



SAINT SEBASTIAN'S CONTRAPPOSTO – FROM RENAISSANCE ITALY TO RENAISSANCE ENGLAND: ASYMMETRICAL SYMMETRY IN REPOSE AND IN ACTION

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Beginning with Donatello, the Italian Renaissance rediscovered classical contrapposto in the visual arts. In the English Renaissance, Shakespeare most fully translated the concept of contrapposto to the literary arts. Nowhere is the renaissance movement from visual Italy north to literary England clearer than in the images presented of Sebastian in both contexts – from physical contrapposto to contrapposto in character and narrative, from limp and submissive contrapposto to contrapposto poised for action.

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The Christian figures most routinely and consistently portrayed in contrapposto throughout the late 15th and early 16th century, first in Italy then in the entire Western European mainland, are Christ and St. Sebastian. Other saints stand solidly with their wheels or books or grills, but the hundreds of Sebastians that exploded onto the walls and canvases during that time are almost all in contrapposto.

A character named (or disguised as) Sebastian appears in four of Shakespeare's romantic comedies and is mentioned in a fifth. Often, the character not only embodies the principles of contrapposto, but functions as counter-poise to other characters in the dramatic narrative.

I will look at characteristics of contrapposto, then examine characteristics of St. Sebastian as he was perceived during the visual Renaissance, then glance more closely at one Shakespearean play. Finally, I hope to draw some conclusions about Italy and Shakespeare's gift of Sebastian to future generations of artists, authors, film-makers and composers.

For my purposes, I will work with the following definition. Contrapposto is a Classical representation of the human body in which the upper body and lower body are at odd angles to each other – not parallel – with the weight on one foot, and with the body partly tensed as if for action and partly relaxed as if in repose. The slight spiral in the torso encourages shifting perspectives on the body. Because of subtleties and complexities of the form, contrapposto is an external physical manifestation of an internal psychological or emotional condition – asymmetrical but somehow harmonious. Contrapposto is the way we stand in the present moment between actions, between the past and the future.

The Renaissance St. Sebastian as he appears in paintings, stained glass, sculptures, and manuscript illuminations is based on *The Golden Lives of The Saints*, but is significantly transformed. The new St. Sebastian is young, beardless, beautiful, naked(ish), feminized, bound to a stake/tree/post with knotted rope, penetrated with arrows, and often gazing heavenward. Other important characteristics of St. Sebastian include his resurrection by Irene, his miracle of the gift of speech to the mute Zoe, and his status as the main patron saint prayed to as intercessor

in *The Plague*. The Renaissance St. Sebastian is a Classicized Christian hero. He is androgynous and Christ-like (whether in crucifixion or in descent from the cross). Indeed, he is often portrayed beside Christ, either at the crucifixion or with the Madonna at Christ's infancy. He is also often portrayed with John the Baptist, as if one represents the coming of Christ and the other Christ in human form, pierced with arrows of love – either from Eros or from God, or both. St. Sebastian also frequently shows up in scenes with St. Anthony, the older Saint whose miracle also was language. Indeed, old and new worlds seem to function as a backdrop to many St. Sebastian scenes, either in classical ruins strewn about, or in older men watching in near-erotic delight as the young boy is shot full of arrows. Above all, the Renaissance St. Sebastian shows no suffering in his face and allows his body to be transformed for Love. One characteristic I would like, especially, to point out is St. Sebastian's passivity in these representations. He rarely struggles against his bonds or shows any indication of action. There are no verbs in these paintings, and where there are, they belong to other figures: the archers who draw their bows, Irene who plucks arrows out of his limp body, even the infant Christ who reaches out for him. Shakespeare will transpose the passivity of the visual Renaissance martyr to characters very active in their own creation.

In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venus*, an older man, Antonio, is in love with a younger man named Bassanio – a shortened form of Sebassanio (note: Shakespeare invented the name Bassanio). In *Twelfth Night*, an older man, Antonio, is in love with a younger man, Sebastian, and an older man, Orsino, comes to love a girl, Viola, disguised as her twin brother, Sebastian. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Antonio is an older man, a father, trying to keep his son away from a girl, Julia, in disguise as a boy, Sebastian. In *The Tempest*, Antonio and Sebastian are inseparable, if unpleasant, companions. Sebastian is only mentioned in *All's Well That Ends Well*, but even here he is, like the martyr, a soldier. Most of these plays feature some combination of cross-dressing, an emphasis on youth and beauty, bonds and/or bondage imagery (sometimes in the form of rings, sometimes with magic, sometimes with actual ropes, sometimes with language), arrow/bolt/piercing imagery, plague imagery, resurrection for new life, androgyny bordering on the homoerotic, a classicization of Christian imagery, a sense of separateness of the hero/heroine (as if he/she exists in a different world from all the other characters), a sense of patient endurance and silent suffering for love, a transformation of the physical body for love, and, of course, the power of language. These thematic repetitions from play to play, specifically associated with the name Sebastian, cannot be coincidental, especially when they turn up in five out of The Bard's fourteen comedies. What is going on with Shakespeare and St. Sebastian?

Let me look closely at *Twelfth Night*, where I see the fullest, most complex, realization of the Sebastian theme, and draw on similarities in the earlier and later plays.

Viola is the heroine, the contrapuntal figure who, disguised as a boy in clothes exactly copied from those worn by her supposedly drowned identical twin, Sebastian (3.4.381ff), is the central figure around which harmony and balance are restored to a world plagued with excess: excess of self-pity (Orsino and Olivia), excess of riot (Sir Toby Belch and companions), and excess of dour, supercilious, holier-than-thouness (Malvolio). The play is named for the last night of the Christmas revels when the three wise men appear at the nativity, and those three wise men are roundly parodied by "we three" (2.3.17) drunken fools singing "O, the twelfth day of December –" (2.3.84). On the night of The Epiphany, order is restored to a Christian kingdom from the immoderation of the boisterous festivities, from "disorder" and "uncivil rule" (2.3.97 & 121) – not by stern imposition of old rules, but by love. Illyria, which ought to be Elysium, is initially overrun with all the wrong sorts of love: love of the wrong object (Olivia, Orsino, Sir

