Anamorphic Naming in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

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As the main opponent to the comic festivities of *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio embodies ill will. His name, of course, tells us as much.[1] We know well "how that name befits [his] composition" (*Richard II*, II.i.73).[2] Instead of representing the Good News that is the Gospel, he distorts or reverses the sense of Christmas joy suggested by the play's title and is Bad News to the comic world of the play, primarily because his message centers on sober, joyless peace in Illyria and ill will toward men and just about all women. In fact, three women, in different ways, disturb his peace of mind. Maria's trumped-up letter prompts him to seek the hand of Olivia, who becomes emotionally attached to the disguised Viola, Malvolio's newest rival. By Act III of the play, the Malvolio-Olivia-Viola triangle is fully established, visually, emotionally, and onomastically. In the name of Malvolio is Olivia, and in the name of Olivia is Viola. That Malvolio's name contains the names of both Viola and Olivia is more than mere coincidence in a play whose anagrammatic features have not gone unnoticed.[3] It is Malvolio who is the chief analyst of the apparent anagram that Maria so cleverly makes part of the letter she writes. How Malvolio reads this anagram, how his reading becomes an exercise in anamorphic naming, and what this tells us about his place in the comedy is the focus of attention in this paper.

The prime indication in *Twelfth Night* of Shakespeare's interest in anagrams is, of course, the configuration that Malvolio finds so enticing:

> M.O.A.I. This simulation is not as the former;
> and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me,
> for every one of these letters are in my name
> (II.v.139-41).

In an intensely comic way Malvolio reads these alphabetical letters anagrammatically, and in doing so must force and expand M O A I into MALVOLIO. He seeks and finds his own name by torturing the text, as David Bevington says, "to make it yield a suitable meaning, much in the style of Puritan theologizing" (395). What I should like to add to the

discussions of Malvolio's reading habits is an examination of the way in which he uses the technique of anamorphosis.

In Malvolio's approach to Maria's letter, a quasi-anagram gives way to an anamorphic perspective of a name. What Malvolio is enacting, whether done with full awareness or not, is connected not only with a feature of Renaissance art-theory but also with psychological processes that have been studied closely in the middle of the twentieth century. A clarification of the aesthetic and psycho-linguistic implications of Malvolio's reading of M O A I starts with an understanding of the technique of anamorphosis as it is practiced in the graphic arts:

> Anamorphoses are an extreme example of [the] subjectivization of the viewing process. The observer is first deceived by a barely recognizable image, and is then directed to a viewpoint dictated by the formal construction of the painting. Indeed, the etymological origin of the word - from the Greek *ana* (again), *morphē* (shape) - indicates that the spectator must play a part and re-form the picture himself (Leeman 9).

To shape again is to restructure, even to distort. Fundamentally, anamorphosis is the deforming or the distorting of an image, the alteration of the image by attempting to represent it in a drawing or to reflect it in a mirror. Anamorphic art presents a deformed image, a distorted picture that must be normalized or correctly analyzed by simply gazing obliquely at the distorted image or by means of a perspective glass like the anamorphoscope or anamorphic mirror. This cylindrically-shaped mirror and other kinds of perspective glasses correct the distortion and transform or reform the image into a recognizable shape or set of shapes. Jurgis Baltrušaitis has studied anamorphic art in great detail, reminding us that since this is a matter of visual perspective we are simultaneously dealing with a science that "fixes the exact dimensions and positions of objects in space [and] an art of illusion which recreates them" (4). Perspective seeks to create spatial illusions and, as a result, produces what Baltrušaitis calls "phantom forms" (4), forms that are there and yet not actually there.

