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Antonio's Lament

"Mightily Abused" in *Twelfth Night*

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Abstract - The play *Twelfth Night* depicts the fluid nature of sexuality, although it ends with the standard trope undergirding romantic comedy: inevitable heterosexual unions. Additionally, *Twelfth Night* upsets stereotypical constructions of masculinity and sexual desire by provocatively introducing

Antonio (a heroic sea captain) who saves Sebastian (a beautiful young man) from watery destruction; moreover, they form a homoerotic domestic partnership that lasts three blissful months—a substantial timeline in Shakespearean comedy. The ongoing critical conversations on this topic are limited to a discussion of bisexuality (Pequigney), a consideration of the implications of homoerotic partnership (Thomas), and an observation of the inherent cruelty in the comic situation (Adelman). My critical intervention highlights the fact that Shakespeare scholars tend to focus on the homosocial pairs of Viola/Olivia and Cesario/Orsino rather than scrutinizing the function of Antonio and Sebastian's passionate partnership within the context of romantic comedy. Therefore, this essay shall offer three strains of analysis to help alleviate this aforementioned critical deficit. First, it posits that Antonio's downward spiral (due to his refusal to pursue traditionally-sanctioned matrimony) is in line with tragedy rather than comedy. Next, this essay theorizes that Sebastian's Roderigo alter-ego, which he adopts to engage intimately with Antonio, profoundly fractures his sexual psyche. Finally, it offers an elastic rendering of the play's end in which Sebastian reconciles with his Roderigo persona and invites Antonio to join his marriage, all with Olivia's approval, merging homoerotic passion and heteronormative inevitability into a flexible middle sphere.

I. Antonio's Lament: "Mightily Abused" in *Twelfth Night*

William Shakespeare's romantic comedies, including *Twelfth Night* (subtitled *What You Will*), follow a conventional formula: boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, they undergo some trial or period of separation in which some kind of antagonistic force (nature, society, family, etc.) tests the limits of

their love; however, comic conventions also dictate that, by the end of the play, the boy and girl reunite, reconcile, and either are betrothed or married. Regarding *Twelfth Night*, Camille Slights posits that the move from personal frustration and social disorder to individual fulfillment and social harmony (drawing on what Leo Salingar identifies as the traditional comic combination of beneficent fortune and human intrigue) likens *Twelfth Night* to other Shakespearean romantic comedies (537). Moreover, Lisa Marciano argues that the dark aspects of *Twelfth Night*, which permeate so many of William Shakespeare's comedies, precludes the play from appearing light (3). Marciano offers, "Shakespeare's comic characters repeatedly come face to face with mortality, learn that one must, therefore, live well, and teach others wisdom accordingly" (3). She suggests that not only are a brush with death and exhorting others to live well staples of Shakespeare's comedies, but *Twelfth Night* abounds with scenarios in which characters who are aware of mortality attempt to bring others to reform through means of this knowledge (3). Through the comic lens of *Twelfth Night*, Marciano alleges that a dark didacticism, an urgent sense that life must be lived well because it is ephemeral, undergirds Shakespeare's plays. Yet even within this context of tragic circumstances happening alongside love and marriage, *Twelfth Night* presents a situation that is unusual in comedies—the dissolution of a relationship that seems otherwise loving in order to attain the standard happy ending.

The story dictated sabotage of the union between Antonio and Sebastian, while expected, nevertheless creates an unsatisfying resolution. Within comedy as a genre, the audience expects homosocial pairs to transition into heterosexual couples, yet I contend that the contrived breakup of Antonio and Sebastian approaches unwarranted cruelty; Sebastian inexplicably jettisons his loving partnership with Antonio, grounded in fidelity and loyalty, to enter a conventional paradigm with Olivia, which conversely derives from convenience and bribery. By evincing that Antonio and Sebastian begin *Twelfth Night* as domestic partners, I do not superimpose a modern-day or

anachronistic connotation on the play. The text explicitly relates that once Antonio rescues Sebastian from the fateful shipwreck, they adhere for three uninterrupted months at each other's side. Furthermore, the glaring lack of a promise from Sebastian to recompense Antonio with gold for his valor equivalent to the bargain Viola strikes with her heroic captain connotes that the love Antonio harbors toward Sebastian exceeds a commercial enterprise. In truth, Sebastian spends as much time with Antonio as Viola shares with Orsino (the object of her affection), with the exception that Antonio and Sebastian's future together is unceremoniously interrupted and does not extend beyond the play's finale. While Antonio's commitment to Sebastian exudes an unwavering loyalty, Sebastian fails to reciprocate likewise at the end of the play when Antonio needs Sebastian's immediate intervention to abate Count Orsino's wrath and thwart Antonio's impending incarceration. Thus, the melancholy denouement of Antonio's abandoned domestic partnership with Sebastian warrants deeper analysis because no other pair (male/male, male/female, or female/female) in the play embody a singularly devoted bond. I posit that denying Antonio a happy resolution and thereby simultaneously withdrawing a counter presentation of a traditional love story, the play explicitly recommends that if a man fails to advance from homosocial pair into heterosexual marriage, such a man is not reconcilable and should be subject to punishment and imprisonment.