Andrew), love of worldly pleasure (Sir Toby and company), and Malvolio's sick "self-love" (1.5.87). The contrast is made clear in the beginning when Viola says, "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother is in Elysium" (1.2.3-4). She might be saying: and what should I do on earth, my counterpart is in heaven? Illyria is a Fallen world, where Olivia's fleshly chamber maid Maria is called by the not-so-foolish fool, Feste, "a piece of Eve's flesh" (1.5.27-28). Viola/Sebastian, like Christ and like the saint, represents true and redemptive love, patient in her pain, humble in her fate, hopeful, faithful, and above all, active (note that her first words include the verb "do"). Although Viola calls herself Cesario and Sebastian calls himself Rodrigo, throughout this paper I will refer to Viola in disguise in her twin's clothes as Viola/Sebastian. Shakespeare never uses the the names Cesario or Roderigo to indicate who is speaking. Those names are only in the misguided and misled characters' heads. Viola is Sebastian and Sebastian is Viola. The twins are one, as Orsino remarks: "One face, one voice, one habit" (5.1.215).

Like St. Sebastian, resurrected by Irene from near death, Viola/Sebastian is resurrected "from the breach of the sea" (2.1.21), "from the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth" (5.1.74). Like St. Sebastian with The Plague, by the end of the play it is because of Viola/Sebastian that the air is "purged... of pestilence." (1.1.19) Like the punctured saint, Viola/Sebastian is hit with love's "rich golden shaft" (1.1.34). Like the androgynous saint, Viola/Sebastian takes the form of a "eunuch" (1.2.56). Unlike the feminized saint, Viola/Sebastian is actually a girl, which means she really does function as a eunuch throughout the play. Like the saint, in her boy disguise she is, as is repeated throughout the play (beginning in 1.5.96-117), a gentle man. Orsino says to her-as-him, "Diana's lip / Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe / Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman's part" (1.4.31-34). Like the saint, Viola/Sebastian is "Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy.... One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him" (1.5.152-159). Like St. Sebastian, Viola has the gift of language. When she utters her "Make me a willow cabin at your gate" speech, Olivia immediately falls in love with her, and is moved to utter, "You might do much" (1.5.263-271). Viola's eloquent rebuke to Orsino, in Act 2 scene 4, about the power of a woman's love instructs him and corrects his misogynistic arrogance. Even Malvolio acknowledges of her, "he speaks very shrewishly" (1.5.157). Like the visual saint, Viola seems to float among the other characters as if in her own realm. Her thoughtful soliloquys and asides help to set her apart, but there is something even in her manner that the other characters react to. As Olivia remarks, after just meeting her, "Methinks I feel this youth's perfections / With an invisible and subtle stealth / To creep in at mine eyes" (1.5.291-293). A soliloquy is also a moment of nakedness, when the character is shorn of all accouterments and pretensions, and appears before us as he or she is. Elsewhere, Viola/Sebastian says, "I am not what I am" (3.1.141), but never in soliloquy. St. Sebastian's nakedness is key to his iconography, and reduces him to exactly what he is, a vulnerable flesh-and-blood human. Like St. Sebastian, Viola is bound up in knots. While her twin, the male Sebastian is seen literally "to bind himself.... / To a strong mast that lived upon the sea" (1.2.12-14), Viola/Sebastian is in bondage to the tangles of love and deception: "O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie" (2.2.40-41). Viola/Sebastian displays the Saint's virtue of patience in suffering, and does not show her grief. She says of herself, "She sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief. Was that not love indeed?" (2.4.114-115). Yet she is not passive in that suffering. She attacks her problem from the moment she steps on stage and on land and makes a plan: "Conceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent." (1.2.53-55). Indeed, one cannot help but suspect that Viola/Sebastian's intent includes marriage with Orsino before she even meets the man, for her first probing comment about him is, "I have heard my father name

him. / He was a bachelor then” (1.2.28-29). She then insinuates herself into Orsino’s court as his special, preferred servant in a mere “three days”(1.4.3), does truly fall in love with him, and negotiates the vicissitudes of fate and chance, as her initial plan unfolds in unexpected directions. Viola/Sebastian always stands up for herself, within the bounds of both her disguise and her true female condition in her world. She says, honestly, to Olivia, “By my innocence I swear, and by my youth, / I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, / And that no woman has, nor ever none / Shall mistress be of it save I alone” (3.1.157-160). Although she knows she is “no fighter” (3.4.244), she draws her sword and prepares to duel with Sir Andrew, at Sir Toby’s mischievous instigation. And when she hears that Orsino tenders her dearly, she confesses to Olivia that she goes “After him I love / More than I love these eyes, more than my life, / More than all the mores than ere I shall love wife” (5.1.132-134) – all this still in disguise as a young man.

Viola in Sebastian’s trappings is a *contrapposto* figure in two ways. First, soliloquys and asides are moments of theatrical *contrapposto*. The speaker pauses in the middle of the action, with the weight of the speech on one foot – a comment on the recent past – and the other foot poised to move into the next moment of action. The torso of the speech is twisted to comment on what just happened, but also to suggest what is about to happen. The speaker is in a thoughtful pose, outside the main action for a moment. Like *contrapposto* in visual art, soliloquys and asides invite shifting perspectives on the action. One is not invited to walk around a Korou figure, but one is led around Michelangelo’s David, by the eye. One is not invited to look too deeply into Maria’s stock character, but one is constantly invited, by the words she utters and the words those around her utter, to want to understand more deeply Viola/Sebastian’s character. As Orsino says, when Viola/Sebastian and the male Sebastian stand side by side at last, “A natural perspective, that is and is not!” (5.1.216). The painted St. Sebastian stand or hangs in relaxed *contrapposto*. In this world, he is a victim, and it is too late for him to act. Viola/Sebastian’s soliloquys, on the other hand, are tense with the question of what to do about the situation. Her private moments are external, textual manifestations of her internal psychological or emotional condition – asymmetrical but somehow harmonious. Her *contrapposto* speeches represent the way she stands in the present moment between actions, between the past and the future. Actors often actually stand in *contrapposto* to deliver soliloquys, with their torso spiraled to include both the stage world and the audience world. Think about the *contrapposto* in this aside, delivered the moment after Viola/Sebastian hears from Antonio that her brother Sebastian might be alive, but before the proof unfolds:

