

ASF Study Materials for



Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

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Characters

In Illyria:

Duke Orsino, ruler of Illyria

Valentine } attendants
Curio } to Orsino

Olivia, a countess

Maria, her gentlewoman

Malvolio, Olivia's steward

Feste, a professional fool

Fabian, Olivia's servant

Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's
kinsman

Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a
foolish wooer of Olivia

A priest

From the sea:

Viola, a shipwrecked
gentlewoman, later
disguised as Cesario

Sebastian, her twin brother,
also shipwrecked

Antonio, a merchant-sailor who
saves Sebastian

A Sea Captain, who saves
Viola

Setting: Illyria

(in the Renaissance, Illyria was the region we know as the former Yugoslavia; Shakespeare may imply a more imaginary/fantasy realm)

Welcome to *Twelfth Night*

Shakespeare usually lets the subplot provide a key image for the action of his plays, and that is certainly true for *Twelfth Night*. With Sir Toby typecast as a Lord of Misrule, revelry rules the house, much as Malvolio tries to stem the tide of booze. Instead, that tide carries even the staunch steward to heights (or depths) of giddy aspiration in the name of love, enticed by a drunken prank and his own egotistic fantasy. So what is the image for love in this play—without doubt, it's intoxication! Love is the bubbly; it packs a punch; it can send you silly or sobbing; and the recovery can be a sobering surprise.

Shakespeare knows everyone loves a party, and no one throws a party like he does. In fact, the title itself tells us to expect a wild and raucous Mardi Gras-style entertainment, and the play certainly lives up to its billing. Widely considered to be the last and perhaps the greatest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, the Bard looks at love one more time and at the glorious foolishness of being in its clutches. Both his wit and his wisdom abound in *Twelfth Night*—that state of intoxicating confusion through which true love eventually finds its way.

"There's something in 't
That is deceivable."

—Sebastian, 4.3

Contents of this Study Guide

Information that can be adapted to any grade level includes:

- structure, plus an act-by-act analysis
- the play's themes, characters, and imagery
- the cultural/historical context of ideas
- courtly love rhetoric and comparable Renaissance sonnets/poetry
- relevant Renaissance theatre practices
- discussion topics and activities (in blue)

Display and Hooking the Prey



Order becomes disordered by dreams of love in both the main plot and subplot of the play. Here the subplot characters scheme and spy to skewer Malvolio's pride with a fake love letter in H. C. Selous's 1830s illustration.

How the Comedy Works

Shakespeare's comedies begin in crisis, the traditional comic "separation," and work through increasing complications and love trials until they reach the reunion, reconciliation, or resolution that ends a comedy.

Twelfth Night opens with unrequited love—always a problem in a romantic plot—and a shipwreck in which Viola believes she lost her twin brother, Sebastian. Such an opening seems more tragic than comic, but once we learn Sebastian is alive and mourning his drowned twin sister, comic resolution becomes possible, especially to resolve the love triangle beset with mistaken identity that has developed in Illyria.

The comic subplot reflects the giddy and impulsive emotion of love in the main plot with its own booze-driven gratifications, more focused on indulgence and revenge than loving resolution.

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Olivia in mourning (above)
and (below) Maria chastizes Sir
Toby for his late night indulgence
(both by Sir John Gilbert)

"I am sure care's an
enemy to life."

—Sir Toby, 1.3



Twelfth Night Fact Sheet

Genre: Romantic comedy—
Shakespeare's last in this genre

Date of composition: circa 1600, just
after the move to the Globe, about the
same time as *Hamlet*

Sources: Several Renaissance Italian
comedies known as *Gl'Ingannati*
or *Gl'Inganni* [to deceive or trick]
are comparable to Shakespeare's
main plot confusions, and the
preface to one includes a Malevolti.
Shakespeare also likely knew the
adapted tale of "Apollonius and
Silla," comparable to the main plot
but which includes a pregnancy and
abandonment that he excludes.

Length: With slightly over 2400 lines, it
is the fourth shortest comedy in the
canon. The play is 61% prose and
39% verse—only *Merry Wives* and
Much Ado have a higher percentage
of prose.

Setting: Illyria, though sometimes called
a fantasy realm, was on the eastern
shore of the Adriatic Sea in the area of
the former Yugoslavia.

Longest roles in the play: Sir Toby,
Viola, and Feste

Words and Imagery:

- courtly love imagery: *disease*: Orsino
in 1.1 is *lovesick*, and when Olivia in
1.5 realizes she loves Cesario, she
asks "even so quickly may one catch
the *plague*?"

- the hunt*: In 1.1 Orsino uses the
common Petrarchan image of hunting
the hart, that is, the [beloved's] *heart*.

- flowers*: usually used to describe the
beloved's beauty, Orsino in 1.1 leaves
to seek a "bed of *violets*"; he will
eventually marry *Viola*. His imagery is
far more conventionally Petrarchan
than Viola's more individual and
heartfelt imagery for love.

Plot: In Illyria, Duke Orsino loves
the Countess Olivia, who has pledged to
mourn the recent deaths of her father and
brother for seven years. On the shore of
Illyria appears Viola, survivor of a shipwreck
which claimed her twin brother. Needing a
refuge, she disguises herself as a boy to
become a page, Cesario, at Orsino's court.
She promptly falls in love with him—only
to have him send her to woo Olivia for
him. Olivia hears her impassioned plea for
Orsino and immediately falls in love with
the young page.

Also wooing Olivia is Sir Andrew
Aguecheek under the inebriated guidance
of Olivia's kinsman, Sir Toby Belch, who is
bilking him of money. When their partying is
chastized by the steward Malvolio, they and
the gentlewoman Maria conceive a practical
joke to convince Malvolio that Olivia loves
him, which is actually his secret fantasy.
He falls for their fake letter and obeys it,
appearing to Olivia smiling and wearing
yellow stockings. Maria says he's mad and
Olivia, beset by her own love mania, leaves
them to deal with him. They do—by locking
Malvolio up as a madman.

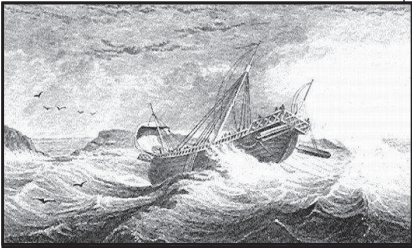
Then Sebastian, Viola's undrowned
twin brother, appears in Illyria and is
mistaken for Cesario by the brawling Sir
Andrew and Sir Toby and later by Olivia,
to whom he becomes betrothed. When
Orsino and Cesario appear at Olivia's
house, revelations and reunions abound.

Things to watch for in production:

- the twinning
- the mood of Illyria (for instance, which
song seems to be the "theme song"—
the carpe diem "O mistress mine," one
of the drinking songs, or the last song,
"When that I was and a little tiny boy"
with its refrain of "The rain it raineth
every day"?)
- the tone of the subplot—innocent fun or
a bit more malicious?

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Details to Consider

- Compare how Orsino begins 1.1 and how he ends it. How does he take Olivia's "no"?
- Viola does not immediately disguise herself; what does she really seek? why does she think a disguise will afford her that?
- Is Sir Toby just a fun-loving guy or is he a mischief maker? Is he really Sir Andrew's friend? Does he listen to Maria's counsel?
- Compare Sir Toby's witty puns at the top of 1.3 to Sir Andrew's ineptness with words.
- Why does Orsino think Cesario, his new page, will be the perfect emissary to woo Olivia for him?
- What has Viola seen in Orsino that has prompted her to fall in love with him? Do we understand it? Is it a positive sign or a sign of her vulnerability?
- Maria warns Feste, too. If she is protective, of what? How does she negotiate her loyalty and duty to Olivia and her affection for Toby?
- Exactly how do Feste and Malvolio get into their showdown? How are Feste's objections to Malvolio different from Sir Toby's?
- Exactly how and when does Olivia stop dismissing words from Orsino and start listening to Cesario? What happens to her response?

