



Introduction to the Play

Background to *Twelfth Night*

The title, *Twelfth Night*, is most likely a reference to the celebration of the Feast of Epiphany, which occurs the twelfth night after Christmas, on January 6. In the Christian church, the Epiphany is the final night of the celebration of Christmas. On this night, the celebration centers on the Three Wise Men who journey to find Jesus and present to him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. However, in Shakespeare's era, this religious celebration was also part of a cultural tradition. In the same way, the Easter Bunny is a cultural tradition during Easter, which is a religious celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

When Shakespeare was writing his play, the Feast of Epiphany or Twelfth Night was celebrated in secular society as the Feast of Fools. This celebration involved a reversal of roles between people in authority and their subordinates. Everyday rules and procedures were changed or abandoned. The Feast of Fools was a great time of partying and joking, and people who were tired of taking orders from their superiors could be in charge and play pranks, or "punk," others. This celebration of role reversal, and the drinking and playing that accompanied it (instead of quiet, work, and sobriety), is very important to the action of this play.

The second part of the play's title, *What You Will*, is a wonderful play on the name of the author, William Shakespeare. In addition, it

indicates that the play is not a religious pageant but is open to interpretation. It is as if Shakespeare says with deep seriousness, "Here is Twelfth Night." And then immediately he changes his tone in a light, flippant way to say, "Or, whatever. . . ." The second part of the title also helps us understand the play, because it is defined by mistaken identities, gender switches, love at first sight, and pranks, as well as loyalty, reunion of siblings, and marriage.

The plot of the play is similar to an Italian play called *Gl'Ingannati*. In that play, a brother and sister are parted by a twist of fate, but they eventually find each other. The sister disguises herself as a male page at the court of a count. The count asks his page to be his ambassador to a disdainful woman, who falls in love with the sister dressed as the page. Eventually the brother arrives on the scene, and the woman transfers her affection to the brother. However, Shakespeare takes this basic plot outline and fills it out with great language, humor, and memorable characters.

Another key component of the play is mistaken affection. Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, is mistaken in his love for Olivia. Olivia, a rich countess, is mistaken in her love for Viola, who is disguised as Orsino's page. Malvolio, a steward of Olivia, is mistaken when he assumes that Olivia is in love with him. Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a friend to Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, is also mistaken in thinking that Olivia would consider him a worthy suitor. The only character who is not mistaken is Viola, who

declares her love for Orsino to the audience early. It is her loyalty that wins over his heart at the end of the play. The joy of *Twelfth Night* is to see how all these reversals are made right by the conclusion.

To Shakespeare's audience, the plot device of a shipwreck in the ocean near a remote land helps give a fairy-tale distance to the story. The name of the country, Illyria, suggests illusion or delirium. However, in Shakespeare's era, Illyria did exist as a small country located on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, where Yugoslavia is located today.

Because of the great themes, memorable characters, and wonderful fun of this play, it is one of the most popular and most produced of Shakespeare's works.

Synopsis of *Twelfth Night*

Act one, Scene 1

Orsino enters his court, accompanied by lords and musicians. He asks the musicians to play music to help him forget his love sickness. They play for a little while, but Orsino tells them to stop because his love cannot be drowned out by their music. Curio asks Orsino if he is going hunting, and he replies that he does hunt, but it is Olivia and not a deer that he is hunting.

Valentine enters and reports that Olivia will not allow herself to have a suitor until she has mourned her brother's death for seven years. Orsino is impressed with her devotion to her brother and says that because her capacity for

love is so intense, her love for a suitor will be even more amazing.

Act one, Scene 2

Viola is on the seacoast of Illyria with a Captain and other sailors. Viola is sad that she has survived a recent shipwreck, but her brother seems to have perished. The Captain tells her to hope that since she survived the shipwreck, maybe her brother did as well.

Viola asks about the place where they have landed, and the Captain explains that Illyria is governed by Orsino. Orsino is in love with Olivia, who is mourning the loss of her father and her brother, and therefore will not be wooed by any man.

Viola does not want to be identified until she can discover what her position in the world will be. She asks the Captain to lend her some boy's clothes so that she can serve the duke as a page. The Captain agrees to help Viola with her disguise.