- Methinks his words do from such passion fly
- That he believes himself. So do not I.
- Prove true, imagination, O, prove true,
- That I, dear brother, be now ta’en for you!
- He named Sebastian. I my brother know
- Yet living in my glass; even such and so
- In favor was my brother, and he went
- Still in this fashion, color, ornament,
- For him I imitate. O, if it prove,
- Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love! (3.4.375-386)

Secondly, Viola/Sebastian functions as a counterpoint to all the other principal characters in the narrative and in the city. She represents, in her person and in her actions, the counter position to theirs. One might run down the list of the seven deadly sins and see how each character

embodies one of them at some point, and how Viola/Sebastian, somewhere in the course of the play, embodies the opposite, antidotal virtues. This very contrapposto is what puts fate on her side in the end. She demonstrates generosity as opposed to covetousness. Sir Andrew covets Olivia. She demonstrates moderation as opposed to gluttony. For the fools, life “consists of eating and drinking” (2.3.12). Orsino in his first speech on music as food says, “Give me excess of it, that surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die” (1.1.2-3). Orsino, in his own gluttony of love-sickness, compares a woman’s love to “appetite, / No motion of the liver, but the palate, / That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt; / But mine is all as hungry as the sea, / And can digest as much” (2.4.97-101). She demonstrates action as opposed to sloth. Orsino is frozen in his inability to effect his desire and has turned into a melancholic couch potato. He moans, “I am best / When least in company” (1.4.37). She demonstrates chastity as opposed to lechery. Sir Toby repeatedly makes lewd jokes about lustful sexuality: “‘Accost’ is front her, board her, woo her, assail her” (1.3.55-56), and “Lechery? I defy lechery” (1.5.121), and a running pun on holding his piece. She demonstrates humility as opposed to pride. Viola/Sebastian says of Olivia, “I see what you are: you are too proud” (1.5.245). She demonstrates patience as opposed to wrath. Antonio’s anger is quick to surface in both of his principal scenes, and Olivia and Orsino become blind with anger in act 5. Finally, she demonstrates kindness as opposed to envy. Malvolio, whose name means ill will, is envious of everyone and tries to stomp out their pleasure with puritanical virtue, to which Sir Toby replies, “Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?” (2.3.114-115). In Act 5, Orsino’s envy of Viola/Sebastian as Olivia’s love object causes him to threaten to kill his own beloved companion. In sum, Viola might be referencing all the characteristics we have seen on display in the other characters, when she says of herself, “I hate ingratitude more in a man / Than lying, vainness, babbling drunkenness, / Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption / Inhabits our frail blood” (3.4.354-358).

Saint Sebastian’s iconography, in art and in *The Golden Lives of the Saints* (a text Shakespeare knew well and drew from in other instances, notably, for *Othello*, from the St. Maurice passage), features the plague, arrows, bondage, classical references (not the least of which is contrapposto itself), ideas circling the relationship of a divine plan and human will, death and its handmaiden time, the miracle of language, disguise unveiled (he is stripped of his disguise as a Roman soldier and revealed as a Christian missionary), and homo-eroticism. Shakespeare’s play teems with images in all of these areas.

We are reminded early in *Twelfth Night* that we are in a plague-ridden world, although the disease here is misguided love. Sir Toby calls Olivia’s unreasonable love for her dead brother “a plague” (1.3.1). When Olivia falls in love with Viola/Sebastian she says, “Even so quickly may one catch the plague” (1.5.290). As mentioned, Malvolio is described as “sick with self-love” (1.5.87). And Olivia and Orsino are love-sick with impossible objects – one dead and the other uninterested. As Saint Sebastian was thought responsible for curing The Black Death, so the cure for the Illyrians will arrive when Sebastian and Viola/Sebastian are reunited, when the sundered twins become one again.

Not only is *Twelfth Night* rife with images of arrows, piercings, and beatings, these images are often associated with love, not of God but of a human. Orsino bemoans his inability to hunt the hart, with a pun on his heart, and, as noted, calls love “the rich golden shaft” that kills (1.1.34). Malvolio’s self-love is followed by a reference to “bird-bolts” (1.5.89). Sir Toby wishes for “a stone-bow” to shoot Malvolio in the eye for his railings about Olivia’s love (2.5.45), and goes on to conflate both bondage and arrows in his exclamation “Bolts and shackles!” (2.5.55). Antonio describes his love for the male Sebastian as “My desire, / More sharp than filed steel”

(3.3.4-5). References to swords, rapiers, cudgelings, “mortal arbitrament” with piercing (3.4.263), and being “stuck with... mortal motion (3.4.276-278) abound in all the clowning scenes. Antonio, rushing to rescue Viola/Sebastian orders Sir Andrew: “Put up your sword” (3.4.311), an injunction echoed by Viola/Sebastian a few lines later: “Put your sword up, if you please (3.4.322). Feste, the commentator on all actions, reminds Malvolio about the old Vice in Medieval English drama, the devil, who carried a “dagger of lath” with which he attempted to stab goodness (4.2.127). Saint Sebastian’s piercing imagery, while maintaining its association with love, is everywhere transformed from the ethereal Christian world to the tragi-comic world of humanity.