Studying the Play: Act One—Impulse

The five scenes of Act One introduce the major characters and hurl the action into complication and adversity. What more could one ask of an opening?

- a young man in love but unrequited
- a shipwreck stranding a young woman and apparently drowning her twin brother
- an inveterate drinker, the countess's kinsman, who is bilking an inept wooer
- the young woman, now disguised as a young page, falls in love with the duke s/he serves, who sends her to woo the woman he loves
- the steward and the returned fool snipe at each other; then the countess finds herself not only listening to the page but falling in love with him

Orsino/ 1.1 and 1.4

It's romantic comedy, so we meet a young man in love, fairly wallowing in its agony and the effort to get a response from his beloved. Because he is the local duke and she the local countess, this looks like the match their fathers would have made—but there are no fathers in this play, no traditional parental figure to block the yearnings of the young. Comedy insists that the yearnings meet a challenge, so Shakespeare uses basic romantic geometry—the triangle—which by the end of 1.5 is complete and the comedy fully underway amid this snarl.

Orsino's unrequited love—or his hobby of sending messengers to Olivia, depending on your view of his passion's earnestness—affects his entire behavior. "Will you go hunt, my lord?" offers him what we assume is a usual activity, but he filters it through his role as lover. In production terms, Orsino can seem languid, indulgent, playing at love imagery; the challenge is to keep him active enough to be worthy of Viola in the long term. Is emotional pining Orsino's usual behavior or something unusual? By 5.1 he's active.

He also strikes up a deepening mentorship/ friendship with his new page, Cesario.

Viola/ 1.2 and 1.4

Viola is beset, and that largely describes her character through the entire play. She begins by surviving a shipwreck, and "shipwreck" also describes the love complications she is about to encounter in Illyria. In a strange country and grief-stricken by her brother's death, she wants to find refuge; when she apparently cannot do it with Olivia (ironically), she finds refuge in disguise—a decision comparable to Olivia's swearing off the world for seven years. Viola tries

to disengage but, like Olivia, only finds herself thrown back into emotional life. Shakespeare puts the "stinger" at the end of 1.4. We meet Viola in her new guise as Cesario and watch her receive her first task, wooing Olivia for Orsino; then on leaving she has that aside, "myself would be his wife," and the second side of the triangle snaps into place.

Sir Toby and the subplot/ 1.3

Time to start the subplot, which means dealing with inebriation. Maria is a voice of order, "You must come in earlier o' nights," but Sir Toby's self-indulgence refuses limits, especially when he can get Sir Andrew to pay for the booze. That response sets the tone and goal for the subplot—no limits! Party on! Until the party's over... and it seems to be ending now when Sir Andrew says he'll leave, but Sir Toby talks him out of it. How many things does Sir Toby talk Sir Andrew into or out of during this play, overriding Andrew's fledgling good sense with Toby's unbridled appetites?

Feste and Malvolio/ 1.5

The first half of 1.5 may introduce us to Olivia, but it actually focuses on the subplot by introducing two more key players in that action, Feste and Malvolio, whose values are utterly opposed. Feste's first action with Olivia is to call her on her emotional trap and start to remedy it by labeling *her* the fool for grieving her brother's soul being in heaven. When Malvolio, who enjoys the sobriety of Olivia's grief, belittles Feste, the conflict ignites; this showdown will end the play as Feste repeats Malvolio's words from 1.5. We also see how Sir Toby is barely tolerated in this household, despite his feeling of invulnerability.

Olivia/ 1.5

Because we know Cesario is on "his" way to Olivia's, we spend the first part of the scene waiting for "him" to arrive. When Cesario enters, we get to know Olivia much better and to feel Viola's passion for Orsino working underneath her duty. Olivia starts to listen and becomes engaged by the page's words; she finds it hard to let him go. She suddenly decides to become a wooer herself, seizing an active role to pursue her new emotion, and the last side of the triangle falls in place. Now we have a genuine love challenge.

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"Dost thou think,
because thou art virtuous,
there shall be no more
cakes and ale?"

—Sir Toby, 2.3

The Play's Timeline

Try to establish the play's timeline. From the shipwreck to the ending is three months, we are told. When does the time pass? Which scenes are close to the shipwreck; which are near the end of the time passage? How do you know?

Studying the Play: Acts Two and Three—Opportunity

If 1.5 creates a triangle, 2.1 immediately turns it into a potential rectangle and completes the stemming of grief that 1.5 began. Sebastian is alive—and once we have as many young men as women, there is hope for a happy ending and we can enjoy the comic confusions along the way:

- a young man grieves for his lost twin sister and sets off for Orsino's (just as Viola had)
- Viola realizes from the ring that Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario
- Malvolio scolds the party people, who plan a trick to humiliate him and it works perfectly
- Cesario tells Orsino of her "sister's" love
- Sebastian begins to explore Illyria (but to protect Antonio he does not go to Orsino's)
- Maria tells Olivia that cross-gartered Malvolio seems crazy, and Olivia believes it when she sees him; the tricksters decide to lock up Malvolio as a madman
- Toby convinces Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario to a duel, but Antonio intervenes, calling Cesario "Sebastian"

Details to Consider

- **Interstitching:** These two acts are a good place to watch Shakespeare's interstitching—the way he connects scene to scene. Scene 1.5 ends with Olivia falling for Cesario and urging, "Fate, show thy force." One line later as 2.1 begins, Sebastian walks in, a dead ringer for Cesario—quick-working Fate indeed. That scene ends with a pursuit based in friendship, and 2.2 begins with Malvolio's pursuit of Cesario with the ring, based in Olivia's sudden love. Now Viola beseeches not Fate, but Time, to untangle the knots, which the subsequent three acts will do. The next two scenes begin with a desire for music and then set the trick on Malvolio and send Cesario to Olivia once again. Once we watch Malvolio "decode" or "deconstruct" the letter to his advantage in 2.5, we appreciate Feste's early comment in 3.1, "How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!" That scene ends with Cesario's leavetaking, and the next scene opens with Sir Andrew leaving again, which Sir Toby diverts into a challenge that will threaten Viola but be perfect for Sebastian.
- Compare Sir Toby's 2.3 urge to keep partying to Malvolio's 2.5 ambition and his urge to keep dreaming of Olivia. How does the play feed their desires?
- Compare the friendship of Sir Toby with Sir Andrew in 3.2 (as Sir Toby brags of how much money he has bilked from him) with the friendship between Antonio and Sebastian in 3.3.
- Scene 3.4 is a swinging door scene; almost every character plays a part by twos and threes as people enter and exit. We can compare the 3.2 scene between Olivia and Cesario with this one and notice that Olivia finds herself in two different kinds of love scene in 3.4, one with Malvolio where she is wooed unawares, and one with Cesario, where she woos. Cesario, beset by Olivia, is then beset by Sir Andrew (supposedly).
- The name "Sebastian" ends the act for Viola, and Sebastian himself opens Act 4.



The imbibing midnight revelers taunt and tease Malvolio as he tries to maintain order and quiet in the household (Sir John Gilbert)

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"One face, one voice,
one habit, and two
persons,
A natural perspective,
that is and is not."

—Orsino, 5.1

Studying the Play: Acts Four and Five—Revelations

Act Four opens with everyone at Olivia's meeting Sebastian instead of Cesario, and the tangle that Viola's disguise has caused snarls into a new knot, but one that holds more promise for the ending. Sebastian asks if he is mad just before we meet Malvolio locked away for being mad, then Sebastian, deciding he's not mad, opens 4.3. Since 4.3 ends with an imminent betrothal, 5.1 must bring the action to its eye-opening conclusion.

The last scene deals with many subsets of characters—Orsino and Olivia, arrested Antonio, the priest, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, Sebastian and Viola, and lastly Malvolio confronting Olivia, then Feste. While most of the suitors are excluded from the marital joy of the conclusion, Malvolio is humiliated in public. But so is Orsino, for a time, when Olivia says she has married Cesario. The happy ending comes after repeated bursts of emotional distress for the principals and for Malvolio and Sir Andrew, so we feel the pull of reality as well as the bubble of bliss.

