Armin/Shakespeare Collab: "you must allow *vox*"

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Like Fred Astaire waltzing with an anthropomorphized broom, Robert Armin, in his dedication to *Quips Upon Questions,*[1] performs a tour de force duet, in which he personifies his jester's stick and solicits its favor as a poet would his patron. First, he salutes "the crab-tree countenance" of Sir Timothie Truncheon (alias Bastinado), making a "low congee" in imitation of courtly etiquette. Then, presenting himself as an unemployed performer ("unkindly thrust out of [his] lodging" at the Curtain Theatre, forced to hit the road as an itinerant player), he begs Sir Timothie's protection from a spiteful world: "Guard me through the Spittle fieldes, I beseech yee, least some one in ambush endanger my braynes with a Brickbat unsight or unseen" (Sig. A2). We should imagine that, in actual performance, Armin carried, not a standard jester's wand, but an ordinary, featureless club, such as the one described here.

Quips Upon Questions, published in 1600, tells us something about Armin, the clown: by August of that year, he was working at the Globe Theatre as the comic actor for whom Shakespeare ultimately wrote roles ranging from the Gravedigger in *Hamlet* to Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale.* Two months earlier, however, a city-wide ban had curtailed his solo performances at the

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Curtain Theatre[2] so, at the time the pamphlet was written, he was figuratively roofless and in search of a place to play. Meantime, he turned to writing pamphlets, apparently hoping through this medium to ply his independent stage persona, keeping it present in Londoners' minds. The persona is double-sided: foolish on the one hand, ambitious on the other. Armin plays both the spurned exile and the obsequious wannabe. This doubleness structures the dynamics of the dedicatory skit, in which the clown begs protection in phrases which are hyperbolic, given that his patron is a faceless club. But even as he prostrates himself before the "right worthy stick, he throws in a remark about its rude origins ("whose birth or growth [was] in the open fieldes"); fawning at Sir Timothie's 'feet' ("being stroke down with thy favour"), he recalls their shared abjection ("I sometimes slept with thee in the fieldes, wanting a house ore my head.") While these contradictions ought to parody the overt duplicity of courtly praise, they end up having the opposite effect, making the reader witness, in the complexities of Armin's self-definition, the force of a genuine, if fractious, co-dependency. "Sweete Sir Timothie, kind sir Timothie, tough sir Timothie. . .[3] whose barke I will grate like Ginger, and carrouse it in Ale, and drinke a full cuppe to thy curtesie when I am returned to the Citie againe" (Sig. A2v).

When Armin turns, in the second dedication to the Reader, his tone changes. Gone is the perverse camaraderie shared with Sir Timothie. "Readers," Armin starts, "Revilers, or in deede what not? to you I appeale, either for a quicke-turne over, or a long lookt for loving looke." Posing as though he embodied the pages of the pamphlet itself, Armin makes himself emblematically female, implying that, although resigned to a quick screw, he would prefer a "loving looke." "Well, go on, use me at your pleasure." Armin acts as though antipathy divides him from the race of human beings for whom he writes—not out of mutual sympathy (as he does for his guardian, the stick)—but out of monetary need. He pretends to expect little more than their grudging patience, "but if your patience willingly endure unforst, I shalbe the more beholding to you." Then a nasty afterthought surfaces: "otherwise, let Sir Timothie revenge it." The truncheon lashes out as the material extension of Armin's aggression—as though he were pointing it threateningly at a heckler in the audience. Behind his weapon,

however, the obsequious performer continues to hide: "and so a thousand times making legges, I goe still backward, till I am out of sight, hoping then to be out of minde" (Sig. A3).

The text of *Quips* records a theatrical practice which involved the clown's immediate audience in a participatory role. 'As part of his solo work, Armin would invite inquiries from the audience—sometimes riddles which begged a lewd response or called attention to a chance disturbance in the theatre (a dog barking or a drunk snoring in the grass), in other cases, risqué questions which singled out a particular spectator ("a man who looks angry, [another] who enters sweating, an over-dressed woman, a prostitute).[4] Armin's responses promised to ring changes—"moralizing metamorphoses"—on each riddle, by entering into an exchange with one or more members of the audience. Typically, the answer ended with a quip which turned the question back, either at the asker or at the object of ridicule. In 1600, Armin transposed the text of his performance to the page, setting out the questions (which—without attribution to specific speakers—appear startlingly, even hauntingly, anonymous), and then reinventing his own replies. As though to capture the actual rhythms of an interactive and improvisational dialogue, Armin used neither punctuation nor line breaks to "disentangle the structure of the dialogue,"[5] but left it to the reader's ear to pick out from the words of a seemingly unitary speaker, the interplay of two antagonistic voices.