I propose that the romantic relationship between Antonio and Sebastian if examined from their inception right up to the moment of Sebastian's decision to renounce his Roderigo guise and search out his presumed dead sister diverges from the conventional comedic construction of a heteronormative couple navigating toward an inevitable happy ending. For the broader purposes of Shakespearean and gender/queer studies by extension, I assert that an autopsy of Antonio and Sebastian's abandoned romance reveals that a rarely achieved happy ending involving two sexually viable males is initially presented and then almost immediately becomes undone and deconstructed throughout the play albeit with pervasive references to the strength and ostensible constancy of their original love pairing. Consequently, although *Twelfth Night* is a romantic comedy, it nevertheless borrows the darker overtones of tragedy. I assert that Antonio is the only truly heroic character, the dashing Romantic Savior as it were, who ends the play worse off than his circumstances when the play commences.

This arbitrary character assassination reorients the standard trajectory of romantic comedy as a literary genre, but also lends itself to ripe analysis of a heroic male character who resists a romantic existence beyond a homoerotic pairing. Additionally, this essay unpacks the heretofore largely unexplored Roderigo dual-identity Sebastian adopts, which I allege grants him freedom to conduct a sexual liaison with another man. However, when dissected independent of his Roderigo persona, Sebastian's relationship with Antonio resembles exploitation rather than reciprocation and suggests that Sebastian is merely a spurious romantic hero. Operating like a subtle opportunist, he deftly uses his tempting face and figure to manipulate spellbound Antonio. For descriptive purposes to connote character designations, I dub Sebastian the Sexual Chameleon who ultimately exudes stunning passivity throughout his intimate liaisons, but traverses a bisexual gray scale with arguable ease and occasional ambivalence. Lastly, expanding on the scholarship of previous critics, I interject an alternative conclusion for *Twelfth Night* utilizing queer elements inherent in the play, which subverts fossilized romantic comedy tropes by enabling Antonio to enjoy a romantic threesome sanctioned by Olivia and initiated by Sebastian. The overall import of such an ending melds the concepts of passionate homoerotic attachment introduced earlier in the play and heterosexual inevitability demanded by normative constructs into a middle sphere where both can exist successfully in future broader conceived productions. Ideally, the intervention I initiate in this paper prompts other Shakespearean critics to invoke a queer inquiry of *Twelfth Night* that encompasses the diversity of Antonio's relationship with Sebastian compared to other Romantic Savors that advances from rescue to domestic bliss to being pulled asunder by various contrived plot devices. Also, I invite further scholarship that attempts to address the provocative reason besides survival that Sebastian chooses an alternate persona as Sexual Chameleon to engage with Antonio as his domestic partner when concealment of his true identity considering Antonio's unconditional allegiance to him seems unwarranted during his three month residency.

II. Antonio's Loss: "That most ungrateful boy"

The moment Antonio and Sebastian appear in *Twelfth Night*, their dialogue evokes the private intimacy of lovers. The palpable homoeroticism emanating from Sebastian's exchange with Antonio (in act 2, scene 1) contrasts sharply with the life and death

circumstances in which the audience meets Sebastian's twin sister, Viola. She does not mention love (in act 1 scene 2), but vacillates between imagining her brother at peace in "Elysium" (3) and the faint hope that "Perchance he is not drowned" (4). In stark relief, given the intimate nature of their discourse, it is appropriate to envision Antonio and Sebastian limbs intertwined, conversing softly on an exquisite bed, luxuriating unclad in the afterglow of sensuality. Such a possibility matters in the presentation of Antonio's and Sebastian's relationship because their intercourse telegraphs that

Antonio feels more than platonic camaraderie for Sebastian. Antonio implores: "Will you stay no longer, nor will you that I go with you?" (2.1.1.)

The tone and timbre of Antonio's tentative inquiry telegraphs approaching interruption to their domestic bliss. The implication of impending separation threatens to disturb that which Antonio cherishes with Sebastian. This unanticipated contingency takes Antonio aback, as if it never occurred to him that Sebastian would return from whence he came or that he would seek an existence beyond Antonio's companionship. After all, at this point in the play, they live as domestic partners. The question ominously foreshadows that Antonio fears his life without Sebastian will be unbearable. At this juncture, the loyalty Antonio exhibits to his lover surpasses the allegiance Viola elicits from the courageous captain who plucks her from a watery oblivion. Alas, Sebastian's reply obliterates Antonio's hope. He responds: "By your patience, no. My stars shine darkly over me, the malignancy of my fate perhaps distemper yours. Therefore, I shall crave of you your leave that I may bear my evils alone. It were a bad recompense for your love to lay any of them on you" (2.1.3-8). In contrast to his lover, Sebastian contemplates the disaster that befell him and realizes that staying with Antonio subjects his benefactor to whatever perilous fate stalks him. On the surface, Sebastian's decision surpasses noble because he fears that his proximity to Antonio increases the chance of his misfortune infecting Antonio. Thus, proceeding without Antonio becomes the best way for Sebastian to repay Antonio's love. Remarkably, Sebastian fails to justify how his absence benefits Antonio. Since Antonio materialized fatefully as his Romantic Savior to rescue him from the shipwreck Sebastian's current circumstances contradict his flimsy assertion that he carries catastrophe that may eventually afflict Antonio. Quite the contrary, Antonio exemplifies his good fortune and his vehement objection to Sebastian's departure indicates

that separation from his beloved dooms him far more than the Sexual Chameleon's imaginary prognostications.

