

“Virtue in Twelfth Night:

A Humanifesto

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1. “Is it a world to hide virtues in”?

In Act One, Scene Three of *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby Belch takes Sir Andrew Aguecheek to task for not dancing his way through every scene of life, from going to church to . . . . taking a piss:

Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em? Are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture? Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig. I would not so much as make water but in a cinquepace. What dost thou mean? Is it a world to hide virtues in? I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg it was formed under the star of a galliard. (I.iii.102-8)<sup>1</sup>

Tucked inside this mock exordium is a rather serious question: “Is it a world to hide virtues in?” Shining through Toby’s query is the Biblical injunction about the candle and the bushel basket: “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house” (KJV: Matthew 5:15). Both wittily and unwittingly, Toby has touched upon the central question of *Twelfth Night*. When the play begins, Olivia is hiding *her* virtues behind the veil of mourning. Orsino, by remaining at home and communicating by text message, is effectively hiding *his* virtues as a duke and a lover. Viola is candle, match, and flame: she is hidden by her disguise as Cesario, which allows her to delay delivery “to the world / Till I had made mine own occasion mellow, / What my estate is” (1.2.38-40). Yet once dressed

up and in service, her embassy between the two great households of Illyria unlocks both her own expressive capacities and those of Olivia and Orsino.

The candle image, which had become proverbial, shows up frequently in Shakespeare, most famously in Portia's comparison of a "good deed" to a "little candle."<sup>2</sup> (You can even purchase your own Portia candle if you are seeking Shakespearean inspiration.) What is distinct about Sir Toby's rendition is not only its facetiousness, but also its installation in a performance context: Toby is talking about *dancing*, while perhaps doing a little jig himself. On the one hand, he and Shakespeare are mocking the bad education of Sir Andrew, who regrets not putting the time "in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. O had I but followed the arts!" (1.3.78-9). Dancing is bundled here with idle pastimes that lack the prestige of higher education. Yet dancing *was* considered a virtuous practice in humanist education: in *The Book named the Governor*, Sir Thomas Elyot recommends such sports as wrestling, running, swimming and hunting as "exercises whereby should grow both recreation and profit" and then turns to dancing, arguing "how dancing may be an introduction unto the first moral virtue, called prudence" (78).<sup>3</sup> How indeed? might you ask. Dancing not only provides a needed break from study, but also "comprehends in it wonderful figures, or, as the Greeks do call them, *ideae*, of virtues and noble qualities" (60). Dancing according to Elyot trains both participants and observers in a range of virtues, including that flow from prudence, including honor, maturity, providence (foresight), industry, circumspection, election, experience, and modesty (discretion). Sir Thomas and Sir Toby share the sense that physical culture can enact and render manifest the virtues, and that virtue itself, far from being a simple prescription, code of behavior, or internal attribute, is deeply concerned with judgment, timing, opportunity, exercise, performance, and capacity. (If Sir Toby seems an unlikely philosopher of virtue, please note that Aristotle classed

wittiness, *eutrapeleia*, as an intellectual virtue.<sup>4</sup>) For these knights of Tudor humanism, virtue concerns personal character and training, the actor's inherited class or estate, and his responsibilities within a "world" of tasks, roles, and skills. Elyot's "powers or offices" glosses both *what a virtue is* (virtue or vertue is a power or capacity) and *what a virtue does*: a virtue finds its particular efficacy within a scripted assemblage of "offices," of possible duties and expected actions.<sup>5</sup> Like dance, virtue is *physical*, incorporating comportment, timing, affect, and training. Like dance, virtue is also *cognitive*, requiring judgment, foresight, deliberation, and discretion. Finally, like dance (and like theater), virtue is *social and situational*, involving roles, partners, privileges, opportunities, and audiences. We might add to Sir Toby and Sir Thomas's complex of concerns the *pleasurable and graceful flow* that accompanies virtuous exercise; and the element of *spatial and temporal design*, partly captured by Elyot's reference to the Greek *Ideae*, sometimes translated as *disegno* and affiliated in the performing arts with scenography and choreography.<sup>6</sup>

