Figure 3. Triangulation of Olivia's desire.

Placing Orsino (M) as the model Olivia (S) imitates (figure 3) allows us to see her desire for Viola (O) as something fueled by the desire for authority as a means of safeguarding her autonomy. Orsino does make it clear that he aims for the position of a ruler (1.1.41), so attaining the servitude of Orsino's current favorite servant (1.4.1-2) would allow Olivia not only to usurp a fragment of Orsino's authority, but, when thinking about Viola's subserviency, also to achieve a marriage in which her autonomy would not be suffocated.

This reading converges with Girard's theory that the model's desire is what alerts the subject "to the desirability of the object" (*Violence and the Sacred* 145). The subject, for Girard, "desires *being*, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess" (*Violence and the Sacred* 146). For Lacan, this lack is impossible to be articulated in language as part of an unconscious aspect of the subject inserted into the Symbolic Order, but the *objet petit a* highlights the elements that would allow the (albeit impossible) fulfillment of this lack in different objects. With both theories together, we have Girard's triangulation helping the subject, in this case, Olivia, select the ideal object-of-desire (Viola) via the observation of the model (Orsino). The *objet petit a* backgrounds this whole operation: from the selection of a model, which, in this case, is not articulated in language, to the selection of an object-of-desire, we have the subject's fantasy and lack framing both alternatives.

The reading of rivalry that ensues in this triangulation comes later in *Twelfth Night*. For now, Olivia depends on her interpretation of Orsino's desire and Viola's role in this process to read the desirability of the object she just selected. As Girard explains that it is "by the example of his own desire that the model conveys to the subject the supreme desirability of the object" (*Violence and the Sacred* 146), it becomes relevant to remember that the interpretation of the examples provided by the model comes through the framing of the subject's particularized access to the Symbolic Order. In short, Olivia's interpretation of Orsino's desire does not necessarily corresponds to Orsino's actual desire, but it is dependent on the context from which she views this desire being expressed.

In the third act Viola comes back to Olivia's house as per request through Malvolio. Their short greetings take on the subject of servitude again:

OLIVIA. Give me your hand, sir.

VIOLA. My duty, madam, and most humble service.

OLIVIA. What is your name?

VIOLA. Cesario is your servant's name, fair princess.

OLIVIA. My servant, sir? 'Twas never merry world

Since lowly feigning was called compliment.

You're servant to the Count Orsino, youth.

VIOLA. And he is yours, and his must needs be yours.

Your servant's servant is your servant, madam.

OLIVIA. For him, I think not on him. For his thoughts,

Would they were blanks rather than filled with me. (3.1.96-106)

Viola stealthy underlines their difference in ranking by simultaneously introducing herself as a servant and Olivia as a princess — a clear exaggeration of her rank. While this hyperbole serves to widen the gap Olivia just tries to narrow, it brings out a reaction to Viola's reiteration of her position as her servant: the "My servant, sir?" (3.1.100) and the "You're servant to the Count Orsino" (3.1.102) [43] reveal Olivia's annoyance at the elusion of Viola's suggestion. In this whole exchange, Viola not once denies being a servant to Orsino, but rather emphasizes the impossibility of Olivia's desire: "Your servant's servant is your servant, madam"

[43] There is certain instability to Orsino's rank in *Twelfth Night*: throughout the first scenes, he is referred to as a duke, but later in the play there are several instances in which he is called a count. It is generally accepted that the highest position Orsino occupies is that of a duke, just like Virginio Orsini, often pointed out as a possible inspiration to Shakespeare's Orsino, who held the position of both a duke and of a count (Elam 157-158).

(3.1.104). By being Olivia's servant's servant, Viola would keep Orsino as her master and keep Olivia at bay as a master to Orsino, never allowing Olivia to directly own her.

Being denied not once, but multiple times in the course of this scene, the countess ends up professing a clear confession of her feelings, to which Viola responds with yet another denial:

> VIOLA. By innocence I swear, and by my youth,
> I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
> And that no woman has, nor never none
> Shall mistress be of it, save I alone. (3.1.165-168)

If, for the readership, Viola's words refer to her being a woman that does not intend to marry someone of her own gender, the dramatic irony of this dialogue only allows Olivia to hear Viola's confession as an even sturdier rejection. Viola not only rejects Olivia's profession of love, but she rejects altogether the possibility of ever being ruled by her. To Olivia, who unconsciously desires that specific servant of Orsino as a means of safeguarding her autonomy, the impossibility of being Viola-as-Cesario's mistress is the impossibility of realizing her desire.

However, denial fuels not only the heart of the courtly lover, but also the determination to possess that object-of-desire that keeps itself just enough to be both within and out of reach. Olivia, in typical Orsino fashion, does not give up in face of Viola's straightforward rejection. While unconsciously imitating the duke, the countess gets closer to her model and ignites the possibility of violence within the triangulation of her desire.

Act 4, scenes 1 and 3: from the seat of a ruler

The misunderstandings that accompany Olivia's romantic endeavors find yet another element of chaos with the introduction of Sebastian. From the fourth act onwards, Viola's brother leaves the margins of the plot to join the main conflict of *Twelfth Night*, providing Olivia with a way out of the love-triangle formed alongside Orsino and Viola. Sebastian's temper, which throughout the play appears to be mellower than Viola's, not only fits Olivia's demands, but it also contributes to the smoothness of the process of exchanging siblings by the end of the play.

That Olivia wants a husband over whom she would be able to rule is balanced by Sebastian's constant emasculation throughout *Twelfth Night*. In his first scene, Sebastian observes that his temper is "near the manners of [his] / mother" (2.1.39-40) due to his disposition to cry for the loss of his sister. Sebastian is thought to be a physical double of the disguised Viola to the point that neither Olivia nor Antonio can discern the two siblings when first meeting them. Thus, through the description of Viola, it is easy to picture Sebastian's appearance: he most certainly lacks a beard (3.1.46-47), which consequently contributes to him looking too young to be considered a full-fledged man (1.5.155).

Moreover, while the adjective "handsome" is never used to describe Viola as Cesario, she is more than once referred to as "beautiful" (2.2.25; 3.1.152) both by her brother and by Olivia, allowing us to assume that Sebastian probably does carry that kind of androgynous beauty with him. Sebastian's lack of a beard allows Olivia to read him, as well as Cesario, as less threatening to her authority since, in the words of Will Fisher, "in the Renaissance the beard was one of the primary ways in which masculinity was materialized and that it was therefore not simply a

'secondary' sexual characteristic" (184). Sebastian — without a beard, physically resembling his cross-dressed sister, too close to the manners of his mother, and self-proclaimed maid (5.1.275) — can hardly be called a stereotypical full-fledged man, best fitting under the label of a "youth"[44].

Men in Early Modern England, according to Elizabeth Foyster, were defined mostly through the aspects of reason and strength[45]. As "reason" is not exactly abundant in the world of *Twelfth Night*, "strength" becomes the means through which Sebastian can reaffirm his manhood and distinguish himself from his sister. When challenged by Andrew and Toby, who mistake him for Cesario, Sebastian faces both offenders at once: instead of hesitating in face of violence, like his sister does, he draws his sword and protects himself from the sudden attack. His demonstration of martial prowess at this point, although short-lived, is overlooked by Olivia, who interrupts the combat and is quick to apologize in Toby's stead: "Be not offended, dear Cesario" (4.1.52). While the scene is brief, Olivia's sudden interruption of Sebastian's drawing of his sword[46] illustrates a metaphorical castration of his manhood, allowing her some sort of control over that one aspect

[44] Alexandra Shephard, in "Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England", describes the youth from Early Modern England as someone taken to be ungoverned in their speech, prodigal, ungovernable, headstrong, willful, lustful and mostly taken by unruly impulses (45-46). While these characteristics may fit all male characters in *Twelfth Night* — whose adulthood we do not question — better than Sebastian, they also hint at the impossibility of those labeled as "youth" to be masters of both themselves and of others. Shephard adds that the distinction between a full-fledged man and young or old men "worked to subordinate both the young and the old and to limit access to claims to patriarchal manhood in terms of rational discretion, bodily stature, authority, and self-control" (46).

[45] Foyster explains further: "Men and women were defined in relation to each other's qualities: 'a woman is not as strong as a man', explained Lemnius in the 1630s, 'nor hath so much reason'. It was thought that once men had learnt the essential qualities for their gender, they could then use them to maintain and justify a position of power over women. God had meant to give the male 'great wit, bigger strength, and more courage to compel the woman to obey by reason or force', Sir Thomas Smith wrote in 1583" (chapter 2).

