

## Act I:

Count Orsino of Illyria is introduced; he laments that he is lovesick, and wishes that "if music be the food of love," he could kill his unrequited love through an overdose of music. Orsino's servant Valentine, whom Orsino sent to give his affections to Olivia, returns; Valentine was not allowed to speak directly to Olivia, but Olivia sent a message, via her handmaiden, that Olivia will continue to mourn her dead brother, and will neither allow Orsino to see her or to woo her.

Viola lands in Illyria, after a terrible shipwreck in which she was separated from her twin brother, Sebastian. Viola hopes that her brother was saved, as she was; the Captain, who also managed to get ashore, tries to console her of the hopes of finding her brother alive. The Captain recalls seeing her brother in the water after the shipwreck, clinging onto a mast, and riding above the waves. As it happens, the Captain is from Illyria, and tells Viola of Count Orsino, and of his love for Lady Olivia; the Captain also mentions Olivia's recent loss of both her father and her brother, and Viola, having lost her brother as well, commiserates with Olivia's situation. Viola proposes that she serve Orsino, since he is a good and just man; she conspires with the Captain that she may be presented to Orsino as a eunuch, and that her true identity as a foreign woman be concealed. The Captain agrees to help her, and he leads her to Orsino.

Sir Toby, Olivia's drunken uncle, is approached by Olivia's handmaiden, Maria, about his late hours and disorderly habits. Maria also objects to one of Sir Toby's drinking buddies, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a rather foolish man who Sir Toby has brought as a potential suitor to Olivia. Sir Toby has great affection for Sir Andrew, but Maria does not; she believes that Sir Andrew is a drunkard and a fool, and not to be suffered. Sir Toby attempts to introduce Sir Andrew to Maria; wordplay ensues from a series of misunderstandings, puns, and differing usages of words. Maria exits, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew continue to quibble, with some amusing results; at last, they decide to start drinking.

Viola has now disguised herself as a boy, Cesario, and has been taken into the service of Count Orsino. Valentine remarks that Orsino and Viola, as Cesario, have become close in the short time that Viola has been employed; indeed, Orsino has already told Viola of his great love for Olivia. Orsino asks Viola to go to Olivia and make Orsino's case to the lady; Viola says she will obey, although she confesses in an aside that she already feels love for Orsino, and would rather be his wife than try to woo Olivia for him.

Feste first appears in the play in Act I. Olivia enters, with her attendants, and is somewhat displeased and short with Feste; Feste says she is a fool for mourning her brother, if she knows that her brother is in heaven. Viola/ Cesario arrives at Olivia's house, and is admitted after much waiting, and being examined by both Sir Toby and Malvolio. Viola is brought in to meet Olivia, who finds out Viola is a messenger on Orsino's behalf, and Olivia discourages Viola from wooing her for the Count. Viola tries to make Orsino's suit, but is unsuccessful; Olivia begins to show interest in Viola as Cesario in this scene. Viola is sent away at last, and Olivia has Malvolio go after Viola, with a ring and an invitation to come back tomorrow.

## Act II:

Sebastian, Viola's brother, is shown alive, and in the company of Antonio, a somewhat shady sea-captain. Sebastian tells Antonio of his sister, Viola, who he fears has been drowned; he thanks Antonio for his kindness in saving him and resolves that he must be off alone.

Malvolio catches up to Viola, with the ring he was instructed to give Viola by Olivia. Viola is surprised, since she left no ring with Olivia; Malvolio grows impatient with Viola, throws it down onto the ground, and storms off. Viola realizes that the ring is proof that Olivia has some affection for her as Cesario; she regrets that Olivia is in love with her disguise, as that will come to nothing, and also that she is in love with her master, but that she can do nothing in her present disguise.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are up late, drinking, and Feste joins them. They proceed to make a great deal of noise, by singing, drinking, and talking nonsense; Maria tries to get them to be quiet, but Malvolio is awakened by the noise, and comes down to berate them for disturbing the household. Once Malvolio leaves, Maria concocts a plan to make Malvolio look like a complete fool: she will write love letters to Malvolio and make it look like the letters have come from Olivia. The party decides to try this out and see if it will work; Maria leaves to go to bed, and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew decide to drink the rest of the night away.

Orsino calls upon Feste to sing an old song, that pleases him very well; Orsino then begins to talk to Viola/ Cesario of love, and its imperfections. Orsino compares women to roses "whose fair flower/ being once displayed, doth fall that very hour"; Viola does not approve of Orsino's slightly cynical view of women.