Virtue, then, is *corporeal, cognitive, social, pleasurable, and designed*, and it integrates those features in a single gesture, flow, or flourish, as a meeting of persons, actions, and world. In my new work on Shakespeare's Virtues, I want to explore the total ensemble of skills and practices, powers and offices, that virtue organizes and energizes. This is an "old topic," dating back to Aristotle and his heirs, including the world of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It is also an "old topic" in the sense that we've been here before: this is the realm of Alisdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, published in 1981, when I was a freshman in college and some people in this room were not even born yet! I am hoping, however, that testing Shakespeare's virtues in the multivalent matrix provided by ethical philosophy, performance studies, organizational and design studies, and theories of pedagogy and enskillment will allow me to reframe the virtuous

dynamics of Shakespearean drama in a manner responsive to the value and import, the powers and offices, of the humanities today. In this new work, virtue is not simply an historical theme or supplementary context for Shakespeare scholarship; virtue rather concerns the aims and affordances of literary education as a capacity-building enterprise. (That's the "humanifesto" part.)

The questions I want to consider include:

- 1) How did Shakespeare think creatively and non-prescriptively about human and also non-human virtues?
- 2) How do the particular kinds of cognitive and cooperative skills required by theatrical work break into the action of Shakespeare's plays, revealing their relationship to human capacity-building considered more broadly?
- 3) How do the humanities develop capacity, build worlds, and promote the exercise of judgment by making manifest the creative as well as destructive potential of human action and cooperation?

In the next part of this talk, I will explore virtue in Aristotle, whom I read through MacIntyre and Nussbaum. (My other inspirations in this project are Arendt and Hadot.) I will then return briefly to virtue in *Twelfth Night*, and then end with some comments on the humanities.

## 2. Aristotle on *arete*

The *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with the statement,

Every art [*techne*] and every inquiry, and similarly every action [*praxis*] as well as choice [*proairesis*], is held to aim at some good [*agathos*]. Hence people have nobly declared that the good is that at which all things aim. But there appears to be a certain difference

among the ends [*telē*]: some ends are activities, others are certain works [*erga*] apart from the activities [*energeiai*] themselves, and in those cases in which there are certain ends apart from the actions, the works are naturally better than the activities. (1094a: 1-5))<sup>7</sup>

The passage is alive with the directional, intentional, aim-oriented movement of human action and activity, whether in medicine, generalship, household management, or horsemanship, areas of human knowledge and skill that Aristotle inventories in the next paragraph (6-14). Action for Aristotle is inherently dynamic, in the precise sense of moving out of *dynamis* (capacity, power) and into actuality as both the effortful process of doing or making something (*energeia*, activity) and the result of that activity in a work or *ergon*, an outcome that contributes to the duration of the world.<sup>8</sup> What motivates the movement from *dynamis* to *energeia* is longing (*orexis*), which aims like the archer at a *telos*, a target, end, or goal (1094a: 20-25).<sup>9</sup> The *ergon* might be a crafted object such as a ship or shoe, but it can also be a deed, especially when action is realized in speech (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1n). Aristotle weaves a nested set of ends: the act of creating a bridle results in a functional object that contributes to the end of horsemanship. Horsemanship, a *technē* that gathers together a range of physical, artisanal, communicative, and cooperative skills among persons, objects, and animals, in turn belongs to generalship, another ensemble of knowledges that, along with arts such as household management and rhetoric, constitute politics. The “political art” [*politikē*] encompasses the others and is even synonymous with the human good as such, since “to secure and preserve the good of the city appears to be something greater and more complete” than any other art (1094b5-11).

Virtue is aspirational, in the etymological sense of involving the breath: in the arts of dance, oratory, and swimming, the actor’s practiced intake of air prepares for and flows into the actuality of the executed turn, the spoken word, and the completed stroke.<sup>10</sup> In larger complexes

of virtuous activity, aspiration concerns the considered and creative orientation towards models and ideals that organize and in-spire the work at hand, drawing potentiality into actuality. Virtue names the surging movement of just about anything (the power of a person, animal, plant, or thing) out of dormancy and into actuality towards a goal that is both immanent in the given activity and hovers just outside of it, an ideal, blueprint, design, or model that motivates and orders the activity in question. *Arete* is derived from the superlative of *agathos* (good), and thus indicates the best that a thing, person, or activity can achieve; it is related to the *aristeia* of the heroes, the battles in which they proved their excellence, and to the presumed inherited gifts of aristocrats (“the best [men]”). This heroic-aristocratic background feeds the hierarchical and masculinist underpinnings of much virtue discourse. Yet there is also evidence that the ancient Greeks and other Near Eastern and early European societies treated “human nature as being something that made it the basis of a fundamental worth or status.”<sup>11</sup> When epic becomes romance in Hellenistic literature and early Christianity (and within the Homeric corpus itself), these other vessels of virtuous potential and inherent nobility – including women, slaves, children, and animals – could become heroes of virtue in their own right.<sup>12</sup> This romance milieu of manifold nobilities and unexpected excellences is very much the world from which Shakespeare draws many of his narratives, including *Twelfth Night*.