Act one, Scene 3

At Olivia's house, Maria, Olivia's maid, tells Sir Toby that he must reduce his drinking and partying with Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Andrew enters and misunderstands Sir Toby's command to accost, or greet, Maria. Sir Andrew and Maria speak, and Maria hints that she thinks Sir Andrew is a fool.

After Maria leaves, Sir Andrew admits to Sir Toby that Maria won the battle of wits, and he blames his lack of wit on the amount of beef that he eats. Sir Andrew wants to leave the next

day, but Sir Toby convinces him to stay in order for Sir Andrew to win the hand of Olivia. Sir Andrew agrees to stay, commenting on what a superb dancer he is.

Act one, Scene 4

In Orsino's court, Valentine remarks at how much favor the Count Orsino has shown Viola, now dressed as a page and known as Cesario. Orsino enters and commands Viola to go to Olivia and declare Orsino's love to her. Viola protests that Olivia will not listen to a young page, but Orsino compliments Viola's lips and voice and says that Olivia will most certainly be willing to listen to the message. Orsino promises that he will reward Viola for good service. In an aside to the audience, Viola admits it is difficult to woo for Orsino because she is in love with him herself.

Act one, Scene 5

Maria jokes with Feste the clown about where Feste has been. Olivia, Malvolio, and some servants enter. Olivia is upset with Feste for his absence. He tries to earn her favor by witty puns and jests, telling Olivia she must think that her brother is in hell because she is still mourning him. Therefore, she is the fool, not he. Olivia appreciates his wit, and remarks to Malvolio that Feste seems to be improving. Malvolio, however, is unimpressed.

Maria enters and reports that a young man is at the gate who wishes to speak to Olivia. Olivia sends Maria and Malvolio to get rid of the visitor. Sir Toby enters, obviously drunk, and

Olivia is dismayed at his condition. She sends Feste to look after her uncle.

Malvolio reenters, reporting that the young man at the gate will not leave until he can speak with Olivia. She decides to meet with him, and puts a veil over her face.

Viola, dressed as a page, makes sure that Olivia is really the person she seeks, because she doesn't want to waste her speech. Olivia tells Viola to skip the poetry and get right to the point. Viola asks to see Olivia's face, and Olivia takes off her veil. Viola says that Olivia is selfish because she will leave no copy of herself, meaning a child. Olivia retorts that she will leave a copy by sending out a list of her itemized features.

Viola repeats that her master, Orsino, loves Olivia with great passion. Olivia appreciates Orsino's nobility, but she cannot be persuaded to love him. Viola says she cannot understand how Olivia can reject such a strong passion. Olivia instructs Viola to tell Orsino not to contact her anymore—unless he sends Viola.

After Viola leaves, Olivia confesses that she is attracted to the young page. She calls Malvolio in and gives him a ring to "return" to Viola, asking him to come tomorrow to hear why she rejects Orsino's love.

Act two, Scene 1

In the countryside of Illyria, Viola's brother Sebastian tells Antonio that he is grateful to him for saving his life by rescuing him from the sea. At the same time, he expresses grief that his twin sister, Viola, has drowned in the same

After Feste leaves, Orsino tells Viola to return to Olivia and declare his love for her again. Viola asks the Duke what he will do if Olivia will not love him back. She argues that, if another woman were in love with him, he would have to reject her, and she would have to accept it. Orsino rejects Viola's argument on the basis that a man's love for a woman is much stronger and more abiding than a woman's love for a man.

Viola responds that a woman can be as strongly in love as a man and tells him of "her sister," who had a strong love for someone like the Duke, but she never told him of her love (she is, of course, talking about herself). Viola concludes that it is women who are strongest in love. Orsino then asks her to go to Olivia's house and bring her a jewel to show his love.

Act two, Scene 5

In Olivia's garden, Sir Toby, Fabian, and Sir Andrew hide so that they can watch Malvolio find the letter written by Maria. She has written the love letter so that Malvolio will think it is from Olivia. Malvolio enters, and he muses aloud about how delightful it would be to be married to Olivia and be Count Malvolio. His words infuriate the three who are in hiding. They almost lose their temper completely when Malvolio imagines that he can tell Sir Toby and Sir Andrew to mend their ways and stay away from alcohol. Malvolio then spies the letter and begins to read it aloud. Maria has left many obvious hints in the letter that it is from Olivia and that it declares her love for Malvolio. She asks him to be mean to the people in her house, to be informal with her, to smile all the time,

and to wear yellow stockings that are cross gartered.