Cosmetically, Sebastian's desire to spare Antonio from the destructive force that pursues him resembles altruism, but upon closer inspection, Sebastian's decision to abandon Antonio also exposes selfish motivations. Subsequent to his rescue, Sebastian claims inescapable "dark stars" shadow his future. Yet, when Antonio presses him for details about his destination, Sebastian reveals only his intention to wander aimlessly; glaringly, such an explanation belies the truth. Sebastian eventually confesses that he plans to journey to Count Orsino's court (where, unbeknownst to Sebastian, his sister has already arrived disguised as the eunuch Cesario and fallen in love with Orsino). During the three months Sebastian abides with Antonio, he must notice Antonio's blatant ardor and devotion. Indeed, later in the play, Antonio proclaims as much to Orsino after confusing Viola/Cesario for Sebastian:

That most ungrateful boy there by your side
From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth
Did I redeem. A wreck past hope he was
His life I gave him and did thereto add
My love, without retention or restraint
All his in dedication. For his sake
Did I expose myself – pure for his love
Into the danger of this adverse town. (5.1.73-80)

Antonio's lamentation broadcasts his depthless constancy; speaking in terms of redemption and purity of love, Antonio represents a messianic figure to Sebastian. Although *Twelfth Night* is a romantic comedy, nothing about Antonio intervening as Sebastian's savior elicits humor; moreover, Antonio feels punished for the deeds he performed for Sebastian's benefit. In fact, George T. Wright observes that Shakespeare includes "two main strands of language: a verse language whose form marks it as significant or as carrying significant content; and a 'prose' language that, for the most part, is the common currency of colloquial exchange" (163). However, as Wright qualifies, "Shakespeare found it inconvenient or deforming to make too many changes as the characters move into or out of The Significant. A kind of aura of significance surrounds the verse passages and in a sense, mythologizes even the parts that are mere ordinary colloquial give-and-take" (163). In other words, when Antonio delivers Sebastian from certain death, the destructive power of the baptizing sea, he resurrects Sebastian spiritually and physically. Employing

verse, the language of lovers and heroes, Antonio solemnly refutes Orsino's incendiary accusation that he is a rapacious swashbuckler. Rather, Antonio illuminates himself as a sympathetic hero who jeopardizes his own life to accompany this cursed young man safely to Illyria, where Orsino now relishes the opportunity to castigate him as a criminal for speculative transgressions.

The dashing Romantic Savior commits no crime against love that earns his unsatisfying resolution: to the contrary, notorious abuse and great loneliness befall him because of his attachment to the bewitching Sexual Chameleon. When he confronts Antonio, who bested him in a contest of wills on the tumultuous sea, Orsino excoriates him: "Notable pirate, thou salt-water thief / What foolish boldness brought thee to their mercies...?" (5.1.65-66). Even before Antonio eloquently acquits himself: "Be pleased that I shake off these names you gave me. Antonio never yet was thief or pirate" (5.1.69-70) with his regal rejection of the count's spurious allegations, Antonio's actions heretofore show him to be more noble, honorable, and a far gentler soul than Orsino's bitter portrayal permits. Despite all that dashing Antonio risks for love, love (or, more aptly, Sebastian's gross ingratitude) leaves Antonio spurned, bereft, and vulnerable to Orsino's unreliable witness testimony and his seething retribution.

Sebastian betrays Antonio once he succumbs to Olivia, a wealthy heiress in Illyria, who purchases him (more or less) for marriage with promises of lifelong care and luxury. Olivia paints her pursuit of Cesario and Sebastian (who she mistakes for Cesario) in terms of economic exchange, asking Maria, "How shall I feast him? What bestow on him? / For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd" (3.4.2-3). As Joseph Pequigney productively notes, "This observation clearly has retrospective reference to the purse, indicating that it is given with the ulterior motive of pleasing if not purchasing the desired youth" (204). When Pequigney compares Olivia's scheme to seduce Cesario through a gift "to the purse," he refers to the purse Antonio has earlier given Sebastian: "A kind and generous gesture, to be sure, but the intent behind it is less simple than the reply suggests" (204). Sebastian spurns Antonio's abundant affection although he embraces his financial largesse with barely token reluctance. Perceptively, Olivia surmises that dazzling jewels attract the companionship of ambitious young men. Sebastian's

awed reception of the object Olivia bestows upon him betrays his avarice more than aroused sexual attraction for her as his potential lover: "This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't / And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus / Yet 'tis not madness. Where's Antonio, then?" (4.3.2-4). The effect of Olivia's pearl on Sebastian supersedes any lukewarm fondness he might otherwise manifest for Antonio. If Sebastian feels genuine love for Antonio, he conceals it adroitly; although Sebastian invokes Antonio as he tries to discern the appropriate course of action: "His counsel now might do me golden service" (4.3.8). Ironically, Sebastian never sought Antonio's golden counsel before he decides to travel to Illyria and he does not utter Antonio's name in Olivia's presence, where such an invocation might indicate affection for his benefactor, and Sebastian does not confer with Antonio before accepting Olivia's proposal. As Pequigney alleges, Antonio's purse attaches Sebastian to Antonio, which elucidates Sebastian's zeal to marry Olivia with no previous courtship or familiarity. Possessing no prior alluded to professional money-making acumen or mastered skills, the Sexual Chameleon cannot survive without benefit of a smitten patron. Their gender matters little to him contrasted against their ability to provide his comfort.

