NO RESPECTER OF ‘PLACE, PERSONS, OR TIME’: FESTIVITY AS COERCIVE POWER
IN TWELFTH NIGHT AND THE PURITAN WIDOW

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

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Washington, DC
April 8, 2017
ABSTRACT

Scholars of early modern England have recently renewed their interest in festivity—the religious and social concept and practice of feasts, fasts, processions, celebrations, gatherings, and other rituals associated with the holidays and seasons of the Christian liturgical calendar. Scholars have turned much of their attention to the term as it relates to theater and religion. Whether it is Erika T. Lin (2013), who argues theater was not a “culmination of” but rather an “active negotiation with contemporaneous festive performance practices,” Phebe Jensen (2008), who historicizes late medieval and early modern Catholicism’s theological unease about festivity, or Leah Marcus (1986), who theorizes that the “lawless topsy-turvydom [of festivity] can both undermine and reinforce” authority, scholars suggest that festivity helped to define and shape communities, even as those same communities fiercely debated its meaning over time. With this growing historiography in mind, I see an opportunity to reconsider the literary and social meanings of early modern comedies as they relate to festivity’s complicated history. Drawing on discourses of Catholic and Protestant theology, religious memoirs, and recent early modern English scholarship, this thesis investigates festivity in William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night and Thomas Middleton’s The Puritan Widow. I argue that characters in Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow exercise power through festive occasions to coerce non-conformist characters into religious and social conformity across religious and gendered axes by appealing to anxieties about time, space, and bodies. After an analysis of scholarship on festivity, followed by readings of Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow, I conclude by considering what is at stake for festivity’s dialectical relationship between ideology and practice, when commercial theater represents, or perhaps reveals, festivity as coercive on the early modern stage.
For Tom, Sam, and Dave.

Many thanks,
Robert
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“Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?”
Twelfth Night, 2.3.87

“Device well-managed may do good upon her.”
The Puritan Widow, 1.3.105

INTRODUCTION: A REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP ON “FESTIVITY”

Recently, scholars of early modern England have renewed interest in festivity—the religious and social concept and practice of feasts, fasts, processions, celebrations, gatherings, and other rituals associated with the holidays and seasons of the Christian liturgical calendar. Scholars have turned much of their attention to festivity as it relates to theater and English culture more broadly. From Erika T. Lin (2013), to Phebe Jensen (2008), to Leah Marcus (1986), these scholars as well as others suggest that festivity helped to define and shape communities, even as those same communities fiercely debated its meaning over time. Within this growing historiography, opportunity exists to reconsider the literary and social meanings of early modern comedies as they relate to festivity’s complicated history.

Drawing on discourses of Catholic and Protestant theology, religious memoirs, and recent early modern English scholarship, this thesis investigates festivity in William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night and Thomas Middleton’s The Puritan Widow. Characters in Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow exercise power through festive occasions to coerce non-conformist characters into religious and social conformity across religious and gendered axes by appealing to anxieties about time, space, and bodies. After an analysis of scholarship on festivity and readings of

Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow, I conclude the thesis by considering what is at stake for festivity’s complex dialectical relationship between ideology and practice, when commercial theater represents, or perhaps reveals, festivity as coercive on the early modern stage.

Festive religious and social practices were common throughout early modern England, even as Protestantism and Catholicism reformed festivity in various ways over time. Phebe Jensen says that in late medieval England

on the eve of reform, the ritual year dictated that folk customs and traditional pastimes, often arranged by the laity, punctuated and accompanied liturgical celebrations led by the clergy, such as processionals at Candlemas and Palm Sunday, Whitsuntide festivals, and Corpus Christi celebrations, and activities associated with Easter Week on Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Black Saturday, and Easter Sunday. ³

In other words, pastimes like “decorating churches with holly and ivy, the passing of the wassail cup or bowl, Lord of Misrule or Boy Bishop games” intersected with religious practices. ⁴ In fact, Jensen notes that the traditional feast that broke the Christmas Eve fast was not a “religious observance,” but the feast nonetheless exemplified charity and “translated that central value [. . .] into the social realm [of the parish community].” ⁵ One way the Christmas Eve festivity “exemplified charity” was by inviting poor members of the community to the feasting table. Jensen asserts that although sacred and profane festivities could serve devotional purposes, the “late medieval church establishment did not embrace all such extra-liturgical festivity.” ⁶

⁴ Jensen, 27.
⁵ Jensen, 27.
⁶ Jensen, 27.
Therefore, before Protestants reformed the church, including festive practices, Catholicism debated the appropriate balance of liturgical and extra-liturgical festivities in order to avoid “disorder” and “impiety” as a result of festive occasions. The church and later the state understood they might reorder festive occasions and practices to influence their communities.

For example, as England entered the Protestant Reformation, the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), within the larger project of unifying a people under one religion, maintained and organized festive occasions and practices throughout the year. R. Chris Hassel, Jr. describes the *Book of Common Prayer*:

> It begins, in fact, with elaborate calendars which prescribe biblical readings not only for each of the Sundays and festival days of the year, but for every single day. [...] As they are today, the two major focal points of the Renaissance church years are Christmas and Easter.

Christmas, for instance, was the “highest festival day” of the season of Advent, which the church observed for four Sundays leading up to Christmas day. Upon Christmas day, twelve days of further celebration followed, which led into the season of Epiphany (6 January). Epiphany—a “season of the discovery of Christ and his message for mankind”—would then occur over the course of the five proceeding Sundays. Finally, Candlemas—the festival of lights on 2

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7 Jensen, 27.
8 Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961), 219-220. “The three Tudor Books of Common Prayer were a coerced formulary of worship intended for “soul control” – that is, to force the parson and people in a direction predetermined by their sovereign and Council. [...] Absence from church on Sundays or holy days was punishable by a fine of 12 pence for each offence, the sum to be levied by the churchwardens for the use of the poor of the parish. The later Elizabethan Acts against Recusants and the Puritans contained even stiffer penalties, including imprisonment and in extreme cases, death.”
9 R. Chris Hassel, Jr., *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 8.
10 Hassel, 9.
February—was also associated with Christmas. Hassel writes, “In all, then, eleven Sundays of the church year and six other holy days are devoted to the general celebration of Christmas.”

The second most important holiday was Easter, which consisted of its own list of “festival services” and occurred during the season of Lent. If Advent and Lent were seasons of great liturgical and festive activity, the third season, Trinity, is one of rest and expectation. Hassel writes, “As a result, from ‘the First Sunday after Trinity’ through ‘the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity’ the church year quietly awaits another Advent, another Lent.”

Furthermore, there existed a consistent relationship between the Anglican liturgical year, as delineated in the Book of Common Prayer, and theater at court. Hassel builds on E.K. Chambers’ observation of the “persistent correlation between the dates of dramatic performances at Elizabeth’s court and certain liturgical festivals of the English church year.” Hassel describes the relationship between the liturgical year and theatrical productions at court as

A tradition that gradually emerged during the reign of Henry VIII and flourishes for thirty years during Elizabeth’s rule. Then it gradually diminishes during the Jacobean and Caroline period until its quiet extinction around 1640, a date near the closing of the theater in 1642. During the whole period 70 percent (397 of 561) of the recorded dramatic performances at court occur on the same ten liturgical festivals. Over 80 percent (450 of 561) occur sometime during Christmastide.

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11 Hassel, 9.
12 Hassel, 9.
13 Hassel, 9.
14 Hassel, 1.
15 Hassel, 6.
Hassel’s evidence of theater’s relationship with the liturgical calendar and also with the throne supports Jensen’s claim that even as late medieval England debated festivities, “religion and revelry” were nonetheless “inextricably connected.” 16 They were connected in that a “celebration of the Church” could include solemn practices—foot-washing at Maundy Thursday and candlelight vigils—as well as “secular pastimes”—church ales and plays by traveling professional players—but they could work together to offer a “devotional charge” or experience. 17 In other words, from the late medieval period through the early modern period, the church and state could influence and enforce religious devotion and shape communities through festive occasions, which often were associated with theatrical performance, which has long been of interest to literary scholars.

Literary scholars have long studied festivity in relationship with early modern drama. In the mid-twentieth century, C.L. Barber read Shakespearean comedy through a lens of Roman Catholic and conformist festivity, arguing that to “relate [Shakespearean comedy] to holiday has proved to be the most effective way to describe its character.” 18 He calls “the festival occasion” a type of “paradigm,” which illuminates comedies like Love’s Labour’s Lost, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Twelfth Night. 19 Barber claims that his agenda is not to “say how far analogies between social rituals and dramatic forms” extend but to argue that “the underlying movement of attitude and awareness is not adequately expressed by any one thing in the day or the play, but is the day, is the play.” 20 In other words, the way Shakespeare structures his plays

16 Jensen, 26.
17 Jensen, 28-29.
19 Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom, 5.
20 Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy, 6.
references and constitutes festive experience simultaneously. Barber argues that this changes the way we should read Shakespeare’s plays:

But the fundamental method is to shape the loose narrative so that ‘events’ put its persons in the position of festive celebrants: if they do not seek holiday it happens to them. 21

As the lines between festivity and particular comedies blur, characters participate in what seems more like a religious ceremony than strictly comic drama. We hear resonances of Northrop Frye within Barber’s text: “holiday [. . . ] happens” to the characters and integrates them into the festive community. 22 Barber describes characters who passively encounter the festive as experiencing “clarification” as they achieve a “heightened awareness of the relation between man and ‘nature.’” 23 Barber’s conception is problematic on at least two levels: first, he fails to properly historicize the way various powers—church, state, and theater—actively shaped community through the power of festivity; second, he does not explore how characters exercise the power of festivity against one another. Barber says Shakespeare’s characters encounter “the festive,” but I show how characters within Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow exercise power of festive occasions to punish and coerce other characters. My argument is not that early modern theater was more coercive than previous forms of festive practice; rather, these plays demonstrate in clearer terms how festive occasions could reinforce conformity to religious and gendered roles and punish those who would seek to subvert it through coercive means.

21 Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy, 6.
22 Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000). He writes, “The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it” (27). Within Frye’s comic form, a resistant character undergoes a transformation or becomes compliant in order to achieve incorporation, or join together with others, within a given social order. According to Frye, festivity is one vehicle for integration and incorporation within comedy.
23 Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy, 8.
Furthermore, by not reifying “the festive,” and by attending to festive practices in a variety of contexts, I suggest we more clearly see the stakes of Erika Lin’s argument that early modern theater was a “distinct cultural form” of festivity. Early modern theater presented models of how others might exercise power of festive occasions to shape community through coercion.

