Not at Home

Emma Smith on 'Twelfth Night'

Viola's question to the sea captain on being washed up on the shore after a shipwreck – 'What country, friends, is this?' – begins the second scene of *Twelfth Night*. His reply, 'This is Illyria, lady,' is our first introduction to the world in which the play will unfold. Many productions have begun here rather than with Orsino's indolent 'If music be the food of love, play on,' inverting the opening scenes to inaugurate the action with the shock of Viola's arrival. Reflecting on playing the role, Zoë Wanamaker described Viola as a catalyst who comes into a world that is stuck in self-love, mourning and convention – and makes it change. Starting the play with her arrival emphasises that reading. But it underestimates the reality of Illyria. Beginning with Viola's question about the place, rather than Orsino's unquestioning habitation of it, implies that Illyria only exists when she arrives there; beginning with Orsino makes clear it is an established society, with its own people, customs and hang-ups. The play's only early textual witness, the First Folio, opens with a stage direction: 'Enter Orsino, Duke of Illyria.' This is a place where Viola is an intruder or outsider – not 'of Illyria'. Her introduction to Illyria in the second scene speaks this proper noun aloud: we don't hear Viola's own name spoken, but we do know we are in Illyria. And since Patricia Parker's groundbreaking work, we know that Illyria is not a fairy-tale world, but a real contact zone: Ragusa, a maritime republic centred on Dubrovnik – once a Venetian territory and later an ally of the Ottoman Empire – and, as the long history of that region makes clear, a place where people of different origins and different traditions lived alongside one another.

So we know where Viola has ended up. But we don't know where she came from. This feels important in two ways. First, generic expectation. Many of Shakespeare's previous comedies turned on displacement or dislocation. The lovers of Athens find themselves in the wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone move from the court into the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*; Bassanio sets out from Venice to Belmont in his expensive, credit-fuelled wooing of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. In *The Winter's Tale*, the generic expectation is even more pronounced: it's not just that the comedy includes this relocation, it's that the relocation itself – from Sicilia to the 'coast of Bohemia' – secures the play as a (kind of) comedy.

These are all versions of 'green world' plays, in which, as Northrop Frye pointed out in the 1950s, 'the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a real world, moves into a green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.' What's emphasised here is the return to the 'normal world' at the end of the story. Frye's comic relocations are the equivalent of a holiday, a boot camp, dry January, or a dream – somewhere to work on yourself for a limited term, so that you can return better, according to some standard of judgment.

That promise to return to the real world is crucial to the comic conclusion in Frye's formulation. It is entirely absent from *Twelfth Night*. Illyria is not a spa, and there is no prospect of return. Viola and her twin brother, Sebastian, enter Illyria never to leave it. But even if they did leave, where would they go back to? We don't meet Sebastian until a whole act after our introduction to Orsino's Illyria and Viola's arrival. Act II, Scene i is one of several oddnesses in *Twelfth Night*'s set-up – Viola's plan to become a eunuch, for instance, or the strangely overemphasised role of the sea captain. In it, Sebastian reveals to his companion, Antonio, that he is not who he seems. 'You must know of me, Antonio, that my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo.' But why has Sebastian been pretending to be called Roderigo? Or, more pertinently, why would a skilled playwright introduce a character by having him disavow an assumed identity that hasn't been used and will never be referred to again? 'My father,' Sebastian then announces, 'was that Sebastian of Messaline whom I know you have heard of.'

Sebastian's entire speech here displays the shifty Latinate circumlocution that is straight out of the Shakespeare playbook for compromised or self-deluded male characters: the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. Sebastian's seeming revelation is syntactically evasive: 'the malignancy of my fate'; 'my determinate voyage is mere extravagancy'; 'if you will not undo what you have done – that is, kill him whom you have recovered – desire it not.' Perhaps this periphrasis is because Sebastian is unable to articulate his own desire for Antonio: Lindsay Posner's 2001 production for the RSC staged the conversation with the couple dressed on a rumpled double bed. But I'm more interested in the place that cannot speak its name. Sebastian tells us where his father is from, indeed his father's identity is apparently secured by being 'of Messaline'. But where is Messaline? You won't find it on a map. Some editors emend it to Mytilene, the capital of Lesbos, or to Marsalia – Marseille. Others suggest it is a deliberate no-place. H.H. Furness suggested – jokingly – that Messaline was the main town on Prospero's island. The truth is that Sebastian's statement of origin is a fake. He seems to be telling us where he is from, but the answer is obscure, unknowable, nowhere.