Sebastian's rash betrothal to Olivia mocks his previous concerns about alleged "dark stars" hovering over him and unveils the young man as an opportunist who exhibits scant love for his Romantic Savior beyond tepid gratitude. Earlier, Sebastian highlights his propensity for deception by only revealing his true name after he fails to dissuade Antonio from accompanying him to Illyria. Conversely, his sister, Viola, adopts her Cesario persona as a safety precaution to conceal her gender status, an unchaperoned young woman, in a potentially aggressive environment. Moreover, Sebastian dons his own alter-ego (Roderigo) because his new surroundings might spark physical intimacy with Antonio, which he hides under cover of his surreptitious identity. As Pequigney notes: "When initially about to depart, Sebastian makes the curious admission that as a companion to Antonio that he had always gone by another name, calling himself Roderigo. Why he should do so goes unexplained...The alias may be...a means to hide his identity, his true name and family connections, during a drawn-out sexual liaison with a stranger in strange lands" (205). Pequigney concludes that Sebastian's charade facilitates his sexual adventure in his new location—and lends credence to the

premise that Antonio and Roderigo are closer than mere friends. I concur with Pequigney's summation and I further allege that Sebastian's Roderigo facade emphasizes his pathological compulsion to deceive Antonio. I rigorously maintain that no plausible motive exists for the Sexual Chameleon to deceive his Romantic Savior for three months after observing that Antonio put Sebastian's welfare before even his own safety. If Antonio did not prove his intrinsic worthiness of Sebastian's confidence by saving him from calamity and granting him sanctuary, no deeper form of emotional connection seems conceivable. Perhaps Sebastian's bizarre behavior and mysterious motivations rest firmly upon the fact that he is mentally incapable of enjoying physical intimacy with Antonio as his namesake's scion. Immediately, Sebastian may have sensed his Romantic Savior's unbridled desire for him and decides in gratitude that he cannot remit Antonio's sexual love without the buffer of a psychological mask. Maybe the Sexual Chameleon journeys to find his dead sister because the mask began to crack or he realizes his sexual identity demands fluidity.

III. Sebastian's Fractured Psyche: "Both Maid and Man"

Once removed from certain death, Sebastian and Viola each cope with the loss of the other by conjuring an alternate persona, one which subsequently becomes a love object for a potential romantic partner in each's new life. In this, they are not mere twins, but become quadruplets. Her brother's absence allows female Viola to reinvent herself as male Cesario, a boy who loves Orsino, functioning as his right hand but also with the soul of a woman. Cesario camouflages Viola's gender and maintains an illusion of her deceased brother as she lives two existences. She partially obscures her femininity as Cesario, but processes the new environment and experiences love as Viola. Sebastian's resurrection from a saltwater grave by his Romantic Savior creates a marginal circumstance for him to invent his Roderigo identity, the Sexual Chameleon. Paradoxically, Sebastian's motivation for constructing the Roderigo alias remains nebulous if I remove the catalyst of sexual attraction. He performs for three months as Antonio's domestic partner. Sebastian perpetrates his own male twin; the brother he never had. According to Antonio's narrative while in Orsino's custody, nary a sliver of sunlight or moonlight came between them as

Roderigo clung to his side: "Today, my lord, and for three months before/ No interim, not a minute's vacancy / Both day and night did we keep company" (5.1.90-92). I extrapolate that proximity arouses Roderigo's passions and he indulges in Antonio's freely offered tenderness as Sebastian's newborn twin brother. Resurrection from near death awakens erotic possibilities in his new surroundings. Anonymity guarantees secrecy for his sexual exploits.

Unlike Viola in her Cesario guise, however, I contend that clothes do not play a primary role in Sebastian's transformation to Sexual Chameleon. Viola, in a sense, becomes her own brother, as she recalls during her street brawl with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew: "In favour was my brother, and he went / Still in this fashion, colour, ornament / For him I imitate (3.4.378-380). Viola refashions herself into the image of her brother, and she recalls him each time she witnesses her own reflection. Relatedly, although Malvolio cannot identify him, Feste brags of his own deception: "Nay, I am for all waters" (4.2.62). Thus, both Viola and Feste use garb to perpetrate their masquerade. Maria even scolds Feste that his fraud warrants no accoutrement since his victim cannot see him: "Thou mightest have done this without thy beard / and gown he sees thee not" (4.2.63-64). Just as Feste has no necessity to conceal himself from the clueless Malvolio, Sebastian's ruse also serves no purpose, except to slip furtively inside a new sexual skin. When Antonio snatches him from the raging sea following the shipwreck, Sebastian's garments (and the form underneath) confirm him as male. Certainly Antonio's heroism was not predicated upon a belief that Sebastian is female (in the same way that motivated the Sea Captain to fish Viola from the sea).

Since his adoption of the Roderigo persona does not obscure his gender or elevate his social status, as Viola's and Feste's respective disguises do, Sebastian's alternate identity supplies a way to reciprocate the intense love Antonio professes for him. Late in the play, Sebastian's Roderigo-persona reappears after Antonio witnesses Sebastian side by side with Cesario and cannot resolve which half of Sebastian loves him: "How have you made division of yourself? / An apple cleft in two is not more twin / Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?" (5.1.218-220). Perhaps the answer, albeit unsatisfying, is that Sebastian struggles with ambivalence as to whether he loves Antonio. Indeed, maybe his unorthodox, passionate love only expresses itself when

the Roderigo side of Sebastian's identity controls his heart. Thus, Sebastian's Roderigo persona allows a space for him either to meet Antonio's romantic expectations or to suspend his own inhibitions. Apparently, the time Antonio spends with Roderigo happens undercover from anyone who knew him as Sebastian; what precipitates the Sexual Chameleon's prolonged separation from his birthplace? Most of Antonio's relationship with Roderigo transpires offstage and beyond the audience's purview. However, when Sebastian reveals his "true" identity, we witness a recommitment of his Romantic Savior's undiminished devotion. Unlike with the confused Cesario/Orsino/Viola and Viola/Olivia/Cesario permutations, gender discontinuity does not rip Antonio and Sebastian/Roderigo asunder; conversely, Antonio affords Sebastian undeserved credit for unimpeachable honor and integrity. That generous praise turns out to be woefully misplaced. Although sincere Viola reveals her true self except for her maiden's weeds at the play's end, Olivia never learns because her "honest" husband, the Sexual Chameleon, keeps hidden the details of the three months he spent sequestered as his Romantic Savior's youthful companion and domestic partner, Roderigo.

