Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY
Advancing knowledge & the arts

George Washington University

The Minor Characters in Twelfth Night
Author(s): Dennis R. Preston
Source: *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring, 1970), pp. 167-176
Published by: Folger Shakespeare Library in association with George Washington University
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2868828
Accessed: 20-05-2015 14:05 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Folger Shakespeare Library and George Washington University are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Shakespeare Quarterly*.

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The Minor Characters in *Twelfth Night*

DENNIS R. PRESTON

IT is pretty well agreed upon that no matter what the central plot of *Twelfth Night* may be the total effect is musical, or, to make that flat analogy more descriptive, the characters of *Twelfth Night,* as disparate in function as the different instruments of an orchestra are, play in concert: Sir Toby's bass notes crash in on the lyric qualities established in the first two scenes of the play, only to be answered by Viola and Orsino, the soloists of those scenes, who "play" a duet in scene four. So the arrangement goes; never reaching symphonic heights until the denouement, but developing and introducing aspects of plot and character in short concerti which build to the final total chorus of voices. There are soloists in each scene in the sense that instruments of an orchestra are featured in concerto, but there are few truly *soli* passages.

The major characters—Orsino, Viola, Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste, Olivia, Malvolio, and Sebastian—could not, by their interweaving of parts, maintain the pace which prevents any character from becoming a Hamlet or Macbeth. If the major figures attempted to accomplish this liveliness without assistance, the dramatic action would be thoroughly confused. The dramatic purpose is served, in keeping with the total musical effect of the play, and the confusion of the Italian *novella* avoided by the careful use of minor characters.

Unlike Shakespeare's other Italian romance comedies, where the minor characters make up a second or third plot which injects the play with native humor, *Twelfth Night* already has an Elizabethan plot involving major characters. The importance of the minor figures, then, does not rest in a single section of the play, nor do those characters act together as an example of a class or type. *Twelfth Night* demands, rather, a number of minor figures, coming from all of society and occurring throughout the play. Some of them fulfill such obvious functions as bringing a letter, performing a service, or announcing an arrival. Others, however, build contrasts, stand in for major players, further the action, or contribute a distinct character. None, even of the members of the first mentioned group, is left without sensible dramatic motivation.

I believe that a careful survey of the minor players of *Twelfth Night* can display how three common errors in the performance, reading, and criticism of lesser figures in Shakespearian drama may be avoided. The easiest way to deal with minor figures is to indicate their social standing. For many this method seems to be the final word in character analysis; however, a list of social "do's" and "don't's" coupled with a social rank supplies only a necessary and handy framework for further investigation. The character has yet the dramatic justification of his presence and his lines. More important, especially

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

as a minor figure, he must be related to the structure, themes, action, and major characters of the play.

The other two faults are especially dramatic ones, though the first often asserts itself in reading as well. Minor characters are likely to be skipped over. In reading, their lines seem often to be mere transitional devices, hardly the words of real people. In performance, their presentation is often so flat that they conflict disastrously with the flesh-and-blood reality of the major players. The opposite of the fault is especially disastrous in performance, however. Often a minor player supplies a faulty motivation for his part or conceives of his part as being more important to the development of the plot than it really is. Therefore, in a play which, when performed well or read carefully, moves so quickly as *Twelfth Night* does and relies so obviously on small parts for a good deal of its chief effect, the minor figures must be given rather exacting interpretation. The reason for and explanation of their being should provide a rather detailed basis for the construction of their characters.

It is not necessary to prepare a set of director's notes to sketch in such a background of character. Characterization is not a question here, though, at times, it is necessary to indicate a particular rendering of a line, especially if the line is capable of diverse and conflicting deliveries. What can be made, however, is an indication of the role, in the broadest sense of that word, each figure is to play in the drama.

It is perhaps most difficult to deal with the really small members of the cast, for they usually take care of an immediate structural necessity and then disappear or remain silent. Whatever part of the action is moved by their message or appearance only reacts to a purely mechanical convenience, for what they have to say or do is more a total dependence on the demands of the action or a major character than a willful extension of their own reality.

This distinction between minor figures whose character is completely revealed by the immediate dramatic purpose and those whose character is further revealed in the outcome of some action or in their extended relation to other characters may be seen between the two officers who arrest Antonio in Act III.

