

# Letters to the Editor

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It certainly appears that C. Richard Desper is correct in stating that the “clownish nonsense” in IV.ii.15-19 of *Twelfth Night* is also and actually an allusion to “Edmund Campion and his 1580-81 mission to England.” (“Allusions to Edmund Campion in *Twelfth Night*,” *Elizabethan Review*, 3:1)

However, I think Desper is wrong (42) when he says that, “The allusions referred to here should not be thought of as topical” because “the first production of *Twelfth Night*” was in 1602 at the Middle Temple and that the author of the play “sees the opportunity for inserting something he has been suppressing for decades” because “sympathetic allusions to Campion... would have been quite risky during the 1580s....”

First, risk did not daunt the author, who was something of a Feste, the clown in this same play. Speaking of Feste, Olivia says, “There is no slander in an allowed fool, though he do nothing but rail” (I.v.). Certainly the author of the plays had often been allowed to rail.

Second, just because there was a performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple in 1602 doesn't mean this was the *first* performance.

Third, the play had to have been written before the death of Philip Sidney in October 1586. No matter how aggravating Sidney could be, the author would not have been so insensitive as to caricature him as the dolt Sir Andrew Aguecheek after Sir Philip died as the result of battle wounds. And there is ample evidence that Aguecheek *is* a caricature of Sidney, starting with his name. (Sidney was born on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle,

November 30, 1554, and, according to Ben Jonson, “Sir Philip was no pleasant man in countenance, his face being spoiled with pimples.” See James Osborn's *Young Philip Sidney*, 1972, p. 518. Quoting from *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*.)

Therefore, the play in essentially its present form was most likely written after the events in the life of Edmund Campion in 1581, alluded to in Act IV, scene ii, and before the death of Philip Sidney in 1586. A good guess for the date of authorship would be early 1583. Sidney had finally been knighted in January of 1583, more for convenience than for reasons of service or valor. (See Katherine Duncan-Jones's *Sir Philip Sidney*, 1989, p.xvi.) In the play, Aguecheek is said to be a “knight, dubbed with unhatched rapier and on carpet consideration” (III.iv.). He is addressed as “knight” and “sir” far too many times for it not to have been a very topical allusion.

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