[46] Needless to point out how the "drawing of a sword" equates to the drawing of a phallic element that could ascertain Sebastian's masculinity. Puns on the "sword" as a metaphor to either the male external genitals or one's virility appear throughout the third scene of the first act in Toby's and Andrew's discourses, being common throughout most of Shakespeare's plays.

that could differentiate him from the cross-dressed Viola and ascertain his standing as a man.

If duels were a form of "defending and restoring honourable manhood" (Foyster), Olivia's interruption marks a barring that holds Sebastian in his position as a youth and, like Viola, "Not yet old enough for a man" (1.5.155). At that instant, Olivia, believing to be talking to Cesario, invites Sebastian to her house and pleads: "Nay, come, I prithee. Would thou 'dst be ruled by / me!" (4.2.67-68); to which Sebastian promptly answers "Madam, I will" (4.2.69). His acquiescing to her rule is a recognition of Olivia's hierarchical role in their soon-to-be officialized relationship and gives Olivia the consent she needed to support the marital authority she so desires.

From beginning to end, Olivia's desire works as a central gear in the plot's mechanism. If Viola's desire sets the plot in motion through her search for balance, Olivia's desire lies at the root of *Twelfth Night*'s instability. Through her extended mourning, motivated by her refusal to marry either an equal or someone of higher standing, Olivia isolates herself from the external world which, in turn, forces Viola to cross-dress and serve Orsino after the shipwreck. Additionally, her remaining a single woman motivates Orsino's pursuit, Andrew's attempt at courting her, and Toby's argument to keep Andrew near all the while fueling Malvolio's distorted hopes instilled by Maria's letter. Her desire, through the highlighting of Viola's aspects that relate to her will to maintain her autonomy, is also what allows her to fall in love with the cross-dressed Viola and, later, to marry Sebastian and accept the siblings' exchange. If we take the character's list of *Twelfth Night*, the only ones that are not directly affected by Olivia's presence are the ones without a name.

Thus, like a spider sitting at the center of her web of influence, Olivia's desire tugs the strings of most characters from *Twelfth Night*. Her desire to maintain autonomy defies the general submissive role of a wife in marriage and, as a consequence, disrupts the social world of Illyria and brings out the chaos commonly found in Shakespeare's comedies. I do not contend that her desire is the sole source of chaos or even the madness that infests the atmosphere of Illyria, else the comic closure of *Twelfth Night* would never come to transpire by the end of the text. Rather, I argue that the transgressive nature of her desire destabilizes the functioning of society around her and sets characters and plot alike in motion.

In the last scene before the final act, Sebastian re-enters the stage still under the effect of what seems a fever dream to him: "And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus, / Yet 'tis not madness" (4.3.2-3). While he wrangles around the absurdity of his sudden fortune, he finds proof of Olivia's sanity in the way she governs her house:

> SEBASTIAN. She could not sway her house, command her
> followers,
> Take and give back affairs and their dispatch
> With such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing
> As I perceive she does. (4.3.17-21)

Sebastian's choice of words when describing the way Olivia manages those around her reveals the sympathetic attitude with which he sees such affair. "Smooth", "discreet" and "stable" paint the picture of an efficient ruler — he calls her servants "followers" — and reinforce his acknowledgement of her authority within their

marriage. While this might tell us much about Olivia's competence, it also shows us the kind of hierarchical dynamic the countess is trying to preserve within her house.

Olivia's prowess as a leader naturally extends to matters outside the house. As she enters her second to next scene, it is the imperative mood in her voice that guides Sebastian to the altar:

> OLIVIA. Now go with me and with this holy man
> Into the chantry by. There, before him
> And underneath that consecrated roof,
> Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
> That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
> May live at peace. (4.3.25-29)

Sebastian's answer to her commanding tone could not be more agreeable: "I'll follow this good man and go with you, / And, having sworn truth, ever will be true" (4.3.33-34). But, more importantly, the speed with which she arranges the whole stage for their betrothal adds onto the comicality of the play and displays Olivia's own desperation in the matter.

She is so baffled at the prospect of marrying Cesario — whom had been firmly refusing her — that she pleads Sebastian assurance in order to dispel all doubts she had about his sudden change of heart. The jealousy that afflicts her soul takes us back to the triangulation of her desire (figure 3) and her taking "Orsino's servant" as the model's desire. Olivia's marriage, from her current standing, implicates her winning over the model (Orsino) and taking his object of desire (his

servant) for herself. For Girard, such movement would implicate the vanishing of the prestige of the model and, under this circumstance, the subject that imitates "then turn[s] to an even greater violence and seek[s] out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable" (*Violence and the Sacred* 148). In *Twelfth Night*, however, we do not witness such change in Olivia's behavior, and that is not only due to the play's ending coming too soon for such change to manifest, but also due to the reading that, by possessing Sebastian, or what Olivia thinks is Orsino's servant, she is not endowed with the *being*[47] she assumes Orsino is.

Although marrying Sebastian does contribute to the realization of her desire, and we see that she does invest herself with a renewed kind of authority when she ignores Orsino and shushes him with a "Good my lord—" (5.1.107), it does not fulfill it. Even if Sebastian does acquiesce to her will in marriage, the impossibility of fulfillment of her desire for autonomy lies not only in its own nature, according to Lacan, but mainly in her own gender. As a married woman, Olivia's autonomy is both socially and legally subdued in favor of her male counterpart, and the maintenance of her freedom to govern is still depend on her husband's will (or lack of it). Following this logic, marriage both pushes and pulls the (im)possibility of her desire.

Act 5, scene 1: the impossibility of desire

The convolutedness of *Twelfth Night*'s last scene does not leave much space for Olivia to express herself on the matters of her desire. The tying up of the

[47] Girard explains that, rather than possess something material, what the subject desires is the plenitude of being something he or she is not and that some other person seems to be. For Girard, "the subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that *being*. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior *being*, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of *being*" (Violence and the Sacred, 146).

numerous loose threads of the play make the denouement a bit anti-climactic for Olivia, who holds few lines in reaction to the twins' grand reveal. Before that, Olivia separates from Sebastian and, still ignorant of Viola's identity, questions Cesario on their recent betrothal in a clear dismissal of Orsino's affections. As the duke answers with a sudden outburst of violence, we are reminded of the rivaling stablished under the triangulation of their (Orsino's, Viola's and Olivia's) desire, each within their own objects and selected models. As he threatens to sacrifice Viola, thinking her the one responsible for Olivia's even more accentuated refusal of his affection, we witness a love confession that overturns, from the countess's point of view, Olivia's triumph over Orsino.

As a last resort to her apparent defeat, Olivia assumes that Viola, who is still dressed as Cesario, is fearful of the duke's anger and unwilling to play the part of an unfaithful servant. She tells Cesario: "Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art / As great as that thou fear'st" (5.1.156-157) in a clear defiance of Orsino's authority. Even if he were married to a countess, Cesario would still not be as great as a duke when considering their social standings[48], but that plays well with the sense of *being* that Girard suggests that the subject wishes to attain from their model. Olivia is still inferior to Orsino, but by usurping that which she thinks he desires, she now sees herself as someone who has triumphed over her previously selected and now discarded model. Thus, her disregard for Orsino's authority since the beginning of this last scene seems well justified by her illusion of success.

Her dispute with Orsino is interrupted, however, by the entrance of both Andrew and Toby. While they accuse Cesario of hurting them, Sebastian finally stands on the stage alongside Viola, confessing the violence he has just committed.

[48] This could also be a reflection of the instability of Orsino's title throughout *Twelfth Night*.

The ratification of his manhood, previously interrupted by Olivia, goes unnoticed as everyone else seems astounded with the unexpected duplication of Cesario. Olivia's only reaction to this amazement is a quick exclamation: "Most wonderful!" (5.1.236) and we read no more of her on that matter. Rather than being furious at the beguilement of which she was just a victim, she seems to be overjoyed at the possibility of there being two Cesarios.

That situation speaks to the core of *objet petit a*'s functioning: *"*I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you — the *objet petit a* — I mutilate you*"* (Lacan, Seminar XI 268). Olivia's love for "something more than Cesario" is precisely what allows her to trade both siblings so seamlessly. Sebastian, in all of his submissive acceptance of the countess's rule, carries with him the same "something more" that appeals to Olivia's desire and makes him the perfect substitute for Cesario, with no losses involved.