In response to Barber’s nonetheless influential work, scholars have complicated festivity as a concept and as a historical practice by approaching it from historical, political, and religious angles over the last three decades. Leah Marcus’ *The Politics of Mirth* remains one of the definitive historicist texts on early modern festivity, in which she sets out to “establish connections between royal theory and specific literary practice.”  

The Stuart kings undertook an interesting experiment: they actively promoted the old holiday pastimes as essential “penny glasses” for the preservation of their authority and that of the Anglican Church they headed, the welfare of which they considered intimately bound to their own.  

According to Marcus, festive occasions and literature might present subversive behavior only to the extent that eventually they will reinforce political and religious authority. Soon after Marcus’ work, early modern studies experienced what some scholars call a “turn to religion,” a shift in the field to engage more directly with questions of how religion relates, in this case, to early modern festivity. The “turn to religion” maintains the claim that morality, politics, and religion

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25 Marcus, 9.
are difficult to separate in seventeenth-century England, while it also supports the study of early modern culture from a religious angle.

Phebe Jensen is perhaps the most recent voice within the scholarship of festivity and Catholicism in early modern England. She argues that to understand the “festive world” of early modern comedy we must “restore a sense of the devotional issues surrounding festivity.” 27 When we fail to historicize Catholic views of festivity in Protestant England, says Jensen, we miss relevant details for literary interpretation, such as how Catholic perspectives on festivity were internally diverse. Jensen writes:

Festive disruptions of church services, bear-baitings, and church ales were hardly in keeping with the spirit of the Tridentine church. And the deep nostalgia for a late medieval festive world expressed by some Catholics obscured the fact that the Roman church had for centuries worried over the impiety and disorder caused by the secular celebration attached to the liturgical calendar, just as the Church of England did. 28

Jensen describes festivity as a practice, scrutinized by the church from the late medieval period into the early modern period; however, “deep nostalgia” can mask that Catholicism, historically generalized as pro-festive, was among festivity’s most severe critics. Jensen complements rather than challenges Marcus’ work, in that Jensen demonstrates how those in authority could and did police festive practice to manage the behaviors and beliefs of others. I seek to add, not challenge, this work by advancing the argument that “deep nostalgia” also masks violence of festivity, and that *Twelfth Night* and *The Puritan Widow* remove this mask by presenting characters within

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28 Jensen, 25.
these comedies, who use the power of festive occasions for coercive ends, which often result in
the marriage of an unwed woman. Furthermore, my thesis enters into a wider conversation about
female experience in early modern England by demonstrating how a [festive] reading of early
modern plays suggests new questions about the intersection of theater as festive practice and
female experience in the seventeenth century.

Early modern England sustained and managed anxieties about women. Laura Gowing’s
recent intervention into the historiography of seventeenth-century English women demonstrates
some of these anxieties as she explores and troubles the “practices of touch between women.”
Gowing argues relationships between women, which have been thought of as a social refuge,
could also reinforce patriarchal hegemony, even before literal male influence in female spaces—
we might think of “men-midwives” during childbirth. Gowing provides compelling evidence
as to why unwed women and especially young widows would threaten patriarchal power in early
modern England:

By the mid seventeenth century, as many as a fifth of women were not married by
age forty-five, and the majority of them seem to have remained lifelong spinsters.
Old poor women were always among the principal claimants of poor relief. [ . . . ]
In Pelling’s words, the functions allocated to the older woman “were double-
edged, showing her to be as expendable—or at least replaceable—as she was
useful.”

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30 “The transition from female amateurs to male professionals is often described in terms of the erosion of female
collectivity, a loss of the levelling bonds between women that childbirth rituals brought. [ . . . ] This story, too, can
become simplistic,” Gowing, 51.
31 Gowing, 76.
Poor women could live without marriage—both through charity and their own economic “usefulness” —but widows further threatened patriarchy because at the death of their husbands, widows’ “bodies were again their own” after gaining sexual knowledge and experience. \(^{32}\) The young widow, in Gowing’s words, served as a reasonable “repository of fears about sexually experienced, unpartnered women.” \(^{33}\) As I compare memoirs of older festive practices and occasions with \textit{Twelfth Night} and \textit{The Puritan Widow}, I will argue that the plays more clearly demonstrate what Gowing calls the “flexibility and heterogeneity [of patriarchy] that kept early modern patriarchy powerful” \(^{34}\) within these plays.

I begin my comparison by introducing Roger Martyn (c. 1527-1615), who reflected nostalgically on Catholic festive practices during the reign of Queen Mary in his memoir, which he printed in the late sixteenth century. In \textit{The State of Melford church…as I did know it}, Martyn recalled how liturgical festivities permeated church life and spilled over into the local community. “Upon Palm Sunday the blessed sacrament was carried in procession about the churchyard under a fair canopy borne by four yeomen,” Martyn wrote in his memoir. \(^{35}\) The procession and “fair canopy” held historical and theological meaning for Martyn. Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem for Passover immediately before his crucifixion. In the account within the Gospel of Matthew, the event is one of celebration and foreboding:

\begin{quote}
They [the disciples] brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others
\end{quote}

\(^{32}\) Gowing, 83.

\(^{33}\) Gowing, 82.

\(^{34}\) Gowing, \textit{Common Bodies}, 6.

cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

The community of Long Melford, as remembered by Martyn, fused a performance of St. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem with the sacrament of Holy Communion, which itself is an act of remembering Christ’s crucifixion. The Catholic “feasts” on Christ’s body and blood through Holy Communion in order to be reconciled with God the Father. Like the sacrament of Holy Communion, Martyn describes how festivity was in part a practice of communal incorporation while also one of religious expression. Martyn and his fellow villagers process with the sacrament, which, according to Catholic doctrine, is Christ’s body and blood in the present. The villagers symbolically walk with Jesus into Jerusalem. Or, as the early church will later identify themselves, they walk beside him as a bride, for the church is the “bride of Christ,” according to the Gospels.

Martyn and his fellow parishioners performed non-verbal acts of festivity along with the language of the sacrament to shape a religious community, which symbolically references a spiritual marriage between Christ and his bride, the church.

Within Martyn’s memories other practices shaped the community of Long Melford. Upon reflecting on less “sacred” moments of festivity, he writes:

36 Matthew 21:7-11 Authorized King James Version.
37 Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 3:34
Upon Wednesday being fasting day they had a drinking at Melford Hall. All the choir dined there, three times in the year at least: viz. St Stephen’s day, mid-Lent Sunday, and I think upon Easter Monday.  

In Martyn’s memoir, holidays and the call to fast and sing established a yearly routine for the members of the choir. Less privileged members of society also joined the celebrants of festive occasions:

On St James’s eve there was a bonfire, and a tub of ale and bread then given to the poor, and before my door there was made three other bonfires, viz. on Midsummer eve, on the eve of St Peter and St Paul, when they had the like drinkings [. . . ] And in all these bonfires, some of the friends and more civil poor neighbours were called in, and sat at the board with my grandfather, who had at the lighting of the bonfires wax tapers with balls of wax, yellow and green, set up all the breadth of the hall, lighted them and burning there before the image of St John the Baptist. 

Martyn’s grandfather chose specific “civil poor neighbors” to enter the church hall and dine with the affluent members of community. Within Catholic festivity, therefore, not everyone has a seat at the table.

Martyn’s memoir, in the way it recounts a symbolic marriage between Christ and his church, displays unification, as it also delineates ways festive occasions exclude participants from the community. By observing a mechanism for exclusion within Martyn’s memoir, we

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39 Cressy and Ferrell, 14, emphasis mine.
avoid reading Martyn’s festive memory as Mikhail Bakhtin’s *carnival*, where festivity establishes its own space “outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization.” 40 Marcus, who also critiques Bakhtin’s theory, suggests that festivity’s “lawless topsy-turvydom can both undermine and reinforce—it can constitute a process of adjustment within a perpetuation of order.” 41 In other words, the lawlessness of festivity eventually reinforces the law. Similarly, Martyn’s grandfather brings the poor to the feasting table, but in choosing only the “civil” ones, he ensures order within the parish. Furthermore, Martyn’s festive memoir, without explicitly mentioning the fact, reinforces an association with marriage—we remember the parish procession with the communion—with festive occasion. As we transition to works of comedy like *Twelfth Night* and *The Puritan Widow*, where we see similar patterns of integration and exclusion, a way to parse continuities and differences between drama and other religious writings becomes necessary.

Erika Lin provides a framework to understand early modern performance as related to but also distinct from older forms of festive practice. Lin writes

> The presentational dynamics of the late sixteenth-century stage repeatedly drew on, even as they exceeded, the calendar of seasonal observances. In doing so, early modern theatre echoed in its temporal structure the trope of festive plenty, not only by depicting but also by enacting holiday practices outside of the ritual confines usually ascribed to them. 42

41 Marcus, 7.
Early modern commercial theater established itself as a distinct entity by commoditizing and appropriating religious and civic festivities and pastimes. When Lin describes early modern theater’s social function, she says that it was “less about art and representation and more about full integration into social and communal life.” 43 By “full integration,” Lin means the audience and the performers join together to form an “affective community” through the festive occasion of early modern performance. 44 In “Popular Festivity and the Early Modern Stage: The Case of George a Greene,” for instance, she examines communal feasting, festive combat, and livery as examples of festive pastimes, which structure the play George a Greene (1593). Lin demonstrates there is “continuity” between Protestant and Catholic representations of festivity as well as elements of the “sacred and the secular” within the play. She writes, “In having George offer wafer cakes to his guests rather than bread, the play simultaneously calls to mind both sacred and secular feasts.” 45 We might remember Martyn’s memoir, in which he also combines the memory of the Palm Sunday procession of the Eucharist with the evenings of eating and drinking with the choir and other members of the community. How, though, is this different from Barber’s “the day is the play, and the play is the day” statement fifty-some years ago? Lin’s work presents a way to think about festivity broadly as a moldable form of social power, which people within early modern theater were able to exercise to shape community. I add to her work by analyzing the type of person that theater sought to “fully integrate” into society and identifying the effect on “communal life” once theater accomplished its integrative goal. I suggest that when

43 Lin, 229.
44 Lin, “Involving the audience in this way [referring to the various types of participation in theatrical representations of feasting, festive combat, and livery] integrated them into a unified whole, an affective community growing out of festive performance in the absence of the actual social ties found at parish events” (284).
we compare memoirs of older festive practices with *Twelfth Night* and *The Puritan Widow*, two plays chosen as a small sample of new theatrical festive practice, we see that, as Lin argues, early modern theater is preoccupied with the “integration” of others “[into] communal life.” More significantly, *Twelfth Night* and *The Puritan Widow* demonstrate how representations of festive occasions force integration through coercive means.

