

UCLA

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies

Title

"Here I am ... Yet Cannot Hold this Visible Shape": the Music of Gender in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1bh919c5>

Journal

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 32(1)

ISSN

0069-6412

Author

Tan, Marcus Cheng Chye

Publication Date

2001-10-01

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1bh919c5#supplemental>

Peer reviewed

**“HERE I AM ... YET CANNOT HOLD THIS VISIBLE SHAPE”:
THE MUSIC OF GENDER IN SHAKESPEARE’S
*TWELFTH NIGHT***

by Marcus Cheng Chye Tan

THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Taken as Shakespeare’s farewell to romantic comedy and written around the same time as *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* presents a high comedy of elusive complexity that preempts the problem plays. Contesting a “universal consent [that] the very height of gay comedy is attained in *Twelfth Night*,”¹ modern critics note that *Twelfth Night* possesses “darker” features of the problem plays but, as C. L. Barber suggests in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, the play manages to restore the festive through its comic resolution,² affirming what Jonathan Dollimore terms “the *telos* of harmonic integration.”³

Elements of “dark tragedy” constantly complicate the “sunny identity of spirit.”⁴ The gulling of Malvolio is often seen by modern sensibilities as an excessively cruel prank passing into the domain of sadism. The latter’s ignored plea for help while locked in the dark room, exacerbated by Feste’s cruel taunting, becomes a comic joke that proves excessive for the audience.⁵ In addition, Orsino’s unsettling “murderous” rage and Viola’s swooning acceptance of a love death cause the play to “walk the edge of violence”⁶ till the arrival of Sebastian in Act V. Malvolio’s unresolved vow of vengeance (V.i.376),⁷ sworn after the union of the lovers, threatens a newly established harmony, prompting the audience to speculate on his possible return, which could turn comedy into tragedy. Consequently, Harold Bloom

¹Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare’s Use of Song* (Oxford 1923) 80.

²C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (Princeton 1959) 256–258.

³Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago 1984) 58.

⁴Furness notes that these remarks from A. C. Swinburne’s *A Study of Shakespeare* readily summed up the nineteenth-century feeling about *Twelfth Night* (*Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, ed. Horace Howard Furness [Philadelphia and London 1901] 386). See the introduction by J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik to the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (1975; London 1988) lii.

⁵Ralph Berry, “‘Twelfth Night’: The Experience of the Audience,” *Shakespeare Survey* 34 (1981) 112.

⁶Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York 1990) 234.

⁷All quotes are taken from the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above).

asserts that “*Twelfth Night* is of no genre.”⁸ The play possesses a generic elusiveness that, like the problem plays, superficially adopts a comic genre but constantly threatens to metamorphose into a tragedy, suggesting that “the whole bright revel emerges from shadow.”⁹

Twelfth Night also plays about with hermeneutics.¹⁰ As Bloom observes, “[the play is] another “poem unlimited.” One cannot get to the end of it, because even some of the most apparently incidental lines reverberate infinitely.”¹¹ Generic uncertainty and the interpretive “reverberations” of the text plunge both literary and performance critics into a crisis of hermeneutic subjectivity echoed in *Twelfth Night*’s secondary title, *What You Will*. Such an irresolute title playfully jests at hermeneutics, freeing interpretation of the play from the stipulations of its title and flippantly reducing “what it is” to “what you want it to be.”

The multiplicities resultant from varying interpretations of the text contribute to this highly unstable nature of *Twelfth Night*. Laurie E. Osborne’s seminal study of the various performance editions of *Twelfth Night* proves that the dramatic text is constantly subjected to historically specific tastes. Her work demonstrates how we must avoid “the trick of singularity” (II.v.151), dispelling the myth of a singular text and realising the presence of multiple texts of *Twelfth Night*.¹² Davies echoes this elusive multiplicity when he remarks that “*Twelfth Night* contains multitudinous *Twelfth Nights* and the dormant seeds of many more, whether generated by a producer’s singular comprehensive reading of the text or the nuanced particularities of the actors’ voices.”¹³

Considering *Twelfth Night* in performance, Michael Billington believes that this is among the hardest of Shakespearean plays to stage because of its “kaleidoscopic range of moods,”¹⁴ from melancholia to drunken revelry, high-strung tension to joyous sadness. In performance, “elusiveness” takes on a different definition. Unlike other Shakespearean plays where temporal location is either “real” (such as in the his-

⁸Bloom (n. 6 above) 227.

⁹Barber (n. 2 above) 259.

¹⁰Stevie Davies, *Shakespeare: Twelfth Night* (England: Penguin Books, 1993), xv.

¹¹Bloom (n. 6 above) 227.

¹²See Laurie E. Osborne, *The Trick of Singularity: Twelfth Night and the Performance Editions* (Iowa 1996).

¹³Davies (n. 10 above) x–xi.

