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“What country, friends, is this?”: Australian and New Zealand Productions of *Twelfth Night* in the Twentieth Century

The production history of a Shakespeare play serves as a remarkable matrix by which to observe changes in styles of production and reception in any society in transition from colony to independent nation, and in our case, that of New Zealand and Australia, the equally difficult transition to regarding ourselves as no longer the Antipodes, but the centre of our own world. “Indigenising the imperial canon” (to employ an apt phrase of Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, used here in its general sense, not with reference to indigenous peoples) is clearly a crucial part of this development (Gilbert and Tompkins 22, 176–84).¹

Colonial Debts in the Early Twentieth Century

In theatre, as in most other spheres of life, Australia and New Zealand followed British styles of Shakespeare production closely in the nineteenth century. New productions by Samuel Phelps or Henry Irving would quickly be mounted for the trans-Tasman circuit, often by a member of the London company eager (usually in a larger role) to continue the success in the thriving theatres of colonial Australia and New Zealand.² This is not to deny, of course, the specifically local flavour that might be imparted by a particular actor, such as the Australian-born Essie Jenyns, whose performance as Viola in 1887 sent the reviewer of the *Bulletin* home in a “clamorous condition from over-excitement” for a shower-bath.³ Notwithstanding local excitation, the main lines of interpretation were nearly always determined at the imperial centre

In a *Twelfth Night* programme probably from the late 1920s or the 1930s, Roland McCarty’s production announced proudly that “the cuts used in this production are those of the late Sir Herbert Tree, in his London productions”.

¹ In Gilbert and Lo (2007) the chapter entitled “Indigenizing Australian Theatre” (47–81) uses the term to refer specifically to “the integration of Aboriginal practitioners and products into the nation’s performing arts industry, with a concomitant valorization of (selected) markers of Aboriginality in political, aesthetic and/or commercial terms” (50), a much more specialized sense than I wish to convey.

² I use the term “Australia” for convenience, but it must be remembered that it was not a country in the nineteenth century, but a collection of separate colonies that, together with New Zealand, and with travel mainly by ship anyway, created a convenient colonial touring circuit.

³ Quoted by Fotheringham (307); cited by Waterhouse (28, n. 39 [*sic; recte* 38]).

Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's lavishly spectacular Shakespeare productions about the turn of the century continued the tradition of Henry Irving, and Tree's scenery, costumes, and effects were legendary, as illustrations of the elaborate garden set for Olivia in *Twelfth Night* demonstrate.⁴ Roland McCarty's presentation seems likely to have been reliant on Allan Wilkie's productions in Australia and New Zealand of the 19-teens and 1920s,⁵ and Wilkie had not only seen Tree's production in London, but had acted a small role in the 1904 revival. In his Australian and New Zealand productions Wilkie played Malvolio, and his costume and make-up,



Figure 1: Colonial debts: Allan Wilkie as Malvolio, his appearance based on Beerbohm Tree's London portrayals. (By permission of Ms Lisa Warrington; unidentified publicity clipping from the 19-teens or 1920s, in the private collection of Ms Warrington.)

even his beard, were very similar to the Spanish grandee style of Tree (see Fig. 1).⁶ Wilkie modelled his characterization of Malvolio on Tree as well, making him “a solemn ass, a man so crusted over with the observance of his own outward dignity that he had nothing kindly or human left” (*Argus* [Melbourne] 6 March 1916; qtd. in Warrington 64). He even had a “ceremoniously grandiose” Malvolio leitmotif composed for the orchestra to play at each entry, in time to which Malvolio strutted on with his long staff of office; the music ensured, of course, that the comic effect of the individual entries became cumulative.⁷ And he was attended, as was Tree, by “four smaller Malvolios, who aped the great chamberlain in dress, in manners, in deportment” (Shaw 249).⁸

Wilkie was also following Tree when he tore off his badge of office and flung it at Olivia’s feet at the end of the play, but it seems he introduced an entirely original comic sentimentalism by having Olivia “entreat him to a peace” (5.1.379) before he could finish his slow upstage exit after “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you”:

Olivia taking pity upon his fallen state beckons to Fabian to run and call him back. Malvolio slowly returns and Olivia picks up the chain of office and motions to him, he kneels and she places the chain around his neck. He kisses her hand and stands erect, his old self, and goes off with his pompous walk and head in air.⁹

This is a remarkable antipodean addition to the performance history of *Twelfth Night*.

As an actor-manager in charge of his own company, securing “curtains” for himself by having Malvolio the central or only figure on stage as the curtain fell at the end of each act or major scene was a great and necessary art. A review from 1928 is revealing about the end of 2.3 (the scene in which the late-night revelling by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and the Clown is interrupted by Malvolio):

⁴ See, e.g., the illustration of Tree as Malvolio appearing cross-gartered to Olivia in her garden, from the *Illustrated London News*, February 16, 1901; reproduced as Fig. 11 in Donno (32).

⁵ Among other evidence, his programme uses Wilkie’s synopsis of the play.

⁶ I am indebted to Lisa Warrington for providing this illustration from her thesis on Wilkie. Neither of us has been able to identify where or when it was published.

⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* (April 24, 1916), cited in Golder (126) in the caption to a caricature of Wilkie as Malvolio (a useful comparison to the image of Tree in Olivia’s garden referred to in note 4). See also Warrington (64–5).

⁸ Warrington (65) quotes this as Sprague (4), but Sprague is quoting Shaw.

⁹ Wilkie’s recollection many decades later, in a letter to Arthur Colby Sprague cited by Warrington (65). Warrington assumes this to have been Tree’s happy ending (although she cites Wilkie’s admission that “how much of this business I owed to Tree and how much I evolved myself I don’t know”; 66). I am indebted to Elizabeth Schafer for the information that the reconciliation appears in none of the Phelps or Tree promptbooks she has examined for her “Shakespeare in Production” edition of *Twelfth Night* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). All quotations from *Twelfth Night* in this essay are from the Arden Second Series edition (1975).

Mr Wilkie had contrived much elaborate ‘business’ so that he himself might take the curtain. Instead of going off to bed, [Sir Toby and Sir Andrew] sank snoring back to back upon the floor. The Feste stole in with a ghost-like effigy that he had contrived out of a sheet, woke the knights, and sent them into the wings roaring with terror. Forthwith, humming over snatches from his songs, “O Mistress Mine” and “Come Away Death”, Feste pulled his chair close to the fire and fell into a doze. Thus it was that Malvolio was able to make his entrance carrying a drawn sword, and skirmishing round after marauders. (*Sydney Morning Herald* 3 May 1928)

Comparison of Wilkie’s appearance and acting of Malvolio with that of Tree, and even with that of Henry Irving and Phelps before him, makes clear the extent to which London theatre was regarded as the touchstone for how Shakespeare should be performed.¹⁰ Productions in Australia at this time also recreated the very broad comedy then standard in London in the performance of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and the other characters of the sub-plot, as is confirmed not only by contemporary reviewers, but also by a programme illustration from an Allan Wilkie production in Sydney in 1916. Wilkie’s company made an astonishing contribution to Shakespeare in Australasia, touring continuously to all parts of both countries throughout the 19-teens and 1920s, and with more than twenty plays in the repertoire. Clearly, however, Australia and New Zealand were still an extension of the British provinces.

Professional theatre in both countries, already in decline after World War I and with competition from the cinema, suffered further with the advent of the talkies, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and World War II. In the 1950s, however, *Twelfth Night* became significant in marking changing approaches to Shakespeare.

Fresh Approaches in the 1950s

Outside New Zealand, Ngaio Marsh is principally known as a writer of detective fiction, and is especially associated with the country-house genre popularized by Agatha Christie. Readers of her thrillers will be aware, however, of the frequency in them of theatrical occurrences. Ngaio Marsh as a very young aspiring New Zealand actress got her first acting job touring with Allan Wilkie in Shakespeare in 1919–20. Subsequently she became a director who greatly influenced the production of Shakespeare in New Zealand. Marsh returned from

¹⁰ A *London Illustrated News* (August 16, 1884) depiction of Irving as Malvolio shows the same Spanish grandee style, the same beard, the same staff and chain of office, and the same arrogant stance that both Tree and Wilkie adopted; cf. notes 4 and 7. The image is reproduced as Fig. 4 in Gay, Introduction to *Twelfth Night* (12).

a period in England to New Zealand in 1951, bringing with her a professional company of actors. Many were English, but she deliberately sought London-based Australian and New Zealand actors, as well as some from other parts of what was now being called the British Commonwealth. The intention, sadly unrealized, was that her British Commonwealth Theatre Company should become a permanent professional touring ensemble. That it should be an ensemble was emphasized in a programme note: “There is no starring of players and there will be frequent interchanges of cast”.¹¹

One of her productions was *Twelfth Night*; and despite her modern aversion to star players, vestiges of her experience with Wilkie’s company survived, such as Malvolio entering in 2.2 with Olivia’s ring held out to Viola on his long staff of office.¹² Nevertheless, much was new: Marsh writes of the difficulty of persuading her young romantic leads not to follow the then standard melancholy English tradition of playing everything for “infinite sadness”. She also broke with tradition in 4.2 (the scene in which the Clown teases Malvolio, who is imprisoned in the “dark house”) when “a giant be-ribboned birdcage, prominent throughout the garden scenes ... became Malvolio’s mobile prison, being clapped over his head, leaving his legs free” (Marsh, “Note on a Production” 71). At least, so she describes it; but the word used in the promptbook is not “birdcage” (which implies an openwork wire or basketwork cage that Malvolio would be able to see out of)—but “dovecote”. The direction written into the promptbook has Malvolio, still cross-gartered and at liberty, appearing at the top of a set of stairs to see Olivia happily exiting with Sebastian at the end of 4.1. As he descends the stairs, Maria and Feste “drop dovecote over him ... Feste steers Malvolio down the steps”.¹³ Fortunately Marsh has provided a delightful sketch in the margin, which shows that the solid circular dovecote, with conical tiled roof, itself looked like a huge unhappy face—two square openings for eyes, and a drooping rectangular mouth looking utterly mournful (see Fig. 2). Elaborate comic business ensued: the Clown knocking on the dovecote to attract Malvolio’s attention; looking into the dark “eye” openings as if they were windows (in realistic terms, access in

¹¹ *Twelfth Night* programme, British Commonwealth Theatre Company, from Christchurch performances 29 August–8 September 1951.