Details to Watch

- Act 4 begins to end the plot's jokes because of Sebastian's presence with Olivia and her displeasure with her cousin Toby, which limits how far he is willing to torment Malvolio. How does the action start to spin out of control and how does it begin to spin back toward control and order in Act 4?
- Note that Feste opens 5.1 by claiming he is "better for my foes and the worse for my friends" because "[my friends] praise me, and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass...." How do the friendships in the play work out in Act 5 and how many fit Feste's claim?
- Feste then tries to beg a second coin by talking of "double-dealing." How does this image fit with Shakespeare's "double-dealing" in the play, the twins getting closer to reunion?
- Impossible truths—Orsino hears Antonio's claim to have spent the past three months with Cesario and then senses Olivia's obvious preference for Cesario. Olivia hears Cesario, her betrothed, pledge loyalty to Orsino. Everyone is in an emotional tizzy, all centered on Cesario. Sir Andrew adds to the confusion by saying Cesario just struck him and Sir Toby, so that Olivia asks, "Who hath made this havoc with them?" Into this whirlwind steps Sebastian, the moment we've been waiting for since 2.1.
- Antonio intuitively expresses the truth without realizing it: "An apple cleft in two is not more **twin** / Than these two creatures."
- Feste has had Malvolio's letter all day and only now delivers it.
- Malvolio was suckered by a letter; now he writes his own letter to Olivia, in which he chastizes her for neglect and inducing his recent behavior: "I leave my duty a little unthought of, and speak out of my injury." How many people have spoken so in the course of this and recent scenes?
- Maria's trick letter reveals more "double-dealing," her writing being a "twin" to Olivia's, as Malvolio learns. Everyone is part of the play's "double-dealing."
- Is Malvolio the only one irked enough to threaten revenge in 5.1? How much vengeful impulse has the play had? What comes of it now?
- How should we interpret Feste's last song? What does it say about the play and us?

The confusions and deceptions in the plot lines set up a series of "oops" moments near the end—here Sir Andrew meets Sebastian, not Cesario: oops!



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Above, "Phiz" Browne's version of a real 19th-century Twelfth Night party.

"Many of the existing customs—such as the wassailing of apple trees and the revelries associated with Twelfth Night—were blatantly raucous and ribald. Villagers let their hair down, got blind drunk, and threatened temporary social disorder. Men dressed up as women and women as men; fools were made kings."

—*Christmas Past*
(1988)

Why It's Called "Twelfth Night" and What That Tells Us

The title offers the central metaphor for the play's action and themes. Twelfth Night refers to the last night of the traditional Twelve Days of Christmas, January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, the time the three wise men arrived in Bethlehem. In England, this holiday was associated with drinking, noise, revelry, feasting, dancing, cross-dressing, and topsy-turvy authority governed by a Lord of Misrule.

For over a thousand years, this celebration was a communal event when the entire estate—lord, lady, and servant, both gentry and commons—gathered in midwinter to party. Only the combined influence of Puritan Oliver Cromwell,

who in 1652 declared Christmas celebrations illegal and impious, and the Industrial Revolution, which shifted much of the rural population to the cities, managed to supplant the festivity. The Christmas tradition nearly died out until Charles Dickens popularized a milder domestic celebration dedicated to family and concern for the poor in *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

So the title highlights important themes and, in fact, the entire mood of frivolity and holiday so essential to the play. The play's subtitle, "What You Will," provides more permission to indulge in romance, given the Renaissance association of the subtitle's *will* with sexual urges, which also tells us something about the impulses in the play. In spirit, the title is much like the titles of his previous two romantic comedies, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, suggestively upbeat.

A History of Christmas Celebration

Christmas Emerges

- **2nd century:** despite the fact that it overlapped with the wild Roman new year festival, Saturnalia, church fathers proclaim Christmas a holy day
- **597:** Pope Gregory sends a missionary team led by St. Augustine of Canterbury, as he was later known, to convert the Anglo-Saxons, in part by making their local winter feast a Christian festival. This action incorporated Yule, the Saxon feast for the return of the Sun (which involved burning a huge log), into Christmas celebrations and gave a holiday role to holly (used in pagan divination), mistletoe (which the Druids believed had mystical and medicinal qualities), and evergreens
- **878:** Alfred the Great orders the full twelve days of Christmas to be celebrated throughout England

Celebrating Christmas in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

- **1170:** Henry II welcomes the season with plays, masques, and spectacles; the clergy promotes instruction and entertainment with spiritually focused plays
- **13th century:** Henry III establishes the custom of giving food to the poor during the Twelve Days of Christmas. He also extends the court feasting, a customary royal extravagance; he has 600 oxen slaughtered for a holiday banquet

The Puritan Reaction

- **16th/17th century:** Puritans attack the customs for celebrating Christmas as pagan superstitions and consider the "Saturnalian" traditions blasphemous
- **1647:** Puritan-dominated Parliament ordains that Christmas may not be celebrated with the other holy days
- **1652:** Parliament declares "no observance shall be had of the five and twentieth day of December, commonly called Christmas day; nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon that day in respect thereof"
- **1660:** with the restoration of Charles II to the throne, some old traditions return; through the 18th and early 19th centuries, however, increasing urbanization prevents the rural holidays from regaining their former place
- **1843:** Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* published
- **late 20th century:** stores begin opening on Christmas Day for after-Christmas sales

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Teaching the Play



Illustrations by Sir John Gilbert: Above, laughing at Sir Andrew's letter after setting him up to write it, and right, three versions of misrule in *Twelfth Night*—Feste, the knowing purveyor of wit, the fun that also shows "rule"; Sir Toby, the play's Lord of Misrule in his inebriated state, and his companion in drink and his dupe in all else, Sir Andrew.

The "Puritan" in the Play

Renaissance religious politics pits Puritan piety against traditional festivity, as can be seen at the climax of act 2, scene 3 of *Twelfth Night*:

Malvolio: My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?

Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night?...

Toby: Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?...

Maria (referring to Malvolio): Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan.

The Lord of Misrule and the Feast of Fools

Under the Tudor monarchs, the court and certain colleges at Oxford often appointed a special officer known as **the Lord of Misrule** to oversee the Christmas revels. He also held sway in the London law school at the Inns of Court until well into the 17th century. Usurping all other authority, he commanded games and entertainments and fostered mischief—"what you will." Most of his activity was based on an even older clerical tradition called the Feast of Fools.

The Feast of Fools was part of the New Year celebrations in cathedrals and churches across Europe during the Middle Ages when the lesser officials and minor clergy claimed the offices of their superiors and burlesqued their functions. A procession headed by a "king" on a donkey began the festivities, which extended into skits, satiric church services, and general mayhem. Such practices disappeared in the church during the 14th century and transferred to secular holiday traditions.



Misrule and Folly in the Play

In *Twelfth Night*, the subplot definitely usurps the main plot through the middle of the play, and misrule fittingly describes its antics. In a world beset by young love, loss, and intense emotion, Sir Toby cares only for drink, protesting that "care's an enemy to life." Olivia is too much in love to pay close attention to Toby's behavior, so the plot against Malvolio runs its full course, and so might the mock duel between Sir Andrew and Cesario did Antonio not interrupt, or Toby's assault on Sebastian before Olivia appears.

As we meet Sir Toby, he is protesting Maria's attempts to "confine" him "within the modest limits of order." At the moment, Sir Toby refuses to be confined, made modest, or ordered. By the end of the comedy he has agreed to marry Maria, an action which promises at last to bring some "modest limit" to his excesses. Until then, however, he abuses Sir Andrew's guileless gullibility, soaks the poor, hapless knight for money, and abuses him for his own amusement.