The nature of the object-of-desire within the triangulation changes, but by the moment the exchange happens, Olivia has already detached herself from the dynamic that places Orsino as her model. After exchanging promises of marriage with Sebastian, she starts to disregard Orsino's authority as a duke. Further proof of Olivia's autonomy within her own marriage can be found in her promise of paying for Orsino's marriage to Viola:

> OLIVIA. *To Orsino.* My lord, so please you, these things
> further thought on,
> To think me as well a sister as a wife,
> One day shall crown th' alliance on 't, so please
> you,

Here at my house, and at my proper cost. (5.1.330-335)

Olivia's offer to cover the costs of their union hints at her freedom to deal with her own fortune. In a traditional early modern marriage, the one invested with the proper rights to make decisions about the usage of their money would be the husband, and since there was not enough time for Olivia and Sebastian to discuss the expenditure of an extra marriage, it is easy to assume that Olivia made that decision by herself right at that instant. Sebastian's lack of objection guides us back to both his acquiescence and his subjection to Olivia's preservation of her authority within the household.

One last comment about Olivia's mourning can be made past the revelation of Viola's true identity: even if we are unable to determine with precision at which stage of mourning Olivia is, it is from her meeting with Viola onwards that other characters stop associating the countess with the state of mourning first described by both Valentine and Sir Toby. Going back to Lacan's treatment of mourning, the instant Olivia meets Cesario for the first time seems to mark the end of the suspension of desire that Lacan suggests to occur during the mourning process. It is not that Olivia is unable to desire anything prior to that point, but rather that the loss of her brother destabilized the logic of the Other that previously informed Olivia's desire. By seeing Cesario for the first time, Olivia, who removed herself from society with the excuse of mourning her deceased sibling, is presented with a way to escape from Orsino's clutches and, simultaneously, to reestablish a triangulation of desire with the duke himself as the model (M). Olivia's restructuring of the Other as well as of the Other's desire in this same scene also happens as a result of Viola's willow-cabin speech in the sense that it not only

appeals to the fantasy of male submission performed by Viola placing Orsino in an even higher place of authority, but it also provides the framework that informs the countess's subsequent pursuit of the cross-dressed page.

The veil, which she lifts for Cesario during their first meeting, serves as "an obvious sign of her mourning; however, it also serves, secondarily, as a type of disguise, since it allows her to hide her face from Orsino's suitors" (Parker, 25). Since her marriage in the final acts of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia does not need to evade Orsino's proposals or hide her face anymore. At the same time, she is able to find herself someone that she could call a sister (5.1.344) and, thus, to redirect the energy previously dedicated to the loss of a previous object toward a new object[49].

Olivia's betrothal in a chantry (4.3.25), a catholic kind of chapel "specifically for the chanting of prayers for the dead" (Penuel 86), instead of a more appropriate space, hints both at the hurriedness of her exchange of vows and at her momentaneous detachment of the significance of devoting oneself to remembrance of the dead — mainly her brother. The reorganization of the signifiers disarranged through the death of her brother, and the resignification of her egoic constitution through the roles of a sister, a wife and the mistress of her own household allows Olivia to satisfy partly her desire as well as the desire of the Other insofar as it is understood as the cultural and social expectations that circulate in her environment.

While Olivia's interest in marriage acts as a repellent of her desire for autonomy, under the circumstances she imposes, it nevertheless allows her to

[49] It is also possible to argue in favour of her reclaiming the role of a daughter, at least in language, when she repeatedly calls God as well as the priest by their title of "Father" (4.3.25; 5.1.146; 5.1.157-158) in the latter acts of *Twelfth Night*. While neither assume a paternal role in the play, they still occupy the place of spiritual fatherhood in the Catholic tradition to which Olivia seems to subscribe.

maintain that which she desires while also elevating her social status to that of a married woman. Just like Viola, within the pages of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia never sees the fulfillment of her desire, and, in her case, the impossibility of it ever being satisfied lies not only in its own nature, not only in the limitations of the text, but mainly in her own gender. As an early modern English woman, her autonomy is legally at the hands of either her husband or her male guardian and, as I previously quoted, women at that time "acknowledged that the powers granted them by their husbands were privileges to be negotiated, not rights to be defended" (Mendelson and Crawford 135). Her desire, however, with all its particularities, acts as a motor to the whole of Illyria: there is no plot within the play that is not affected by Olivia's desire for autonomy. From the first to the last act, what we witness is the unfolding of the countess's refusal of Orsino and of her appreciation of Cesario backgrounded by the raging force of her *objet petit a*.

CHAPTER 4

Maria: from lady-in-waiting to lady-dramatist

If I do not gull him into a nayword
and make him a common recreation, do not think I
have wit enough to lie straight in my bed.
(*Twelfth Night* 2.3.134-36)

Unlike Viola, Maria, the countess's lady-in-waiting, does not have an entrance grand enough to evoke parallels with one of Botticelli's paintings; nor has she her name announced prior to her first appearance, as it happens with both Olivia and Shakespeare's greatest tragic heroes. Maria retains the least number of lines amongst the three female characters, and, if considering the male ones, she is only ahead of Fabian, Antonio, and Sebastian — but not by much. Yet, akin to the heroine of *Twelfth Night*, Maria is largely responsible for this play's state of festivity. It is by her hand that the letter that tricks Malvolio into a condition of externalized madness is forged, and it is also by her instruction that part of the dark room scene is conducted.

If one were to draw parallels between the characters of *Twelfth Night*, Viola would be the most likely candidate to be placed alongside Maria. Surely, her status as the play's heroine gives her more lines and scenes when compared to Olivia's chambermaid, which, thus, allows her more room for the development of her persona and her motivations. But, besides their gentry status, both characters share the struggle of serving delusional masters who immerse themselves in fantasies of unrequited love. Not only that, even if only a minor character, Maria

shares with the heroine of this comedy the same burden of shaping the structure of the play: if *Twelfth Night* is the materialization of Viola's desire for order, as previously discussed, the expulsion of the *pharmakos,* essential to the traditional comic resolution and re-establishment of order, comes at the expense of Maria's desire.

The irony, and that is yet another element that she and Viola have in common, is that her desire must bring chaos before the order it engenders. The chaos her actions generate appears as a means of rectifying that which Maria perceives as an injustice in the countess's household. Order, or justice, in the most selfless and elevated sense, however, are never on Maria's plans. As a minor character, the countess's chambermaid does not aspire to fix the whole of Illyria. Her motivation, however petty, is directly related to both her pride as a woman and her condition as a servant.

Maria's entrance in the play happens at the beginning of the third scene of the first act. Mainly due to Sir Toby's arrival, we are introduced to a mood of revelry and joy that is not seen in either Orsino's or Viola's introductory scenes. Maria's first lines point us out to a character that must play the mediator between the one she serves and those who insist on bringing improprieties to the house: "By my troth, Sir Toby, you must come in earlier / o' nights. Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions / to your ill hours" (1.3.4-6). Opposite to Malvolio, the puritanical steward, Maria is not against the festive mood Sir Toby and his companions seem to enjoy, but she is keenly aware of how thin the ice over which they tread is. Their sustenance depends on Olivia's bestowed favours, so, even if Toby may dismiss the idea, it is in their best interest to keep themselves on the good side of the lady of the house.

Even so, Sir Toby's excessive roistering allows Maria to emerge as the sanest character amongst their circle. Unfortunately, in leading a minor role, the countess's lady-in-waiting does not have enough room, as do Viola and Olivia, to confess her true feelings in a soliloquy. As a result, in order to assess both her character and desire, one needs to engage mainly with patterns, slips, and clues found between the few lines assigned to her name — her actions, of course, also provide a basis for understanding Maria's nature and motivation. However, unlike the two previous chapters, it is imperative to delve into Maria's context as a female servant in a noble house before we get to the explicit expression of her desire brought forth only after her third scene in the play.

Before that, Maria is able to navigate the domestic environment skillfully, even if, in the specific context of the Elizabethan noble household, women were not exactly welcome. As Kate Mertes observes in *The English Noble Household,* female servants in that kind of space would be limited to "chamberwomen and companions to the lady of the household and nursery servants, restricted to the private portions of the house (and often married to another servant)" (57). The absence of female servants was mainly due to the widespread belief that women, unable to resist their intrinsic nature, would disturb the harmony and sobriety necessary to a respected house (Mertes 58). Being far from the protection of their parents, single women were seen as "masterless" and, as Michelle Dowd suggests, "often regarded as transient, potentially disruptive and sexually available" (134). Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, in *Women in Early Modern England*, corroborate this idea as they write that the general understanding of the Elizabethan society was that "all masterless women were disorderly by nature, and

were moreover the stimulus for misconduct in others" (96), demanding, when in service, constant supervision of their superiors.