¹² Sprague (5) credits Tree with introducing this business, so it is almost certainly another of the many elements Wilkie copied. Marsh’s working script is annotated “Bus. Ring Staff,” and the theatrical promptbook has a charming sketch by Marsh showing Malvolio holding the staff out horizontally with the ring sparkling at its end (Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, fMS 166, and MSI Papers 1397–4/32).

¹³ Promptbook (Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, MSI Papers 1397–4/32). Although the production may have changed during the tour, the substitution of an open “birdcage” for the very funny and much more appropriately dark interior of the dovecote seems theatrically unproductive. On the other hand, the promptbook drawing was probably made prior to the production, whereas Marsh’s description of the birdcage was, if her memory was accurate, a recollection of what happened in performance. When I cited Marsh’s birdcage in “*Maluolio within*” (398, n. 33) I was unaware of the promptbook evidence. I am grateful to Mark Houllahan for drawing it to my attention.



Figure 2: Fresh approaches: Ngaio Marsh's promptbook sketch of a dove-cote as Malvolio's "dark house" in 4.2 of the British Commonwealth Theatre Company's 1951 touring production. Dir. Ngaio Marsh. (By permission of the estate of Dame Ngaio Marsh; Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, MSI Papers 1397-4/32.)

and out for the doves) as he declaimed about the "bay-windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south-north" (4.2.37-9); and losing his false beard to Malvolio's desperately clutching hands. The perambulatory and dejected dove-cote was left holding a beard to which no person was attached as the Clown commented, "there is no darkness but ignorance" (4.2.43-4).

Where Ngaio Marsh had failed to establish a national touring company in New Zealand, despite such lively staging, Richard and Edith Campion succeeded, in 1953, by creating the New Zealand Players. Richard Campion rejected what he regarded as Marsh's old-fashioned methods that required actors to be puppets ("like classical ballet dancers" he has said, "highly coloured universal bullshit").¹⁴

¹⁴ Richard Campion, personal communication (also the source for most of this paragraph, confirmed in places by promptbooks at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, 80-321-11). Certainly Marsh's director's copy confirms that most of the blocking and even gestures were carefully worked out ahead of rehearsals.

Instead, he drew on his experience at the Old Vic Drama School in London for his 1956 New Zealand Players production. He strove to retain a delicacy of balance between romance and comedy (and adopted Laurence Olivier's recent success with having a slightly working-class accent as Malvolio). The Clown addressed the audience direct on occasion. The set design broke with tradition in its use of freestanding units to merely suggest the different locations of the play, and Orsino and Olivia's separate houses were majestically joined together into a single, arched dwelling in full view of the audience in Act 5. It was both a visual metaphor of harmony for the union of all the lovers, and a foretaste of theatre in New Zealand and Australia, as in Britain and elsewhere, breaking free of the trammels of a hundred years of "upholstered Shakespeare".

In the same year, 1956, in Australia, Hugh Hunt, who had directed the play in London in 1950, presented an all-Australian cast in *Twelfth Night* as part of the inaugural season of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, opening in Sydney prior to a national tour. The critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, apparently still anticipating the broad comedy inherited from Beerbohm Tree via Oscar Asche, Allan Wilkie and Roland McCarty, commented:

Here, at last, was a producer determined to convince us that "Twelfth Night" is primarily a love story whose mood of entrancing sweetness must never be defiled by belching Tivoli-style vaudeville from the comic characters. Here, at last, are the romance and the comedy given as equal strands, each in harmony (instead of the usual crude conflict) with the other. (L.B., *Sydney Morning Herald* n.d.)

The *Bulletin*, however, complained of this same "entrancing sweetness", finding it too English: "too much emphasis on languid grace and lovely grouping and movement tends to transform the plays into scented essays on style. The last Old Vic company to visit ... was an extreme exponent [of] ... emasculated Shakespeare" (25 April 1956; qtd. Gay, "International Glamour" 190–91).

The Maria in this production was Zoe Caldwell. She had the previous year played Viola in Melbourne in a John Sumner production re-directed for touring by Ray Lawler (the Clown in Hunt's production). It is interesting to note that Ray Lawler is best known in Australia as the author of *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, set in Melbourne among working-class sugar-cane cutters. Lawler was writing his play, a harbinger of the new nationalism in Australian drama, at the very time he was directing *Twelfth Night*.¹⁵ Also part of the Melbourne production, when it went on a country tour, was the young Barry Humphries, later to become famous to the world as that epitome of Australian middle-classness,

¹⁵ Elizabeth Schafer notes that Lawler's direction, and even more his playing of the Clown, may have influenced his writing: "'Youth's a stuff will not endure' is a sentiment that resonates through almost every line of *The Doll*" ("Unsettling AustrIllyria" 349).