Thus, sexual elasticity between Antonio and Sebastian undergirds a homoerotic frisson that threatens extension beyond the play's final curtain. Antonio, Sebastian, and Olivia, potentially flourish in an elegant *ménage à trois* union that supersedes the conventional homosocial pair or inevitable heteronormative matrimony—the courageous privateer, the beautiful young male damsel, and the rich countess. This new configuration becomes more probable when considering Sebastian's attachment to his Roderigo persona. Sebastian cryptically directs his final words of the play to Olivia: "You would have been contracted to a maid / Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived / You are betrothed both to a maid and man" (5.1.257-259). This may be the closest Sebastian comes to confessing the exact nature of his relationship with Antonio. If he is a maid to Olivia (because he lacks sexual experience with a woman), perhaps he conversely became a man by virtue of his physical relationship with Antonio.

The revelation that a man can love another man romantically as other men love women would not be a foreign disclosure to Olivia. Before Viola divulges her true identity, Olivia asks: "Where goes Cesario?" (5.1.129). Viola, who follows obediently

behind Orsino, answers Olivia's query: "After him I love / More than I do love these eyes, more than my life / More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife" (5.1.130-132). In man's attire, Cesario speaks passionately to Olivia about loving another man more than any woman. While Olivia may be hurt or confused by Cesario's proclamation of love for Orsino, she does not question the validity of the declaration, even though both Cesario and Orsino are ostensibly men. Rather than rebut the veracity of Cesario's love, Olivia accepts that he has discarded her for a man: "Ay me, detested, how am I beguiled!" (5.1.135). Of course, Olivia is not beguiled, as neither Cesario nor Sebastian deliberately deceives her; still, this misunderstanding introduces Olivia to the concept of all-consuming homoerotic attachment, an idea which she acknowledges as unexceptional if not favorably. Moreover, the proposed scenario that Olivia welcomes Roderigo's desire for Antonio offers a clever and witty inverse of the prior scene between Olivia and Cesario. Critics affirm this transgressive possibility. Here, Pequigney alludes to Sebastian's sexual ambiguity in his assessment of Antonio and Sebastian:

Sebastian turns out to be the most extreme exemplar of this recurring theme of bisexuality, for he is not only attracted to, but also able and willing sexually to enjoy, both a man and a woman...who are, and with obvious passion, enamored of him. While he remains heterosexually virginal, he is unlike the virgins Viola and Olivia or Orsino in that he entertains homosexual impulses that are fully conscious. (209-210)

Reading Sebastian expansively, Pequigney suggests that Sebastian enters sexuality via a same-sex relationship and that Sebastian is comfortable with both Antonio and Olivia as intimate partners. However, even with Pequigney's expansive reading of the end of the play as a romantic threesome, Sebastian's sexual fluidity seems motivated largely by financial feasibility; Sebastian behaves like an erotic chameleon, gauging which purse can best secure his desires. Sexuality does not breed character just as sexual compatibility may supersede erotic identity. In Shakespeare's tragic comedy or love's fickle realm, neither of these factors guarantees humane regard. Sebastian's accrual of sexual experience with a man, while remaining a heterosexual virgin, tantalizes the imagination with erotic intrigue, even if, at the play's resolution, his actions do not communicate that Sebastian will maintain his partnership with Antonio (or any

other man). Surely, no financial imperative exists for Sebastian to include Antonio in his economic wind-fall with Olivia.

Sebastian's behavior with both Antonio and Olivia is steeped in an archetypical feminine passivity while his sister employs her gorgeous intellect to devise a brilliant stratagem stereotypically correlated to masculine ingenuity and cunning. The aftermath of her collision with death inspires Viola's bravery and boldness which eschews the performance of damsel in distress as she undertakes the hero's journey through the strength of her spirit. She designs a position for herself in Orsino's court touting exceptional musical talents that she never actually displays. However, Viola/Cesario possesses an oral ability that makes her/him indispensable to Count Orsino. Sebastian, on the other hand, relies naively upon serendipity. He just happens to be miraculously lifted from the sea by a love-struck guardian who intervenes between Sebastian and death and then devotes his emotional and financial resources to him. Then Sebastian blithely stumbles upon heiress Olivia, who instantly craves the pretty youth for her husband and wins him with her dowry. Sebastian never calculates how to survive challenges; the world simply acquiesces to his ostensible childlike innocence coupled with his irresistible magnetism. Sebastian's ethereal pulchritude navigates him through life and he complacently relies upon providence.