For Maria, all those expectations of her gender fall short when the character, rather than promote disorder, seems to mediate it. Sir Toby, a male knight, is the one who mostly brings the air of debauchery to Olivia's house, and Malvolio, a male servant, is the one who first externalizes his sexual availability while in service. Maria's awareness of the general image unmarried female servants have in noble households may be part of what motivates both her role as a mediator of sorts and her constant restraint in face of the merriment into which Sir Toby, Feste, and Sir Andrew drown. In the end, even with a lady as her master, Maria's position as a servant is never completely secure while she is but an unmarried woman[50].

Before going into the subject of Sir Andrew, Maria has two more opportunities to warn Toby of his excesses:

> MARIA. Ay, but you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order.
>
> TOBY. 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!
>
> MARIA. That quaffing and drinking will undo you. I heard my lady talk of it yesterday, and of a foolish knight that you brought in one night here to be her

[50] Marguerite A. Tassi comments on how Maria's dependance on an alliance with Olivia accounts not only for her own sustenance, but also for the maintenance of her public identity. Being shunned by the countess without a proper recommendation letter would make it hard for her to get another position as a servant in Illyria.

wooer. (1.3.8-17)

From this point onwards, Maria keeps on proving herself one of the most resourceful characters of *Twelfth Night*: while able to hear her lady's complaints personally, she uses that information to navigate both extremes of the house without actually betraying one another. Keeping in mind that Maria's position as a servant is always at play, we may as well remember that her actions and desire could be motivated by her sheer sense of self-preservation: by advising Toby, Maria is fulfilling her duty to Olivia and simultaneously extending her friend[51] and future husband's stay in the house.

As Sir Andrew Aguecheek enters the scene, Maria and Toby take turns bullying the ignorant knight. The scene introduces her skillful control of language while also establishing the sense of camaraderie she shares with Toby. Maria uses Sir Andrew's own words to create meanings the knight himself, in all his social inability, is not able to grasp:

ANDREW. Fair lady, do you think you
have fools in hand?
MARIA. Sir, I have not you by th' hand.
ANDREW. Marry, but you shall have, and here's my
hand. [*He offers his hand.]*
MARIA. [taking his hand] Now sir, thought is free. I

[51] Maria and Toby's relationship is hard to describe at this point. Their flirting becomes more evident at a later point in *Twelfth Night*, but, for now, Maria seems to care about him enough that she goes to such lengths as to warn him of Olivia's discontentment. Their exact difference in social standing is also not clear, as Sir Toby may be a knight, but Maria, as a chambermaid to the countess, could be of the same standing as either him or Olivia, the one she serves (Kamps 240).

pray you, bring your hand to th' butt'ry bar and let it drink.

ANDREW. Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?

MARIA. It's dry, sir.

ANDREW. Why, I think so. I am not such an ass but I can keep my hand dry. But what's your jest?

MARIA. A dry jest, sir.

ANDREW. Are you full of them?

MARIA. Ay, sir, I have them at my fingers' ends. Marry, now I let go your hand, I am barren. *Maria exits* (1.3.63-79)

As she moves from literal to figurative readings of the words, Andrew is not able to follow, losing himself in Maria's first jest in the play. When he asks "do you think you / have fools in hand?" (1.3.63-64), Maria chooses the literal meaning of his figurative saying: "Sir, I have not you by th' hand" (1.3.65), which prompts Andrew to give his hand and assert his position as the fool she now holds by the hand. From this point onwards, Maria consciously moves to the figurative meaning and stays there for the remainder of their exchange, a move that places the knight at her mercy.

The "bring your hand to th' butt'ry bar and let it drink" (1.3.69-70) line brings forth at least two different readings: the first, a literal invitation for Andrew to visit the buttery bar[52] and to take whatever drink suited his fancy; and a second

[52] A buttery was one of the rooms to which waiting servants, like Maria, had free access in the house. Mertes explains that "the rooms chiefly involved in waiting service were the great hall and other dining or living chambers; the pantry; and the buttery" (37). The latter was the place where ale and

figurative reading that suggests the buttery bar as a metaphor for her breasts. The buttery bar, being on the upper half of the buttery's door roughly sits at the same area where one's breasts sit in the body; likewise, the connection between "butter" and "breastmilk" endorses the pun. The sexual innuendo, which is beyond Andrew's understanding, comes as a follow-up to Sir Toby's previous attempt at gulling the knight: "You mistake, knight. "Accost" is front her, board her, / woo her, assail her" (1.5.55-56). Reading between the lines, Sir Andrew dismisses the possibility of making sexual advances as per his suggestion, and that is the moment Maria decides to take part in the gag and fulfill Sir Toby's attempt at jesting with a more sophisticated wordplay. The Arden Shakespeare's version of the play, edited by Keir Elam, suggests an extra rubric that indicates that the one performing Maria could bring Andrew's hand to her breast, making the pun even more literal. The "dry" references in her speech point to an array of meanings: a dry metaphor, as in a terrible association of words; a dry breast, as a meta-textual reference to Maria's role being originally written for a boy to perform; a dry body, in the sense of not being aroused by Andrew's lack of intelligence; a dry jest, as a reference to her sarcastic tone, and, as per Keir Elam's suggestion, the use of dry both as "an allusion to the proverb 'Fools have wit enough to keep themselves out of the rain'" (175), and to Andrew's lack of virility, as "a dry hand was correspondingly a sign of impotence" (175).

This game with words reveals Maria's ability to explore language as a means of turning the tides of the conversation to her own advantage — a skill essential to the gulling of Malvolio. The way she handles Andrew allows us to read Maria as someone not only quick-witted but also familiar enough with the ways of

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wine were usually stored, thus Maria's invitation for Andrew to drink. The buttery bar was "the top half of the buttery door opened outwards to create a ledge or a bar" (Warren and Wells 97).

the world outside the protection of the household. She is able to read the situation created by Sir Toby and to make use of the sexual innuendos laid out by him in order to degrade another man's pride to his face without soiling her reputation as an unmarried woman.

Act 1, scene 5: resolved on two points

By the fifth scene of the first act, Maria makes sporadic appearances to fulfill her duty as Olivia's lady-in-waiting and to warn Feste of his own duty to the countess. The latter happens at the opening of the scene, and through a short exchange between the two characters, Maria is able to best Feste, the witty fool, in one of his jests:

> MARIA. You are resolute, then?
>
> FOOL. Not so, neither, but I am resolved on two points.
>
> MARIA. That if one break, the other will hold, or if both break, your gaskins fall.
>
> FOOL. Apt, in good faith, very apt. Well, go thy way. If Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria. (1.5.21-27)

As she anticipates his wordplay with the word "points" actually referring to the lace holding his own breeches, Feste rebukes her with bitterness and suggests that a real display of her wittiness would be the feat of getting Sir Toby out of his drinking habits. Elam Keir, Marianne Novy, Roger Warren and Stanley Wells all agree that this passage foreshadows Maria's marriage to Olivia's kinsman, but yet

another reading is possible: as the second conditional in "If Sir Toby would leave drinking" (1.5.26) reveals Feste's lack of faith in that possibility, his suggestion that, only then, he would recognize Maria's wittiness, is his own way of proposing her a challenge.

Richard Madelaine's indication that Maria's role was tailored not only for a boy actor that would, later, undertake the role of the Clown[53], but also for "upstaging the Clown's role" (74), endorses the reading that Feste's last lines to Maria could imply a direct challenge to her skills. If, from the Elizabethan actors' point of view, this challenge could be from master to apprentice, from the character's point of view, this challenge showcases Feste, the one recognized as "wise enough to play the Fool" (3.1.61), urging the lady-in-waiting of the countess to prove her wit. Following Madelaine's proposal, it is possible to read most of Maria's interactions with Feste as a trial of sorts — one that is later overcome both by Maria's gull on Malvolio and by her letting Feste take on her role as the guller[54]. Even as she meets Feste's challenge with apparent dismissal, "Peace, you rogue. No more o' that" (1.5.28), this scene, as well as her last one with Toby and Andrew, introduces Maria's constant endeavor to outsmart those around her. Being bound to a male-centered environment that, as previously discussed, is not absolutely welcoming of her gender, Maria's continued displays of resourcefulness come into view as a means of ascertaining her own standing in Olivia's household.

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[53] Catherine Belsey's "Shakespeare's Little Boys: Theatrical Apprenticeship and the Construction of Childhood" and David Kathman's "Grocers, Goldsmiths, and Drapers: Freemen and Apprentices in the Elizabethan Theater" offer a comprehensive introduction to the system of apprenticeship and to the employment of boy actors in female roles in Shakespeare's time.

