Shakespeare’s
Twelfth Night
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S

Twelfth Night,
or

What You Will

DIRECTORS
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DESIGNERS
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Directors’ Note

HELLO AND WELCOME TO OUR PRODUCTION OF

TWELFTH NIGHT! While putting it all together, we thought long and hard about the theme of the play: “I am not what I am” (3.1.107). This theme is especially pertinent to the fourth scene in the play, in which Viola (dressed as Cesario) comes to Olivia’s house to woo her for Orsino. Orsino can’t even do his own wooing — he sends a front man. And this front man? He isn’t even a man. He’s a woman in love with him. And the woman she’s sent to woo? She’s wearing a veil and refusing to be seen. Almost everyone is wearing a mask, whether literally or figuratively. Nobody is what he or she seems to be.

For our production, we have chosen not to specify a particular time period. Leaving the time ambiguous, however, is rather preferable. We are staging our production outside to utilize a comedic, pastoral setting and the season of Spring which symbolizes rebirth and change. The beautiful flowering trees and greenery of the outdoors also lend themselves to the decadence of our characters Olivia and Orsino. We’d like the audience to identify and empathize with these characters and to be able to focus on the way each of them pursues what they want.

While we have kept our costumes and time period pared down to a bare minimum, we have decided to be a bit more generous in setting and props. Olivia will be surrounded by decadence – chocolate, parasols, her lace veil. This will allow the audience more participation and allow them to feel as though they are being taken to a different world, the world of the stage, here a dramatic enactment of Arcadia. There is an “otherly” quality about Illyria – a world of both privilege and play - and as Twelfth Night is a comedy we decided a nice pastoral touch would help to transport the audience.

We hope you enjoy the show!

Plot Summary

DUKE ORSINO OF ILLYRIA IS IN LOVE with the Countess Olivia. However, she is mourning the death of her brother and refuses to speak with men. Meanwhile, a young woman named Viola is shipwrecked and stranded in Illyria. She mourns the death of her twin brother, Sebastian, who she believes has died in the wreckage. Her captain helps her as she decides to dress as a boy so she can work as a page for Duke Orsino. Even though Olivia has been consistently rejecting Orsino, he continues to deploy messengers to preach his love to her. He sends Cesario, his new page who is actually Viola in disguise, to court Olivia in Orsino’s name. Viola reluctantly goes because she has fallen in love with Orsino. Then, Olivia falls for “Cesario” and sends her manservant Malvolio after him with her ring. When she gets the ring, Viola realizes that Olivia loves her.

Olivia’s drunken uncle, Sir Toby Belch, has a friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who is also fighting a losing battle for Olivia’s affections. Toby keeps him around because Andrew has money to buy alcohol. Olivia’s lady-in-waiting, Maria, plots with Toby and Andrew to trick Malvolio into thinking that Olivia loves him by means of a fake letter. Malvolio follows the letter’s instructions to wear yellow stockings and cross-garters and to smile at Olivia. Because she does not know about the trick, Olivia thinks Malvolio has gone crazy and she locks him up in the dark.

In the meantime, Sebastian, Viola’s twin brother who has been saved from the shipwreck by Antonio, comes to Illyria. Antonio is wanted for piracy against Orsino, but out of love for Sebastian, he risks his life to aid him. Antonio gives Sebastian money to walk around, agreeing to meet after an hour.

The jealous Sir Andrew wants to challenge Cesario to a duel, so he writes but Toby decides the letter is too stupid to deliver. Instead, he decides to threaten Cesario in Andrew’s name. Viola does not want to fight, so she asks Fabian, who is in on Toby’s plan, to make peace with Andrew for her. However, Fabian furthers the confusion and Andrew prepares to duel Cesario. Antonio intervenes to defend Cesario who he believes is Sebastian, and is arrested. Meanwhile, Olivia has met and married Sebastian, thinking he is Cesario.

The fool, Feste, visits Malvolio, pretending to be a curate, and brings a letter from Malvolio. Upon Malvolio’s release, Maria, Toby, and Andrew confess to having written the false letter. Malvolio vows revenge and storms off the stage. Maria and Toby have married in celebration of the success of their device against the steward. Cesario is accused of deserting both Antonio and Olivia when the real Sebastian arrives after getting in a fight with Andrew and Toby. When the twins are seen together, everything is revealed. The play ends as Orsino forgives Antonio, welcomes Sebastian and Olivia, and realizes his own attraction to Cesario/Viola. He promises that once she is dressed as a woman again they, too, will be married.

Theme

ONE OVERALL THEME FOR THIS PLAY IS CAPTURED IN VIOLA/CESARIO’S CLAIM, “I am not what I am” (3.1.107). This is shown both with physical disguises as well as emotional ones. Viola changes her appearance to become a boy, physically becoming something she is not, and while she hints at her
true self, she does not come right out and say it. Malvolio wears yellow stockings with the cross in front. This is an important detail because yellow is a color worn only by those of higher social standing, and wearing the cross in front, rather than in back or not at all, was a fancier way of wearing the stockings. Therefore, Malvolio is attempting to look as though he is of higher class, though he is actually just a steward. Another disguise is put on by Maria as she forges the letter supposedly from Olivia to Malvolio. This is out of pure enjoyment for Maria, and plays on Malvolio’s emotions towards his mistress, but the letter again is not what it appears to be. There are characters that wear emotional disguises instead of physical ones. Olivia outwardly mourns for her recently departed brother while internally she longs for Cesario who is actually Viola in her male disguise. Orsino is just as complex, claiming to love Olivia, but not caring that she does not return his passionate feelings. Instead of talking to her himself, Orsino hides behind the walls of his castle and mopes around while claiming to be in love.