Malvolio is thrilled with the letter and vows to do everything requested of him. When he leaves, Fabian, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew come out of hiding. Maria enters and states that Malvolio is now going to act in every possible way to irritate and annoy Olivia. They all congratulate Maria on her great wit.

Act three, Scene 1

Viola meets Feste in Olivia's garden. They exchange words about the honesty of language, Viola's lack of a beard, and begging. Viola gives Feste two coins. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew enter and greet Viola. Olivia and Maria also enter. Olivia wants to speak only to Viola, and the others leave.

Olivia tells Viola that she is in love with her, thinking, of course, that Viola is a young man named Cesario. Viola tells Olivia that she cannot return her love and so must leave, never to return. Olivia invites Viola to come again to talk about Orsino as a way to see Viola again.

Act three, Scene 2

Sir Andrew complains to Sir Toby that Olivia likes Orsino's servingman, Cesario, more than she likes him. Sir Toby concocts a story that Olivia showed favor to Cesario just to make Sir Andrew jealous. He encourages Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario to a duel to show his bravery to Olivia. Sir Andrew agrees to write the letter of challenge and leaves. Fabian and Sir Toby

enjoy this contest since both Sir Andrew and Cesario are so meek.

Maria enters and reports that Malvolio is now smiling constantly as he wears his yellow stockings with cross garters.

Act three, Scene 3

Sebastian and Antonio talk on a street in Illyria. Sebastian thanks Antonio for his loyalty and support and suggests that they tour the town. Antonio refuses because he is a wanted man in Illyria and does not want to risk being caught. Antonio gives Sebastian his purse in case he wants to buy anything and goes ahead to the Elephant Inn, in the suburbs, to order dinner and wait for Sebastian.

Act three, Scene 4

In Olivia's garden, Maria warns Olivia that Malvolio is acting very strangely. Olivia is hoping that a visit with Malvolio, who is usually prim and proper, will suit her melancholy spirits and distract her from thinking about Cesario. Malvolio enters and makes many references to the letter he received, which Olivia finds very confusing. Dressed in yellow stockings that are criss-crossed with garters, he looks ridiculous. And instead of his usual civility, he is smiling wildly and showing improper boldness. Olivia is informed that Cesario has returned. As Olivia leaves, she instructs a servant to have Sir Toby look after Malvolio. Olivia does this out of concern for Malvolio's sanity, but Malvolio mistakenly assumes that this treatment shows her favor to him.

Sir Toby, Fabian, and Maria enter and treat Malvolio as if he is possessed by a demon. After Malvolio leaves in a huff, the three plan to put him in a dark room, which was a common way to deal with madness in Shakespeare's time.

Sir Andrew enters and reads his challenge letter aloud. The letter comes close to challenging Cesario, but it is extremely silly. Sir Toby promises to give it to Cesario, and Sir Andrew exits. Sir Toby says he will not deliver the letter because it would not scare Cesario. Instead, he will frighten Cesario (Viola) by saying Sir Andrew, a skillful and furious dueler, is looking for a fight. Then, when they confront each other, they will both be so afraid that neither will harm the other.

Olivia gives Viola a locket to show her love, but Viola protests that Olivia's love should be given to her master Orsino. Olivia tells Viola to come again tomorrow.

Sir Toby and Fabian tell Viola that Sir Andrew is furious, and that Viola should be very careful because Sir Toby is a dangerous man. Viola is upset, confessing, "I am no fighter."

Sir Toby then tells Sir Andrew that the young man is a very skilled fighter. Sir Andrew is afraid and wishes to withdraw from fighting. However, in order to enjoy the joke, Fabian and Sir Toby insist that both must fight each other.

Just as Viola and Sir Andrew are about to fight, Antonio enters and begins to defend Viola, thinking the young page is his friend Sebastian. The disturbance brings Illyrian officers to the scene, who immediately arrest Antonio. Antonio asks Viola for his money, but she

He states that they have been inseparable since they landed on the island.

Orsino tells Antonio that Viola has been with him for the past three months. When Olivia enters, Orsino expresses his anger with her for refusing his love. To pay her back, he threatens to kill Cesario. Olivia says that Cesario has betrayed her love and calls Cesario (Viola) her husband. To prove it, the priest verifies that he has joined Olivia and Cesario together. Orsino tells Viola never to cross his path again.