IV. Comic Conventions, Tragic Possibilities: "For His Love Dares Yet Do More"

Up until this point in the essay, I stressed the improbability of Antonio, the Romantic Savior, sharing a happy ending with Roderigo, the Sexual Chameleon, in which he receives love as unselfishly extravagant as he relinquishes it by the conclusion of *Twelfth Night*—after all, the play is a romantic comedy, and comic convention dictates that heterosexual couples replace homosocial pairs by the time the final curtain falls. However, beyond the pairs of happy lovers, an inconsolable pall pervades the end of *Twelfth Night*: Malvolio swears he will have revenge, Sir Toby has no choice but to marry Maria, and Antonio stands excluded while Sebastian kisses Olivia—all of which suggest the potential for tragic elements. In his study of Shakespeare as a tragic playwright, Robert Ornstein argues that the number and variety of pattern developments in Shakespeare's tragedies

present an enormous obstacle to broad generalization (259). He insists that a cogent definition of Shakespearean tragedy is not all-inclusive although "all tragic plots are threaded by ironies" (262). Ornstein doubts "whether a template abstracted from Shakespeare's tragedies can encompass the different ways the tragedies speak to us of the mysteriousness of human destiny" (263). Moreover, the study of Shakespeare's tragedies hinge upon appreciating the idiosyncrasy of Shakespeare's creativity and becoming familiar with the various tragedies so that readers are able to use the knowledge of one play to refine an understanding of another (264). Ornstein concludes: "The longer we live with the plays, the more we appreciate the wholeness of Shakespeare's artistic achievement. We recognize that he returns again and again to the moral themes and dramatic situations that interest him...[and] sometimes recognize significant parallels in plays that are very different from one another" (265). That said, Antonio's problematic ending resembles tragedy more than comedy, which further challenges the standard expectations of comedy (and of tragedy.)

Twelfth Night imports tragedy into its comedy and offers Antonio's unsatisfying resolution immediately in the wake of Sebastian's impetuous decision to yoke his future to Olivia. Independent of his callous rejection by Sebastian, Antonio's predicament is extremely troubling. Preceding his reunion with Sebastian, Antonio defends Cesario, who he mistakes for Sebastian, when Sir Toby and Sir Andrew attack the youth: "Put up your sword. If this young gentleman / Have done offence, I take the fault on me / If you offend him, I for him defy you (3.4.307-310). Although Antonio confuses Cesario for Sebastian, his undeniable love not only punctuates the scene, but repels the violence threatening Sebastian's disguised sister. When Sir Toby enquires about Antonio's identity and why he interferes, Antonio answers: "One, sir, that for his love dares yet do more / Than you have heard him brag to you he will" (3.4.311-312). Whether he battles a violent sea or razor-sharp steel, Antonio proves himself irrefutably heroic on multiple occasions. He is a Romantic Savior worthy of a lover who does not throw his depthless attachment back on his face like cheap ale—and deserving of a pardon for any past infractions he committed. Viola testifies to Orsino of Antonio's intercession, announcing: "Here comes the man, sir, that did rescue me" (5.1.46). Certainly, protecting Orsino's beloved Cesario should register favorably

upon the count, but he does not acknowledge Antonio's gallantry even when Viola repeats it. She explains: "He did me kindness, sir, drew on my side..." (5.1.62). Still, Orsino remains unable to fathom Antonio's valorous behavior, and, even at the end of the play, Orsino does not connect the succession of events to deduce that without Antonio shielding Cesario, Viola could not share a future with Orsino.

Antonio's lugubrious quandary originates from loving Sebastian and doing everything possible to secure Sebastian's happiness—even though ultimately, Antonio is ostracized from his former lover's happiness. Towards the very end of the play, Feste, in a mockery of Malvolio's previous hubris, pantomimes: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness / and some have greatness thrust upon them" (5.1.364-365). To paraphrase Feste, Antonio is neither born lonely, nor achieves loneliness from his actions, but has it thrust upon him. The end of the play provides "an image of loss that it can do little to assuage, since at the end Antonio finds Sebastian only to stand silently by, watching him commit himself to Olivia" (89). Antonio's future without a partner who reciprocates wholeheartedly his attachment darkens the play in a manner, I struggle to nonchalantly shrug away. His predicament especially resonates because humanist education avows specific sentiments regarding fairness, equality, and justice. Antonio's love prospect, his champion does not exist. His faithfulness wrought punishment instead of fidelity.

Olivia exclaims "Most Wonderful!" as she appraises the titillating spectacle of her two favorite men (Cesario and Sebastian) side by side, which reinforces the notion that physical/sexual attraction possesses duality (5.1.221). If Olivia can love both Cesario and Sebastian without conflict, it stands to reason that no qualms would circumvent her from loving both Roderigo and Sebastian. By the same token, Sebastian could emulate Olivia and refuse the finality of Antonio being banished from his life. Maybe Roderigo reemerges powerfully when Sebastian exclaims: "Antonio! O my dear Antonio / How have the hours racked and tortured me / Since I have lost thee!" (5.1.214-216). The text does not explicitly authenticate this supposition, but it's easy to envision Sebastian leaping effusively into Antonio's arms. Arguably the visceral outburst Sebastian unleashes upon seeing Antonio again after only a brief separation rivals the discovery of Viola, alive and well, who was absent from him for three months: "Were you a

woman, as the rest goes even / I should my tears let fall upon her cheek / And say, 'thrice welcome, drowned Viola'" (5.1.235-237). The twins' reunion superficially elicits relief from Sebastian, but his unbridled enthusiasm upon seeing Antonio bristles with naked intensity; and at last, an unmistakable impression manifests that Antonio is irreplaceable in Sebastian's life, his loss threatens to haunt Roderigo forever. Of course, this is the conundrum of Roderigo's/Sebastian's fraught relationship with Antonio; it teeters emotionally each moment and totters between breathtaking commitment and unabashed indifference.