¹⁴Michael Billington, ed., *RSC Director’s Shakespeare: Approaches to Twelfth Night* (London 1990) ix.

tory plays) or “fantastic” (as in *The Tempest*), Illyria is at once both. Its dreamlike environment presents difficulties in achieving verisimilitude on the stage.¹⁵ Furthermore, the manifold possibilities of staging the “darker” and complex elements, such as those mentioned, can disclose directorial bias and effect particularised impressions of character. Malvolio can become the Puritan Shylock or an oppressed victim. The trickery of physical allure between the infatuated lovers can metamorphose into a homoerotic attraction just as the homosocial bond between Antonio and Sebastian proves susceptible to varying interpretations. These possibilities demonstrate, in congruence with Osborne and Davies’s observations, *Twelfth Night*’s elusive and unstable nature both as text and in performance.

Perhaps the most salient reason for *Twelfth Night*’s elusive nature lies in the difficulty of striking a balance between the play’s light and dark aspects. In its stage history, few directors have managed to evoke what Stanley Wells terms “the transmuting alchemy”—that which unlocks both the play’s ambivalent darkness and resonant comedy.¹⁶ This dialectical duality of “ambivalent darkness” and “resonant comedy” is not merely resultant from emplotment and dramatic staging. Music also contributes to this elusive nature of *Twelfth Night* because it eludes any attempts at an understanding of its aesthetics. *Twelfth Night* becomes a play that, like music, can communicate simultaneously joy and sadness, festive revelry and a deep-rooted melancholy, and so share a common feature of elusiveness. It is perhaps this pervasive presence of music that accentuates the elusive quality of *Twelfth Night*.

MUSICAL ELUSIVENESS AND ELUSIVE MUSIC

Jean-Pierre Barricelli, in *Melopoiesis*, observes that Shakespearean plays are “verbal” dramas which transmogrify into “musical” dramas at pivotal interstices in the text.¹⁷ This is certainly true of *Twelfth Night*, where music permeates the play and is tightly interwoven into the dramatic structure and thematic concerns such as love, gender, and time. As Davies observes, “*Twelfth Night* is all music.”¹⁸ It begins, ends and progresses with music, not solely via its quintessential songs but “the

¹⁵See Billington (n. 14 above) 8–11 for a discussion on Illyria between four RSC directors.

¹⁶Quote taken from Billington (n. 14 above) xxx.

¹⁷Jean-Pierre Barricelli, *Melopoiesis: Approaches to the Study of Literature and Music* (New York 1988) 206.

¹⁸Davies (n. 10 above) 36.

melodious recitative of its language,”¹⁹ where the verse structure becomes “musical” in form.²⁰

It is by virtue of this musical quality that *Twelfth Night* has an unsettling elusiveness, a “peculiar sweet sadness,”²¹ possessing both a spirit of revelry and a pervasive melancholia. Barbara Everett encapsulates this ambiguity when she states that,

Twelfth Night is itself an elusive work, which—perhaps because of this quality of ‘musicality’ or aesthetic self-consistency, an expressive reticence, seems to resist critic’s attempts to explain or define or even describe the work as a whole, to say how or why it succeeds and why we value and admire it so.²²

Twelfth Night’s elusiveness and resistance to critical placement resembles music’s elusive nature. Music is “a supreme mystery of the science of man”²³ whose inner spirit cannot be easily expressed through language. It is that “which we cannot define in words, or include in any category of thought ... a language we speak and understand, but which we are unable to translate.”²⁴ The central dichotomies in musicology and music criticism remain: can music be described adequately by language and is music a “language” in itself? If it is a language system, what it expresses or communicates is ambiguous. Perhaps music will remain perpetually enigmatic and ineffable, just as *Twelfth Night* proves to be elusive because of this pervasive presence of music.

MUSIC AS THEME AND IDEA; MUSIC AS PERFORMATIVE

The difficulties encountered in the discussion of an aesthetics of music amidst the disputations of its nature has confined scholarship in Shakespearean music, and in particular, music in *Twelfth Night*, to a discursive consideration. Canonical works such as those by John H. Long,²⁵ Richmond Noble²⁶ and Peter J. Seng²⁷ approach music as an idea or

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰For a detailed discussion on the musicality of verse, see Davies (n. 10 above) 34–61.

²¹Peter J. Seng, *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History* (Cambridge 1967) 106.

²²Barbara Everett, “Or What You Will,” *Essays in Criticism* 35.4 (1985) 300.

²³Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (London 1970) 18.

²⁴Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music* (New York 1974) 71.

²⁵John H. Long, *Shakespeare’s Use of Music: A Study of Music in its Performance in the Original Production of Seven Comedies* (Gainesville 1955).

²⁶See n. 1 above.

²⁷See n. 21 above.

theme in the play to evade the hazardous terrain of musical aesthetics. By investigating the lyrical content and contextualization of each song, these works engage music in *Twelfth Night* as a prevailing thematic concern, and regard it as a conventional adjunct to the dramatic action whose primary function lies in the establishment of mood and atmosphere. Despite their importance in the field of Shakespearean music scholarship, such studies have seldom considered the performative aspects of music or music's musicality, treating it discursively and thematically whilst establishing the historical justification and contextualization of the musical texts. Furthermore, music's contributory role to the elusive and problematic nature of this comedy has not been explored.