Dame Edna Everage. Humphries was playing Orsino in this production. His future as a comedian was evident from his occasional deliberate misreading:

For example, in the opening scene, instead of ‘Enough, no more’ when referring to music as the food of love, he suddenly commanded ‘Enough—no, *more!*’ ... Edna Everage started her life in 1955 in the touring bus ... where [Humphries] entertained the cast over monotonous roads between country towns. (Sumner 38)¹⁶

Apparently Edna, Humphries’ world-famous comedy impersonation, was a burlesque parody of the ladies in the small towns they played at who made speeches of thanks to the company at supper after the show. Had Barry Humphries ever played Sir Toby (he actually wanted to play Sir Andrew), he would also no doubt have resembled his other famous creation, Sir Les Patterson, the gin-soaked diplomat left over from the colonial era. Penny Gay suggests that Humphries “perhaps invented ‘Iarrikin Shakespeare’ on this tour” (Gay, “International Glamour” 277, n. 21).

The inter-reliance of professional Shakespearean productions in the English-speaking world at this period is suggested by the Cavalier costume in Tyrone Guthrie’s 1957 Canadian production at Stratford, Ontario (a costume that allows Viola’s disguise to be considerably ornamented, and which permits long hair), which was adopted for Peter Hall’s famous 1958–60 Stratford production in England, and then by the John Alden Shakespeare Company in Sydney in 1960.

The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius: Cultural Change and Nationalism

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of enormous social and cultural change in Australia and New Zealand. In the theatre, this was the age of *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *The Rocky Horror Show* (written by New Zealander Richard O’Brien and directed by Australian Jim Sharman). Youth culture and a new attitude to sexual relations coincided with the invigorating nationalism of local writing and production, and the movement away from realist scenery and acting. Productions of *Twelfth Night* reflected the change. A Queensland Theatre Company programme note in 1972 quoted Jan Kott’s influential book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* in support of alternating nightly the roles of Sebastian and Viola between the actor and actress playing the roles. This decision cheerfully reflected (at least on the nights when the actor played Viola and the actress played Sebastian) Kott’s preoccupation with the Elizabethan convention in which “a boy dresses up as a girl who disguises herself as a boy” (Kott 209).

At the Fortune Theatre in Dunedin in 1975 the men all had long hippy-length hair and were dressed in flowing kaftans; only Viola was in jeans and boots

¹⁶ See also Humphries 141–5.



Figure 3: The age of Aquarius: Orsino's court, with all the long-haired men in kaftans, Viola in jeans and boots, at the Fortune Theatre, Dunedin, 1975. Dir. Jan Prettejohn, des. Murray Hutchinson. (By permission Fortune Theatre Company; photo Denyse Watson.)

(Fig. 3). While this design style suggested to some viewers simply a relaxed fantasy world where Viola was clearly an outsider, the lesbian director and gay designer may have been hoping to offer at least a suggestion of sexual ambiguity and homoeroticism. What marked a more obviously antipodean postcolonial flavour was the delighted audience reaction when Malvolio's cross-gartering was presented in the form of extra-long knitted rugby socks.

In Sydney in 1977 John Bell's production for the Nimrod Street Theatre also quoted Jan Kott in its programme, in reference to Elizabethan boy actors, and cast Russell Kiefel as Viola. "Typically Sydney", commented Dorothy Hewett, "to translate one of Shakespeare's marvellous transvestite heroines into Elizabethan reality!" (Hewett). Dorothy Hewett, we might note, was one of the new Australian playwrights, but, unusually, one who learned her stagecraft on a quasi-Elizabethan stage (the New Fortune at the University of Western Australia). Although the sexually ambiguous Viola was costumed to suggest the boy in the 1971 film of *Death in Venice*, the setting was much closer to home. For Hewett, the design suggested Sydney: "slatted wood, jetties, platforms stained with bird-shit, striped awnings, lapping water, and the sound of gulls" (Hewett). Hewett found, however, as did other critics, that the production was somewhat awkward with a male Viola because the other female roles were played by women. The result was to shift the balance of attention to the comic plot, which was served by strong actors and

inventive business. “Malvolio, timidly taking off his sandshoes to paddle in the sea, is pure Buster Keaton.” Meanwhile, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew and (in this production without a Fabian) a menacing Clown cavorted behind Malvolio’s giant beach umbrella as he read the letter in 2.5.

Perhaps more important than any of this was that the Nimrod was the Sydney base of the new wave of Australian drama and theatre. John Smythe identifies Nimrod’s irreverent 1971 *Hamlet on Ice* as a landmark, and Elizabeth Schafer notes a “fashion for Australianising Shakespeare, for making Shakespeare exuberantly larrikin. By performing the plays in a brash, often iconoclastic way, the Nimrod Shakespeares established a tradition for playing Shakespeare full of ‘vitality, energy and openness’,” and quotes Bell as describing these production as “identifiably and distinctively ‘Australian’”.¹⁷ In addition, at Nimrod the actors did not have to speak the BBC English that was normally required on stage. They spoke in their own Australian accents (those who had not irrecoverably suppressed them in order to get jobs on radio). Here was a milestone in transporting Shakespeare to the antipodes.¹⁸ Furthermore, the imperial centre was losing its monopoly: a younger generation of actors, directors and designers was as likely to be influenced by American film (here, the silent movie comic Buster Keaton) as British theatre.