Toby is undoubtedly *Twelfth Night's* Lord of Misrule, but in a way so is Orsino. The duke lets the idea of love overrun his life; it takes him to excess just as drink does Sir Toby. He is far more benign than Toby, but in the last scene they both have run their emotions or scams to the limit, and both know a reckoning is in order. Orsino

takes the forthright approach and finally goes to see Olivia to protest his love; Toby shows Sir Andrew another side of his inebriation and, *in vino veritas*, a harsh, unvarnished truth.

As the play's fool, Feste might be considered the center of folly, but Feste is a professional, skilled in wordplay and wit, and is actually nobody's fool. A person of insight and judgment, a skilled mimic, and a hearty spirit, Feste is not one to meddle with, as Malvolio learns to his shame. Unlike the others, Feste controls his folly, marshals it like a weapon, uses it to heal, to entertain, or to barb.

The Puritan View

The Puritans reacted against the neo-Catholicism of the newly formed Anglican Church (Church of England) after the English Reformation in the 1530s. They wanted simpler, plainer religious observances, less pomp, and fewer icons, including plain glass rather than stained glass in churches. After 1642 Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) led the Puritan military and political forces to dominance over the crown and aristocracy for almost twenty years in the mid-seventeenth century and himself ruled England from 1649 (when Charles I was beheaded) until his own death in 1658.

The Structure of *Twelfth Night*

Main plot:	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.4	3.1	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.3	5.1
Subplot:			1.3	[1.5]			2.3	2.5	3.2	3.4	4.1	4.2	5.1

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Viola/Sebastian swap starts

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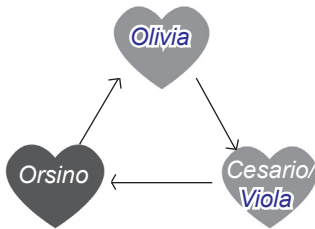
Teaching the Play

How Shakespeare Complicates the Love Plot

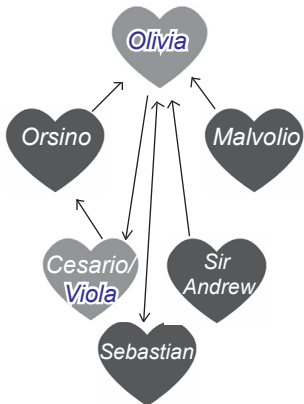
1)



2)



3)



“O spirit of Love, how quick and fresh art thou”

Love-Sick Orsino

Orsino opens the play with one of Shakespeare's oft-quoted phrases. He is in love. He is in an agony of emotion—for the onset of love turns us all into adolescents, regardless of age—and he is consequently unstable. He sets both the tone and the intensity level of feeling in this play, but he is far from the only lovesick character. [Watch how Orsino's kind of lovesickness seems to sweep like an epidemic through the action, or, to use the play's imagery, like madness or a binge.](#)

- Read Orsino's entire first sentence (ending with "and so die") to see how the initial phrase twists in meaning.
- Orsino describes his love in 1.4 as comprised of faith and woes and himself as best when solitary.
- In 2.4 he adds to his list of love traits being "unstead and skittish" in everything except affection and confesses that men's fancies are "more giddy and unfirm, / More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, / Than women's are." Yet he professes his own steadfastness to Olivia.
- Feste sings of unrequited love, "I am slain by a fair cruel maid," feeding Orsino's self-image, but also calls Orsino's mind "a very opal" of changeability.
- By 5.1 Orsino is driven to verbal extremes: his adoration of Olivia borders on the religious (or idolatrous), claiming that "My soul the faithful'st off'rings have breathed out / That e'er devotion tendered!" so that her denial of such fidelity renders her "marble-breasted" in his eyes; then his jealousy renders him murderous. Like Orlando in *As You Like It*, he has loved alone as long as he can, and now he can live no more by thinking—hence his trip to Olivia's house.

How the Love “Plague” Spreads

Watch how the love infection spreads: **Viola** catches it as soon as she joins Orsino's court, for she falls in love with him within three days.

- Wooing Olivia in Orsino's name, she uses comparable images of divinity for his "adorations," and mentions his groans and sighs
- She confesses to Feste in 3.1 that she is "almost sick" for a beard, "though I would not have it grow on my chin."
- When Orsino tries to paint a woman's love as weaker than his, she protests in near confession about her father's daughter and her silent love, "smiling at grief." They debate who can love more strongly, man or woman, and Viola gets the last word.
- Her 5.1 proclamation of love is again self-sacrificing, "I, ... to do you rest, a thousand deaths would die," and absolute, "more than I love these eyes, more than my life."

Olivia catches the sickness from Viola in 1.5, as she recognizes: "Even so quickly may one catch the *plague*?"

- She feels herself in the hands of Fate, as Sebastian does in the opening of the next scene, 2.1, and Viola in the ring scene, 2.2, immediately afterward.
- Yet Olivia swaps roles with Cesario, becoming the wooer and thus parallel to Orsino; his "go to her" becomes her "come to me again."
- By 3.4 she calls Cesario's heart a "heart of stone" as Orsino will later call her own, and she offers gifts just as Orsino does. She is sick as long as her love is unanswered; once Sebastian appears, love leads to a plighted troth.

The Infected Subplot

A number of other characters also speak the language of love or attempt it, for both **Sir Andrew** and **Malvolio** try to woo Olivia. **Sir Andrew's** love talk is distinguished by its ineptitude. He is envious of Cesario's phrases such as "rain odors": "I'll get 'em all three all ready." He wants to be eloquent, but he has slender means. **Malvolio**, on the other hand—though mostly "sick of self-love," as Maria notes—believes Olivia is wooing him and abandons himself to his ambition to his pride's peril. What happens

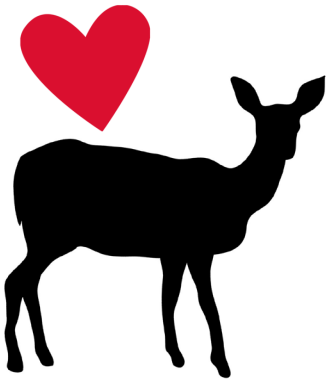
when the madness passes, when the inebriants sober up, when the disease is cured by requited love is the tale of the play's fifth act.

Even Antonio's passionate dedication to Sebastian uses love rhetoric, because the male friendship bond in the Renaissance was more forthright and emotional than today's. With so many arranged marriages in the Renaissance, choosing a friend was often the only way a man could have a "soul mate."

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

Teaching the Play's Poetry



"I am slain by a fair, cruel maid"

—song Orsino requests in 4.1

Courtly Love Imagery—How Renaissance Lovers Speak

In the 1520s when Sir Thomas Wyatt began translating Petrarch's love sonnets into English, he inspired a poetic outpouring that would change English poetry. Not only did almost every English poet start exploring the sonnet form, often writing entire sonnet cycles, but poets adopted Petrarch's courtly love imagery: the ardent lover—eager, fevered or dying for love, beseeching the beloved as if she were a star or a hart/deer (homonyms of "heart" and "dear"), her beauty a combination of roses and alabaster—pleaded that she take pity on him, which she would only do if his love were pure and true, not worldly or physical.

Orsino is sick with love, his contradictory moods reflecting the paradoxes of his passionate state, as shown in Wyatt's sonnet, "I Find No Peace," which translates and adapts the common Petrarchan element, the paradox, as the ideal expression for the contradictory feelings a lover may experience:

"I Find No Peace" by Sir Thomas Wyatt

I find no peace and all my war is done,
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice,
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise,
And naught I have and all the world I seize
on;
That looseth nor locketh holdeth me in
prison,
And holdeth me not; yet can I [e]scape
nowise;
Nor letteth me live nor die at my devise,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eyen I see; and without tongue I
plain; (plain=complain)
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health;
I love another, and thus I hate myself;
I feed me in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain.
Likewise displeaseth me both death and life,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

Wyatt also uses the hunt image with the deer/dear pun (a *hind* is a female deer) in another sonnet adapting Petrarch, a lament Wyatt wrote after King Henry VIII started pursuing Wyatt's beloved, Anne Boleyn:

"Whoso List to Hunt" by Sir Thomas Wyatt

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,
But as for me, alas, I may no more.
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.
Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore,
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well as I, may spend his time in vain.
And graven with diamonds in letters plain
There is written, her fair neck round about,
"*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame."
(*Noli me tangere*= do not touch me)

Shakespeare's sonnets offer us views of the moral aspect of love sickness:

"Sonnet 147" by William Shakespeare

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic mad with evermore unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's
are,
At random from the truth vainly expressed;
For I have sworn thee fair, and thought
thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

Questions

- Does Wyatt's description of love match Orsino's feelings? Is love always an entirely pleasant emotion?
- Most of the standard paradoxes from Petrarch are in Wyatt's "I Find No Peace." What are they? Are they in the play?
- How many themes used in the love language and love sick imagery in *Twelfth Night* appear in "Sonnet 147"? How is the sonnet different from the love sick states in *Twelfth Night*?
- How does "Sonnet 147" shift from focus on the lover to focus on the beloved? What is the nature of each focus?