Virtue for Aristotle is inherently social insofar as the different arts of human life are learned and practiced in groups and contribute to the common worlds of the household and the polis: “the good of the individual by himself is certainly desirable enough, but that of a nation and of cities is nobler and more divine” (1094b: 7-11). Virtuous activity both produces concrete goods that contribute to human welfare and happiness (*eudaemonia*) and generates its own distinct pleasure and sense of wellbeing. The “work of man,” unlike the work of the shoemaker

or the statesman, is not identified with any particular end, but rather with the creation of a “certain life” composed by “the activity of the soul (*anima*) and actions accompanied by reason” (1098a: 13-15). Performance runs through Aristotle’s account of virtue: Sir Toby talks about dancing, while Aristotle speaks instead of the “serious [*spoudaios*]” cithara player: “It belongs to the cithara player to play the cithara, but to a serious one to do so well” (1098a: 12-13). *Spoudaios* conveys a sense of “activity, energy, earnestness, zealousness (from the root *spoudē* = haste, zeal),” conveying the animating energetics of virtue as an incipient ensemble of gestures that draw on a repertoire of skills.<sup>13</sup> The seriousness that contributes to excellence is a matter of focused and vigorous practice in accordance with standards that are learned, met, and rendered manifest by the practitioner, who integrates reason and passion, body and soul, in the dedicated exercise of her art in concert with others.

This is the world of Alisdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*. MacIntyre renders his own version of the candle image when he writes of virtue in the Homeric period, “By performing actions of a particular kind in a particular situation a man gives warrant for judgment upon his virtues and vices; for the virtues just are those qualities which sustain a free man in his role and which manifest themselves in those actions which his role requires” (122). *Performance, action, role, manifest*, and *free man* are all key words in the energetic complex articulated by *arete* and already implicit in the Homeric world view. The more developed Aristotelian virtue tradition, which both inherits and recalibrates Homeric *arete* within the post-heroic space of the polis, consists according to MacIntyre in *practices, traditions, and narrative*. MacIntyre defines a practice as

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying

to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that the human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (187)

Tic-tac-toe, writes MacIntyre, is too trivial to be a practice in this sense; the examples he offers include friendship, teaching, and chess, to which we can add dancing, cithara playing, and theater. Theater is “coherent and complex” and it is a “socially established cooperative human activity.” It also develops goods internal to its own operations (the “play’s the thing”) and follows criteria of excellence that belong to its own distinctive activity. The list of such criteria vary across periods and traditions, but might include being narratively or emotionally compelling; successfully engaging the senses through voice, sound, and movement; achieving an appropriateness with respect to site or setting; and producing thought and reflection that overflow the time of performance. When theater meets its own marks, it “systematically extends ... the human powers to achieve excellence,” by building out a given community’s capacities for worldly imagination, affective response, evaluative attunement, sensory awareness and proprioception, cooperative and organizational intelligence, and specialized yet transferrable forms and durations of attention. *Tradition* concerns the embedding of these practices in a shared way of life and the critical transmission and incremental transformation of techniques and norms over time. Finally, *narrative* encompasses both the aspirational movement of a particular action towards a goal or telos and the desire of the virtuous actor to live a coherent life that can be told to others as a meaningful story.

How does the specifically ethical component that we associate with the word virtue emerge from this realm of practice as game and skill? MacIntyre argues that all human practices

organically develop three core moral virtues: courage (the willingness to risk one's own wellbeing in order to express care for the community of practice), honesty (the commitment to playing by the rules in an environment of trust), and justice (the articulation and acceptance of shared standards and an established process of adjudicating deviations and transgressions from them).<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre's project is to retrieve the breadth and creativity of Aristotelian ethics before virtue had become rule bound, divorced from the passions, instrumentalized by utilitarianism, and reduced to impoverished concepts such as altruism, benevolence and sexual propriety. MacIntyre's location of virtues in practices and traditions and his insistence on the contribution of narrative to the intelligibility of human discourse and life has immediate bearing on Shakespearean drama and theater. Yet MacIntyre's anti-modernism, anti-pluralism, and increasingly orthodox Christianity fail to account for important dimensions of Shakespeare's cosmopolitan inquiries into virtue. With these reservations in mind, I am supplementing MacIntyre with the work of two other great Aristotelians, Hannah Arendt and Martha Nussbaum. (I will only talk about Nussbaum here.)