> Who began to live in the worlde?
>
> Adam was he, that first livde in the world,
> And Eve was next: Who knowes not this is true?
> But at the last he was from all grace hurld,
> And she for companie, the like did rue.
> Was he the first? I, and was thus disgrast,
> Better for him, that he had been the last. (Sig. A4)

Like learning to see in the dark, reading the verse is a process of natural acclimation: growing used to the registers of a voice adept at ringing changes on itself, a voice fluid at moving through multiple declensions. It helps, moreover, if we read the verse in the context set by the pamphlet, conceiving it, not as exchanges between Armin and members of his audience, but as a dialogue spoken—in anticipation of modern ventriloquial routines—between Armin and his personified slapstick, Sir Timothie.[6]

Who began to live in the worlde?

Arm.: Adam was he, that first livde in the world,
And Eve was next:
Tim.: who knowes not this is true?
Arm.: But at the last he was from all grace hurld,
And she for companie, the like did rue.
Tim.: Was he the first?
Arm.: I, and was thus disgrast.
Tim.: Better for him, that he had been the last.

Timothie reasons that by exiting Eden first, Adam missed the opportunity he might have enjoyed from behind, of sodomizing Eve. (The banter even takes the form of what will become, in the tradition of popular entertainment, stock "dummy" humor.) In the ensuing quip, Armin, turned satirist, comments on the current glut of facile witticisms.

Arm.: Thou art a foole:
Tim.: Why?
Arm.: for reasoning so,
Tim: But not the first,
Arm.: nor last by many mo. (Sig. A4)

How can we account for the fact that the mute truncheon, called upon in the dedication to protect the author from carping critics, speaks now in the voice of a heckling audience member? Sir Timothie interrupts the flow of Armin's answer, turns the meaning of his words around, and frequently goes for the cheapest laugh. Through enacting the truncheon's mutation, Armin puts a spin on the conventional triangulation of patron, public, and performer. The routine, encoded in the pamphlet, renders the position of each role, vis a vis the other, drastically unstable, even—in the final analysis—interchangeable. Although Armin technically bases his art—the art of drawing "three souls" out of one vessel—on the natural promiscuity of voice (its facility for jumping range and changing timbre), that mutability extends, in the imagery of Armin's prose, to physical substances: Sir Timothie's hardwood shaft, grated and dissolved in ale, is imbibed by the actor who carries it (literalizing the incorporation of the patron into the performer); upended, it becomes a cudgel (used to beat unkind spectators); endowed with speech (as we shall see), it turns on

Armin and abuses him in the voice of the public, with an uncouth and impertinent tongue. Armin grounds his satire, questioning the stability or centeredness of social character, in a fantastical physics where natural matter proves equally protean.[7]

The capricious substance of Armin's body, as though in imitation of his ventriloquial voice, did not remain, like that of other clowns, "obstinately anthropomorphic,"[8] but ran a gamut of physical phases, from "forked man" to crouching cur. "[His diminutive] shape and size gave point to the recurring image of the cringing dog,"[9] reinforcing the sense of dangerous likeness between himself and his constituents, "of being surrounded by a fawning audience who might at any moment turn on him... [as in Robert Wilson's:] 'But yonder is a fellow that gapes to bite me, / or else to eat that which I sing. . .'"[10] If we imagine the actor, not only personifying his truncheon through manipulations of gesture and voice, but also causing his own physical presentation to change in response to it, we arrive at a picture of Armin's craft in its peculiar metamorphic quality: which, in turn, gives us a clue to the technique employed in *King Lear,* where the nameless Fool,[11] leading Lear through a devolving spectrum of embodiments, helps to unfold his fall from the throne to the sulphurous pit.

> Why barkes that Dogge?
>
> *Tim.:* Aske him, and he will tell thee why he barkes.
> *Arm.:* Dogges can not speake, although they gape so lowde:
> *Tim.:* Enough to pose the wisest heades of Clarkes,
> To aske this reason,
> *Arm.:* yet it is alowde. (Sig. A4)

The question foregrounds the commotion of a dog barking in earshot of the theatre. The sticks response, which points two ways—first at Armin ("Aske *him*, and he will tell thee...") then in the direction of the noise (". . .why *he* barkes"[my emphases])—carries the unfriendly connotation: take the question to the source. Armin's flesh, falling prey to the suggestion, might have cowered or cringed, while his chastened voice, in sympathy with the body, retaliates, "you can ask, but dogs can't answer." Turning its blind look back to Armin, the stick replies with tart sarcasm that this is a puzzle to perplex the "wisest heades." Again, Armin counters: "yet it is alowde." Thus, the aggression which the performer might

conventionally turn on his public, gets turned back and absorbed by the actor himself, doubly transubstantiating his form—from man to beast, and from professional clown to natural fool.