We all know that asking someone where they're from is not a neutral question, and that it takes on a particular violence when the implication is that they are not from 'here', wherever that might be. *Twelfth Night* hardly asks the question of where Viola and Sebastian have come from, but that absence is itself telling. At least at the level of itinerary rather than identity, knowing where characters have come from is usually important in Shakespeare. We know, for example, how Egeon ended up in Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors* and why he has been arrested; we are told that the royal party comes into Prospero's orbit in *The Tempest* on its way home from a wedding in Moorish North Africa. These are the kinds of detail Lorna Hutson identified in *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (2015) as the crucial topics of time, place and motive from which Shakespeare builds his human dramaturgy. And here they are absent. While we don't hear about the sea voyage in detail, the play has a sea-soaked lexicon: overwhelming love is like a rough and immense sea in Orsino's opening speech, Olivia weeps salt-water tears, Maria and Andrew parry 'dry jests', Cesario is 'standing water' and encouraged to 'hoist sail': 'no, good swabber,' he replies, 'I am to hull it here a little longer.' The maritime imagery continues. This is a play that can't forget the sea voyage which is its enabling condition.

Viola and Sebastian have left behind their place of origin, occluded that origin in their description of themselves, arrived after a dangerous voyage, reinvented themselves with new names, and settled, displaying courage, flexibility, hard work and a strong sense of self, in a new place that doesn't recognise their status and talents. 'I am no fee'd post, lady,' Viola tells Olivia, with some heat. To recognise the twins as forced migrants makes sense of some interesting oddities in the plot. Seeing the sea captain as a people smuggler, as in Tim Supple's TV film of 2003, brings out the tension in Viola's strangely pacifying and edgy way of talking to him: 'There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain . . . I pray thee, and I'll pay thee bounteously.' Why does he still have Viola's 'maid's garments' at the end of the play? Perhaps this shadowy figure holds her original identity, like a passport, for surety. In this reading Viola can't send a message to her father's old contact Orsino, or to Olivia, because she has entered the country illegally. Her disguise as Cesario is then a means of self-protection. (Many productions of the play, particularly for the more realist form of film, have needed a motivation for this, from the war between Messaline and Illyria explained in an ominous voiceover in Trevor Nunn's 1996 film, to an overriding need to play in the boys' football team in Andy Fickman's likeable 2006 adaptation, *She's the Man*.) Whereas in *The Tempest* the storm has left the ship unscarred – the bosun has 'freshly beheld/ Our royal, good and gallant ship' as the play prepares for the return to Milan – there is no sense that Viola's boat has survived the ordeal. According to government figures, more than 45,000 people arrived in Britain in 'small boats' last year, with four dying in December alone.

Lots of things read a bit differently if we think of Viola as an exile, including the overwrought sense of her history as a blank: 'I am all the daughters of my father's house/And all the brothers too, and yet I know not.' Her emphasis on her class status ('I am a gentleman'), which is seen as much more important than gender in this play preoccupied with rank, resonates in the context of forced migration. That same context gives a different resonance to Sebastian's willingness to marry Olivia: questions about the play's narrative that are

concerned with romantic attraction, or personal choice in matrimony, might come from a place of unexamined privilege. Although marriage isn't a sure-fire route to citizenship, then or now, it certainly helps. Rather than finding a green world, Sebastian gets a green card. Of course he will say yes.

But seeing *Twelfth Night* in the context of migration isn't simply a matter of finding presentist equivalents. Just as queer studies has moved from outing particular characters to a larger project of deconstructing normativity of character, behaviour, form and time, so too using migration as a heuristic doesn't just mean calling Viola a refugee. Instead, it should open up a larger sense of *Twelfth Night*'s displacements. The structure of the play alternates mobile and static characters. Viola, Sebastian, Antonio and Feste arrive into the playworld and have freedom to move around it. By contrast, the households of Orsino and Olivia are fixed. Nevertheless, notions of home – the key term in the emerging field of exile studies – whirl around the play's unconscious. Sir Andrew, bankrolling Toby's excesses to pursue a suit with Olivia that he knows is hopeless, keeps trying to leave: 'I'll home tomorrow,' he says. He ends the play, broken-headed, wishing 'rather than forty pound I were at home'.

