



# Twelfth Night

Study Guide by Course Hero



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## 👁 Book Basics

### AUTHOR

William Shakespeare

### YEARS WRITTEN

1600–02

### GENRE

Comedy

### PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR

The title *Twelfth Night* refers to the last night of Christmas holiday celebrations in England before the feast of the Epiphany (the Christian holy day commemorating Christ's appearance to the Magi). According to tradition, on Twelfth Night communities choose a "Lord of Misrule" to lead the

activities. Various kinds of pandemonium, often involving cross-dressing, the playing of practical jokes, and participating in other antics that temporarily disrupt social order ensue. These activities also figure prominently in Shakespeare's play. Its alternate title, *What You Will*, also evokes an atmosphere of free-for-all and may have been used to suggest *Twelfth Night's* relationship to Shakespeare's earlier play *As You Like It*.

### ABOUT THE TITLE

The title *Twelfth Night* refers to the last night of Christmas holiday celebrations in England before the feast of the Epiphany (the Christian holy day commemorating Christ's appearance to the Magi). According to tradition, on Twelfth Night communities choose a "Lord of Misrule" to lead the activities. Various kinds of pandemonium, often involving cross-dressing, playing practical jokes, and participating in other antics to temporarily disrupt social order ensue. These activities also figure prominently in Shakespeare's play. Its alternate title, *What You Will*, also evokes an atmosphere of free-for-all and may have been used to suggest *Twelfth Night's* relationship to Shakespeare's earlier play *As You Like It*.

## 🕒 In Context

### Theatrical Performances in Shakespeare's Time

Because women were barred from performing on the Elizabethan stage, young boys would generally assume female parts. A contemporary audience would have been comfortable with Viola cross-dressing to play Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, but identities would become even more complicated in Act 4 when a boy (Sebastian) acts a girl (Viola) who pretends to be a boy (Cesario). Elizabethan plays were most often performed in open-air theaters and on a very simple stage. The stage would

have a few doors for entrances and exits, possibly some pillars or a balcony, and sometimes a trap door allowing a character to pop out from under the stage. Furniture would include only what was absolutely necessary; for *Twelfth Night*, it might be no more than some chairs, brought on when needed, or a "tree" of some sort for the scene in which the conspirators (Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and Fabian) hide to watch Malvolio find the letter supposedly written to him by Olivia.

The theater usually had two viewing areas. Balconies ringing the stage were the expensive section. Here, wealthy people congregated, hobnobbed, and showed off their expensive clothes. The area closest to the stage was inexpensive because no seating was provided; audiences had to stand during the entire play. Tickets for this area were a penny each, and the people who purchased them were called "groundlings" because they stood on the ground. Groundlings also frequently brought snacks with them. Archeological excavations of London theater sites have turned up empty bottles and the remains of food.

When Shakespeare was writing his plays, no one knew his works would still be read and performed 400 years later. He was writing plays not for posterity, but to be performed immediately. He himself sometimes worked as an actor and later became a part owner and manager of a troupe of actors. His plays existed only in scripts intended for actors and were not published until after his death. As a result there are some inexplicable errors and inconsistencies in his plays. In *Twelfth Night* Orsino is referred to both as a count and as a duke, for example. Viola and Sebastian are described as twins, yet a line refers to Viola's birthday as if it were not also Sebastian's birthday.

## Twelfth Night

Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* sometime between 1600 and 1602. The first confirmed staging of *Twelfth Night* occurred in February 1602, although it is possible the play had been performed earlier. Few details are provided about the audience's reaction to the performance.

The plot of *Twelfth Night* is similar to those of several Italian plays as well as to a romance, *Gl'ingannati* (1531), by Italian author Matteo Bandello (c. 1480–1562). Shakespeare likely would have known this story from English writer Barnabe Rich's rendition of Bandello's tale (with the characters

renamed Apollonius and Silla) in *Riche His Farwell to the Militarie Profession* (1561). The tale includes the elements of a brother-sister separation, a shipwreck, a sister dressing as a man, and parallels to the Orsino and Olivia characters. Shakespeare borrowed plot elements from some of his own plays in *Twelfth Night*, including *The Comedy of Errors*, which turns on mistaken identities. He also used the theatrical device of a young woman who dresses as a man in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and in *As You Like It*.

## Elizabethan Attitudes toward Women and Marriage

Although Elizabeth I (1533–1603)—known as the Virgin Queen—remained unmarried and without progeny, noble women of the period were expected to marry and to produce multiple children. Because Elizabethan society was deeply patriarchal, a woman would not select her own husband. Instead, her father would choose a husband for her, or, if her father were dead, another male relative would take on the task. In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia's loss of both her father and her brother is, therefore, significant. Her only male relative is her hapless uncle, Sir Toby. He has brought Sir Andrew to her as a possible candidate for marriage, but Olivia will not even see him. She is willful and stubborn in an unladylike way. Hence the lovesick Orsino, another interested suitor, is frustrated with her. However, in the context of the Elizabethan era, Olivia cannot just send her suitors away. Her opinion as a mere woman would not have much weight against social judgment in praise of a worthy suitor. Orsino expresses similar ideas to Viola's, describing women as creatures needing tender care and protection.

## Author Biography

### Childhood and Family Life

The childhood of William Shakespeare is a murky area for scholars because few records of his early activities exist. Very little is known about his birth, education, or upbringing. However, according to church records, he was baptized on April 26, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, which leads

scholars to the conclusion that he was born on April 23 of that year. Birth records were not usually kept in Shakespeare's time, although church records—baptisms, weddings, burials—were kept fastidiously by clergy.

Shakespeare's family was solidly middle class, and he would have had a typical education for an English boy of his time at a public school endowed by Elizabeth I. This education would have included studying the Latin language and Roman and Greek classical literature. At age 18 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his elder who was already pregnant with their daughter Susanna. Anne gave birth to twins—Judith and Hamnet—a few years later. Church records reveal Hamnet died in childhood.

## Theatrical Life

Shakespeare moved to London to pursue a career as an actor and playwright, and, over time, he achieved success. He became a shareholder in the open-air Globe Theatre in London and had widespread fame as a playwright whose works included romantic and classically inspired comedies, histories, and tragedies. He is credited with writing at least 37 plays and over 150 sonnets.

Throughout his career Shakespeare and his fellow actors were supported by the patronage of the nation's monarchs—first by Elizabeth I (1533–1603), under whose reign Shakespeare's company was known as The Lord Chamberlain's Men. When James I (1566–1625) assumed the throne in 1603, the company was renamed the King's Men. Although many of Shakespeare's plays were written for performance at the Globe, the King's Men also performed at the nearby Blackfriars Theatre, a smaller indoor space, after 1608.

## Retirement and Legacy

In 1610 or 1611 Shakespeare retired, moving back to Stratford-upon-Avon. Despite his retirement from London life, the playwright continued to do some writing, contributing to *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* as well as to another play, *Cardenio*, now lost. Scholars believe these final works to be collaborations with John Fletcher (1579–1625), another playwright.

Shakespeare most likely died on April 23, 1616, leading to the

romantic notion that he was born and died on the same date, although there are no records of the exact date of either event. He was 52 at his death and was buried on April 25 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. Over 400 years after his death, Shakespeare is still regarded as the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world.

## Characters

### Viola

Viola survives a shipwreck and believes her brother was killed in it. Grieving, she decides to pretend to be a boy and find employment with Orsino, the Duke of Illyria. Cross-dressing as Cesario, she becomes Orsino's favorite page. She falls in love with him. On his orders she tries to woo Olivia for him. She is so persuasive that Olivia falls in love with *her*, leading to many complications. Viola accidentally discovers that her brother, Sebastian, did not drown, and they are reunited. When Orsino learns Cesario is really Viola, he realizes he has loved her all along and asks her to marry him.

### Orsino

Orsino, Duke of Illyria, suffers greatly from unrequited love. He has his heart set on winning Olivia, but she will not see him. He sends his new favorite servant, Cesario, to woo her for him. Orsino grows very fond of Cesario, but doesn't realize his servant is actually a woman, Viola. When Viola's true identity is revealed, Orsino understands he is in love with her, not Olivia.

### Olivia

Olivia has suffered through the deaths of her father and brother, and she has vowed to remain in mourning for seven years. In spite of that, she permits Orsino's new servant, Cesario (Viola), to plead Orsino's love to her. Cesario is compelling, and Olivia falls in love with Cesario, not realizing he is really a woman. Olivia pursues Cesario throughout the play. At one point she finds him—or so she thinks—and invites him into her house. He gladly accepts, but Olivia does not realize she has really found Viola's brother, Sebastian. She asks

