

## Twelfth Night

*W.Shakespeare*

January 5-6, 2015

The play was the first play by Shakespeare I ever saw staged. It was in the summer of 1966 and I visited England for the first time, and with my parents and brother. Our trip took us through Stratford, and during the evening my mother took me there, no doubt anxious to instal in me good cultural habits. I doubt that I understood very much, but of course it was an experience, and I do imagine that I recall the play ending on a plaintive song. Some time later (in fact on Twelfth Night 1967) it was shown in a Swedish adaptation on Swedish TV. I recall not only vividly the performance of the actor Per Oscarsson as Sir Andrew, but also a hoist of other Swedish actors. I do not know how free the translation was, but I remember Oscarsson as playing the most memorable and dominating role, although in the play itself, Sir Andrew has but a minor one. In particular I recall the ridiculous old-maidish way of cursing the actor had affected, in the play itself there is almost nothing of that. It goes to show the great leeway you have in performance and setting up a play. It may be the same play but the effects it may have may differ widely.

The plot of the play is rather uninteresting involving love and deception, one woman dressed up like a page, enticing the love of a Countess, but conveniently presenting a brother to take up the interest otherwise wasted. So the play abound in contrived situations and solutions, but that matters very little. What matters is the lightness of tone and the intermittent comedy, involving many fools, and one *bona fide* one, illustrating the fact that the best way of avoiding being a fool is to pretend to be one. The true fool does not realize that he is a fool, like the foolish Malvolio, who actually may be more conceited than foolish, and the unabashedly foolish Sir Andrew Aguecheek, whose folly is innocent of anything. In other words those who take themselves seriously end up being ridiculous, but by excelling in your own folly you make yourself immune, as any confirmation of your foolishness becomes automatically a confirmation of your wit and astuteness, and any denial is of course an acknowledgment of wisdom. The deliberate fool will hide behind so many masks, that unmasking becomes impossible. Whatever claim, it can always be construed as irony, including the ironic detachment itself.

One thing that surprised me is that the common saying that *Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them* actually stems from the play. In fact it is referred to twice. Furthermore the songs performed by Feste - the clown, are songs that are often performed independently such as *O mistress mine, where are you roaming?/O stay and hear, your true love's coming* or the concluding plaintive *When that I was and a little tiny boy,/with hey, ho, the wind and the rain,/ A foolish thing was but a toy,/For the rain it reineth every day.* which somehow stick in my memory after all those years.

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