In the next section on *Twelfth Night*, I focus on the characters of Olivia, Malvolio, and Feste to argue that Feste coerces Olivia into marriage through the power of the festive occasion, while he tricks Malvolio into participation within the community without fully integrating him. I use work by conformists and puritan non-conformists to demonstrate how puritans provided a way of thinking about festivity, which subverted more dominant modes of festive practice and thought. Furthermore, I frame my discussion of *Twelfth Night* with the memoir *Le Prince d’Amour, or The Prince of Love* by Sir Benjamin Rudyerd. Rudyerd, in his festive memoir, presents similar ways which festive occasions shape community as we see in Martyn’s memoir, but Rudyerd also directly references marrying a “rich widow” as a possible conclusion of a season of festivity. Together, *Twelfth Night* and *The Prince of Love* emphasize a relationship between festive occasions and the integration of a non-conformist into a community, but my comparison also shows that theater as an emerging form of festivity more clearly presented how festive integration might occur through coercive means. I extend my discussion in the second section of the thesis, where I argue that Thomas Middleton’s play *The Puritan Widow* (1607) is an event of early modern festivity, preoccupied with social integration of an unmarried widow. A festive reading of *The Puritan Widow* demonstrates how early modern theater perpetuated festive
occasions, which unified community through the coercion of unwed women into marriage and the punishment and eventual exclusion of puritans.
SECTION 1: THE COERCIVENESS OF FESTIVITY IN TWELFTH NIGHT

Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night presents a story of two shipwrecked orphans—Viola and Sebastian—who enter and eventually integrate into the noble households of Orsino and Olivia of Illyria. The play in its earliest performances existed within a wider culture of Anglican festive practices of the Christmas season. R. Chris Hassel lists two types of correlations between early modern performances and holidays and festivals:

Once the liturgical tradition for a given day has been established, all of the plays and masques performed on that day are considered for their possible correlations to it. We might expect two general kinds of correlation to exist between these plays and their holy days. One can be called ‘genetic’ and other ‘affective.’

Genetic would describe each work which was clearly named for a festival or written for festival performance.”

Twelfth Night’s correlation with Twelfth Night, the eve of Epiphany, is “genetic” in that the title references the holiday and “invites comparison with some social aspects of Twelfth Night, especially its Saturnalian form and spirit.” Twelfth Night’s “genetic” relationship to the liturgical calendar prompts Hassel to interpret the play with a generalized understanding of Epiphany’s themes: the “motif of enlightenment” and the “humility of Christ and the humiliation of man.” He writes that

The thrust of much of their [the characters within the play] comic action in Twelfth Night is designed to disabuse them of their amusing but ultimately

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46 Hassel, 18.
47 Hassel, here, also references the work of C.L. Barber and John Hollander. See especially pages 77 – 78.
48 Hassel, 79.
antifestive attitudes, which are embodied in their extremist forms in Malvolio’s pride and Toby’s self-indulgence.49

The action of Twelfth Night, as Hassel argues, makes characters’ attitudes more “festive.”

While Hassel notes important continuities between festive practices associated with Epiphany and the “comic action” of the play, his reading overlooks another way early modern theater correlated with Christianity: both theater and Christianity questioned festive meanings and practices. As Phebe Jensen has argued

The spirit of that holiday is not really captured by the ambivalent mood of Twelfth Night, especially when the mirth becomes malicious enough that modern audiences often, along with Sir Toby, wish themselves “well rid of this knavery.”50

Hassel and Jensen illustrate two poles on a spectrum: the first understands festivity as mostly coherent and uniform, while the second complicates festivity by historicizing its Catholic past. The “festive world” within early modern plays, Jensen says, often flattened the disagreements within Catholicism’s understanding of festivity in order to create a [festive] world that did not exist beyond its stage.51 I suggest another reading of Twelfth Night and its relationship with festivity is possible, however, in which the play is neither “genetic” nor “ambivalent” but rather cautious of holiday occasions and festivity—including its means and its ends. In what follows, I argue that Feste coerces Olivia and Malvolio into festive participation in order to integrate the

49 Hassel, 81.
50 Jensen, 150. Quote from Twelfth Night, 4.2.69-70.
51 Jensen, 22.
former into the dominant society through marriage and punish the latter for his association with a subversive understanding of festivity.

In *Twelfth Night* festive occasions reinforce a dominant, patriarchal social order. At the beginning of the play, Olivia maintains a state of mourning in honor of her deceased brother, while her household already enjoys the mirth surrounding festive occasions. Even before we see or hear Olivia, Orsino marks her as an object of desire in part because of her resistance to merrymaking:

> O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame  
> To pay this debt of love but to a brother,  
> How will she love, when the rich golden shaft  
> Hath killed the flock of all affections else  
> That live in her (1.1.32-36)

For Orsino, Olivia’s mourning signifies potential for earthly love, which he hopes to later enjoy. But Sir Toby two scenes later expresses concern that her sobriety, in excess, will prevent her from experiencing pleasures: “What a plague means my niece to take the death of / her brother thus? I am sure care’s an enemy to life” (1.3.1-2). For Sir Toby, “care,” not “death,” is the primary “enemy to life.” Sir Toby suggests Olivia should forget concern, order, and mourning, especially in a season of festivity, and enjoy pleasure. For Sir Toby and his comrade Sir Andrew Aguecheek, festive pleasures consist mostly of drinking and carousing. As Sir Andrew says, “I am a fellow o’th’ stran / gest mind i’th’ world. I delight in masques and revels sometimes altogether” (1.3.101-102). Although Sir Toby and Sir Andrew fail to persuade Olivia to participate in the revelry, Olivia increasingly confronts arguments as to why she should cease
mourning and participate in festivity, which would culminate with her incorporation into the dominant society.

Olivia temporarily resists festive participation, in part, through her relationship and employment of Malvolio. In the second act of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia sends her steward, Malvolio, to quiet her cousin Sir Toby and his companion Sir Andrew. It is late in the night, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew continue to make merry. Malvolio appeals to Sir Toby’s and Sir Andrew’s sensibilities in order to quiet them. He asks, “Is there no respect of place, / persons, nor time in you?” (2.3.86). In one sense, the line establishes conflict between Malvolio and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew: the steward Malvolio will try to carry out Olivia’s orders to quiet the rabble-rousers, and the rabble-rousers will not respect Malvolio, who is socially inferior to them. In another sense, the line presents an ironic critique of Malvolio as “some kind of puritan” (2.3.140) in its allusion to a verse in Romans: “For there is no respecter of persons with God.”\(^{52}\) This was a verse some puritans cited as evidence for why it was necessary to further purge the liturgical calendar to achieve a more complete Protestant reformation. A puritan might reason that all Christians—or “the elect”—are saints, all time is holy, and all of the world is God’s creation. Malvolio betrays conventional puritan ideology and later behavior, which some have argued make him a hypocrite, a social climber, or both.\(^{53}\) These readings, which I will consider in this section, further highlight how *Twelfth Night* presents a cautious view of festivity. Malvolio is marked and punished as a non-conformist because of his association with a subversive conception of festivity, which *Twelfth Night* lampoons and punishes through the work of Feste,

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\(^{52}\) Romans 2:11.

Maria, and Sir Toby. Consideration of how “Malvolio’s ambivalent Puritanism” helps Olivia to resist festive participation shifts a strict focus on Malvolio’s personal religious identity to the ways in which Twelfth Night represents festive negotiations within a wider cultural context.

Twelfth Night negotiates meanings of festivity by associating Malvolio with puritan non-conformists, whose writings influenced conceptions and practices of festivity by imagining it in heavenly time and space. Puritan non-conformists Robert Cawdrey in Printed Alphabet (1604) and Samuel Ward in The Life of Faith in Death (1623), for example, reimagine festivity so that it better aligns with puritan values regarding time. Ward’s The Life of Faith in Death demonstrates that puritans were not anti-festive in the sense that they condemned festive practices entirely; rather, puritans relocated the rituals associated with Catholic and conformist festivities to heavenly time and space. Within a section entitled “And long white Robes were giuen vnto euery one,” Ward describes how John the Apostle sees souls of people who were of “poore and meane condition” in life but now in heaven are “adorned with white Robes.” For Ward, the white robes symbolize full purification. He portrays festivity as unblemished, stainless life:

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54 Jensen, 150.
Endowed now, and glorified with perfect righteousness, purity, clarity, dignity, and festivity: of all which white apparel hath ever been an Emblem and Symbole in Divine and Humane Heraldry [...] At feasts great persons were wont to change their guests ordinary clothes with a white Synthesis, a colour fit to express alacrity. Christians, the whole Easter weeke wore white apparell.58

Notice how festivity is the last in an extensive list of holy characteristics, but Ward describes the white robes almost entirely with reference to earthly holidays and feasting. Heaven would purify and magnify the routine or ritual of earthly festivals, according to Ward. And while Ward aligns with puritan precepts, he cites Catholic and even pagan practices associated with festivity within his writings.

Despite puritan writings’ preservation of older vestiges of festivity, their central arguments threatened to tear the social fabric woven by Catholic and conformist ideas and practices of festivity. As we see in Ward’s writings, puritans challenged understandings of time in addition to external practices of celebrations, like dancing and music. Unsurprisingly, conformists offered rejoinders to puritan non-conformists’ critiques of festivity with arguments around time and space in order to salvage particular social rituals at risk of erasure. John Howson (1556/7-1632), Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford and later Bishop of Durham, argues in 1602 that England should continue to observe festivals, especially those that relate to the Queen, by reaffirming a conformist understanding of time:

It is certain that al daies were first made and created by God; [...] Nevertheless though God be the auctor of them al, yet hee hath put a difference and distinction

betweene them, and is said more especially to haue made one then another: more especially the Sabboth and holy-day, then the ordinary day appointed for labour. The term that Howson uses throughout his sermon to show how God and then the Church of England differentiates time is “solemnize,” or “to dignify or honour by ceremonies; to celebrate or commemorate by special observances or with special formality.” Once Howson establishes there are holy or solemn occasions, he describes these particular moments as both “ceremonial” and “moral.” He illustrates the ceremonial and the moral by discussing the Sabbath:

It is ceremonial that this should once be done in every seaven daies. [. . .] It is moral that some time should be allowed to the service of God, that we might remember his benefits & magnifie his holy name.