As an alternative parameter to the thematic understanding of music (and its functions) in *Twelfth Night*, this paper seeks to understand music as performative, through an analysis of the songs in the play, and hopes to prove that *Twelfth Night's* elusive quality is accentuated by the frequency and prevalence of music. A framework of musicological analysis will be employed, through an examination of the music's formal dimensions such as notational sequencing, major-minor distinctions, harmony, rhythm, and other properties to show how music, when heard and understood as performative, can modulate responses to the play.

Like a dramatic performance, music varies with nuances in every performance, yielding a diverse range of responses despite an "authoritative" score. Thence, there is no absolute meaning in a piece of music yet an analysis of music's musicality renders a range of possible meanings delimited within the boundaries scripted in the score. These meanings are never arbitrary for the arrangement of an ensemble of notes with its dynamic properties indicates a specific range of particular responses. Meaning in music is then a tonal range of possible responses. This range remains intrinsic to the song despite possible stylistic variations and interpretations.

THE POLITICS OF HOMOEROTICISM

There is critical consensus in scholarship on *Twelfth Night* that issues of gender contribute to *Twelfth Night's* darker tonality. In the play, disguise causes gender confusion that further leads to suggestions of homoerotic love. As Casey Charles observes, *Twelfth Night* is centrally concerned with demonstrating the uncategorical temper of sexual at-

traction.”²⁸ These ever-present “dark” suggestions of homoeroticism and “ambi-sexuality” not only subvert the harmonious order in Illyria but produce the elusive nature of the play.

Shakespearean comedy constantly appeals to the body and in particular to sexuality as the heart of its theatrical magic.²⁹ Cross-dressing, as a central leitmotif in issues of gender, is employed in several comedies and best exemplified in *Twelfth Night*. *Twelfth Night* is arguably about bisexuality and the fashioning of gender.³⁰ Exhaustive studies have been done in relation to disguise, transvestism and mimesis leading to notions of androgyny and homoeroticism in the play. The following discussion thus seeks to illuminate the ways in which music contributes to this nexus of issues on gender explored by preceding scholarship.

Illusionism that leads to ambiguity is the very substance of the theatrical experience in *Twelfth Night*, where Viola embodies this ambiguity effected through the illusion of disguise. On the Shakespearean stage, the double cross-dressing convention (boy playing girl disguised as man) complicates gender relations on the dramatic and meta-dramatic levels. The issue of an artistically licensed homoeroticism effected through stage transvestism becomes then a central problematic in *Twelfth Night*.

On stage, the three contingent dimensions of Viola/Cesario’s corporeality, her physiological sex as a boy actor, her gender identity in the drama as a woman, and her gender performance as Cesario, encourage the audience to view him/her as a sexually enticing *qua* transvestized boy.³¹ Because her gender is consistently the ulterior topic of conversation when she is present (I.v.185, I.v.158–161, III.i.143), the audience’s eyes are invited to dwell upon the actor’s body as a *pretty* boy, inadvertently stimulating homoerotic desire. Her/his multiple-disguised presence triggers an attraction in both genders, within the fiction of Illyria and the non-fiction of an Elizabethan audience. Furthermore, pederastic intimations between Antonio and Sebastian invite further speculation of same-sex love in *Twelfth Night*.³²

²⁸Casey Charles, “Gender Trouble in *Twelfth Night*.” *Theatre Journal* 49 (1997) 121.

²⁹Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford 1988) 86.

³⁰Charles (n. 28 above) 121–124.

³¹See Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton 1983) 31. See also Charles (n. 28 above) 130.

³²See Joseph Pequigney, “The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992) 201–209, for a

Homoeroticism on the Renaissance stage was neither misogynist nor confined to men. Lesbianism was also a common feature as Valerie Traub shows.³³ The stage articulated a discourse of desires and acts that can be articulated and correlated with our modern understanding of diverse erotic practices among women. At the narrative level, the romantic discourse in *Twelfth Night* is improperly addressed by a woman disguised as a young man to another woman and vice versa (from Olivia to Viola/Cesario). At the performative level, it is still improperly addressed from one boy in boy's costume to another boy cross-dressed as a woman. "The proper axis of desire is thus crisscrossed by improper ones."³⁴

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much [...]
 And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love:
As I am woman (now alas the day!)
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?
(II.ii.26–27, 33–38)

Viola's articulation of anxiety has implicitly served as a summation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes toward transvestism and homoeroticism.³⁵ Cross-dressing is presented as wicked while homoerotic desire is implicitly monstrous. The pregnancy of disguise threatens to deliver an apocalyptic disruption of a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, not only in Illyria but in a conservative English society.³⁶ Anti-theatricalists and religious authorities charged the playhouse as a "Venus Palace,"³⁷ a place of erotic arousal that promoted sodomitical practices among theatergoers and encouraged such behavior and effeminacy in the general population.

further explication of the homoeroticism between Antonio and Sebastian.

³³Valerie Traub, "Lesbian Desire in Early Modern England" in Susan Zimmerman, ed., *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage* (New York 1992) 150–169.

³⁴Jonathan Crewe, "In the Field of Dreams: Transvestism in *Twelfth Night* and *The Crying Game*," *Representations* 50 (1995) 101–121.

³⁵See Traub (n. 33 above) 157.