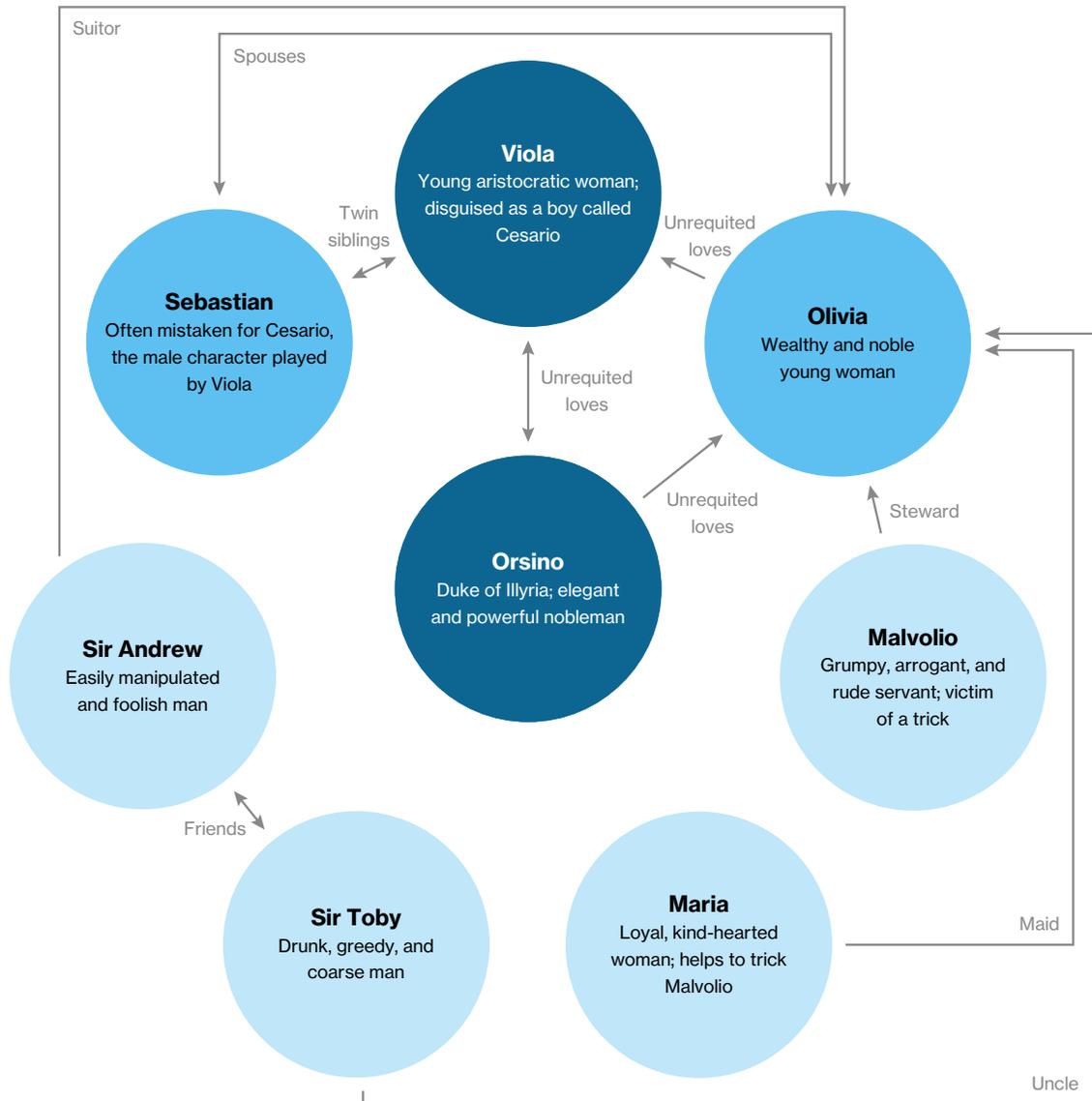
Sebastian to marry her, and he agrees. She doesn't discover her husband is actually Sebastian—not Cesario—until a few hours after the wedding.

## Sebastian

Sebastian is heartbroken because he believes his sister drowned in the shipwreck. He is grateful to Antonio, who saved him and has become almost a surrogate father to him.

Sebastian is perplexed when Olivia welcomes him so warmly (she believes him to be Cesario) but is impressed by her beauty and affection and happily agrees to marry her. He does not discover Viola is alive until after the wedding.

## Character Map



- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

## Full Character List

Character	Description
Viola	After losing her brother, Sebastian, in a shipwreck, Viola disguises herself as a boy named Cesario. She finds work as a page with Orsino and falls in love with him.
Orsino	Orsino is the Duke of Illyria. He is madly in love with Olivia, whom he barely knows, and he asks Viola (as Cesario) to woo her on his behalf. He develops a great fondness for his new servant, Cesario, but doesn't realize Cesario is a woman.
Olivia	Olivia is a beautiful, wealthy countess grieving over her brother's death. She swears she will receive no visitors for seven years, but she quickly gives up on her vow when she falls in love with Orsino's servant, Cesario (really Viola in disguise).
Sebastian	Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, is separated from her during the shipwreck and saved by Antonio. Viola does not know he is still alive. When he arrives in Illyria, people mistake him for Cesario, and much confusion ensues.
Sir Andrew	Sir Andrew Aguecheek is a foolish knight and a friend of Sir Toby's. Sir Toby wants Sir Andrew to marry Olivia. Sir Andrew is easily led by Sir Toby, Maria, or almost anyone.
Antonio	Antonio rescues Sebastian after the shipwreck and helps him find his way in Illyria. He is an old enemy of Orsino's, so he is in danger in Illyria.
Captain	The captain commanded the ship on which Viola and Sebastian sailed. He rescues Viola and keeps her secret when she disguises herself as a boy.
Curio	Curio is one of Orsino's attendants.
Fabian	A servant in Olivia's household, Fabian participates in the trick played on Malvolio.

Feste	The Fool, Feste, is Olivia's jester. As is typical in Shakespeare, he is a clown who often seems wiser than the other characters.
Malvolio	Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is a grumpy misanthrope or hater of humankind. His bossy demands lead Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew to play a trick on him.
Maria	Maria is Olivia's maid. She has a friendly, somewhat flirtatious relationship with Sir Toby, and she resents Malvolio. She writes the letter used to trick Malvolio.
Priest	The priest marries Olivia and Sebastian (who she believes is Cesario). Later, when Viola (as Cesario) denies she is married to Olivia, the priest is called upon to confirm the fact of the marriage.
Sir Toby	Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, is a loud, often drunk man. He is friendly with Sir Andrew, whom he is using because Sir Andrew is rich. Sir Toby resents Malvolio's bossiness and helps organize the trick played on him.
Valentine	Valentine is one of Orsino's attendants.

## Plot Summary

### Setting the Stage

Helped by the captain, Viola has survived a shipwreck in which she became separated from her brother, Sebastian. She presumes him to be dead. (He, too, has survived the shipwreck, however. Neither twin knows the other is still alive.) She has been washed ashore in Illyria, the kingdom of Orsino, Duke of Illyria. She decides to go to Orsino's court disguised as a boy, Cesario, and to seek employment. Orsino is melancholy because he is in love with Olivia and would like to propose marriage to her, but he can't make any progress. Olivia is in mourning for her dead brother and refuses to see any of Orsino's messengers. She has made a vow not to receive any visitors for seven years. She respects Orsino, but she is not attracted to him.

Cesario, now in the service of Orsino, has become the duke's favorite page. Orsino asks Cesario to plead his case to Olivia, but Cesario realizes she—Viola—has fallen in love with Orsino. When Cesario goes to Olivia and gives an eloquent speech relating Orsino's love for the lady, Olivia immediately falls passionately in love with Cesario. After Cesario leaves, Olivia sends her steward, Malvolio, after him with a ring and a request for Cesario to return on another occasion.

## Amorous Complications

With Olivia retired for the night, her uncle, Sir Toby; his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek; Olivia's maid, Maria; and Olivia's jester, Feste (called the Fool), drink and make merry. The dour Malvolio scolds them for inappropriately partying in a house of mourning, and they decide to get revenge on him. They later arrange for Malvolio to find a fake letter, apparently written by Olivia. The letter expresses Olivia's love for Malvolio, encouraging him to pursue her and bidding him to come and see her in ridiculous, bright yellow, cross-gartered stockings. When Malvolio tries to act on the suggestions in the letter, he makes a fool of himself, leading Olivia to think he has gone crazy. Based on this assessment, he is ultimately bound and confined in a dark room.

In the meantime Viola, in love with Orsino, tries to convince the duke to give up on Olivia, but he will not. As Cesario, she once again visits Olivia on Orsino's behalf. Olivia dismisses Orsino's suit yet again but now expresses her love for Cesario.

Outraged to see Olivia bestow such favor on a mere servant, Sir Toby encourages Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario to a duel.

## Twists of Fate

Saved by Antonio, Sebastian—Viola's brother—has also landed in Illyria. Antonio, however, turns out to be an old enemy of Orsino's. When Sebastian tells him he is going to Orsino's court, they separate, with Antonio giving him a purse of money in case he needs to buy something and wishing him good luck. Later, Antonio sees Sir Toby watching as Sir Andrew and someone he thinks to be Sebastian are drawing swords to duel, and he intervenes. Recognized as an enemy of the state, Antonio ends up getting arrested for saving Cesario (who he believes is Sebastian). When Antonio asks Cesario for his

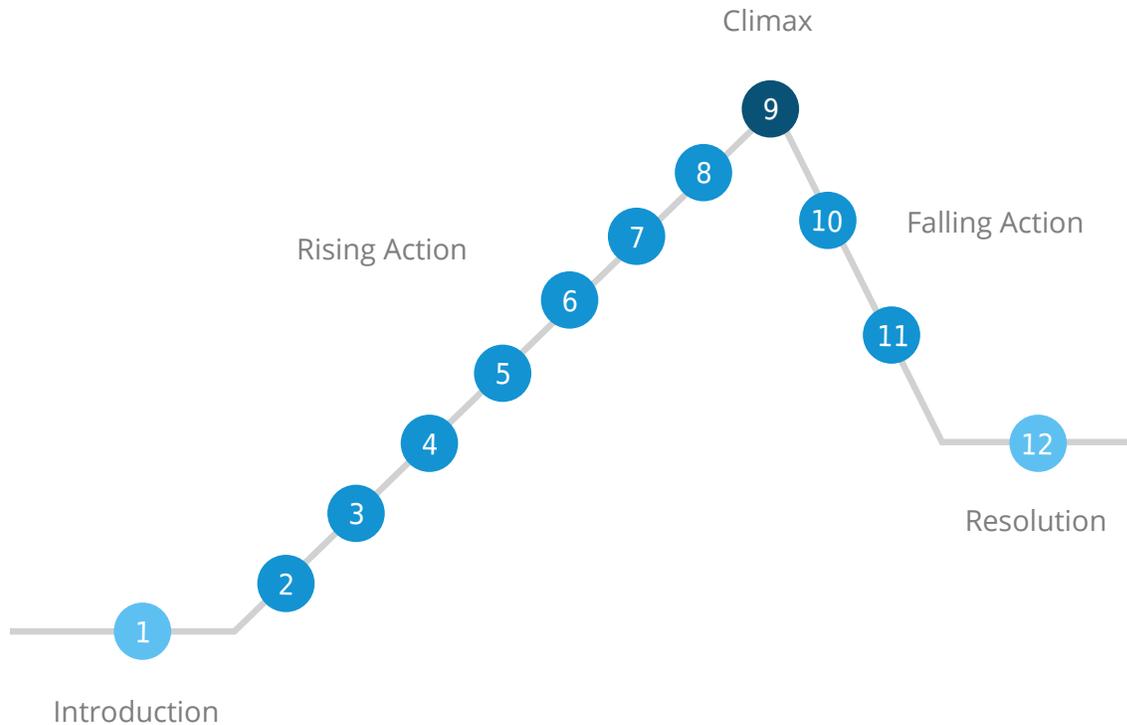
money purse back, Cesario refuses, saying he does not even know him.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew continue to chase Cesario, but they eventually come upon the wandering Sebastian (who they believe is Cesario). Sebastian defends himself, wounding both men. Assuming Sebastian is Cesario, Olivia prevents them from further fighting and then asks Cesario to marry her. Sebastian is utterly confused, but he accepts. After they are hastily married by a priest who happens to be on hand at Olivia's house, Sebastian heads out to find Antonio to return his money purse.