A similar transformation occurs with Saint Sebastian’s bondage iconography. Although our first encounter with binding is most reminiscent of the Saint’s visual imagery (the male Sebastian is seen literally bound to a mast in 1.1.12-14), on the whole, the characters in *Twelfth Night* are bound to each other in sensual, sexual love, or in servitude. Shakespeare often uses rings as a symbol of a love bond (as in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Merchant of Venice* – two other plays with notable Sebastians). Olivia gives Viola/Sebastian a ring to communicate her love and to ensnare him in her binding (1.5.296 and 2.2.17ff), to which she/he responds “O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t’untie” (2.2.40-41). Olivia and the male Sebastian exchange rings in “A contract of eternal bond of love” as they are bound in marriage (5.1.154ff). Sir Toby, expressing his love for Maria, and promising to marry her says, “Wilt thou set thy foot o’ my neck?” and offers to give up his freedom to “become [her] bonds slave” (2.5.184-187). Malvolio’s self-love is parodied by Sir Toby as he says of the servant’s symbol of bondage, “rub your chain with crumbs” (2.5.55). Viola/Sebastian has to explain herself when she says to Sir Toby, “I am bound to your niece, sir; I mean, she is the list of my voyage” (3.1.76-77). The clowns put Malvolio in a dark room and bind him (3.4.137-138). Reason itself, which ought to set the humanist mind free, is referred to as a “fetter” (3.1.155). Olivia offers to “set mine honor at the stake” (3.1.118). Even ordinary expressions like, “I shall be much bound to you” (3.4.272), with which the play is peppered, accrue extra meaning under the weight of the bondage imagery. The terrible thing about bondage is that the one tied up is helpless, has no choice. All the power is in the hands of the binder, in this case, Fate. Most importantly, Viola and Sebastian’s natural bond of twinship is rent in the beginning of the play, when the tempest divided what never had been kept apart. When the twins are rebound, all the unnatural knots get untied and all the new bonds, the chosen bonds, get properly retied, in the name, not of God, but of human love.

Critics have suggested that when classical ruins are featured as a backdrop to images of Christ, they symbolize the crumbling of the old pagan world and the birth of the new Christian world. I suggest the same interpretation for similar images of Saint Sebastian (in his Christ-like contrapposto), but place more emphasis on the humanity of the central figure. Unlike Christ, the saint was fully human, and beginning as early as Giotto, the Renaissance was interested in humanizing the Christian story. Thus, the prevalence of Saint Sebastian figures could be part of a project to create a human counterpoint for Christ, a figure ordinary people could relate to and through whom could comprehend the sacrifice of Christ. Contrapposto, if this is the case, takes on an expanded meaning, beyond the position of the figure in the painting. I also suggest that Shakespeare pushes this idea even further. The detritus of both the pagan and Christian worlds that lies about in the background of *Twelfth Night* suggests that neither of those ideals is sufficient to uphold humans in their pragmatic struggle to resolve identity, community, and love issues in the real world of flesh, blood, chance, and politics. Illyria is a realm in which the characters must endure what another play calls, “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”

(*Hamlet*, 3.1.59). *Twelfth Night* is littered with both classical and Christian references, and Christianity comes off the worse of the two.

On the classical side we have references to Actaeon, Taurus, Diana, the gods, Penthesia, Saturn, the melancholy god, Lucrece, the fates, Tartarus, Pandarus, Troilus and Cressida, Pythagoras, Vulcan, Phoenix, Titus, and Jove all over the place. Normally these references reflect the condition of one of the characters. For example, Feste says to Orsino, who is in a deep state of melancholy, “may the melancholy god [Saturn] protect you” (2.4.73). Orsino compares himself to Actaeon when he says, “My desires, like fell and cruel hounds, / pursue me” (1.1.20-21). Olivia, much concerned with her honor, has an image of Lucrece on her seal, a Roman matron who committed suicide when her honor was besmirched through rape. Feste says in one of his many begging moments, “I would play Lord Pandarus, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus” (3.1.51-52), and Pandarus is surely one of his functions in the play, as he skips back and forth from one lover’s house to another’s.

The Christian references are more complex. There is one group clustered around Olivia, who is referred to throughout (always by Feste – the commentator) as “Madonna.” She seems to represent “divinity” (1.5.211), whose mother is “Ste. Anne” (2.3.116), who gets married in a real church by a real priest, and who causes Orsino to gasp, “Now Heaven walks on the earth” (5.1.94), and then to complain that she is an “uncivil lady, / to whose ingrate and unauspicious altars/ My soul and faithfull’st have breathed out / That e’er devotion tendered!” (5.1.110-113).

There is a very different group of references that seem to cluster around Malvolio, and seem to provide a serious (in comic attire) critique of the organized religion of the day. These include constant comments about puritans, the devil, Satan, Beelzebub, hell, Brownists, Lent (the opposite of the revels of Christmas), fiends, and witchcraft. When Malvolio turns up in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, a character comments (suggesting that religion itself is all about appearances) that he must have turned heathen because no Christian could hope to be saved in that outfit (3.2.68-69). When Feste dons a fake beard and priest’s robe in a mock confession scene with Malvolio, he remarks “I will dissemble myself in’t, and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown”(4.2.4-6). When God or the nobility of the soul is mentioned the context is either ironic or random swearing.

Christianity comes off quite badly in both of these sets of images, because Olivia is, in fact, no Madonna. She is an over-sexed and over-sentimental would-be non-virgin – as soon as possible. She falls in lust with Viola/Sebastian before she even sees him, asking all about what he looks like before deciding to admit him. And Malvolio, the devil of the play, is the self-proclaimed guardian of Christian and civil virtues.

Even the ultimate moment of the Christian story, the sacrifice of the lamb of God on the cross for love, a moment clearly referenced in the visual images of Saint Sebastian, is brutally parodied by Orsino. As he prepares to murder Viola/Sebastian, he says of his love of two humans whom he thinks love each other rather than him, “I’ll sacrifice the lamb that I do love [Viola/Sebastian], / To spite a raven’s heart within a dove [Olivia]” (5.1.128-129).

Shakespeare seems to say that neither the much revered – by Renaissance humanists – classical values, nor the much revered – by Church purists – Christian values suffice to help humans sort out their tangled messes, not because there is anything wrong with the values in themselves, but because of human nature. The worst in human nature created the knots in the first place, and only the best in human nature can untie them – with the help, of course, of Chance. Thus, the new world, for Shakespeare, rising out of the ruins of reclaimed classicism and Christianity, is a world of human beings, on their own – a shift from the world of Saint Sebastian.