³⁶Jean E. Horward, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.1 (1988) 418.

³⁷Greenblatt (n. 29 above) 88.

A MUSICOLOGY OF GENDER AND THE MUSIC OF ANDROGYNY

Homoeroticism has, in scholarship on *Twelfth Night*, been the central focus of gender issues in the play. However, recent critics such as Rackin³⁸ and Greenblatt have considered the problematics of androgyny, implied by Viola's disguises, as the pivotal agency of *Twelfth Night*'s double tonality. Music, in performance, is a dramaturgical device that can modulate our understanding of these concerns of androgyny. By being a unique performative discourse alongside the visual and verbal lines of action, the songs in *Twelfth Night* augment the visual cross-dressing (physical presence and costume) and gender (con)fusion that results.

Music is, as Susan McClary notes, "shaped by constructions of gender and sexuality."³⁹ In most dramatic music, there exist musical utterances inflected on the basis of gender. The rise of opera in the seventeenth century saw the birth of a musical semiotics of gender—"a set of conventions for constructing "masculinity" and "femininity" in music."⁴⁰ Such codes of gender differences are informed by prevalent attitudes of the time, for instance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, music was regarded as a predominantly male occupation.

These attitudes toward gender and music were inherited from the misogynist ideas of the classical poets and philosophers. Females who undertook music studies or performance were cast as vile and contemptible, unless they were of the highest social classes. This attitude was prevalent because music was considered a representative of the destructive power of feminine sexuality that needed to be disciplined.⁴¹ Music is then, as McClary points out, a gendered discourse rooted in social attitudes concerning gender. Musical semiotics can thus tell us as much about the actual music as it can suggest how particular pitches and rhythms, as opposed to others, can delineate gender.

"O Mistress Mine" is among the more popular songs of the play. Al-

³⁸See Phyllis Rackin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 102.1 (1987) 29–41.

³⁹Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota 1991) 9.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* 7.

⁴¹Linda Phyllis Austern, "Music and the English Renaissance" in Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds., *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Chicago 1994) 55.

though this song is not “gendered” in any deliberate compositional way as the operas of Cavalli were, an understanding of its formal arrangement can possibly suggest the androgynous nature of cross-dressed Viola/Cesario. The song, however, is not sung by Viola/Cesario but by Feste. In its dramatic context, the song, sung as a “love song” (II.iii.38), garners its affective power through irony, for Feste sings seemingly without realising its implications. The audience is, conversely, made aware of not merely the thematics of the song but the musical qualities (and their possible extra-musical connotations) because it is performed. The sub-plot thus comments on the main plot in an intersection of lines of actions (as Trevor Nunn’s production demonstrates).

In Thomas Morley’s instrumental arrangement for viols (1599), “O Mistress Mine” is set to the key of G.⁴² Although there is inconclusiveness over the versions Shakespeare employed in his stage productions, there is general consensus that Morley’s arrangement, later adapted and varied by William Byrd (ca. 1619), was probably used.⁴³

The G major scale lies “in-between” in the Western harmonic scale of seven major tones in a single octave. In Naylor’s version, the song is set to F major, a note whose placement is exactly mid-point in the notational sequence beginning in C.⁴⁴ Likewise, Andrew Charlton’s arrangement sets the song in F major while retaining Morley’s original tune.⁴⁵ Both keys are suggestive of an in-betweenness that could be associated with the gendered “middleness” of androgyny. Hollander suggests that this song directs attention to the overall themes and individual characters, and in particular refers to Viola/Cesario, “the *boy-girl* true love, ‘that can sing both high and low.’”⁴⁶

The harmony of the song implies the androgynous nature of Viola as well.⁴⁷ Morley’s settings employ the entire notational range within the

⁴²See appendix 1a.

⁴³See Long (n. 25 above) 169–172; Seng (n. 21 above) 96–97; and the introduction of the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 181–182, for a further discussion on the authenticity of “O Mistress Mine.”

⁴⁴See appendix 1b.

⁴⁵Andrew Charlton, *Music in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Practicum* (New York and London 1991) 244–246.

⁴⁶John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500–1700* (Princeton 1961) 157.

⁴⁷In speaking about chordal harmony, I will utilize terms used in music theory. Chords will be referred to by letter and mode (e.g., G major) or Roman numeral (upper case for major chords, lower case for minor). Thus the triad based on the first note of the major scale is denoted as “I” and the second as “II” and so on. The degrees of the scale will also be referred to by their names. The first in the scale degree is known as the tonic of the

octave of G major, beginning with the tonic which ascends an entire scale degree and returns back. The aural patterning of this sequence at once reveals a range of ascending and descending notes indicative of Viola's "high and low" vocal abilities. The almost equal number of downward and upward staves suggests the high and low tonal movements, further indicating the range required in the performance of the song. The singer's ability is challenged by the range—from the VI of the lower degree (lower E in measures 12 and 18) to XIII of the tonic (higher G in measures 10 and 16). High ascending notes have often been associated, in traditional musicology, with higher voices of "the maiden's organ," whose "small pipes" are "shrill and sound," and are "semblative of a woman's part" (I.v.32–34). Conversely, lower bass notes of "deep and dreadful organpipe[s]" (*The Tempest* III.iii.98) are often attributed to the masculine persona. Viola's ability to sing both these ranges, according to Feste, reinforces her dual-gender effected through disguise.

