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### **The Camera Sees More in “Twelfth Night”**

In 1996, Trevor Nunn directed the film “Twelfth Night” as a realistic full color experience enhanced by orchestral music, scenic outdoor settings, and special effects. The film begins with a severe storm about to crush a passenger ship against rocks. When the ship breaks apart and passengers must jump into the heaving waves, the camera goes underwater to record how severely the wind, waves, and currents treat swimmers struggling to survive.

Just before the shipwrecking event, wealthy passengers laugh and applaud the singing of two performers dressed as exotic harem women who in comedic fashion reveal that one is a man, the twin of his sister. Shakespeare liked stories of twins and, in “Twelfth Night, or, What You Will” used them to link with two other favorite themes--false and/or mistaken identities and confused pursuits of love. The opening scene of this film serves as a prologue to the play by placing emphasis on the first of those themes, the close familial tie between twins. The underwater cinematography, for example, shows how desperately the twins reach for each other before the currents separated them.

The character names suggest an Italian setting used often by Shakespeare, but the filming took place in several Cornwall, England, locations. Duke Orsino’s castle is on a hill above a town on the shores of a small rocky island. Grounds around his castle, outbuildings, and the church nearby are all paved with flat slabs of granite or other hard material. The impression is that of a spare severe environment with little greenery to soften a stereotypical military fortress. [Cornwall location: St Michaels Mount & Causeway]



Orsino’s domain is across a shallow sea from the estate where Olivia lives. The lush green grounds of Olivia’s estate feature landscaping in classical Italian style with shaped hedges, formal paths, and wide expanses of groomed lawn. [Cornwall location: Lanhydrock House]



Both expansive outdoor settings provide acres of space for the cameras to move and zoom from close-in shots to wide panoramic views of the action. Daytime lighting gives the audience clear sight of the actors for full appreciation of their dramatic gestures, strides from place to place, and emotional outbursts with widely flung arms. The close-up views of faces and their expressions during dialog give the audience a better chance to understand the meaning of their lines, which are spoken as Shakespeare wrote them in words that sound old and formal to modern listeners.

Based on the costumes, this version of “Twelfth Night” might take place in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Shakespeare’s words do not yet sound too out of date. The dresses and aprons worn by kitchen staff, the coats and vests of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio suggest this period, as well as the gowns worn by Olivia. The men do not wear the powdered wigs, cascades of lace, ornate layers of brocade, or large feathered hats that suggest 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century European styles. All the costumes are simple compared to earlier times.

Orsini’s staff and soldiers wear long black trousers. The conservative style of their black uniform jackets features small stiff collars with rank distinguished only by brass buttons and/or subdued stripes on sleeves. With everyone dressed in black, the director keeps focus on the character’s faces. The head gear worn by Sebastian and Viola (as Cesario) are garrison caps with visors, which are different from the flat-topped service caps worn by others in Orsini’s employ. This helps the viewer identify Cesario/Viola when he/she is marching or riding a horse alongside others in a squad across a distant landscape. Practically speaking, garrison caps when not in use are easy to flatten and insert in the wearer’s belt, removing otherwise awkward issues of what to do with the hat while filming indoor scenes.



The furniture and décor of interior scenes is also conservative. The walls of stone blocks, the wood carving of sofa and chair frames, the wall paintings, the large simple candles, and a lack of 1800s Victorian lace, tapestry hangings, knick-knacks, heavy curtains, etc. helps the audience focus on the players and not their immediate surroundings. Those surroundings do convey hard realism and solid construction, but they serve only as background and contrast for the drama, which can range from comedic farce to passionate romance.

Overall, interior furnishings and costumes avoid distraction. The same is true for camera shots that move around the room to show only what is important for the moment. Camera

movements give more angles of view than what one attending a live performance can see from a seat in front of the stage. For example, in Act 1, Scene 1, after Orsino demands “If music be the food of love, play on,” we do not know who is playing the piano until the camera moves to reveal Cesario at the keyboard.

Before that glimpse of Cesario, the film director places Orsino reclining on a couch with his right arm in a sling and the left arm over his brow. He is a fit but melancholy young man who wants music to suit his mood while his staff and guests must stand quietly along the walls of the room. He commands that the music begin and stop several times between utterances of lines 1-7 provided by Shakespeare. After “Enough,” and a pause when the music continues, he says “no more” while jumping up suddenly and going to the piano to close the lid over the keyboard. One gets from Cesario/Viola’s timid and questioning expression that he/she fears making a mistake that might prompt Orsino’s wrath.