Sebastian's reunion with Viola emboldens Antonio to reconsider the role he served for the hapless young beauty. Startled by Viola's visage identical to his own, Sebastian declares: "I never had a brother" (5.1.222). He expresses this sentiment unequivocally in Antonio's presence (who acted as father, uncle, and brother to him). For his part, Antonio presents his case best:

Let me speak a little. This youth that you see
here I snatched one half out of the jaws of death
Relieved him with such sanctity of love
And to his image, which methought did promise
Most venerable worth, did I devotion.
(3.4.356-360)

After Antonio enumerates all the actions he performed to his benefit, what more could Sebastian desire from a brother? Literally and metaphorically, he found a fraternal sibling in Antonio. Casey Charles points out that the dimension of Antonio's role in Sebastian's life defies conventional labels: "What is unusual in this relationship is that Antonio, although of lower social status than Sebastian, is the more powerful and principled figure, a circumstance that places their connection outside the scope of the usual master/servant, teacher/student matrices" (137). Indeed, because Sebastian initially conceals his true identity, Antonio possesses no other recourse than to intuit what Roderigo desires from him and to perform that part. Additionally, Sebastian adopts an alter-ego that attracts Antonio's unrestrained adoration. If Sebastian cajoled Antonio into believing that he is orphaned without family, Antonio gladly substituted himself for the nuclear relations Sebastian lacks.

Because no other viable romantic candidate exists in *Twelfth Night* to provide Antonio the happiness he temporarily enjoyed with Roderigo in Elysium, I adamantly assert that Sebastian represents

Antonio's sole incarnation for homoerotic companionship. This means Roderigo must return to the forefront of Sebastian's sexual psyche and demand a place in his marriage for Antonio. Laurie Osborne concurs with my theory and invokes Pequigney: "He claims 'that in taking a wife Sebastian will not need suffer the 'rack and torture' of losing his male lover [Antonio]' and in a footnote, imagines an appropriate staging for the final scene: If I were to direct the play, I would want Olivia, Sebastian (in the middle), and Antonio to leave the stage together, arm in arm" (108). Pequigney's hypothetical stage direction possesses seductive appeal, but detractors may interject that Shakespeare's intent does not permit romantic threesomes, and that Shakespeare's Elizabethan-era audiences would reject the possibility. Respectfully, such a rejection fails to account for the durability of Shakespeare through four hundred years of shifting cultural mores and social norms.

If Olivia sanctions the prospect of a romantic threesome, she then becomes the catalyst that upends the stark tableau of Antonio as a frustrated eunuch condemned to loneliness and desolation. The incontrovertible truth is that Antonio cannot continue in Sebastian's life unless Olivia embraces Rodrigo's homoeroticism, which thrives matter of factly alongside Sebastian's desire for feminine companionship. This contingency might also hinge upon Osborne's description of an 1810 revision of Antonio's invented pardon by John Philip Kemble: "[Sebastian runs to Antonio, embraces, brings, & presents him to Olivia.]' By including this stage direction, Kemble presents the reunion of Antonio and Sebastian in vivid physical stage action. This dramatic gesture seems fully to support Pequigney's reading of the scene's resolution as involving a complete reunion of the two men" (111). Although Kemble's stage direction unleashes an opportunity for Antonio and Roderigo to recapture their time together in Elysium, it does not ameliorate the preceding scene in which Sebastian greets Viola costumed as Cesario and behaves toward Antonio as if their domestic partnership for three months meant nothing. However, the promise of a passionate display of affection from Sebastian to Antonio resurrects the private intimacies in which they engaged prior to his seduction by Olivia's handsomeness (and luxury).

The precise nature of Sebastian's and Antonio's relationship encourages vigorous speculation because their prolonged physical intimacy transpires

beyond the audience's scrutiny. Roderigo may love Antonio, but feckless Sebastian loves himself more and displays little of his sister's wisdom beyond her years. Charles offers: "Similarly, though critics assume Antonio to be older and more experienced than Sebastian...the play does not make the age difference between the two so discernible that this relationship falls squarely within the man/boy paradigm" (137-138). Charles' observation dovetails with the circumpect reality of the play that divulges meager clues revealing Antonio's maturity or youth. What contributes to the illusion of Antonio being more sophisticated than Sebastian rests on the dichotomy between how Viola and Sebastian react to life after confronting death's cold kiss. Almost immediately, Viola strategizes how to proceed forward and infiltrate a new environment. Her stratagem comes to fruition within three days. Conversely, Sebastian seems sanguine at Antonio's side for several months until Illyrian wanderlust bites him. Remember Viola's cryptic confession to Orsino: "I am all the daughters of my father's home / And all the brothers" (2.4.1120-121)? Paraphrasing Sebastian, Antonio represents many males of the Sexual Chameleon's family—father, brother, uncle, and cousin--during their seclusion together.

IV. Endings (Happy and Otherwise): "Do Not Tempt My Misery"

This essay sows a conversation that may continue fruitfully along fresh paths of inquiry. Further analysis of sexuality in *Twelfth Night* could delve into how Sebastian reverses gender performance as a survival strategy eschewing traditional masculine identifications. A more avant-garde critical reading could juxtapose the twins' roles of objectified males in the play, reconfiguring the comedic terrain of sexuality and gender. The text implies that Viola and Sebastian are practically orphans. It's telling that Sebastian and Viola lack parental supervision because the ill-fated shipwreck allows them to reconnect with paternal symbols and a maternal substitute. Are Antonio and Olivia lovers who stimulate Sebastian's libido or is Antonio the stalwart father who will never leave Sebastian's side and is Olivia the sexy mother who can nurse him at her breast even as she provides him safe haven in her bed? Is Orsino truly the man of Viola's girlish fancy or does he personify a father with whom she can permissibly make love?

Their parents' absence leaves indelible psychic impressions on the twins' sexual proclivities that beg commentary and notation.