Note how Howson understands solemn occasions: during a solemn occasion, morality and ceremony are enmeshed. After establishing the legitimacy of holy days, Howson quickly pivots to concede that festivals might be abused. Howson appeals to puritan listeners:

They who are superstitious in observing of holydaies are of two sorts; for either they obserue superstitious feasts or obserue the true feasts superstitiously.

In other words, the days are holy, but humans have the capacity to make them profane. Humans might piously observe pagan feasts and festivals, or they might observe solemn feasts superstitiously, both of which are wrong in Howson’s view. However, because mankind wrongly celebrates festivals and holidays, it does not then follow that all days are unfit for celebration.

Howson’s theological argument establishes the political stakes of festivity for understandings of human time, spaces, and bodies. Howson’s sermon posits that festivals are important forms of respect and adoration for Queen Elizabeth. He writes:

I thought it a part both of my duety to God, and loyalty to my soveraigne Mistres, to undergo the defence of the festivities of our Church, which haue their adversaries at home among vs, as of the celebration of the day of her most blessed inauguration into this kingdome.\textsuperscript{63}

The type of power Howson petitions for—the power of the Church of England to set aside a holiday to celebrate the Queen—requires festivity in earthly time and space. Religious stakes aside, the political stakes are also high: the Queen must consolidate her power and authority, and festivity is one way to do that. Together, Ward and Howson illustrate how non-conformists and conformists debated festivity’s meanings and practices as a way to shape their communities.

But theologians and politicians were not the only ones who saw value in writing about festivity. Other early modern writers preserved memories of festivity in the late sixteenth century. For example, the case of Middle Temple and their Christmas season as recorded in Sir Benjamin Rudyerd’s \textit{Le Prince d’Amour, or The Prince of Love} illustrates various religious and social functions of festivity, even as communities adjusted its meaning to fit religious and political needs of the time. The Middle Temple in London, one of the Inns of Court (or a school for legal study) in early modern England, is where John Manningham watched a 1602 performance of \textit{Twelfth Night}. More broadly, it is a site in which festive power forms a community. Each Christmas season, Middle Temple celebrated forty days of festivity, including

\textsuperscript{63}Howson, “A sermon preached at St. Maries in Oxford,” A2.
feasts, pageants, and performances. However, Middle Temple reflected its social context in that the community celebrated Christmas festivity differently in 1597-98 than in previous years because of the English Reformation. Rudyerd, in *Le Prince d’Amour*, recounts the 1597-98 revels at Middle Temple, when Richard Martin (1570-1616) assumed the role of The Prince of Love, a master of ceremony for the forty days of Christmas. The role of the Prince of Love replaced the banned, Catholic role of Lord of Misrule and other forms of festivity like “dicing” and “card playing” in 1584. Nonetheless, Martin and his friends maintained many traditional festive practices even as they reformed them:

Upon Monday at night there happened a comedy, and dancing, which was no wonder, and a banquet which was not looked for. There was this night a discovery of pickpurses, more fit to be put into the stocks than a chronicle, for the strangesness of their inventions.

As Middle Temple banned one manifestation of festivity—Lord of Misrule—another one took its place: Prince of Love.

Christmas festivities at Middle Temple also served a social function: festivity prepared students for their future careers as lawyers. Bruce Smith notes that Middle Temple “sometimes hired professional actors for holiday celebrations, just as the court of the realm did.” Middle Temple became a space where students of law practice festive occasions, which they also experienced in the future as professionals. Smith writes:

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As sportive as that may seem, Martin and his comrades were training in earnest for the very roles in diplomacy and public speaking that would occupy them as future attorneys and members of Parliament.\textsuperscript{67}

Rudyard’s text demonstrates preparation for future [earthly] life was integral to the forty days. On Candlemas, the evening on which \textit{Twelfth Night} would be performed a few years later, for example, Rudyard writes:

> Upon Candlemas night the Prince, wearied with the weight of government, made a voluntary resignation into the hands of the optimates, intending a private life, where he required the advice of his counsell. One advised him to follow the sea, another to land travel, a third to marry a rich widow, and a forth to study the common law.\textsuperscript{68}

As the forty days come to an end, the Prince and the Middle Temple audience reflect on the approaching transition from a time of festivity to common time. Within the list of possible futures for the Prince of Love, “to marry a rich widow” emerges as an economic option.\textsuperscript{69}

Rudyrerd’s memoir subtly presents festive practices—which shift within the memoir—as reinforcing authority, but as we return to \textit{Twelfth Night}, characters more overtly exercise festive power to assert authority. Drawing from Howson, Ward, and Rudyerd, however, I suggest \textit{Twelfth Night} cautions against even as it perpetuates coercive festive power.

In Act 1, scene 5, for example, Feste seeks to shift Olivia’s mood from sober to festive by defending his own behavior with festive logic and next by appealing to Olivia’s understandings

\textsuperscript{67} Smith ed., \textit{Twelfth Night: Texts and Contexts}, 118.
\textsuperscript{68} Rudyerd, \textit{Le Prince d’Amour, or The Prince of Love}, 125.
\textsuperscript{69} Rudyerd, \textit{Le Prince d’Amour, or The Prince of Love}, 125.
of body, time, and space. In other words, Feste establishes his own credibility as a festive character, which he then uses to coerce Olivia into festive participation. When Feste first appears in the play, Maria, Olivia’s housekeeper, rebukes Feste’s negligence saying, “My lady will hang thee for thy absence” (1.5.3). When Olivia and Malvolio join the discussion a few lines later, Feste appeals to “wit,” a saying “calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness,”70 for help. He prays, “Wit, an’t be thy will, put me into good fooling” (1.5.28). Feste’s aim is to delight others by associating the right ideas in the right way, and wit energizes his efforts. Feste does not apologize to Maria, nor does he make supplications to a god, who will make him more serious or honest, traits Malvolio values for much of the play. In only a few lines, Shakespeare establishes Feste as one who actively operates power through festive occasions, best illustrated by the conversation Feste next has with Olivia and Malvolio. Olivia dismisses the Clown—“Take the fool away” (1.5.34)—but Feste defies her and says she should leave. In lines 35-36, Olivia dismisses Feste a second time, claiming he is not funny and has become dishonest—a reference to his unexcused absence. “Go to, you’re a dry fool. I’ll no more of you. Besides, / you grow dishonest” (1.5.35-36). But Feste insists she wrongly dismisses him and argues that she is the fool:

Two faults, Madonna, that drink and good counsel
will amend. For give the dry fool drink, then is the fool not
dry. Bid the dishonest man mend himself; if he mend, he is
no longer dishonest. (1.5.27-30)

Feste’s pun—figuratively “dry” might mean to be dull, and literally it might mean to be thirsty—advances a “topsy-turvy” sense of festivity: drink cures mental and physical dullness and thirst, but it also can make one drunk. Feste builds on the laughter elicited by humor to deflect the more serious accusation that he has been dishonest. Rather than admit he is wrong, Feste incorporates all people into foolery:

Anything that’s mended is but patched. Virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue. (1.5.41-43)

Feste argues people are always “patched” with both virtue and sin, and their only recourse is to have the opportunity to “mend,” to improve. All people have the trace of both wisdom and foolishness; therefore, Olivia should provide Feste with a second chance as well as identify herself as part of his festive community.

Furthermore, as Feste demonstrates how Olivia is a fool, he more forcefully coerces her into participation within the festive community. Olivia, according to Feste’s logic, is a fool because she continues to mourn for her brother, who she believes is now in heaven. Feste reasons

The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother’s soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. (1.5.63-64)

Feste’s conclusion rests on the premise that Olivia should and will ultimately concede and seek love on earth. He says, “As there is no true cuckold but calamity, / so beauty’s a flower” (1.5.62-63). Because all people flee calamity or disaster, Feste reasons, it is the only thing that might be truly considered a fool. A cuckold, someone who is the victim of their romantic partner’s infidelity, becomes a symbol for a bad form of foolery, as opposed to the “good fooling” Feste performs in this scene. The cuckold of disaster foreshadows death, and Feste uses metaphor to
advance his claim: all people flee death and the pain associated with it and, more implicitly, festivity is one path away from it. Similarly, reasons Feste, beauty is a flower and therefore temporary. Olivia should participate in the festive so she might enjoy the benefits of her beauty, which will last for a limited amount of time. Feste, empowered by wit, appeals to what Olivia knows to be true in earthly terms (i.e. beauty will fade) and what she believes about her brother in heavenly time (i.e. that he enjoys eternal bliss). Feste’s rhetoric drives Olivia into festive participation, which would sustain his employment within Olivia’s home and eventually reintegrate Olivia into the dominant community through marriage.

But as Feste attempts to make Olivia a festive participant, Feste must also address Malvolio, who in this scene first becomes associated with puritan non-conformist critiques of festivity. But how seriously should we consider Malvolio’s religious identity? Scholars have argued that Act 3, scene 4—especially lines like “quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control”—indicates that Malvolio is more of a hypocrite than a devout non-conformist. Frances Dolan’s reading, for instance, highlights Malvolio’s “self-love and self-importance” above any “concrete religious beliefs.”\(^71\) Maria calls him “some kind of puritan” in Act 2, but we do not encounter other explicit references to Malvolio’s religious identity. Similarly, G.P. Jones reads Kristen Poole’s *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton* (2000) to evaluate whether our understanding of Malvolio as a puritan is a “modern construct” and a problematic one at that.\(^72\) He wonders if Elizabethan audiences would understand Malvolio as a puritan in the same way we do. Jones draws upon William P. Holden’s 1954 work *Anti-Puritan Satire: 1572-1642*

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Twelfth Night to argue that Shakespeare may not be as “avid or as systematic a puritan baiter as [Ben] Jonson,” but Malvolio does bear the “sectarian markers” that sustain a puritan reading of the steward. I expand Jones’ claim: Twelfth Night’s portrayal of Malvolio bears “sectarian markers” in the way he becomes associated with arguments by puritan non-conformists.

