

# Twelfth Night Study Guide

Compiled by Laura Cole,  
Director of Education and Training  
[Laura@ShakespeareTavern.com](mailto:Laura@ShakespeareTavern.com)

For

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company  
at The New American Shakespeare  
Tavern

499 Peachtree St. NE,  
Atlanta, GA 30308

Phone: 404-874-5299

[www.shakespearetavern.com](http://www.shakespearetavern.com)



## Original Practice and Playing Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Tavern on Peachtree Street is an Original Practice Playhouse. Original Practice is the active exploration and implementation of Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques.

For the Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) at The New American Shakespeare Tavern this means every ASC production features hand-made period costumes, live, actor-generated sound effects, and live period music performed on period instruments in our Elizabethan playhouse. Our casts are trained to speak directly to the audience instead of ignoring the audience through the modern convention of acting with a "4<sup>th</sup> wall."

You will experience all of this and more when you see ASC's Twelfth Night

### Who's Who in Twelfth Night

**Orsino:** A nobleman of Illyria, hopelessly in love with the Lady Olivia. His "desires, like fell cruel hounds, ere since pursue" him. He listens to music a lot.

**Olivia:** She has just lost her brother, and within the last year, her father also. "She hath abjured the sight of men" in mourning for her brother and father.

**Viola:** She "bore a mind that envy could not but call faire" Orphaned at 13, she has just lost her twin brother at the beginning of the play.

**Sebastian:** Viola's missing brother. Antonio, a sea captain, befriends him after rescuing him from the sea.

**Sir Toby Belch:** As his name implies, he is a partier, er, Courtier. He is related to Olivia and is "helping" Sir Andrew woo her.

**Sir Andrew Aguecheek:** "A very fool and a prodigal". Sir Toby is wringing him dry of money.

**Maria:** Olivia's lady-in-waiting. Her handwriting is remarkably similar to Olivia's.

**Feste:** He travels the country, entertaining the gentry. "This fellow is Wise enough to play the Fool"

**Malvolio:** Olivia's steward or butler. He likes the color yellow. He has "greatness thrust upon him"

**Antonio:** A "notable saltwater thief" and friend to Sebastian.

**Sea Captain:** His ship has just sunk at sea, and he is going to help Viola make her way in the world.

**Valentine:** Gentleman of Orsino's court.

**Fabian:** Servant to Olivia.

**Curio:** Servant to Orsino.

### Officers, Sailors and Musicians

**Illyria:** The Elizabethans thought Illyria was on the coast of Africa. Illyria was a mysterious, dangerous and exotic land full of pirates.

**Twelfth Night:** The 12<sup>th</sup> day of the Christmas season in England, marked by the Feast of The Epiphany. This holiday was celebrated with rejoicing, hi-jinks, tricks and jokes.

## **Twelfth Night Study Guide page 2**

### **The Story**

As our play opens, Count Orsino has musicians playing for him. He is in love with the Lady Olivia in a big, sloppy way. He is hoping that music will overwhelm him and make him fall out of love with Olivia but it doesn't work. Valentine enters and tells him that Olivia will not hear Orsino's suit of love and marriage. She says "The Element (the Sun) it selfe, till seven years heate, shall not behold her face at ample view" She is refusing all offers of love, in mourning for her brother and father.

We meet Viola, a young lady shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria. She has lost her brother Sebastian in the wreck and must make do on her own. She hears of Olivia and Orsino, and decides to disguise herself as a boy, to serve Orsino in his court. She will do this till she can figure something else out. The sea captain agrees to help.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are finding it hard to have fun drinking and carousing when Olivia insists on being in mourning. Sir Toby has made Sir Andrew believe that Andrew could marry Olivia shortly. They jest and talk with Maria, who doesn't have a very high opinion of Sir Andrew, or Sir Toby, for that matter. She doesn't approve of the late hours he spends carousing.

Viola appears at Orsino's court as a boy named Cesario. She has become a favorite of Orsino's and he decides to send Cesario to Olivia to woo her, instead of sending Valentine again. He tells Cesario that Olivia will like him better since he looks so much like a woman. Viola agrees to go, although she admits to us that she has already fallen in love with Orsino herself!

Now, we meet Olivia, all in black, and currently upbraiding her Fool, Feste. He has been gone for a while, and she is in no mood to be "fooled" with. He tries to prove to her that she is being silly for mourning her brother's death since he is in heaven. She

cheers up a bit and when Malvolio, her Steward, criticizes Feste, she defends Feste. She tells Malvolio "you are sick of self-love" and cautions him that an "allowed fool" is a good thing.

Viola shows up at the gate, demanding to speak to Olivia. Olivia consents to see him, veiled. After some confusion, Viola finally sees Olivia's face and begins to woo her for Orsino. By the end of her visit, she has done such a good job as Cesario, that Olivia falls in love with him/her! Viola leaves, hoping Olivia will see Orsino's worth as a mate. Olivia wonders at how quickly she has fallen under Cesario's spell- "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?"

Olivia sends Malvolio off in pursuit of Cesario, to offer him a ring. She lies and tells Malvolio that the boy left it, hoping Cesario will return, with the ring. Viola realizes Olivia has fallen for her, in the same way that she, Viola, is in love with Orsino.

Now, we meet Sebastian, Viola's brother, for the first time. He is on his way to Orsino's court. Antonio, who saved him from drowning, would like to follow but he "has many enemies in Orsino's court" but "I do adore thee so, that danger shall seem sport and I will go".

Malvolio gives Viola the ring, and all her fears are confirmed. She decides that Time shall work out her problems and goes on her way.

Later, it is late at night and Toby has been out partying with Andrew. They invite Feste to sing for them, and wake up the whole household in the process. Before Maria can shut them up, Malvolio enters, and threatens Sir Toby with expulsion from the house, apparently on Olivia's orders. Malvolio threatens Maria's good standing with Olivia and Maria comes up with a plan to gull Malvolio into thinking Olivia is in love with him. Maria will write a fake letter, and they plan to leave it in Malvolio's way the next day.

### **Twelfth Night Study Guide Page 3**

Meanwhile, Orsino has Feste sing another melancholy song for his entertainment. Cesario tries to convince Orsino that Olivia simply will not change her mind. Cesario tells him a story about his sister, who pined for love. They discuss the differences between men and women's love, but Orsino's mind is not changed. He sends Cesario back to Olivia with more words of love.

Toby, Maria, Andrew and Fabian all hide in the garden, and watch as Malvolio finds the fake letter from Olivia. He becomes so convinced Olivia loves him from what he reads in the letter that he decides to dress the way Olivia apparently wants him to dress, act snooty as she requests, and generally make a jerk of himself for her sake.

Viola and Feste tease each other on the way to Olivia's house then meet Toby and Andrew at the gate. Olivia again begs Cesario for his love (and Viola is torn even more). Cesario leaves, swearing, "nevermore will I my masters tears to you deplore". Andrew, incensed at Cesario's apparent success in wooing Olivia, tries to go home. Toby, seeing his meal ticket leaving, says "Challenge me the Counts youth to fight with him, hurt him in 11 places, my Niece shall take note of it" Andrew goes off to write his challenge and Maria enters offering to show Toby something funny, in another part of the garden.

Antonio catches up with Sebastian, and we find out more about Antonio's dark past.

Malvolio appears, in yellow stockings cross-gartered and smiling. He scares Olivia with his antics so much that she thinks he is mad. He is sent away to a dark cell and Viola enters again to be immediately challenged by Toby, for Andrew. Viola hasn't done anything- Toby is simply arranging all this foolishness so that he can gull some more money and a horse out of Andrew.

Antonio shows up just as Andrew and Viola begin to duel. He thinks Viola is Sebastian, since she is wearing clothes just like Sebastian's. Antonio jumps to "Sebastian's" defense and is arrested by officers. He asks "Sebastian" for money he lent his friend but of course, Viola doesn't know what Antonio is talking about. She doesn't have enough money and Antonio is carried away, mourning "Oh, how wild an idol proves this God" in other words- Sebastian-Viola-Cesario.

Sebastian shows up and Andrew, thinking he is Cesario, challenges him to another duel. Olivia shows up, rescues her sweetie, Sebastian/ Cesario, and asks him to come into the house. Malvolio shows up in jail, tormented by Feste, who is masquerading as Sir Topas, the Curate.

Sebastian/Cesario has now fallen in love with Olivia, and agrees to marry her. The Duke has had it with Olivia's refusals and goes to her house, Viola in tow, to demand her love. Antonio, officers in tow, shows up, and Orsino yells at him. Olivia shows up, wondering why Cesario/Viola isn't as cuddly as he was 10 minutes ago. Andrew and Toby show up, bloody from another encounter with Cesario/Sebastian and recoil in fright from Cesario/Viola. When Sebastian appears and apologizes for hurting Toby, everything is explained. "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons". Sebastian and Viola reunite, Orsino gets a surprise, Olivia gets her man, and Malvolio "will be revenged on the whole pack of you". Everyone, including the newly married Toby and Maria, can now live happily ever after.

#### **Theatergoing Then and Now:**

Find out what the typical Elizabethan audience was like and imagine what a performance might have been like back then. What is different about theatre going nowadays? The answers may surprise you! Clue: What would this play be like to watch outside, in the light of day?

## Twelfth Night Study Guide page 4

### **During a Performance, Watch And Listen For This:**

#### **Music**

There are more songs and music in Twelfth Night than any other Shakespeare play. What do the different songs represent? Do they mean different things to different characters? What is Feste's role in this play? How does it change?

### **After a Performance, Talk About This:**

#### **Gender in Shakespeare:**

In Shakespeare's day, teenage boys played all the women's roles. How would that change a production of Twelfth Night for you? Think of another play of Shakespeare's that you know- how would it work, if young men played the female characters.

#### **Original Practice Theatre:**

Does directly addressing the audience affect what you think and feel about the characters? Does it affect your understanding of what is going on onstage? Does it interfere? Why do you think Shakespeare wrote his plays this way? What are the benefits to the actor and/or audience? What are the risks?

### **Words Invented by Shakespeare and Used for the First Time in this Play:**

Hobnob  
Label  
Lapse

Find for yourself where they appear in the play! Can you spot them in performance? Do they mean what you thought they meant?

## **For Further Information/Exploration:**

#### **Websites:**

Our website has a great "ask Jeanette" section-email us questions about the show you saw, and get an answer back.  
<http://www.shakespearetaVERN.com/BTC/btcaskjeanette.html>

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet:  
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/> this site contains excellent resources and has tons of links.

The Shakespeare Globe Centre USA:  
<http://www.shakespeareglobeusa.org/>

#### **Books:**

Twelfth Night Arden Edition

The Elizabethan World Picture by E.M.W. Tilyard

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

The Complete Idiot's Guide To Shakespeare Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

#### **Our performance text is:**

The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type, Neil Freeman

For more information on the First Folio of Shakespeare go to:

<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html>

#### **Movie Versions:**

Twelfth Night- Dir. By Trevor Nunn. A great version with Nigel Hawthorne, Helena Bonham Carter and Ben Kingsley.

#### **Definitions of Words Invented for**

##### **Twelfth Night**

Hobnob- to mingle  
Label-to affix a name to  
Lapse-to fall into error