> *Tim.:* A Dogges skin serves for something when he's dead,
> A Mans for nothing:
> *Arm.:* yet is Mans the better.
> *Tim.:* Nay tis not so, thy skin will stand in stead,
> Tis thicke, rough, strong, and will appease thy debter.
> (Sig. A4v)

Armin goes down another rung in the order of being, metamorphosed from dog to cadaver, whose skin the stick is already tanning in potentia. But, at this point, Armin formulates a cowardly come-back, retreating from the stick as performative object, and comparing it, in its soullessness, to an inkblot. We move from the stage to the page, over which Armin—now the puffed up writer—sits, sheltered from the contingencies of live performance, by his power to scrape out and revise.

> Thou that wilt make comparisons so odious,
> As twixt a Christian and a barking Curre,
> I hold thy wit to be no whit commodious,
> But to be scrapt out like a parchment blurre. (Sig. A4v)

Though posing often, in his stage roles, as a writer/clown who knows Latin (and who strikingly accessorizes his costume, not with the fool's emblematic wooden sword, but with an inkhorn like those worn by the orphans at Christ's Church), Armin's actual prose—as the pamphlet testifies--is steeped in the rhythms and requirements of acting. The fluid positions, changing in tandem with other points in a self-staged triangle, set the pace for rapid-fire physical transformation, where one likeness, no sooner realized, dissolves and gives way to another: all of which, don't forget, is achieved inside the logic of a well-rehearsed persona, moving in regular rotation between three distinct theatrical poses—the convivial, the misanthropic, and the servile. Just as Armin knew how to play the line between performer and audience, so he knew how to sustain a palpable tension between himself and his truncheon, exploiting their reciprocity, without blurring the distinction between their respective identities on stage. Once we, as readers, are able to assign both physical shape and personality

to each of the speakers in *Quips,* the verse comes to life as a canny registration of embodied banter. But this only presents an example of how Armin might perform, mobilizing his repertoire of alter-egos in a solo context, free from the pressure of other autonomous characters and the temporality of dramatic narrative. What would this performance style look like, grafted into the mechanism of a full-blown festive comedy? How might the satirical possibilities of Armin's "protean personae" unfold in Shakespeare's conception of a fictive world and its non-clown characters?

* * *

> *Maria:* Here comes my lady: make your excuse wisely, you were best.
> [Enter Lady *Olivia,* with *Malvolio.*]
> *Clown:* Wit, and't be thy will, put me into good fooling! (1.5. 28-30)[12]

The first performance of *Twelfth Night* probably took place on December 29, 1601.[13] The date leads us to imagine that Shakespeare not only wrote the clown part with Armin in mind, but tailored it to the comic persona that we find worked out in the pamphlet. At Olivia's entrance, Feste snaps to attention as a professional jester, prepared to entertain his patroness, not however with the clear conscience of a newcomer to the court, but as a regular retainer with a culpable record—an echo and a portent of the guilty dog which "must to kennel." "*Olivia.* Go to, y'are a dry fool... Besides you grow dishonest" (1.5. 38-39). The triangle instituted in solo performance, between Armin, Timothie, and the reader/audience, becomes internal to the new situation, with Olivia's steward, Malvolio, playing the Puritanical reviler: "I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal: I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool, that has no more brain than a stone" (1.5. 81-84), and Olivia herself cast as the patron, alter-ego.

> *Olivia:* Take the fool away.
> *Clown:* Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady. (1.5. 36-37)

But is Feste, scripted into this more complex dramatic situation, likely to mingle with extrinsic identities (those of other characters or the audience) in the same way that Armin does when working solo? Can Feste, for example, presume to manipulate Olivia in the

same way that he manipulates the truncheon in the dedication to *Quips*? Olivia's status as a principal character does not allow her to be moved around so freely by the Clown; and while the flatteries paid by Armin to his stick bind the two together in a humble imitation of courtly fashion, Feste's overtures to Olivia serve, albeit in a playful way, to structure the terms of his actual employment:

> *Clown:* Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
> *Olivia:* Good fool, for my brother's death.
> *Clown:* I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
> *Olivia:* I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
> *Clown:* The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven.
> Take away the fool, gentlemen. (1.5. 64-70)