At Home in the Southern Hemisphere

While some productions retained Elizabethan or Jacobean costuming, and sets that either suggested “back then, over there” or were stylistically abstract (such as Raymond Hawthorne’s carefully choreographed 1979 production in Auckland for Theatre Corporate), Neil Armfield’s famous 1983 production for the Lighthouse (the State Theatre Company of South Australia) was a different matter entirely. The play was ostensibly set on a Mediterranean shore, but Caribbean Copacabana music gave it a holiday-brochure fantasy feel. The *Sydney Morning Herald* theatre critic H. G. Kippax complained, however: “just why we need to be taken to the Caribbean to watch a good old Australian booze-up [is] baffling” (9 Jan. 1984). In combination with Australian accents, modern dress, and very

¹⁷ John Smythe, personal communication, 22 November 2007; Elizabeth Schafer, “Unsettling Austrillyria” (348–9). Schafer also discusses the Sydney Old Tote Theatre production of *Taming of the Shrew*, “the first explicitly and confrontationally Australianized Shakespeare in mainstream theatre,” in “Reconciliation Shakespeare” (59).

¹⁸ The use of Australian accents seems to have started with characters who in England would have played with a regional dialect; Tyrone Guthrie asked for Australian accents rather than Mummerset or Cockney for his *Shepherd and Messenger* for the Old Tote Theatre Company’s *Oedipus Rex* in Sydney in 1970, and for the *Widow of Florence* and her daughter Diana in *All’s Well That Ends Well* for the Melbourne Theatre Company the same year. In John Bell’s production of *Hamlet* at the Nimrod in 1973, however, not only the Gravedigger but also Polonius were played in broad Australian—presumably not only because the roles were doubled. (John Smythe, personal communication, 22 November 2007.)



Figure 4: Southern hemisphere: Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (John Wood and Geoffrey Rush) as ocker blokes at the Lighthouse (State Theatre Company of South Australia), Adelaide, 1983. Dir. Neil Armfield. (By permission State Theatre Company of South Australia; photo David Wilson.)

broad ocker portrayals of Sir Toby (“John Wood’s bibulous Belch, clad in the obligatory Saturday afternoon Oz bowler’s blazer and cream”—*National Times*, 6–12 Mar. 1983) and Sir Andrew (Geoffrey Rush, who had played Fabian and understudied Sir Andrew at the Queensland Theatre Company in 1972) making Sir Andrew try hard to be fashionable and getting it just wrong, it is not surprising that some critics saw it as set in Australia (see Fig. 4).

Besides excellent ensemble playing, Armfield (again drawing on Kott) had his Orsino clearly in love with the boy Cesario in Gillian Jones’s persuasive performance before she was revealed as Viola. More open discussion of homosexuality in the 1960s and 70s (including an American musical based on *Twelfth Night* called *Your Own Thing*, which made Orsino’s difficulty explicit), led to greater attention to this element of attraction (though less so to Olivia’s potentially lesbian attraction to Viola).¹⁹ It also led to an almost obligatory assumption that Antonio’s love for Sebastian is sexual, despite the class difference that in the Elizabethan period would have been an even greater obstacle than the

¹⁹ Laurie E. Osborne (1996) considers the historical balance of male homosexual versus lesbian potentiality in performance, esp. chap. 5, “Textual Perversity in Illyria”.

sinfulness of homosexual acts. The Clown in Armfield's production was played by a woman, Kerry Walker, but ambiguously in male costume. Her night club style singing, and her watchful, cynical presence, usefully contrasted with the boisterous comedy and rich romance.

The production was immensely successful, toured from Adelaide to Sydney, and was subsequently filmed by Armfield. The film adaptation was, like that of Kenneth Branagh in the UK, shot in what is clearly a studio, and based on the stage production; but unlike Branagh's, the mood is summer festivity—perhaps *Twelfth Night* in Australia's southern Christmas period.²⁰ As in the stage version, Armfield draws attention to the artifice of the medium by having the blue sky behind the introductory beach party revealed as no more than a cyclorama: a hidden door in it opens, and Orsino enters. In the dead silence that follows this breaking of the illusion, he saunters onto the streamer-decorated terrace, glances at the Caribbean combo, and restarts the party with "If music be the food of love, play on" (1.1.1). This festive atmosphere, but always with a sardonic edge of theatrical self-awareness (particularly from Kerry Walker's sexually ambiguous Clown), gives the film both great gusto and sharp poignancy.