The question arises, how does this new world view the relationship of Free Will and Fate? One of the themes I have been exploring, through the lens of Sebastian (Saint and otherwise), is passivity versus activity. The passivity of the visual, Renaissance Saint Sebastian is a reflection of a still- Catholic culture, in which the highest human virtues are submission, humility, and patient suffering for love (of God). The individualization and activity of Shakespeare's Sebastian characters reflect three things: 1) the humanizing effect of the Renaissance itself – that is, the shift from a theocentric world view to a homo-centric world view, 2) the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on a direct, active, individual relationship with God, and 3) the empowerment of the individual in such secular literature as *The Decameron*, *Canterbury Tales*, and the English sonnet craze to, among other things, pursue love of a fellow human. Of course, the earlier Renaissance images are immobile figures in themselves, whereas the theatre is all about people in motion. One important notion that did carry over from Medieval and Renaissance Catholicism to Anglican England is reflected in both worlds' depictions of Sebastian. Humans have been given Free Will, and the highest use of that will is "right" reason, which will result in the alignment of the human will with the will of God (in Christianity) or Fate/Destiny (in a secular context). Saint Sebastian's passivity is a result of his alignment of his will to the will of God. Viola/Sebastian's activity is her pursuit of the right alignment of her will to the will of Fate/Destiny.

"What You Will," the subtitle of the play, can mean many things: whatever, I don't care, however you choose to interpret whatever was said or happened, what you want/desire, what you intend to do, what you intend to make happen, permission, command, and what you choose – among others. In St. Sebastian imagery, "What You will" is clearly expressed, through the limp body and the uplifted, serene face, as surrender to the Will of God. In *Twelfth Night* the ambiguity of the idea of Will is thoroughly explored, and comically so, since the characters are as bound as Saint Sebastian, one way or another, and unable to exercise Will at all. Feste says to Olivia, "Wit, an't be thy will, put me into good fooling" (1.5.31-32)! Olivia says about answering the door, "What you will" (1.5.106). Sir Toby says to Olivia about Viola/Sebastian, "Let him be the devil an he will, I care not" (1.5.125). Olivia asks of Viola/Sebastian, "Your will?" (1.5.165). Olivia parries with Viola/Sebastian about the parts of her own beauty, "It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labeled to my will" (1.5.240-242). Viola/Sebastian remonstrates with Orsino, "We men may say more, swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will" (2.4.116-117). Malvolio sneers to Viola/Sebastian, Olivia's "will is [the ring] should be so returned" (2.2.14). Sebastian assures Antonio, who has followed him out of love, "I would not by my will have troubled you" (3.3.1). Viola/Sebastian confesses, about fighting Sir Andrew "I do assure you, 'tis against my will" (3.4.312). Antonio says of his love for Sebastian, I am "One, sir, that for his love dares yet do more / Than you have heard him brag he will" (3.4.317-318). Sebastian succumbs to Olivia, who has just asked if he will be ruled by her, "Madam, I will" (4.1.64). Each of these usages seems to suggest a different facet of the ever-shifting concept of Will.

The servant of Will ought to be Reason, the demi-god of the Renaissance (starting all the way back with Dante and his guide through Hell and Purgatory), but Reason, in the upside down world of *Twelfth Night* is either reduced to its opposite (madness), misused in the service of passion and desire, useless, ridiculed as a meaningless scholastic exercise performed by a pompous ass, or babbled about by a drunkard. "If you be not mad, be gone; if you have reason, be brief" (1.5.212). "If that the youth will come this way tomorrow, I'll give him reasons for't" (1.5.325). "Thy exquisite reason, dear knight? – I have no exquisite reason for't, but I have reason good enough" (2.3.156). "Every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me" (2.5.179).

“Thy reason, man? – Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words; and words are grown so false, I am loathe to prove reason with them” (3.1.26). “Maugre all thy pride, Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide” (3.1.164). “Do not extort thy reasons from this clause, For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause; But rather reason thus with reason fetter, Love sought is good, but given unsought is better” (3.1.165). “I’ll not stay a jot longer. – Thy reason, dear venom, give thy reason. – You must needs yield your reason” (3.2.2.). “I will prove it legitimate, sire, upon the oaths of judgement and reason” (3.2.16). “Wonder not.... Why I do call the so, for I will show thee no reason for’t” (3.4.167). “I am ready to distrust mine eyes, and wrangle with my reason” (4.3.14).

The concept that is set against Will in this play, and that does not shift, is Chance, or Fate, and its servant, Time. In St. Sebastian’s world there is no Chance, for his is an orderly universe governed by God. His Fate is part of God’s plan, and we see in his posture and expression that he gets it. In *Twelfth Night* we are reminded constantly that we are in a disorderly world governed from beginning to end by Chance, where any plan that is hatched is not only not God’s, but is the result of human foolishness or passion, and is always (except in Viola/Sebastian’s case) doomed either to failure (Olivia and Orsino), disappointment (Andrew and Malvolio), or sheer exhaustion and disillusionment on the part of the plotter (Sir Toby). Consider this context-setting exchange at the start of the play:

- Viola (just washed ashore, about her twin): Perchance he is not drowned. What think you sailors?
- Captain: It is perchance that you yourself were saved.
- Viola: O, my poor brother! And so perchance may he be.
- Captain: True, madam, and to comfort you with chance... (1.2.5-8)

This passage is followed immediately by Viola’s plan to storm Orsino in Sebastian-drag, of which she wisely says, “What else may hap, to time I will commit” (1.2.60), thus aligning her will with the will of Fate. Other significant passages that comment on Fate include the following. Olivia, just after she rashly sends her ring to Viola/Sebastian, says, “Fate, show thy force” (1.5.305). Sebastian, freshly washed up, speaks (in far more self-pitying tones than his sister did) about “The malignancy of my fate” (2.1.4). Viola, after she receives Olivia’s ring, again wisely, puts her faith in “Time” (2.2.40). Malvolio, lusting after Olivia, comments, “Tis but fortune; all is fortune” (2.5.23). Maria’s phrase, in her forged letter, which eloquently sums up the relationship of humans to chance, is repeated three times in the play, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them” (2.5.142ff). Malvolio, again ruminating on his prospects with Olivia, comments, “Jove, not I, is the doer of this” (3.4.84). Sebastian, stunned by his good luck with Olivia, marvels about “this accident and flood of fortune” (4.3.11). And Feste concludes all with the comment, “And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges” (5.1.176).