Using the alphabetical letters M O A I, Malvolio indulges in the creation of an all-important phantom form: his own name. He purposely distorts Maria's already comically distorted letter so that he himself becomes an identifiable part of it. He desires to see himself in Maria's trumped-up letter, and will stretch the four-letter puzzle reforming it into his own eight-letter name. Through anamorphic analysis he comes up with MALVOLIO. He wants to be the anamorphic mirror that corrects the distortion; at the same time, Maria's letter is a reflector that Malvolio holds up

as a mirror to himself. He searches feverishly for the hidden image within the misshapen version of what he believes to be his name, but he fails to see that he actually deforms himself, foolishly so, the closer he gets to his name. If he possessed the Machiavellian will of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, he would be able to bring off the mirror-gazing with highly positive results. By the end of the second scene of *Richard III*, Gloucester has figuratively corrected his misshapen self in the eyes of Lady Anne, and says he will "be at charges for a looking-glass" (I.ii.255) and hence can cry out, "Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, / That I may see my shadow as I pass" (262-63). Gloucester enjoys an improvement in form; whereas Malvolio is losing form. To carry out this loss visually, Maria's letter urges Malvolio to dress up in yellow stockings and crossed garters and to smile. This costume and the smiling serve to mirror the letter's request and to deform literally the usually sober, conservative dress and manner of Olivia's steward. It is, then, the literal equivalent (albeit not strictly parallel) of Malvolio's reforming and deforming M O A I. When a smiling Malvolio parades around in crossed garters and yellow stockings, he walks the stage as a flesh-and-blood anamorphosis who paradoxically is also a phantom form of what he actually is. That his name is in Maria's letter to begin with is based on comic deception; and that his silly get-up will lead, so he thinks, to the absorption of OLIVIA into MALVOLIO is farcical self-deception and the crowning achievement of Maria and Sir Toby Belch in their plot against him. An ironic comment on Malvolio's way with words and names comes in the very next scene where Feste the Fool calls himself Olivia's "corrupter of words" (III.i.36). Feste is a Fool, but he is no fool. On the other hand, Malvolio is not a Fool, but he becomes a complete fool in his absurd search for the hidden name.

Anamorphic art purposely hides, through deformation and distortion, an image that is a recognizable signifier. In dealing with M O A I, Malvolio has to "crush [it] a little" (II.v.140); that is, he has to wrench or distort it to get what he wants. He comically dramatizes for us what Jacques Lacan calls the mirror stage. In the development of a child who sees herself in a mirror and says, "That's me," the body-image ("That") and her self ("me") are her creations (Bruss 65). At this stage of development there is an inability to distinguish between the real and the imaginary, but through the acquisition of language the child is released from this limitation or prison (Bruss 65; Eagleton 164-67). The child is developing an ego, an integrated self-image. Eagleton paraphrases Lacan's playfully abstruse thinking this way:

> The image in the mirror both is and is not itself ... This self, as the mirror situation suggests, is essentially narcissistic ... For Lacan, the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify (164-65).

This is precisely Malvolio's role in the letter-scheme. He distorts the language, and for a time remains in a dream-world (Lacan calls it the "imaginary"), in a prison of his own making. Through deformation, says Rudolf Arnheim in his discussion of anamorphosis, space is created (258-61); that is, a shape, a word, an anagram, a place can be stretched into existence. But this same space-through-deformation may act as a confining trap. Emblematic of this is the literal prison or confinement in which Malvolio ends up later in the play.[4] As if in a bad dream, he has trapped himself.

In analyzing Holbein's use of anamorphosis in *The Ambassadors* (1533), Lacan indicates that the cloud-like image at the feet of the two men in the portrait snares us. The image, which in fact is a skull stretched beyond recognition, wants to trap us. Lacan writes:

> Anamorphosis shows us that it is not a question in painting of a realistic reproduction of the things of space ... For us, the geometral [sic] dimension enables us to glimpse how the subject who concerns us is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision ... In Holbein's picture ... the singular object floating in the foreground, which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, *to catch in its trap*, the observer, that is to say, us ... we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught (92).