Viola attempts to soothe Orsino's melancholy by getting him to accept that Olivia might not love him, but that perhaps another woman does; Orsino counters this with the argument that women are very inconstant in their love, and could not have a feeling as deep as the love he has for Olivia. Viola knows that this is not true, in light of the great amount of feeling she has for Orsino; she attempts to persuade him that women are "as true of heart" as men, by telling him a story she makes up about a sister that loved only too constantly and too well. Orsino asks Viola to go again to Olivia, and make his suit; Viola obeys.

Maria appears, with the love-letter she has written for the purposes of baiting Malvolio. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and their friend Fabian are present; they hide behind a tree as Malvolio approaches, and Maria places the letter somewhere where he is certain to find it. Malvolio approaches, already muttering nonsense about thinking that Olivia fancies him, and about how things would be if they were married; this angers Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, who want to beat Malvolio for his pretension. Malvolio finally spots the letter, and thinks he recognizes the handwriting as Olivia's; he takes the bait completely.

### **Act III:**

Viola enters, on her way to see Olivia; she comes across Feste, who is full of wit and foolery as usual. Feste expresses his dislike for Viola, which Viola does not take personally; Viola gives him a few coins for his wordplay, and mentions the wit that it takes to act the fool as well as Feste does. Olivia then comes to meet Viola, and Viola again attempts to make Orsino's case.

Olivia confesses her affection for Viola/ Cesario, and begs to know if Viola does indeed feel the same way. Viola says no, then asks again if Olivia will have anything to do with Orsino; Olivia is constant in her lack of response to Orsino, but makes one last attempt to win Cesario over. Viola warns Olivia as best she can, telling Olivia that "I am not what I am," though Olivia does not guess at the statement's real meaning (III.i.139). Viola leaves but not without an entreaty to return.

Sir Andrew finally comes to his senses, realizing that Olivia favors. His friend Fabian tries to convince him that Olivia is just trying to make him jealous; this does not soothe Sir Andrew's anger. Sir Toby then persuades Sir Andrew that he should challenge Cesario to a duel. Sir Toby tells him to write a letter of challenge, which Sir Toby will deliver; Toby actually has no intent of sponsoring a duel, but thinks the exercise might cool Sir Andrew off a little.

Antonio fears some accident may happen to Sebastian since he is completely ignorant of the country. Sebastian wants to go about and see the sights, but Antonio tells him that he cannot; Antonio confesses that he was involved with some piracy against Illyria, and that he is wanted by the Count because of it. Antonio proposes that they meet up at an inn in one hour, and that Sebastian can wander about until then.

Maria warns Olivia of Malvolio's very strange behavior; Malvolio is wearing yellow, cross-gartered stockings, which Olivia abhors. Malvolio continues his absurdity, making remarks of unwarranted familiarity, and completely baffling Olivia with his misguided attempts to be amorous toward her. Olivia dismisses Malvolio's odd behavior as being some kind of passing madness, and orders that Malvolio be looked after.

Sir Toby, Maria, and Fabian approach Malvolio; they treat Malvolio's case as an instance of witchcraft or possession. Not satisfied with the havoc they have already caused, they decide to make Malvolio go mad, if they can. Sir Andrew returns, with his "saucy" letter for Cesario, and Viola as Cesario appears, having patched up any bad feelings with Olivia over their last, dramatic scene.

Sir Toby conveys Sir Andrew's challenge to Viola, and tries to make Viola shrink from the confrontation by greatly exaggerating Sir Andrew's meanness and anger. Sir Andrew and Viola come close to some sort of reluctant confrontation, when Antonio stumbles on them; Antonio is arrested by officers of the Count, and asks Viola for his purse, mistaking Viola for her brother Sebastian. Antonio is taken aback when Viola will not give him his purse, thinking that she, as Sebastian, is ungrateful for his help; he speaks of rescuing Sebastian from drowning, which lets Viola know that her brother might be alive. Viola hopes that what Antonio said is indeed true, and that her brother might have been saved from the wreck.

#### **Act IV:**

Feste approaches Sebastian, thinking that Sebastian is 'Cesario'; when Sebastian tells Feste that he does not know him, nor Olivia, whom Feste tells him to meet, Feste becomes rather upset, and accuses Sebastian of "strangeness". Then Sir Andrew comes, and strikes Sebastian out of anger, as if he were Cesario; Sir Toby and Sebastian come close to getting in a duel of their own, when Olivia finds them, and charges them to stop. Olivia dismisses Sir Toby, and asks Sebastian "would thou'dst be ruled by me," thinking that he is Cesario, due to his great resemblance to his sister. Sebastian decides to go along with it, struck by Olivia's beauty, thinking it all a pleasant dream from which he hopes he will not awaken.

Maria and Feste conspire to present Feste as Sir Topaz, the curate, to Malvolio, who is hidden from view. Feste tries to convince that Malvolio that he is crazy, and Malvolio continues to insist that he is not, that he has been wrongly incarcerated. Feste then confronts Malvolio as himself, and torments him some more; he fakes a conversation with himself as Feste and Sir Topaz, and

Malvolio begs for paper and ink so that he can send a message to Olivia. Feste promises to fetch these things, and exits with a song.

Sebastian debates with himself whether he is mad, or whether it is the Lady Olivia who is crazy, though this does not stop him. Olivia asks him to come with her to the parson and be married to her; Sebastian, though he is completely confused, goes to be married to her.

### **Act V:**

Fabian asks Feste for the letter Malvolio has written; Feste refuses this request, and then Orsino, with Viola, finds them. Viola points out Antonio, who is being brought to them by officers; Orsino remembers Antonio from a sea-battle, and Viola tries to defend Antonio from charges of crime by noting his kindness to her. Antonio claims that he rescued Viola from drowning, and that they have been in each other's company ever since; Orsino says that this is nonsense, since Viola has been serving him the whole time.

Then, Olivia approaches them, still denying Orsino's love, while admitting her affection for Viola. Orsino becomes angry at Viola, rather than Olivia, because of these developments; he begins to suspect Viola of double-dealings, and out of his anger, he admits his love for Viola, still disguised as a boy. Viola, for the first time, declares her love for Orsino, much to Olivia's consternation; Olivia counters this declaration by divulging that she was married, to Viola as Cesario, she thinks. A priest confirms Olivia's account, and Orsino becomes even more angry at Viola. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby enter, charging Viola with fighting them and injuring them; Viola is again shocked, and confused.

Suddenly, Sebastian dashes in, apologizing for injuring Sir Toby; he expresses his happiness at seeing Antonio again, and acknowledges Olivia as his wife. Viola and Sebastian see each other again, and there is a joyful reunion. Sebastian reveals to Olivia that she married him, rather than his sister in disguise; Orsino swears that he loves Viola, and will marry her.

Then, the action turns to Malvolio's condition; his letter is read, and his condition explained. Malvolio is upset at his mistreatment, and Olivia attempts to smooth things over; Fabian explains his, Sir Toby's, and Maria's part in Malvolio's torment. Then, Feste inflames Malvolio's anger, and he leaves, in a huff.

Orsino pronounces that happiness will stay with all of them, and that his marriage to Viola will soon be performed. Feste closes the play with a song about "the wind and the rain," a reminder that even great happiness is not safe from life's storms

### **Analysis**

Twelfth Night is one of the most commonly performed Shakesperean comedies, and was also successful during Shakespeare's lifetime. The first surviving account of the play's performance comes from a diary entry written early in 1602, talking about the play and its basic plot. The play is believed to have been written in 1601, not long after Hamlet was completed. Despite the play's initial success, it was rarely performed in the late 17th century; this unpopularity continued until the mid-18th century, when it was revived and was moderately popular until the 19th century, when the play began to fare better.

A successful production of the play from the early 19th century added a great number of songs and funny scenes lifted from other Shakespeare works; even the betrothal masque from The Tempest, which seems like it would be entirely out of place in a play like Twelfth Night, was included. The play was first performed in New York in 1804; and, in 1865, the first known production of the play with one actress performing the roles of Sebastian and Viola was staged. Of course, this development required some alteration of the text; but the experiment was later copied by Jean Anouilh, who adapted the play for French audiences.

Until the early 20th century, the play was staged in a roundly Victorian style. Sometimes, elaborate outdoor sets were constructed for the play, with the advantage of being very pretty, but with the disadvantage of all the action having to take place in that one setting. The darker, more melancholy aspects of the play were ignored in favor of broad humor and the comic set-pieces within the work; not until the 20th century did productions emphasize the tragic and bittersweet aspects of the play, and show great progress regarding insights into the characters' minds.

Although the title of the play is Twelfth Night, it is not certain that this title means that the play takes place on the "Twelfth Night" itself, or the twelfth day after Christmas. There are references within the play to Christmas, as Sir Toby drunkenly attempts something that sounds like the "Twelve Days of Christmas" song. Thematically, there are links to this period of time, which was a time of feasting and revelry; the reveling, pranks, and merriment within the play resemble activities that are characteristic of Twelfth Night, which was the culmination of the Christmas season, and a time of much festivity. Some directors of the play have taken the title quite literally, paying close attention to the Elizabethan rituals related to Twelfth Night; others have disregarded it entirely, and set the play in the sunny Mediterranean, where the historical "Illyria" is located.

The journal entry that records a performance of the piece in 1602 also compares the play to The Comedy of Errors and an Italian play named Gl'Inganni. Several 16th century Italian plays with this name survive, and all of them with the same basic plot as Twelfth Night: a woman disguises herself as a page and woos a woman for her master, whom she loves, but the woman falls in love with her, and accidentally marries her twin brother. The story was also included in two English works of prose, one written by Barnaby Riche in 1581, and the other by Emanuel Forde in 1598.

In one of the Italian versions of the play, the heroine assumes the name "Cesare" when she is in disguise, which might have been the origin of Viola's chosen name of Cesario. There is one crucial difference in the plots of the Italian versions; and that is that the heroine chooses to serve a lover who had rejected her, so the risk of recognition runs even greater. It is Riche's treatment of the tale, however, that comes closer than the Italian versions to what Shakespeare portrays in Twelfth Night, in terms of the specific situations and reactions of the characters as they interact throughout the story. However, Riche's version is not as innocent in the way the mix-up of the twins is dealt with; the Viola character reveals her gender by removing her clothes in front of the Olivia figure, and the Olivia of his work, rather than marrying Viola's twin, becomes pregnant by him and becomes involved in another confusing situation. However, Forde's portrayal of the relationship between Orsino (called Pollipus) and Viola (Violetta) is closest to Shakespeare's, in the tenderness and devotion that develops between the two characters before Violetta drops her disguise and is revealed as a woman.

It is almost certain that Shakespeare took elements of plot and character from the Italian Gl'Inganni and from Riche's and Forde's subsequent reworking of this somewhat-known story; however, Shakespeare was able to borrow elements of his previously written comedies of mistaken identity, such as The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Comedy of Errors. In Two Gentlemen, Julia

follows her love Proteus, disguised as his page, and when he falls in love with another woman, she does the wooing on his behalf. The woman she woos does not fall in love with her, however, as Olivia does with Viola. The Comedy of Errors is also a source for Twelfth Night because of the use of twins and mistaken identity in the plot; though the major difference is that the twins in Twelfth Night are a boy and a girl and therefore not completely identical, though their resemblance is used as a device in the plot. However, The Comedy of Errors is a more lighthearted work, that is more comedic in nature; Twelfth Night, though it is a comedy, delves more deeply into the grief of the twins, and into the emotional predicaments inherent in its plot.

The text of the play first appeared in the First Folio of Shakespeare's work, published in 1623. Unlike with The Tempest, there are few apparent discrepancies from what must have been Shakespeare's original text and what is published; the text does not appear to be a transcript from a performance, as the Folio text of The Tempest most likely was. There is some evidence that the text was amended by Shakespeare himself after his first performance; Viola supposedly had a song in an early version, that was cut and replaced with her story about an imaginary sister, that has bigger emotional impact. Also, the discrepancy in Orsino's title, between Count and Duke, appears to have been amended after a first performance, and Fabian's sudden substitution for Feste appears to have been done rather crudely, sometime after 1602, so that Feste could act more like an ironic commentator than merely a funny accomplice. The text of the play that has survived, however, appears to be very close to Shakespeare's original vision, and an accurate reflection of the original text, plus later additions and revisions.

### **Orsino, Duke or Count of Illyria**

Though his title in the play is disputed, Orsino is the ruler of Illyria, with some naval experience behind him. He is lovesick for the Lady Olivia, who will not return his affections; Viola is taken into his service, as the boy Cesario, and is quickly taken into his confidence and tries to woo Olivia for him. However, Orsino's affections shift by the end of the play; he drops his self-indulgent behavior, and develops affection for Viola.

### **Curio, Valentine**

Two of Orsino's attendants. Valentine is sent to try and woo Olivia, though he is not quite as successful at gaining entrance to Olivia's house as "Cesario" is. Curio accompanies Orsino on his visit to Olivia's in the last act, though he says nothing; their basic purpose is to wait on Orsino as best they can, but they are not as close to him or as important in the action as Viola is.

### **First Officer, Second Officer**

These two recognize Antonio as having committed crimes against Orsino, and arrest him. In the last act, they hold Antonio, as they remind Orsino of the crime that Antonio had committed.

### **Viola**

A young woman who is shipwrecked, having lost her twin brother Sebastian, and lands in Illyria quite by accident; she resolves to make the best of her situation, and be taken into Orsino's service, as a young eunuch named Cesario. Viola is quickly taken into Orsino's confidence, and he tells her all the secrets of his heart; she is entrusted with wooing Olivia, though Olivia herself falls for Viola as Cesario. Viola herself is in love with Orsino, though she cannot admit this; she does succeed in gaining Orsino's affections, however, and gets him to be a more honest, less self-centered person.

### **A Sea-Captain**

He rescues Viola from drowning, and helps her transform herself into Cesario and become Orsino's page. Later, he has supposedly had some issues with Malvolio somehow, and must be found so that Viola may reclaim her female clothes and possessions.

### **Sebastian**

Viola's non-identical twin brother, who nevertheless bears a great resemblance to her. Viola tries to imitate her brother in her disguise as Cesario, as the two are mistaken for each other in many scenes. Sebastian himself is saved by Antonio, and the two become fast friends. Quite by accident, Sebastian comes across Olivia, and is taken for Cesario; she proposes, and they are quickly married, despite Sebastian not knowing who she is.

#### **Antonio**

Another sea-captain; he saves Sebastian's life, and appears to be benevolent in his intentions toward Sebastian. However, he has a questionable past, and was involved in some doings at sea that mean he is wanted by Orsino. He stops a duel between Viola and Sir Andrew, mistaking Viola for her brother Sebastian. His relationship with Sebastian has argued to be a little more than friendly though this can certainly be disputed.

#### **Olivia**

A noblewoman, Countess of Illyria. She lost her father, then her brother right before the beginning of the play; she resolves to be in mourning for her brother for seven years, thus thwarting Orsino's attempts to woo her. She becomes enamoured of Viola, who acts as a messenger for Orsino; and though Olivia tries her best to win Viola, Viola does her best to let her down easily, because Viola is not a boy like she pretends to be. Olivia rushes off and marries Sebastian, thinking that he is Viola as Cesario; but everything works out in the end.

#### **Maria**

Olivia's gentlewoman-maid, a witty, wily woman who has some affection for Sir Toby. It is she who resolves to get revenge on Malvolio, after he embarrasses the party; she claims to have handwriting like Olivia's, and will use that gift to trick Malvolio. She is actually a good-natured woman, though she loves a good joke, and holds her own with the "boys" Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste.

#### **Sir Toby**

Surname Belch, not very complimentary but sadly, accurate. He is Olivia's ill-behaved uncle, and spends most of his time drinking, fooling, and carousing with Sir Andrew. He takes part in the pranks against Malvolio, and arranges the duel between Sir Andrew and Viola as well. He is hot-tempered, and usually unruly, but not a bad fellow either.

#### **Sir Andrew**

Surname Aguecheek, also not complimentary, but correctly describing his thin, pale face. He is a complete, very dense fool, who can't help but misconstrue every word his friend Sir Toby says. He hopes to win Olivia's affection, though they have few interactions in the play. Jealous of the attention that Olivia pays to "Cesario," he challenges the young man to a duel, that is never quite completed.

#### **Malvolio**

Olivia's steward, a man who is supposedly good at his job, but is stern and hates merrymaking. He rebukes Sir Toby and company very harshly, for which they resolve to get revenge. They play on his vanity and his pride by convincing him that Olivia loves him, and getting him to act foolish in front of her. He is finally locked up in a dark place, and tormented by Feste; in the last act, he comes forward and tells of his ordeal, and swears revenge on everyone involved, having not learned any lessons.

#### **Fabian**

A member of Olivia's household with responsibilities that are never explained. He is a sort of mid-play replacement for Feste, taking part in the plots against Malvolio with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.

He doesn't seem to have much of a personality, but is included in the play for the purpose of exposition and he is also good at stating the obvious for the audience.

**Feste**

A jester and musician who lends his services to Olivia, and to Orsino as well. Feste is quick-witted and quite skilled at wordplay; but he is also somewhat cruel, as seen in his behavior toward Malvolio. Feste may act the part of the fool, but in fact he is very wise and perceptive about people's natures; he knows the perfect song for any occasion, but resents when his services are taken for granted.

**A Priest**

Marries Sebastian and Olivia, and later testifies about this union to Orsino and others.