The First Officer, evidently the superior, is not, as it might seem at first, only an identifier of Antonio and a bystander to the process of arrest:

> *1st Off.* This is the man. Do thy office.
> *2nd Off.* Antonio, I arrest thee at the suit
> Of Count Orsino.
> *Ant.* You do mistake me, sir.
> *1st Off.* No, sir, no jot. I know your favor well,
> Though now you have no sea cap on your head.
> Take him away. He knows I know him well. (III. iv. 359-365)[1]

Although, as he later explains to Orsino, the First Officer has fought against Antonio, this functionary now, perhaps due to times of peace or his advancing age, is a municipal officer in Illyria: "What's that to us? The time goes by—away!" And though it is the Second Officer's official duty to perform the actual arrest, the First, probably more familiar with military swiftness of

[1] *Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by G. B. Harrison (New York, 1952), p. 871.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

procedure, is the one who finally demands Antonio's cooperation: "The man grows mad. Away with him! Come, come, sir."

Here, and later, when the First Officer tells Orsino of Antonio's crime against Illyria, the dramatic action depends upon and demands a specific individual with knowledge of specific details and events.

The Second Officer, no more than a type, meets only the dramatic necessity of number in handling the rough Antinio.[2] His concern is purely official: "Antonio, I arrest thee at the suit of Count Orsino." Without the First Officer this policeman might prove a poor adversary to the daring seaman. The officers are not, however, guards of Dogberry quality. In spite of Orsino's love-sickness, he has kept an efficient state.

Other characters who suffer the minute demands of dramatic or linguistic necessity are Curio, the Priest, and the Messenger. Curio, however, requires more than the Second Officer, even though the Duke's servant seems to serve the dramatic action less than the policeman does. Indeed, his presence seems purely linguistic; he is a "straight man" to Orsino's pun on "hart". But even though Curio's line seems only to fill this need in the dialogue and supply a transition between Orsino's two speeches, it must be given some dramatic quality or motivation. The Second Officer had a job to do and an obvious motivation. Curio is in a less revealing position; his line, nevertheless, must partake of the same real qualities that the Second Officer's does.

Two possibilities are apparent; perhaps both are there. Aside from providing Orsino with a character to feed him his cue, Shakespeare probably intended Curio's "Will you go hunt, my Lord?" to contrast humorously with Orsino's rhapsodic speech. However, this stylistic purpose cannot be extended to the character. If the pun on "hart" is first Curio's, then he must be allowed an unlikely license with his Duke's serious thoughts. Only a jester (witness Feste's "catechizing" of Olivia) could dare make fun of such emotions in the nobility, and there is nothing in Curio's name, lines, or behavior to indicate that he is the court fool. If he filled such a position, he certainly missed a professional opportunity to make a disparaging remark about Feste, whom he fetches to sing for the Duke.

It is most likely that Curio is a serving man to the Count, older than Valentine, perhaps a follower of Orsino's father. Since Curio is aware that Orsino is more in love with love than he is with Olivia, he suggests the traditional Elizabethan cure for love-melancholia—hunting.[3]

In spite of the fact that more can be said of Curio than of the Second Officer, the Count's man is really no more than a verbal functionary, and his character, even when infused with dramatic motivation, is no more than a broadly defined type.

Of Valentine, Curio's social counterpart, more can be said. His report to Orsino, though consisting of information he got from Olivia's handmaid, is not framed in language he heard from Maria:

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

[2] John W. Draper, *The Twelfth Night of Shakespeare's Audience* (Stanford, 1950), p. 167.
[3] Draper, p. 165.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

> Shall not behold her face at ample view;
> But, like a cloistress, she will veiled 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. (I. i. 24-32)

In name and in speech Valentine seems well-suited to the task Orsino has set for him. Unlike Curio, whose character is formulated best by a reference to Elizabethan medical theory, Valentine is best understood in reference to the larger context of the play. He is called upon, as many minor Shakespearian figures are, to explain the first turn of the action: the love Orsino has described in the first lines of the play must go unrequited. Curio, on the other hand, speaks his lines before any plot has developed; his sole obligation is to Orsino's character. Valentine too contributes to the Count's character, but the contribution is by comparison rather than contrast. The love messenger continues the mood of Orsino's first two speeches. Like the Count's love, Olivia's rejection of it, as Valentine chooses to phrase it, is lengthy and descriptive. Furthermore, Valentine's speech, unlike Curio's brief cue, is one of the four poetic units which make up the first scene.