Even for the temporarily resurrected, whether saint or twins, the certain end of Time is Death. We are reminded of death from the first to the final words of the play. While Saint Sebastian can look forward to a life hereafter, as you can see in his uplifted eyes, in Shakespeare’s world, there is no “hereafter,” as Feste constantly reminds us in his songs (2.3.47). Matters must be sorted out while the characters are still on earth. Morose Orsino likes the music because it has “a dying fall” (1.1.4). Feste reminds would-be lovers that “youth’s a stuff will not endure” (2.3.52). The fools “keep time” by enjoying the present moment with singing and dancing (2.3.93). Viola/Sebastian and Orsino rue the fact that women are like “roses, whose fair

flower / Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour. / And so they are. Alas that they are so, / To die even when they to perfection grow!" (2.4.30-41). Feste, sings a whole song that starts "Come away, come away, death" (2.4.51ff). Olivia, deciding to smile again says, "The clock upbrades me with the waste of time" (3.1.130). Urgency and fear of real and immediate "pangs of death" pervade the otherwise comical sword fighting scene (3.4.240-241). The soldiers, unimpressed with Antonio's professed love of Sebastian, say "What's this to us? The time goes by. Away!" (3.4.366). Viola/Sebastian, knowing Orsino intends to murder her, speaks: "And I, most jocund, apt and willingly, / To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die" (5.1.130-131). Our final reminder in the narrative that life grows out of death is that the elder Sebastian, the twins' father, "died" when they turned thirteen (5.1.244). And our good-bye from Feste sends us out of the world of the play with the message that life is a cycle, and the world is old.

Renaissance images of St. Sebastian depict him as denuded of his dress as a Roman soldier. Although he was a real soldier, he used his uniform as a disguise to convert people to Christianity. His old clothes lie at his naked feet like a peeled-off skin. Indeed, the Romans were not averse to really skinning people alive – see St. Bartholomew. Images, disguises, the role of imagination and fancy in interpreting them, and the need for proof are key elements of *Twelfth Night*. Saint Sebastian does not need imagination or fancy. He has faith. Saint Sebastian does not need proof. He knows God's love and truth with spiritual understanding. But the characters in Shakespeare's play run around in a confused flurry of disguises, pictures, and seemings. They employ imagination and fancy to explain these images according to their own desires, and they are desperate for proof of whatever truth they desire. The play begins with Viola saying "Conceal me what I am," as she takes on the "disguise" of her brother Sebastian (1.2.52-53). And the play concludes with all disguises shed and a traditional, fairy-tale, three-fold proof of the truth that the twins are brother and sister: 1- their father's name and country, 2- their father's mole, 3- their father's death date (5.1.244-45). In between, we have many instances of false images, wishful imaginings, and the need for proof. First, there is Feste's claim that he is not what he seems and his offer to prove Olivia the real fool: "I wear not motley in my brain. Good Madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool" (1.5.53-55). Olivia's beauty is unveiled before Viola/Sebastian (1.5.229ff), with which she is remonstrated in visual terms, "you are the cruel'st she alive / If you will lead these graces to the grave / And leave the world no copy" (2.5.236-238). Viola/Sebastian refers to herself as "a blank" and reminds Orsino that men "prove" much in their vows but little in their love (2.4.110-118). Who can ever forget the outrageous disguise Malvolio dons (yellow stockings, cross-gartered) when his imagination rather torturously succeeds in convincing him of her love for him? Maria's false letter has urged him to "Cast off thy humble slough and appear fresh" (2.5.146). Feste is loath to "prove reason with words" (3.1.24-25) Olivia wishes Orsino's mental pictures of her were "blanks" (3.1.104). Viola protests to Olivia that pity is "a vulgar proof" of love (3.1.124). Olivia give Viola/Sebastian a locket, since the youth refuses the real thing "Tis my picture. / Refuse it not; it hath no tongue to vex you" (3.4.210-211). Antonio bemoans Viola/Sebastian's failure to recognize him, which he misconstrues as abandonment of proffered love: "and to his image, which methought did promise / Most venerable worth, did I devotion" (3.4.364-365), followed by "Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame" (3.4.368). Viola/Sebastian, upon hearing her brother's name mentioned, whispers to herself, "Prove true, imagination, O, prove true" (3.4.377), and says her brother's image is "yet living in my glass" (3.4.382). When Olivia mistakes Sebastian for Viola/Sebastian and urges her love on him, he says in an aside, "Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep; / If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep" (4.1.61-62). Then there is Feste's disguise as the curate in his hysterical riff with himself in 4.2, with Malvolio as unwilling, imprisoned audience. Viola refers

to her “masculine usurped attire” (5.1.250), to which her brother replies, “yet the glass seems true” (5.1.265). Finally, imagination and reality are aligned when Viola truly becomes “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen” (5.1.388).

The eroticism of the Saint Sebastian depictions is not a projection backwards from our day. Such Renaissance luminaries as Vasari commented on the phenomenon, worrying that the images would arouse inappropriate feelings in onlookers. The fact that Sebastian is being penetrated by men, lends to the eroticism of his pose, his nakedness, his beauty, his youth, his feminization, and his vulnerability, a homosexual overtone. Further, the relationship between the love of close male friendship, the care-taking love of an older man toward a younger, and the romantic/sexual love between two men is at least as old as *The Iliad* (possibly even *Gilgamesh*), and was firmly entrenched in the Western psyche by the time of Socrates and his Phaedrus. In Shakespeare, this relationship is most fully explored in *The Merchant of Venice* with Antonio and (Se)Bassanio, a play that also features literal bondage, penetration with sharp objects, cross-dressing, purses, bonds, rings, proofs, pictures, the relationship of Will and Fate, the importance of words, music, and the restoration of order through love. But the male-male relationship is also explored in our play, between Antonio and Sebastian. In this play, too, Antonio loses out to a woman, and is left alone in the end (along with the wise fool, Shylock/Feste), as all the happy heterosexual lovers pair up.