'Good madonna,' Feste begins. 'Good fool,' Olivia echoes, apparently in amiable humor. The titles establish each speaker according to their courtly station. And yet, something both tender and mocking flavors the Clown's use of 'madonna,' a version of 'my lady' which, hovering between official and familiar address, begins to sound like 'mad lady.' Olivia's use of 'fool' in turn grants Feste, over and above the rank of Clown, a subversive latitude. Later in the scene Olivia remarks, 'There is no slander in an allowed fool,' a line which echoes the defensive pun from *Quips:* when Armin, countering Timothie's raillery, protests concerning his own line of reason, 'yet it is alowde.' In short, Shakespeare opens the distance between patron and player-cum-fool, to negotation, and for Olivia, who is—after all—more sensate than Armin's truncheon, the rhythm of Feste's catechism, the tug-of-war over her own authority, proves titillating. His "I think his soul is in hell, madonna," is unabashedly impertinent, as if prodding the lady toward madness, while Olivia's "I know his soul is in heaven, fool," in taking unguarded offense, suggests that the fool has struck a chord. Feste, resuming his professional objectivity, steps back as if to offer a detached critique of his patron's power of reason: "The more fool, madonna, to mourn," etc.

The negotiable distance between the Clown and his benefactor(s)—a more accurate representation, in fact, of late sixteenth century mores1[14]—throws into fanciful relief the picture drawn by *Quips,* of Armin bedding down or carousing with his

inanimate (but intimate) patron. Feste is less "the Lady Olivia's fool" than a promiscuous servant who roams between households, picking up extra money where and from whom he can. While his presence (and later his songs) provoke emotive responses in his interlocutors, he is also isolated, with a double line sketched around him, so that—even within the world of the play—he works in a solo capacity. While the other characters live in a time-scheme of fictive experience (whether Olivia's bereavement or Orsino's disappointed love), Feste's sense of duration is constituted out of what might be termed he play's "professional memory," and the hint it conveys of a repertoire performed in the past (whether of music or gags) for a prior employer: e.g., Olivia's father, "the count / That died some twelvemonth since," or for her brother, "Who shortly also died" (1.2. 37-39). Like the travelling players in *Hamlet,* Feste maintains a strictly professional tie to Illyria: any experience he gathers there, he empties out again in a riddle, pun, or song.

Twelfth Night, commissioned by George Carey, Lord Chamberlain, as Twelfth Night entertainment for the Queen and her attendants, introduced elements of Armin's playing style—already familiar to a public audience—to a courtly clientele. Shakespeare scripts Feste so that he will look to all intents and purposes *like* the clown from the Curtain, but shifted into the guise of a court fool, employed by fictive potentates. With this external reference point, the public audience at subsequent performances could expect to see Armin do what he did best, but this time using the elements of the fictive world to sharpen his material. For instance, the business of projection (i.e., projecting a character onto a stick) might easily, in a situation where the comedian was licensed to play the fool, change to that of impersonation: rather than making fragments of human behavior adhere to an inanimate object, the impersonator steals pieces of behavior away from an unknowing rival, making them adhere to his/her own body, thus giving them a satirical, alien life. This is what happens at the end of *Twelfth Night* when Feste, bearing a letter from "mad" Malvolio, prepares—at Olivia's command—to "open't, and read it."

> *Clown:* Look then to be well edified, when the fool
> delivers the madman. [*Reads*] *By the Lord, madam,—*
> *Olivia:* How now, art thou mad?

> *Clown:* No madam, I do but read madness: and your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow *vox*.
> *Olivia:* Prithee, read i'thy right wits.
> *Clown:* So I do, madonna. But to read his right wits is to read thus: therefore, perpend my princess, and give ear. (5.1. 288-99)

The implication is that, in reading the letter, Armin begins to ape the voice (and perhaps the behavior) of a madman so that, in place of the epistolary text, we get a theatrical representation of the speaker. The pun on "mad, madam, and madonna" returns, rejuvenated by association with Feste's impersonation of mad Malvolio. Again, we witness Armin's powers of self-transformation, but this time the spectacle is transplanted to the middle of a layered situation, where both on- and off-stage audiences are already occupied with the revelation of Viola's real identity and her reunion with Sebastian. Olivia indicates that the fool has reached the limits of his license, that there is no room in the present situation for the digressions of Feste/Armin's solo performance or the competitive motives which drive it.

"[A]nd your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow *vox*." Feste's protest singles out voice—gleaned from the actor's other means—as a metonym for theatrical impersonation. Elsewhere in the play, voice, unnaturally estranged from the body, is recognized as a special instrument of invasion (assault and contagion), as when Viola, seeking to breach the melancholic perimeter of Orsino's court, disguises herself and gains employment as a eunuch: "for I can sing, / And speak to him in many sorts of music" (1.1. 56-58). Malvolio's complaint, later in the play, that the "nocturnal roisterers"[15] (Sir Toby, Feste, and Sir Andrew) "squeak out [their] cozier's catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice" (2.3. 91-92), portrays a world in which drunken festive voices are always sounding from somewhere below the platform of the stage. Sir Toby, capping the argument, invokes the properties of Feste's singing voice which make it, like the plague, a transmissible thing. "*Toby*. A contagious breath. *Andrew*. Very sweet and contagious. *Toby*. To hear by the nose, it is dulcet in contagion" (2.3. 55-57).