Symbolism

THE STORM

It is perchance that you yourself were saved. (1.2.5)

The play begins in the wake of a great storm that’s caused a horrible shipwreck. All of the passengers have been scattered along the shores of Illyria, a new and unfamiliar land to them. Sebastian and Viola, twin brother and sister, believe each other to be dead. The storm serves as a catalyst for the entire story. We are set in motion by chaos, loss, and uncertainty. Everything these people have known is now topsy-turvy. Status, labels and gender roles have all gone out the window, for when one is faced with the prospect of death or near-death, such things can hardly take up as much focus in one’s life. Survival is their only consideration and a possible reunion, their only wish. The storm serves to make a clean slate for our characters, a tabula rasa. It leaves them shaken and sad, to be sure, but they are now free to explore this strange new world now stretching out before them with no constraints, no limits and no preconceptions. They are newly free.

A person is met with many proverbial storms throughout the course of her life. Injury, illness, death, theft, loss, pain, and suffering are all integral and inevitable parts of a human life. While unpleasant, these things are necessary to provide the opposite: health, life, gain, prosperity, and thriving happiness. Every storm in our lives comes to a close, leaving light and hope. The story of Noah’s flood, for example, is one of a terrible wiping out of the earth, but it provides the world with a chance to start over and build a world of peace. Twelfth Night’s storm also provides a rebirth, that renaissance of renewed zeal.

The victims of the shipwreck pick themselves up and square themselves for the next big thing, whether it proves to be good or bad.

THE VEIL

I swear, I am not that I play. (1.5.166)

Olivia wears a veil at the start of the play because she is mourning for her deceased brother, but this is also a symbolic prop because nearly every character hides behind something and wears a mask of sorts. Viola changes her appearance to try to move on with her life and get close to the king, and even though she hints at her true self, the other characters do not believe her. Orsino hides behind the walls of his castle for much of the play and orders others to deliver his messages, even after these messages are rejected. Feste hides behind his appearance of being the fool of the play, but he contributes wisdom throughout the action.

THE YELLOW STOCKINGS

He will come to her in yellow stockings and ’tis a color she abhors. (2.5.182)

Olivia’s steward Malvolio thinks he is above his position. He orders Olivia’s lady in waiting, Maria, to keep the drunken Sir Andrew and Sir Toby in check. All three are offended and Maria plots to bring Malvolio, who is in love with Olivia, down a few notches. She writes a love letter to Malvolio in Olivia’s handwriting, saying how she wishes she could tell someone how she secretly loves him, but because her station in life is higher than his, it would be unacceptable to society. The letter gives Malvolio suggestions for some ways to show he received and understood the message. One of these is for Malvolio to wear his yellow stockings. He resolves to follow all the letter’s advice, and he leaves as Maria comes back again to see if the plan worked. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew say it did and Maria reveals that all the suggestions in the letter are bound to frustrate Olivia, including the yellow stockings because she detests the color.

The yellow stockings symbolize Malvolio’s futile attempts to raise his status and have his love for Olivia reciprocated. They also represent his misunderstanding of Olivia as he tries to gain her affections by following the clues in the letter. The color yellow is a sign of wealth in the time of this play, so Malvolio should not be wearing it in his station as a manservant. When he wears the stockings in front of Olivia, she does not understand that he is trying to woo her; therefore, they also symbolize his folly in taking the letter to heart and assuming that the letter is meant for him, which is implied but never explicitly stated. They also help show that Malvolio loves himself even more than he loves Olivia because he is so quick to believe that she loves him. The yellow stockings symbolize Malvolio’s foolishness and his deception.
Designers’ Note

FOR SHAKESPEARE’S TWELFTH NIGHT, OUR PARTNER DIRECTORS provided us with an open-ended interpretation of setting and time period stating that, “leaving time ambiguous is rather preferable.” We accepted this ambiguity and with time undefined we aimed to provide a timeless design that would be easily interpreted while directly reflecting the plot. Having not read Twelfth Night before, we were troubled by the many layers and endless connections between characters. Confused but not deterred, we attempted to draw a creative and fresh portrayal of the play, exaggerating the director’s theme, “I am not what I am.” Although the directors used words to create images of veils and masks in their notes, we tried to steer clear of cliché, masked designs for our poster. Instead, we examined other worn items that could reflect one’s mood, sex and sophistication. We chose hats to exemplify character identity, relating “I am not what I am” to “we all wear different hats.”

We created three hats to represent the three main characters, Olivia, Orsino and Viola/Cesario. We incorporated a coat rack to organize and display the hats. In designing the hats, we left the outsides very plain and basic to hint that everything is normal; there is no confusion or deception. The outsides of these hats appear honest and pure, while the insides are wildly patterned, indicating that what you see is not always what you get.

The patterns we created were made with the characters in mind. We made the outside of Olivia’s hat black to reflect the mourning of her brother and the inside decorated with a decadent pattern to reflect her social status and obvious beauty. Viola’s hat is grey on the outside, a neutral color that could be worn by a man or a woman, and the inside is stamped with a pattern reminiscent of a butterfly wing, which is a symbol of rebirth and celebration of transition. The Duke’s hat is brown on the outside and richly patterned inside.
**THIS PROGRAM** and the corresponding theater poster were produced as part of an interdisciplinary collaboration between students in two *Reading Shakespeare* classes and two *Graphic Design Two* classes at Drake University in Spring 2011. The program is typeset in Chaparral Pro.

**THIS PROJECT** was conceived and organized by Sarah Hogan (Department of English) and Hilary Williams (Department of Art & Design).