Curio's later lines, delivered when he is sent to summon Feste, tell nothing further about his character. Draper would say, however, that Valentine's gossipy remarks to Viola at the beginning of scene four are significant:

> *Val.* If the Duke continue these favors toward you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.
> *Vio.* 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?
> *Val.* No, believe me.
>
> (I. iv. 1-8)

> Thus Viola takes over Valentine's thankless post. The older servingman is luckily not jealous, and kindly tells "Cesario" that she is like to be "much advanc'd," that Orsino is by nature constant in his favors; and with these felicitations, he seems to drop out of the play as if his task as unsuccessful intermediary had quite exhausted him. His magnanimity to Viola, without apparent motive, makes him seem a bit too good for this wicked world, for very few of us rejoice to be supplanted by others more successful.[4]

The problem here is that the lines quoted above and by Draper occur at the very beginning of scene four, and nothing has passed to indicate that Viola or anyone else has been chosen to supplant Valentine. By line thirteen the audience knows that Orsino has spoken to Viola of his love for Olivia: "I have unclasped / To thee the book even of my secret soul." But the Count's first speech of the scene was, "Stand you awhile aloof." His words to Viola are private, and when, in line fifteen, he instructs Viola to go to Olivia, there is no reason to assume that this commission had been arranged earlier. The line Draper uses to substantiate the contrast between Viola and Valentine does not occur until half the scene is played out: "She will attend it better in thy youth / Than in a nuncio's of more grave aspect."

[4] Draper, p. 165.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Rather than being magnanimous, as Draper would have it, Valentine is only indulging in court talk with Viola. She misunderstands his remark, and, uncertain of her new position, questions Valentine about the constancy of the Count's affections. Viola probably observes in Valentine, as she did in the Captain who brought her to Illyria, a "fair behavior" and thus permits herself to ask the serving man a frank question about his master. Aside from this confidence that Valentine must have inspired in Viola, there is little in this repartee to define his character further.

The minor figures of Olivia's household, except for Fabian, are even less significant than the Duke's serving men. The servant who tells Olivia in Act III that "the young gentleman of the Count Orsino's is returned" is simply a stand-in for Malvolio who is parading on stage with his yellow stockings and ambition. He, as steward, would ordinarily bring such news, as he did at Viola's first arrival. If he were otherwise involved, Maria would serve in that capacity, as she does twice earlier. In this scene, since Malvolio and Maria are both on stage, another servant must be inserted for the announcement.

The Priest who marries Olivia and Sebastian has a little treatise on marriage to deliver when he is asked about Cesario. Perhaps H. B. Charlton is right when he asserts that the main problem in Elizabethan comedy is the fusion of comedy and romance.[5] Shakespeare has on stage an Italian delight: A woman disguised as a man is accused of courting her master's lady; the master is about to inflict a harsh punishment on the mistaken deceiver; she, all the while, loves the misguided master; the lady reveals that a marriage has already taken place; a formidable sea-pirate, whose case has been set aside, is, by association, kept on stage as a reminder of the real husband. Yet into this excellent comedy of romance Shakespeare chooses to insert a fatuous Priest whose lines could not have been taken seriously:

> A contract of eternal bond of love,
> Confirmed by mutual joindure of your hands,
> Attested by the holy close of lips,
> Strengthened by the interchangement of your rings.
> And all the ceremony of this compact
> Sealed in my function, by my testimony.
> Since when, my watch hath told me, toward my grave
> I have traveled but two hours. (V. i. 159-166)

If the outline of the marriage ceremony does not make the Priest a marked man for a laugh, his notion of reckoning time will.

It is surely a mistake, though, to suggest that the Priest is comic relief for the potentially dangerous situation on stage, for romantic comedy thrives on such situations. The comic irony of differing levels of awareness, misunderstandings, and mistaken identities is the real basis of the romantic comedy. The Priest is an Elizabethan fault. Even in *Twelfth Night,* Shakespeare's greatest achievement in romance comedy, the dramatist did not pass by the chance to introduce one more genre figure. Instead of relying completely on the comic realization of the romantic plot, Shakespeare chose to add to an already complete situation. This is probably one of the few instances in Shakespeare where obtrusive lines should be delivered as unobtrusively as possible.