[54] On that matter, Madelaine writes that "assigning to Feste the costume and ludic role of Sir Topas is Maria's masterstroke in her literal containment of Malvolio (...) Feste triumphs over Malvolio as a comic virtuoso – and thus Maria draws out the Clown's comic talents, which have hitherto been largely hidden behind interlocutorship and singing" (80).

Apart from the challenge posed by Feste, the scene also brings a second instance in which Maria anticipates a behavior that could inconvenience her mistress and, as a result, threatens a character against it: "(…) My lady will hang thee for thy / absence." (1.5.3-4) and "Yet you will be hanged for being so long absent. / Or to be turned away, is not that as good as a / hanging to you?" (1.5.12-14). As she did with Toby, and later does with Viola, "Will you hoist sail, sir? Here lies your way" (1.5.200), Maria's pattern of keeping Olivia's best interest in mind echoes Alison Findlay's suggestion that the countess's lady-in-waiting may well be read as an ally because she "works alongside Olivia to secure her female authority in the household" (253). The hostility both of them face due to their gender —in Maria's case, as an unmarried female servant, and in Olivia's case, as an unmarried female orphan — strips them of a sense of autonomy that, otherwise, could have been enjoyed were they men rather than women. As previously discussed, Olivia's social status allows her enough freedom to choose a husband of lower standing that would not be able to take away the autonomy she partly enjoys as the sole heir of her family's fortune. Although she is still bound to comply with duke Orsino's decisions, in *Twelfth Night,* Olivia holds a kind of power that Maria lacks as her lady-in-waiting. This lack of power, her drive to prove herself, and the environment to which Maria is bound (she never leaves the house), background her desire.

Act 2, scene 3: shared desire

Maria's entrance starting with yet another of her reprimands should not come as a surprise by now. In her third scene, the lady-in-waiting's first lines echo her previous warnings: "What a caterwauling do you keep here! If my / lady have

not called up her steward Malvolio and / bid him turn you out of doors, never trust me" (2.3.73-75). Again, Olivia's chambermaid alerts Sir Toby and his crew against their own debauchery without forgoing the explicit threat that follows all of her warnings. Her evocation of Malvolio as someone who could, under Olivia's orders, chase Sir Toby away, reminds us that, as a steward, he holds the highest rank amongst the servants. As David Schalkwyk explains in "Love and Service in *Twelfth Night* and the Sonnets":

> Stewards, who occupied critical positions of authority and trust, could be drawn from the yeomanry, the lesser gentry, and in some cases the upper gentry. There is thus not a significant difference in rank between Malvolio and Cesario or even between Malvolio and the two unruly knights. Although Maria is a gentlewoman, it is acceptable for Malvolio, as steward of the household, to treat her as a subordinate. (87-88)

Even without a significant difference in rank between Malvolio and Sir Toby, it is only under Olivia's orders — and thus, drinking from her own authority — that the steward can reprimand or even cast out the partying drunkards. Maria is still under Malvolio's scrutiny, as the role of maintaining discipline amongst the servants was one of the steward's responsibilities[55].

[55] "The steward or seneschal (both terms are used, even as late as 1500) is perhaps the officer whom we think of as *major domus*; and indeed the title is a ubiquitous one. The role is usually defined as that of one who helps determine, and sees enforced, household policy; he is in charge of discipline and order in the household, seeing that all runs smoothly — a kind of general manager." (Mertes 22)

Maria's repeated pleas for order, however, fall on deaf ears, and Malvolio arrives as per her prediction with even harsher words of reprimand:

> MALVOLIO. My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?
> Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to
> gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you
> make an ale-house of my lady's house, that you
> squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation
> or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of
> place, persons, nor time in you? (2.3.87-93)

Even if tinged with irony, the way Malvolio uses the word "masters" to address Sir Toby and his party, and Toby's own dismissive response of "Art any more than a / steward?" (2.3.113-114) followed by "Go, sir, rub your chain / with crumbs" (2.3.118-119) make it clear that there is a difference of standing between the two characters. Likewise, it is also clear that Olivia's kinsman is not only aware of that difference, but he is also willing to take advantage of it.

As Malvolio is left with no retort, it might be safe to assume that Sir Toby's crude offense does bear some truth to it. It is in his powerlessness against the knight that the steward redirects his anger to Maria, whom, bearing a lower standing in the servant's hierarchy, has no choice but to listen:

> MALVOLIO. Mistress Mary, if you prized my lady's favor
> at anything more than contempt, you would not give
> means for this uncivil rule. She shall know of it, by

this hand. *He exits* (2.3.120-124)

Malvolio mimics Maria's habit of weaving threats into a warning (or is the chambermaid the one who mimics Malvolio?), but the difference is that all of Maria's reprimands up to this point were addressed to those with fault. Malvolio's threat, however, is redirected to the only guiltless character at that moment and, on top of that, to the only character that does try to stop the excessive partying of the knights.

Malvolio's four lines are just a spark on the list of the steward's behaviors that Maria finds reproachable, as she later comments. This spark, however, is strong enough to inflame the chambermaid's temper to the point that, for the first time, Maria exposes her intent to the whole room:

> MARIA. Sweet Sir Toby, be patient for tonight. Since the youth of the Count's was today with my lady, she is much out of quiet. For Monsieur Malvolio, let me alone with him. If I do not gull him into a nayword and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed. I know I can do it. (2.3.131-137)

The promise to gull Malvolio does not seem so out of order with his own threat: as Maria is solely dependent on Olivia's good will, the word of the steward, whom Olivia prizes very much (3.4.68-69), would be enough to have her evicted of the house. Getting rid of Malvolio, or of his authority — "If I do not gull him into a

nayword / and make him a common recreation "(2.3.34-35) — would be a sure way to protect both her position and her lady's favors toward her.

Maria's attitudes and remarks, by now, allow us to pinpoint one of her objects-of-desire in *Twelfth Night*. Departing from the violence that sparks between her and Malvolio, Girard's triangulation of desire guides us toward the reading of Maria (S) as the desiring subject and Malvolio (M) as the model she might have unknowingly elected. From this dynamic we are able to deduce the presence of a shared object-of-desire (O) that takes the shape of Olivia's favor (Figure 4) and stands at the center of their conflict.

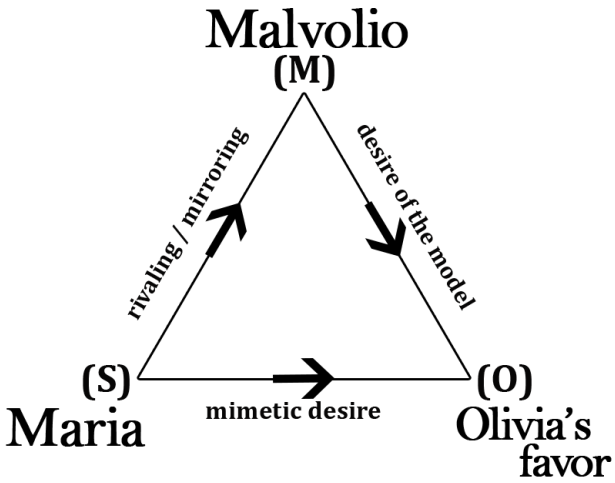

Figure 4. Triangulation of Maria's desire.

Maria's proximity with Sir Toby could also be a contributing factor in her election of Malvolio as a model within Girard's triangulation. Olivia's kinsman's will to free himself from the steward's clutches may present itself as the Other's desire from Maria's standpoint. I do not claim that Maria's desire, in the shape of

her search for stability, is, in any form, Toby's professed desire[56] that found its way through the maid's unconscious. However, Toby's repeated discourse in favour of his own debauchery — that which is precisely opposed by Malvolio — may integrate the chain of signifiers that compose Maria's unconscious and, thus, aggravates her initial process of triangulation with the steward without competing with her desire. Toby's "Confine? I'll confine myself no finer than I am" (1.3.) and "Malvolio's / a Peg-a-Ramsey" (2.3.76-77), professed before Maria's suggestion of tricking Malvolio, play their part in what Bruce Fink explains as a type of talk that "takes on a sort of independent existence within 'ourselves'" (*Lacanian Subject* 10), shaping up the elements that frame one's fantasy as a response to what the Other desires.