The boy-actor playing Viola (though he does not sing this song) meta-dramatically reinforces this androgynous notion since his pubertal voice lies in-between the shrill "maiden's organs" and the bass "organ-pipes." His range and vocal quality would then have resembled the countertenors or male sopranos of the Baroque era.⁴⁸ "O Mistress Mine" performed by countertenor Alfred Deller of the Deller consort is one such example. The pubertal youth who is "[n]ot yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy" (I.v.158)—a description of Cesario by Malvolio—is then most fitting to portray an androgynous Viola/Cesario. Like the latter, the youth is ambivalent in gender identity and orientation as he embodies a "pre-sexual androgynous youthfulness."⁴⁹

"O Mistress Mine," though not sung in the presence of the androgynous figure, recalls Viola/Cesario's ambi-sexuality as it musically fuses, in an embodied whole of the androgyne, what s/he still considers as dual genders in her/his "poor monster" soliloquy in II.ii. The dramatic irony arises because the song actualises her fears of metamorphosing into an unnatural monstrosity. As a distinctive action in performance, "O Mistress Mine" enhances the visual action of stage trans-

key, the fourth as the subdominant, fifth as dominant and seventh as the leading note.

⁴⁸Michael Kennedy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 3rd ed. (Oxford 1985) 152.

⁴⁹Davies (n. 10 above) 115.

vestism effected through costume and the boy-actor. The tune actualises the notions of androgyny and creates performatively, via an aural experience, the figure of the androgyne because the song's "high and low" tonalities are sung by (and embodied in) the same person. The binary oppositions found in the visual text of costume-change (where gender cannot be "fused" because it is still constructed [and reconstructed] as a superficial switch of clothing) are dissolved in the harmonics of the tune sung by the pubescent youth. The matrix of experience resultant from the conjunction of the verbal text, visual action and aural harmony creates then the notion of androgyny.

In Trevor Nunn's filmic adaptation, composer Shaun Davey exploits this androgynous possibility of "O Mistress Mine" by having the twins disguised as look-alike girls and singing this tune in unison. Davey's cabaret-style adaptation of the folk song provides a different tune in C major but resonates with Morley's melody and tempo. By having the twins sing together, beginning on a middle-C, Davey accentuates the ambivalent gender of the twins for this is a note that plays "mid-way" and can be sung by both males and females. Sebastian sings in *falsetto* through much of the song but resumes his masculine tenor and descends to a low G when the lyric indicates "both high and low," demonstrating how musical range can determine or disguise gender.

In Morley's arrangement, Viola/Cesario's androgynous identity is reinforced further with the song's conclusion on a perfect cadence. In the final measure, the chord of the dominant returns to the tonic, implying not just finality but reasserting the "middleness" of androgyny. This perfect cadence, keeping firmly within the harmonic framework, correlates with Rene Fortin's belief that Viola, in her bisexuality, embodies the myth of the androgyne.⁵⁰ In Neoplatonic tradition, the androgyne was associated with an ideal prelapsarian perfection.⁵¹ This perfect figure exemplifies the "primordial totality of being,"⁵² embodying and displaying the strengths of both sexes, and representing "the ultimate harmony with which the individual might be endowed."⁵³

Yet the androgyne is "terrifying and seductive precisely because s/he

⁵⁰Rene E. Fortin, "'Twelfth Night': Shakespeare's Drama of Initiation," *Papers on Language and Literature* 8 (1972) 141.

⁵¹Rackin (n. 38 above) 34.

⁵²Fortin (n. 50 above) 141.

⁵³Lynn Liptak Budd, *Musical Attitudes in the Renaissance: The Structural and Thematic Use of Music in Several Shakespearean Plays* (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University 1976; Ann Arbor 1999, no.7625714) 160.

incarnates and emblemizes the disruptive element, signaling not just another category crisis, but—much more disquietingly—a crisis of “category” itself.⁵⁴ In II.ii, Viola recognizes her state as “poor monster,” a Renaissance appellation reserved for unnatural prodigies. Her androgynous fusion deepens the sense of indeterminacy characteristic of the play itself. As Davies notes,

Shakespeare’s cryptic use of the boy-actor playing the girl-boy heroine goes further than mere reversal: it extends female characterisation into a realm which confounds sex-differentiation.⁵⁵

Viola/Cesario’s sexual “ambi-valence,” in Jungian terms, “fuses both gender-polarities, *animus* and *anima*, in a transgressive wholeness [...] by trespassing over the borders of what society constructs as ‘male’ and ‘female’ behaviour.”⁵⁶ Although Barber believes that the saturnalian reversal of sexual roles does not threaten the social structure but serves instead to consolidate it,⁵⁷ the threat posed by transvestism, leading to an ambiguous sexual existence that incites potential homosexual impropriety, causes the play to walk the edge of chaos where social and sexual perimeters are violated. Sexual identity becomes a “performance,” readily transformable by the clothes one wears. Such was the idea antitheatricalists of the Renaissance feared most—a fluidity of gender and the resultant licentiousness. The music of “O Mistress Mine” likewise blurs the distinctions between masculine and feminine. “The homoerotic shades into the heterosexual”⁵⁸ as they both sing a common tune. Music, via its formal qualities in performance, accentuates as it embodies the themes of sexual ambivalence.