The source notes for Act 1, Scene 1 indicate that Orsino should recite lines 1-15 as he walks into the room with Curio and other lords, followed by a response to Curio’s question about hunting and Orsino’s dual meaning references to hart and his heart. The stage version next has Valentine entering the room to orally report from Olivia’s handmaid that Olivia intends to remain veiled in mourning for seven years. The film version, however, omits the exchange with Curio and has Valentine beginning to read aloud from a written message until Orsino rises from his couch to snatch the letter away and read it for himself. This sudden action breaks Valentine’s reading in the middle of line 27 at “But like a cloistress.” Orsino takes over by skipping two lines about her daily stinging tears to begin line 29 with “—all this to season / A brother’s dead love, which she would keep fresh / And lasting in her sad remembrance. / O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame / To pay this debt of love but to a brother.” He is looking at Cesario as he speaks this last phrase, and she has a cinema flashback to her own brother drowning in the sea. Source lines 34-40 unspoken in the film describe his worry that after so long Cupid’s arrow might kill “the flock of all affections else / That live in her—” (Oxford 1830). Orsino thinks Olivia is wasting her powerful love this way and hopes she will have some left for him when her mourning period ends. Viewers may or may not grasp his meaning from the abbreviated film script.

Cesario is not yet there in the source version of Act 1, Scene 1 because Shakespeare does not describe her rescue and clothing transformation by the helpful sea captain until the second scene of Act 1 and does not mention her in the service of Orsino until the fourth scene. But in that fourth scene Valentine does remark “If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger” (Oxford 1835). Those three days may be why Director Nunn can legitimately include Cesario in the first scene of the film production. Having her in the music salon and catching the attention of Orsino lays the ground for the building attraction suggested later.

The source for Act 1, Scene 4 does not suggest a setting. In the film, Viola/Cesario is receiving fencing lessons along with others in a stone loggia. Right after the coach has pushed her in the chest (causing pain in her bound breasts) to correct her stance, Orsino strides through

and orders her to accompany him outside. While sitting on slabs of rock by the ocean, the duke tells Cesario “Thou know’st no less but all. I have unclasped / To thee the book even of my secret soul. / Therefore, good youth, address thy gait unto her, / Be not denied access, stand at her doors, / And tell them there thy fixed foot shall grow / Till thou have audience.” Cesario is willing to relay Orsino’s feelings but doubts Olivia will allow admittance and listen. Orsino tells Cesario how he must “unfold the passion of my love” and believes “She [Olivia] will attend it better in thy youth / Than in a nuncio’s of more grave aspect.” When Cesario still doubts this, Orsino presents a more forceful argument pointing out and touching Cesario’s not-quite-a-man physical attributes (saying Shakespeare’s usual genital puns) “Diana’s lip / Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe / Is as the woman’s [maiden’s] organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman’s part.” References to lips, a woman’s organ, and small pipe can mean more than a mouth, a throat or vocal cords; a female’s sexual parts are also implied. Cesario struggles against this unwelcome close contact and suggestive talk, inadvertently pushing on Orsino’s injured arm and causing him pain. The film scene then shifts to Orsino’s salon where he is again reclining on the sofa to favor his injured arm. He completes his previous thoughts with “I know thy constellation is right apt / For this affair” (Oxford 1836). Cesario bows in acceptance of the assignment. He tells Curio and two others to accompany Cesario to Olivia’s estate.

The film omits the remaining seven lines of the source scene. The viewer does not know Orsino promises Cesario that he “shalt live as freely as thy lord, / To call his fortunes thine” if the mission is successful. The film also omits Viola’s response “I’ll do my best / To woo your lady,” and more importantly leaves out her aside “Yet a barful strife: / Whoe’er I woo, myself would be his wife” (1836). Viola/Cesario feels conflicted and secretly wants the duke for herself. The film watcher will have to conclude this by interpreting her facial expressions and actions in later scenes.

Viewing and writing the review of this film made me appreciate the open-source nature of Shakespeare’s work. By “open-source” I mean a quality found in software apps made freely available to any user who wants a basic algorithm but plans to add his own coding ideas for his own purposes. By not specifying the details of every stage set, costume style, blocking arrangement, or how players should recite their lines, Shakespeare’s work invites creativity on the part of directors and producers. In “Twelfth Night,” Trevor Nunn picked his own settings, changed the order of scenes, omitted lines, added music, employed cinematographic special effects, used flashbacks, and expanded character profiles (especially Sebastian’s friend Antonio) to enhance the story quality of the play. All those creative options increased my appreciation and understanding of the original play.

#### Works Cited

Nunn, Trevor, screenwriter/director. *Twelfth Night*. Renaissance Films, 1996.

Shakespeare, William. “Twelfth Night; or, What you Will.” *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition: The Complete Works*, edited by Rory Loughnane, Oxford UP, 2016, pp.1829-1889.