As arbiter of *vox* in Illyria, Feste receives a challenge from Viola, who likewise passes between the courts of Orsino and

Olivia, disguised as the eunuch, Cesario. In metatheatrical terms, this conflict would have been staged as a confrontation (an exchange of suspicious sidelong glances?) between Armin and the boy-actor playing Viola. Both, in a sense, have donned fictive identities and entered Illyria's mad web under professional pretenses. Within the context of the fiction, their vocal peculiarities represent equally fashionable novelties: while Armin contrives, through artifice, to disguise his voice, the eunuch's vocal maturation has been unnaturally suspended. The clown is thus thrown into competition—for money and courtly favors—with this rival creature, whose voice, in potentia, threatens to prove as preternatural as Armin's, perhaps even less anchored to worldly cadences. Cesario's voice, which is simultaneously Viola's and the voice of the boy actor (one unchanging voice which spans three superimposed incarnations), moves emblematically to the center of the plot, stimulating fantasy and motivating desire.[16]

When Orsino sends Cesario to deliver "the book of his secret soul" to Olivia, he suggests that his/her voice is singularly suited to the task: "thy small pipe / Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman's part. / I know thy constallation is right apt / For this affair" (1.4. 32-36). In the Duke's fantasy, he takes possession of that (much desired) voice and, with methodical perversion, fits it to his own message: in his ear, he hears his sentiments (those of an adult male) calibrated to Cesario's prodigious vocal cords. The effects of Cesario's voice equally underlie his/her wooing of Olivia in 1.5. Olivia hears the voice from behind her veil and seems to welcome the opportunity to unveil, to bare her face, so as to meet the naked voice on a like plane of exposure.

> *Viola:* Good woman, let me see your face.
> *Olivia:* Have you any commission from your lord to
> negotiate with my face? You are now out of your
> text: but we will draw the curtain and show
> you the picture. [*Unveiling*] Look you, sir, such
> a one I was this present. Is't not well done?
> *Viola:* Excellently done, if God did all. (1.5. 233-239)

The quibble, with which Olivia compares her face to a painting, serves to reinforce the nature of the eunuch's special appeal. Like Olivia's figurative portrait, in mourning for her brother, Cesario

is unnaturally suspended in time: as Maria says, "'Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man." (1.5. 160-161). But in the act of *facing*—that is, of interpreting past another persona's "fair and outward character," and being interpreted in turn—Olivia is content to stop at the physical surface (in the same way that Viola settles in 1.2. not to pry into the Captain's character, "though that nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution" ([48-49]). Although Viola's feminine character presses, in all sorts of ways, against the limits of her disguise, Olivia's misconstruction smooths over the eruptions. Or rather, reading the erotic possibilities of the liminal voice into Cesario's face, Olivia's libido is launched into a realm of hypothesis and projection: first it becomes possible for her to conceive how a eunuch might desire (in response to Viola's "If I did love you in my master's flame"), then to imagine being literally seduced by the eunuch's voice (Cesario's face and form concealed, all the while, by the fragile lattice of the "willow cabin" at Olivia's gate). The strange way that Viola seizes, in her improvisation, on the image of the willow cabin—a pastoral emblem which, on first impression, does not square with the ambiance of Olivia's milieu—makes more sense if we think of the uncanny power of shepherds' voices, in Virgil or Theocritus, to resurrect the past and bring the dead to life. The willow cabin stands as a figure for the many unassimilated tabernacles—or points of imaginary space—out of which *Twelfth Night,* as an entire play, is comprised. These points might take the form of Orsino imagining the voice of his passion "unsexed," or Olivia fantasizing herself violated by that voice but, in all cases, these windows of projection, inspired by the "dulcet contagion" of an imagined song, come to punctuate the progress of Shakespeare's otherwise straightforward plot of comic disguise and reversal.