For Girard, even when conflict arises specifically due to the pursuit of a shared object, both subject and model are still "half blind to this conjunction, unable to perceive it as a cause of rivalry" (*Violence and the Sacred* 146). Of course, the desire of the model is always framed alongside the subject's particularized access to the Symbolic Order, so Maria's perception of Malvolio's desire being directed at Olivia does not mean that this is Malvolio's actual desire from his standpoint. In reading Malvolio's journey, one would soon learn that what he articulates as his desire is, actually, something related to the social emancipation that would come with him becoming "Count Malvolio" (2.5.34). What occupies the role of the object in Girard's triangulation, then, is what the subject is able to conceive as the model's object-of-desire, to borrow a Lacanian term. The subject, Girard posits, looks at her / his model (M) and rationalizes that "if the model, who

[56] A "professed desire", here, comprises that kind of will we are able to articulate consciously in language, very different from the unpronounceable desire that drives us from object to object. Bruce Fink calls it a desire professed in "ego mode" (*Lacanian Subject* 9).

is apparently already endowed with superior *being*, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of *being*" (*Violence and the Sacred* 146). That supposed pursuit of an object-of-desire is what, in turn, is imitated by the subject.

This movement of imitation is backed up by desire itself as one's particularized motor of demands. As Maria selects Malvolio as her model and imitates his pursuit of Olivia's favor, the *objet petit a* is the one element behind the (un)conscious selection. Departing from this premise, it is possible to follow the trail of Maria's desire as being something simultaneously crossed by her condition as a mediator of conflicts, as a female servant, as an unmarried woman, and as someone who is always trying to prove herself resourceful by besting those around her. Maria's desire, which not only backs her constant display of wit but also results in the expulsion of Malvolio by the end of the play, directs us to the constant search for stability. As instability seems to be at the core of this character, the search for that which she lacks relates to all aspects of the making of Maria.

Stability, a keyword to Maria's desire, is not the same as Viola's search for balance. Viola's desire has to do with the will to retrieve what she once possessed, to reorganize that which she disorganizes, to go back to a state of order, but Maria's search for stability is mostly related to her dependence on Olivia's favors and on Malvolio's judgment, as well as her unstable condition as an unmarried female servant. Maria's circumstances do not allow her to make a mistake, and, even if her lady is notoriously lenient, one misstep could result in all the threats that she has been weaving into her warnings backfiring right on her. Stability, in her case, relates, first and foremost, to the relative sense of social and financial

security she could enjoy were she married, were she a man or were she the master of the house.

As Maria is none of the above — at least not until the final scenes of the play —, she is keen on devising a prank that would take advantage of Malvolio's vice in order to lure him to his own demise:

> MARIA. The devil a puritan that he is, or anything
> constantly but a time-pleaser; an affectioned ass
> that cons state without book and utters it by great
> swaths; the best persuaded of himself, so crammed,
> as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds
> of faith that all that look on him love him. And on
> that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause
> to work. (2.3.145-152)

Maria's rejection of Sir Toby's excessive partying and of Malvolio's excessive self-love now speaks volumes in respect to her search for stability. As the only level-headed character amongst the unruly men, Maria's promise of revenge has an emotional factor in its foundation, but, as Linda Anderson suggests, being it a kind of comic revenge, it is "directed by cool reason" (19).

Author to *A kind of wild justice: revenge in Shakespeare's comedies*, Anderson adds that comic revengers usually assume their role with "multiple aims of providing aid to one or more innocent parties, limited punishment and reformation for the victim, and the restoration of harmony in society" (19), all of which seem to agree with Maria's initial reason to trick Malvolio. While she may

act in a spur of self-preservation, her gulling mostly addresses Malvolio's excesses in tampering with Toby's pleasure, in coveting both a lady and a position that he is not allowed to covet, and in unjustly threatening her as she makes an effort to bring about peace to Olivia's house. Everything considered, Malvolio is someone that threatens the very concept of stability — starting with Maria's stability*, per se*, but also including stability within society, as the steward confesses his desire to marry his own mistress in order to become a count.

Act 2, scene 5: a dramatist of sorts

Malvolio's list of vices is not limited to his sense of self-importance, his overbearing self-love and his undisguised self-service made evident through the second act. By calling him a "kind of puritan" (2.3.139), and confirming that "the devil a puritan that he is" (2.3.145), Maria is describing the steward as someone that, much like Angelo, from Shakespeare's *Measure to Measure*, enforces a sense of repressive, punitive authority as a facade to their own earthly ambitions. London playwrights, as Huston Diehl writes, viewed "puritanism as a religious culture essentially antagonistic to theater and other forms of mirth, a culture they seek to suppress" (81), a view reinforced by the repeated casting of their radical members as the theater's particular enemy[57]. As Maria plots and conducts her revenge, it becomes clear how the dynamic established between Malvolio and her echoes the

[57] Throughout his paper, Huston analyzes a more nuanced approach to the rivalry between Puritans and those related to the theater, dissipating the black and white reading that often permeates this discussion: "The playwright's appropriation of the disciplinary goals of the preacher in *An Apology for Actors* and the preacher's appropriation of the theatrical techniques of the player in *The Faithfull Shepheard* serve to remind us of what the powerful construct of the anti-theatrical stage Puritan too often obscures: puritanism and the theater were not simply rival and antagonistic institutions, but interdependent and mutually constitutive ones" (86).

same rivalry observed between playwrights and Puritans in Elizabethan and Jacobean England[58].

As the last scene from the second act starts, Maria approaches Toby, Andrew and Fabian — the latter being a man who has lost Olivia's favor thanks to Malvolio's meddling — to announce the start of her gull. This whole part is structured like a group getting ready to watch a spectacle, as Toby hurries Fabian to get into his place and Maria enters the scene by saying: "Get you all three into the boxtree" (2.5.14). While the "boxtree" to which she refers may indicate the literal bush, as it is often used in performances of the play, the word "boxtree" may also refer to the numbered box seats present in the upper galleries of the theater. These seats, also called "gentlemen's boxes" or "gentleman's room" were often reserved for people of higher standing who would first cross the stage before reaching their seats (Robson 44), much like Toby and his lot have to cross in order to find a place to hide and watch Malvolio's demise.

Further references to the whole gull being a sort of play inside the play appear in Maria's speech: "Malvolio's / coming down this walk. He has been yonder i' the /sun practicing behavior to his own shadow this half / hour." (2.5.14-17). Like an actor, Malvolio is rehearsing his role before his entrance, unaware of the script Maria just left him in the shape of a letter. As the main character to her *impromptu* farce arrives, Maria goes into hiding and leaves the stage, as it is expected of the playwright that she is.

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[58] Maria's name evoking both the imagery of Jesus's mother and that of Mary I of England, the one who sought to restore the Church of England to full communion with the Church of Rome, adds another layer of meaning to the dispute between Maria and Malvolio, who serves as a metaphor to Puritans. During the reign of Queen Mary I, a number of English Protestants fled England, just like Malvolio flees the stage at the end of the play, under the name of "Marian exiles", in order to join Reformed Churches. In the second Act, Toby calls Maria as "Marian" (2.3.14) in an affectionate way, and throughout the play she is called "Mary" in at least 3 different situations.

Going back to the reading of Malvolio as the Puritan and of Maria as the playwright, it is possible to see how both characters are able to materialize a conflict that, at that time, crossed the limits of the stage. Following this logic, the whole gulling scene stages a reaction to the anti-theatrical sentiment that loomed before the actual closing of the theaters in 1642[59]. By facing Malvolio with that which he, and Puritans, supposedly despised the most, Maria suggests the weaponization of mirth, drama, and theatricality as a means of exposing the hypocrisy of his self-righteous attitudes. As Malvolio performs and takes the whole garden as his own stage, his excesses are revealed through the greed he himself confesses. Maria's script — the letter she coins to dupe Malvolio — guides the steward to believe he is the main character of what later reveals to be a tragedy: a man so sure of his own deserving greatness that he is thrown into the pits of misfortune by his manifested *hubris*[60].

Maria's carefully devised script showcases, once again, her mastery in juggling with words and their multiple meanings. Just like she does with Sir Andrew in the first act, Maria takes advantage of Malvolio's excessive pride to lure him to reveal his true face as a self-serving man. But, before that, Malvolio himself enacts a whole passage scripted and directed by his own imagination:

> MALVOLIO. Calling my officers about me, in my
> branched velvet gown, having come from a daybed
> where I have left Olivia sleeping— (2.5.46-48)

[59] "Depicting puritans as, among other things, sanctimonious, legalistic, rigid, and excessively zealous, a number of the comedies written in the early years of the seventeenth century stage puritan attacks on the theater and related forms of mirth in order to examine and contain a virulent anti-theatricality that threatens their very livelihood" (Huston 87).

[60] A type of *harmatia*, or fatal flaw, manifested through excessive pride and self-importance that often leads tragic characters to their downfall.