It is worth reminding people that all female parts were played, in Shakespeare’s day, by young boys. So the Viola actor is a young boy, playing a girl, in disguise as a young boy. And Olivia is a young boy playing a young woman. I doubt that this situation was as interesting to Shakespeare’s audience as it is to us, because that’s just the way it was – a convention. Still, the sex and gender confusions and illusions on the stage are augmented by the behind-the-scenes realities. All the love scenes between Olivia and Viola/Sebastian have homo-erotic undertones, because Viola/Sebastian is a girl and Olivia falls in love with her. All the scenes between Orsino and Viola/Sebastian are charged with homo-eroticism because she really does love him, yet she is a boy. In the Trevor Nunn version of the play, one scene takes place in a bath as Viola/Sebastian has to wash the naked Orsino’s back. All four of the scenes between Antonio and Sebastian are heart-rendingly homo-erotic because the older man loves the boy who is apparently oblivious to the depth of that love. Antonio reminds us that, like Irene with the saint, he resurrected Sebastian from death. Sebastian says he wants to bear his evils alone because to lay any of them on Antonio would be “a bad recompense for your love” (2.1.6-7). To which Antonio protests, “If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant” (2.1.33-34), and follows this with “I do adore thee so” (2.1.45). Act 3 scene 3 seems like one long, not-so subtle innuendo. Antonio sends Sebastian to an inn called The Elephant (a clearly phallic animal) and says “there shall you have me” (43). He gives Sebastian his purse in case the boy’s “eye shall light upon some toy / You desire to purchase” (44-45). And, as mentioned, he makes phallic reference to his “desire / More sharp than filed steel” (4-5). In Act 3 scene 4 Antonio again, and publicly, declares his “love” (316), and proclaims that “out of the jaws of death, / [I] Relieved him with... sanctity of love” (362-363). Lastly, In the final scene (5.1) Antonio reiterates, publicly, that “his life I gave him, and did thereto / Add my love, without retention or restraint, / All his in dedication. For his sake / Did I expose myself – pure for his love - / Into the danger of this adverse town (76-80). He follows this with his final and telling revelation of love – at least from his perspective, that he and Sebastian had been together “for three months before, / No interim, not a minute’s vacancy, / Both day and night did we keep company” (91-93).

Through all this, Viola/Sebastian functions as the contrapuntal figure in a narrative abounding with male-male love, female-female love, and female-male love. The ambiguity

towards sexuality is underscored, as the entire narrative ends on a homo-erotic note. Orsino and Viola/Sebastian, still dressed as a man, vow marriage and exit hand in hand.

I want to conclude with thoughts about the medium: in the Saint's case visual art (paint), in Shakespeare's case dramatic art (words, staging, and music). Every work of art does, in some way, inescapably reference the medium in which it is created. The Saint's portrayals use color, line, composition, form, to tell a story that features, not just the Saint, but the artist's choices about color, line, composition and form. I would go farther, given my subject, to suggest that the medium is not the message, but is the artist's contrapposto: the sum of the artist's constant moments of reflection, always poised between the past of the idea, the present of his engagement with that idea, and the future of our engagement with his entire work; the sum of the artist's soliloquies about how to proceed – to create shifting perspectives on the body of the work; the sum of the artist's asides – pointing out to us conflicting tensions in the response of the natural and human worlds to the main matter; the artist's external manifestation of an internal psychological and emotional condition; the sum of the artist's perpetual posture between contemplation and movement, understanding and action. Consider the contrast of textures of (marble and skin) in Cosme Tura's painting (1470s). Consider Remi's choice in one of his nine St. Sebastian paintings, to offset the saint to the far left in stark white against the almost black foliage, with fading light in the distance – his gaze cast even farther left, out of the frame, as if he has already escaped the boundaries of this world. Consider Perugino's 1490 image with its thrusting, sturdy verticalities contrasted with the soft lines of the saint's body and the undulating green hills. Consider da Messina's version (1474-76). The context is an ordinary, wealthy Italian city, shown in the mathematical perspective so popular at the time, with oriental carpets draped over balconies, matrons holding conversations, merchants discussing business, a sleeping beggar, a window box overflowing with plants. Front and center of this common scene, very much foregrounded, and most improbably, a tree grows out of the piazza stone, with a huge, naked, punctured, wistful Saint Sebastian martyred upon it – and no-one pays any attention! Consider Albrecht Dürer's altar (1509-1516), in which he uses the color green somewhat ambiguously. Flourishing, towering green trees frame the background, where citizens watch the proceedings from a bridge. The principle archer's striking green leg is thrust forward into the action, as he is braced to let fly a mortal arrow. But dark green weeds sprout from between the cracked, ruined tiles on the ground. I do not know what these greens mean, but they are a clear artistic choice. I could go on, but let me turn to the play.

I will glance at staging, music, and especially language. A painting has only one artist/creator behind it. A play has many: the playwright, director, costume and set designers, actors. Because Shakespeare leaves few stage directions, directors must make many staging choices. *Twelfth Night* has been staged in the Italian Renaissance (when it takes place – yet another connection with the visual saint), in the England of its playing, in an existential Waiting-for-Godot like world, in a leather homo-erotic sadomasochistic world, in Edwardian, Victorian, Military and many other worlds. Each of these choices encourages a shift in perspective on the central contrapposto figure of Viola/Sebastian and her story. Some things, however, seem constant to the vision of the original artist himself, Shakespeare. Like St. Sebastian with his arrows, Viola/Sebastian never goes anywhere without her sword. Thus do we know her. The weapon is her public proof that she is a he – the outward phallic counter to her hidden maidenhead. Also, Viola/Sebastian and Sebastian are always costumed exactly alike, and cast to look exactly alike, with exactly alike hairdos, mustaches, and all other details. The two are one. Like contrapposto, they are asymmetrically symmetrical – identical twins, but male and female.

One bit of staging that Shakespeare does not leave to directorial choice is the continuous presence of music.

Twelfth Night begins, ends, and is sustained, by music – somber, riotous, romantic, and philosophical music. Feste, the fool, is the multi-dexterous musician. Music does not move the action forward, but is the soundtrack to the narrative – the palette with which Shakespeare illuminates and comments upon, in authorial aside, the actors and their actions. Music leads the imagination through and around the story in ever-shifting perspective. As surely as de la Tour (Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene, 1639) shades his palette from the brilliant light of flame and what it immediately illuminates, to the red of Irene's dress, to the dark, mysterious shadows of the background and the brown earth tone into which Saint Sebastian's body seems already to be fading, so Shakespeare uses music to shift his tone from light to dark, from clarity to ambiguity, from humor to tragedy, and, in the end, from the world of the play to our world.

