

Analysis: Act II, scenes iii–iv المحاضرة السادسة

These scenes give us the first of the play's many songs. Twelfth Night is full of music, which is linked to romance from Orsino's command in the play's very first line: "If music be the food of love, play on". Most of the songs are sung either by the drunken Sir Toby and Sir Andrew or by Feste the clown, who is a professional singer and entertainer as well as a joker. In Shakespeare's time, love was often associated with the emotional expressiveness of music, so the love songs in this comedy are quite appropriate.

The clash between Malvolio on the one hand and Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria on the other is a central conflict in Twelfth Night. On the face of things, it does not seem to be Malvolio's fault that he has to break up their party. After all, the men's drunken singing in their host's house in the middle of the night is unquestionably rude. But Twelfth Night is a play that ultimately celebrates chaos—whether it is brought on by romantic ardor, by alcohol, or simply by general enthusiasm—over the straitlaced order that Malvolio represents. The play's title refers to the Feast of the Epiphany, the twelfth day after Christmas, which in Shakespeare's England was a time for revelry and even anarchy—a day when servants impersonated their masters, alcohol flowed freely, and all of the customary social hierarchies were turned upside down. The puritanical, order-loving, and pleasure-hating spirit of Malvolio contrasts greatly with this anarchic spirit that flows through Sir Toby and Maria, Feste, and Sir Andrew. Malvolio, we realize, does not

merely object to the circumstances of Sir Toby's revelry—he objects to revelry, music, and alcohol entirely. His sharp questions—“Do ye make an ale-house of my lady's house?” prompt a bitter retort from Sir Toby, who asks. “Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?” Sir Toby seems to understand Malvolio's attitude: because Malvolio himself detests merrymaking, he thinks that no one should be allowed to make merry. His very name consists of elements—“Mal” and “volio”—that essentially mean, in Italian, “ill will,” suggesting his profound contempt for others' pleasures.

Maria, however, proves more than a match for Malvolio. She knows his faults well: for one thing, he is a hypocrite, always trying to impress other people; worse, he is puffed up with pride, a weakness that she plans to take advantage of in exacting her revenge. Her comment that “it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him” remind us of Olivia's earlier comment that Malvolio is “sick of [meaning “sick with”] self-love” Maria's trust in the all-consuming nature of Malvolio's egotism leads her to believe that it will be easy to make him think—foolishly—that Olivia loves him. The revenge seems appropriate—Malvolio, who loathes folly, will be tricked into displaying it.

The dialogue between Orsino and the disguised Viola in Act II, scene iv further develops the curious relationship between Orsino and his seemingly male servant. Their discussion of the relative power of men's and women's love is one of the most often-quoted passages in the play. The complicated ironies built

into the scene—in which the audience knows that Cesario is really a woman in love with Orsino but Orsino remains unaware—add both a rich complexity and a sense of teasing to the discussions, even as the seeming hopelessness of Viola's position adds a hint of pathos. Still, one cannot find her plight too pathetic—the audience knows that the play is a comedy, in which romantic love must lead to married happiness. Moreover, we have already heard Orsino's comments to Cesario in Act I, scene iv, praising Cesario's female-like beauty, so we know that Viola's disguise has not entirely prevented Orsino from being attracted to her.

Orsino's claim that men love more strongly than women was a commonplace one in Shakespeare's day, but Viola eloquently refutes it. In a very famous passage, she tells Orsino about how her fictional sister