HOMOSOCIAL DRUNKENNESS AND THE MASCULINE DISCOURSE OF SONGS

The drunken revel songs in II.iii stand in contrast to the “androgynous” love tune of “O Mistress Mine” as they create a homosocial ethos. In *As You Like It*, the masculine courtly ritual of hunting ends with a catch (IV.iii.10–19). The hunt and catch become significant masculine ac-

⁵⁴Majorie Garber, “Dress Codes, Or the Theatricality of Difference” in Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (London 1998) 177–178.

⁵⁵Davies (n. 10 above) 114.

⁵⁶*Ibid.* 56.

⁵⁷Barber (n. 2 above) 245.

⁵⁸Davies (n. 10 above) 59.

tivities that reverberate with a homosocial cadence. The image set before us, in performance, is a bond of masculinity where the men move in a circle after killing the deer, rejoicing in a catch that can repeat itself *ad infinitum*. This motional and musical circle ostracises the women who become “only a ghostly presence.”⁵⁹

Such a masculine ritual is repeated in the catches of Sir Toby and companions as Maria is significantly left out of the singing though she is physically present. Although many stage (and filmic) productions have interpreted Maria’s role as complicit in (and co-opted into) the festivity which gives cause for Malvolio’s reprimand, the dramatic text remains silent on her role in this misrule. She can thus be interpreted as a silent associate of the merry drunks or as an ostracised other.

The catches together exude an abrupt male persona with short unison passages and common stresses on the downbeats, especially in the example of “Hold Thy Peace.”⁶⁰ The dotted figures, accompanied by several quavers and semi-quavers of generally low notes (measures 1–3), create an aggressive downbeat that leads the song into subsequent rounds while creating the whirligig of motion, hence occasioning its *ad infinitum* characteristic.

Though a common “cake and ale” (II.iii.115) tune, “Three Merry Men Be We”⁶¹ reinforces via its lyrics the visual performance of three men prancing around in a circle of drunken merriment, exemplified in Kenneth Branagh’s 1991 production of *Twelfth Night*. The rise in tone (measures 1, 3 and 7) expresses, as Cooke propounds, “an outgoing emotion.”⁶² Like “Hold Thy Peace,” the major mode (here in B-flat major) evokes an emotion of joy and pleasure. Such an association of mode and emotion has long been exploited in Western music. The major modes of these songs, then, create a mood of festive revelry that balances the minor modes of ambiguity and melancholy felt in other songs such as “Come Away, Come Away Death” and “Hey, Robin,

⁵⁹Jacquelyn Ann Fox-Good, “*Let Rich Music’s Tongue Unfold*”: A Study of Shakespeare’s Songs (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia 1989; Ann Arbor 1999, no. 9002853) 100.

⁶⁰See appendix 2. Two versions of the song exist. I have here referred to an anonymous composition printed by Thomas Ravenscroft in *Deutromelia* (1609). This is also the version that Long suggests (n. 25 above, 173). The other is found in a manuscript book of rounds collected by Thomas Lant (1580). See the introduction to the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 84.

⁶¹See appendix 3.

⁶²Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford 1959) 115.

Jolly Robin.”⁶³

Tonal mode is also a marker of gender. Eighteenth-century theorist Georg Andreas Sorge explained the hierarchical distinction between major and minor triads in terms he regarded as both natural and God-given—the respective powers of male and female:

Just as in the universe there has always been created a creature more splendid and perfect than the others of God, we observe exactly this also in musical harmony ... the first (major triad) can be likened to the male, the second (minor triad) to the female sex.⁶⁴

Arnold Schoenberg’s *Theory of Harmony* (1911) resonates with Sorge’s ideas. The major mode, considered as masculine, was “natural” while the minor mode, in its association with femininity, was regarded as “unnatural.”

In traditional, pre-feminist Western musicology, cadence was an important marker of gender. A cadence is called “masculine” if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and “feminine” if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. Hence, the masculine ending is identified as the objective and rationale of musical discourses while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles.⁶⁵ Such a definition is bound in a binary opposition that associates strength with masculinity and normalcy, and weakness with femininity and abnormality. In “Three Merry Men Be We” and “There Dwelt a Man in Babylon,”⁶⁶ the cadences fall on the strong beat (first beat in “tree” of “Three Merry Men Be We” and fourth beat in “la-dy” of “There Dwelt a Man in Babylon”).⁶⁷ Although it is arguable that the songs were never completed and sung only in abstract, they nevertheless, in composition, seem to reinforce a masculine solidarity characteristic of such drinking songs.

Grout notes that these rounds were often accompanied with humorous and ribald texts sung unaccompanied by a convivial group, usually of men because of its lewd content.⁶⁸ According to Seng, such catches

⁶³See appendixes 5, 6a, and 6b.

⁶⁴Quoted in McClary (n. 39 above) 11.

