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### Performance Analysis: *Twelfth Night*

The production of *Twelfth Night* as put on by the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company featured a framing narrative that bookended the sections of the play separated by an intermission. This element of the production altered individual scenes by forming 'a play within a play'. Within Shakespeare's time, 'warnings' or statements were made prior to the start of a performance because of regulations on plays, writers, and actors. Enforcing a controlling environment on the play's performance can show the 'antics' of Shakespeare's day where there is reality and opportunity for true representation in the arts in the modern day. This framing narrative elaborates on the foundation set by Shakespearean England but establishes the *true* setting of *Twelfth Night* as put on by actors in a secretive setting, who are then played by the cast of the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, who perform in the Otto M. Budig Theatre on Elm Street in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the United States of America.

The theatre's stage was designed to show *Twelfth Night* being performed in secrecy. The backwall showed glass windows and a massive sliding metal door like a warehouse setting, with wooden and cement debris clustered on the left side of the stage, a piano below a metal balcony and a metal spiral staircase from that balcony to the floor on the right side. The theatre is intimate, with audience seating surrounding the actors, as they travel backstage and to their next entrance through the aisles and behind the audience seats. This environment impacts how the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company staged the performance, but was only one of the

location/settings, as the 'play within a play' itself was in less of a demonstrative space for performance.

The play started with this 'warning' monologue about secrecy because of the play's 'content', insinuating the location of the play was where the arts are subjected to censorship and the actors threatened with legal repercussions for performing unapproved or banned works. The actors were in modern, plain clothes and carried garment bags with their rest of their costumes as they entered the stage as Jeremy Dublin (playing the actor playing Feste the fool) 'warned' the audience of the need for silence and hoped that were not any moles in the audience. The actors then changed into elements of their costumes and the internal play started with a portrayal of the shipwreck that separates Viola and Sebastian. The play then remains in the internal play for long enough to nearly make the audience forget the beginning or have them assume it was 'an odd choice' that does not impact the rest of the show.

When Toby, Mariah, and Feste go from plotting against Malvolio to singing, Toby was the one initially playing piano, but Elissa Levitt (the actor playing the actor playing Olivia) entered from the right in modern plain clothes and an altered hairstyle to substitute in on the piano. While a minor detail, this allowed the character of Toby to leave the piano and execute his choreography with Mariah and Feste without the piano dropping out of the scene. Levitt portrayed her character, the traveling actor, in this scene, not as Olivia.

Most of the internal vs external performance resided with Jeremy Dublin, as the one who signaled the beginnings and ends of both 'halves' of the play. At the close of the first half, sirens and flashing police lights came from behind the windows and the actors broke out of their *Twelfth Night* characters to be 'themselves', who went silent and ducked for cover. Dublin signals to the others that the police passed by, there was not anything to worry about, and they

would reconvene after the intermission. This abrupt, tense ending remains with the audience until Dublin returns to teach the audience the call and response participation portion of the show's ending jig. Dublin included additional 'wall-breaking' jokes regarding the study of theater and years dedicated to Shakespearean interpretation, knowing that a portion of the audience was university students taking notes. This demonstrated the third level of the 'cast', the actor contracted by the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, playing the traveling troop of actors fearful of discovery, playing the characters within *Twelfth Night* experiencing their comedic twists and turns.

Feste's costuming remains when Dublin assumes other necessary side characters, unlike other 'multiple castings' with the rest of the cast. Within Orsino's involvement in the beginning and end of the play, whenever he was not involved, Leraldo Anzaldúa was free to portray one of Antonio's arresting officers or whoever else scenes required. Dublin, as the holy man that betroths Olivia and Sebastian, wore a fake mustache and a hat, but the pantaloons and shoes of Feste were visible and actively a part of Dublin's role as the other scene-specific character. These instances were increasingly obvious. Dublin, as Feste, fled the scene he was actively in to half dress as the police officer to reappear behind Antonio, where he should have been from Antonio's entrance in the scene. With Feste's costuming being visible, Dublin's noticeable accent switch, and Dublin pretending to be out of breath from the quick change, the actor within the warehouse troop was poking through.

From there, the reveals and reunions of Act 5 unfold, and the play is 'normal' until Malvolio's declaration of revenge and leaves the scene, not taking part in the jig that traditionally unites characters and reconciles any unhappy feelings that characters may feel at the plot's end. But upon the closing of the jig, a booming knock accompanies the back wall's metal door

opening and Barry Mulholland enters wearing a contemporary black suit with a red tie. The actors portraying Orsino, Olivia, Antonio, and Sebastian walk over and stand behind the actor formerly portraying Malvolio, all of them either turncoats or moles. The disruption of the warehouse setting ‘ends’ *Twelfth Night*, but the actors are still under threat having performed a presumably banned play. There is separation between those that betrayed the performance and those that ‘remain’, at which point the outermost performance ends. The *Twelfth Night* characters who could be considered slighted by the ending of Shakespeare’s play – not necessarily consenting to the relationship they end the play in (Orsino, Olivia, Sebastian) or being tormented by other characters for the play’s duration without real rectification (Malvolio, Andrew) – are the traitors to the internal performance and liberation of the arts at large. With such a queer play, one can only speculate what the ‘turning into the authorities’ and ‘betrayal of secrets and expression among those you trust’ means for each of the actors, and their characters, in the traveling troop.

This framing narrative, entirely ‘additional’ to the source text, shapes the performance in a modern, socio-political context. The Cincinnati Shakespeare Company produced this show in combination with the Prague Shakespeare Company, both companies performing in their cities before the show closes. With the Czech Republic formerly under Soviet domination, while not apart of the Union itself, authoritarianism with a focus on censorship of ‘undesirable’ subjects within the arts relates to a reality that eastern Europe still feels echoes of throughout their nations, despite government and societal regime changes since the fall of the Soviet Union. This production’s utilization of that international memory permanently places it within the discussion of government and law’s involvement in literature and performance, especially as reminiscent political movements spark and expand across the globe in the present day.