

now the boast of Achilles is answered, Hector is arming,
 here he is bursting from the walls of Troy, [V, iii]
 here is Achilles striding from his tent to meet him; [V, v]
 now the squalid end of Hector, tamer of horses,
 taken by surprise by Achilles' hitmen when unarmed, [V, viii]
 the sun setting, his body dragged in triumph,
 the Greeks ascendant, Troy's walls about to fall,
 And Troilus screaming vengeance. That is all. [V, xi]

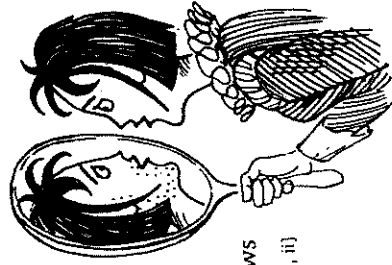


*This mordant and cynical play
 Is acted more often today
 Than ever before;
 It is rough-edged and raw,
 So I thought I would write it this way!*

Twelfth Night, or, What You Will

Is *Twelfth Night* the most perfect play
 That Shakespeare would complete?
 If pressed to name one, I would say
 That nowhere else did he display
 The same ability to weigh
 The bitter and the sweet!

It dates from the creative height
 Of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.
 His touch is absolutely right,
 The comedy is sheer delight,
 The passion stretched, but not too tight —
 As shortly will appear . . .



Twins so alike, you might suppose
 The sister was the brother.
 They're on a voyage; a tempest
 blows;
 The vessel to the bottom goes;
 But they survive, though neither knows
 What happened to the other. [I, ii]

When Viola, to her surprise,
Is safely cast ashore,

She finds a post (in male disguise)

[I, iv]

At Count Orsino's court, and sighs

For his embrace; but he just eyes

Olivia, next door . . . †

[I, i]



Who is an interesting case!

Her brother's died; and so

She favours black, and veils her face,

And plans to mope about the place

Till seven years her grief efface.

'Now then, Cesario . . .

[I, iv, 15]

(The Count uses the soubriquet

That Viola goes by)

'Visit this maid without delay,

And plead my suit in your own way;

Your youth may urge what I can't say —

At least it's worth a try!

Our heroine must acquiesce,

And utters, from the heart,

The words she's longing to express

About the love she can't profess

For him for whom she woos — unless

She steps out of her part . . .

† Orsino, if music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die. [I, i, 1]

Olivia, despite her veil,

Now finds she's not immune.

The words of this entrancing male

Her vow of continence assails;

Her resolution starts to fail —

She tells him: 'Come back soon!'

But once the youth has gone away

She quickly calls her Steward.

[I, v, 304]

'Malvolio, catch that fellow — say

He left this ring. Now don't delay!'

So Viola learns, to her dismay,

The lady's heart is skewered!'

Olivia keeps a Fool, to speak

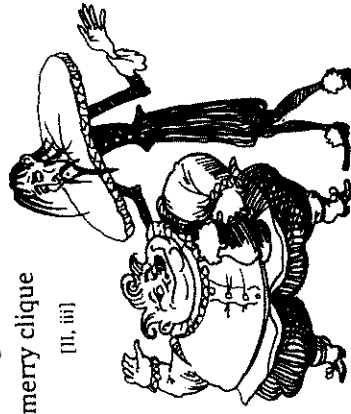
The Truth; a maid-in-waiting;

There's Uncle Toby, whose physique

Contrasts with Andrew Aguecheek . . .

Malvolio finds their merry clique

Extremely irritating. [II, iii]



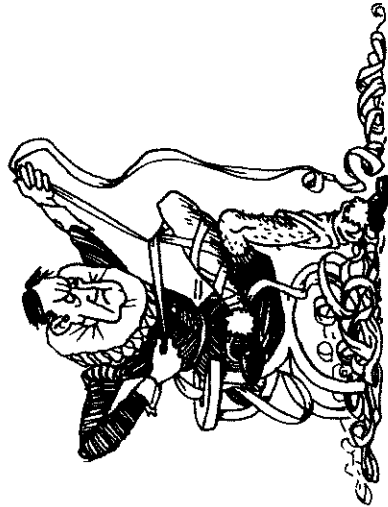
† Viola. Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy doe much. [II, ii, 25]

To bring him down a rung or two,
They draw to his attention

Olivia's forged *billet-doux*

[II, v]

Which ends: 'Prove that you love me too . . .
Cross-gartered stockings, dear, will do
To show me your intention!'

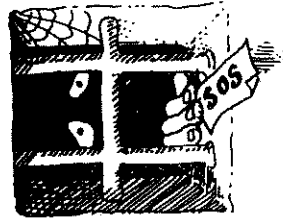


He greets his mistress in the style
Suggested in the letter.

'Malvolio, why do you smile?
That rig-up's absolutely vile!

Put him in darkness for a while,
Until he's feeling better!'

[III, iv]



Now misconception's at its
height,

For Viola's twin is here!

Bemused Sebastian has to fight

A duel, at which amazing

sight

[IV, i]

Olivia cries: 'Are you all right,
Cesario, my dear?'

'Cesario? By what strange spell

[IV, i, 59]

Have I this lady won?'

The pair get on extremely well:

In less time than it takes to tell

They've booked the church and
rung the bell

And Two are joined as One!

Logistical manipulation,

Which keeps the twins apart,

Increases our anticipation

Of the climactic confrontation . . .

[V, i]

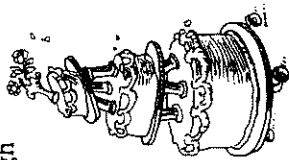
And after general consternation

The explanations start!

Once everyone knows who is who,

Viola gets her man;

Orsino finds he loves her too
 (There's not much else that he could do) —
 The wedding will be hurried through
 As quickly as it can!



But there is ambiguity.
 As others may remark.
 Abused Malvolio, set free,
 Declares undying enmity:†
 Wherever there is Comedy
 One person's in the dark . . .

Feste, the Fool, will improvise
 Sharp comments on the way:
 Dishonesty goes in disguise;
 Fair words are good for truth and lies;
 But this should come as no surprise —
 For the rain it raineth every day! [V, i, 368]



† Malvolio. I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.
 Exit. [V, 1, 377]

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Two young men, one of them in love,
 Have in all things been hand-in-glove
 (That couplet is extremely poor —
 Love's hard to rhyme, unlike *amour*):
 The hearts that Cupid thinks he'll stab
 For this emotional kebab
 Are Julia's and Proteus's.
 The dreamy votary discusses
 His rapture with his lifelong friend;
 But Valentine cannot pretend
 To see the point — he's more inclined
 To use his time to stretch his mind

(i. i)

