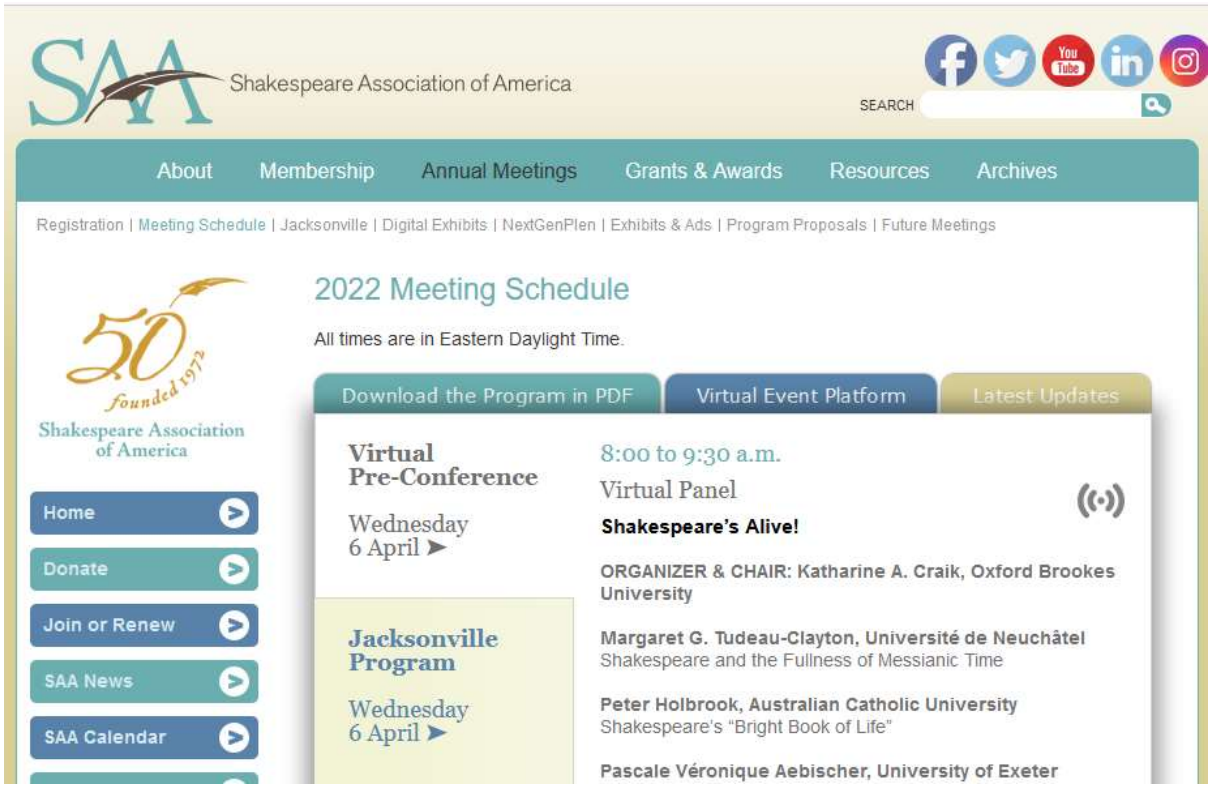

Virtual Seminar

***Twelfth Night,* Part One**

LEADER: Emma Smith, Hertford College, University of Oxford

Twelfth Night has been a key text for understanding Shakespeare's "bittersweet," "cross-dressing" and "festive" comedy: these critical cliches need rebooting. This seminar invites work on the play that engages with new approaches: performance and theatre history; gender, queer, and trans studies; historical investigations of social rank and status; editing and book history; and critical race studies and the occluded orientalism of its Illyrian setting.