Feste employs wit to surprise and delight Olivia in order to integrate her into the festive community, but Malvolio challenges Feste’s appeal to earthly time and pleasures. For example, when Olivia asks Malvolio if Feste “mends,” Malvolio rejects the festive nature of her question and insists “mend” means “to grow more foolish” rather than “to improve.” Malvolio says, “Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake / him. Infirmity that decays the wise doth ever make the better fool” (1.5.67-69). Malvolio wittily rejoins Feste’s argument for festive pleasure by saying in essence: once you die, then what? Malvolio and Feste’s argument is one of comic, witty banter, but also, as Phebe Jensen notes, one with religious resonance. While this association does not establish Malvolio’s sectarianism, it does associate Malvolio with non-conformist critiques of festivity in earthly time. Reading Malvolio as associated with puritan non-conformist views of festivity suggests why Feste and Maria target him: he threatens the community by challenging Feste’s livelihood and perhaps Olivia’s future marriage. This reading also further develops a sense of Twelfth Night’s cautionary stance toward festivity.

Maria tricks Malvolio into festive participation within the household, even as his language reveals his separation from the community. Malvolio seeks to woo Olivia after reading

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73 Jones, “Malvolio Flouted and Abused,” 22.
74 Jensen, in considering Malvolio’s ambiguous religious identity, argues that he only uses religious language in Act 1, scene 5 in the three-way discussion between Feste, Olivia, and Malvolio. “Malvolio uses a set of linguistic tags that invoke the godly insistence on the need for spiritual “mending” by the morally infirm, with an eye to the final reckoning” (167).
a forged letter written by Maria, which he believes bears the marks of Olivia’s “sweet Roman hand” (3.4.25) compelling him to woo her. Before he approaches Olivia, however, Malvolio imagines prohibiting Sir Toby’s revels and reinforces his distance from the festive community. While he may be a festive participant in this scene, he has not been “incorporated in the spirit of fun.”

I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control. [. . . ] Saying, “Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech. [. . . ] You must amend your drunkenness.” (3.4.59-65)

We remember his witty rejoinder to Olivia a few scenes earlier: Feste must cease speaking because he continues to mend, or grow foolish. Similarly, Sir Toby must “amend” his behavior; he must stop his drunkenness. Within Malvolio’s worldview the earthly festive occasion will not improve Sir Toby. He must amend, or stop, the behavior altogether. Malvolio’s association with a competing understanding of festivity along with his “self-love,” as Olivia describes him, increase his appeal as a target for Feste’s and later Maria’s trickery.

*Twelfth Night*, however, cautions readers away from completely embracing the ideology and practice of festivity it represents as dominant. The text cautions the reader in part by presenting many guises of festivity. For example, Feste sets Olivia into festive lovemaking, which culminates with her marriage, while Feste also works with Maria to force Malvolio to participate within festivities as a type of revenge or punishment. Feste, by orchestrating “sportful malice,” signals acknowledgement of the dangers of festivity. Jensen, for instance, reads the

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75 Barber, (xii).
character of Feste as embodying a “key issue” within Catholicism’s and Protestantism’s festive debate: “mirth” is at times too close to worship. But I also suggest festivity’s ambiguous nature exists in the etymology of the word itself. Alison Shell introduces the paradoxical term “ferial drama” in her “Introduction” to *Shakespeare and Religion* in an effort to describe Renaissance professional drama as related to and yet distinguished from Christianity.

*Fearie* is the Latin for ‘holiday’ and ‘festival’, but in church calendars, *feria* is used to indicate a day on which no saint or Gospel event is commemorated. Thus, in a liturgical context, the term ‘ferial’ has a paradoxical function, pertaining to holidays but not to festivals. The notion of being detached from church festivals, but still operating within an overarching ecclesiastical framework, is a useful one when considering drama in Shakespeare’s period.

Said in another way, professional drama was similar to the liturgical use of the word “feria” in the way it was a part of but also distinct from religious festivals, like Twelfth Night. Shell, a few lines later, slips between the word “ferial” and “festive” and “festivity” to continue describing those practices and ideas associated with but also distinct from religious practice. *Twelfth Night* presents the potential pitfalls of an ideology and practice, whose definition shifts throughout its history but especially in early modern England, and which characters might employ to shape community.

Erika Lin’s history of early modern performance continues the narrative of festivity’s “fungible” but ongoing presence in early modern England, as she demonstrates how commercial theater constituted itself and exercised social power by drawing upon traditional festive

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76 Jensen, 171.
practices. Lin’s case study of Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* serves as a prime example. *Holiday* was first produced in the autumn of 1598, and it honored Queen Elizabeth’s Ascension Day, November 17th, by conflating a political holiday for the Queen with a religious one, Saint Hugh’s Holiday:

The appropriation of Saint Hugh’s Day for the Queen’s celebration is often read as an effect of the Reformation, which transformed many Catholic holidays into Protestant state-sponsored events. Competition for control over holidays thus had a decidedly political character. Debates over the ritual calendar were also economic, bound up as they were with disagreements over the number of working days in a year.78

In early modern theater, festivity was “fungible” and shaped society to political and economic ends. By contextualizing festivity historically within political, religious, and theatrical spheres, *Twelfth Night* on the one hand remains paradoxical in how it encompasses critique and reinforcement of characters using festive practices to shape communities. On the other hand, it also exposes festive practices as coercive, which dominate not only a subversive character like Malvolio but also amendable and desirable ones like Olivia.

The last scene of the play attempts – like a mask – to cover the full extent of festivity’s potential for coercion. It is Olivia, we remember, who says of Malvolio’s mistreatment: “Alas, poor fool, how they have baffled thee!” (5.1.357-358). C.L. Barber reads Olivia as experiencing a type of “clarification”; over the course of the play, she becomes less “proud,” which Viola calls her in Act 1, scene 5, and reintegrates into the community. In the last scene, after experiencing

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clarification, she now seeks to manage her house and reach an appropriate balance between mirth and mischief. For example, as Malvolio departs the stage with a threat, Olivia says, “He hath been notoriously abused” (5.1.365). Olivia’s line on the one hand cautions Twelfth Night’s audience to beware of festivity; on the other hand, there is an eerie quality to the way in which it is Olivia who identifies how Maria and Feste used festive practices to abuse Malvolio. She does not mention how, earlier in the play, she concedes to Feste’s argument that “everyone must mend” and integrates within the festive community. Olivia transitions from an object of festive coercion to its critic even as she maintains its overarching machinery within the community. In contrast, Malvolio, like the puritans considered in this section, asserts a new meaning for “mend”—and by extension “festivity”—and seeks to amend the festive at work within Twelfth Night, only to be ironically forced into temporary festive participation before he is disgraced and departs from the community. In the next section, I explore how The Puritan Widow, a play which collapses the identities of “puritan” and “woman-in-mourning” into one subject, further unmask coercive patterns of festivity.
SECTION 2: REMARRY THE WIDOW: “A DEVICE WELL MANAGED”

Scholars have considered how the satirical and farcical elements of Thomas Middleton’s *The Puritan Widow*\(^7\) (1607) illuminate aspects of its religious and political significance for seventeenth-century England. Donna Hamilton, for instance, says the play’s satire is “unrelenting and comprehensive” before claiming that the “main targets [of the satire] are Puritans and Catholics.”\(^8\) Middleton, as Hamilton notes, satirizes Puritans and Catholics by associating Catholic beliefs and practices with Puritan ones, but there remains an opportunity to reflect on how the satire associates two other identities: the “Puritan” and the “widow.” Widowhood, like Catholicism and Puritanism, poses a threat to society’s order within and outside the play’s fictional context. As a widow, Lady Plus does not conform to society’s expectations—she resists the pressure of her family and society to remarry—but she is also valuable to it. As a young, healthy, and wealthy widow, Lady Plus possesses monetary and bodily capital, which a

\(^7\) Before the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars widely credited Shakespeare, not Middleton, as the author of *The Puritan Widow*. According to Donna Hamilton, Edward Malone in 1780 offered the first persuasive argument that William Shakespeare did not author *The Puritan Widow*. Hamilton writes that after Malone’s argument “virtually all critics have concurred on the basis of style alone; the fact that Shakespeare did not write for Paul’s Boys provides confirming external evidence” (358). Although Malone establishes that Shakespeare is not the author, Hamilton says that it is not until Mark Eccles’ essay “Middleton’s Birth and Education” in 1931 that academia conceded that Thomas Middleton authored the 1607 play about a widow from Watling Street and her children as they avoid the villainy of George Pieboard – a “scholar and citizen” (1.2.1). Eccles entertains two theories about the play’s authorship. Either Middleton is the playwright, argues Eccles, or someone imitated Middleton’s style and created the play (437). Ultimately, Eccles decides that Middleton must be the author: The theory of imitation seems especially difficult since, as Bullen and Dunkel have pointed out, the clearest parallels are with a play which Middleton had not yet written, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman’s*. (438) Eccles supports his argument for Middleton’s authorship by examining the two plays and suggesting that an imitator is “less likely to repeat inconspicuous turns of phrase” (439). For example, Eccles notices Middleton’s use of “arch--" and compares “arch-pander, arch-tabacco-taker, and arch-tradesmen,” constructions found in *No Wit, No Help Life a Woman*, to *The Puritan Widow*’s “arch-conjurer” and “arch-gull” (439). Eccles cites four additional phrases, five contractions, and lastly the verb “trash” within *The Puritan Widow*, which are linguistic constructions unique to Middleton (439). Donna Hamilton, Ed., “Introduction,” *The Puritan Widow in Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008)

predominantly patriarchal society desires. In this section, I argue Pieboard and later the 
Nobleman exercise the power of the festive occasion to reincorporate the widow—her wealth, 
her body, her dissident religion—into the dominant society. When we read *The Puritan Widow* 
as a satire structured with and by festivity, we might better identify how festive power coerces 
Lady Plus into a subject of conformity while preserving her subversive title of *Puritan Widow*.

Pieboard and the Nobleman exhibit an anxiety common in early modern England: young, 
and especially affluent, widows possessed power to regulate the population, exercise industry, 
and share sexual knowledge. As Laura Gowing notes, “By the mid seventeenth century, as many 
as a fifth of women were not married by age forty-five, and the majority of them seem to have 
remained lifelong spinsters.” Society often provided for these women, but they were also able 
to find employment for themselves, leading one historian to call the function of unmarried 
women as “double-edged” in that they were expendable but also useful. Young, rich, widows 
further complicate this picture. Poor women could live without marriage—both through charity 
and their own economic “usefulness” —but widows threatened patriarchal because at the death 
of their husbands, widows’ “bodies were again their own” after gaining sexual knowledge and 
experience. The young widow, in Gowing’s words, served as a reasonable “repository of fears 
about sexually experienced, unpartnered women.” It is within this setting, where a fifth of the 
female population did not marry and where pathways for livelihood for wealthy and unwealthy 
women existed, that *The Puritan Widow* first appears on stage.