Out of these cells, or apertures, of imagined space, Armin's voice physically emerges. For despite all the *talk* of eunuchs and song, it is only Feste who really sings. The desire for a certain kind of music, displaced from the beginning of the play—when Orsino calls for the musicians to continue ("If music be the food of love, play on")—snags on the boy actor's body, but even then fails to be vocalized until Feste, specifically sought out for the purpose, arrives at Orsino's court to perform. His is a strange piece of

music, chosen—as John Hollander says—out of Orsino's "desire for the Good Old Song that nudges the memory, the modern request made of the cocktail pianist."[17] Feste uses the "old, plain" song, however, to mimic the hyperbolic logic according to which the love-sick Illyrians have frozen time. In a way that pertains more immediately to the Clown's professional interests. Feste sings to "face off" with Cesario, impersonating—at the same time undermining—the promise invested in the boy actor's (still unvoiced) song.[18] Again, Armin's voice is used to sing in place of someone else, acting as a metonym for the eunuch who only exists imaginarily, as well as for an extrinsic time-frame, into whose fluid, unmarked parameters Feste fades, whenever he crosses out of the concrete, fictive context.

The play is more lucid about the frame from which Viola's character has entered Illyria. Cast ashore by a storm, and bereft of her brother, she allows her identification with Olivia's mourning to motivate her plan to assume a neutered mask. Within Illyria, the split between what Viola pretends to be and what she really is produces duplicitous speech: "What I am and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead" (1.5. 218-219). Loving Orsino herself, jealousy motivates Viola's desire to look behind Olivia's veil: she wants to get a first-hand glimpse of her rival's beauty, to verify that it is as wondrous as the Duke believes. Thus, beneath the provocation of Cesario/Viola's indeterminate voice, exists a layer of double-sided language, whose intimations Orsino cannot hear any more than Olivia can: "VIOLA. Ay, but I know—ORSINO. What dost thou know? VIOLA. Too well what love women to men may owe. . . My father had a daughter lov'd a man. / As it might be perhaps, were I a woman / I should love your lordship" (2.4. 104-109). Rather than making Orsino consider a level of literal signification (i.e., what if I were *really* a woman?), Viola's "were I" propels the Duke back into ecstatic hypotheses. He hears "were I a woman" as "were I Olivia." No one in Illyria catches onto Viola's innuendo save Feste. After all, artificial folly—the Clown's guise—provides the primordial model of double-edged hypothesis: "Were I a wise man," the fool might say, meaning that he is wiser than his ignorant interlocutor. Whereas, "were I a fool" means that if the fool were really a fool (which he is), he would be wise enough to acknowledge it. In folly, as Feste/Armin practices

it, the conditional mood produces an oscillating effect, so that no speaker is ever just one thing, but (at least) two—simultaneously. Feste's suspicion of the newcomer is therefore heightened by a sense of recognition: where others project raw eroticism, Feste catches the hint of trickery in Viola's voice.

* * *

Another example from *Quips Upon Questions* illustrates how Armin and his truncheon might have played the parts of two fools joined in a mutually unprofitable contract. This quip does not begin with a question, but rather the title of a parable:

Two Fooles well met

Arm.: Two fooles well met, each poynted at the other.
Tim.: Laughing a good to see each others face:
Arm.: The one made vow to call his fellow brother,
And to acknowledge him in every place.
To lend him coyne,
Tim.: though he had none him selfe:
Arm.: To teach him wit,
Tim.: when he himselfe had none. (Sig. Bv)

Each fool laughs at the other's face, unaware that he is looking at a reflection of his own. The first fool, represented by Armin, pretends to be a good-willed simpleton. He says that he wants to befriend his semblance, but as Timothie, who represents the second, savvy fool points out, he has neither the wit nor the money to do so.

Tim.: The other sott
Arm.: like to this former else,
Tim.: To requite his kindnesse, vow'd like love alone.

The truncheon thus picks up the story line, overriding Armin's interruption—which seeks to restore equality between the two fools—and proceeds to turn the moralizing epigram around.

Tim.: Seest thou this bird (quoth he) in yonder wood?
I give thee her to rost.
Arm.: O wilt thou so?
That meat I love, and will not denie her.
Tim.: Take her (quoth he) and if thou canst come by her.

Imagining a dialogue between the two not-so-foolish fools, Timothie shows how the so-called sot (who has gotten wise to the other's tricks) gets revenge on his friend, whose voice presumably

is mimicked by Armin. The double entendre of "rost" (roast/roost) implies a test of the first fool's sexuality, or by extension, of Armin's vs. the stick-cum-dildo's virility. Then, without warning, a third voice intervenes:

> Were not these fooles, to promise what they had not?
> Where such want wit, 'twere better their tongs gad not.

This, the voice of the moralist—perhaps a heckler who has jumped in to mediate the conflict between the two fools—is not immune to this tag game of folly.

> *Tim.:* True hast thou sayd, the first was nothing wise,

The stick sides momentarily with the audience member against the first fool, but Armin has had enough.

> *Arm.:* No more, the second was, let it suffice:

But Timothie prefers to keep the ball in the air.