⁶⁵McClary (n. 39 above) 10.

⁶⁶See appendix 4.

⁶⁷“Hold Thy Peace” is not considered here because it is a catch that has no formal resolution and thus, proves difficult to determine its cadence.

⁶⁸Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 5th ed. (New York 1996) 340.

and drinking songs were popular in the sixteenth century and the male audience would have easily recognised them and participated in the singing. The drinking songs then intensify a homosocial ethos, characteristic of Renaissance patriarchy, that merges performance and reality as both audience and characters partake of this masculine ritual.

The drinking songs become more significant because their dramatic placement, following “O Mistress Mine,” undoes the fearful androgynous transgression suggested by the harmonies of the love song. Such a reading of sexual tensions becomes possible when we note how readily Sir Toby shifts focus away from the love tune to the catches (II.iii.57–61). The emphatic masculinity evoked by these catches, though it can be seen as an excess of revelry that leads to disorder in Olivia’s household, re-establishes the social system of patriarchy.

Malvolio’s interruption gives cause for antagonism in both audience and characters for he disrupts a moment of masculine bonding. Despite legitimately exercising his stewardship, Malvolio is cast as a “Shylockian other” (and possibly a “feminine other” since he disrupts what is considered a virile pursuit) that needs to be expelled. Ironically, another catch (“Farewell Dear Heart”) is used to banish the Puritan steward in an exclusionary manner just as the rounds in *As You Like It* exclude the feminine “other(s).”

MELANCHOLIC LOVE TUNES AND THE TWIN THEMES OF LOVE AND MUSIC

Love is an important aspect in discussions of gender. The Renaissance, inheriting many Neoplatonic ideas, considered music to be intimately connected with love. Thomas Morley (1597) adopted the Platonic definition of music as “a science of love matters occupied in harmonie and rhythmos”⁶⁹ while Thomas Ravenscroft (1614) notes that music can truly express the universal passion of love and that the power of love may teach a man music. The opening lines of *Twelfth Night* readily establish this relationship between music and emotion, where “music [is] the food of love” (I.i.1). Although Long notes that this music is one that feeds Orsino’s melancholia,⁷⁰ it can perhaps be seen as a measure by which the latter learns to love and to await his “true love” (II.iii.41).

⁶⁹Quoted in Austern (n. 41 above) 55.

⁷⁰Long (n. 25 above) 168.

Love and music are thus considered as “twin themes” in *Twelfth Night*. As Lynn Liptak Budd notes, “[m]usic is more than a tool of courtship in this play. It is an active ingredient in and metaphor for love itself and for love’s frustrations.”⁷¹ Much of the incidental (instrumental) music in *Twelfth Night* then, functions to create an atmosphere of romance (e.g., I.i, II.iv).

“Come Away, Come Away Death,” however, serves to problematize the notion of love in *Twelfth Night* as noted by critics. This scene (II.iv) is “the emotional heart of the play” and exemplifies the play’s “elusive” quality with its shifting and bittersweet mood occasioned by music.⁷² The song is extravagant and almost parodic of the theme of death from unrequited love. It is unusual that Orsino would find such a song “reliev[ing] [his] passion much” (II.iv.4) since the lyrics propound a hopeless love that ends in death. Davies notes that the song contributes to the atmosphere of melancholy with its “peculiar sweet sadness”⁷³ and feeds Orsino’s love-sickness which is now protracted to extremes.

Although the settings of the original song have been lost, Long has attempted to reconstruct the tune by adapting a traditional Elizabethan tune entitled “Heart’s ease.”⁷⁴ Set in the key of B flat major, the song revels in the minor mode, producing a dark tonality that shades the play as well. The predominance of G minor chords (measures 1, 3, 7 etc), together with other minor chords within the diatonic scale (C minor in measures 9 and 10) darkens the modality of the moment. Following a time signature of 6/8, the downbeats (first and fourth beats) constantly articulate the fatalistic sense of the lyrics (e.g. “death” in measure 3, “slain” in measure 7, “cruel” in measure 8, “death” in measure 13), accentuating the dark nature of the song. Charlton’s adaptation set in F major, a copy of Long’s with minor variations, permits the minor mode (G minor and D minor) to prevail over the major as well.⁷⁵

Musicologists have theorized the affective power of the minor mode in Western music and queried its frequent association with negative emotions. Leonard Meyer postulates the nature of the mode’s chromatic potentiality as a possible explanation. Chromaticism possesses ambiguity not only because “chromatic alterations delay or block the

⁷¹Budd (n. 53 above) 179.

⁷²See the introduction to the Oxford edition of *Twelfth Night* (Oxford and New York 1994) 34.

⁷³Seng (n. 21 above) 110.

⁷⁴See appendix 5.