Presently, Antonio's unsatisfying resolution at the end of *Twelfth Night* fails to engender mirth as comedy often does. Besides the vague transgression that Orsino and Antonio murkily reference, which collaterally injures Orsino's nephew, Antonio's behavior during the play prohibits that solitude should define his destiny. His aspirational selflessness prevents Sebastian's demise and also abbreviates Viola's mourning of her presumed dead brother. Yet, Antonio's heartbreaking peril derives from his exponential love for Sebastian which receives no gold recompense. To the contrary, he begs Sebastian: "If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant" (2.1.32-33). To his remarkable credit, Antonio utters this earnest plea after learning Sebastian deliberately deceived him for months while shamelessly luxuriating in Antonio's extravagant love without even submitting a cursory explanation or half-hearted apology for his fraud. Viola, on the one hand, remunerates the captain handsomely who saves her: "I pray thee—and I'll pay thee bounteously/ Conceal me that what I am, and be my aid" (1.2.49-50). She not only finesses her captain's help (physical and fiscal), but Viola also brags that she (disguised as a boy) will entertain and delight Orsino. On the other hand, since Sebastian neither rewards Antonio for wresting him from the clutches of death nor describes how he entertained and delighted his benefactor, their situation registers as decidedly more poignant. More disturbing, Sebastian seems to exploit Antonio as a placeholder until a better prospect materializes in the form of Olivia. Indulging self-gratification while callously ignoring a person who bathes one in affection, indicates the absence of either a soul or conscience. Sebastian's wanton narcissism mars his sexual appeal and undercuts the powerful charisma that obviously beguiled Antonio.

Ultimately, Antonio's unsatisfying resolution squanders the strength of a potent character uniquely atypical in *Twelfth Night*. He is no less worthy of love than Olivia; and, ironically, Antonio and Olivia swap dispositions. At the beginning of the play, Olivia mourns her brother and by the end of the play Antonio faces imprisonment because he accompanies his beloved Sebastian to a hostile country. Antonio does not obfuscate or pretend to be anyone except who he is—honorable, chivalrous,

and loving. He executes no physical or emotional subterfuge and he deserves better than ashes and soot. And yet, as Chad Allen Thomas argues, "A happy ending for Antonio might not, however, have seemed out of place on the early modern stage. Whereas our modern conception of sexuality often coincides with ideas about sexual identity, which are relatively recent formulations, Shakespeare's audiences viewed eroticism and sexual attraction as fluid and multivalent" (227). As Thomas observes, the modern temptation to categorize may seduce one to conclusively identify Antonio's sexual orientation, yet the validation of Antonio's love for Sebastian is not contingent upon ascribing a queer orientation to him. Furthermore, Alan Sinfield theorizes that marriage does not preclude Antonio and Sebastian from participating in fully realized sexual love: "I see no reason why Antonio should appear at the end as the defeated and melancholy outsider that critics have assumed... [Sebastian] is the man Antonio thought he was. There is no significant confusion in their relationship, and no reason why marriage to a stranger heiress should change it" (*Faultlines* 73). While Sinfield is persuasive in his assertion that Sebastian's marriage to Olivia is perplexing, this essay argues strenuously that Antonio does not apprehend what he's purchasing in Sebastian. A happy ending may exist for Antonio and Roderigo, but if Sebastian ever really loved Antonio, he taints that love irrevocably after he becomes Olivia's passive conquest.

Antonio's happy ending shall remain improbable until a savvy stage director highlights the schism between the Sebastian and the Roderigo personalities in order to project that Antonio is sincerely loved by Roderigo beyond his role as Sebastian's expendable source of protection. After all, if Orsino cherishes both Cesario and Viola, it will not strain credulity or the elasticity of romantic comedy for Sebastian to satiate both sides of his sexual psyche by loving Antonio and Olivia. Real life teems with posers who soil love and exploit it for inexplicably base motivations. A sensitive, virile character with boundless integrity and unmatched depth, such as Antonio, finding contentment with the object of his affection, almost balances the scales for every cheated loser who earned love and regrettably did not reap the fruits of their labor. Sinfield imagines a love-affirming production of *Twelfth Night* that caresses Antonio: "If I were directing the play, I would show Antonio delighted with the way it all turns out. Sinfield

also has suggested the possibility of Sebastian leaving the stage ‘flanked by both Olivia and Antonio’” (*Faultlines* 73). Sinfield also calls attention to “why such an arrangement is more likely to suit Olivia (who loves the still-impossible Cesario and has only a forced and formal marriage with Sebastian” (*Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality* 15). Lastly, Sinfield surmises that the continuation of Antonio’s relationship with Roderigo in Illyria is inextricably linked to the largesse of Olivia. To extend Sinfield’s suggestion, an additional gesture might show Roderigo leading Antonio away from Orsino’s guards towards Olivia, with Sebastian’s arm encircled around Antonio’s waist to instantiate that, in spite of Sebastian’s sudden marriage to the lovely heiress, Antonio is no inconsequential dalliance but a treasured paramour. Furthermore, if Roderigo bestows a simple kiss upon Antonio, matched by an analogous kiss from Olivia upon Antonio, this would telegraph that Olivia not only accepts but fully embraces the reality of Antonio—an invited connubial gift for Sebastian. Thus, the addition of a single moment corrects the standard ending found in romantic comedy without inserting a single word of additional dialogue: the protagonists do not have to choose between admiring an erotic dessert and consuming it. They really can have “what they will.” Such a reading of *Twelfth Night*, which alludes to a polyamorous connection between Antonio, Roderigo/Sebastian, and Olivia, exceeds the expectations of what most lovers will: love never leaving any lover humiliated, deserted, exploited, abandoned—unloved.

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