(…)

MALVOLIO. And then to have the humor of state; and
after a demure travel of regard, telling them I
know my place, as I would they should do theirs, to
ask for my kinsman Toby— (2.5.51-54)

(…)

MALVOLIO. I extend my hand to him thus, quenching
my familiar smile with an austere regard of
control— (2.5.64-66)

(…)

MALVOLIO. Saying, "Cousin Toby, my fortunes, having
cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of
speech—" (2.5.69-71)

As Girard's triangulation suggests a kind of approximation between subject and model through imitation, Malvolio's use of theatricality seems awfully close to Maria's own uses of the structure of drama to introduce the gull. His performance brings not only a narrative voice to the stage, but also a type of rubric followed by self-assigned lines professed in his imaginary drama. Huston, in his "Disciplining Puritans and Players", explains that the distinctions between Puritans and players were often thwarted by playwrights to "undermine Puritan efforts to judge and suppress the theater (…). To defeat their Puritan antagonists, they sully them with the name of player" (88). This movement is evident in these passages: Malvolio's use of the dramatic structure makes him both a player and a playwright, much like Maria herself.

Her letter to Malvolio ends with another relevant addition to her role as a dramatist in *Twelfth Night*:

> MALVOLIO. [He reads] (…) *Be opposite with*
> *a kinsman, surly with servants. Let thy tongue tang*
> *arguments of state. Put thyself into the trick of singularity.*
> *She thus advises thee that sighs for thee.*
> *Remember who commended thy yellow stockings and*
> *wished to see thee ever cross-gartered. I say, remember.*
> *Go to, thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so. If*
> *not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of*
> *servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers. (2.5.152-161)*

The letter not only dictates the manner of speech that Malvolio should follow, but it also adds instructions to his behaviour and clothing. The yellow stockings, a color Olivia abhors (2.5.204), and the cross-gartered leg alongside Malvolio's smile create the impression of a mad man: something of which Olivia accuses him (3.4.61), and the exact same thing of which Malvolio accused Sir Toby when asking "My masters, are you mad?" (2.3.87), right before his accusation of Maria.

This is not the only instance in which Maria assigns a specific costume to one of her scripted characters: in the second scene of the fourth act, she appears for the duration of three lines only to give Feste, the clown, the role of a curate: "Nay, I prithee, put on this gown and this beard; / make him believe thou art Sir Topas the curate. Do / it quickly. I'll call Sir Toby the whilst" (4.2.1-3). Both

costumes foil one another, especially when considering the nature of the one wearing it. As Richard Madelaine notes:

> In iv. 2, Malvolio's Maria-imposed costume is ironically complemented by the Sir Topas outfit with which Maria costumes the Clown. Visually, the effects of inverted colour contrast linger after her disappearance from the play. Hereby, Maria's transformation of the sober- (perhaps black-) costumed steward, complete with chain of office, into a yellow-stockinged and cross-gartered joy boy probably plays ironically with his hair-style too. Since Puritans commonly affected cropped hair as a sign of their disapproval of vanity, and fools (both natural and artificial) also had their hair shorn short, Malvolio's metamorphosis may be intended to make a visual identification of Puritan with Fool. Such visual dysfunction reinforces the revellers' determination to represent Malvolio as mad. (80)

Maria's assignment of roles and costumes, ironically, and much like Viola's desire, brings a sense of instability before realizing the stability she so desires. As the roles of the fool and Malvolio are reversed, Maria makes a point about the steward's own foolishness: he is as mad as the lot he condemns.

Maria's desire for stability, thus, works in the direction of exposing Malvolio's hypocrisy. Although he may sustain a discourse of uptight order, his ambition and erotic greed make him a figure of instability inside Olivia's household, much like anti-theatrical Puritans could be seen by those involved in play-matters.

Malvolio's consequential purge, even if not plainly professed as one of Maria's aims, works in favour of her desire for stability. Following Shakespeare's comic structure, Maria's desire is that which enables the purge of the *pharmakos*[61] — a needed step to the transformation of the comic society into a healthy one — and, alongside Viola's desire, the realization of the comic ending.

Act 5, scene 1: presence in absence

Maria's expulsion of Malvolio does not happen before her own disappearance from the play. After her short exchange with Toby right after the dark room scene in act 4, Maria is only referred to by other characters as her actions still reverberate on the stage. The irony of the perfect society often established by the end of a comedy is that it leaves no room for those who may disturb it. Maria's act of revenge, regardless of it being just or not, poses a threat to a desired society that aims to integrate characters and reestablish order.

Yet, Maria's disappearance from the final celebratory scene follows her pattern of not taking part in any form of merriment, with the sole exception being the steward's exorcism in the third act. Even as she scripts Malvolio's gulling, she is never present throughout the development of these scenes, leaving the debauchery to Sir Toby and his companions. As a "masterless" female servant, Maria opposes most of the social expectations described by Mertes, Dowd, Mendelson and Crawford throughout this work: far from being the ultimate source of disruption in the household, Maria is the one who actively does something to mediate and, considering Malvolio's threat to order, to purge this disruption. Her not

[61] "Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy" (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 165).

participating on the merriness of a number of moments throughout the play refers us back to Maria being the most level-headed of the minor characters, but also to the possibility that, as an unmarried female servant, her job is always on the line.

As Malvolio returns to the stage demanding compensation for the crimes committed against him, however, we hear from Fabian a different version of what has occurred:

> FABIAN. In hope it shall not,
> Most freely I confess, myself and Toby
> Set this device against Malvolio here,
> Upon some stubborn and uncourteous parts
> We had conceived against him. Maria writ
> The letter at Sir Toby's great importance,
> In recompense whereof he hath married her. (5.1.381-387)

When the guilt over the gulling is transferred to both Fabian, who has already lost favor with Olivia, and Toby, who is her kinsman, Maria is shielded from any possible reprimand directed at her as Olivia's lady-in-waiting. While this protects her position as a servant, for Madelaine, who suggests that Maria's role is of an apprentice to a Clown, it occurs "possibly to prevent the apprentice from upstaging the master" (81), thus leaving the glory of retaliating Malvolio to Feste, who is reprimanded for his folly at the beginning of the play.

One more information that we learn from Fabian's speech is that Sir Toby has just married Maria as a recompense for her service: 'Maria writ / The letter at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her"

(5.1.385-387). Marrying Olivia's kinsman solves one of Maria's problems regarding her instability in the household: now, as a married woman, she does not face the logic of being a "masterless woman" who would need guidance from an external source. Her social ascension is a bit muddled as we have no access to Sir Toby's actual standing in society, but it does represent some kind of social mobility — something that Malvolio explicitly covets. That, however, only holds true if one can believe what Fabian has just relayed. As Kristian Smidt notes in his analysis of the unconformities in *Twelfth Night*, it is not "possible to see when there could have been the slightest interval for such a marriage" (74), and considering that Fabian is already covering for Maria, such information could be just another layer of protection added upon the chambermaid's reputation. Both Fabian and Toby have already lost Olivia's favour, so transferring the blame to them would lessen the impact of the news.

Maria's disappearance follows Lacan's writings on the (im)possibility of ever fulfilling one's desire: when getting closer to the satisfaction of her lack, Maria leaves the stage, so we never actually see her achieve that stability she pursues throughout the play. Marrying Toby and purging Malvolio do move her desire closer to her grasp, but as the end of the first scene of the fourth act suggests, Olivia's favor toward her kinsman is shaken when she screams at him: "Will it be ever thus? Ungracious wretch, / Fit for the mountains and the barbarous caves, / Where manners ne'er were preached! Out of my / sight!—" (4.1.48-51). Toby himself confirms that possibility, when, in the following scene, he explains to Maria: "I am now so far in / offense with my niece that I cannot pursue with / any safety this sport the upshot" (4.2.72-74). In the end, Maria's desire is the one thing that allows for the ritual of expulsion of the *pharmakos* and the restitution of order

through a sacrifice, but it is also what makes it impossible for her, and her newly-acquired husband, to take part in the celebration of this new society.

Going back to the triangulation of a desire in which Malvolio is the model (M) and Maria is the subject (S), the violence ensued between both of them is a consequence of their own closing distance to the object (O). For Girard, the only way to subdue violence originated from the mimetic desire is through the "scapegoat mechanism". Michael Kirwan explains this structure as a process of selecting one person, the scapegoat, and concentrating all violence and responsibility for the ensued violence upon this subject: "In the scapegoat mechanism, everything negative is loaded upon the victim" (85). This victim, then, is sacrificed, much like a *pharmakos*, in order to quench the thirst for violence of those involved in the process.