## All Is Explained

Orsino, accompanied by Viola (as Cesario), decides to visit Olivia. He is infuriated when Olivia introduces Cesario as her husband. Then Sebastian appears, and everything becomes clear. Viola and Sebastian are twins. Cesario is revealed to be Viola, and Orsino asks her to marry him. Olivia and Sebastian will live happily ever after. Sir Toby will marry Maria. Malvolio remains humiliated and unhappy. Finally released from the dark room, he storms out, scowling and vowing revenge as the others celebrate the new couples' happiness.

## Plot Diagram



### Introduction

1. Orsino loves Olivia, who won't see him.

### Rising Action

2. Viola goes to work for Orsino dressed as a boy (Cesario).
3. Orsino sends Cesario to woo Olivia, but Viola loves Orsino.
4. Viola (as Cesario) woos Olivia, who falls in love with her.
5. Sebastian appears in Illyria, having been saved by Antonio.
6. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria play a trick on Malvolio.
7. Antonio saves Cesario from a duel, thinking he is Sebastian.
8. Olivia asks Sebastian to marry her, thinking he is Cesario.

### Climax

9. Viola and Sebastian finally meet face-to-face.

### Falling Action

10. Orsino vows to marry Viola.
11. Olivia learns how Malvolio was tricked and frees him.

### Resolution

12. Orsino and Viola will stay with Olivia until they marry.

## Timeline of Events

### The same day

Viola has survived a shipwreck but lost Sebastian. She decides to go to Orsino's court as a boy.

### A few hours later

Viola (as Cesario) sees Olivia and speaks so persuasively that Olivia falls in love with her.

### A few minutes later

Viola (as Cesario) discusses love with Orsino.

### One day later

Viola (as Cesario) goes to see Olivia, who confesses she loves Cesario, thinking Viola is a boy.

### A few minutes later

Sir Andrew duels with Viola. Antonio intervenes but is

### One day in Illyria

Orsino is frustrated because he loves Olivia, who will not see him because she is in mourning.

### Three days later

Orsino sends Viola (as Cesario) to woo Olivia. But Viola loves Orsino, who thinks she's a boy.

### Elsewhere, the same time

Sebastian turns up in Illyria, having been saved by Antonio, an old enemy of Orsino.

### The next day

Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew play a trick on Malvolio, making him think Olivia loves him.

### A few minutes later

Malvolio tries to woo Olivia, but she thinks he is crazy. Malvolio is locked up.

arrested. Viola learns her brother is alive.

#### A few hours later

Olivia and Sebastian are married. Sebastian leaves to find Antonio.

#### A few moments later

Olivia calls Viola (i.e., Cesario) "husband"; the duelists blame Viola for Sebastian's actions.

#### A few minutes later

Orsino vows to marry Viola.

#### A minute later

Orsino announces that he and Viola will stay with Olivia until they are married.

#### A little while later

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew pick a fight with Sebastian (thinking him Cesario); Olivia intervenes.

#### Two hours later

Orsino and Viola (as Cesario) visit Olivia's house so Orsino can woo her in person.

#### A moment later

Sebastian appears, and everyone's misunderstanding is cleared up.

#### Several minutes later

Olivia learns of the trick played on Malvolio and frees him, but he is still angry.

# Scene Summaries

## Act 1, Scene 1

### Summary

The play begins in Illyria, at the court of Orsino, Duke of Illyria. Orsino calls for music: "If music be the food of love, play on." He is suffering agonies of love, which he expects his entire court to suffer with him. He loves Countess Olivia. He barely knows her, but she is beautiful, noble, and wealthy, so he pursues her. However, since her brother's recent death (and her father's death not too long ago), Olivia has gone into deep mourning and will receive none of his messengers.

### Analysis

The play is set in Illyria, an imaginary country in Shakespeare's time, but which did exist as a country hundreds of years earlier, around the 10th century BCE, on the Balkan Peninsula. It eventually became part of the Roman Empire. Shakespeare often chose exotic locations for his plays, which allowed him to invent bizarre customs or laws or to present situations that would not occur in Elizabethan England. He often uses cities in Italy for this purpose, but he also invented his own countries.

By using a fictional setting, Shakespeare could more easily claim the people or events in his plays did not represent real people. For example, he could insist Orsino did not represent a particular duke. Orsino suffers tremendously from unrequited love for Olivia, a woman he has scarcely ever seen. The only thing that soothes him is music, particularly sad music: "That strain again! It had a dying fall."

Orsino speaks in blank verse. Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter, so each line is made up of 10 syllables, usually five stressed alternating with five unstressed syllables, but without rhyme. Shakespeare regularly used blank verse for the speech of his noble or higher-status characters. In *Twelfth Night*, blank verse is also often used when talking about love.

Orsino is not the only character with a dramatic—some would say overdramatic—reaction to the events in his life. For

instance, after her brother's death, Olivia vows she will remain in mourning, veiled, and hidden from "the element itself" (i.e., the sky) for seven years. By today's standards, many Shakespearean plays appear almost soap opera-like in terms of dramatic reactions and effects, and *Twelfth Night* is no exception. However, Shakespeare is establishing the play as a comedy, so characters have exaggerated reactions to relatively normal events such as unrequited love or a sibling's death. People generally survive unrequited love, and while a sibling's death is painful and tragic, seven years of deep mourning and isolation seem a bit extreme.

## Act 1, Scene 2

### Summary

Viola, a young lady, has survived a shipwreck, but her brother, Sebastian, was last seen clinging to a bit of wreckage. Viola believes he is dead. The captain who saved her talks with her about Illyria, where they have landed. She longs to work for the countess Olivia, who is also mourning a brother, but the captain tells her that Olivia won't see anyone. Instead Viola decides to disguise herself as a boy, Cesario, and get a job as a page to Orsino. She asks the captain for help: "Conceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent."

### Analysis

Like a character in a fairy tale, Viola finds herself alone in the world. Her brother is apparently lost at sea, though the captain tells her Sebastian might have survived: "I saw your brother, / Most provident in peril, bind himself / ... To a strong mast that lived upon the sea." In spite of that, Viola grieves as if he were dead.

Viola's conversation with the captain provides additional details. Apparently Olivia has lost both her father and her brother within the last year, which makes her deep mourning a little easier to understand, although seven years is still excessive. When the captain mentions Orsino, Viola says she heard her father speak of him, remembering "He was a bachelor then." It is possible Viola's father had mentioned Orsino to her as a potential suitor. On the other hand, Viola

may have hoped that if Orsino were married, she could obtain a place working for his wife.

Viola decides to pretend to be a boy. This is a common device in Shakespearean comedies. Women were barred from performing on stage in Shakespeare's era, so plays were performed solely by male actors, with young boys typically taking the roles of females. So the actor playing Viola would have been a boy pretending to be a girl who is pretending to be a boy. That in itself would be good for some laughs from the audience. Within the story, however, Viola's decision makes sense for two reasons. On a practical level, it allows her to get a job as a page and support herself; a woman would have very limited options in an all-male court such as Orsino's. On an emotional level, Viola's turning herself into Cesario, a counterpart of Sebastian (who, as we learn later, is her twin), allows her to keep his memory alive and grieve for him while still protecting herself.

## Act 1, Scene 3

### Summary

At Olivia's house, her uncle, Sir Toby Belch, and her maid, Maria, talk about Olivia's grief for her brother. Sir Toby is frustrated: "What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life." He wants to have fun. In particular he wants Olivia to accept his friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, as a husband. But Sir Andrew is hardly an impressive specimen, and Olivia has not taken any notice of him.

### Analysis

Shakespeare's comedies inevitably include some elements of low comedy—things done purely to make people laugh, often involving physical humor, crude jokes, sexual innuendo, boasting, and drunkenness. This helped keep the attention of the groundlings, those members of the audience who bought cheap tickets, stood nearest the stage, and were known to throw food at the actors when they were bored. While they certainly enjoyed the dramatic speeches, a few quick, easy laughs also helped keep them engaged. Shakespeare's plays often include a host of characters who are guaranteed to

provide this type of humor. Low-comedy characters typically speak in prose rather than in verse, as in this scene, in which the audience meets Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's servant Maria, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek for the first time.

Sir Toby characterizes himself immediately by saying "care's an enemy to life." Olivia, in his mind, needs to stop being so sad, but his approach of drunken and noisy partying does not suit his niece at all, as Maria tries to explain. Sir Toby teases Maria with a play on words; when she tells him to "confine" his activities, he takes it as a request to dress better. Maria brings up another grievance: Sir Andrew. From Maria and Sir Toby's conversation, the audience understands Sir Toby likes Sir Andrew chiefly because he has money and is easy to manipulate. Maria says Sir Andrew is foolish and cowardly. His surname, Aguecheek, also suggests he is skinny, as if he is suffering from a disease.

When Sir Andrew does appear, he immediately demonstrates his foolishness. Sir Toby encourages him to flirt with Maria, hinting with sexual innuendo, but Sir Andrew doesn't seem to understand what Sir Toby means. Maria does, and she dismisses the idea, leading Sir Toby to complain that Sir Andrew was "put down." Although Sir Andrew is foolish, he knows he won't win Olivia. He tells Sir Toby she won't even see him. Nevertheless, with minimal persuasion from Sir Toby, he swears to stay "a month longer," and the two of them go off to celebrate noisily.

## Act 1, Scene 4

### Summary

Three days have passed. Viola, disguised as a boy named Cesario, is Orsino's new favorite servant. Valentine, one of Orsino's attendants, tells her so, and reassures her that Orsino is not "inconstant" in his treatment of servants. Orsino commands Cesario to go to Olivia and wait outside her gate until she receives his message. He thinks Cesario might be able to gain admittance to see Olivia and woo her effectively because he is so young and looks almost like a girl. Viola agrees to see Olivia, but does so reluctantly—she has fallen in love with Orsino herself.

## Analysis

It is extraordinary that Viola would be Orsino's favorite servant after only three days at his court. Maybe Orsino is easily swayed by a new face, but Valentine's comment indicates otherwise. Viola must have been a particularly effective servant in those three days for Orsino to be so determined to send her to speak to Olivia.