Just as the anamorphic, cloud-like skull traps the viewer of Holbein's painting, so does the anamorphic M O A I trap Malvolio. In the missive that Malvolio picks up there is what Lacan would call a "lack" (73), the endless chain of signifiers in pursuit of "real" satisfaction (Wright 122). An anagram is a conversion of one signifier into another signifier, and in this regard represents Lacanian "lack." Malvolio is trapped by his own anagrammatizing, his own emotional as well as linguistic lack that prompts him to derive his name anamorphically from the letter he thinks is Olivia's. But Malvolio does not see that the technique of anamorphic perspective is both scientific and illusory. He gets caught up in illusion only. It is the reader's or spectator's perspective that can cut through the illusion that clouds Malvolio's mind and heart. The reader/spectator can come to the play with what Duke Orsino, upon seeing twin brother mirrored in twin sister, calls "a natural perspective" (V.i.217). Such a perspective would distinguish the name of Malvolio from the four letters M O A I that are not his name. As readers/spectators we can selectively

"crush" the name *Malvolio* and extract from it *Viola* and *Olivia*. That Malvolio's name contains, in a scrambled, "crushed," or distorted way, these other names (even some of *Maria* - she of the enticing anagram) makes his name itself anamorphic. In acting out the Lacanian mirror stage, Malvolio goes about his creation childishly, narcissistically, and from the audience viewpoint comically.[5] He is the anamorphic artist with an anamorphic name.

The Malvolio-Olivia-Viola triangle is based on two distortions: Viola's disguise as a young man and Maria's trumped-up letter - a funhouse mirror in which Malvolio sees himself. What is more, the alphabetical letters M O A I in Maria's letter become a mirror within a mirror in which Malvolio sees his own name reflected. Maria's letter, then, is an unnatural perspective - that is, an artfully contrived perspective that purposely distorts reality. In this way, the author of that letter is also an anamorphic artist, for she puts together an anamorphic construction that Malvolio, believing it to be by Olivia, reads and interprets in such a way as to perform the trick of pulling his eight-letter name out of the four-letter anagram. Ironically, M O A I has all the ingredients of egocentricity: English "I," Italian "MIO," "MIA," "IO," and French "MOI." His egocentric, artful perspective creates the anamorphic name, and his anamorphoscopic view of it gives him what he wants: MALVOLIO. Malvolio's relationship with M O A I, then, is both anagrammatic and anamorphic.

Following the leads of Baltrušaitis and Leeman, Stephen Greenblatt discusses the anamorphic skull in Holbein's painting of *The Ambassadors* as a feature that asks us - indeed forces us - to "throw the entire painting out of perspective in order to bring into perspective what our usual mode of perception cannot comprehend" (19). The anamorphic skull in Holbein is the unseen skull beneath the skin. It is there and yet not immediately there. In much the same way, Malvolio's name is in Maria's letter and yet not immediately there. The same is true of *Olivia* and *Viola* as names that appear in *Malvolio*. It requires an abnormal perspective - an unnatural perspective - to see MALVOLIO in Maria's letter. The skull in the Holbein is a graphic counterpoint (a counter-Renaissance idea) in a great Renaissance painting. It is alien to the grandly humanistic, vital Renaissance world of the two ambassadors. Renaissance self-fashioning, according to Greenblatt, takes place in relation to the alien Other, "the nagging consciousness of distortion and indeterminacy ... the silent subversiveness of anamorphosis," and it "always, though not exclusively," takes place through language (61 and 9). Malvolio engages in a kind of self-

fashioning as he responds to the language of Maria's letter with its alien M O A I, but the result is comically ironic. His fashioning of self is in relation to something alien, an illusion, but it is a mock self-fashioning, a distortion of self-fashioning itself. It is, then, an anamorphic self-fashioning based upon the anamorphosis of his own name.