Most interesting is Olivia. When she dispatches Malvolio to get rid of a renewed embassy from Orsino, she offers reasons: 'If it be a suit from the count, I am sick, or not at home: what you will, to dismiss it.' On the face of it, this is a throwaway suggestion. It's deeply implausible that Olivia – who is never seen outside her house in the whole play, and whose mourning for her brother has turned her into a 'cloistress', a woman defined by constraint within a building – would not be at home. Perhaps it's a fantasy: a desired freedom that presents itself unbidden as she reaches for an excuse. The line emphasises the specificity of Olivia's reasoning; it also pairs it with the play's own title. Both the printing of the play in the First Folio, and the law student John Manningham's account of the production at Middle Temple in 1602, stress that the play's full title is *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* – with the suggestion that the second phrase modifies the first rather than substitutes for it. In 1662 Samuel Pepys – who often went to the theatre but almost never seems to have enjoyed it – complained that *Twelfth Night* was not only silly but also not related in any way to either part of the title, and critics have echoed his question about the relevance of 'Twelfth Night', since there is no mention of it in the text. 'What you will' is also a fugitive phrase. This is its one appearance in *Twelfth Night*, and it seems significant. 'Not at home: what you will.'

We tend to see this play as the last of the comedies, emphasising its disguise plots, gender play and the marriages at its conclusion. Sometimes it seems to anticipate the problem plays that came after it, or – like its immediate chronological predecessor, *Hamlet* – to be preoccupied with mourning and melancholia. But there are two other possible affiliates for this play of displacement. One is *Othello*. Cyprus, its location, is, like Illyria, a contact zone between East and West. Sebastian's 'mere extravagancy' recalls Othello, the 'extravagant and wheeling stranger': there, 'extravagant' signifies otherness, which helps lend some of those connotations to not-at-homeness in *Twelfth Night*. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are comic versions of Iago and Roderigo – that name again – and Sebastian, alias Roderigo, could be thought of as an escapee from *Othello*'s Cyprus, washed up in an Illyria, where this time the noblewoman really does want to marry him. *Twelfth Night* engages its themes of migration and belonging without seeming to be interested in race – Viola and Sebastian are never marked as outsiders on racial, ethnic, religious or national grounds – while *Othello* has an overdetermined focus on race-making as the symptom and symbol of belonging. Othello is not the Moor of Venice in quite the same way that Orsino is the Duke of Illyria: the tragic 'of' has a different, disjunctive force. If *Twelfth Night* idealises its patterns of migration and assimilation through the shape, if not always the tone, of romantic comedy, *Othello* agonises over them, in a racist dramaturgy that produces tragic destruction.

Twelfth Night's other neighbour is *Thomas More*, the probably unperformed manuscript play by many hands on which more than one theatre company seems to have worked, fitfully, over several years. John Jowett's Arden edition brilliantly re-dated the play from the 1590s to 1600-04, with Hand D, reputedly Shakespeare, coming at the end of that period. It's always seemed odd that Shakespeare would be working as a play-patcher at this point in his career, but perhaps it's easier to see More's humdinger speech about migration and tolerance as an epitome – what the Elizabethan theatre called a plat or plot – for *Twelfth Night*. This is Thomas More, upbraiding London rioters for turning against immigrants, with a not-at-home empathetic flip of the sort we see in *Twelfth Night*:

> alas, alas, say now the King,
> As he is clement if th'offender mourn,
> Should so much come too short of your great trespass
> As but to banish you: whither would you go?
> What country, by the nature of your error,
> Should give you harbour? Go you to France or Flanders,
> To any German province, Spain or Portugal,
> Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England,
> Why, you must needs be strangers, would you be pleas'd
> To find a nation of such barbarous temper
> That breaking out in hideous violence
> Would not afford you an abode on earth.
> Whet their detested knives against your throats,
> Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God
> Owed not nor made not you, not that the elements
> Were not all appropriate to your comforts,
> But charter'd unto them? What would you think
> To be us'd thus? This is the strangers' case
> And this your mountainish inhumanity.