The starting point for Nussbaum is *moral luck*: the idea that happiness and the good life, though requiring virtuous activity, are also contingent on external affairs, from the circumstances of one's own birth and social condition (slave or free? rich or poor? male or female?) to the traumas and privations of disease, loss of livelihood, bereavement, enslavement, displacement, and war.<sup>15</sup> The scandal of such contingency would lead the Stoics to fashion an ideal of happiness divorced from material circumstances and immunized against loss through spiritual discipline, with profound implications first for Christianity and later for Kantianism. Aristotle's virtues are more worldly, however; realized *in* the world through practices that act *upon* the world, virtue also exposes the actor *to* the world, including the limitations the world places on

her own virtuous expressivity.<sup>16</sup> Although he would not use the language of sin, Aristotle would agree with Feste that virtue is always “patched”: “Anything that's mended is but patched. Virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue” (*Twelfth Night*). Nussbaum is attuned to those moments in Aristotle in which the flow of virtue is inhibited, blocked, or redirected by external and internal impediments.<sup>17</sup>

For Nussbaum, classical theories of moral luck become an invitation to think about the good life as it applies to women, non-citizens, and others whose occasions for virtuous exercise unfold in a patchwork of status limitations that result in a heightened exposure to creaturely need and diminished access to *eudaimonia*. Here is Nussbaum on the relation between virtue, world, and vulnerability:

We require that the good condition find its completion or full expression in activity; and this activity takes the agent to the world, in such a way that he or she becomes vulnerable to reversals. Any conception of good living that we will consider rich enough to be worth going for will contain this element of risk. The vulnerability of the good person is not unlimited. For frequently, even in diminished circumstances, the flexible responsiveness of his practical wisdom will show him a way to act well. But the vulnerability is real: and if deprivation and diminution are severe or prolonged enough, this person can be ‘dislodged’ from *eudaimonia* itself. . . . virtuous condition is not, itself, something hard and invulnerable. Its yielding and open posture towards the world gives it the fragility, as well as the beauty, of a plant (*Fragility* 340).

Whereas for Aristotle the free man of wealth and leisure (the “great souled man”) is the consummate actor in a status-scape of nested offices, Nussbaum makes the precarious and exposed actor into the emblem of the virtuous predicament. For Aristotle, reckoning with moral

luck is a secondary consequence of virtue's inherent worldliness; for Nussbaum, exposure to moral luck is written into the narrative dynamism and contingency of virtue and is key to virtue's democratic extension from great-souled men to all human actors. Moral luck also frames her ecological reading of virtue as unfolding within contexts that can either inhibit or encourage the growth of individuals and communities: flourishing requires that we "need to be born with adequate capacities, to live in fostering natural and social circumstances, to stay clear of abrupt catastrophe, to develop confirming associations with other human beings" (1).

This ecological view of virtue connects Nussbaum's writings on classical philosophy to her contributions to public philosophy. In her work on the status of women in developing countries, Nussbaum champions "a view of the human being as a being both capable and vulnerable, in need of a rich plurality of life activities"<sup>18</sup> and she supports forms of engagement that allow individuals, organizations, communities, or nations to flourish on their own terms. For Nussbaum, capability or capacity concerns "not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment,"<sup>19</sup> and she suggests that religious and ethical traditions around the world "see the person as having activity, goals, and projects – as somehow awe-inspiringly above the mechanical workings of nature, and yet in need of support for the fulfillment of many central projects."<sup>20</sup>