Unlike the stage production, the actress of Viola here also plays Sebastian, though the filmic crosscutting between them suggests a low budget more than a thematic intermingling. In the comic play, however, the energy, timing and Ocker parody of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in particular ensure that the performance is borne on with gusts of laughter. Music supports the performance, with the small combo available at a moment's notice to play for the Clown, provide martial drumbeats for Sir Andrew's arrival at the mock duel, or create the mood for a change of scene. Close-up photography allows the viewer intimate consideration of individual psychology, so the love and uncertainty of Orsino, Olivia and Viola are intense. By the same token, the deeply wary observation of the Clown, a sad Buster Keaton persona apparently adopted by a middle-aged female torch singer, is brought to our attention most forcefully. In the final scene, as she sings "The Rain It Raineth Every Day," the moon on the night sky slips down to be revealed as a theatre follow-spot, thus mirroring the self-reflexive artifice of the opening sequence.

Simon Bennett's Wellington production at the Depot in 1989, and to some extent his 1992 Auckland production at the Watershed, had a similarly theatricalist emphasis, and stressed zany comedy almost to the exclusion of sustained romance. At the Depot the cast of eight was so small that audience members who were familiar with the play constantly wondered how actors would cope with each impending dialogue with themselves. For instance, the same actor played Antonio and Orsino, and therefore their confrontation in Act 5 involved a lot of pushing of each other behind a screen, and legs and arms appearing briefly in two different

²⁰ Neil Armfield's film, which he directed himself, was released in 1986 by *Twelfth Night Ltd.*, and is currently available from the Australian Film Institute. Branagh's Renaissance Theatre stage production was produced and directed by Paul Kafno for Thames Television, and released in 1988.

jackets and two pairs of trousers. The inventive solution to getting Antonio off-stage was a helicopter rescue (sound effects plus a rope ladder lowered from above), based on the Vietnam war film *Apocalypse Now*; Antonio was described in the programme as “a grunt”, American slang for soldier. Again we see pervasive American popular film culture redefining the points of reference for Shakespearean performance in New Zealand and Australia.

At Perth in 1991 Andrew Ross launched the multicultural Black Swan Theatre with a production of *Twelfth Night*, seizing on the affirmatory spirit of the play for the occasion. The set was a northern Australian Illyria: “an anti-illusionist, sculptural space of bleached wooden paving and copper sunflowers, of brooding elemental shapes set against an ever-changing sky. There are traces of Asia, the outback and our northern coastline” (Williams). The acting was mixed, particularly with some non-native speakers of English having trouble with Shakespeare’s language, but a ludicrously petty ex-colonial bureaucrat Malvolio, a musical Clown and an emotionally convincing Viola were high points. The multicultural effort was generally praised but one of the most sympathetic reviewers pointed out the dangers of “damaging racial stereotypes: notably an orientalist ‘Asian princess’ and a brawling Aboriginal drunk” as Sir Toby (Williams).²¹

The advantages of making Malvolio an outsider in the play were demonstrated in Rodney Fisher’s delicate 1992 production for the Royal Queensland Theatre Company. Bille Brown as Malvolio was described as “lugubrious, obsequious, tyrannical. He makes the letter scene into a solo tour de force, a lovingly structured aria that changes tempo, rhythm and key, exploiting every opportunity to build to a climax of ambition triumphant” (Kiernander). To play the letter scene mainly to the audience in this way, rather than developing a lot of action of eavesdropping, narrowly-averted discovery, and other stage business, allowed Malvolio to isolate himself. At the end, “his eyes streaming with tears of mortification and rage, pointing to members of the audience in his frenzy, his embittered delivery of the last lines, ‘I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you’, is simultaneously funny, pathetic and terrifying” (Kiernander).

Malvolio’s treatment in Elric Hooper’s production for the Court Theatre in Christchurch in 1994 was also significant, for somewhat different reasons. In 4.2 Malvolio’s head and hands were encased in a box of clear polycarbonate: a kind of high-tech pillory.²² It was evident in the acting that he could not see out, though the audience could see in. His voice was hollowly amplified. The effect was of someone being driven mad by institutional brutality of the kind associated with the treatment of political dissidents in mental hospitals during the final years of the Soviet Union. The *concept* of imprisonment was being staged rather than a representation of a prison, perhaps with the aim of keeping Malvolio downstage

²¹ Gilbert and Lo (134–5) discuss the casting and performance of this production as it relates more particularly to using Shakespeare as a site for politicizing Aboriginality, as does Schafer in “Reconciliation Shakespeare”, 61.

²² A photograph is reproduced as Fig. 9 in Carnegie (405).

just as Ngaio Marsh had done in Christchurch forty years earlier. (There were other similarities between the productions.) Technical requirements for a microphone cord led to a rope being attached to Malvolio's leg to further indicate imprisonment; and practical difficulties in manoeuvring Malvolio offstage required the Clown to assist with the rope. In order to motivate this technical business, the Clown had to be moved to pity by the sight of Malvolio's suffering (thereby reinforcing the stage tradition since Henry Irving in the nineteenth century).²³ Sympathy for the Clown, too (a Velasquez dwarf, though not based on the idea of Armin being a dwarf), was achieved by revealing in a frozen tableau at the end that he also was one of Olivia's hopeless admirers.