Not-at-homeness is seen as the ethical alternative to anti-immigrant violence in this fragmentary play, which is more closely aligned with Shakespeare's early 17th-century preoccupations when seen as a triangulation point between *Twelfth Night* and *Othello*.

The theme of migration dislocates all notions of home. Both of the major sources for *Twelfth Night* speak out what is silent, almost, in the play: the prompts for the journey. Both sources – one English, one Italian – identify violent, traumatic conflict as the motor for the displacement and separation of peoples. The major one is Barnaby Rich's prose story of Apollonius and Silla. The italic summary in the 1594 edition of Rich gives the story's outline:

> Apollonius Duke having spent a year's service in the wars against the Turk, returning homeward with his company by sea, was driven by force of weather to the isle of Cyprus, where he was well-received by Pontius governor of the same ile, with whom Silla daughter to Pontius fell so strangely in love, that after Apollonius was departed to Constantinople, Silla with one man followed, and coming to Constantinople she served Apollonius in the habit of a man, and after many pretty accidents falling out, she was knowen to Apollonius, who in requital of her love married her.

Shakespeare takes explicitly from this the relationship between Orsino (Apollonius) and the male-attired Viola/Cesario (Silla). But there are other occluded legacies. Apollonius is coming home from the wars against the Turks, and returns to Constantinople, the front line of Christendom in the decades leading up to its fall to the Ottoman forces of Mehmed II in 1453. The love story is set in Cyprus – another geopolitical setting that places the romance right at the heart of East-West politics (and again emphasises the connections with *Othello*). Movement across the seas in Rich is – like much else in his book – military in origin. People are not at sea for leisure or enjoyment or for no reason at all: their travels are motivated by war.

The second source was noted by Manningham, the play's first known spectator: 'At our feast we had a play called *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Much like the *Comedy of Errors* or *Menaechmi* in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called *Inganni*.' In Plautus' *Menaechmi*, twin boys are separated when one of them is abducted. But in the Italian *Inganni* plays the source of the familial split is geopolitical. The closest model is *Gl'Ingannati* ('The Deceived'), a play about twins and confusions produced by Siena's Academy of the Intronati at Siena, a literary and philosophical society. We don't know whether Shakespeare saw it, or whether it's the play Manningham refers to (there are other plays with similar titles in Italian). It was translated, though not into English: a Latin version was performed in Cambridge in 1595. If 'Apollonius and Silla' gives Shakespeare the Duke and the cross-dressed lover, *Gl'Ingannati* gives him the traumatised boy-girl twins.

But *Gl'Ingannati* is also a submerged source in the way it sets up its story, which has to do with a formerly wealthy merchant living with his daughter in Siena. She must disguise herself in male clothing and court a woman on behalf of her master, whom she herself loves. So far, so familiar. But Gl'Ingannati's commedia is prompted by a dark past: the father has lost his fortune, and his son, in the sack of Rome, only a few years before the date of the play's first performance in the 1530s. The sack of Rome was for the 16th century what the fall of Constantinople had been for the 15th: an epochal shift, marked by brutality, regime change and massive enforced population movement. On 6 May 1527 the Spanish, German and Italian troops of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, sacked the city, assaulting and slaughtering its citizens, pillaging and violating sacred spaces and objects. The level of violence reported in eyewitness accounts shocked the rest of Europe, even after decades of war. The Roman population waited in vain for salvation: the imperial army remained in Rome for nine months, kidnapping and

torturing the local population in an attempt to unearth hidden money and valuables. While it's difficult fully to measure the impact of the sack, it's estimated that by the end of the year nearly half the population had been killed, or driven out, or starved to death. It was a trauma that haunted the early modern period, echoed in stories of the fall of Troy and the nightmarish urban genocide with which Shakespeare has Henry V threaten Harfleur.

Both Rich and *Gl'Ingannati*, then, offer complex, political reasons for the travels of their characters, who are more clearly than in *Twelfth Night* forced migrants, or travellers caught up in networks of trade, religion and conflict. Shakespeare's omission of these geopolitical contexts are perhaps an example of what Stephen Greenblatt has called his 'strategic opacity' – a gap into which we are encouraged to place our own interpretations. But there is more to say about the significance of ignored sources. Editors and critics have tended to think about Shakespeare's use of sources in an instrumentalist way: he uses this bit, he rejects this bit. But what if the source was a less controlled and controllable predecessor, something more random and troubling? Shakespeare may not have been in control of the way the source texts bled into his own work. The source is not the thing that is remembered so much as that which can't be forgotten. It functions like the stressor in trauma psychology, the past event that is transformed, repressed and rehearsed in the present. The source is to the text as traumatic memories are to the psyche: present in disorderly, intrusive, multisensory recollections, disturbed or partial recall and false or fictive associated memories.