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

Teaching the Play's Poetry



Olivia unveiling at Cesario's request. Is being "veiled" emotionally a widespread aspect of the play? Do characters "unveil" their feelings along the way? Is this action also an image?

"Thou know'st no less but all. I have unclasped To thee the book even of my secret soul."

—Orsino to Cesario, 1.4

Twelfth Night's Courtly Love Imagery

Orsino's love talk is full of Petrarchan courtly love images and phrases, as in his early use of the hart/heart image, here a classical Actaeon image, in 1.1:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me. (1.1.19-23)
Thus, he feels devoured by his desire.

Three voices speak of love in 1.5: Olivia with disdain and then two voices cross-pleading for love. Cesario begins the scene speaking for Orsino with his Petrarchan intensity; then—perhaps triggered by Olivia's personal question "Why, what would you?"—Cesario seems to respond with more of Viola's sensibility, which is also in love.

Does Cesario indeed speak with two different sensibilities, one the standard rhetoric and the other individual and passionate? Why does Orsino's rhetoric fail to move Olivia but Cesario/Viola's seem to succeed?

Consider the shift in the dialogue:

Olivia: How does he love me?

Cesario: With adorations, fertile tears,
With groans that thunder love, with sighs
of fire.

Olivia: ... But yet I cannot love him;
He might have took his answer long ago.

Cesario: If I did love you in my master's
flame,
With such a suffering, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it.

Olivia: Why, what would you?

Cesario: Make me a willow cabin at your
gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of
night;

Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me.

Olivia: You might do much....
(1.5.258-260, 266-280)

("Willow" is an image for unrequited love. A "canton" is a song. "Pity" means to answer the offered love.)

Watch how "Sonnet #20" plays with the idea of friendship and clearly distinguishes it from erotic love (and also watch the stereotype of woman's fickleness here):

"Sonnet 20"

A woman's face with Nature's own hand
painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my
passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women's
fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in
rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls
amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for
women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love and thy love's use their
treasure.

Courtly Friendship Poetry

Shakespeare's 154 sonnets famously include a number written to a young man, urging him to marry. The friend takes the rhetorical place of the love object, the beloved, and the strong love is not erotic but amicable. One Renaissance meaning of the word "love" (as in "o my love") is "friend" and is so annotated in his plays.

"Sonnet 30"

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's
waste.
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless
night,
And weep afresh love's long since canceled
woe,
And moan th' expense of many a vanished
sight.
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoan'd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

Teaching the Play's Poetry

Shakespeare's Sir Andrew

For all the fun we can have with Sir Andrew's inabilities to woo, he is still a Shakespeare character, and that means he is more than two-dimensional. Deep in his cups, as Sir Toby brags that Maria adores him, Andrew responds, "I was adored once too." That comment alone gives him a roundness and life we might not otherwise consider.

Also, by the time Sir Toby tells him off in 5.1, we may actually feel sorry for Sir Andrew, whose behavior was mostly at the behest of the very "friend" who now scorns him.



Another wooer,
Malvolio, in yellow display
before amazed Olivia;
illustration by Sir John Gilbert

The Importance of Language in Courtly Wooing

The courtly genre of love sonnet was, by definition, "courtly"—a way of strutting one's eloquence, like a peacock his feathers. That is why so many variations were wrung upon the conventional images and rhetorical stances—it was a way of displaying one's intellectual and verbal prowess. *Twelfth Night*, with its array of wooers, also shows off a variety of verbal styles, and part of its humor is in the incompetence of a wooer such as Sir Andrew, whose cluelessness and verbal poverty let us appreciate Viola/Cesario's ready invention and skill all the more. Make a list of how many times and ways Sir Andrew goes verbally astray—we can learn the importance of language facility by its absence.

We may think that Sir Andrew is just the butt of Sir Toby's jests, but his type was apparently prevalent in the Renaissance, more show than sense. Poet Michael Drayton begins a sonnet by commenting, "How many paltry, foolish, painted things, / That now in coaches trouble every street, / Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings, / Ere they be well wrapped in their winding sheet?" Ben Jonson savages a lord in "On Something That Walks Somewhere" by opening, "At court I met it, in clothes brave enough / To be a courtier...." [the "it" being a singular jab].

Below see Thomas Campion's poem written in the medieval form of fourteeners (which later broke down into our 8/6 ballad meter) for a female speaker's response to such a wooer (and realize how rare such a female persona is in this courtly tradition and how powerfully Shakespeare's women speak throughout his plays):

Wooing Then and Now: Grades 11-12

- Are display and eloquence part of wooing today? What are the things to say to get the attention of someone special or to attract some definite interest from that person?
- What are the rhetorical stances of the modern wooing world? What phrases, ideas, images are used? Do males and females use the same strategies and phrases? If not, how are they different? Why?
- Are there Sir Andrews in our world? What shows that someone is clueless in his or her wooing? Make a Top Ten List of what not to say.
- Compare the attitude of the female speaker in the Campion's "Think'st Thou to Seduce Me" below left with the male speaker's attitude in these two stanzas of another Campion poem. How true is each?

I care not for these ladies that must be wooed and prayed.
Give me kind Amaryllis, the wanton country maid.
Nature art disdaineth; her beauty is her own,
Who when we court and kiss, she cries "Forsooth, let go!"
But when we come where comfort is, she never will say no.

If I love Amaryllis, she gives me fruit and flowers;
But if we love these ladies, we must give golden showers.
Give them gold that sell love, give me the nutbrown lass,
Who when we court and kiss, she cries "Forsooth, let go!"
But when we come where comfort is, she never will say no.

"Think'st Thou to Seduce Me Then"

by Thomas Campion

Think'st thou to seduce me then with words that have no meaning?
Parrots so can learn to prate, our speech by pieces gleanings;
Nurses teach their children so about the time of weaning.

Learn to speak first, then to woo; to wooing much pertaineth;
He that courts us, wanting art, soon falters when he feigneth,
Looks askint on his discourse, and smiles when he complaineth.

Skillful anglers hide their hooks, fit baits for every season;
But with crooked pins fish thou, as babes do that want reason:
Gudgeons only can be caught with such poor tricks of treason.

gudgeon = small fish

Ruth forgive me, if I erred from human heart's compassion,
When I laughed sometimes too much to see thy foolish fashion;
But, alas, who less could do that found so good occasion?

ruth = pity

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare



Elizabethan miniature of "Young Man among Roses" by Nicholas Hilliard—often used as inspiration for Orsino or Viola in production

"I would you were as I
would have you be."

—Olivia, 3.1

Considering the Subtitle—*What You Will*

Few of Shakespeare's plays have subtitles, so we had best pay attention when he uses one, as with *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Reading the subtitle from a 21st-century perspective, we assume it means "what you want" or "what you decide to make happen," or perhaps even "whatever." The word "will" had more denotations in the Renaissance, however, as a quick visit to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (the OED, the historical dictionary of English word meaning) will reveal.

Watch how Shakespeare knowingly uses the word in this sonnet:

"Sonnet 135"

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,
And Will to boot, and Will in overplus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store,
So thou being rich in Will add to thy Will
One will of mine to make thy large Will
more.

Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

Here Shakespeare puns on the many Renaissance meanings of the word *will*, which include wish, sexual desire, erogenous zones, and his own name. How many shadings are there now in the play's subtitle? While key nouns are often capitalized in the Renaissance, what does Shakespeare gain by capitalizing "Will" in the sonnet? Perhaps the subtitle seems to be more "what you *desire*," and we are alerted to watch that element in the play's motivations and schemes.

ACTIVITY—Exploring Poems

- Compare the sea/water imagery in "Sonnet 135" to Orsino's use of the sea/water image in 1.1 and also consider the shipwreck in 1.2.

- Compare Shakespeare's "Sonnet 135" with some Renaissance love arguments, poems using persuasion to gain love, often physical love, such as Sidney's "Fourth Song" in *Astrophil and Stella* or Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." How is desire viewed and used in these poems? How is the beloved portrayed in these poems?



"Olivia" by Edmund Blair Leighton (1888)

In 1.5 Olivia's unveiling at Cesario's request suggests her first step toward emotional re-engagement with life and her particular interest in the young page

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

Teaching the Play's Imagery



An antique one-quart tankard, the size Sir Toby might prefer

"Does not our lives consist of the four elements?"

"Faith, so they say, but I think it rather consists of eating and drinking."

—Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, 2.3

In the spirit of *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby keeps the party going into the night (Robert Chambers, 1869)



Folly, Drunkenness, and Madness

Watching her kinsman Sir Toby reel into 1.5, already half-drunk early in the morning, Olivia asks Feste, "What's a drunken man like, fool?" and Feste quips, "**Like a drowned man, a fool, and a madman.**" Feste's response aptly describes degrees of inebriation, folly maddened to drowning, but the wise fool also describes several of the crucial characters and characterizations in the play.

A Drowned Man

Twelfth Night has two nearly drowned men, Sebastian and the "man" Cesario (Viola). This presumed drowning numbs them with grief and yearning for their lost twin. But the drowning most often portrayed is not a drenching in the sea but in booze. Sir Toby has no cares and does not care—he does not care whom he uses, whom he hurts, or, for much of the play, even what the consequences of his reveling may be. His is a self-centered ethic: a foolish man such as Sir Andrew is meant to be used by an unscrupulous and self-indulgent knight such as Sir Toby. The clever prey on the foolish.

"Many peoples have been used to observe an annual period of license, when customary restraints of law and morality are thrown aside, when the whole population give themselves up to extravagant mirth and jollity, and when the darker passions find a vent which would never be allowed them in the more staid and sober course of ordinary life."

—Sir James Frazer,
The Golden Bough

A Fool

Much of the action Sir Toby drives is **gulling**, the Renaissance term for cheating or making a fool of someone, and in the world of the subplot, one is either a gull or a guller. Sir Andrew is a gull, and for a time in 3.4 so is Viola before Antonio saves her from the duel. Sir Toby, Maria, Fabian, and Feste are all gullers—merry tricksters who assume they have a right to expose and profit from others' follies. Feste, of course, can be expected to do so; it is his profession. Sir Toby is prompted by greed to dupe Sir Andrew, and all are driven by spite to revenge themselves on Malvolio and his puritanical pride. The revenge plot, born of a night's partying, becomes itself a kind of inebriating activity madly pursued.

And a Madman

Malvolio, on the receiving end of their plot, has his own folly and becomes giddy with his hopes of wedding Olivia and lording over everyone. His self-inebriating ambition turns him into a madman in the eyes of others, for his smiling and yellow stockings are remarkably out of character and decorum, and Olivia can make no sense of the phrases he quotes her from Maria's letter.

Questions

- Is the subplot indeed made up of "the darker passions," as Frazer describes? What might they be and how do they proceed?
- How does the effect of drinking progress from inebriation to drunkenness? How do people behave after one drink? after three drinks? after five drinks? Do we see this progression in the play, especially the subplot's attitudes and actions?

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

Teaching the Play's Poetry



Maria baits the trap
(Sir John Gilbert)

More Madness

When the fake letter convinces him that Olivia loves him, Malvolio tellingly claims, "I have limed her." Lime was used to catch birds, and his phrase places him firmly in the camp of the would-be gullers: he is willing to fool, to trap, to ensnare for his own gain. But since Malvolio is also being preyed upon by Maria's trick, his own folly is revealed, a folly the tricksters label and treat as madness. In confining Malvolio like a madman, they force him to insist on his sanity, and the scene works as a version of "Are you crazy? Get real, man" in modern

parlance. Malvolio does not quite learn from his incarceration, but he is more sober and less illusioned when he finally confronts Olivia in act five, when he feels the sting of his pride and folly publicly displayed and promises his own revenge in return.

Drink inebriates, pride and folly inebriate, and throughout *Twelfth Night* love also inebriates. The subplot actions and issues reflect and illuminate the main plot's action. Orsino is certainly drunk with love; Olivia soon joins him. Both recognize the folly of their states but do not care; both are driven nearly mad by unrequited love; and only when the presumed drowned youths, Sebastian and Viola, are recognized do the aristocrats finally drown their foolish passion in the discovery of true love. The very idea of *Twelfth Night* promises intense disruption and indulgence, then a return to order, and the play fulfills that promise.

Foolishness vs. Foolery: Wise Fools in Shakespeare

Amid all the inebriation in *Twelfth Night*, amid all the madness and folly, one character seems to have his head on straight, to see what is and to comment reliably—Feste, the only character labeled a fool. In the Renaissance, being a fool was a profession, something like a political stand-up comic in our world. Many kings and aristocrats kept a fool about the court as an entertainer, and the fool's lot, as is made very clear in *King Lear*, was not without its perils. Lear's fool is beaten and threatened for his loyalty and astute insights. Feste faces no such vehement threat, but Maria suggests that since his "folly" has been absent, he may lose his employment. Of course, the plot of the play shows instead that folly spreads throughout Illyria. The presence of a professional fool simply alerts us to watch for folly everywhere else.

In the late 1590s, Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, lost their great comic actor, Will Kempe. He was gifted at

performing the rustic clown, the kind of character Shakespeare created in Bottom and Dogberry and Launce (in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*) and Launcelot Gobbo. The next comedian the company hired had very different talents, and consequently, the clown roles changed to professional fool roles to showcase the skills of Robert Armin. Feste, like Armin who first played the role, is a singer and a wit. His songs carefully comment on the mood and truth of situations, and his banter reveals his insight into character and human nature. Feste is not foolish; foolery is just what he gets paid to do.



Robert Armin,
the actor who
originated the
role of Feste
for the Lord
Chamberlain's
Company

Cesario: Art not thou the
Lady Olivia's fool?

Feste: No indeed sir.

The Lady Olivia has
no folly. She will keep
no fool, sir, till she be
married.... I am indeed
not her fool but her
corrupter of words.

—3.1

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

The Play's Songs

Malvolio: "Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?"

Sir Toby: We did keep time, sir, in our catches. Sneak up."
—2.3

And the Music

Period tunes for much of the music in 2.3 survives, and music close to the period exists for several other songs in the play, although "Come away, death" has no extant melody earlier than 1741.

The Oxford edition of the play has an appendix complete with musical arrangements.



The mummers' tradition combines disguise, music, and begging

The Songs: "If Music Be the Food of Love, Play On..."

In Shakespeare's practice, comedy is also melody, for many of his comedies are filled with songs. Feste may be a jester and professional fool, but he is also a singer, and—as is true of all Shakespeare's songs—the lyrics are crafted for their dramatic moment.

Feste's first song, sung in 2.3 when Sir Toby and Sir Andrew request a tune, is a carpe diem theme relevant to their hedonistic way of life and indicative of the play's larger action:

"O Mistress Mine"

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

The song captures the yearning of youth and the longing for immediate gratification and love at any age. Almost all the play's characters are bound up in the emotions expressed by this song. It is followed by the three-part catch, "Hold Thy Peace," an idea

which is precisely what the revelers refuse to do and which their noise will bring Malvolio in to enforce.

