

المحاضرة التاسعة **Analysis: Act IV, scenes i–iii**

Sebastian briefly takes center stage in these scenes, but he fails to make much of an impression as a character in his own right: his principal role is to serve as a male substitute for his resourceful and attractive twin sister, Viola. Sebastian's primary state of mind in these scenes is total confusion, which is understandable. Having arrived in a country that he has never seen before, he is suddenly surrounded by people who seem to think they know him and who have extreme attitudes toward him: some want to kill him, while others appear to be in love with him. It is not surprising that, after trying to fend off the insistent Feste and being abruptly attacked by Sir Andrew, Sebastian asks in bewilderment, "Are all the people mad?" (IV.i.24). Olivia's approach forces him to wonder about his own state of mind: "Or I am mad, or else this is a dream" (IV.i.57). These references to insanity are significant. As he does with Antonio and Malvolio, Shakespeare suggests here that madness and the chaos associated with comedy are closely linked.

By Act IV, scene iii, however, Sebastian begins to come to terms with his situation. He decides that the sun that he sees is real, as are the air that he breathes and the pearl that Olivia has given him. "[T]hough 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus, / Yet 'tis not madness," he decides (IV.iii.3–4). He even reasons out the situation with the beautiful woman who claims to love him. If Olivia were mad, he figures, surely her servants wouldn't obey her—so she must be sane. All the same, he realizes, "There's something in't / That is deceivable" (IV.iii.20–21). He is right, of course; he just hasn't figured out yet exactly what the deception is.

Meanwhile, issues of madness and identity are addressed in a different way in the dialogue between Feste and the unfortunate Malvolio. In this scene, Feste proves himself a master of disguise by imitating the curate's voice and speech patterns. But there is something very strange in his disguise: there seems no reason for Feste to dress up in a priest's robes if Malvolio, locked in the darkness as he is, cannot even see him. Again, as

with Viola's male clothes and Malvolio's fantasies about wearing a nobleman's garments, Shakespeare seems to suggest a link between garments and identity. To impersonate Sir Topas, Feste must dress like him, so closely are clothes and public personae bound together.

Feste also uses tactics of confusion on poor Malvolio, telling him outright lies to make him think his senses deceive him and, thus, trying to make Malvolio himself believe that he is insane. He adds the final insult after Malvolio angrily claims that he is as sane as Feste himself, telling Malvolio, "Then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool" (IV.ii.82–83). Again, we are impressed with Feste's cleverness; yet, as he torments Malvolio, we begin to wonder if he is employing his talents to a good end. The steward, whose earlier humiliation is perhaps well deserved, now seems a helpless victim. It is as if Malvolio, as the embodiment of order and sobriety, must be sacrificed so that the rest of the characters can indulge in the topsy-turvy spirit of the Feast of the Twelfth Night that suffuses the play.

Malvolio is hardly a tragic figure. After all, he is only being asked to endure a single night in darkness. But he earns our respect, nevertheless, as he stubbornly clings to his sanity, even in the face of Feste's insistence that he is mad. Malvolio, perhaps more than anyone else in this frenetic, zany play, knows that he is sane, and he will not allow the madness swirling in the air of Olivia's home to destroy his sense of his own sanity. One cannot help pitying him, in spite of his flaws. He seems to be punished for not being as mad as everyone else, more than he is for any real sin. He cries, "I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused," making the darkness of his prison a powerful symbol for the madness that seems to have taken over the world of the play (IV.ii.40–42). Malvolio is right—but being right avails him nothing. Twelfth Night is a play filled with absurdity and madcap fun, and Malvolio suffers his unhappy fate because he is unable to put his scruples, his puritanism, and his pride aside to join in the revelry.