Twelfth Night tries to forget the legacy of war and geopolitical conflict that shapes its parent narratives, and the silence about Viola and Sebastian's origins is an attempt to suppress that traumatic past. But the play has a latent violence that makes clear the effort of suppression. 'My lady will hang thee,' Maria chides the returning Feste. Let her, he replies. 'He that is well hanged in this world need fear no colours.' There's something oddly literal about Maria's reply: 'I can tell thee where that saying was born, of "I fear no colours."' Feste asks where, and she answers: 'In the wars; and that may you be bold to say in your foolery.' The absolute unnecessariness of the explanation of the idiom makes this seem a moment from the play's unconscious. Tim Supple wrote of his own TV version that '*Twelfth Night* is a very violent play and all the more so for the repression and restraint of that violence . . . the violence of frustrated desire, the extreme condition of not getting what, or doing, or living as, you really want and moreover having to repress that thing you really want within the restraints of your social condition.' The play is characterised by violent extremity in love, in grief, in revenge. It's a romantic comedy that is constantly playing whack-a-mole with its precedent trauma. Sometimes the stressors are reconceived as farce: the sword fight between Viola/Cesario and Sir Andrew, for instance. But often they emerge more harshly. The cruelty of Feste's disguise as Sir Topaz; the sea battle, recalled in considerable detail, in which Antonio grappled Orsino's fleet and the Duke's 'young nephew Titus lost his leg'; Orsino's heartfelt desire to 'kill what I love' in 'savage jealousy' (once we start seeing *Othello*, it's everywhere). Even at the end, Malvolio's prediction that 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you' commits the violence of the stressor to an effect beyond the comic conclusion.

Viola and Sebastian are escaping the trauma of their past lives in other texts. They are forced migrants from narratives they have abandoned, with only the clothes on their back, to be accepted into other fictional worlds, given new names and reset on different fictional paths. We could figure migration and its traumatic dislocations as the relationship between texts rather than between countries: a more politicised, more agonised, way of conceptualising intertextuality. Textual migration, like its human counterpart, defamiliarises the idea of the text as home. To think of Shakespeare's plays as safe havens for displaced textual agents from different traditions is to understate the underlying violence of the dislocations that both *Gl'Ingannati* and 'Apollonius and Silla' are keen to display. But to say that the passage of these ideas is fraught and troubled, rather than apolitical, raises one of the abiding problems in Shakespeare studies: the instrumentalisation of real-world pain for a greedy project of relevance. When I read about twins separated in the chaos of the failed evacuation of Kabul last year, one of whom had ended up in France and the other in England, I thought: how relevant for *Twelfth Night* and *Gl'Ingannati*. I'm not sure that this resort to fiction to understand – to distance, to idealise, to control, or even to ignore – the suffering of others speaks well of me or my discipline. Even worse, it was only when writing this piece that I looked up what had happened to those twins. They have been reunited in the UK, thanks to the work of advocacy charities.

The literature on forced migration shares with critical race studies the conviction that their methods must have traction in the real world. The aim is social justice, not critical elegance. English studies, by contrast, has had a difficult relationship with moral urgency, and has tended to opt out of the difficulties of direct engagement. I share that instinctive discomfort with the idea of the discipline as a moral beacon. But with English studies in freefall, we need to clarify the ethical and practical claim we make for our discipline in a less apologetic tone. A version of this piece was given as the Northcliffe Lecture at University College London last year. The bequest in 1929 of £30,000 to the UCL English Department was made by the brothers of Lord Northcliffe, founder of the *Daily Mail*, a newspaper that has been keen to advance the deliberate, racially aggravated category confusion of illegal migrants, asylum seekers, economic migrants, foreign students and other displaced or relocated persons. I've suggested that Olivia's sudden sense that she, too, might be not at home highlights the intuitive empathy that forced migration should provoke. As Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*, 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.' Or, as Shakespeare puts it, 'What country, friends, is this?' □