82 Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern 
83 Gowing, 83.
84 Gowing, 82.
The Puritan Widow is in one sense about a woman resisting reincorporation into the marriage state. The play opens with Lady Plus mourning her husband and refusing to remarry. She cries, “O, I shall never forget him, never forget him. He / was a man so well given to a woman—O” (1.1.9-10). Her brother-in-law, Sir Godfrey, reasons with her, saying, “Methinks you are well read sister, and know that death / is as common as Homo a common name to all men” (1.1.13-14). Unsurprisingly, Sir Godfrey’s observation that death is a universal human experience fails to comfort his sister-in-law. But his primary consolation follows a few lines later: “My brother has left you wealthy. You’re rich. [. . . ] I say you’re rich. You are also fair” (1.1.59-61). Sir Godfrey couples these observations with insistence that Lady Plus should remarry: “For what / should we do with all our knights, I pray, but to / marry rich widows, wealthy citizens’ widows, lusty fair- / browed ladies” (1.1.66-67). Lady Plus rejects Sir Godfrey, insisting, “Marry again? No, let me be buried quick then” (1.1.80). Middleton establishes the primary problem of the play in these first few lines: the widow must remarry. Scenes later, Lady Plus meets the “citizen scholar” George Pieboard, who seeks to hoodwink her into marriage in order to gain her wealth. While Pieboard eventually fails, and Lady Plus and her daughters avoid troublesome marriages, all three single women conclude the play as married women. The unnamed Nobleman, who exposes Pieboard’s plot just as Lady Plus and her family walk to the church, insists, “And now, widow, being so near the church, ‘twere great pity, nay, uncharity to send you home / again without a husband” (5.4.76-78). The Nobleman replaces Pieboard and his fellow tricksters with three appropriate suitors, and the play concludes farcically with the promise of three marriages.
But *The Puritan Widow* is also about female souls, as well as bodies. Gowing, once more, helps us think about early modern widowhood, which in the following case, serves as a site where a woman might reflect on herself as a body and a soul. Gowing includes a journal entry from Katherine Austen, who was a widow living in London in the 1660s:

> As for my body it can be enjoyed but by one. And I hope its the worst part of me [. . .] But that which my desire is should far excel my body is my soul, and the virtues and quality of that. And this I think may be useful to more then me, and not confined to a single person. And if anything in me is to [be] loved I hope tis my mind.  

Gowing notes that this entry in Austen’s diary occurs after she rejects the advances of a suitor. Austen reasons that while only “one” can enjoy her body, many people might love her mind. For Gowing, Austen’s reflection demonstrates the power of male presence: Austen does not think of herself as enjoying her own body, but remembers her husband enjoying it.  

Similarly, Lady Plus remains loyal to her husband even after he is dead, as he was “unmatchable, unmatchable” (1.1.86). In fact, Lady Plus responds so vehemently at the idea of remarriage that she preemptively curses herself:

> O, may I be the by-word of the world,  
> The common talk at table in the mouth  
> Of every groom and waiter, if e’er more  
> I entertain the carnal suit of a man. (1.1.98-101)

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85 102, Gowing.  
86 102, Gowing
Here “common” does not refer to class, but rather sexual availability of the female body in seventeenth-century England. Notably, these are the first lines of the play that Lady Plus speaks in verse, and the “O” at the beginning of the speech suggests she might pray these lines. Lady Plus, like Austen, might seek to “improve” her soul by abstaining from fleshly desires. On the other hand, Lady Plus might also demonstrate an early modern understanding of the female body—even after the death of a husband, his presence and superiority remains present. As Lady Plus says, “O my sweet / husband, I shall never have the like” (1.1.91-92). Both readings suggest that Lady Plus’ resistance to marriage stems from the logic that bodily pleasure—even in a new marriage—exposes her to shame, and that she is better remembering her husband’s goodness. Gowing demonstrates that Lady Plus’ thinking would have been imaginable for early modern audiences, heightening the drama when she ultimately remarries at the end of the play. My reading of *The Puritan Widow* as a festive comedy examines how Pieboard and the Nobleman use festive power to coerce Lady Plus into marriage, as well as considers how understanding festivity as coercive power enables us to further investigate how drama worked to construct understandings of the early modern female body.

While scholars label the play as a “scurrilous city comedy” and a satire, they have yet to investigate how *The Puritan Widow* is also a festive comedy and why such a reading matters for early modern literary scholarship. George Pieboard, a “scholar and a graduate,” enters the stage in Act 1, scene 2 and bemoans his life as an academic to his friend Peter Skirmish:

87 Gowing, *Common Bodies* advances the historiography of female bodies by exploring new archives and demonstrating how social construction of gender made certain behaviors possible. Its title is polysomic – meant to signify the wider corpus of “the poor, the servants and labourers of rural and urban society,” which is crucial for Gowing as she moves beyond the “household,” but “common” also refers to the sexual availability of the female body in early modern England (15).

I’ll not be afraid
to say, ‘tis a great breeder but a barren nourisher, a
great getter of children, which must either be thieves
or rich men, knaves or beggars. (1.2.64-66)

Once he establishes his poverty, Pieboard suggests that he and Skirmish should turn to more nefarious methods for making a living:

For since the law lives by quarrels, the courtier by smooth Godmornings, and every profession makes itself greater by imperfections, why not we then by shifts, wiles, and forgeries? [. . .] And for our thriving means, thus, I myself will put on the deceit of a fortune-teller, a fortune-teller. (1.2.76-78; 84-85)

Pieboard justifies deception through an imperfect analogy with the law, courtiers, and “every profession”: they all benefit from “imperfections.” Next, Pieboard makes “imperfections” and “shift, wiles, and forgeries” synonymous, ignoring legal or religious arguments to the contrary.

On the one hand, Middleton satirizes scholars, who might exploit knowledge and understanding for personal gain. As the debt collector Puttock says later in the play, “Troth, I have wondered how slaves could see into our breasts so much when our / doublets are buttoned with pewter” (3.3.13-15). Pieboard’s actions justify Puttock’s suspicion, but Puttock’s suspicion also reveals fear of his own exposure as a hypocrite. Puttock’s friend Ravenshaw says, “they will / publish our imperfections, knaveries, and conveyances / upon scaffolds and stages” (3.2.11-12). While The Puritan Widow comically critiques scholars, it also suggests Pieboard is a festive, rather than dangerous, presence within the play. Satire destabilizes Pieboard’s identity as a criminal; like Feste, Pieboard seeks to make a living within his means, which is knowledge and language.
Pieboard draws on this resource, like Feste, throughout the play. For instance, in the third act, Pieboard, cornered by debt collectors Ravenshaw and Puttock, says “‘Extremity is touchstone unto wit’, ay, ay” (3.4.97) as he barely escapes from them. Pieboard lacks morality, but The Puritan Widow, as Donna Hamilton says, is “comprehensive” in the way it reveals the hypocrisy of all characters. But if we read Pieboard as a character who, like Feste, manipulates the power of festivity, then a clearer link between Pieboard and the Nobleman emerges. Both Pieboard and the Nobleman employ festive occasions to transform Lady Plus from a widow to a wife of a man, who is “welcome at court” (5.4.91-92).

Pieboard coerces Lady Plus into the festive plot, but the Nobleman coerces her into marriage. First, Pieboard explains to Skirmish that the “Lady Widow, who of late / I saw weeping in her garden for the death of her / husband” (1.3.100-102) will be the target of his scheme, which involves him entering her house as a fortune-teller and pretending to make a number of prophesies to gain her trust. Although Pieboard’s scheme is elaborate and farcical, it remains festive in that it increasingly incorporates more of the community within the play, including Sir Godfrey’s puritan household, while remaining fixed on its target of coercing Lady Plus into marriage.

For instance, the plan to “nim” Sir Godfrey’s golden chain illustrates the ambiguity of Pieboard’s immorality, his festive nature, and the way in which his plan creates a community. As Pieboard and Skirmish decide to plot against Lady Plus, they discover that Skirmish’s “sworn brother, Captain Idle” is in prison for petty crime and cannot pay the fine to make bail (1.2.119-120). Pieboard and Skirmish postpone their earlier plan and proceed to the prison to visit Idle, only to find that Idle’s cousin and servant to Sir Godfrey, Nicholas St. Antlings, is also at the
prison. Idle does not welcome Nicholas, however, saying, “This is double torture now. This fool by th’ book / Does vex me more than my imprisonment” (1.4.51-52). Nicholas, like his master, identifies as a puritan, and the scene proceeds with Pieboard persuading Nicholas to help steal Sir Godfrey’s golden chain by replacing the word “steal” with the synonym “nim.” Nicholas refuses to steal the golden chain because “That’s the word the literal, thou / shalt not steal. And would you wish me to steal then?” (1.4.143-144). Pieboard reasons:

    PIEBOARD: No, faith, that were too much, to speak truth.
    Why, wilt thou nim it from him?

    NICHOLAS: That I will. (1.4.145-147)

Middleton satirizes puritans as hypocrites and simultaneously, as Hamilton shows, associates Puritans with Catholics through Sir Godfrey’s gold chain, which ultimately strengthens Pieboard’s plan. Hamilton writes:

    Organizing these characters’ overriding materialism around this nimming event,
    Middleton plays ironically on the equivocating style for which the Jesuit ‘plotters’ had become so well known.89

Here Hamilton references the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, the Jesuits’ failed attempt to assassinate James I. This event then prompted the 1605 session of Parliament to pass four statutes, which included

    An act to declare 5 November an annual day of thanksgiving, an act to punish those involved in the Plot, and two acts setting forth measures for “discovering and repressing” and “avoiding the dangers that may grow by” popish recusants.90

In these four statutes, a “day of thanksgiving” for James’ life joins with acts of punishment and repression of subversive religion subjects, Catholics and extreme Protestants. A dialogic relationship emerges between overt violence and repression and festivity: they all reinforce James’ authority. Similarly, Pieboard masks and then changes his plan to literally steal Sir Godfrey’s chain so as to accomplish his overarching goal of seducing Lady Plus. Pieboard says, “Nay, I’ll come nearer to you, / gentleman, because we’ll have only but a help and a / mirth on’t” (1.4.160-161). Instead of keeping it “outright,” Pieboard’s new plan requires that the chain go “missing”:

When thou hast the chain, do but convey it out at backdoor into the garden, and there hang it close in the rosemary bank but for a small season. And by that harmless device, I know how to wind Captain Idle out of prison, the knight thy master shall get his pardon and release him, and he satisfy thy master with his own chain and wondrous thanks on both hands. (1.4.166-175)

The analogy between the coerciveness of the four statues and Pieboard’s plan to put “mirth on’t” appear in stark terms within this passage: both situations provide a festive occasion – a celebration for the king and a celebration of a found necklace – which use “mirth” to hide violence and oppression. Nicholas and Sir Godfrey, as participants of Pieboard’s scheme, serve as part of the machine that moves Lady Plus closer from widowhood to marriage. In other words, as Pieboard’s scheme becomes more festive it grows more coercive.