– Nicholas Bellinson, St. John's College, Annapolis
– Michael Benitez, University of Southern California
– Kyle Louise DiRoberto, University of Arizona
– Loreen L. Giese, Ohio University
– Katherine Hennessey, Wenzhou-Kean University
– Mark Houlahan, University of Waikato
– Catherine S. Lisak, Université Bordeaux Montaigne

– Margaret Ann Maurer, Colgate University
– Holly C. Pickett, Washington and Lee University
– Jade Elizabeth Standing, Corpus Christi Colle

Abstract (published on website) https://shakespeareassociation.org/annual-meetings/2022-schedule/

Mark Houlahan '*For what saies Quinapalus?'*
John Manningham, the first person to report a performance of *Twelfth Night* (Feb 2, 1602), also began the discussion of the play's sources. Scholars since then have linked the play to a network of sixteenth century plays and prose fictions in Italian, French and Latin. How much of these Shakespeare had read, seen or heard tell of we cannot say.
This paper traces some (potential) threads from these sources, in particular those underpinning the flight of the twins and their arrival in Illyria. In several sources the disasters of war have dispersed the family. The play chooses not to directly represent this but the violence of war (by land and sea) erupts at key points in the action. When Viola and Sebastian finally meet in Act V they experience a combination of grief, trauma and relief. Two refugees finally arriving, alive, at a safe haven, is the emotional centre of the play; though in live performance and other adaptations this is often downplayed.

Paper:

Mark Houlahan

Abstract: TN Seminar 1 (SAA 2022)

Seminar Leader: Prof. Emma Smith.

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SAA 2022 TN Seminar 1 (Prof. Emma Smith)

"For what saies Quinapalus?" (*TN* TLN 329; I.v.36)[1]

"...[W] hat saies Quinapalus [?]", asks the Clown known as Feste, before answering the question rhetorically, or tautologically, "Better a witty foole than a foolish wit" (TLN 329-30; I.v.36). You can put the quote inside " ", as *The Riverside Shakespeare* does, but no amount of sleuthing, digital or physical, will find you a source for this sage outside the 1623 text of *Twelfth Night*, for the Clown has invented, it seems, this neo-Latin authority, showing a deftness throughout in manipulating simulations of learning with the misusing of genuine, unfake authorities (such as Pythagoras). Shakespeare either made these jokes for Robert Armin, who first played the Clown; or Armin, himself a playwright and author as well as performer, concocted them and they were then inserted into the playscript some time in the two decades between the first recorded performance of the play in 1601 and the publication of the Folio. In a recent chapter on the play (Houlahan 2018) I have suggested these kinds of non-sourceable sources are used by the play as a kind of defensive screen, undermining the notion of source itself, and allowing the play to pursue its own purposes, by indirections finding direction out. Here I will follow up another form of elusiveness the play trafficks in, tracing implications from some of the sources Shakespeare may (or may not) have accessed directly. For most of these direct Shakespeare access is not quite proveable. Even so, story ideas and tropes from these can be seen placing pressure on the playtext we have, though the pathway from these extant sources and *Twelfth Night* can seem nebulous at times.

Geoffrey Bullough's 1958 assemblage, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* remains a useful place to begin with sources, as he both narrates the likely influence of various sources and anthologises whole texts or crucial excerpts; and Melissa Walter in her 2019 monograph *The Italian Novella and Shakespeare's Comic Heroines* provides a contemporary re-summation of these issues. Commentary from Bullough to Walter agrees that one source Shakespeare had directly to hand was a copy of "Apollonius and Silla" , (most likely with him while he was drafting the play), a tale retold in Barnabe Riche's story collection, *Riches Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581). A spirited young woman pursues a Duke, entering his service disguised as her brother. He/she is then sent to woo a wealthy woman on the Duke's behalf. The woman falls in love with with she/him. Her brother arrives in the story, and the wealthy woman sleeps with him and becomes pregnant. Once the complications are clarified, a heterosexual quartet is apparently formed, and a new dynasty can begin.

As Bullough shows, Riche did not invent this story but reworked elements from a series of European stage plays and prose fictions (he lists eight prior to Riche). The first of these is *Gl'Ingannati*,

[1] As a provocation to myself I've been using the F1 text, cited by TLN. For convenience of other readers I will also cite from *the Riverside Shakespeare.*

performed in Siena in 1532. There are two further Italian plays, Secchi's *Gl'Inganni* (1562), Gonzaga's *Gl'Inganni* (1592), as well as French and Spanish versions of *Gl'Ingannati* (1543 and 1567); and a Latin comedy, *Laelia*, staged in Cambridge in 1595. In prose fiction the core story can be found in Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* (tale 36 in Part 2), and as the 59th story in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques.* It is much easier to pile up these sources than to assert which of them Shakespeare specifically accessed. He used Bandello and Belleforest for other plays, so might have read their versions. He could have been in Cambridge to see *Laelia*, or knew somebody who was present. John Manningham who saw *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple Hall, February 2, 1602, noted the similarity of the play to *Gl'Inganni* ("most like and neere to that in Italian", he puts it (48)); perhaps Shakespeare thought so too, when he thought of reworking the twin plots from his own *Comedy of Errors* by splitting the genders. Resolutely pinning down a source by itself does not seem a profitable way to proceed, as we should be mindful of Britton and Walter's caution that…