MacIntyre emphasizes the traditional and substantial character of virtues in a status-scape where person and role or office converge; shoemaker, lawmaker and homemaker are ontological more than performative categories, though they must always be sustained and renewed by right action.<sup>21</sup> Nussbaum, on the other hand, reads Aristotle for a more variegated, conflictual and vulnerable ecology of virtues. Nussbaum's virtuous actor can combine and change roles and

hence extend her virtuous occasions and vocabularies: the shoemaker or the homemaker might become a lawmaker, for example, as implied by Aristotle's dictum that "the citizen is the one who rules and is ruled by turn." For Nussbaum, the very unevenness in the opportunity to exercise capacity is itself a potential source of aspiration and can, through the concerted and creative practice of virtues such as courage and justice, transform how a group understands and participates in virtue. Such expansions of virtue have emerged periodically in the history of the reception of classical ethics: for example, in the egalitarianism of messianic Judaism and Pauline Christianity; in the rise of humanist/ bourgeois meritocracies in the Renaissance; in Marx's vision of the good life as integrating multiple forms of human activity in a single meaningful life; and in modern social movements dedicated to the empowerment (in-virtue-ing) of diverse actors. Whereas MacIntyre reads Aristotle for normative patterns of tradition, Nussbaum reads Aristotle for scenes of moral luck, in which accidents of birth codified in unequal institutions and traumas against well-being can both constrain and inspire persons and communities to participate meaningfully in the pursuit of a good life.

### 3. Courage, hope, and participation in *Twelfth Night*: a virtuous scansion

The virtuous rhythm of dynamic potential and energetic action receives an inaugural scansion or sounding in the dialogue between Viola and the Captain in Act One, Scene Two, which occurs in the aftermath of shipwreck on the shores of Illyria. The Captain describes Sebastian as surviving by tying himself to a mast. He has been "taught the practice" by the virtues of "courage and hope." The Captain presents courage and hope as a couple, we might even say *as twins*. Does Sebastian practice the masculine virtue of courage while Viola embodies the more feminine virtue of hope? Not really. Both characters practice both virtues, and what animates (ensouls)

*Twelfth Night* is the flow of virtue among diverse social actors in a situation of misfortune and heightened vulnerability. The twins suffer the “moral luck” wrought by shipwreck, a catastrophe preceded, however, by the orphaning and partial destitution of the twins that placed them on that ship to nowhere in the first place. Viola is separated from her brother, becoming an emblem of hope, patience, and messianic expectancy in the interim between nativity and epiphany, dynamic hiddenness and virtuous manifestation, marked by the festival of Twelfth Night. Yet in that interim she also becomes her missing brother, taking action as the boy messenger Cesario who draws out others in the process of realizing her own capacities for speech and pedagogy as well as erotic longing and human attachment.

*Courage* is a classical or cardinal virtue, while *hope* is one of Paul’s three theological virtues, along with faith and charity. So, in joining courage and hope, Shakespeare is interested in the crossing of classical and theological virtue tables in the layered landscape of romance, with its Homeric, Athenian, and messianic time signatures. Although hope takes flight from the element of yearning or *orexis* in Aristotle’s dynamics of arete, Aristotle himself did not count hope as a virtue, and its presence here indicates the messianic tonality of the Shakespearean milieu.<sup>22</sup> As Joan Pong Linton has demonstrated, *Twelfth Night* is messianic in the sense that it explores the attitude of hope and the forms of open address practiced by both the Jewish prophets and the Pauline epistles.<sup>23</sup> In the Captain’s speech, the language of providence belongs to Sebastian’s practical reason, “most provident in peril,” yet also implies a view of the cosmos as not hostile to human projects and hence capable of becoming a partner in the effort of survival. In the zone of hope, design belongs to both human intention and dispositions towards action that animate the created world.



As a couple, hope and courage nominate the rhythm of virtue as the tremulous realization of potential in a situation of vulnerability and risk. *Hope* distills aspiration into an attitude or posture of affirmative anticipation and trust. In Giotto's portrait of Hope, note her yearning, even wistful tilt towards a beckoning crown; the crown is heavenly, visualizing the salvation of the soul in Christian theology, but "crown" can also simply mean the culmination of a deed in a tangible outcome, a shining manifestation of capacity visualized by Giotto in the outstretched reach of the aspiring person.<sup>24</sup> *Courage*, on the other hand, frames the energetic movement of aspiration into deed. Forged in the arts of war and hunt, courage carries a vitalism at its heart or *coeur*, as Paul Tillich notes.<sup>25</sup> That vitalism is on display in the Captain's portrait of Sebastian bound to the mast like Arion to his dolphin, becoming a moving assemblage composed of human, tool, and animal in a watery environment that is no longer the antagonist of the swimmer, but rather his interlocuter and even his friend: Sebastian survives because he is able to "hold acquaintance with the waves." Sebastian harmonizes his own movements, but also his aspirational being, that is, his *pneuma* or breath, with the patterns and powers of the waves, as their *energeia* crests and falls, revealing and concealing the depths beneath.