The following year in Wellington, Murray Lynch's production for Circa Theatre deliberately eschewed the tragedy of Malvolio, and emphasized the festive side of the comedy by setting it on a partying cruise ship. ("What vessel, friends, is this?" "This is th' *Illyria*, lady". Rehearsals included research on ocean liners such as had brought the immigrant parents of many of the cast to New Zealand.) The Clown was an entertainer with a ukulele and a ventriloquist's dummy and dressed in 2.3 as a huge Christmas tree (Sir Andrew as a pink rabbit) underneath which Maria was able to hide from Malvolio. In Act 5, Malvolio's final line of revenge was undercut by his then seizing a child's rubber duck water ring before leaping overboard with a great splash. One could assume he would be rescued, humiliated but unharmed.

Extensive clowning in the sub-plot was also an important feature of Lisa Warrington's WOW! Productions staging in Dunedin in 1997.²⁴ Sir Toby and Sir Andrew were both potheads (though of course Sir Andrew quickly became imbecilic), and Maria and Sir Toby coupled at every opportunity (usually interrupted by Sir Andrew). Costume in this "rough theatre" production was modern, straight off the streets, and the Clown was played by a well-known local folksinger, the Canadian Lorina Harding. Malvolio's dark house in 4.2, however, was expressionistic in both lighting and concept: a table he carried on his back suggested a self-inflicted darkness and imprisonment. And similarly shadowy at times, and perhaps the most prominent conceptual element of the production, were constantly ambiguous same-sex encounters and eroticism, both of main characters and background chorus, both men and (principally) women. It was clear at one point that Maria was hungrily bisexual, and implied that Olivia might have been a willing partner. Nature did not to her bias draw, for the heterosexual romance of the play appeared perfunctory compared to the ambiguities of disguise, substitution, and modern sexual and gender choices.

²³ On Irving in 4.2, see Carnegie 396–7.

²⁴ I am grateful to Lisa Warrington for access to a video recording of this production, and to David O'Donnell, who played Orsino, for valuable comments.

The Bell Shakespeare Company

The Bell Shakespeare Company brings us in some ways full circle in this selective survey of the stage history of *Twelfth Night* in Australia and New Zealand. Like Allan Wilkie early in the century, John Bell has revived the actor-manager tradition by creating a company dedicated to touring Shakespeare. But John Bell was also one of the founders of the Nimrod Street Theatre in Sydney, one of the young bloods who pioneered the brash new Australian drama of the late 1960s and the 1970s. It was at the Nimrod that actors were encouraged to speak in their own voices. The logo of the Bell company was for many years,



Figure 5: Defiantly hybridized: the Bell Shakespeare Company logo from its formation to the mid-1990s, an Australian fringed lizard looking as if wearing an Elizabethan ruff. (By permission Bell Shakespeare Company.)

until the mid nineteen-nineties, an Australian frilled lizard, a distinctive creature of the Australian outback, but looking very Elizabethan in its ruff (Fig. 5). For the Bell Shakespeare Company, as for most practitioners now in Australia and New Zealand, Shakespeare is not an English playwright to be produced in accordance with English norms, but a part of our own culture, and presented according to our norms.

A sense of festivity was important in the Bell Shakespeare Company production in Sydney in 1995, and subsequent tour. David Fenton, the director, wanted a contemporary Australian production that would nevertheless reflect what he saw as the universals of the play:

There is a street in every city where late at night it feels like everyone is having a party ... These streets are the modern equivalent of the *Feast of Misrule*, the Twelfth Night of Christmas ... populated by drunks, sailors, black market profiteers and celebrities.²⁵

²⁵ From preparatory notes prepared for the cast prior to rehearsals. My information on the Bell Shakespeare production is based on interviews with most of the company, and access to the promptbook and other documentation, as well as attendance at several performances during the company's Melbourne season.

The designer, Andrew Raymond, chose Sydney's King's Cross as meeting this brief, and initially planned the interior of a nightclub called "Olivia's Place", where the Clown was an entertainer, and very large paintings ("tax-deductible") hung on the walls. Gradually the concept was simplified to a few real things (a large, modern black sofa on wheels; a rubbish dumpster) in an increasingly abstract set. The valuable art collection framed on the walls of Olivia's Place became finally a huge projection of the head of Botticelli's Venus (Love), seeming



Figure 6: Indigenized irony: an image of Botticelli's Venus floats above John Bell's yellow-stockinged Malvolio, the characterisation based on Britain's Enoch Powell, in the Bell Shakespeare Company's 1995 production in Sydney. Dir. David Fenton. (By permission Bell Shakespeare Company; photo Branco Gaica.)

to hover dispassionately at the back of the bare stage just as the audience peered in at the front (Fig. 6). She was also, however, a contemporary street billboard with the Coca-Cola style lettering now more familiar from fellow-Australian Baz Luhrmann's commercial graffiti images in his film of *Romeo + Juliet*. Love is both an abstraction and a set of responses to immediate pressures.