Why is Orsino so desperate to have Olivia? He tells Cesario to push the boundaries of polite behavior if that is what it takes for Cesario to get an audience with Olivia. Olivia seems to have become a symbol of idealized womanhood to Orsino, and he is determined to conquer her. Many marriages in Elizabethan England were more practical than romantic, particularly for titled individuals. But Orsino is not seeking Olivia's lands or titles. She is a countess, but he is the ruler of Illyria. Orsino's conversation focuses solely on the lady's personal qualities, and he is determined to have her—at great emotional cost to Viola, who has already fallen in love with Orsino.

At the end of the scene, Orsino suggests Cesario will be more effective in wooing Olivia because of his youth. He says: "For they shall yet belie thy happy years / That say thou art a man." He describes Cesario's lips as hairless and his voice as feminine, even comparing his lips to those of the goddess Diana. Orsino thus seems to be attracted to his male servant (though he is clearly interested in women), yet it never occurs to him that Cesario might be a woman.

Viola says she wishes she could marry Orsino. Shakespeare's use of language in *Twelfth Night* shows the audience that Orsino and Viola are meant to be together. Orsino and Viola both speak in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter, or alternately stressed, 10-syllable lines) because they are noble characters. When Orsino is raving about his love for Olivia, however, Shakespeare deliberately breaks some of the lines. Sometimes Shakespeare intentionally makes a line by Orsino shorter than 10 syllables, and some of Orsino's broken lines are actually completed by Viola (in other words, if Orsino's and Viola's lines are combined, they equal 10 syllables). For example, at the end of the scene, Orsino's line ends " ... To call his fortunes thine" and Viola responds, "I'll do my best." Each looks like a half-line, but together they add up to a full line. They appear to be visually related on the printed page. This relationship between Orsino and Viola's lines is suggestive of the culmination of their romance by the end of the play—in other words, they are meant for each other because they

complete each other's thoughts.

## Act 1, Scene 5

### Summary

Maria brings the Fool to Olivia. The Fool tries to cheer Olivia up, but Malvolio complains his jokes are weak. Malvolio tells Olivia a messenger from Orsino waits at the gate and will not leave before he sees her. Olivia, putting on a black mourning veil, says the messenger may enter.

The messenger is Cesario. Cesario makes an eloquent speech and, out of curiosity, asks Olivia to remove the veil. Olivia does so, and Cesario responds with such beautiful language that Olivia falls in love with him. She rejects Orsino's suit, but tells Cesario to come back again. After Cesario leaves, Olivia summons Malvolio and sends him after Cesario with a ring, on the pretense Cesario left it with her.

### Analysis

Two more characters are introduced in this scene: the Fool (Feste) and Malvolio, Olivia's steward. Like all Shakespearean clowns, the Fool is actually wiser than most of the other characters in the play. He demonstrates this when he tells Olivia that mourning for her brother is foolish because her brother is in heaven. While Olivia seems to appreciate Feste's humor, Malvolio does not. He is self-absorbed, gloomy, and grumpy at all times. His name even comes from the Latin *malus*, meaning "bad." Malvolio wants to get rid of the Fool, but Olivia comes to the Fool's defense.

Olivia, for all her sadness, is apparently eager to let go of her vow to mourn her brother for seven years. It doesn't really take much persuasion to get her to see Orsino's messenger, and Cesario doesn't have to beg Olivia to take off her mourning veil. Olivia may already be regretting her promise. She seems ready for something new, and she finds it in Cesario.

Cesario was not instructed to ask to see Olivia's face. Viola is understandably curious about the woman Orsino loves, and she is clearly impressed by Olivia's beauty: "'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white / Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on." Olivia is not impressed by compliments or by

Cesario's descriptions of Orsino's passion for her, though she notes Orsino's many good qualities. Olivia is only emotionally affected when Cesario shifts into blank verse for the "Make me a willow cabin at your gate" speech. She immediately asks about Cesario's parentage and sends a message to Orsino: "I cannot love him. Let him send no more— / Unless perchance you come to me again / To tell me how he takes it." She is already creating a reason to see Cesario again, as she continues to do when she sends a ring via Malvolio. No sooner does Cesario leave than Olivia raves enthusiastically over the boy she just met and notes, "Even so quickly may one catch the plague." Act 1 ends with a complication neither Viola nor Orsino expected.

## Act 2, Scene 1

### Summary

Sebastian, Viola's brother, arrives in Illyria with the help of Antonio. Antonio saved Sebastian from the shipwreck, and he wants to continue helping him, even though Antonio is in danger in Illyria because he has enemies at Orsino's court. Sebastian is grieving for Viola, who he thinks is dead, but he sets out for Orsino's court.

### Analysis

For the first time the audience sees Sebastian, Viola's brother, who, it turns out, did not drown. Like Viola, Sebastian speaks in prose, too emotionally distraught to be poetic. Within the first few minutes of the scene, Sebastian says he and Viola are twins, thus setting up as plausible Olivia's confusion of him with Cesario in Act 4. He describes his sister, whom he believes to be dead, as beautiful and intelligent—an unusual description, as women were rarely praised for their intelligence in Shakespeare's day.

Sebastian sees himself as cursed. He tells Antonio, "My stars shine darkly over me. The malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours." Because Sebastian and Viola's father is also dead, Sebastian may indeed have reason to think himself unlucky. However, he was lucky to have Antonio find him. Antonio repeatedly expresses his love for Sebastian, almost as if he views him as a surrogate son. Antonio is older, a peer of

Orsino's—possibly even a peer of Sebastian and Viola's father—so he may feel a certain obligation to look after an unfortunate young man in a strange environment.

Sebastian expresses his desire to see Orsino's court. Like his sister, he may remember his father speaking of Orsino in the past. Thanks to dramatic irony (in which the reader or audience know something the character does not), the audience has an even greater desire to see Sebastian in Orsino's court: they know he will find Viola there.

## Act 2, Scene 2

### Summary

Malvolio finds Cesario, who has just left Olivia, and delivers the ring from Olivia. Cesario tries to reject the ring, but Malvolio insists on his taking it. After she leaves, Viola realizes Olivia sent her the ring as a gift because Olivia is in love with her. Viola feels sorry for Olivia because Olivia's love for her is as impossible as Viola's love for Orsino.

### Analysis

When Malvolio first offers Viola the ring, she responds: "She took the ring of me. I'll none of it." Why does Viola lie? Olivia, too, lied, when she told Malvolio that Cesario gave *her* the ring. This parallel points to many similarities between Viola and Olivia. In the previous scene the audience learned Viola's father is dead, so she is fatherless and brotherless (she thinks), just like Olivia. Olivia seems to be someone with whom Viola might be friends, so perhaps her first instinct is the polite lie to protect Olivia's dignity and reputation. She knows Olivia is defying social custom by sending a ring to a servant. Along with delivering the ring, Malvolio repeats Olivia's message: Orsino should not send anyone back to speak to Olivia unless it is Cesario. If Viola missed the implications of Olivia's earlier overtures, she certainly can't misunderstand now. As she says once she is alone on stage, "I am the man."

Viola is sympathetic to Olivia for another reason, too: like Olivia, she loves someone who does not love her back. Viola's speech in this scene neatly outlines the love triangle: "My master loves her dearly, / And I, poor monster, fond as much on him, / And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me." Viola says

she has no idea how this situation came about or how it will ultimately work out—and neither does the audience. The audience also knows about another complication: the presence of Sebastian.

Also in this speech, Viola addresses one of the major themes of the play: the way disguise or deceit can cause problems in society and in love. Viola describes disguise as a tool of the devil and describes her alter ego, Cesario, as a "monster" because he is neither fully man nor fully woman in his borrowed clothes and borrowed name.

Shakespeare ends this scene with one of his favorite concluding devices—a rhymed couplet. Shakespeare wrote more than 150 sonnets, all of which ended with a rhymed couplet or a pair of rhyming lines. He used the couplet to emphasize the main idea or theme of the sonnet, as well as to wrap it up in a neat conclusion. In the same way, a couplet can clearly indicate the end of a scene, as it does here when Viola says, "O Time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie."

## Act 2, Scene 3

### Summary

Late at night, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are boisterously drinking and partying. They invite the Fool to join them, and he serenades them with a love song, followed by a loud, drunken "catch" (or round song). Maria comes in to quiet them, followed shortly by Malvolio. Malvolio scolds them all severely for behaving inappropriately in a house of mourning, and they decide to take revenge on him.

Maria offers to write a letter, supposedly written by Olivia, that implies Olivia is in love with Malvolio. Maria says her handwriting is very similar to Olivia's. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Fool will all join Maria to secretly watch Malvolio "accidentally" find the letter. They are eager to see how he reacts. The night, however, ends on a melancholy note as Sir Andrew continues to complain of spending too much money and having no luck with Olivia.

### Analysis

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew now demonstrate exactly the sort of behavior expected of low comedy characters. They are drunk and rowdy, and they persuade the Fool to join them in their revelry. A "catch" is a song sung in rounds (e.g., one person starts singing, a moment later the second person joins in starting at the beginning, then the third, and so on, as in "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"). Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's song is a repetition of the phrase "Hold Thy Peace." Because "hold thy peace" means "be quiet," their loud singing is already humorous. The lyrics can also be interpreted as having a sexual meaning (with "piece" referring to the male sexual organ), which would fit with Sir Toby's style of humor.

While Sir Toby is the instigator of most of the pandemonium, Maria is the one who thinks up a way to trick the dour, sanctimonious Malvolio. If Malvolio wasn't so awful to them, the trick might never have happened. Malvolio is doing his job as steward in trying to maintain order in the household, but he is extravagantly harsh in his comments. He tells Sir Toby that Olivia wants to kick her uncle out of the house, though nothing Olivia ever says supports such a claim. Malvolio threatens to blame Maria for the men's revels even though she only came to quiet them down. It's hard to feel sorry for Malvolio. He deserves what he gets.

In spite of the scene's chaos, there is a melancholy tinge to it as well. The Fool sings a love song—at Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's request—emphasizing the passing of time. At the end of the scene, Sir Andrew sounds sorrowful. Sir Toby claims Maria adores him, and Sir Andrew responds with "I was adored once, too." He also complains about running out of money, but Sir Toby assures him that Olivia will marry him and he'll be rich. The audience, of course, knows the unlikelihood of such a union. Sir Andrew is being used, and he will suffer for it. He is a foolish character, and no doubt many audience members would feel he, too, deserves what he gets.