Echoing Aristotle and anticipating MacIntyre, the Captain uses the word "practice" to discover the moral virtues of courage and hope in Sebastian's skill as a swimmer.<sup>26</sup> Swimming develops the athlete's strength and endurance in concert with the rhythmic mastery of breath, the mindful organizing of emotion, and alertness to the environment. When Sebastian identifies and

employs the broken mast as a life preserver, he surges out of the routines of swimming and into the inventiveness of a new action, though one couched in the deep histories / stories transmitted by both literature and seafaring.<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre might emphasize the extent to which noble pursuits have trained Sebastian in the habits of skill, judgment and independence that sustain him now. Nussbaum might frame this image instead as an allegory of resilience in a scene of moral luck. Sebastian is orphaned, without friends or family, on a journey whose unknown end and chaotic capsize suggest the extreme vulnerabilities and makeshift improvisations of the twins' journey. Both he and his sister have the benefits of a noble education but little tangible credit or capital. The twins resemble young people displaced by family loss, abuse or disaster, or, less drastically, adolescents seeking an appropriate apprenticeship, like the boy actor who would have played Viola. Viola-Sebastian also resemble a homeless transgender teen who is seeking their place in a world with no place for them.<sup>28</sup> Orphan, refugee, apprentice, or gender outlier: the point is not to determine one scenario as more fitting than another, but instead to begin to locate rhythms of duress, capacity, and repair across a range of situations, vocations, and epochs: not a thematic or historical reading so much as a virtuous scansion, an essay in pattern recognition.<sup>29</sup>

Viola's disguise is *her* mast, an instrument of improvisation that allows her both to hide her identity in the posture of hope and to act in that world, by becoming along with Feste the only person in the play who both walks and talks between households. Her particular practice is music, which shares with swimming, dancing and theater a range of masteries and attunements. The willow cabin weaves courage and hope into a veritable architecture of virtue, like Marina's "leafy shelter" in Act Four of *Pericles* or the extraordinary teepee at the end of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*. By weaving the supple branches of misfortune into an open structure of expressed yet occluded desire, Viola demonstrates her capacity for creativity, adaptation, and attachment.

Viola touches others both through what she says and what she leaves unsaid. The willow cabin is both bushel and lamp, a fitting emblem of Viola's virtues. V is for Viola: it is also for Virtue, Vitality, Vulnerability, and the double V / doubleyou of "World."

Shakespeare glosses the synergy between courage and hope in the reunion between the twins at the end of the play:

Viola:           If spirits can assume both form and suit,  
You come to fright us.

Sebastian:           A spirit I am indeed,  
But am in that dimension grossly clad  
Which from the womb I did participate.

Were you a woman, as the rest goes even,  
I should my tears let fall upon your cheek

And say 'Thrice welcome, drownèd Viola.' (5.1.22-28)

The participation of the soul in the body implies the incarnation celebrated on the Feast of the Nativity and points to the conception of the twins as itself a kind of miracle, a hermaphroditic merging of male and female in one pregnancy. But the work of *Twelfth Night* is to draw the hiddenness of nativity into the openness of epiphany, in which adoration, gift-giving, and acts of acknowledgment create the conditions for fellowship. The word participation implies precisely this social dimension of epiphany, which renews personhood by engaging actors in a larger social body. Virtue *is* participation: the movement of several persons into a scenario that invites the actualization of capacity and affirms their mutual ensoulment. Participation is both the condition of and the means towards a just society. The good life requires that the limited justice internal to a practice extend into the virtue ecology at large, and this requires more heightened

and risky aspirations and actions, postures of hope and deeds of courage that contribute to greater ensembles of persons and practices. This means that virtue is always political as well as ethical, involving some vision of the common good and the search for paths to realize it.