The first stage note reads, "Enter Orsino... [with musicians]," and the first line reminds us that music is "the food of love" (1.1.1). Viola/Sebastian knows that her path to Orsino will be through music: "I can sing / And speak to him in many sorts of music" (1.2.57-58). Feste unites music and love in his first song, "A love song, a love song" (2.3.37ff). Music, like the plague of love, is described by sirs Toby and Andrew as "A contagious breath. / Very sweet and contagious, i' faith. / To hear by the nose, it is dulcet in contagion" (2.3.54-56). Malvolio, like the Satan of England's medieval morality plays (who could not sing because he was out of tune with the universe) is described as "Out o' tune" (2.3.113). Music is medicinal for Orsino: it does "relieve my passions much" (2.4.4). And for Viola/Sebastian, music is "the very echo to the seat / Where love is throned" (2.4.21-22). Olivia describes Orsino's discordant suit as "howling after music" (5.1.7). Finally, throughout the play, the vulgar, romping, delightful, drunken music of the clowns is contrasted with the perfect music of love, "the music from the spheres" (3.1.109). Perhaps this is the music, the perfect harmony of God's love, that the painted Saint Sebastian hears, and that causes him to lift his face and gaze heavenward.

The renaissance painters illuminate their passive contrapposto Sebastians with their brushes. If music is Shakespeare's palette, language is the brush with which he paints his active contrapposto figure, Viola/Sebastian. *Twelfth Night* is rife with words that either can mean several things, thus obfuscating meaning, and words that deliberately hide meaning, when it is the normal function of words to reveal and clarify meaning. The puns, innuendos, letters (real and fake), messages (real and fake), and misinformation that abound in the play contribute not only to the humor but to the confusion of character identity and narrative action. Thus the language itself becomes yet another disguise. No-one and nothing are what they seem, until the end, when, as with St. Sebastian's Roman garments, the false language falls away revealing the alignment of naked truth and linguistic transparency.

To parse the linguistic complexities of the whole play would be tedious, so let me just cite a few highlights. Olivia and Feste play with the concept of "fool" for over sixty lines, during which the fool proves the wise lady a fool, and claims of himself, "I wear not motley in my brain" (1.5.53-54). Beginning in 1.5.164, Olivia and Viola/Sebastian have a scene that is one long riff on the concept of "text," both physical and philological, which includes the literal unveiling of Olivia and the Viola/Sebastian's linguistically veiled comment, "What I am and what I would are as secret as maidenhead" (1.5.210-211). The trap that is laid for Malvolio is sprung with a fake epistle brilliantly crafted by Maria. Viola/Sebastian and Feste have a wonderful exchange on the word "by" during which Feste says, "A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward." Viola snaps back, "They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton." And Feste responds,

“Words are grown so false I am loathe to prove reason with them.” Then he says of his relationship to Olivia, “I am indeed not her fool but her corrupter of words” (3.1.1-36). The “excellently ignorant” (3.4.190) Sir Andrew’s ill-written challenge to Viola/Sebastian is rewritten by Sir Toby to accomplish his mischievous goal. Finally, after all the linguistic confusions are sorted out, the play concludes with a pun on the word “wreck.” *Twelfth Night* begins and ends with a wreck. In Shakespeare’s time, wreck had two meanings. A wreck was a ruin, a disaster, a situation in which things are rent asunder, as in the initial shipwreck when the twins are separated. But wreck was also that stuff which is washed ashore by the sea. The twins are the goods cast onto Illyria’s shore, and they are the happy cargo washed up by Fate and Time to be reunited in the end on the shores of love. Thus Orsino says, “I shall have share in this most happy wreck” (5.1.273).

The storm that shipwrecked Viola/Sebastian and Sebastian upon the hidden rocks that lie beneath all of our life journeys, and blew them both, separately, to shore in Illyria (as witnessed by Feste the fool and Shakespeare the playwright), is the storm of chance that blows us all to the shores on which we must discover, act out, and realize our own selves. Although chance, fate, God, or “What you will,” has much to do with resolution of the conflicts of our identities and loves, and although death comes to all, that resolution also is much affected by the persona, choices, virtues, and bearing we take upon ourselves – our contrapposto, if you “will,” our moments of reflection, with one foot always resting in the past and one always poised to move into the future. And, because, in *Twelfth Night* at least, life is a comedy, “the wind and the rain” may follow us from birth to death, but there is much merriment and love to be experienced along the way. And we can rejoice with Sir Toby when he exults, “Is it a world to hide virtues in?” (1.2.128).

Thus does Shakespeare transform the sorrowful, passive, visual contrapposto of the renaissance St. Sebastian, with his love of God, to the active, dramatic, linguistic contrapposto of Viola/Sebastian, with her/his love of Orsino. Whether through the senses and language or through faith, both Sebastians (the feminized male and the masculinized female) move from a situation in which “nothing that is so is so” (4.1.8) to “proof” of a higher reality (5.1.330) – or at least to what I have called an asymmetrical symmetry, a balance. And in the chiaroscuro of both worlds, Truth and Love prevail. As Feste, the fool, says, “There is no darkness / But ignorance” (4.2.43-44).

Future generations of artists, beginning especially in the 19th century, have identified strongly with both the Italian Renaissance Saint and Shakespeare’s several treatments of the Sebastian theme in his comedies. I hope to open, in this paper, a dialogue about the history and evolution of these artists’s portrayals. In literature: Melville, Waugh, Wilde, Mann, Hemingway, O’Conner. In music: Debussy. In art: Redon, Moreau, and a very long list of others. In photography: Holland Day. In film: Derek Jarman’s *Sebastiane* and Richard Burton’s version of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, in which a life-sized statue of the naked Saint stands, in contrapposto, in Faustus’s study under a crucifix, and speaks, throughout the film, to the conflicted Doctor in the voice of The Good Angel (always with Christ in the background).

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