Sir Andrew enters and reports that Cesario has fought with him and Sir Toby and injured them, which Viola denies. Sir Toby enters with Feste, and everyone sees how drunk Sir Toby is and that he has indeed been injured.

Sebastian enters and apologizes to Olivia for fighting with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Then Sebastian and Viola see each other, and each is amazed that the other is alive. Viola wants to prove her identity by showing her woman's clothes from the shipwreck. Orsino realizes from previous conversations that Viola deeply loves him.

They then remember that Malvolio is imprisoned, and they read aloud his letter of protest. Olivia asks for Malvolio to be brought to them. While they wait, Orsino asks Viola to marry him, and Olivia calls her sister.

Malvolio enters with the letter written by Maria, and he uses it to blame Olivia for his behavior. Olivia tells him that Maria was most likely the author. Fabian and Feste admit to the plot to fool Malvolio. Malvolio leaves, promising revenge.

Orsino tells everyone that they will work out a peaceful settlement with Malvolio. Everyone leaves except for Feste, who sings a song and announces that the play is over.

Annotated Character List for *Twelfth Night*

Orsino: Duke of Illyria. At the beginning of the play, he is pale and sick from love for Olivia. By the end of the play, his false love becomes true love.

Sebastian: The twin brother of Viola. He was on a ship that became wrecked off the coast of Illyria, but he is rescued by his friend Antonio and makes it safely to shore.

Antonio: A captain on the ship that was wrecked. He is a loyal friend to Sebastian and rescued him from drowning.

Sea Captain: The head captain of the ship that was wrecked. He finds boy's clothes for Viola so that she can dress as a page and find employment with Orsino.

Valentine: A gentleman who is part of Orsino's court

Curio: A gentleman who is part of Orsino's court

Sir Toby Belch: Uncle of Olivia. His name suggests one of his common behaviors—belching from too much eating and drinking alcohol.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek: A friend of Sir Toby. He thinks he can win the hand of his friend's niece Olivia while he is a guest at her home.

Malvolio: The lead steward in Olivia's household. He presents himself as a Puritan of

lived in London and its suburbs. People were attracted to London because it gave many opportunities for work and financial improvement. It was also a vibrant social scene for the upper class. In fact, one honor of being a noble was the opportunity to house Queen Elizabeth and her entire party if she was in your neighborhood. If she was a guest, it was expected that her noble hosts would cover all the expenses of housing her group. She made many “progresses” through England and London, establishing her relationships with the nobility. However, several nobles asked to be released from this honor because the expense of supporting her visit had often caused them bankruptcy.

Perhaps it was better to be a flourishing member of the English merchant middle class. Their numbers and influence were rising in England at the time of Shakespeare. This was a new and an exciting development in Western European history. One major factor in the rise of the middle class was the need for wool for clothing. The expansion of the wool trade led to the formation of entire cities throughout England and sparked progress in many other areas of commerce and trade.

With the rise of the middle class came a concern for more comfortable housing. Rather than serving simply as shelter or defense against attack, housing developed architecturally and functionally. One major improvement was the use of windows to let in light. Also, houses were built with lofts and special places for eating and sleeping, rather than having one multifunctional room. However, doors between rooms

were still very rare, so that privacy in Shakespeare’s time did not really exist.

Meals in Shakespeare’s England were an important part of the day. Breakfast was served before dawn and was usually bread and a beverage. Therefore, everyone was really hungry for the midday meal, which could last up to three hours. If meat was available in the home, it was usually served at this time. A smaller supper was eaten at 6:00 or 7:00 P.M., with the more wealthy people able to eat earlier and the working class eating later. Cooking was dangerous and difficult since all meals were cooked over an open fire. Even bread was not baked in an oven but was cooked in special pans placed over the fire. A pot was almost always cooking on the fire, and the cook would put in whatever was available for supper. This is most likely where the term “potluck” came from.

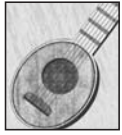
Furniture was usually made of carved wood, as woodcarving was a developing craft in Shakespeare’s day. One important part of an Elizabethan home was the table, or “board.” One side was finished to a nice sheen, while the other side was rough. Meals were served on the rough side of the board, and then it was flipped for a more elegant look in the room. The table is where we get the terms “room and board” and having “the tables turned.” Another important part of a middle or an upper-class home was the bed. Rather than being made of prickly straw, mattresses were now stuffed with softer feathers. Surrounded by artistically carved four posts, these beds were considered so valuable that they were often a specifically named item in a will.