> Drama, an oral art and embodied practice that leaves some textual traces, is "transmitted by other than merely textual means," raising questions of evidence and creating uncertainty and thus space for interpretation. (5)

For a performer who became a writer (like Shakespeare), trace memories of sources could take many forms, of things read or heard, a story told in a tavern, perhaps watching a show in a language he did not speak fluently. From here I will take the "space for interpretation" Britton and Walter gesture towards, and think about the potential meanings the story field, across these possible sources, creates for us. What might then result, as Stephen Guy Bray puts it, "is a kind of dialogue between each play and its source, or sources" (149).[2]

In Shakespeare's play that dialogue begins in the second scene of the play, where we first meet the unnamed Viola[3], and hear of the shipwreck from which she has been rescued by the sea captain and which has separated her from her twin brother, presumed drowned. This scene is held so crucial that many productions stage it first, or *Tempest*-like, stage the shipwreck (as it seems all tv or film versions do). Yet the playtext offers no direct answer to the question as to where they are sailing from or to. What is the point of their voyage?

The Bullough sources summarised above anchor us with a more specific answer than Shakespeare's play does. In *Gl'Ingannati* Virginio has fled Rome with his daughter Lelia and his son Fabrizio after the 1527 sack of Rome when the troops of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, invaded the city, and the Pope, Clement VI, fled also. Five years later, the year the play was performed, Lelia is in a convent in Modena and her father is negotiating to marry her, while his son is wandering elsewhere in Italy. In 1527 Fabrizio and Lelia were thirteen, the same age as Viola and Sebastian when their father died. Though Shakespeare does not reveal their age at the time of *Twelfth Night*, if we take the cue from *Gl'Ingannati*, and assume they are eighteen, that would be a very plausible age for their characters coming into late adolescent sexual maturity, when their androgynous male/female charms

[2] In context, he is describing links between *Pericles, Dido, Queen of Carthage* and their sources.

[3] Her name is not heard till she announces it at the climax of Act 5, though for readers F1 offers versions of Vio. or Viol. throughout as speech prefix.

would be evident. Three other versions of the story, in Bandello, Belleforest and *Laelia* repeat this context, with a family driven apart by the sack of Rome.

Shakespeare invents new (yet Italianate names) for his romance plot characters and shipwrecks them on the Adriatic, on the coast of Illyria; and on the surface this seems like the generic action of fate rather than a time-specific instance. Illyria's coast though is rich in cultural memories which could be readily accessed in late 16th century England, remembering its links to cross-dressing and to piracy, as well as to famous historic naval battles, such as the battle of Le Panto (1571) or the battle of Actium (BC 31), fulcrum of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, most likely written four to five years after *Twelfth Night*.

Though it is possible to imagine a comedy plot unfolding at a quite specific moment in "real" time, inserting imagined characters into empirically known circumstances, that is not Shakespeare's disposition. He had already set three comedies in Renaissance Italy, but here he transposes the action to the sea-coast nearby. The events in *Apollonius and Silla* take place across the eastern Mediterranean, from Cyprus to Constantinople when it was still in Christian control. The play chooses not to remember that time and place, no more than it does the sack of Rome. But it does frequently embed its characters in a martial context and, in accordance with the decision to float the story out to sea, frames the memory of naval battles at the climax of the action. As the boy page Cesario, for example, Viola is sent as a "Nuntio" (TLN278; I.iv. 28) to Olivia's household, like an ambassador in time of war treating with a foreign power:

> I bring no ouerture of warre, no taxation of homage; I hold the Olyffe in my hand: my words are as full of peace as matter. (TLN 502-4; I.v..207-10)

Just prior to this exchange, Viola jousts in naval terms with Maria. When invited to "hoyst sail" and leave the house, Viola fends off: "No good swabber, I am to hull here a little longer" (TLN 496-497; I.v.202-204). At the beginning of this scene Maria remembers aphorisms from "the warrs" (TLN 307; I.v.12). The peace-loving Sir Andrew is goaded into his duel by being invited to draft his challenge in a "martial hand" (TLN 1421; III.ii. 42). Somewhere in Illyria (as in the streets of *Romeo and Juliet's* Verona) a brawl is never far away.