For Girard, this process may imbue the victim with positive qualities, as this person's sacrifice allows for reconciliation within the community. *In Twelfth Night*, however, Malvolio's fatal flaw is dangerous enough for him to be allowed to be fully integrated into that new society that is born. The violence ensued among the steward, Maria, and the unruly characters is never completely quelled, even as Malvolio undergoes the process of purging. Malvolio's last lines make the promise of violence resurface, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.401), and leave an open wound that bleeds upon the festive mood that crowns the comic ending of *Twelfth Night*.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

She sat like Patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

(*Twelfth Night*, 2.4.125-127)

Amid her discussion with Orsino about the differences between men's and women's expressions of love, Viola's simile in the epigraph above introduces a metaphor of stillness that is placed in contraposition to the duke's insistence on a love that acts as an all-devouring sea. By comparing her alleged sister with "Patience on a monument", Viola references the famous Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593) that introduces Patience (*Patienza*) as a virtue symbolized by a woman sitting on a stone and carrying a yoke over her shoulders. Through her speech, Elam Keir suggests, Viola reinterprets that symbol as a sign of "heroic self-denial" (*Introduction* 34) that, while covertly exposing her own conundrum, does not quite match the active instance she takes since the beginning of the play.

Superficially, the desire female characters pursue in *Twelfth Night*, as I discuss in chapters two, three and four, may point toward an impression of stillness: balance, maintenance and stability — keywords to Viola's, Olivia's and Maria's respective desire —, which evoke a string of mental references that could indicate one's absolute refusal of movement. Under the constraints of the Shakespearean comic genre, however, these three keywords are re-signified to propel their corresponding desiring character to assess the impossibility of

fulfilment without an active attitude of moving and demanding movement of those around them.

Rather than a monument set in stone, Viola is brimming with life as she brings chaos and, consequently, movement to Illyria. Her desire for balance, in all of its contradictory nature, not only sets the plot in motion but it also structures and guides the play towards its ideal closure. Her presence in Orsino's court changes the dynamic of the duke's courtship of Olivia and breaks his state of resignation after being granted entry to the countess's household. Her presence prompts not only Olivia to move out of her confinement, but also Andrew Aguecheek, who is led to believe that Cesario is a rival that should be opposed. Sebastian, too, is only able to marry Olivia by the end of the play because Viola previously sets the stage for the countess's proposal through her enactment of Cesario. Even if believing herself to be a victim of some kind of stilling self-denial, Viola is not one to be devoured by the silence of inertia, and her open declaration of her love for Orsino while still disguised as Cesario (5.1.138-142) is proof of that.

The same can be said about both Olivia and Maria. Olivia, as previously discussed, sits at the center of the intricate web of relationships that tie *Twelfth Night* together. Orsino, Andrew, Toby, Malvolio, Maria, Sebastian and even Viola have their course of action tied to Olivia's decision to either marry or remain single, to either submit to the expectations the early modern society might have for her or to carve her own path in order to maintain the autonomy she enjoys as a noble orphaned single woman. In Olivia's case, the transgressive nature of her desire destabilizes the society around her to the point that characters and plot alike are forced to be put into motion. Olivia as well is not one to expect greatness to be thrusted upon her: from the moment she leaves reclusion and unveils her face, the

duchess is active in her pursuit of Cesario, continuously developing ploys and pressing her object to succumb to her desire.

Maria, following suit, is the one character that never leaves the constraints of the house but still navigates with precision when having to deal with Malvolio. Her desire for stability sets the stage for the expulsion of the *pharmakos* and, alongside Viola's desire, allows the structure of Shakespeare's comic play to come to fruition by the end of *Twelfth Night*. Her desire ignites Malvolio's dormant movements toward the courting of Olivia and offers up an opportunity for Feste, Toby and Fabian to carry out their will for vengeance against the steward. Prior to Maria's proposal, these three characters harmed by Malvolio's actions do not put any kind of revenge into practice.

Accordingly, the active stance these three female characters demonstrate would better fit Orsino's description of an all-devouring sea instead of Viola's suggestion of Patience on a monument. Male characters, in *Twelfth Night*, rather display a sort of acquiescing passivity when faced with the consequences of Viola's, Olivia's or Maria's pursuit of their desire; repeatedly needing to be prompted before taking any sort of action. Orsino himself is the classic example of a lethargic lover that sings empty promises without much action. His introductory scene, for instance, is filled with metaphors of stillness: rather than going after the satisfaction of his appetite, Orsino clamors for its nauseating repletion, hoping that it would die (1.1.2-3). In the same scene, the duke affirms that his desires (1.1.23) are the ones doing the pursuit, placing himself in the role of the victim being pursued. Moreover, by the end of the play Orsino manifests not once, but twice, the intent to kill other characters, but, just like his promise of marriage, none of those ever come to fruition for the duration of *Twelfth Night*.

Orsino's placidity comes from his narcissistic nature. If we were to draw the triangulation of the performance of his desire[62] under Girard's terms, we would probably find both the position of Model (M) and of Object (O) occupied by Orsino's projected self-sufficiency. Malvolio's triangulation, although less narcissistic in its nature, could probably work with his version as "Count Malvolio" also occupying either the mediator or the object vertex. In both instances, these characters' desire seem to direct us to a kind of closed circuit that is not seen among female characters in this play.

All male characters considered, the one that most often seems to escape the logic of stillness is Sir Toby. Even if, like Orsino, Olivia's kinsman may lead a self-indulging style of life, Toby, from his very first scene, rejects any possibility of being held down:

> MARIA. Ay, but you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order.
>
> SIR TOBY. 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! (1.3.8-13)

[62] I call it "performance" when referring to the triangulation of Orsino's narcissistic desire because, for Girard, the idea of "such autonomous 'self-love' – absolute self-sufficiency, metaphysical plenitude – is implausible, standing largely as the ideal state of being, immortalized by the endless tributes paid to it by romanticism. Girard explains 'narcissism' as another configuration of the mimetic relation; the narcissist realizes that desire attracts desire and that in order to be desired [one] must demonstrate self-desire. Thus, narcissists' purported self-sufficiency – their aura of indifference – is a projection, a strategy, effected in order that they be coveted (sexually or otherwise) by others" (Fleming 37-38). Thus, rather than being a triangulation of his desire, what is being discussed is the triangulation of the projected desire of a narcissist under Girard's considerations.

Still, his desire for a life of excessive joys and the consequences it brings to the characters of *Twelfth Night* do not exert the same kind of pressure Viola's, Olivia's and Maria's desire exert when considering the progression of the plot. Toby's schemes go as far as controlling Andrew and helping set the stage for Olivia and Sebastian's first encounter, but, aside from that, his hedonistic nature is more related to his opposition to Malvolio being a sort of Puritan and against other people's joy than to the general motion of the plot.

Even Sebastian's perfunctory agreement to Olivia's marriage proposal seems to reinforce Mihoko Suzuki's suggestion discussed in the introduction of this thesis: men, in *Twelfth Night,* "either are frustrated – in the cases of Malvolio and Orsino (courting Olivia) – or acquiesce to the role of object of female desire – in the cases of Sebastian, Toby, and Orsino (marrying Viola)" (157). Despite not being mentioned, Antonio is a character that, albeit a tad isolated from the central conflicts of the play, does profess a desire that involves the logic of movement: "I could not stay behind you. My desire, / More sharp than filèd steel, did spur me forth" (3.3.4-5). His actions and expressions, however, are mostly self-contained within his interactions with Sebastian. All in all, female characters either lead or provoke most of the action in this comedy, fueled by a desire that finds some kind of resistance within their gendered society, but, nevertheless, sets them and Illyria in motion.

These final remarks conclude the general objective of this research, which is to evaluate the ways through which female desire, in *Twelfth Night*, sets plot and characters alike in motion. The close reading employed throughout the last three chapters support the claim that it is the pursuit of desire carried out by female characters that weave most of the narrative of this comedy, giving it both structure

— when thinking about Viola's and Maria's role — as well as groundwork — when considering Olivia's central role in the narrative.

Throughout this thesis I have taken advantage of Jacques Lacan's and René Girard's theories of desire to find a common denominator that would guide my reading of *Twelfth Night*'s female character's desire. Besides the convergence of Lacan's psychoanalytic studies and Girard's philosophical anthropology, the historical investigation of England's early modern society and their gendered practices strongly supported my approach to Shakespeare's Viola, Olivia and Maria. These different fields contributed, each in their own way, to a literary analysis that hoped to multiply even further the meanings possible to be found in Shakespeare's works. The discussions carried out in this thesis have by no means exhausted the investigation of desire in *Twelfth Night*, thus, my sincerest wish is that, going further, this play may receive even more attention, especially with regard to the expression of female characters in shaping the dramatic structure of Shakespeare's comedies.

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