[5] H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearean Comedy* (London, 1938), p. 23.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Two of the more important minor figures of the play have similar functions. The first duty of the two seamen, Antonio and the Captain who serves Viola, is to show by their attitudes and actions what attractive and likeable young people Viola and Sebastian are.

Viola's friend is agreeable at every turn. He gives Viola hope for Sebastian's safety, describes the situation in Illyria, and agrees to help Viola in her plan to serve the Count. Beyond this agreeableness, however, the Captain's character is something of a puzzle. It is difficult to draw the broad social boundaries necessary for a beginning. While Valentine's speeches show that he is on a plane of sophistication near the Duke's, the Captain's halting, overly-parenthetical speeches contrast sharply with Viola's flowing lines. However, his lines are set in poetic form, and, even though he admits that "what the great ones do the less will prattle of", he is well-informed about the situation in the Illyrian court. It is unlikely that he would knowingly classify himself a prattler. In spite of his halting lines, the Captain, instead of indulging in hearty sea-talk, alludes to court affairs and classical learning.

That he is not an ordinary seaman can be seen further in his gentle pun of Viola's "perchance", his attractive manner, and his ability to introduce Viola into the Illyrian court. Though M. St. Clare Byrne shows that accessibility to the great was unrealistically easy in Shakespeare's plays,[6] it is difficult to believe that Viola's friend is merely a mechant seaman. Perhaps he, like the First Officer, is a former defender of Illyria and has gained the respect and admiration of the Count through service in war. His readiness to take a "fearfull oath", familiarity with the ways of the sea, and courtly manner all indicate that he might have spent earlier years in the Count's military.

The second seafarer, Antonio, is the most completely developed minor character, though the honor of most useful must be reserved for Fabian. Although Antonio introduces Sebastian and helps reveal his likeable qualities in the same way the Captain does for Viola in Act I, the rough pirate does not disappear from the action. Perhaps there is some question about his identity, but it need not be so involved as Draper would have it. By narrowly interpreting "breach of the waves", from whence Antonio saved Sebastian, to mean "shore", Draper assumes that Antonio has a house by the seaside, was not a pirate or a seaman (since the boarding party onto the *Tiger* would probably have been led by a soldier), and entrusts too much friendship and money to Sebastian to be the "Notable Pyrate" he is called in Shakespeare's text.[7]

"Breach of the waves" is just as likely a reference to the break between the crests of the waves on the open sea. It is as well unlikely that Antonio, had he been a soldier serving a rival state, would choose not to reimburse Orsino had the government so demanded. He is most likely the commander of a privateer, where, as leader of a group of men necessarily fighters and sailors, he would have led the party that boarded the *Tiger*. The First Officer indicates that Antonio is a man of the sea: "I know your favor well, / Though now you wear no sea cap on your head." Orsino later explicitly states what Antonio's profession is: "A bawbling vessel he was captain of."

[6] M. St. Clare Byrne, "The Social Background", in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies,* ed. by H. Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison (Garden City, New York, 1960), pp. 196-200.

[7] Draper, 158.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In Antonio's original motivation Shakespeare probably commits one error to gain several advantages. Sebastian directs his course to Orsino's court purely by chance. If a strong friendship had developed between the two men and Antonio sincerely wished to accompany Sebastian, the young man could surely have been persuaded to wander to less dangerous ground. That possibility is, of course, not open to the play, so Shakespeare must formulate Sebastian's hasty farewell and Antonio's decision to follow within the framework of strong friendship, hoping that that theme will dominate and Sebastian's illogical direction will pass unnoticed. Shakespeare uses this weakly motivated passage, however, to strengthen the two most important aspects of Antonio's character—daring and devotion:

> I have many enemies in Orsino's Court,
> Else would I very shortly see thee there.
> But, come what may, I do adore thee so
> That danger shall seem sport, and I will go. (II. i. 45-49)

Further corroboration for the likelihood of Antonio's seamanship and devotion comes from the highly suggestive parallel with Viola's Captain of Act I. Both are fatherly, though neither attempts to persuade his young charge to a different course of action. But, unlike the Captain's, Antonio's language is full of references to the sea: He has come far to find Sebastian, but his love "might have drawn one to a longer voyage"; Illyria, like the sea, may prove "rough and unhospitable to a stranger"; Antonio is in danger in Illyria because he has done service "in a sea fight, 'gainst the Count his galleys"; Sebastian, when pulled "from the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth", was, like a ship in peril, "a wreck past hope". Thus in language alone Antonio does more than help define Sebastian's character.