Clothing in Shakespeare's time was very expensive. Of course, servants and other lower-class people wore simple garb, often a basic blue. But if a person wanted to display his wealth, his clothing was elaborate and colorful, sewn with rich velvet, lace, and gold braid. An average worker might earn seven or eight English pounds in a year, and a very nice outfit for a nobleman might cost as much as 50 or 60 pounds. In other words, if seven or eight healthy workers pooled their money for the entire year, spending nothing else, they could buy only one respectable nobleman's outfit.

Entertainment was an important part of life in Shakespeare's England. Popular sports were bear-baiting, cockfighting, and an early form of bowling. Bear-baiting, in which a dog was set loose to fight with up to three chained bears in the center of an amphitheater, and cockfighting, in which roosters pecked each other to death, were popular then but would be absolutely unacceptable entertainment today.

Bowling, however, has maintained its popularity in our current culture.

In London, a main source of entertainment was the theater. Some theaters were very large and could hold more than two thousand people. Even poor people could attend the theater since entrance cost only one penny (equivalent to 60 cents today), and they could stand around the stage. For a bit more money, a person could sit in an actual seat during the performance. However, some thought that going to the theater could be dangerous to your body or your soul. The theaters were closed twice during the plagues to reduce the spread of the disease. The Puritans disapproved of the theater as an unwholesome leisure time activity. And the Puritans also disliked the theater because the theaters were located in an area of London surrounded by brothels and bars. Nevertheless, the theater became respectable enough by 1603 to be supported by James I—and he was the monarch who directed the King James Version of the Bible to be translated.



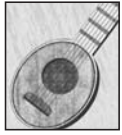
ACTIVITY 1

*The Lovesick Duke Orsino*Act one, Scene 1

Background We will see much more of the lovesick Duke pining away for his love, but you should first attempt to get your bearings on his situation.

Directions Answer the following questions based on the Duke's first speeches in Act one, Scene 1. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. What is "the food of love"? Why does the duke wish for the "excess" of it? (lines 1 and 2)
2. The Duke plays on the double meaning of "hart" (lines 21–23). What are its two meanings, and in what way is he Olivia's hart?
3. According to Valentine, why won't Olivia accept the Duke's courting of her or be seen in public? (lines 24–32)
4. How does the Duke turn even Olivia's mourning into something passionate in lines 33–41? Put another way, why does Olivia's commitment to mourn make the Duke believe in her ability to love passionately?
5. The relationship between love and music is a recurring theme in *Twelfth Night*, so be looking for it as you read the play. As the play begins, the Duke is like a lovesick teenager who listens to the same melancholy love tune over and over as he dreams of the object of his affection. Why do you think music has such a powerful effect on so many people?



ACTIVITY 6

*Character Assessments*Acts one and two

Background Shakespeare has created many fascinating characters in this play, and we can learn much about them and their perceptions of one another based on the lines they speak about one another.

Directions Based on the following lines, write a one- or two-sentence conclusion regarding each of the characters spoken of. Use another sheet of paper for your conclusions.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek (spoken by Maria), Act one, Scene 3, lines 26–29:

“He hath indeed, almost natural; for besides that he’s a fool, he’s a great quarreller; and but that he hath the gift of a coward to allay the gust he hath in quarrelling, ’tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have the gift of a grave.”

Feste (spoken by Malvolio), Act one, Scene 5, lines 74–78:

“I marvel that your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal; I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he’s out of his guard already; unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged.”

Orsino (spoken by Olivia), Act one, Scene 5, lines 234–239:

“Your lord does know my mind; I cannot love him; yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble, of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth; in voices well divulged, free, learned, and valiant; and in dimension and the shape of nature a gracious person; but yet I cannot love him.”

Viola (spoken by her brother, Sebastian), Act two, Scene 1, lines 21–25:

“A lady, sir, though it was said she much resembled me, was yet of many accounted beautiful; but, though I could not with such estimable wonder overfar believe that, yet thus far I will boldly publish her; she bore a mind that Envy could not but call fair.”

Malvolio (spoken by Maria), Act two, Scene 3, lines 133–138:

“The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass, that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.”