The next scene, 2.4, has Feste sing at Orsino's request, and the fool fits the duke's emotional state—and Viola/Cesario's—very aptly:

"Come Away, Death"

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid;
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it.
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones
shall be thrown:
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there.

The sense of utter dedication and utter despair comments on both characters' loves and also on the posturing of Orsino's passion, which indulges his emotion of being "slain" by love, while we watch Viola live it and literally offer her life in 5.1.

The songs with which Feste teases Malvolio in his "madman" scene, 4.2, both comment truthfully on his love delusions:

Hey, Robin, jolly Robin,
Tell me how thy lady does.
My lady is unkind, perdy.
Alas, why is she so?
She loves another—

This lyric states the truth that Malvolio's pride has obscured, Olivia (his lady) loves another, and Feste's exit verse, "I am gone, sir, / And anon, sir / I'll be with you again, / In a trice / Like to the old Vice, / Your need to sustain..." also speaks truly.

Feste's final lyric closes the play with a wistful, almost bittersweet sense of the real world that maturity and romance—and the audience—must now re-enter:

When that I was and-a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day....

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare



At the Globe in London, they often perform "original practices" Shakespeare, which includes an all-male cast. In their 2002 *Twelfth Night*, artistic director Mark Rylance played Olivia in period white makeup (above); he reprised the role at the Globe in 2012, and the performance is now available on DVD.



Adah Lucocque, 10, who plays for the 56ers, had her hair cut when she was 4, mostly so she wouldn't have to deal with tangles. Now her hairstyle is more of a bold statement.

NO, THEY'RE NOT BOYS

Wisconsin soccer team has to fend off haircut hassles, but it stands firm in the face of gender stereotypes

Madeline Koss, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

When Mira Wilde was 8 years old, she wanted to cut her hair like one of her idols, Ellen DeGeneres. So she did. Fast-forward two years, and Mira, 10, still has short hair — though now she's mimicking a new idol, Abby Cadabby.

Think all this is just in the Renaissance? Read the USA Today article from 8/8/17 shown above about soccer-playing girls with short hair challenged for being boys, ridiculed, and asked to prove their gender at tournaments

Boys Playing Girls Disguised as Boys

For a young boy in the 1590s, being an apprentice with the Lord Chamberlain's Men not only meant that he got to study the art and craft of acting by living with a professional actor and working with him, but it also meant getting to perform some of the finest female roles ever written. The irony that great women's roles were written for and played by pre-pubescent boys is not lost on modern actresses nor on critics of *Twelfth Night*.

In many of his comedies, Shakespeare used the male identity of his female characters as an "in" joke with his audience, shifting the girls into male disguise and out again as necessity demanded. Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Portia and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and of course Viola in *Twelfth Night* all adopt a male disguise. Viola is the last in this line, just as *Twelfth Night* is the last of Shakespeare's

romantic comedies. After this play, his comedy moves to tragicomedy and eventually to the adventure-and-reunion plays known as romances, where in *Cymbeline* Imogen again must disguise herself as a boy.

Viola's Experience

Viola takes her disguise for protection in Illyria when she finds herself alone and shipwrecked there and also as a mourning tribute to her drowned twin, Sebastian. She no sooner puts the disguise into play, however, than it traps her, as it does all of Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines, for she finds herself desperately in love with Orsino. Not only is he in love with someone else, but he doesn't even know she's a woman. Nonetheless, Orsino is drawn to Cesario as the one person with whom he can discuss love meaningfully.

"Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!"

—Viola, 2.2

Identity and Clothes

Far more than in our world of conspicuous display, for Renaissance society one's clothing was the key to one's identity. Only a lord might wear silk, only royalty might wear purple or ermine, only the privileged might wear spurs or jewels, servants wore blue—England's sumptuary [clothing] laws were specific and clear. One need look only at the surface, which told the essential truth of birth, status, and degree.

Whereas in our world someone can choose to dress up or dress down, to dress goth or preppy or grunge whatever one's status, in the Renaissance that someone was supposed to dress "properly," accurately—so of course everyone tried to dress better than his or her actual status. As a result, Philip Stubbes protested in 1583 that when "every one is permitted to flaunt it out, in what apparel he lust himself ... it is verie hard to knowe, who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman, who is not."

Renaissance gender roles shared that superficial focus. The Renaissance viewed human biology as more or less unisex, all having the same analogously shaped sexual equipment, but men's superior "heat" made theirs external and visible, while women's softer, "less hot" nature kept theirs inferior, internal, invisible. They were considered "imperfectly formed" men

(male being the ideal for the Renaissance). So if they were structured analogously, the clothes make a huge difference in stating one's gender. Male dress equals a male; female dress equals a female. To transgress this code off stage caused ructions and prompted sermons from the pulpit or pillorying and imprisonment—especially if the person transgressed by dressing in the more privileged status of the male and took on that authority.

However, Viola, as Jean Howard argues, is not transgressive; she wears masculine apparel not to act out (or "up") but for temporary safety. She knows she is female, which is what she wants to be. She would prefer to seek Orsino's love: "Viola's is a properly feminine subjectivity," Howard asserts. She gets trapped in her male clothing, and thereby the play, Howard believes, works to humiliate the much more independent and stereotype-threatening Olivia.

• How do you assess this view of Viola and Olivia?

References

- Jean Howard, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39:4 (1988): 418-40.
Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: U California Press, 1988)

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare



Olivia woos Cesario; illustration by Sir John Gilbert.

"Jove knows I love, / But who?"

—Maria's trick letter, 2.5



Sebastian is the beneficiary of the love triangle; his route to love is straightforward—the lovely countess proposes and he's smitten (H. C. Selous)

Character Issues and Questions

Orsino's and Olivia's unrequited loves

- Both love on the basis of little knowledge and receive frequent denials and rebuffs
- Both insist that they must be loved, send tokens (especially rings) to their objects of desire
- Both send servants to entreat or fetch their loved ones
- Both comment about their loves, Orsino to Cesario, Olivia in soliloquy. How does each assess the passion? his/her own role in it?
- Now how do their loves and their pursuit of love differ? Although in Renaissance social terms, a match between the duke and the countess is ideal and to be expected, they do not marry; does Shakespeare give us a happy ending, where the "right" people end up together, or a twist on the happy ending? An alternate to the standard happiness? There is the issue that Olivia marries a perfect stranger (which would not be uncommon in that time, given the frequency of arranged marriages, though it seems strange to us). How do we assess the marriages at the end?

Viola and Sebastian in love

- Compare Viola's love with Orsino's and Olivia's; it seems to begin as suddenly (do we credit three days' casual acquaintance as greatly deeper than the meeting in 1.5?).
- Viola's love is unspoken, secret, yet it soon does express itself, perhaps to Olivia in guise of Orsino's words in 1.5, certainly to Orsino himself, in disguise just as she is, in 2.4 ("My father had a daughter loved a man..."). Olivia says love cannot be hidden, "love's night is noon." Do we see Viola remain true to Orsino as a servant, trying to woo his lady for him, or do her situation, action, and responses change as she loves Orsino and Olivia loves Cesario?

- Sebastian walks right into a full-blown passionate love from Olivia. How does he assess the situation and how familiar to the themes of the play are his suspicions of madness? Does he behave properly, prudently, or "twelfth nightly" in pursuing Olivia's invitation to enter the house and then to marry? Is he a good role model?

Other unrequited loves, Sir Andrew and Malvolio

- Why is Sir Andrew wooing Olivia? Does he love her? What does he care about? What is the arc of his wooing?
- Compare Malvolio with Sir Andrew—each is an unlikely wooer for Olivia, but Malvolio is tricked into believing his love (or aspiration) is requited; he believes he has been sought, that he is answering the behest of his beloved, that his dream/delusion is coming true. Andrew is convinced by others to continue; Malvolio is convinced by the dropped letter (or does he convince himself?). The trickery toward both men is revealed at the end, and in comic terms both men are excluded from the reunified society of the conclusion. How should we feel about that? How do we feel in the production?
- Is Sir Toby the only requited lover in the middle of the play? He loves booze and gets it; he ends up married to Maria. Does he love her? On what basis?