> *Tim.:* One that gives golde,
> *Arm.:* the next that gives the bird,
> *Tim.:* Three fooles well met,

And thus, Armin concludes, pointing the stick at the luckless spectator:

> for thou shalt be the third.

When Viola and Feste meet in *Twelfth Night* (3.1.), like Armin and Timothie, they move through levels of ritualized aggression. They are both performers, lifted for the moment out of playing for the public, but—as Feste perceives it—in competition for the same patron. "VIOLA. Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool? CLOWN. No indeed, sir, the Lady Olivia has no folly. She will keep no fool, sir, till she be married, and fools are as like husbands as pilchards are to herrings, the husband's the bigger" (3.1. 32-36). Feste implicitly compares fool sizes to penis sizes, suggesting that—as Olivia's husband—a penis-less Cesario will easily be made a fool (or cuckold) of by a better-hung fool. Just as Feste tries to pin the tag of fool on Cesario, so he tries to negate him/her. "VIOLA. I warrant thou art a merry fellow, and car'st for nothing. CLOWN. Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience sir, I do not care for you: if that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would make you invisible" (3.1. 26-31).

In *Quips,* Armin provides a portrait of the court fool as an educated, upwardly mobile performer. With this in mind, it's important to take Shakespeare's scene for what it is: as representing tensions that could have existed, whether at court or in a theatrical company, between two players (who perceive each other as) vying for the office of fool. Like Sir Timothie, Feste does not believe in the possibility of their fellowship. The scene, however, begs a larger question: does something in the role of artificial fool itself defy doubling? The well-oiled joint on which such a fool's speech pivots—whether in Armin's pamphlet or in Shakespeare's play—already implies an intrinsic, uncentered doubleness:

> *Arm.:* give the dry fool drink, then is the fool not dry:
> bid the dishonest man mend himself, if he mend,
> he is no longer dishonest;
> *Tim.:* If he cannot, let the botcher mend
> him. Anything that's mended is but patched. . .
> (1.5. 40-47)

Character like matter, the first fool says, can be "mended" by accretion: if a quality is lacking, add it. But the second fool cuts him off: shoddy repairs never change the substance. What is the lesson taught by a conclusion which inverts its premise? That to walk on the fissure of so many "patches," as Feste does, is to conjure a vertiginous "nothing" in between. Building his persona on a shifting dialectic, the artificial fool must consistently bolster the dynamic that lets him be a fool... rather than something more simple, dangerous, aberrant, or even mad. The materialization (even the gravitational pull) of another licensed fool threatens to undermine the balance, to throw the first fool's privileged obliquity, in a paradoxical sense, off-center. Within the structure of Shakespeare's play, Feste's fears prove unwarranted, for the boy actor does not derange the tactics underpinning the fool's artifice, so much as he replicates them in the territory of gender: Who Viola/Cesario is (what sex, what substance) becomes contingent—within the fictive world—on maintaining something like the fool's precarious obliquity, his skewed position relative to other characters. Upon receiving Olivia's ring, the boy actor (who is both Viola and Cesario) reflects: "As I am man / My state is desperate for my master's love: / As I am woman (now alas the day!) / What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?" The impossible paradox

resolves itself, through Shakespeare's acoustical sensibility, into a self-reflexive pun: "O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie."

* * *

Love in Illyria flames up around points of infeasible character—epitomized by what others imagine to be Cesario's unearthly voice—while the lovers foment their frenzy by conceiving themselves as victims of erotic, if incorporeal, baitings: Orsino maintains that upon first sight of Olivia, "That instant was I turn'd into a hart, / And my desire, like fell and cruel hounds / E'er since pursued me" (1.1. 21-23), while Olivia solicits Cesario, "Have you not set my honour at the stake, / And baited it with all th'unmuzzled thoughts / That tyrannous heart can think?" (3.1. 120-122).[19] Meantime, the mad quality of this obsessive desire gets absorbed and recycled by Feste and his cohorts. In an outrageous displacement, they transfer the role of lovelorn scapegoat to the person of Malvolio, who has been tricked by the waiting woman, Maria, into believing that Olivia hungers secretly to see him in yellow stockings and cross-garters. When the steward appears on stage sporting, over and above his outlandish trappings, a broad, unchanging smile, Olivia diagnoses his condition as "midsummer madness" and Maria takes her cue to have Malvolio confined to a dark cell. By displacing madness into this corner of the play, Shakespeare gives Armin a spotlight in which to perform his favorite kind of routine. Feste, who has agreed to don a beard and gown and pretend to be the curate, Sir Topas, arrives to conduct an interview with the madman. The clown completes his revenge, for the steward's earlier disparagements, by forcing Malvolio—who cannot see him from the darkness of the cell—to follow a line of lunatic thought couched in the cleric's authoritative voice.[20]