## Act 2, Scene 4

### Summary

Orsino talks with Cesario about love. Viola's response makes him realize Cesario has also been in love, and Orsino asks

about the object of his affection. Viola, choosing her words carefully, describes the object of her love as someone very much like Orsino. Orsino objects, because he thinks a man should choose a younger woman. The two of them listen together to a song sung by Olivia's Fool, who is visiting Orsino's house. After the song, Orsino tries to send Cesario to see Olivia again. Viola doesn't want to go, and tries to point out that Olivia definitely does not love Orsino. Orsino will not listen, so Viola attempts to tell him a story: "My father had a daughter loved a man / As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your Lordship." Orsino becomes interested in the story. He asks, "But died thy sister of her love, my boy?" Viola responds, "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers, too—and yet I know not." Anxious to change the subject, Viola finally agrees to go back to talk to Olivia again.

## Analysis

Although Orsino still believes Cesario is a boy, Shakespeare depicts this as a love scene between Orsino and Viola. He reinforces the idea through his handling of blank verse: the two of them complete each other's broken lines, once again suggesting in auditory and visual fashion that they belong together.

Orsino doesn't realize Cesario is a woman, but he picks up on the page's tone quickly enough and recognizes that Cesario, too, is in love. Viola does her best to be truthful about her loved one, describing her love as similar to Orsino in looks and age. Orsino does not approve, saying the man should be the elder in the relationship. Shakespeare is again returning to the topsy-turvy theme: an older woman with a younger man would be wrong by Elizabethan standards. (Viola, of course, is younger than Orsino.)

Orsino loves Olivia because she is beautiful, but he has had very limited interaction with her. Earlier in Act 2, Sebastian described Viola as being both beautiful and intelligent, and her intellectual qualities are on full display in this scene. She listens sympathetically to Orsino, but she also challenges him. She asks why he cannot accept Olivia's refusal—a question that seems to trouble him. Although a few minutes earlier Orsino spoke reverently of women's faithfulness in love, he insists no woman could ever love him the way he loves Olivia.

Viola talks to Orsino about herself using oblique references at first. She talks of her father's daughter who loved a man "as it

might be, perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your Lordship." When Orsino questions her further, she effectively tells him who she is, saying "I am all the daughters of my father's house." Somehow Orsino does not catch on.

Viola follows up with "I am all the daughters ... And all the brothers, too." Her masquerade is connected to her grief for her brother, Sebastian. She looks like Sebastian, and she uses her male disguise to keep her brother's memory alive. The audience now knows Sebastian is alive, so Viola will not need to continue her masquerade much longer.

## Act 2, Scene 5

### Summary

Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew are ready to play their trick on Malvolio. They have also invited Fabian, one of Olivia's servants. Fabian has reasons to resent Malvolio. They drop the letter in the garden where Malvolio will most probably see it, and they hide to observe him.

Malvolio enters the garden, daydreaming. He claims Maria is in love with him, but his real fantasy is to be married to Olivia. He describes the life he imagines with her in some detail, including the way he would humiliate "my kinsman Toby." In the meantime the hidden characters are frequently laughing and bursting in with comic asides and objections to what Malvolio says, thereby providing much humor for the audience.

Malvolio picks up and reads the letter and is immediately convinced it is from Olivia. The letter is phrased carefully and obliquely, but Malvolio immediately interprets it to be about himself. It ends with a request to appear before Olivia in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, and smiling. After Malvolio dashes off, Maria anticipates his first approach to Olivia: "He will come to her in yellow stockings, and 'tis a color she abhors, and cross-gartered, a fashion she detests."

### Analysis

Shakespeare included minimal, if any, stage directions for his plays. Usually rendered in italics in printed texts, stage directions describe the locations or movements of characters on stage. For example, at the start of Act 2, Scene 5, the

directions only indicate "Enter Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian." Because very few copies of Shakespeare's acting scripts have survived, a modern reader must use his or her imagination to visualize what might be happening on stage based on the text.

A scene such as this really calls for imaginative staging. Several characters are attempting to hide; the audience can see and hear them, but Malvolio cannot. Shakespeare often made use of the theatrical device of characters eavesdropping on other characters, perhaps most humorously in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Although Malvolio is talking to himself, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and Fabian talk at least twice as much as he does, usually telling one another to be quiet. The constant repetition of the word "Peace" echoes the "Hold Thy Peace" round which they sang the night before—the song which got them in trouble with Malvolio in the first place.

Maria's letter falls on fertile ground. Before he ever sees the letter, Malvolio imagines himself as a count married to Olivia and controlling the people around him. When he reads the letter, Malvolio says, "If I could make that resemble something in me!" He wants earnestly to make it about himself.

Maria wants to embarrass Malvolio, but not do him any permanent damage. She asks him to dress in an inappropriate way (bright yellow stockings "cross-gartered") for someone of his age and social position. Men in Shakespeare's time wore hose—a cross between long socks and tights—cross-gartered, or "crossed" and tied at the knee. Some experts have suggested cross-gartering was old-fashioned even by the time of *Twelfth Night*, while others speculate that it might have been the latest fashion for dashing young gentlemen. In either case, a steward would be expected to dress simply, in dark colors. Bright yellow stockings in a flashy or outmoded style are wildly inappropriate to Malvolio's social station. Even worse for Malvolio, the letter asks him to smile. Malvolio is known as an extremely somber man, so a smile on his face would be sure to look false and strange. Olivia may laugh at him, which would certainly hurt his pride—a reasonable revenge after the way he threatened to tattle on the tricksters.

## Act 3, Scene 1

## Summary

Viola (as Cesario) has gone to see Olivia again. She is greeted by the Fool, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew. Impressed by Cesario's turn of phrase, Sir Andrew tries to take notes on how Cesario speaks to Olivia, but Olivia sends them all away so she can speak to Cesario privately.

Olivia tells Cesario of her love. She acknowledges the awkward position she is in because of the stratagem of sending Cesario a ring, and she invites Cesario to respond. Viola tries to be gentle with her, but Olivia interprets gentleness as affection, so Viola has to be clear: "I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, / And that no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it, save I alone." She promises never to visit Olivia again, but Olivia encourages her to return.

## Analysis

Viola has an entertaining conversation with the Fool in which they trade witticisms and play with the meanings of words to comic effect. She seems to be able to keep up with him verbally and intellectually in a way Olivia was not. After the Fool leaves, Viola says, "This fellow is wise enough to play the Fool, / And to do that well craves a kind of wit." Through the character of the Fool in this scene, Shakespeare builds on the theme of the topsy-turvy world. The Fool is wise. In fact, Shakespeare's fools are often wiser than the other characters; they are willing to accept the world as it is, even when the world is crazy.

The world continues in topsy-turvy mode when Olivia dismisses her entire household so she can be alone with Cesario and almost immediately announce her love for him. The language of the play at this point quickly shifts into blank verse: Olivia wants to talk of love, and Viola matches her, though Viola wants to speak of Orsino's love for Olivia in order to fulfill her duty to him. Although their language is in harmony stylistically, Viola (as Cesario) appears cold—even stern—to Olivia. She says she pities Olivia because the latter has debased herself by stooping to "shameful cunning" in her pursuit of love, but when Olivia wants to interpret that as a type of love ("That's a degree to love"), Viola contradicts her: "No, not a grize, for 'tis a vulgar proof / That very oft we pity enemies."

Olivia does not misunderstand, and a few lines later she says,

"Be not afraid, good youth, I will not have you." She is rejecting something Cesario never offered. Cesario looks like a very young man, which is another reason why he would be an inappropriate match for the older Olivia. Yet just a few lines later Olivia pleads her case again, this time in rhymed couplets: "I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride, / Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide." Viola also responds in rhymed couplets, swearing she does not love Olivia.

## Act 3, Scene 2

### Summary

Sir Andrew complains to Sir Toby and Fabian that he is thoroughly disillusioned about his chances with Olivia: "Marry, I saw your niece do more favors to the count's servingman than ever she bestowed upon me." Sir Toby assures him Olivia did this on purpose to make Sir Andrew jealous, and he convinces Sir Andrew to write a letter to Cesario "in a martial hand," challenging him to a duel. Sir Andrew sets off to do so, but Sir Toby says Sir Andrew is not brave enough to fight a challenge, and he doubts whether Cesario is, either. Maria tells them Malvolio is dressed in cross-gartered, yellow stockings and grinning from ear to ear as he goes to see Olivia. They all race off to watch how their trick on him ultimately plays out.

### Analysis

Sir Andrew is one of the saddest characters in *Twelfth Night*. In the previous scene, he is making mental notes of the words Cesario uses in speaking with Olivia, as if he can make Olivia love him simply by using the correct words. In the present scene he is understandably dismayed when the woman he wants to marry is more gracious and affectionate to a servant than to a knight such as himself. However, Sir Andrew continues to demonstrate how easily he can be manipulated. Sir Toby has to exert very little effort to convince Sir Andrew that Olivia wanted to make him jealous. Sir Toby addresses Sir Andrew in affectionate terms, but once Sir Andrew has left, he bluntly confides to Fabian that he has gotten money from Sir Andrew, which is the real reason for his affection.

Sir Toby is the instigator: he encourages Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario to a duel, and he will later be the one to

make Malvolio's humiliation even more painful for him. Sir Toby does not seem to care about the people he tricks. In the Elizabethan era, duels regularly ended in death, but Sir Toby is confident Sir Andrew doesn't have the courage to actually fight a real duel. Fabian agrees with Sir Toby's assessment of both Sir Andrew's cowardice and Cesario's courage.

Maria's appearance at the end of the scene reminds the audience of the great fun they will have in seeing Malvolio looking ridiculous and being humiliated in front of Olivia. His pathetic attempt to ingratiate himself with Olivia is already irritating to Maria: "I can hardly forbear hurling things at / him. I know my lady will strike him. If she do, he'll / smile and take 't for a great favor."

## Act 3, Scene 3

### Summary

Antonio has rejoined Sebastian. Sebastian is glad of his company, though he does not want to put Antonio to any more inconvenience. He wants to see the town, but Antonio explains he is an old enemy of Orsino's and had better not walk the streets freely. They agree to split up: Antonio will arrange lodging for them at an inn, and Sebastian will explore the town. Antonio offers Sebastian his money purse so Sebastian can buy what he likes, and they agree to meet at the inn in an hour.

### Analysis

Sebastian is clearly glad to see Antonio again, although he regrets needing so much assistance. Antonio, on the other hand, has followed Sebastian simply to make sure he is all right. In a play where the major characters are all parentless, Antonio's action stands out. He is one of the few characters who gives without any expectation of recompense, exhibiting the kind of unconditional love a parent is expected to give a child. Like a parent with a child, Antonio offers Sebastian some money so he can pick up a "toy" if he sees something he likes. This deep affection between Sebastian and Antonio becomes important later in the play. Antonio has a lot of trust in Sebastian. Most people, if they were in a place they knew to be dangerous to them, would not cheerfully hand over their wallet so someone else could buy "toys."