In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio deforms M O A I. He himself represents bad, malformed, anamorphic will. In fact, the play's alternative title, "What You Will," in addition to echoing Malvolio's name and Shakespeare's first name gives us permission to de-form or re-form the play's usual title.[6] Just as we may do what we will with "What You Will," so Malvolio does what he will with M O A I in order to achieve willfully his own name, a name that signifies malformed will. Anamorphic naming in *Twelfth Night* underscores the play's concern with the relation of deformation to reformation and hidden form. The Cesario-mask hides Viola's form; Olivia's veil conceals the form of her face (I.v.); the guise and voice of Sir Topas cover the form of Feste in the dark-room scene with Malvolio (IV.ii), and a letter written as if from Olivia conceals Maria's hand. The removal of the pretenses is a return to the original forms, a reforming of those forms into their natural states. "None can be called deformed but the unkind" (III.iv.368), says the disillusioned Antonio, who seeks assistance from the young man he takes for Sebastian but who is actually Viola/Cesario. To the disappointed Antonio, Sebastian's apparent ingratitude is "unkind," unnatural, a deformation of what is natural. To achieve a natural perspective is what Malvolio fails to do. As a result, he is malformed for the comic festivities that mark the play. He has attempted to create his own perspective. He is like those perspective glasses that Reginald Scot speaks of in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584): "You may have glasses so made, as what image or favour you print in your imagination you shall thinke you see the same therein" (179). One such perspective glass Scot mentions is the "columnarie" glass - that is, an early version of the anamorphic mirror or anamorphoscope.

So Malvolio derives his name from a text by looking at that text in a ludicrously self-fashioning way. It is his misfortune, but our comic fortune, that he uses deformation to form his name out of M O A I. In quite a different play, a courtier analyzes a queen's grief:

> ... sorrow's eyes, glaz'd with blinding tears,
> Divides one thing entire to many objects,
> Like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon
> Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry
> Distinguish form. (*Richard II*, II.ii.16-20)

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Sorrows seem numerous, he explains, because it is as if they were being distorted and hence stretched or multiplied in a perspective glass that can create confusion; but if "ey'd awry," that same glass will yield a natural form. Unlike King Richard, who will later in his drama gaze into an actual mirror to see into himself, Malvolio eyes awry the figurative mirror that is Maria's letter and in so doing distinguishes the form of his name. In this case hilarity results. Goeffrey Hartman puts it well when he writes that we "tumble through the doubling, reversing, mistaking, clowning, even cloning" of *Twelfth Night* (47). I should like to add that as we move through the play we also watch characters stumble over comic deformations and verbal distortions - features that one character in particular embodies in his anamorphic behavior and anamorphic name.

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Notes

[1]For various analyses of Malvolio's name see Bevington (395), the Arden Edition (2, n.14), and Hartman (39-40), who offers still another negative assessment of the thesis regarding the names of Orsino and Malvolio presented in Leslie Hotson's *The First Night of "Twelfth Night"* (London: Macmillan, 1954), ch. 5.

[2]All references to the works of Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare.*

[3]See Cox (360), Schleiner (139), Goldberg (217), and the New Penguin Edition (161, the gloss for this edition's II.v.106). In the New Cambridge Edition, Donno discusses usefully the similarities between Olivia and Viola and between Olivia and Malvolio (17-23).

[4]In the New Cambridge Edition, Donno writes: "Maria's letter makes 'a contemplative idiot' of a Malvolio imprisoned first in a false self and then in a dark cell ... " (39).

[5]The New Cambridge Edition presents a helpful account of the impact of the implied Narcissus-theme on various recent stage productions of *Twelfth Night* (36-39).

[6]In her introduction to *Twelfth Night* in *The Riverside Shakespeare* Anne Barton says that the alternate title, the only one in the entire Shakespeare canon, is an "airy invitation to reader or audience to rechristen the comedy according to individual taste and reaction" (403). Barton's term "rechristen" is appropriate in that it suggests a new or different name. In this regard we may think of M O A I and its relation to Malvolio. Maria is the mother of that name, and Malvolio, by identifying himself with it becomes in an odd way the son of Maria/Mary - a further distortion of Christmas values in the play.

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