> *Clown:* What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?
> *Mal.:* That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird. (4.2. 51-54)

The quality that makes voice sufficient to delineate a fictive persona is related to whatever quality allows the clown to exist in Illyria, playing a fool, but untouched by the consequences

or the connective phenomena which anchor experience for the other characters (whether another character's physical entrance, the delivery of a message, or noise coming from elsewhere in the house). Viola/Cesario is most jarred by her encounter with the liminal fool because she meets him in a place already separate from, or outside of, the play's temporal mechanism. For Malvolio, duped and cloistered in a dark cell, the indicators of the fictive world have equally—if for different reasons—receded, so that his encounter with a purely imaginary voice (i.e., Sir Topas does not even exist as a character in Illyria) represents an idealized version of what Feste calls *vox*. For Malvolio, there is nothing to face, no appearance to interpret 'past,' just a voice onto whose unhinged speech the Puritan latches his thought process, and in step with whose madness he unwittingly falls. At this point, the laughter which Malvolio's ravings provoke in the audience, while not audible to Malvolio himself, finds implicit acknowledgement in the judgment served by Sir Topas. "CLOWN. Malvolio, Malvolio, thy wits the heavens restore: endeavor thyself to sleep, and leave thy vain bibble babble" (4.2. 98-100). Bibble babble is what the artificial fool ideally focuses at the center of any exchange: as when Armin and Sir Timothie stand aside to make room for the captured spectator: "Three fooles well met, for *thou* shalt be the third." Meantime, Armin's own voice, in ongoing dialogue with imaginary proliferations of itself, fades out at the margin:

> *Clown:* [*As Sir Topas*] Maintain no words with him,
> good fellow!
> [*As himself*] Who, I, sir? Not I, sir! God buy you,
> good Sir Topas!
> [*As Sir Topas*] Marry, Amen!
> [*As himself*] I will, sir, I will. (4.2. 102-105)

Notes

1. Robert Armin, "Quips Upon Questions, or, A Clownes Conceite on Occasion Offered," in *Collected Works,* ed. J.P. Feather (New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972). All citations appear in parentheses.

2. E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage,* IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press1923), 330-331.

3. The echo of Falstaff's "but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff. . ." suggests that Armin's rhythms are meant to recall his predecessor, Will Kemp.

4. David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 139.

5. Ibid, 138.

6. Nora Johnson, in *The Actor as Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), reads Quips as a "transcript" of Armin's "improvised jesting," while Richard Preiss, in *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), sees it as offering the reader an interactive experience, similar to but not identical to live performance. Neither, however, proposes reading individual quips as ventriloquial banter between Armin and Sir Timothie.

7. For a discussion of how Armin's shape-shifting comes up even in his work as a translator, see Alice Equestri, "The Italian Taylor and his Boy or What Robert Armin did to Straporola," *Renaissance Studies* 30 (April 2016), 254-272.

8. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown,* 148.

9. Ibid, 148.

10. Meredith Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1993), 167.

11. Preiss speculates that Armin played Edgar in Lear, while the Fool role probably went to a boy apprentice.

12. All citations from *Arden Shakespeare* appear in parentheses.

13. David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Almanac* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 1993), 11. Wiles contests Hotson's view that the play was commissioned for the Queen's Twelfth Night celebration the previous year. Instead, Wiles argues, the play was written for performance in the following year "to reawaken the memory" of Twelfth Night 1600-1, when "Virginia Orsino, Duke of Bracchiano, visited the Queen as representative of Tuscany" (8).

14. Compare Will Sommers, a regular member of Henry VIII's household, to Tarlton, who came and went from Elizabeth's court (until his death in 1588), often playing truant in order to moonlight as a barkeep and stage actor.

15. Francois Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 227.

16. The unsexed voice, defying entrapment by physical or ethical constraints, also poses an implicit challenge to the conventions defining courtly status quo. For an example of the capacity of a "border-crossing voice" to challenge socially constructed categories of gender and sexuality, see Elizabeth Wood's "Sapphonics" in the collection, *Queering the Pitch,* ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 27-66.

17. John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 156.

18. Ibid, 160. Hollander writes, "Among the characters to whom Malvolio refers as 'the lighter people,' it is Feste, the singer and prankster, whose pipe and tabor serve as a travesty of Viola's vocal cords."

19. See Skura, 206. For more on the realization of the bearbaiting metaphor in *Twelfth Night,* see Stephen Dickey, "Shakespeare's Mastiff Comedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991), 255-275.

20. Because the clown is wearing clerical apparel, the audience is invited to enjoy the parody on pious pretensions. Another tradition on which Armin and Shakespeare played was the pairing of holy mendicant and meddling friar.