Within this conceptualized setting the characters were clearly delineated: a lively hard-drinking, and fun-loving trio of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria (aided by a competent Fabian who must originally have been envisaged as a bouncer at Olivia's Place), and a vigorous love triangle of self-confident Viola, lustful Olivia and romantic Orsino. The two outsiders were the Clown and Malvolio. The Clown was harsh and cynical, a performer driven, it seemed, by hatred of his audience, and he was dangerously out of control by the end of 4.2 (hammering with a baseball bat on the dumpster within which Malvolio was trapped).²⁶

John Bell's Malvolio, by contrast, was the perfectly controlled Edwardian butler in morning coat and pinstriped trousers, a whistle round his neck serving for his steward's badge of office (and to summon Maria and servants), and giving a hint of British military culture that despised the long hair and casual irresponsibility of those around him. His extraordinary appearance wearing a woman's garter belt and women's long yellow stockings in 3.4 carried transvestism into a new area of the play, but even then he was still wearing pinstriped boxer shorts (Fig. 6).²⁷ As the Clown sang his final song, the stage was not empty; Sir Andrew, having lost Olivia, and Antonio, having in this production lost Sebastian, were separately huddled like street derelicts against walls, "For the rain it raineth every day".

This was an assured, confident production, entirely at home in its Australian context. Of its various points of reference, we might note three as particularly significant for the current discussion. First, the Renaissance European; the Boticelli image presiding over Shakespeare's words. Second, the confident American Coca-Cola graffiti that commercializes and ironizes the European image. Third, Malvolio cast in an early twentieth-century British military culture; the sort of short-back-and-sides man who would despise long hair and lazy Australian accents. Indeed, he would disapprove of precisely the John Bell generation, the young men and women who, at the Nimrod and elsewhere in Australia and New Zealand, have assertively indigenized an icon of the imperial canon.

²⁶ A photograph is reproduced as Fig. 7 in Carnegie, (404).

²⁷ Penny Gay notes that Bell based Malvolio's characterization on British Conservative MP Enoch Powell, who had been "a figure of fun" as a young and pompous academic at Sydney University during his early career; the female stockings and gartering added "a whiff of the Tory sex scandals of the 1980s and early 1990s" (Introduction to *Twelfth Night*, 48). As the illustration demonstrates, and as I can confirm from seeing the production, Gay's evocative reference to fishnet stockings is not literally true. (See also Bell 241–2.) Schafer sees the Enoch Powell reference as suggesting a colonialist Malvolio, whereas I read it as one degree closer to home, though related: the parents of Bell and the Nimrod generation.

Coda: The Twenty-First Century

Two early-twenty-first century productions of *Twelfth Night* deserve comment. A 2002 production in Sydney directed by Mary-Ann Gifford for the Railway Street Theatre Company set the play in an American army base during the Second World War, presenting Orsino and his court as American soldiers, while Olivia and Malvolio were Australians. Malvolio was, according to Penny Gay,

defeated only by his lack of foreign “class”. His yellow stockings outfit was a complete old-fashioned Elizabethan actor’s costume, such as might have been seen in any Shakespeare production in Australia in the 1940s. Unconsciously embodying Australia’s long-lasting cultural cringe towards England, Malvolio was obviously hoping to impress with this grandiose image.²⁸

This sort of production may, as Gay argues, demonstrate an increased interest in *Twelfth Night* as a potentially political play.²⁹

Not overtly political, but relying just as much on local reference, Michael Hurst’s Auckland Theatre Company production of 2006 was set on a somewhat surrealist beach, the dominant and jokily discordant feature of which was a white grand piano, inevitably referencing the Australian/New Zealand film *The Piano* directed by Jane Campion.³⁰ Hurst gave the role of the Clown to a local actor, director, comedian, and celebrity called Oliver Driver. “And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them” demands Hamlet of the players; he would have been appalled by Driver’s Clown. But the Auckland audience rocked with laughter. Driver continually stepped out of character to explain obscure wordplay to the audience, or roll his eyes to indicate that it was beyond him, too; and he held the stage during the entire interval, joking like a stand-up comic with the audience about topical Auckland issues, until reluctantly hauled back into the play by the rest of the cast. The distinction between actor and character was as blurred as it must have been by Tarlton, Kempe, and Armin. Nothing could better illustrate how very much at home the cast and audience felt about playing Shakespeare.³¹

²⁸ Gay, Introduction to *Twelfth Night* 48.

²⁹ A production a few years ago in Los Angeles similarly used a military base as the setting for *Twelfth Night*, but for a rather different political purpose: to interrogate the government “don’t tell, don’t ask” policy on homosexuality in the American armed forces.

³⁰ Jane Campion is, as it happens, the daughter of Edith and Richard Campion, founders of the New Zealand Players, whose 1953 production of *Twelfth Night* is discussed above.

³¹ New Zealand’s leading Māori actor, George Henare, played Sir Toby (and a Māori actor played Orsino in Lynch’s 1995 production), but colour-blind casting is now so common in New Zealand as to evoke no comment, unless deliberately expressive, as often in productions of *Othello*. (Unquestioned casting of a Māori as Othello carries its own dangers of unrecognized racism, but that is another debate.)

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