What makes love and lovers "tick" in this play?

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare



Feste helping in Sir Toby in 5.1—the fool leading the "drowned man" (Sir John Gilbert)

Passages to Examine

- Olivia's beseeching Fate at the end of 1.5, Sebastian's entry in 2.1, and Viola's beseeching Time at the end of 2.2
- Malvolio's 2.5 speech before he finds the letter and the one after it
- 3.1.131-164 for the way it comments on the role-playing and the wooing
- Sebastian's responses to meeting Olivia in 4.1 and 4.3

Shakespeare Concordance

- In the *Concordance*, look up the words *fool*, *mad* (*madman*, *madness*) and *time* to find all the uses of these words in the play, and then analyze how the ideas develop and interact. (The *Concordance* lists every use of a word throughout the canon.)

Quotations from *Twelfth Night* to Consider

Analyze each of the following phrases or lines for thematic import, often on several levels or for several different characters or situations. Find other lines that carry thematic weight.

- "O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou..." (Orsino, 1.1)
- "What should I do in Illyria?
My brother he is in Elysium." (Viola, 1.2)
- "Is it a world to hide virtues in?" (Sir Toby, 1.3)
- "Yet a barful strife! / Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife." (Viola, 1.4)
- "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste
with a distempered appetite." (Olivia, 1.5)
- "I am not that I play." (Viola/Cesario, 1.5) *and also later, Cesario: "I am not what I am."*
Olivia: "I would you were as I would have you be." (3.1)
- "Love make his heart of flint that you shall love,
And let your fervor, like my master's, be
Placed in contempt!" (Cesario, 1.5)
- "Fate, show thy force. Ourselves we do not owe. [owe=own]
What is decreed must be; and be this so." (Olivia, 1.5)
- "What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure...
Youth's a stuff will not endure." (Feste's song, 2.3)
- "Does thou think, because thou art virtuous, there
shall be no more cakes and ale?" (Sir Toby, 2.3)
- "Tis but fortune; all is fortune." (Malvolio, 2.5)
- "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some
have greatness thrust upon 'em." (Maria's letter, 2.5)
- "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool." (Cesario, 3.1)
- "I am as mad as he, / If sad and merry madness equal be." (Olivia, 3.4)
- "Nothing that is so is so." (Feste, 4.1)
- "I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove." (Orsino, 5.1)
- "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not!" (Orsino, 5.1)
- "I shall have share in this most happy wreck." (Orsino, 5.1)
- "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." (Feste, 5.1)

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare



Sir Toby makes fun of Sir Andrew the minute he walks on stage in 1.3 by having him woo Maria—ineptly (Sir John Gilbert), and below, Gilbert illustrates Orsino's approach to Olivia's house that begins the play's resolution

"Odors," "pregnant," and
"vouchsafed." I'll get
'em all three all ready."
—Sir Andrew, 3.1



Twelfth Night Vocabulary

1.2/ Elysium = in Greek mythology, the abode of the blessed after death

1.3/ accost = assail, attack (in Renaissance also means the hesitant approach of a suitor)

galliard = a quick and lively dance in triple time

caper = a leap in a dance

1.5/ madonna = in Italian, *ma donna*, my lady (also a term used for Virgin Mary)

misprision = mistake, error

lethargy/lechery = the first is drunkenness, also unresponsiveness; the second is lust

willow = emblem of unrequited or disappointed love

cantons = songs

halloo = to shout

fee'd post = someone paid to deliver messages (before the postal service)

blazon = (orig. a term in heraldry=a coat of arms) proclaimed public praises

2.2/ monster = her dual identity as male/female seems hideous to her because complicated, unrewarding, grotesque

2.3/ diluculo surgere = part of a Latin phrase that means "to rise early is most healthful"

stoup = a cup or tankard for liquor (also means a basin for holy water at entry of church)

mellifluous = "honey-sweet"

catch = a song sung as a round

Peg-a-Ramsey = character in a popular song, here used in contempt

consanguineous = a blood relative (*sang-* is Latin root for *blood*)

sneck up = go hang

physic = medicine

other scenes/hold the bent = capacity, degree of endurance (literally, how far a bow can be bent)

yeoman = keeper of a gentleman's wardrobe

Jezebel = a comment on Malvolio's pride; Jezebel was the proud queen of Ahab, King of Israel

scab = scurvy fellow

Fates = in Greek mythology, the three goddesses of Destiny who spun, measured, and cut the thread of each person's life

Dieu vous garde // Et vous aussi; votre serviteur = French: God keep you, sir //

And you, too; your servant

coffer = purse (literally means strongbox)

minion = darling, favorite

"Jove" references = in 1606 King James banned the use of the Lord's name on stage; some critics have theorized that texts written before 1606 may then have been edited, substituting "Jove" for "God." Of course, sometimes *Jove* is meant to be Jove.

Twelfth Night

by William Shakespeare

"How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!"

—Feste, 3.1



The ring scene—in the 18th and 19th centuries, little effort was made to disguise Viola's femininity when she is disguised as Cesario, although the disguise in the Renaissance was perfect. (it was played by an actual boy). Do we need to see Viola in Cesario?

Activities Before and After the Performance

Pre-Show Discussion Topics

- Describe Mardi Gras—what do you expect? what kind of behavior and type of relationships are associated with it? what do people wear? what is Mardi Gras about?
- What is the difference between party time and everyday life? What are party values? What are the values of everyday life?
- Describe how parties progress. What happens if neighbors complain about party noise? How do the party people respond? Does the party have to end? Why?
- Compare Mardi Gras to the celebration of Twelfth Night (see p. 5).
- How funny are practical jokes? What prompts them? How cool is it to set someone up? Is it as funny to have a joke played on you? What happens when the joke unexpectedly hits closer to home that the jokesters know? Can jokes do damage? Is it always easy to laugh off a practical joke?
- What does unrequited love feel like—when the one you love doesn't love you back?

What can you do? What does that solitude do to you? How mixed up can your feelings get?

Unrequited love—or not yet requited love—is the state of most speakers in the courtly love sonnets that abounded in the Renaissance. Compare your sense of that state with the way those speakers describe it. See page 8 for some examples.

- What effect does alcohol have on human judgment and behavior? How much does it take to impede reaction time while driving? How much does it take to alter behavior with other people? Does everyone respond to alcohol the same way?

Post-Show Discussion Topics

- Discuss or write about how the portrayal of the characters clarified, deepened, or challenged your view of them, especially if you had read the play in advance. What does seeing a production add to your understanding? Does anything become clearer (text? motivations? consequences?)? Was anything unexpected?
- Consider how *Twelfth Night's* permissive world develops and ends. Is this a happy romantic comedy? Does it have darker aspects? What is the balance of this production, and what balance seems best to you?
- Decide whose perspective is the center of the play or the play's values? Is it Viola who moves between the two households, or perhaps Feste, the observer/jester, who also moves between the two households? Or is it someone else?
- Discuss what is romantic about the play and what is broadly comic. Does comic simply mean funny? Are there parts that are not funny and do not intend to be—is anything serious? How do the various tones and colors blend here?
- Describe the relationships of the major characters as if they were students in your school—the queen bee (the female every man wants), the high-status male who suddenly seems thwarted, the new kid who suddenly gets thrust into the middle of things, the party boys, the rule follower. Are they familiar types? What parts of the characterization and plot fit well with our world and which aspects do not fit as easily?
- What advice would you give Orsino and Olivia? What should they do? What should they say? What about Viola? Sir Andrew? Malvolio? Does the advice in our world apply equally to the world of the Renaissance?
- If you had to pick one visual image to express *Twelfth Night*, what would it be? Use your image to design a title graphic.



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