

Introduction

- Context: Feste's song: 'O mistress mine, where are you roaming? / O stay and hear, your true love's coming, / That can sing both high and low.' (2.3.38-40) → high and low voices in a same ideal body to express a wider understanding of 'true' love, without deciding between 2 options.
- Other acceptions (besides music and body): social hierarchy in 'Shakespeare's most class-conscious play' (K. Elam's introduction, p. 80) → noble and ignoble? 1 extreme of sublimated love and 1 of unbridled sexuality and scatological humour? Romantic+satirical comedy → complementarity, rather than opposition
- Complementarity ('both high and low') = my argument in this reading → 1) Satirical dimension: diagnosing the ill social body resulting from an unbalance of high and low; 2) Romantic dimension: a healing alternative needing to reconcile the two rather than eliminating one pole; 3) Theatrical dimension: inclusivity and community as the backbones of an Elizabethan theatrical project

1) High and low at the service of a social satire

- List of characters: wide social array → Duke and Countess to Fool and Pirate, varieties of servants and religious figures, and even additional superimposed parts → no airtight separation between categories ('Sir' + 'Belch' and 'Aguecheek', Fool + Parson, high-born girl + Page boy)
- Structure of the play also desacralising the supposed dignity of any one class: simultaneous introduction of the Lady and the Fool in 1.5, servant usurping the mistress's identity to unmask the ambitious would-be Puritan → denouncing extremes that fall into their opposites: rapidity of Olivia and Malvolio's falls when tempted
- Satire underlines the interchangeability of extremes → Viola on Feste: 'For folly that he wisely shows is fit, / But wise men, folly-fallen, quite taint their wit' (3.1.65-6) → countering a contaminating illness ('taint') through the satirical play ('show' being 'fit') → complementarity of the wise Fool and the Lady in disguise in this scene: not just denunciation, but reconciliation.

2) High and Low at the service of romantic reconciliation

- Contract of a romantic comedy: not elimination of one pole (=tragedy), but reconciliation and unions → cross-class or cross-origin final unions
- Conventions of the genre: unions= social rises, not step-downs → metaphor of apprenticeship and mastery: 'Your master quits you' (5.1.315) and 'since you called me master for so long, / Here is my hand; you shall from this time be / Your master's mistress' (5.1.318-20)
- Meanwhile the boy actor to whom the line is addressed by the adult actor has not finished his apprenticeship → metatheatrical joke of 'Cesario, come - / For so you shall be while you are a man' (5.1.379-80) → Orsino's 'fancy's queen' (5.1.381) achieved only for the duration of the performance where the spectators suspend their disbelief to accept 'both high and low' in the same body → need to accept the theatrical conventions of Elizabethan drama to make the combination hold.

3) High and Low at the service of an inclusive theatrical project

- Elizabethan theatre's specific structural features: round house, groundlings+gentlemen's gallery → social mixity and mixed tastes/expectations to be catered for
- Plot situated in exotic and distant 'Illyria' + around the corner at the Elephant's Inn (3.3.39) and within hearing distance of 'the bells of Saint Bennet' (5.1.35). Also close by the Bear-baiting pit, whose animal fights spill into the plot → Fabian's original disagreement with Malvolio: 'he brought me out o'favour with my lady about a bear-baiting here' (2.5.6-7) → conspirators' project: to recreate that bear-baiting with Malvolio cast as bear: 'we'll have the bear again, and we will fool him black and blue' (2.5.8-9) → Malvolio as Orsino's low-key double (Actaeon hunted by his dogs in Orsino's Petrarchan analogy 1.1.20-22).
- Similar satire and similar lesson in measure and sobriety given through such parallels to all strata within the audience

Conclusion

- Despite their apparent opposition, High and Low=essentially complementary in *12N* for the comic catharsis to operate within a unified communal body: satire to identify social ill, romantic comedy to heal and reconcile, and performance to bring the community together around the same stage → High and low as both necessary components, not to be dissociated in a theatrical form which aims for universality in the very name of Shakespeare's theatre ('Globe') and its emblem (Atlas bearing the world on his shoulder).