Antonio is in a dangerous place. He minimizes what happened to make him an enemy of Illyria, claiming not very many people were killed and the costs have been mostly paid back. Yet he still obviously believes himself to be at risk of arrest. If this past incident has really been handled, why would he still expect Orsino's men to arrest him? In any case Sebastian takes him at his word and they separate, agreeing to meet in an hour.

## Act 3, Scene 4

### Summary

Olivia has sent a servant to bring Cesario back to her. Nervous, she calls for Malvolio, saying, "He is sad and civil, / And suits well for a servant with my fortunes." Following the instructions in the letter he found, Malvolio enters in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, and grinning madly. He verbally flirts with Olivia and refers to the letter, which she, of course, knows nothing about. She decides he must be crazy and tells Maria to have Sir Toby take care of him, saying, "Let some of my people have a special care of him. I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry." Malvolio believes this order proves Olivia *does* care for him. When Sir Toby and the others approach him, he is even crueler to them than usual. Sir Toby decides they should bind and lock Malvolio up in a dark room as if he were insane.

Sir Andrew enters with his letter challenging Cesario to a duel. It is badly written, but Sir Andrew is proud of it. After he leaves, Sir Toby says he will not deliver the challenge as written because it wouldn't frighten anyone. Instead Sir Toby will challenge Cesario verbally, so he can personally portray Sir Andrew as a fierce fighter.

Olivia reenters with Cesario. She is trying to win him over, but Viola will not be swayed. When Olivia leaves, Sir Toby confronts Cesario with Sir Andrew's challenge. Viola does not want to fight, and neither does Sir Andrew, but they are egged on by Sir Toby and Fabian. Antonio stops the fight before it starts. Thinking Viola is Sebastian, Antonio readily leaps into the fight to defend his young friend. As a result he is arrested. Antonio asks Viola to return his money purse, which she, of course, does not have. Antonio feels betrayed and he shouts at Viola, calling her Sebastian. In that moment, Viola realizes her brother is alive and she runs off to look for him. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew chase after her, determined to finish the duel.

### Analysis

Olivia reveals, in part, why she prefers Cesario over other possible romantic candidates: he is young and, she thinks, easy to control. She nervously contemplates ways to win Cesario's heart, including feasts and gifts. This sounds more like appeasing a spoiled child than wooing a lover. If Olivia accepted Orsino, he would be in charge; by pursuing Cesario, Olivia maintains control of the situation.

Malvolio is another person who wants to maintain control, but with disastrous consequences. The letter he found suggested Olivia's fondness for smiles and silly, gaudy stockings. But when the transformed Malvolio greets Olivia, he makes it so much worse. He calls Olivia "sweet lady" and "sweetheart." Olivia thinks he is not well and suggests he go to bed, but he interprets her remark as an amorous invitation. No wonder she concludes he is crazy. Malvolio's own presumptuous behavior toward Olivia causes far more problems for him than the trick played on him ever could.

The duel between Sir Andrew and Cesario allows Shakespeare to gently poke fun at chivalrous behavior. Sir Andrew is a knight, after all. He presumably knows how to conduct a duel. But his challenge as it is formulated in the letter sounds muddled because he suggests Cesario might be able to kill him and because he calls himself both Cesario's friend and enemy in the space of a few lines. No wonder Sir Toby takes matters into his own hands and opts for delivering a verbal challenge instead.

While the duel is amusing to the audience, it is deadly serious to Viola. Most upper-class men in the Elizabethan era would have at least some basic knowledge of swordplay, but it was not commonly taught to women of any class. Viola could easily be killed in a duel, and if she were wounded, a doctor would discover her secret. Therefore Viola has very good reasons for trying to avoid the duel.

Shakespeare's language makes his opinion about the lack of nobility of the people involved in the duel clear because Sir Toby and Sir Andrew almost always speak in prose rather than verse. Verse does appear late in the scene, when Antonio mentions Sebastian's name and immediately shifts into rhymed couplets: "None can be called deformed but the unkind. / Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil / Are empty trunks o'erflourished by the devil." Viola responds in couplets as well. While this is not a romantic scene, it is certainly an expression

of love and strong emotion. It makes perfect sense the transition from prose to verse occurs when Viola learns her brother is still alive.

## Act 4, Scene 1

### Summary

The Fool, believing he has Cesario in hand, is bringing Sebastian to see Olivia. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew reappear. Sir Andrew, at Sir Toby's urging, slaps Sebastian, challenging him to fight. Unlike Viola, Sebastian is more than ready to fight, and he eagerly takes on Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. Before anything too serious occurs, Olivia arrives and intervenes. She sends Sir Toby away and invites Sebastian—who she thinks is Cesario—into her house. Sebastian is puzzled, but perfectly willing to go with the beautiful woman who speaks so lovingly to him.

### Analysis

Sebastian and Viola may look alike, but they are temperamentally very different. Sebastian is more aggressive. Viola bandies words with the Fool, but Sebastian wants the Fool to stop with the silly comments. Viola pleaded with Sir Andrew not to fight, while Sebastian jumps right in to fight both Sir Andrew and Sir Toby. Olivia thinks Sir Toby is the aggressor and Cesario needs her help, which is not true because it is Sebastian who is fighting. Cesario is attractive to Olivia partly because she feels she could control a young, gentle man. Sebastian is a very different prospect.

Shakespeare's language also shows Sebastian and Olivia as a successful couple. Near the end of the scene, Olivia shifts into speaking in blank verse, and Sebastian picks it up from her. Not only do they both speak in blank verse (with occasional rhymed couplets), they also finish each other's sentences, just as Orsino and Viola do.

## Act 4, Scene 2

### Summary

Maria asks the Fool to dress as the hermit Sir Topas and speak with Malvolio, who is locked up because he is supposedly mad. As Sir Topas, the Fool toys with Malvolio, asking him nonsense questions and claiming his answers show insanity or demonic possession. Then, at Sir Toby's suggestion, the Fool visits Malvolio as himself; he comforts him with a song, and offers to help. Sir Toby says, "I am now so far in offense with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this sport ... " The Fool agrees to deliver a letter to Olivia from Malvolio, protesting his unjust imprisonment and asserting that Malvolio is in his right mind.

### Analysis

The joke played on Malvolio has gone further than the tricksters intended: he is now locked up and has been declared insane. Maria and the Fool seem ready to drive him to an actual point of insanity. The Fool suggests Malvolio should believe heretical and clearly illogical ideas—for example, that his grandmother's soul could reside in a bird. The Fool also tells Malvolio not to complain about how dark the room is when it is filled with barricaded windows. Of course barricades keep the room dark, but Malvolio is so desperate to get out that he doesn't even argue.

Sir Toby is the one who changes the tone. He says he can't afford to keep the joke going because he is in so much trouble with Olivia—evidently a reference to Olivia's scolding him when she sees him fighting with Sebastian (who she thinks is Cesario). The Fool helps Malvolio write a letter of explanation to Olivia. Unfortunately the letter will not be delivered immediately, so Malvolio will languish in his prison a while longer.

## Act 4, Scene 3

### Summary

Sebastian is confused but delighted by his new situation. He's not sure whether he is mad or Olivia is mad, but he accepts his good fortune. Olivia shows favor toward him and has given him the present of a pearl. He wishes he could find Antonio so he

could ask him for his advice. Olivia appears with a priest. She asks Sebastian to marry her, and he agrees.

## Analysis

Shakespeare develops the theme of madness through the situations of Malvolio and Sebastian. After a scene about Malvolio's sanity, the audience sees Sebastian wondering about his own (and Olivia's) sanity. Sebastian's confusion is understandable: he and Olivia have never met before, but she is being very affectionate and generous. Sebastian tries to get his bearings by grounding himself in real things: "This is the air; that is the glorious sun. / This pearl she gave me, I do feel 't and see 't ... / 'tis not madness."

Sebastian wishes for Antonio's advice, reinforcing their father-son bond. He had already looked for Antonio before Olivia found him. Antonio's assessment of Sebastian was correct: he did not abandon Antonio, and he probably wants to return Antonio's money purse.

Sebastian concludes Olivia is sane because she manages a large estate and her servants obey her commands. Of course, Olivia is mad with love—a different type of madness.

Olivia proves her love-madness by appearing with a priest and asking Sebastian (who she thinks is Cesario) to marry her on the spot. This goes against all Elizabethan ideals of how marriage should be initiated, but Olivia is eager to go through with the ceremony before Cesario rejects her again. Throughout this entire scene she never calls Sebastian "Cesario"—if she did, he would surely object, and the mistaken identity would be revealed. Instead she speaks directly to him without using his name. In the topsy-turvy world of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia has no idea she is marrying a man about whom she knows nothing, not even his name. Sebastian, on the other hand, is perfectly aware of what he is doing. But if a beautiful, noble, generous, and obviously wealthy young woman proposes marriage, many single young men would probably agree without a moment's hesitation, just as Sebastian does.

Shakespeare's language again shows Olivia and Sebastian are meant to be together. After an entire scene in blank verse, both Sebastian and Olivia end their lines with rhymed couplets. A rhymed couplet used at the end of a Shakespearean sonnet usually contains a powerful message to wrap up the poem. In this case, Sebastian's and Olivia's concluding couplets function

almost as wedding vows, as their marriage ceremony occurs offstage.

## Act 5, Scene 1

### Summary

In the last act of the play, Orsino finally goes to see Olivia himself, bringing his favorite servant, Cesario, with him. He meets the Fool, who has come to deliver Malvolio's letter of explanation to Olivia, and asks him to tell Olivia he is here. While they wait, the officers bring Antonio to Orsino. Although Antonio helped Viola (as Cesario) end the duel with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, Orsino remembers him with enmity from a past conflict. He also thinks Antonio is crazy because Antonio insists Cesario has been with him for the past three months. Of course the audience knows Antonio is thinking of Sebastian.

When Olivia arrives, she criticizes Cesario for failing to keep her promise to keep Orsino away from her. Viola (as Cesario) tries to demonstrate her loyalty to Orsino, but Orsino can see Olivia has fallen for Cesario. Orsino is furious, suggesting he might even kill Cesario. Viola says she will go with Orsino, even if it means her own death, because she loves him. At that point, Olivia cries out "Cesario, husband, stay." She summons the priest, who verifies her marriage to Cesario (although she actually married Sebastian). Before Orsino can say much, Sir Andrew stumbles in, followed by Sir Toby, both of them injured in a fight with Cesario (actually Sebastian).