It also means that virtue is always patched, compromised by institutionalized inequities and exposed to inhibition and violation. Malvolio's exclusion from the participatory community at the end of the play signals the uneven reach of epiphany's brief candle. That Malvolio should be exiled from festivities that he would wish shut down may exhibit poetic *justice*, but not poetic *mercy*, while Antonio's uncoupled state also points to the limits of the renewed community. Shakespeare leaves us in prophetic time, having undergone a certain movement from nativity to epiphany, while presenting for our further consideration tensions that remain unreconciled (between Catholic and Puritan tables of virtue, for example) and to social challenges that remain unmet (the persistence of same-sex desire and unclaimed genders).

#### 4. Humanifesto

The humanities need a Twelfth Night, a feast of the epiphany. We are very comfortable hiding the virtues of what we do behind specialized language and a sense of professionalism. How do we remove the bushel? How does literary education make students braver, more attentive, and more resilient? How do literary and philosophical texts orient readers in the world? And how can we help students translate and appropriate those capacities to new scenes of use as they move beyond our classrooms into employment, citizenship, and love? I would like to read virtue for its elasticity and contingency, its political edges and blinders, its extra-human extensions, and its inherent dynamism, that is, its origins in *dynamis* or capacity. I think there is great value – scholarly as well as pedagogical -- in thawing the frozen concepts of virtue from their dormancy

and restoring them to creative and critical use.<sup>30</sup> This entails reading them in their original contexts (Aristotle, Elyot, Shakespeare), not, however, in order to historicize them but rather to reencounter them in their plasticity and variety, so that we can take them up in the spheres of activity and repair that beckon to each of us most strongly. For some, the virtues may inspire political activism and social justice projects, and for others the virtues may issue in a renewed pedagogy and more conscientious mentoring. For some, the virtues may foster new forms of community teaching and public humanities, and for others, the virtues may initiate the search for recovery, reconciliation and healing. The virtues belong to the ancient constitution of humanism and *humanitas*, the Aristotelian “work of man,” while also finding counterparts in practices and forms of life everywhere. Articulating that ensemble – its organization, its energies, and its aims -- may help us refocus our work as humanists, by making it more visible, tangible, and legible, to ourselves and to our publics.

Let’s return to Sir Toby’s question: *Is it a world to hide virtues in?* Most certainly not, since the world we cohabit can only be healed by human action, which requires both courage and hope. Yet actualizing virtue sometimes means leaning back before leaning in, by letting events “mellow,” as Viola puts it. (My kids would say: “Chilax.”) The humanities build these and other capacities, through the student-centered techniques of our pedagogies and through the wisdom manifested in the texts entrusted to our care or appropriated through our acts of curation and judgment. In *Twelfth Night*, and on every night, living is always assisted living, and virtue is always patched. So is scholarship. And that’s a good thing, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William, et al. *Modern Critical Edition*. Ed. Taylor, Gary, et al. The New Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 27 Oct. 2016. Web. 4 Jun. 2017. All citations from this edition unless otherwise noted.

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<sup>2</sup>See also the Duke's sermon on virtue that jumpstarts *Measure for Measure* ((MM 1.1.30-36). The image shows up in James I's advice to his son in *Basilicon Doron*. [\*\*\*]

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named The Governour*, ed. S. E. Lehmburg (London: Everyman's Library, 1962), 60.

<sup>44</sup>Aristotle, 1108a24.

<sup>5</sup> An office is "a position of trust, authority or service under constituted authority" (OED 2a) and "a duty attaching to a person's station, position, or employment" (3a). Office can also mean "the performance of, or an act of performing a duty, function, service, attendance, etc" (3b), and it can indicate, like "virtue" itself, "a bodily or mental function as operating; the proper activity of an organ or faculty" (4b).

<sup>6</sup> The Italian art theorist Zuccaro defined *disegno* as "the singular form of the soul, and the virtue that makes it more fully in the divine image impressed upon us .. it is idea ... a concept of all concepts, form of all forms, idea of all thoughts, by means of which all things are in our soul" cited by James Hutson, *Early Modern Art Theory, Visual Culture, and Ideology* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2016), 141. For an intriguing study of designs for virtue in the humanist object world, see Luke Syson and Dora Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: British Museum, 2011). On the modern art of scenography, see Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). They define scenography as "the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment" (4).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, on the relationship between work and world, a framework that she derives from her creative reading of Aristotle.

<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum glosses *orexis* as "the notion of something going on internally, an inclining towards or reaching for, such that in certain circumstances (in combination with the right sort of perception or thought) action will naturally and swiftly result." *Fragility of Goodness*, 277.