⁷⁵Charlton, *Music in the Plays of Shakespeare* (n. 45 above) 249–251.

expected motion to the normal diatonic tone” but also because a persistent “uniformity of progression” tends to create ambiguity and general tonal instability.⁷⁶ Peter Kivy explains the power of the minor from a historical perspective, purporting that contentment and joy, among other “resolved” states of feeling, have historically come to be associated with the stable diatonic harmonies of the major mode. Conversely, extreme states have become associated with the “more forceful departures of chromaticism and its modal representative, that is, the minor mode.”⁷⁷

The tune which is traditionally used for “Gone Away Death” not only darkens the tonality of the play by its musicality but punctuates the dramatic action by its contextual placement as well. It demonstrates the shifting moods, within a single scene, created by music—from the “light airs” (II.iv.5) heard the night before to Feste’s melancholic tune. The song precedes Viola/Ceasario’s passionate address on love sitting like “Patience on a monument” (II.iv.115). Ironic undertones arise because Orsino fails to realize that it is not his “death” that has been sung but Viola’s “death” through her imaginary sister’s love.⁷⁸ Furthermore, in seeking to escape death by demanding the continued pursuit of Olivia’s love, Orsino realizes his own “death” by sending his true love away. The song’s foreboding melancholy is felt by Viola as well since she realizes that she too, could go to her grave without being able to declare her love. The powerful effect of the song then ironizes Orsino’s claim that it is “old and plain” (II.iv.43), sung by common folk about the innocence of love.

“Hey, Robin, Jolly Robin” likewise ironizes its ostensible function via its musicality. Seng notes that the song is used mockingly by Feste to taunt Malvolio, who believes that his lover Olivia loves not him but another—Viola. Though the song may be addressed specifically to Malvolio, it also applies to Viola and Orsino’s situation as well since they all share in the knot of confused love.

William Cornyshe’s composition (ca. 1485–ca.1523), creates, however, not a tone of mockery (or “jolly-ness”) but of melancholic sadness, particularly because of the use of the Dorian mode where the song

⁷⁶Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 67–68.

⁷⁷Quoted in Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 69.

⁷⁸Clifford Leech, “Shakespeare’s Songs and the Double Response” in Joseph G. Price, ed., *The Triple Bond: Plays, Mainly Shakespearean, in Performance* (University Park, PA 1975) 85–86.

is transposed up by a fourth.⁷⁹ Like “Come Away, Come Away Death,” the song’s minor modality predominates yet again (G minor). Fox-Good notes that the minor quality of the initiating G minor chord emerges more clearly because of the entrance of the second and third voices.⁸⁰ Feste’s solitary singing however, heightens the isolation felt not only by Malvolio but perhaps by Feste too since he is the only character not scripted to love another. Furthermore, the singing of fragments from the song without resolutions or cadences amplifies uncertainty.⁸¹ Thus, the song’s peculiar and affecting melancholy awakens in us a sense of loneliness, sitting like “Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief” (II.iv.115–116)—a grief that clouds the sunny spirit of *Twelfth Night*.

The songs in *Twelfth Night* mediate the issue of gender relations and the dissolution of gender categories as they operate within the dialectics of gender. Music’s ambiguous nature compels the understanding of such gender distinctions as possibilities rather than absolutes. It can at once delineate masculinity or androgyny or neither, thus exemplifying music’s elusive nature. Likewise, music is not only “the food of love” but it exposes love’s problematic nature and deep-seated melancholy, thereby creating a double tonality within the play.

Department of English
National University of Singapore
Singapore 269430, Singapore

⁷⁹See appendix 6a, measure 10. I have provided two different scores of the same composition. The first is the fragment sung by Feste from Cornyshe’s composition. The second, appendix 6b, is the complete score for three voices.

⁸⁰Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 67.

⁸¹Ibid. 69.

APPENDIX 1A
“O Mistress Mine” (Thomas Morley)

Transcribed from Thomas Morley, *First Book of Consort Lessons* (1599), ed. Sidney Beck (New York 1959) 148–149.

APPENDIX 1B
“O Mistress Mine” (arr. E. W. Naylor)

Transcribed from Long, *Shakespeare's Use of Music* (n. 25 above) 170.

APPENDIX 2

“Hold Thy Peace”

(anon., included in Thomas Ravenscroft, *Deutromelia* [1609])

Transcribed from the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 182.

APPENDIX 3

“Three Merry Men Be We” (anon.)

Arranged in 4/4 tempo from E. W. Naylor, *Shakespeare and Music* (New York 1932) 182. Long (*Shakespeare's Use of Music*, n. 25 above, 174) notes that the words for this song can be found in *Peele's Old Wives Tale* (1595) and the tune in John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* (1650).

APPENDIX 4

“There Dwelt a Man in Babylon” (anon.)

Transcribed from the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 185. This version is based on the music to William Elderton’s ballad “The pangs of love and lovers’ fits.”

APPENDIX 5

“Come Away, Come Away Death” (adapted from “Heart’s Ease”)

The original settings of this song have been lost; this version is transcribed from an adaptation by Long (*Shakespeare’s Use of Music*, n. 25 above, 178).

APPENDIX 6A

“Hey, Robin, Jolly Robin” (William Cornyshe [ca. 1485–ca. 1523])

Transcribed from the Arden edition of *Twelfth Night* (n. 4 above) 187.

APPENDIX 6B
“Ah Robin, Gentle Robin” (William Cornyshe)

Transcribed from Fox-Good (n. 59 above) 282–283.

APPENDIX 6B (cont.)