Everyone is thoroughly confused when Sebastian appears. Sebastian immediately apologizes to Olivia for hurting her relative, Sir Toby, and then greets Antonio warmly. When he notices Viola, he stares at her as she stares at him. They talk, slowly trading facts about each other and their father until they can accept the truth they are both alive. Even then, Viola asks Sebastian not to hug her until she has changed back into women's clothing.

Sebastian comforts Olivia, saying she was meant to marry a man, not his sister. Orsino confirms Sebastian and Viola's family is of noble blood. Then he turns to Viola and takes her hand, proposing marriage to her. She hesitates, wanting to be dressed as a woman before she embraces him. She says the captain, who has her clothes, has been arrested on a charge from Malvolio. Olivia asks about Malvolio and orders Fabian to

let him out of his dark room so she can speak with him.

Malvolio blames Olivia for tricking him, but when Olivia looks at the letter, she recognizes Maria's handwriting. Fabian explains the trick played on Malvolio. Malvolio storms out, demanding revenge on everyone involved in the trick. Orsino, dismayed, calls after him about the captain and Viola's clothes. Orsino promises Viola he will call her Cesario until she is properly dressed, "But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen." Everyone exits except the Fool, who serenades the audience with a song as the play comes to an end.

## Analysis

Orsino has been moaning about his passion for Olivia since the first line of the play, and finally, in the last act, he comes to see her. Why has it taken so long? Orsino may have been more interested in the *idea* of Olivia—the image of a perfect woman—than in meeting the real Olivia. Now that he has come to see her, he gets caught up in wordplay with the Fool and almost forgets his original purpose.

Orsino's conversation with the Fool is illuminating. The Fool says Orsino suffers because of his friends, who will not tell him when he is making a mistake. He claims the duke's enemies serve him better because they will tell him when he is in error. Orsino's friends—those who work for him—have not convinced him to let go of Olivia. They have made tentative suggestions, but no one really challenged him on his supposedly deep love for a woman he barely knows. Olivia rebuffs Orsino, but she is right: she is not the woman for him. In addition, Orsino's enemy, Antonio, saved Sebastian after the shipwreck. Although Orsino doesn't know it yet, if his enemy had not saved Sebastian, a positive resolution to the love triangle would not have been possible. When Orsino first sees Antonio, he seems to have a certain respect for him, saying Antonio fought well in a previous battle. But the officers point out the genuine damage Antonio did (Orsino's nephew lost a leg, and some ships' cargoes were lost). Orsino might be moved to forgive Antonio because Antonio saved Viola from the duel with Sir Andrew, but Antonio claims Viola (he means Sebastian) has been with him for three months, which Orsino knows to be impossible.

Olivia's entrance only increases the tension. Newly married, she is even more indifferent to Orsino, but she is both puzzled and hurt by the behavior of her new husband. Orsino very

quickly figures out who Olivia really cares for, and his rage is out of all proportion. Why is he so angry? Olivia never showed any interest in him. Orsino's reaction may have more to do with feeling betrayed by Viola, whom he loves: "My thoughts are ripe in mischief. / I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love / To spite a raven's heart within a dove."

In effect Orsino has just declared his love for Viola, and she reciprocates: "After him I love / More than I love these eyes, more than my life, / More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife." When Viola is finally revealed as a woman, there is no need for a dramatic exchange of vows between her and Orsino: it has already happened. Orsino didn't need Olivia. Viola is the right woman for him.

When Sebastian and Viola finally come face-to-face, the audience may be surprised. The audience has known both of them are alive, and they may expect the brother and sister to leap into each other's arms. Instead Viola and Sebastian are wary, almost testing each other. Each of them was so convinced of the other's death that he/she is afraid to accept the happy truth. Viola's disguise must have been fairly effective, because even Sebastian doesn't immediately recognize her.

Before the play's happy ending, there is one more plot strand to wrap up: Malvolio. When Olivia has Malvolio freed, he spends most of his time blaming her for what happened. Even after Fabian reveals the details of the plot to trick Malvolio, Malvolio wants to blame all of them for his humiliation. Apparently Shakespeare thinks Malvolio got what he deserved, which the Fool makes clear. The Fool reminds Olivia and Malvolio of Malvolio's harsh words earlier in the play and concludes by saying, "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." This is the Shakespearean version of "What goes around comes around." Malvolio's punishment was one component of this topsy-turvy world righting itself. Orsino promises Viola, once she is in her feminine clothing, that she will be his "queen." Olivia has married a Cesario look-alike, Sebastian, who actually wants her. All is right with the world.

## “” Quotes

*"If music be the food of love, play on. / Give me excess of it, that*

*surfeiting, / The appetite may  
sicken and so die."*

— Orsino, Act 1, Scene 1

Orsino is suffering from unrequited love for Olivia. He calls for music to soothe his aching heart. Implicitly comparing music to food, he says he wants *too much* music, so much that his appetite (i.e., his love for Olivia) will finally be overwhelmed and suppressed and he can move on with his life.

*"I wear not motley in my brain."*

— Feste, Act 1, Scene 5

"Motley" is a description of the multicolored clothes a jester typically wears. In effect, Feste tells Olivia that she is a bigger fool than he is when they argue about her excessive mourning. He is saying his being a jester doesn't mean he is stupid or foolish. He proves his point by using logic to show Olivia how silly her over-the-top grief really is.

*"Love make his heart of flint that  
you shall love, / And let your  
fervor, like my master's, be /  
Placed in contempt."*

— Viola, Act 1, Scene 5

Viola, disguised as Cesario, has tried to woo Olivia on Orsino's behalf. But Olivia remains uninterested in Orsino. Viola, hurt for her master, almost curses Olivia with these lines, wishing Olivia could experience unrequited love the way Orsino has. Ironically, Viola's curse will work; Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario (who is really Viola).

*"Even so quickly may one catch  
the plague?"*

— Olivia, Act 1, Scene 5

After Cesario's first visit, Olivia realizes she has fallen in love with Orsino's new page. She describes love as a "plague," which ties into one of the play's chief themes—the idea of love as a type of sudden and debilitating madness.

*"I left no ring with her. What means  
this lady? / Fortune forbid my  
outside have not charmed her!"*

— Viola, Act 2, Scene 2

After she is left alone with the ring Olivia sent her, Viola wonders why Olivia sent it. She knows she did not leave a ring with Olivia, so she realizes Olivia may have sent it because she has fallen in love with her (as Cesario). Viola is absolutely right.

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

— Sir Toby, Act 2, Scene 3

Sir Toby asks this question of Malvolio after Malvolio criticizes him for drinking and partying late at night at Olivia's house. Sir Toby's entire life focuses on drinking and enjoying life, and he is outraged that Malvolio would interfere with that in the name of Olivia's mourning. In truth Malvolio should not be giving Sir Toby orders at all because Malvolio is only a servant in the house of Sir Toby's niece, Olivia. However, Sir Toby's behavior is so raucous, someone needs to step in.

*"My father had a daughter loved a  
man / As it might be, perhaps,  
were I a woman, / I should your  
Lordship."*

— Viola, Act 2, Scene 4

Viola wants to tell Orsino she is falling in love with him, but she is afraid to say it directly and cannot do so as Cesario. Instead she uses an oblique approach, hinting to Orsino about how her feelings by way of an invented story about Cesario's sister.

*"I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers, too—and yet I know not."*

— Viola, Act 2, Scene 4

At this moment, Viola reveals her love to Orsino. She tells him *she* is the daughter who loves a man like Orsino (because she is her father's only daughter). She also ties her masquerade to her brother, Sebastian. She says she is "all the brothers," too, because through her disguise she has kept Sebastian's memory alive.

*"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em."*

— Malvolio, Act 2, Scene 5

This statement comes from the letter supposedly written by Olivia to Malvolio. Malvolio reads it aloud to the audience. It implies that he will be able to rise to a position of greatness if he pleases Olivia and captures her heart. Malvolio quotes the statement again when he talks to Olivia. Other characters quote it back to Malvolio later in the play to mock him.

*"Love sought is good, but given unsought is better."*

— Olivia, Act 3, Scene 1

Olivia tries to woo Cesario (Viola in disguise), telling him love is best when it is given freely, rather than requested, as Orsino does with Olivia. Olivia is speaking about her own love for Cesario, but her statement applies to other characters in the play as well. Viola offers "unsought" love to Orsino, and that love turns out to be better than the love Orsino seeks from Olivia.

*"I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, / And that no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it, save I alone."*

— Viola, Act 3, Scene 1

In response to Olivia's declaration of love, Viola (in disguise as Cesario) vows "no woman" will have control of her (Viola's) heart "save I alone." She has, in effect, told Olivia that she is a woman, but Olivia doesn't understand this any more than Orsino does.

*"Why should I not, had I the heart to do it, / Like to th' Egyptian thief at point of death, / Kill what I love?"*

— Orsino, Act 5, Scene 1

When Orsino realizes Olivia is in love with Cesario, he is furious and feels betrayed. He threatens to kill Cesario (Viola). "Th' Egyptian thief at point of death" refers to a story of an Egyptian thief who kidnapped the woman he loved. When he thought he would be captured, he tried to kill the woman so he could be with her in the afterlife. Orsino has thus connected his male servant, Cesario, with a beloved woman. Viola is thrilled to hear words of love and agrees to follow Cesario, even if he kills her.

*"I never had a brother ... I had a*

*sister ... Of charity, what kin are you to me?"*

— Sebastian, Act 5, Scene 1

Once Sebastian and Viola are in the same place again, they stare at each other. Sebastian questions Viola, trying to determine who she might be. He was convinced Viola was dead, so he cannot easily believe he is seeing her now.

*"Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times / Thou never shouldst love woman like to me."*

— Orsino, Act 5, Scene 1

Orsino finally knows Viola is a woman, and all her comments about love now make sense to him. He reaches out to Viola and reminds her of all the times she told him she loved him. Viola is eager to reaffirm her love for him, although she would like to do it in women's clothes.

*"I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!"*

— Malvolio, Act 5, Scene 1

Malvolio is furious about the trick played on him by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria. Although Orsino's attendant Fabian has explained who planned the trick, Malvolio wants revenge on everyone. His anger and sour disposition led people to trick him in the first place, and he has not learned from the experience.