<sup>10</sup> In the words of Seneca, "Just as our breath produces a sharper and more focused sound when it passes through the long, narrow passage of the trumpet and pours out of a hole that opens at the end, so the narrow constraint of poetic form makes our meanings sharper and more focused." Seneca, Ep. 108.10, cited by Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 444.

<sup>11</sup> Patrice Rankin, "Dignity in Homer and Classical Greece," in *Dignity: History of a Concept*, ed. Remy Debes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Cite David Woods' dissertation on Christianity and romance.

<sup>13</sup> Mathew Lu, "Getting Serious about Seriousness: On the Meaning of *Spoudoiois* in Aristotle's Ethics," *Proceedings of the ACPA* 87 (2014): 286. doi: 10.5840/acpapro201441412).

<sup>14</sup> *After Virtue*, 191-3. Two of these belong to Aristotle's cardinal virtues.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle acknowledges three types of moral luck that affect a person's chances to achieve *eudaemonia*: birth, wealth, and power. Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 339.

<sup>16</sup> Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, \*\*\*.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle acknowledges that virtue can sometimes remain dormant, as when a good person is "asleep or even inactive through life," or "suffering badly and undergoing the greatest misfortunes" (1096a).

<sup>18</sup> Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, loc. 237. Check quote.

<sup>20</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72-3.

<sup>21</sup> See MacIntyre's critique of Goffman as excessively theatrical, delinking persona and person in a manner emblematic of modernity (115-17).

<sup>22</sup> On Aristotle's negative view of *euelpis* (hope, confidence, optimism), see G. Scott Graveless, "Aristotle on Hope," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38.4 (October 2000), 461-77. On the blending of courage and hope in the prophetic tradition, see Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 8. Tillich writes, "The reception of courage into faith, especially insofar as it implies hope, appears rather early, e.g., in Ambrose's doctrine of courage."

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<sup>23</sup> Joan Pong Linton, “Hospitality in *Twelfth Night*: Playing at (the Limits of) Home,” in *Shakespeare and Hospitality: Ethics, Economy, Exchange* (Routledge, 2016), 222-41.

<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare captures this sense of crowning or cresting in his portrait of Perdita as a gifted dancer, singer, and giver of alms: “Each of your doing/ So singular in each particular, / Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds, / That all your acts are queens” (TWT 4.4.143-6). See Bradin Cormack’s stunning reading of this passage: “Instead of co-opting experience for a single ‘crown,’ Florizel’s amatory meditation opens the crown to the flow of time: constituted according to the discretion of its present, each act comes to occupy its own jurisdiction.” “Shakespeare’s Other Sovereignty: On Particularity and Violence in *The Winter’s Tale* and the Sonnets,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.4 (Winter 2011): 504.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Tillich writes that “courage is a function of vitality [biology, athleticism, physical response], but vitality is not something which can be separated from the totality of man’s being, his language, his creativity, his spiritual life, his ultimate concern.” *The Courage to Be*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 82.

<sup>26</sup> Elyot recommends swimming as a noble exercise, 60-65. For an extended account of swimming as a skill in the period, see *Master Digbys Booke of the Art of Swimming*, trans. Christopher Middleton (London: 1595). To “swimme like a Dolphin” is “to lift his head about the water, & when he hath breathed, presently diue down againe, as afore” (44).

<sup>27</sup> The image stretches back to Odysseus. See Carol Dougherty, *The Raft of Odysseus: The Ethnographic Imagination of Homer’s Odyssey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). She notes that a raft is “an improvised ship,” built with skill from what is ready at hand. Location 484.

<sup>28</sup> On homelessness, adaptation, and survival among LGBTQ youth, see Rachel Aviv, “Netherland,” *New Yorker* December 10, 2012, a piece of literary journalism that resonates with Shakespearean themes. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/10/netherland>

<sup>29</sup> *As You Like It* has been performed as a refugee drama; see Jessica Bauman’s *Arden Everywhere* project. and *Twelfth Night* could also lend itself to this kind of exploration and staging.

<sup>30</sup> I am not alone in this project, of course. Books of interest include *Dignity: A History*, ed. Remy Debes (Oxford University Press, 2017); Michael Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2010); Massimo Pigliucci, *How to be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); *Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human*, ed. Raymond Boisvert and Lisa Heldke (London: Reaktion Books, 2016); Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge UP, 2017), and many more.