This paradoxically gruff and doting seaman adds a distinct character to the already overflowing lists of *Twelfth Night.* He views the action from a completely different point of view, providing two excellent scenes of comic irony with Viola. In some sense he knows much less about the immediate situation than do the regular inhabitants of Illyria. On the other hand, his presence in the play is an added note of realistic awareness. At least his confusion involves Sebastian, a real person. All of Illyria, however, has been undermined by the Count's new favorite, "Cesario".[8] Antonio brings with him, as well, a note of honesty which imperils his life. All have lied in one way or another; even Viola's Captain is a partner to her disguise, but Antonio is unwilling to assume a mask in a world of pretenders.[9]

His presence on stage, especially in the last act, substitutes for the absent Sebastian and indicates the probable outcome of the confusion. At the same time his rough character announces the disorder of the final scene.[10] In other words, Antonio usurps the world of *Twelfth Night* as he has usurped the Count's peace. Although his faith in Sebastian has been shattered, his truthfulness and courage make him a suitable symbol for the strength of the time which will undo the knot Viola has found too difficult to untie.

The man of all work in *Twelfth Night* is Fabian. Although his very

[8] Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford, 1960), p. 137.

[9] Joseph H. Summers, "The Masks of *Twelfth Night*", *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism,* ed. Leonard F. Dean (New York, 1957), p. 131.

[10] John R. Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (London, 1957), p. 179.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

presence in the play is questioned, since Maria tells Sir Toby and Sir Andrew to "let the fool make a third", Fabian becomes essential, performing services Feste could not. Fabian is probably the second son of a country gentleman, and, having no place in the inheritance, he seeks his fortune in service. His language is particularly rich in allusions to the country, though occasionally his wit sparkles with a new-learned reference to travel, money, or theater.

Only Hugh Hunt has called Fabian's identity into question. He suggests that the clever servant may be a second fool, younger than Feste and much more circumspect.[11] Hunt says that the actor who played Feste may have enjoyed too many liberties behind Malvolio's back during the letter scene, forcing the actor who did Malvolio to request a less ebullient background for his scene. Indeed, that segment of Feste's character which, especially in song, might be called melancholy would be given added significance if the old fool were about to be replaced by a youthful counterpart.[12]

Like Curio, however, there is nothing in Fabian's name or manner or speech to indicate that he is a professional jester. Sir Toby would not address a fool as "Signior Fabian"; Feste would not call a professional inferior "Master Fabian". It is much safer to assume that Fabian is a well-born servant of the type rendered completely useless in the overstaffed Elizabethan household. His affinity for good times has attracted him to Sir Toby, and the roaring knight no doubt looks on Fabian as a particular favorite. Although Fabian shows he is quick to pun by picking up many cues from Malvolio in the letter scene, he only once indulges in the counter-logical type of argument Feste is so fond of. He "proves" to Sir Andrew that Olivia's favors to Cesario in the orchard were directed subtly at the tall knight. Even this, however, seems more like Sir Toby's proof that to be up late is to go to bed early than Feste's involved syllogisms.

Fabian enters the action of the play just in time to relieve the major players of their burden of contrapuntal effect. Only four scenes after the last major player has contributed his introduction to the speed of the play, Fabian appears. As if expecting disappointment or consternation at the absence of Feste, Shakespeare supplies an immediate motivation for Fabian's part in the device against Malvolio: "You know he brought me out o' favor with my lady about a bear-baiting here."