## Symbols

## Music

Act 1 of *Twelfth Night* opens with music playing and Orsino's first line ("If music be the food of love, play on") directly connecting music to love. Music serves as a symbol of love throughout the play. Orsino describes it as a way to nourish love. When Viola hatches her plan to become Orsino's page (Act 1, Scene 2), she is aware one of her qualifications is "I can sing / And speak to him in many sorts of music / That will allow me very worth his service." When Viola (as Cesario) first meets Olivia (Act 1, Scene 5), she says if she loved Olivia, she would "write loyal cantons of contemnèd love"—in other words, love songs. In Act 2, Scene 4, Orsino and Viola (as Cesario) have a love scene in which Viola confesses her love for Orsino (even though he doesn't recognize it). As Orsino requests, music is playing quietly throughout the scene. Orsino and Viola listen to the Fool sing a song about a "sad true lover" (Act 2, Scene 4). *They are true lovers, but Orsino doesn't realize it yet.* When Viola (as Cesario) returns to Olivia's house to speak again for Orsino, she says if Cesario were instead to speak of another suit (i.e., his own), "I had rather hear you to solicit that / Than music from the spheres" (Act 3, Scene 1).

## Jewelry

In *Twelfth Night*, jewelry serves as a concrete symbol of desire and affection. After Olivia first meets Cesario, she sends Malvolio after him to deliver a ring Cesario supposedly left behind. Viola knows the ring represents Olivia's love for Cesario. In Act 3, Scene 4, Olivia gives Viola (as Cesario) a "jewel" with her picture. In Act 4, Scene 3, Sebastian mentions Olivia gave him a pearl as a token of her affection.

In the Elizabethan era, jewelry was also used to reward servants or to mark their rank. When Malvolio fantasizes about being married to Olivia (Act 2, Scene 5), his fantasies include possession of a watch and valuable jewels. As her steward, he would probably already be wearing a heavy gold chain. In Act 1, Scene 4, Valentine speaks of the "favors" Orsino has given to Viola. While the play does not specify what the favors are, they likely included a jewel or chain to indicate Cesario's status as a favorite servant.

## Clothing

Clothing is a major symbol in *Twelfth Night*, serving as a guide to the wearer's character or—in the case of Viola, Olivia, Malvolio, and the Fool—as a disguise of real character. The play's plot turns on Viola's successful impersonation of a male page, Cesario, when she arrives at Orsino's court. Even though cross-dressing is helpful to her at first, it becomes a burden when she falls in love with Orsino and when Olivia falls in love with her (as Cesario). In Act 5, Scene 1, after all of the mistaken identities are finally cleared up, Viola makes a point of waiting to change into women's clothes before embracing her brother, Sebastian, and her beloved, Orsino.

Viola is not the only character who dresses purposefully in *Twelfth Night*. When Olivia first meets Cesario, she puts on her heavy mourning veil, immediately creating a barrier between her and Cesario—but a barrier she will happily discard when she falls in love with him. The trick played on Malvolio by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria is dependent upon his greeting Olivia dressed in ridiculous, cross-gartered, yellow stockings (rather than his usual somber attire). In his case clothing serves to show him up for the fool he really is. Even the Fool puts on a disguise, dressing as the hermit Sir Topas when he comes to visit Malvolio in his dark room.

## Themes

### Topsy-Turvy World

Shakespeare develops the theme of the world turned upside down in *Twelfth Night* through several characters and situations as well as through the title's reference to the celebration of Twelfth Night. In England, Twelfth Night—the last night of the Christmas period—is a holiday celebrated before the feast of the Epiphany (the Christian holy day commemorating Christ's appearance to the Magi). According to tradition, communities choose a "Lord of Misrule" to lead the activities on Twelfth Night. Various kinds of pandemonium, often involving cross-dressing, playing practical jokes, and performing other antics to temporarily disrupt social order,

ensue; these also figure prominently in Shakespeare's play. *Twelfth Night's* alternate title, *What You Will*, also evokes the atmosphere of a free-for-all. While there is no historical evidence that the play takes place during the winter holidays, the play's title does suggest an overall theme that problems happen when the world goes topsy-turvy.

Viola's disguise is a key element in depicting the upside-down world of the play. She herself describes disguise as a "wickedness" (Act 2, Scene 2), and at the end of the play she is very anxious to delay embracing Sebastian and Orsino until she is dressed as a woman again. Viola clearly sees her disguise as a last resort when she finds herself shipwrecked and alone in Illyria, but she engages in it skillfully, even (accidentally) getting Olivia to fall in love with her. Her disguise causes further problems when her identity is mistaken with that of her twin, Sebastian, and vice versa.

Orsino may be viewed as the "Lord of Misrule" in some ways. His pursuit of Olivia and dispatch of Cesario to speak for him sets the plot in motion and leads to further twists. Throughout the play, the audience never sees Orsino engaged in any actual activities a duke might have to perform. He spends all of his time feeling sorry for himself and wallowing in his unrequited love for Olivia. If Orsino were not so distracted, he might have realized Cesario was a woman sooner, thus avoiding many of the complications in the play.

Olivia's behavior is also upside down by Elizabethan standards. Her vow for a lengthy and severe mourning period for her brother's death is unreasonable and out of keeping with social custom. Her refusal to even see Orsino's messengers is disrespectful to one who is theoretically her sovereign (the captain states that Orsino "governs" the region). Olivia's active pursuit of Cesario and her stooping to trickery to bring him back is also highly inappropriate to her station. Olivia asking Sebastian (who she thinks is Cesario) to marry her and keeping a priest on hand for just that purpose are also unexpected. By Elizabethan standards, the woman is supposed to be wooed by the man, not the other way around. Shakespeare uses this reversal of roles in several of his plays. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, Helena chasing after Demetrius causes much humor and chaos.

In the mixed-up world of the play, the Fool, Feste, proves himself to be one of the wisest characters. He points out to Olivia that she is mourning too much, and he shows Orsino that he is making a mistake in pursuing Olivia. The Fool even jokes

with Viola (as Cesario) about her lack of a beard, suggesting he may have seen through her disguise. He is also wise and compassionate enough to recognize Malvolio's genuine suffering in his dark room. He comforts Malvolio with a song and helps him get out of his prison.

## Love and Madness

Shakespeare often ties love and madness in his plays, and *Twelfth Night* is no exception. The world-turned-upside-down theme is echoed on the individual level by various characters' madnesses and the ensuing havoc. Pining for Olivia, Orsino talks about the "fantastical" qualities of love in Act 1, suggesting that lovers imagine things that are not there. In fact Orsino barely knows Olivia and his madness consists of imagining that she has all sorts of qualities she may, in reality, lack. He has built her up into an idealized figure—a kind of passive, easily manipulated, mourning saint, who needs to be saved by his attentions toward her—and he is surprised and annoyed by any divergence from this image on her part. He is frustrated by her steadfast refusal to receive his messengers during her mourning period, therefore viewing Cesario as a possibly useful tool in this regard. Later in the play Orsino is genuinely shocked at the level of Olivia's passion for Sebastian (who Orsino and Olivia think is Cesario) and even more so by Olivia's actively seeking marriage to him. Another aspect of Orsino's madness is that he has no clue Cesario is a woman, despite a number of verbal and physical hints a more alert and sane man might have noticed.

Certainly Orsino's behavior as the play goes on suggests something is wrong with him. He is frequently referred to as "changeable," and in one scene (Act 2, Scene 4), he contradicts himself repeatedly. First, he tells Viola that men are not as constant in their affection as women; then, he insists no woman could love him as much as he loves Olivia. He develops very strong feelings for Viola even though he believes her to be a boy, Cesario. In the last act he has come to woo Olivia in person; yet before the scene is over, he has expressed his love for Viola and vowed to marry her. Orsino is a one-man personification of *Twelfth Night's* theme of love as madness.

When Olivia first falls for Cesario, in Act 1, Scene 5, she says, "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?" She is surprised

by the strength and suddenness of her feelings for Cesario, and she stoops to using the trick (one she is later ashamed to admit) of returning a ring he supposedly gave her just so she can get him to come back. Sebastian also brings up the idea of madness when Olivia finds him. She is so loving toward him—a man she has not met before, from his point of view—that he literally questions her sanity, even as he acknowledges no one else at her house behaves as if she were crazy. Olivia's actions are crazier than she knows. She marries Sebastian (thinking he is Cesario), a man she literally does not know. Sebastian wonders for a second if he is mad to marry Olivia under these circumstances, but then he just accepts his good fortune.

Malvolio is proclaimed mad because of his feelings for Olivia. His desire for her, however, has more to do with gaining power and wealth than with loving Olivia herself. When he attempts to woo her in the ridiculous manner (smiling and wearing yellow stockings cross-gartered) indicated by the letter he finds, Olivia can only think that he has gone mad. His madness, however, has the concrete effect of keeping him bound and confined in a dark room until he is rescued.

## Folly of Grief

In *Twelfth Night*, grief comes in two forms: serious and trivial. Yet the play argues that all grief is, to some extent, foolish or a waste of time. Olivia has suffered real loss: both her father and her brother have recently died. But she turns mourning into an overly dramatic, morose, and public demonstration of her private suffering, making the over-the-top vow to receive no visitors for seven years and covering herself up in a dark mourning veil. The Fool aptly reminds her that if she believes her brother is in heaven, she has no need to grieve for him (Act 1, Scene 5).

Malvolio only makes himself an object of scorn and ridicule as he tries to enforce a funereal atmosphere appropriate to mourning at Olivia's house. Viola believes she has lost Sebastian, and Sebastian thinks Viola is dead. Each grieves for the other, but both turn out to be wrong. Their grief was unnecessary. Orsino grieves because Olivia will not see him, but his perfect woman turns out to be someone else entirely—Viola.

The Fool, as is typical in Shakespeare's plays, is one of the

wisest characters. Early on, Shakespeare connects suffering and folly in *Twelfth Night*. Malvolio says, "Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better Fool," and the Fool responds, "God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly!" (Act 1, Scene 5). Infirmity, illness, and death may cause grief, but here they increase folly. Throughout *Twelfth Night*, the Fool reminds the characters—and the audience—of the need for perspective, levity, and consolation. He has the last word in the play. After all the characters have left the stage in Act 5, Scene 1, the Fool sings, "the rain it raineth every day." There are always problems and reasons to grieve, his song suggests, but people go on and live their lives anyway.

## Suggested Reading

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