

The First Oxfordian Edition of *Twelfth Night*

Reviewed by Felicia Londré

William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, Annotated from an Oxfordian Perspective. By Michael Delahoyde. *The Oxfordian Shakespeare Series*. 2021, 184 pages, (paperback \$17).

So often does *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* come around in stagings of Shakespeare that we think we know it rather well. Yet Michael Delahoyde, Professor of English at Washington State University, offers fresh insights in his annotations along with bonus touches of sly humor. His edition earns a place on any scholar's shelf of various editions of the play.

A prefatory essay by Earl Showerman handles the necessary preliminary debunking of William Shakspeare's claim to authorship of Shakespeare's works. The clear and cogent presentation of salient points against the orthodox case, followed by a summary introduction to Edward de Vere, prepares readers of any background for Dr. Delahoyde's Oxfordian perspective on the play.

Michael Delahoyde's own introduction is substantial and nicely complements his annotations of the main text. He begins by surveying speculation about the enigmatic title that seems to allude to the 6th of January whereas the text itself suggests that the action occurs in May. This segues smoothly into the thematic notion of revelries coming to an end after things have gone too far. Over indulgence characterizes Orsino's performance of love for Olivia, Olivia's performance of grief for her brother, and certainly the heartless trick played on one who loves himself excessively, condoned by



one who drinks to excess. Given *G'lgannati* as a key source for *Twelfth Night* and Oxford's having been in Siena, Italy in January 1576, around the time the Italian play was traditionally performed for Twelfth Night, it seems possible that the title served as an homage to Italian hosts with recollection of a good time—although Delahoyde responsibly abstains from such excess speculation.

A survey of Oxfordian scholars' dating of the play gives possible dates ranging from 1575/76 to the early 1580s, in contrast to "the orthodox 1601 dating" (xxi). 1580 seems reasonable, although "pervasive evidence of revision" (xxiii) complicates the matter. Dr. Delahoyde lays out the telltale signs of revision with attention to the overlapping roles of Feste and Fabian.

The longest section of the introduction focuses on the characters, pinning down the quotations and allusions that are key to identifying the real-life models. *Twelfth Night* must have been a delicious *pièce à clé* for those at court who would recognize the traits being skewered. The parallels of personality, reported comments and anecdotes are abundant in tying Malvolio to Sir Christopher Hatton (Privy Councilor and Lord Chancellor) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek to Sir Philip Sidney. Other identifications include Oxford's sharp-tongued sister Mary as Maria, her husband Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby (and perhaps also Thomas Sackville Lord Buckhurst) as Sir Toby Belch, Queen Elizabeth as Olivia, and Oxford himself as both Feste and Orsino.

Under the subheading "Speculations," Delahoyde explains the Prince Tudor thesis and how the play might be interpreted in the light of this possibility. It's an indication of Delahoyde's lively writing that he manages to work in references to "Viola's pushing of identity and relationship boundaries in a wild LGBTQIA+ romp" (xl) and to Queen Elizabeth as fostering "a kind of gender-fluidity in her own self-presentation" (xli).

The final section of the introduction offers a range of explanations for the meaning of "M.O.A.I." in the letter that Malvolio reads, but singles out Alan W. Green's solution, well supported by textual clues, as the most compelling. That perspective, along with hints of numerical codes and the repeated phrase, "it's all one," seem to open onto other horizons of inquiry, particularly with reference to a religious or spiritual dimension.

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The heart of the book, of course, is the text of *Twelfth Night* with annotations on the facing page. With the introduction as a preview of the main indicators of Oxford's hand, the notes—without seeming redundant—connect those points to specific lines. The real strength of the book is the great proportion of notes that provide Oxfordian context as opposed to merely glossing relatively unfamiliar vocabulary. These notes frequently cross-reference other Shakespeare plays and offer interpretive (and often amusing) side comments. For example, alone among the six editions that I consulted, Delahoyde elaborates on the play's initial word "if." He further compares and contrasts the opening line to *Anthony and Cleopatra*'s "music, moody food" (2.5.1).

Again, Delahoyde is alone in annotating "violets" in Orsino's line 6; he notes the allusion to royalty in their purple color, with parallel usage in *Venus and Adonis* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*; and in connection with Viola's name as Latin for "violet," makes the leap to speculation "that in all these instances Shakespeare is alluding to the Earl of Southampton, who may as a boy have played female roles in plays such as this" (2). In occasional notes throughout Acts 3 and 4, Delahoyde demonstrates an apparently vast knowledge of Elizabethan songs.

The notes for Act 2, scene 5, the baiting of Malvolio, are especially rich. They extend the introduction's answer to the riddle of M.O.A.I., again crediting Alan W. Green (xlvī, 80). Green is listed in the bibliography for a book and a website, but no book under the listed title appears either in WorldCat or on BookFinder. Other cavils might be the occasional note in which the attempted wit fails to land the point, as in note 47 for Act 1, scene 5, about the transfer of power from Queen Elizabeth: "If the Prince Tudor theory is correct, Lady Diana had a stronger claim to the throne of England than Prince Charles" (26). Huh?

The De Vere Shakespeare Series is thus proving to be a successful undertaking. Launched in 2007 with *Macbeth*, under the general editorship of Richard F. Whalen, the series comprises *Othello* (2010), a revised and expanded *Macbeth* (2013), *Anthony and Cleopatra* (2015), *Hamlet* (2018), and now *Twelfth Night*. Presumably the format will be regularized as the series continues through the canon. Meanwhile, we now see thumbnail illustrations and classier cover designs. This edition serves the project well.