Another way Pieboard’s scheme becomes more festive as a result of the nimming scene is how it transfers the action of the play into Lady Plus’ home and garden. The image of the
“garden” recalls Frye’s concept of the “green world.” On Peele, Greene, Lyly, and Shakespeare’s comic form, Frye writes:

Thus the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world.91

But *The Puritan Widow* varies from Frye’s structure in how although Lady Plus undergoes a “metamorphosis” – she first indicates that she is sexually interested in a man within the quasi-green world of her garden – her resolution only occurs once she leaves the garden and enters the street. For instance in Act 4, scene 2, Lady Plus asks where she might find Sir Godfrey. Her servant Frailty says he is in the garden with a “wondrous rare fellow, mistress, very strongly made upward, for he goes in a buff jerkin” (4.2.6-7). The man Frailty refers to is Captain Idle dressed as a conjurer, who will “fetch Sir Godfrey’s chain again, if it hang between heaven and earth” (4.2.8-9). The image Frailty describes proves attractive to Lady Plus, but the logic of Lady Plus’ attraction deserves note – she first remarks, “How happy were that woman to be / blessed with such a husband, a man o’ cunning” (4.2.11-12), which is an affirmation of the supposed conjurer’s mind. However, Lady Plus interrupts herself by asking “How / does he look, Frailty? Very swartly, I warrant” (4.2.12-13). Once she learns that the conjurer is “fair,” her daughter confirms “So fair and yet so cunning. That’s to be wondered / at, Mother” (4.2.19-20). Lady Plus first identifies a male subject as desirable – first by noting his mental capacity and then through racial and racist language – in association with the green world, which is a reversal of her prayer in Act one, in which she says, “O may I be the by-word of the world, / The common talk at table

in the mouth / Of every groom and waiter, if e’er more / I entertain the carnal suit of a man” (1.1.98-101). While Lady Plus’ reversal demonstrates hypocrisy, a better reading is that she becomes increasingly coerced and less powerful as the plot becomes more festive, as evidenced by the scene in Act 4 and further intensified in the last scene of the play.

Lady Plus possesses little agency – by this I mean an ability to speak a desire and then act accordingly – throughout the play, but as Pieboard’s festive plot unfolds, Lady Plus loses agency to even utter her desires. As I noted above, Lady Plus begins the play stating that she will not desire a husband much less remarry, but then once Pieboard thrusts Lady Plus and her family into a quasi-green world, she notes her attraction to Captain Oath’s mind and body in Act 4, scene 2. Later in that scene, Pieboard, dressed as a fortune-teller, explains that she must remarry, and she reasons, “Well, seeing my fortune tells me I must marry, let / me marry a man of wit, a man of parts” (4.2.259-260). Pieboard covertly coerces her into the festive mood, but in the final scene of the play, once Pieboard’s scheme comes to light, Lady Plus says, “Is’t possible we should be blinded so and our / eyes open?” (5.4.48-49). Here, Lady Plus temporarily breaks from the festive mood – she says her eyes are “open” – but she does not possess agency to restate or return to her desires from the beginning of the play. Instead, the Nobleman chides Lady Plus: “Widow, will you now believe that false which / too soon you believed true?” (5.4.50-51). A few lines later, the Nobleman compels Lady Plus and her daughter Frank to marry Muckhill and Tipstaff, characters defined by being “of estimation both in court and city” (5.4.88-89). As The Puritan Widow’s plot becomes more festive, Lady Plus becomes less of a subject expressing desires to more of a subject provided desires. The Nobleman orders Lady Plus to “bestow your eyes and your purest affections upon” Muckhill (5.4.86) in the closing lines of the play.
Some readers might challenge the extent to which I argue that festivity functions as power by which Pieboard and the Nobleman coerce Lady Plus into marriage. While *The Puritan Widow*, unlike *Twelfth Night*, does not reference a specific liturgical or secular festive occasion, Middleton’s play nonetheless incorporates festive pastimes within its structure. Erika Lin argues that generative cultural and literary readings become available when we reflect on these festive occasions incorporated within early modern drama, but it requires and demonstrates “the importance of moving beyond the representational narrative.”92 Here I draw on Lin’s article “Popular Festivity and the Early Modern Stage,” in which she argues for the festive qualities of *George a Greene* (1598)—another play which “does not depict actual holiday observances taking place within the fictional narrative.”93 She says:

Through analysis of three popular practices—communal feasting, festive combat, and the wearing of livery—this essay develops a theoretical framework for understanding how amateur performance traditions were integrated into London’s professional theatres.94

Lin presents *George a Greene* as evidence that professional theater subsumed festive practices within itself as one way to constitute a commercial enterprise. Lin writes:

[I]f regular participation in amateur performance was commonplace in early modern England, its impact on the growth of professional theatre must have been significant.95

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95 Lin, 273.
Communal feasting, festive combat, and the wearing of livery become liminal spaces that connect common festivities in parishes with the early modern professional stage. Her work demonstrates how festivity, as ideology and practice, functioned in various spaces, whether religious, political, or theatrical. For the purpose of this section, I want to think about the ways in which references to feasting, combat, and livery make *The Puritan Widow* a festive occasion, and in turn how a festive reading shapes our understanding of the Lady Plus’ marriage within the text. Festivities—in this case feasting, combat, and livery—provide a way for Pieboard and the Nobleman to exercise power to dominate the dissident Lady Plus.

Like *George a Greene*, *The Puritan Widow* does not take place within a setting or time specifically marked by a holiday or religious festival, but I examine the instances of and references to combat, feasting, and livery as a way to read the play as a festive text. Lin explains combat was an important aspect of early modern festivity:

> The leader of summer festivities was usually known as the “Summer Lord” or “Robin Hood.” [. . . ] The Robin Hood of the summer games was not a subversive outlaw, but was chosen from the ranks of respectable parish leaders. He and his band of merry men solicited money for the community’s needs through a variety of techniques, including what Johnston refers to as “the combat game” —that is, “a wrestling match or an archery contest or a fight with staves.”

In *The Puritan Widow*, Pieboard begins as a “subversive outlaw” but in the end becomes an instrument that reinforces the “needs” of the powerful members of “the community.” As I have

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96 Line, 283.
discussed, Pieboard seeks to secure Corporal Oath’s, Peter Skirmish’s, and his own financial success. He pretends to be a fortune-teller and tells Lady Plus that:

For your part and your daughter, if there be not once this day some bloodshed before your door whereof the human creature dies, the elder two of you shall run mad. (2.2.232-235)

Pieboard plans to use Oath’s and Skirmish’s staged fight to gain Lady Plus’ trust, but in a soliloquy at the end of the act, Pieboard confides to the audience that he has yet again changed the plan:

And to confirm my former presage to the widow, I have advised old Peter Skirmish, the soldier, to hurt Corporal Oath upon the leg, and in that hurry I’ll rush amongst’ em, and instead of giving the corporal some cordial to comfort him, I’ll pour into his mouth a potion of a sleepy nature to make him seem as dead. (2.2.295-301)

Pieboard drugs Oath into a slumber so that later in the play, he can “resurrect” Oath as a demonstration of his power and to further secure Lady Plus’ trust. Notably, however, Pieboard’s plan has consequences for multiple communities within this scene. He first deceives Lady Plus and her family for the sake of his and his friend’s plot, but then he betrays his friends in order to increase the effectiveness of the performance. “These empty creatures, / Soldier and corporal, were but ordained / As instruments for me to work upon” (3.1.64-66), Pieboard says to himself after the staged fight. Similar to George a Greene, combat in The Puritan Widow is a festive occasion that shapes community. Lin writes, “The fight transforms these ‘strangers’ into
neighbors; combat is not disruptive, but instead promotes conviviality.”97 Pieboard does indeed gain Lady Plus’ trust and “conviviality” as a result of the staged combat, but he also creates tension between him and his original conspirators. Pieboard instigates festive “misrule” and plays a part within a wider system that integrates Lady Plus into the dominant society. As a result of Pieboard’s staged combat, Lady Plus invites Pieboard into her home, which culminates with her marriage.

References to feasting further incorporate Lady Plus and other puritan characters into festive participation. When Pieboard first meets with Lady Plus, he tells her that “I truly know by certain / spiritual intelligence that he [Lord Plus] is in purgatory,” (2.1.153-154) Although Lord Plus appeared moral, he in fact “got his wealth with a hard gripe” (2.1.189), or by exploiting the weak. Lady Plus counters Pieboard’s accusation by referencing “high days”:

Dine quickly upon high days, and when I had great guests, would e’en shame me and rise from the table to get a good seat at the afternoon sermon. (2.1.207-209)

Lady Plus argues for her husband’s holiness: on holidays, he went to church as quickly as possible; therefore, he displays outward signs of true devotion to God. Pieboard responds with a common rejoinder, which draws a distinction between the appearance of holiness and the practice of it: “Church, ay, he seemed all church, / and his conscience was as hard as the pulpit” (2.1.216-217). In other words, Lord Plus was outwardly “holy” by foregoing festive occasions and attending church, but internally his “conscience” was hard or corrupt because of his business dealings. Lady Plus’ reference to feasting and festivity further incorporates her into Pieboard’s scheme, as it also exposes her husband’s hypocrisy.

97 Lin, 287.
Later in the play, the “nimming” and eventual recovery of Sir Godfrey’s chain is also an occasion where references to feasting and livery coerce Lady Plus’ family into Pieboard’s plot. Nicholas St Antlings, we remember, serves as Sir Godfrey’s servant and helps Pieboard “nim” his master’s golden chain. When Sir Godfrey discovers it is missing, he despairs saying:

Twas worth above three hundred crowns.

Besides, ‘twas my father’s, my Father’s father’s, my grandfather’s huge grandfather’s. (3.2.27-30)

Although Lady Plus says that he can still “read” – another satirical reference to how puritan’s privileged of the written word of God – Sir Godfrey dismisses her attempts to soothe him:

[W]ould you had me lost more? My best gown, too, with the cloth of gold lace?

My holiday gaskins and my jerkin set with pearl? No more? (3.2.35-38)

Sir Godfrey associates his golden chain, which Hamilton notes performs in some way as an image of the rosary,98 with other meaningful possessions – pieces of festive clothing. Furthermore, the recovery of Sir Godfrey’s chain parallels a moment of spiritual redemption:

“Sister, the rosemary bank. Come, come, / there’s my chain, he says” (4.2.180-181). Sir Godfrey’s sprint to the garden culminates with a call for a feast:

Ay, and a banquet ready by this time, Master Sheriff, to which I most cheerfully invite you and your late prisoner there. See you this goodly chain, sir? Mum, no more words. ‘Twas lost and is found again. [. . .] Come, my inestimable bullies, we’ll talk of your noble acts in sparkling charneco, and instead of a jester, we’ll ha’ the ghost i’th’ white sheet sit at upper end o’th’ table. (4.2.349-355)

The entire occasion of the golden chain parodies the Christian salvation narrative: humans lose that which connected them to the Father, only to find redemption on a “tree.” As Sir Godfrey says, “‘Twas lost and is found again” (4.2.352). Furthermore, Sir Godfrey celebrates redemption through feasting, but instead of a “jester,” he calls a “ghost.” The “ghost i’th’ white sheet” refers not to a literal ghost, of course, but to Corporal Oath, whom Pieboard drugs in order to stage a resurrection later in Act 4. Godfrey’s feast seems analogous to Samuel Ward’s *The Life of in Death*, where Ward imagines a heavenly festive occasion in which the elect celebrate their union with God. In *The Puritan Widow*, however, this scene of heavenly festivity takes place in earthly time and space and, more importantly, is a trick. The feast of the golden chain, a parody of a heavenly festive occasion, functions as a vehicle for Pieboard to further coerce Lady Plus into trusting him.

In addition to feasts and combat, festive occasions also shaped community through clothing. The bestowing of livery—“distinctive clothing marked out by color, cut, and insignia [which] identified persons as members of particular households”99—could signify a “stable social identity”100 in festive, social, and theatrical early modern contexts. Late medieval and early modern parishes, as Lin notes, sold livery, such as badges “cognizances in their hats,” during festivals to raise money for the church and incorporate parish members into the seasonal festivities. Lin writes, “Parishes might sell anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand badges bearing the insignia of Robin Hood or the May Lord,”101 which incorporated persons into the festive parish community. These festive buttons and other items of clothing mirrored formal

100 Lin, “George a Greene,” 293.
livery, which a Lord might use to mark members of his household staff. Lin argues that the historical practice of livery takes on two dimensions in theater: the price of admission serves a similar function as a badge, and costumes signify membership of the actors. By unifying audiences with the actors, livery “appropriated the authority of festive traditions” in order to shape the community of the public theater.\(^{102}\) In the examples above, livery works incorporates subjects in order to positively shape community, but livery was also a device to shame and punish subjects who did not pay for the parish festivities. Lin cites Philip Stubbes who recorded in his memoir that those who “refused to purchase livery badges [at parish events] were ‘mocked, & flouted at, not a little.”\(^{103}\) The festive practice of livery, therefore, shaped community through exclusion and inclusion; it marked its members visually, and it marked outsider through its absence and also through shame.

While bestowing, buying, and wearing livery shaped community – albeit coercively in some cases – *The Puritan Widow* presents the removal of livery as a way to discipline community and indicate that which is valuable.\(^{104}\) In *The Puritan Widow*, the presence of livery demonstrates that rank, gender, and the capacity for childbearing are essential factors in a subject’s value to the community. Nicholas, Sir Godfrey’s servant, for instance, performs a function but lacks value, as compared to Sir Godfrey or Lady Plus, within the festive plot. We learn explicitly that Nicholas wears livery at the moment of his expulsion from the community. When Sir Godfrey discovers that Nicholas “nimmed” his chain, he promptly removes his crest from Nicholas’ back:

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\(^{102}\) Lin, “George a Greene,” 296.  
\(^{103}\) Lin, “George a Greene,” 295.  
\(^{104}\) “Clothed, early modern bodies were expected to be clearly marked by gender, rank and marital status, and until 1604, sumptuary laws attempted to regulate strict relations between rank and dress” (Gowing 32).
Deemed always holy, pure, religious,
A puritan a thief? When was’t ever heard?
Sooner we’ll kill a man than steal, thou know’st.
Out, slave, I’ll rend my lion from thy back
With mine own hands. (5.4.70-74)

Sir Godfrey’s lines contain none of the playful ambiguity between “nim” and “steal” as seen in earlier acts. Sir Godfrey’s removal of livery from his puritan servant emphasizes that Nicholas is expendable and, perhaps for this reason, limited in his capacity for festive participation. We might say that livery becomes a “material mnemonic”\(^{105}\) for some puritans’ troubled relationship with festive practices, a term which extends Ann Rosalind Jones’ and Peter Stallybrass’ case that livery underscores servitude. But like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Nicholas’ servitude and the shame associated with it, partly masks how Pieboard and then the Nobleman coerce Lady Plus through power of the festive occasion.

In the last scene, *The Puritan Widow* presents a final image of coercion across axes of religion, class, and gender. Sir Godfrey’s dramatic removal of livery from Nicholas, while important for questions related to class and religious identity, partly masks the comprehensiveness of festivity’s coercive power within this scene. Unlike Malvolio, Nicholas does not leave the stage. Sir Godfrey removes his livery from him, and Nicholas says, “Dear master, O—“before the Nobleman interrupts him, saying, “Nay, knight, dwell in patience” (5.4.74-75). Nicholas waits for his eventual punishment in this liminal space where he is

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\(^{105}\) See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass. *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). They write that livery is “a form of incorporation, a material mnemonic that inscribed obligation and indebtedness upon the body” (20).
separated from the community but paradoxically existing within it in order to bear witness to the
Nobleman’s authority. In the next line, the Nobleman declares: “And now, widow, being so near
church, / ‘twere great pity, nay, uncharity to send you home / again without a husband” (5.4.75-
77). We might think back to Parliament’s four statutes of 1605, which established a celebration
of the king as it also punished those who opposed him. Or, we might think of parish
communities, which enforced participation of festivals: “Parishioners were expected to
contribute their labor and material resources to festive events; attendance was strongly
encouraged, if not mandatory.”\textsuperscript{106} Similarly, the final stage-picture of \textit{The Puritan Widow} is that
of a community marked by shock and confusion but reinforced by the Nobleman’s authority,
who concludes the play by invoking the divine and telling Lady Plus that her marriage will be “a
happy change which makes e’en heaven rejoice” (5.4.105).

\textsuperscript{106} Lin, 283.
CONCLUSION

Early modern theater was a form of festive practice, which was distinct from other cultural modes of festivity, in part, by the way it overtly presented how others could employ the power of festive occasions to coerce others into submission. By tracing festive practice through Catholic and Protestant England and then reading memoirs of older forms of festivity, I established that within festivity’s varied history, patterns of coercion and exclusion existed, often to achieve social integration and unification of a community. Martyn, we remember, writes that his grandfather included some “civil poor neighbors” and not others to form a community around a feast celebration. Similarly, we remember that Rudyerd references one way to exit the season of festivity into common time is by marrying a “rich widow.” I drew from patterns of festive practice within Martyn’s and Rudyerd’s festive memoirs to read Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow. These plays demonstrate more overtly how dominant powers enforce and reinforce authority through festivity.

Recently, Erika Lin has argued that early modern theater, as a festive practice, drew from the liturgical calendar but perhaps even more so from festive practices in order to join the audience and actors together as a community. Her work situates Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow more firmly in political, religious, and economic discourses and practices, as she provides a way to read beyond the narrative of the play and think about its implications more broadly within early modern culture. What is at stake for festivity when it represents how authority reinforces itself through festive occasions by punishing subversive subjects and incorporating those who are resistant but valuable to society? Future studies might investigate whether or not early modern theater influenced festive practices off stage, and, if so, how. Theater, as a cultural
practice that involves language and movement, serves as an excellent site to ask questions about how experience broadly influences festivity as ideology and practice. Monique Scheer, a historian and cultural anthropologist who researches popular religious practices in 19th-century Germany, argues domination occurs through ‘symbolic violence,’ meaning the compelling, even coercive, logic of a symbolic order that is reproduced day after day in micro and macro acts of body and language.  

She writes later in the essay, “Practice theory is more interested in implicit knowledge, in the largely unconscious sense of what correct behavior in a given situation would be, in the ‘feel for the game.’” I suggest that as scholarship of early modern festivity continues, questions about the “feel for the game” will lead us back to how theater as a festive practice not only shaped society broadly but also shaped the “rules” of festivity in other cultural modes.

*The Puritan Widow*’s unstable title within its print history demonstrates some of the coercive patterns I have presented within these plays. *The Puritan Widow* was first printed in quarto in 1607 (STC 21531), and its title page reads:

THE | PVRITaine | or | THE VVIDDovV | of VVatlingstreeete. | Acted by the Children of Paules. | VVritten by VV. S. | Imprinted at London by G.ELD. |

1607.

Between 1607 and 1734, the play reentered circulation eight times. Additionally, its title shifted regularly between of *The Puritan*, *The Puritan Widow*, and *The Puritan; Or, the Widow of*...

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108 Scheer, 220.
Watling Street. These titles preserve Lady Plus’ identity as a figure resistant to religious conformity, but they do not always maintain her female identity. A future project might involve reading festive plays within the context of their print and reception history.

Finally, I see immense value in researching the writings of women from the late medieval into the early modern period to better understand women’s relationship with festive practices and their representation on stage. Did women have a sense of membership within festive occasions and practices? Did they have a sense of agency within festive occasions, and how did that sense translate into practice? Were there changes in what it meant to feel or experience festivity in England as commercial theater appropriated festive practices and occasions? What about female playwrights – how did they represent their female characters plots where festive power operated? These questions direct future projects on a course to not only historicize festivity’s change and continuity over time but also to test and perhaps challenge the use of the word “coercive” as a descriptor. These questions would certainly provide new insights on representation of Olivia, Malvolio, Lady Plus, and Nicholas within their narrative frames and their reception within the minds of the first audience members, who helped to shape the festive communities of Twelfth Night and The Puritan Widow.
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