The most professional of these brawlers is Antonio, Sebastian's friend and rescuer; he has won renown and in Illyria, notoriety for his skill in naval conflict. "I haue many enemies in Orsino's court" (TLN 651; 2.1.45) he explains to the audience when we first meet him. When we next meet him he clarifies for us and for Sebastian that "Once in a sea-fight 'gainst the Count his galleys,/I did some seruice" (TLN 1494-5; III.iii. 26-27). In reply, Sebastian shows a callow kind of blood-lust: "belike you slew a great number of his people" (TLN 1497; III.ii.29). The scale of Antonio's presumed offence against the forces of Count Orsino becomes clearer first when he is arrested in Act 4 and then when harangued by Orsino in Act 5. The details are strikingly realised. Orsino has last seen Antonio on board ship as "blacke as Vulcan, in the smoake of warre" (TLN 2204; V.i. 53), from, presumably the cannon fire that would attend close ship to ship encounter. Antonio, it is alleged, seized one of Orsino's ships, the *Phoenix*, hence Orsino's assertion that Antonio is a "Notable Pyrate" and "salt-water theefe" (TLN 2220; V.i. 69). In this action, we are told, Orsino's young nephew Titus lost his leg. Though the link is not directly made the placement of this detail allows us to imagine that Antonio was directly responsible for this injury. From the sack of Rome (with characters fleeing overland to the north of Italy), Shakespeare takes the story to sea. These gripping details of a fight at sea are moments when we can see the fortunes of war erupt, against which, to triumph, the characters must strive.

For yet, if encounters at sea bring the disasters of shipwreck and naval conflict (or piracy) it might also be, as Viola hopes at the end of Act III, that "Tempests are kinde, and salt waues fresh in loue." (TLN 1905; III.iv. 384). "Proue true imagination, oh proue true", Viola hopes beyond hope, "That I deere brother, be nowe tane for you." (TLN 1896-97; III.iv. 375-376). When Sebastian enters in Act V, Viola, along with most of Illyria gathered for the final scene, is offered ocular proof of this truth. By this phase of his career Shakezpeare had become skilled at orchestrating emotionally satisfying yet wildly improbable discoveries and reunions. As prelude to Viola and Sebastian we hear the responses for the three maturer people, obsessively in love with the twins, proceeding from the Duke through Antonio to Olivia. For these three their pleasure is, potentially, doubled in a moment.

For Sebastian and Viola, however the consequences are deeper, though you seldom see this played out fully in performance. They work through their similarities, and check off their genealogy. That Sebastian their father had a mole on his brow is a detail glossed over often, or played for laughs. But lacking genetic or blood type biodata, the information is crucial. With this in hand, both can be assured that their (presumed drowned) now stands on the shore alive. Here there is a potential extra emotional impetus if we carry over from the field of sources the idea of children not just wandering the seas of fortune, but in flight, seeking refuge from war zones. In our terms, Viola and Sebastian could easily be refugees, asylum seekers. Tim Supple's 2003 tv film of the play visualises such a context for us. We see Orsino (Chiwetel Ejiofor) wallowing in love sickness. A pianist plays a grand piano on a terrace; a soprano sings of grief. The first scene is intercut with Viola and Sebastian's backstory. Somewhere in the subcontinent of India we see a mother arrested in the dead of night. Her children Viola (Parminder Nagra) and Sebastian (Ronny Jhutti) are well dressed children of privilege: she is in a sari and he in an elegant cream summer suit. He pays with cash to board a refugee ship. We then see Viola arrive, alone, on a much smaller fishing boat, at what is clearly a misty grey small English seaport. Her brother, it seems, has not survived the voyage. This prologue sequence then provides a non-textual context underpinning the desperation of Viola and Sebastian's comic manoeuvres and the grief trauma they can release when they realise they both are still alive.

How much of this war-soaked context Shakespeare wanted us to frame in the play is an open question, of course. But these trace elements very well might be in play. For as the clown Touchstone put it in the comedy written just before *Twelfth Night*: "Your If is the only peacemaker; much virtue in if." (*AYLI* V. iv.103-104).

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