Teacher's Notes

For the section on Criticisms

SECTION SIX
Discussion

This section is to provide sources (only a few examples provided here though) for students to ‘read around’ the play so that they become familiar with the major issues involved in *Twelfth Night*. This will surely add to the repository of knowledge of the students particularly about Shakspere's plays. They will get to see how other major literary critics see the play and what do they have to say about the play. They will then be exposed to the different perspectives written from the point of these individuals who have further contributed to the critical analysis of the play. This contributes to the students' maturity in outlook not only about the play but also about life itself since literature actually teaches about life and values in life.

The students are then free to form their own opinions now that they have read the play critically. They will then be able to evaluate, criticise, judge and pronounce their own verdict in the light of these critical landmarks.

The teacher is encouraged to source for further reading materials to help students grow in the appreciation of Shakespeare.

**Recommended reading**

WILSON, JOHN DOVER (1962) *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies*,

London, Faber & Faber.
Unit Topic: Criticism of the play

Objective: Students get to read about criticisms of other major literary critics.

Materials: A copy of the critical documents.
CHARLES LAMB. Malvolio is not essentially ludicrous. He becomes comic but by accident. He is cold, austere, repelling; but dignified, consistent, and, for what appears, rather of an over-stretched morality. Maria describes him as a sort of Puritan; and he might have worn his gold chain with honour in one of our old round-head families, in the service of a Lambert, or a Lady Fairfax. But his morality and his manners are misplaced in Illyria. He is opposed to the proper levities of the piece, and falls in the unequal contest. Still his pride, or his gravity (call it which you will) is inherent, and native to the man, not mock or affected, which latter only are the fit objects to excite laughter. His quality is at the best unlovely, but neither buffoon nor contemptible. His bearing is lofty, a little above lofty, a little above his station, but probably not much above his deserts. We see no reason why he should not have been brave, honourable, accomplished. His careless committal of the ring to the ground (which he has commissioned to restore to Cesario), bespeaks a generosity of birth and feeling. His dialect on all occasions is that of a gentleman, and a man of education. We must not confound him with the eternal old, low steward of comedy. His is master of the household to a great Princess; a dignity probably conferred
upon him for other respects than age or length of service. Olivia, at the first
indication of his supposed madness, declares that she 'would not have him
miscarry for half of her dowry.' Does this look as if the character was meant
to appear little or insignificant? Once, indeed, she accuses him to his face-
of what?- of being 'sick of self-love,' - but with a gentleness and
considerateness which could not have been, if she had not thought that this
particular infirmity shaded some virtues. His rebuke to the knight, and his
sottish revellers, is sensible and spirited; and when we take into
consideration the unprotected condition of his mistress, and the strict regard
with which her state of real or dissembled mourning would draw the eyes of
the would upon her house-affairs, Malvolio might feel the honour of the
family in some sort in his keeping; as it appears not that Olivia had anymore
brothers, or kinsman, to look to it- for Sir Toby had dropped all such
respects at the buttery hatch. That Malvolio was meant to be represented as
possessing estimable qualities, the expression of the Duke in his anxiety to
have him reconciled, almost infers. 'Pursue, and entreat him to a peace.'
Even in his abused state of chains and darkness, a sort of greatness seems
never to desert him. He argues highly and well with the supposed Sir Topas,
and philosophises gallantly upon his straw. There must have been some
shadow of worth about the man; he must have been something more than a
mere vapour- a thing of straw, or Jack in office - before Fabian and Maria
could have ventured sending him upon a courting errand to Olivia. There
was some consonancy (as he would say) in the undertaking, or the jest
would have been too bold even for that house of misrule.

Selected Criticism (2)

WILLIAM ARCHER. I confess that Malvolio has always been to
me one of the most puzzling of Shakespeare's creations. The theory, so
popular with German, and with some English, commentators, which makes
of him a satirical type of the Puritan as Shakespeare conceived him, will
not hold ground for a moment. It is founded on one or two detached
speeches wrested from their context. Maria says of him that 'he is
sometimes a kind of a Puritan,' only to say in the next breath that 'the devil
a Puritan' is he; and when Sir Andrew expresses a desire to beat him, Sir
Toby derisively asks, 'What, for being a Puritan? Thy exquisite reason, dear
knight.' Is it likely that Shakespeare was himself guilty of the stupidity
which even Sir Toby ridicules in his gull? ... There is nothing of the typical
Puritan in Malvolio ... if I may hazard a theory, I should say that he is not a
Puritan, but a Philistine. The radical defect of his nature is a lack of that
sense of humour which is the safety-valve of all our insanities, preventing
even the most expansive egoism from altogether over-inflating us. He takes
himself and the world too seriously. He has no intuition for the incongruous
and grotesque, to put the drag upon his egoistic fantasy, 'sick of self-love.'

Hid face, not only smileless itself, but contemptuous of mirth in others, has acted as a damper upon the humour of the sprightly Maria and the jovial Sir Toby; he has taken a set pleasure in putting the poor Clown out of countenance by receiving his quips with a stolid gravity. Hence the rancour of the humorists against a fundamentally antagonistic nature; hence, perhaps, their whim of making him crown his absurdities by a forced smile, a grimace more incongruous with his pompous personality than even cross-garters or yellow stockings. He is a being, in short, to whom the world, with all its shows and forms, is intensely real and profoundly respectable. He has no sense of its littleness, its evanescence, without which he can have no true sense of its greatness and its mystery.

Selected Criticism (3)

STARK YOUNG. I have never, in a long list of Twelfth Night productions, seen certain motifs and themes of the play turn out so clear; I have never heard reading that made them so reckless and irresponsible, as they should be, but yet so exact to the play's intention. The melancholy of Olivia and of Orsino, for example, is usually taken in the declamatory vein, heavy, amatory and unconvincing. But as Mr. Chekhov directs it, the theme
is a competition in romantic egotism, in which Viola and her love are
delicately included, though Orsino will not have it that she nor any woman
can ever love as he does, not any age or inclination equal his despair. Their
several loves thus achieve a due placement, sociable, sensible and romantic,
so that our hearts shall be wrung by them, musical, elegiac, delirious, as by
the lute’s playing of some sad, sweet song or by some momentary fading
sweetness on the air. In this production we have the delightful experience of
finding that what in most productions of the play have been mere dull flats
of emotion can take on variety, vigor and something of the rose of spring
and all its fatal lovely music.

The reading of the jester’s lines turns out mere gibberish in most
Shakespeare productions, so much so as to make you wonder why
intelligent princes ever had these perky, punning bores around them, as
historically we know they did. Here in Feste we hear distinctly the
burlesque of philosophic system and thought that Shakespeare intended;
grave echoes appear, laments, quips and poignant topsy-turvy. In this case it
is entirely right that the clown should be the one who sings, that a story
which begins with music should sing itself out with a song.