In the scene which follows Fabian restrains Sir Toby and Sir Andrew from giving away the plot and shows himself to be the quickest wit of the three. His role becomes increasingly important, however, when he is seen not only as an accomplice in the plot against Malvolio, but also as a confidante of Sir Toby's in the constant gulling of Sir Andrew. In the fourth scene of Act III Fabian supplies the necessary addition which prevents a simple two-part banter between Belch and Aguecheek. He moves the foolish knight as surely as Sir Toby does, and, since soliloquy is at a minimum in *Twelfth Night,* he allows Sir Toby to tell of his friendship for Sir Andrew: "I have been dear to him, lad, some two thousand strong or so."

In that scene Fabian is in and out, silent and witty as the action demands. He plays a minor role in the encounter with Malvolio but becomes a witty

[11] Hugh Hunt, *Old Vic Prefaces* (London, 1954), p. 77.
[12] Hunt, p. 78.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

commentator when Sir Toby reads Aguecheek's challenge. In the duel he plays an even more important role, performing the service of "arrangement", a privilege Feste could not have aspired to.[13] Except for the final moments of the play, Fabian is most essential in this scene. He frightens Viola with reports of Sir Andrew's skill and ferocity, warns Sir Toby of the approaching officers, and becomes silent as other minor figures help distribute the action.

Fabian disappears when Feste enters into the trick against Malvolio. Perhaps the Fool was afraid earlier to be outrightly involved in the plot but now enters into the fun when his anonymity as a tormentor seems likely. This almost obvious substitution seems to further validate the necessity for a character of Fabian's social standing in such sequences as the duel. This is hardly necessary, however, if only Feste is to be considered as a major counterpart to Fabian, for Fabian relieves the necessity for constant reappearance and cross play of the entire range of major figures who infest Olivia's household.

When Fabian returns he is in hot pursuit of Feste, who is carrying Malvolio's letter. In Act V Fabian must become a real part of the background. The stage directions indicate that he is before Olivia's house while Feste jokes with the Count, Antonio is heard, Cesario is accused, the Priest verifies the marriage, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew enter from their disastrous duel. All the while he must remain, like Antonio, an unobtrusive observer. He has wisely avoided the conflict with Sebastian, but he and Feste lead the wounded revellers off. Fabian returns with Feste (after Sebastian has entered and ended the chief masquerade of the play) in time to be present for the unfolding of Malvolio's plight. He reads the letter which Feste refuses to read except, allowing Vox, as a "madmans epistle", and goes off to fetch the imprisoned steward. It is indeed Fabian who knows more about the Malvolio plot than any other person on stage at the end of the drama. Although Feste is happy to disclose himself as Sir Topas, Fabian must tell his mistress the history of Malvolio's downfall. He takes away from any serious tone Malvolio might inject with his "revenge" by explaining that the foolery "may rather pluck on laughter than revenge." Though Orsino is to repeat his taking of Viola ("But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress and his fancy's Queen"), Fabian discloses the last important turn of action in the play: "Maria writ / The letter at Sir Toby's great importance, / In recompense whereof he hath married her."

Each of *Twelfth Night's* minor figures has been carefully employed for rather specific reasons, but the major effects of this conglomeration of individuals are speed and economy. The major characters have not been left alone to indulge in tiring repartee, but the play has never been crowded with unnecessary groups of hangers-on. The play has never been invaded meaninglessly as *Romeo and Juliet* is by the musicians, nor has it been left bare at any time.

Especially noticeable is the fact that the minor characters at the first of the play—the Captain, Curio, and Valentine—perform specific chores and, since the introduction of the major characters is performing the contrapuntal function, disappear or remain unheard. The speed in the first part of the play is almost entirely dependent on the introduction of the long list of major figures

[13] Draper, p. 163.

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

which is finally complete at the beginning of Act II. After that, except for the very specific jobs done by the Priest and the Messenger, two more important minor players—Antonio and Fabian—serve as reappearing aids in the pace of the drama. Their significantly different points of view and degrees of awareness produce involvements in the irony, structure, and information of the play.

Even though Antonio and Fabian play more significant parts both as characters and contributors to the action, all the minor figures perform essential services, all the speaking parts can be dramatically justified. Although at times some minor characters fall below the expected Shakespearian mark of characterization or consistency, all contribute vitally to the contrapuntal weaving of people, events, and ideas that is the basis of *Twelfth Night*.

The Ohio State University

This content downloaded from 128.228.173.48 on Wed, 20 May 2015 14:05:10 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions