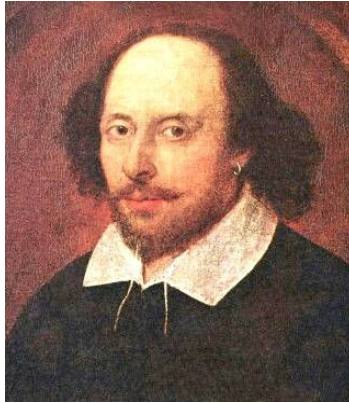


TWELFTH NIGHT

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

Twelfth Night was most probably written in 1601, and is a romantic comedy that focuses much more on character than on its highly improbable plot. Even the clowns and fools are believable as demonstrating characteristics with which we are all too familiar. It was likely prepared as a comedy for performance in the royal court for the celebration named in the title (Twelfth Night, or the Twelfth Night of Christmas, was the Feast of Epiphany, January 6, which commemorated the visit of the wise men; it was celebrated by upending common social convention; thus the appropriateness of the present play for the festival that gives it its name). The main plot was borrowed from "Of Apolonius and Silla," published in 1581, but the story had

appeared in many other forms in earlier times. The Malvolio subplot and the comic figures who drive it were Shakespeare's own invention; in fact, Sir William Knollys, one of Queen Elizabeth's courtiers, was rumored to demonstrate very Malvolio-like qualities in trying to control the ladies of the queen's household while at the same time presenting himself as a prospective suitor for one of them. Another potential model for Malvolio, Sir Christopher Hatton, the queen's steward, who supposedly fancied himself a suitor to the queen herself (Queen Elizabeth hated yellow stockings because her father, Henry VIII, had celebrated by appearing in yellow stockings at a ball on the night following her mother Anne Boleyn's execution).

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Orsino - Duke of Illyria, he nurses a hopeless and unrequited love for Olivia. Viola becomes his courtier, disguised as a man (Cesario), and falls in love with him. When her true identity is revealed at the end of the play, they marry.
- Viola - The heroine of the story, she is shipwrecked on the shore of Illyria and disguises herself as a man for her own protection. She enters the service of Orsino, fall in love with him, but is asked to convey his messages of love to Olivia. Olivia then falls in love with her in her male disguise. When all is revealed, she marries the Duke.
- Sebastian - Viola's twin brother. The two are separated in the shipwreck, and each thinks the other dead. When Sebastian arrives in the city, everyone mistakes him for Cesario. Chaos ensues, but when everything is straightened out in the end, he marries Olivia, who has fallen in love with his likeness in Cesario.
- Olivia - A countess in Illyria, she is in mourning over the death of her brother and refuses to have any contact with men despite the Duke's professions of love for her. When Cesario comes to deliver the Duke's messages, she falls in love with him. Later, mistaking Sebastian for Cesario, she proposes marriage, which he confusedly accepts.
- Sir Toby Belch - Olivia's uncle, a drunken carouser who takes money from Sir Andrew and plays a part in the plots to makes fools of Malvolio and Andrew. He marries Maria at the end.
- Sir Andrew Aguecheek - A suitor to Olivia, he is a fool and a fellow merrymaker with Toby and Maria.
- Maria - Olivia's maid, she is clever and quick-tongued. She masterminds the plot against Malvolio, and marries Sir Toby at the end of the play.
- Feste - Olivia's jester, he provides comic interludes, with banter and music, throughout the play.
- Malvolio - Olivia's steward, he is solemn and humorless. He loves his mistress and hopes to marry her. This ambition becomes the basis for the plot hatched against him by Maria

and her companions. He is made a fool of and imprisoned as a madman, but released at the end, swearing revenge against those who abused him.

- Antonio - A sea captain who rescued Sebastian, he had previously fought in sea battles against the forces of the Duke. When he tries to assist Sebastian, he is arrested, but all is made right in the end.
- Fabian - A servant in Olivia's household, he is often involved in the shenanigans of Toby and Maria.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“If music be the food of love, play on.” (Orsino, Ii, 1)

“I'll do my best
To woo your lady. Yet a barful strife!
Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife.” (Viola, Iiv, 43-45)

“O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird bolts that you deem cannon bullets.” (Olivia, Iv, 92-95)

“How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly;
And I (poor monster) fond as much on him;
And she (mistaken) seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.
As I am woman (now alas the day!),
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O Time, thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a know for me t'untie!” (Viola, Iiii, 33-41)

“For women are as roses, whose fair flower,
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.” (Orsino, IIiv, 46-47)

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.”
(Maria's forged letter to Malvolio, IIv, 141-142)

“Then think you right. I am not what I am.” (Viola, IIIi, 150)

“Nothing that is so is so.” (Feste, IVi, 9-10)

“I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.” (Orsino, Vi, 136-137)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play opens with Duke Orsino bemoaning his unrequited love for Olivia, who insists on avoiding all contact with men until she has mourned seven years for the death of her brother.

Act I, scene 2 - Viola and her twin brother Sebastian are shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria, and Viola fears her brother has drowned. When the captain of the ship tells her that Orsino rules the land, and that he fruitlessly loves the beautiful Olivia, Viola determines to disguise herself as a man and enlist in the service of the Duke.

Act I, scene 3 - This scene introduces the leading comic characters. Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, is conversing with her maid Maria, who is rebuking him for his frequent bouts of drunkenness. He argues that Olivia is far too strict and needs to loosen up a bit; in fact, he has brought a friend of his, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, to seek her hand. When Sir Andrew appears, it becomes obvious that he is a fool, and little more than Sir Toby's drinking partner. The three banter crudely for the remainder of the scene.

Act I, scene 4 - Viola has by this time been in the service of Orsino for three days disguised as the young man Cesario, and the Duke has come to trust her in this character. He sends Cesario to bear his message of love to Olivia, insisting that [s]he should not leave without gaining admittance. Viola reveals to the audience, however, that she has fallen in love with Orsino herself.

Act I, scene 5 - The scene begins with Feste, Olivia's fool, arriving late and being warned by Maria that he risks his mistress' wrath. When Olivia arrives, she is angry with Feste, but he soon puts her in a good mood with his jesting. Sir Toby arrives drunk, and is sent off to bed. Next, we are told that a young man (Cesario) waits at the door with a message from the Duke for Olivia. She tells Malvolio to send him away, but he is unable to get the messenger to leave. Olivia finally agrees to see him. When Cesario comes in, [s]he charms Olivia with his words of love from the Duke. By the end of the scene, Olivia is beginning to fall in love with Cesario. She sends him away, but asks that he come back the next day to report how the Duke reacted to her rejection of his overtures. She then sends Malvolio after Cesario with the gift of a ring.

Act II, scene 1 - Sebastian is seen ashore with Antonio, who has rescued him from the shipwreck. He believes his sister Viola to have drowned, and is determined to go to the court of Duke Orsino. Antonio, though he has been declared an outlaw by Orsino, insists that he will accompany Sebastian because of his love for him.

Act II, scene 2 - Malvolio pursues Cesario to give him the ring from Olivia, claiming that he had left it behind. Viola knows she left no ring behind, and realizes that Olivia has fallen in love with her in her disguise, while she has fallen in love with Orsino. She wonders how such a tangled mess can ever be resolved.

Act II, scene 3 - Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste are carousing late at night. Maria warns them to keep quiet or they will wake Olivia. Soon Malvolio arrives and grumpily orders them to behave themselves, and goes off to report them to his mistress. Maria comes up with a way to get revenge on him - she will compose a love letter praising Malvolio's appearance and demeanor, forged to look like it came from Olivia, and leave it where Malvolio will find it. The other three congratulate her and anticipate the merriment that will ensue at Malvolio's expense.

Act II, scene 4 - Orsino, still pining away for Olivia, summons Feste to sing a sad love song for him. He then asks Cesario (Viola) to return to Olivia with his message of love. Viola professes her love for Orsino in oblique language that he fails to grasp, and goes off again to see Olivia.

Act II, scene 5 - Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and Fabian (another member of Olivia's household) prepare to set the trap for Malvolio. As he approaches, they hide behind a nearby tree to watch the fun. He appears, and has obviously been thinking about becoming Olivia's husband; he talks about how he will live a life of ease and give Toby, Andrew, and the servants the treatment they deserve. Toby restrains himself from attacking him on the spot only with great difficulty. Maria, meanwhile, has left her forged letter on the path. Malvolio falls for it, as they knew he would. The letter implies Olivia's love for him, and tells him, if he reciprocates that love, to appear in yellow stockings with cross-garters (both fashions she hates) and with a big smile on his face (given Malvolio's true nature, it is a wonder that his face doesn't crack when he tries to smile). After he leaves to do what he thinks is his mistress' bidding, the others congratulate Maria on her excellent ruse.

Act III, scene 1 - Viola again arrives at Olivia's house to plead the cause of Orsino, and she and Feste banter a while. When Olivia arrives, she sends the others away and openly declares her love for the youth Cesario (Viola). Viola protests that no woman will ever have her heart, and hastens to depart. Olivia tries to entice her to return by saying that she might, if she tried again, change Olivia's mind about Orsino's love.

Act III, scene 2 - Sir Andrew is angry because Olivia has shown such favor to Cesario, and is ready to go home. Sir Toby convinces him that Olivia was only fawning on Cesario to make Sir Andrew jealous, and that he could win her heart by challenging Cesario to a fight and thrashing him. Andrew then withdraws to write a letter challenging his rival. Maria then arrives and reports that Malvolio is following the directions in the forged missive to the letter, and is preening in yellow stockings and cross garters with an idiotic smile on his face. She and Toby go off to see the fun.

Act III, scene 3 - Sebastian and Antonio arrive in town. Sebastian wants to see the sights, but Antonio tells him he cannot walk around the town freely. He then gives Sebastian his purse and goes to make arrangements for them to stay at an inn called the Elephant.

Act III, scene 4 - Olivia, awaiting the arrival of Cesario, summons Malvolio. He appears in his ridiculous costume, expecting professions of love from his mistress. She thinks him mad, and tells Maria and Toby to "take care of him," which he misunderstands as a badge of her special affection. They decide to tie him up in a dark room like a madman to teach him a lesson.

Meanwhile, Cesario arrives and goes in to speak with Olivia. Sir Andrew then arrives with his written challenge to Cesario, which is a piece of utter foolishness. Sir Toby agrees to deliver it to Cesario, but instead discards it and gives Viola a challenge from Sir Andrew verbally, speaking of the knight's great skill and prowess. Then, he goes to Sir Andrew and tells him that Cesario used to be a swordsman in the service of the Sultan of Turkey. Both are now terrified of the duel to come. Andrew even offers to give his horse to Cesario if he calls off the fight. As they are reluctantly preparing to engage one another, Antonio arrives, mistakes Cesario for Sebastian, and steps in to defend him. Officers arrive to break up the fight; they recognize Antonio, and he is arrested. He asks Cesario for the money he gave to Sebastian, but she, of course, knows nothing about it, neither does she recognize him. As he is hauled off to jail, angry because he has been betrayed, or so he thinks, by a man whose life he has saved, he calls Cesario "Sebastian." She now nurtures the hope that her brother still lives.

Act IV, scene 1 - Sebastian, walking through the town, is met by Feste, who mistakes him for Cesario and summons him to Olivia's house. Andrew and Toby then arrive and, making the same mistake, Andrew attacks Sebastian. The latter defends himself admirably and beats Andrew with his sword. Feste runs off to fetch Olivia. Toby joins the fray to rescue Andrew, then Olivia arrives and angrily sends them all away except Sebastian. She, too, thinks that he is Cesario, and she invites him back to her house with expressions of love. He follows her in a daze, convinced that everyone in the town must be mad.

Act IV, scene 2 - Maria convinces Feste to put on a costume and disguise himself as an old curate, Sir Topas, and torment Malvolio, who is still locked up in darkness as a madman. Sir Toby, who is already in trouble with Olivia for his part in the fight with Sebastian, suggests that the game should be ended. Feste plays his part, some of the time changing voices between that of Sir Topas and his own voice. Malvolio appears to be on the verge of desperation.

Act IV, scene 3 - Olivia has proposed marriage to Sebastian and, though he is still confused about what has happened, takes note of both the sincerity of her love and the obvious status she has in the city. He agrees to marry her, and she summons a priest. Meanwhile, he wonders what has become of Antonio, whom he could not find at the Elephant.

Act V, scene 1 - Orsino, accompanied by Cesario, heads for Olivia's house to ask to meet with her. On the way, they meet Antonio, being taken to jail by the officers. Cesario identifies him as the man who rescued her from the duel with Sir Andrew. Orsino recognizes him as an enemy of Illyria, and asks him why he dared to show his face in the city. Antonio claims to have saved Cesario from the sea, and then insists he was betrayed after having given him his purse. Cesario, of course, knows nothing of all this. The Duke orders Antonio to be taken away. Olivia then arrives and upbraids Cesario for not acting in a manner becoming her husband. Orsino, needless to say, is shocked, and threatens to kill Cesario for his treachery. Cesario (Viola) then professes his love for Orsino, and now Olivia is convinced that he is treacherous! The priest then arrives on the scene and confirms that Olivia and Cesario (really Sebastian, of course) were secretly married two hours earlier. Both are now furious with poor Cesario. Next, Sir Andrew enters, thoroughly bloodied, and claims that he and Sir Toby had been attacked by Cesario (Sebastian again), who denies any knowledge of such a conflict. Toby arrives, a bit the worse for wear, and the two stagger off to nurse their wounds. Sebastian himself then shows up, and when he stands

side-by-side with Cesario, the mystery is unraveled, though at first he does not recognize his sister in the guise of a man. Viola reveals herself as Sebastian's twin sister, offers to prove it by changing into her woman's clothing, and proclaims her love for the Duke. Feste then arrives with a letter from Malvolio to Olivia insisting on his sanity and deploring her treatment of him. While claiming that she knew nothing of the treatment he had received at the hands of the others, she orders his release. When he arrives, he shows her the forged letter, and she recognizes it as Maria's handwriting. Fabian confesses that he, Toby, and Maria were responsible for the prank, and informs her that Toby has married Maria. Malvolio storms off, vowing revenge on the whole pack of them. All exit, and Feste closes the proceedings with a song.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is sometimes referred to as a "transvestite play" - like *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice*, it involves a female protagonist who disguises herself as a man. In the gender-bending days in which we live, critics like to read homoerotic subtexts into such plays. For Shakespeare, however, such plots were mere expedients, since women were not allowed on the stage, and female parts had to be played by prepubescent boys, so that Viola was, in fact, a man playing a woman pretending to be a man. Even if we reject contemporary homosexual readings of the play, however, we must acknowledge that Shakespeare is saying something about gender roles in society. Discuss the message of gender communicated by *Twelfth Night*, using specifics from the play to support your points.
2. Many of the characters in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* seem more in love with love than they are in love with people, as evidenced by the ease with which they switch their affections to other parties at the end of the play. Among the leading characters, which one do you consider the best exemplar of true love? Why? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
3. Compare the characters of Olivia and Orsino in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, particularly with regard to the nature of their loves. In what ways are they alike? in what ways different? How do these characters demonstrate the unhealthy side of romantic attachment?
4. True love is more focused on the one who is loved than on the one who is doing the loving. Yet, all too often, those who profess to be in love become totally self-absorbed, caring only for their own feelings and nursing their own fantasies. Why is such love destructive? Use examples from William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to illustrate your argument.

5. The character of Malvolio brings a jarring incongruity into the world of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. At first he seems to be a caricature of the Puritan, a sour figure who has to spoil everybody else's fun. Later, however, he becomes a caution against the dangers of self-delusion. In your opinion, what is Malvolio's real sin in the play - being a sourpuss or daring to dream of rising beyond his status in life? Is he sacrificed because the chaotic world of the Twelfth Night festival cannot stand the intrusion of order, or because self-deception is ultimately self-destructive? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
6. Discuss the role of Malvolio in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Is he a comic or a tragic figure? Is he a mere caricature of a Puritan, or is he a man, like Macbeth, whose "o'erweening ambition," albeit in a far less serious setting, leads him to destruction? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
7. In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, is love a blessing or a curse? Does the happy ending compensate for the pain through which the characters must go to get there? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with details from the play.
8. In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the thought that the steward Malvolio should marry Olivia, the high-born countess, is treated as an object of scorn. At the end of the play, however, Maria, who is Olivia's handmaid, marries Sir Toby, from the same noble family to which Olivia belongs. Why do you think the first union is treated as ridiculous while the second is accepted? How do these differences contribute to the social commentary that Shakespeare is making through the play?
9. Discuss the role of unspoken communication - letters, objects, messengers - in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. How do these devices move the plot forward? What do they contribute to the message of the play concerning truth and falsehood, reality and unreality? Illustrate your arguments with specifics from the play.
10. Discuss the role of clothing in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Does Shakespeare suggest that "clothes make the man"? To what extent is it true that we become what we wear? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
11. Compare and contrast the characters of Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In what ways do they demonstrate two sides of the same coin? How do the ease with which they are taken in by clever characters like Sir Toby and Maria and their failure at the end of the play illustrate the dangers of deceiving oneself? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
12. Contrast romantic love as it is pictured in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with biblical love as pictured in I Corinthians 13. In the play, is love something that is beyond the control of the lover, or can the characters choose whom they love? How would you answer the same question with regard to Scripture? Be sure to use specifics, both from the play and from the Bible.

13. Twelfth Night in seventeenth-century England was the festival of Epiphany - the twelfth day of Christmas, the celebration of the coming of the wise men, and a time when revelry included role reversals of all kinds, including men and women impersonating one another and servants impersonating their masters. In what ways is William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* an appropriate entertainment for such a festival? Why, in such a setting, would the audience be pleased to see the downfall of Malvolio, Olivia's straight-laced steward?
14. In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Maria describes Malvolio as "sick of self-love." He is presented as the supreme egotist. In what ways does his egotism manifest itself? In your opinion, does he deserve the treatment he gets from the other characters? Support your conclusions with specifics from the play.
15. In Act II, scene 4 of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Orsino and Cesario (really Viola in disguise) have a conversation about the differences of the love of men and the love of women. Do you think the stereotypes they present have at least a grain of truth, or are they entirely insupportable? Use specifics from the play to support your conclusion.
16. What is the significance of the song with which William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* closes? Why would the playwright choose such a melancholy meditation with which to close a madcap comedy?
17. The character of Feste, Olivia's jester, is a central one in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* because he serves as a commentator on the action as well as a witty comic figure in his own right. Why is his commentary important for the audience? Support your arguments with details from the play.
18. The image of drowning is a pervasive one in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Many characters in the play are said to have drowned or to be drowning, either in a literal or a metaphorical sense. What is the role of the image in the play, and how does it help to convey the playwright's intended themes? Use specific examples in building your arguments.
19. William Shakespeare was an actor as well as a playwright, and scholars often speculate about what parts he played in his own works. In *Twelfth Night*, he is often thought to have played the role of Feste - after all, he was paid to entertain the nobility with his wit and his foolishness. In what ways is the character of Feste like that of a playwright? Discuss the appropriateness of Shakespeare acting this particular role, using specific quotes and incidents from the play.
20. For a variety of reasons, many of the characters in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* pretend to be other than what they are. Discuss Shakespeare's view of such pretense. Is there ever a good reason for a person to disguise his identity, or is such a practice always to be mocked or condemned? Use details from the play to support your argument.

21. Critic William Hazlitt said, “There is a period in the progress of manners . . . , in which the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature’s planting, not the growth of art or study; in which they are therefore unconscious of them themselves, or care not who knows them, if they can but have their whim out; and in which, as there is no attempt at imposition, the spectators rather receive pleasure from humouring the inclinations of the persons they laugh at, than wish to give them pain by exposing their absurdity.” Does Hazlitt’s assessment apply to William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*? Does the audience enjoy the self-deceived characters as they are, or desire them to get their comeuppance? Defend your conclusion with specifics from the play.