WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S 12TH NIGHT OR WHAT YOU WILL

adapted by Madella Smith, Sarah Zielinski & Devin Brotze
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

Twelfth Night, or
What You Will

DIRECTORS
Devin Brotzer, Madella Smith, & Sarah Zielinski

DESIGNERS
Whitley Kemble & Adrian Mendez
Directors' Note

**WHEN YOU THINK OF A MODERN FESTIVAL, YOU PROBABLY IMAGINE** grilled turkey legs, cotton candy, street performers, and games to be played. A festival is a time to laugh and enjoy the bustling atmosphere. During Shakespeare's time period and before, festivals allowed citizens to have a day of freedom where the social constructs were turned on their head. Apprentices were in charge of their masters; fools could be king. The normality of life would be thrown to the wind for one day; in essence, the festival acted as a safety valve to allow society to let out some steam. However, the day after the festival, the social rules would go back into place, and the normal social order would resume.

Similar to festivals, college also acts as a time in a person's life that allows for new identities and a new type of society to emerge, one in which students are encouraged to meet new people, drinking the night before a big test is perfectly acceptable, and fast food is a food group. College is a place where gender is often bent or broken, you are encouraged to “find yourself,” and drinking buddies are made for life. Because of these reasons, we decided to set Shakespeare’s *The Twelfth Night, or What You Will* in a contemporary college setting. Instead of knights and fools, the play features frat boys and pledges. Olivia’s grand home is replaced with a dormitory while Orsino’s home is now a fraternity house. Imagine the mischief of Shakespeare combined with *Animal House*’s boisterousness!

By setting the play on a contemporary college campus, a setting that is considered liberal and progressive, we hope you take the play’s lessons to heart and apply them to today’s society. Although written during the early modern period, Shakespeare’s message still applies to contemporary viewers. In defiance of today’s rigid gender division, take courage from Viola’s decision to don men’s clothing and effectively perform masculinity. Push the gender boundaries. Learn from Antonio’s courage and loyalty shown when entering an enemy’s territory in order to help a friend. And perhaps most importantly, learn to laugh at yourself and enjoy the humor of everyday life. So please, enjoy our presentation of *Twelfth Night*, and think of it as your own mini-festival, but without returning to normal the next day.

Plot Summary

**IN ILLYRIA, DUKE ORSINO PINES FOR LADY OLIVIA’S LOVE.** However, Olivia mourns the death of her brother and refuses to entertain any proposals of marriage. Meanwhile, a storm has shipwrecked a young, aristocratic woman, Viola, onto the Illyrian shore. Assuming her twin brother, Sebastian, drowned, Viola must provide for herself and learns of Olivia’s court. However, since Olivia is not receiving strangers, Viola, with the help of the ship’s captain, disguises herself as Cesario, a man and leaves to find work under Orsino.

Cesario/Viola quickly becomes Orsino’s favorite page and finds herself falling in love with Orsino. A love triangle emerges when Orsino sends Cesario to deliver his love messages to Olivia, and Olivia falls for Cesario.

Meanwhile, Sir Toby, Olivia’s uncle, Sir Andrew, Sir Toby’s friend, and Maria, Olivia’s lady-in-waiting, grow tired of Malvolio’s efforts to spoil their fun. Maria devises a practical joke to fool Malvolio into thinking that Olivia is in love with him. Maria forges a letter in Olivia’s handwriting to a secret love saying that if the recipient wants to earn her love, he should dress in crossed gartered yellow stockings, act arrogantly, smile constantly, and refuse to explain himself. Malvolio finds the letter, assumes he is the rightful recipient, and, dreaming of becoming a noble, follows its commands. He behaves so strangely that Olivia believes he is mad.

Sebastian, who lives, believes Viola is dead and arrives in Illyria with his protector, Antonio, who has cared for Sebastian since the shipwreck. Antonio has become attached to Sebastian and follows him to Illyria, despite being Orsino’s enemy.

Sir Andrew, observing Olivia’s attraction to Cesario, challenges Cesario to a duel with Sir Toby’s encouragement. However, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby mistake Sebastian for Cesario and fight Sebastian. Olivia sees the duel and, believing him to be Cesario, asks Sebastian to marry her. Baffled since he never met her but seeing her beauty and apparent wealth, Sebastian agrees to marry her.

Meanwhile, Antonio is arrested by Orsino’s officers and begs Cesario for help, mistaking him for Sebastian. Viola denies knowing Antonio, and Antonio is dragged off, crying that Sebastian betrayed him. Viola begins to hope that her brother is alive.

Malvolio’s alleged madness allows Maria, Toby, and Andrew to lock Malvolio into a dungeon while they torment him. Feste dresses as Sir Topas, a priest and pretends to examine Malvolio, declaring him insane. However, Sir Toby begins to worry the joke has gone too far and allows Malvolio to send a letter to Olivia, asking to be released.
Viola and Orsino travel to Olivia’s house, where Olivia welcomes Cesario as her husband, thinking him to be Sebastian, whom she has just married. Orsino is furious, but Sebastian appears and all is revealed. The siblings are reunited, and Orsino realizes he loves Viola upon learning she is a woman and asks her to marry him. Sir Toby and Maria have also been married privately. Malvolio released from his room. The joke is revealed, and Malvolio storms off, promising revenge.

**Theme**

ONE OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN TWELFTH NIGHT, OR WHAT YOU WILL is the inability of a Puritan to fit into the theater and moreover, into the theater of comedy. Malvolio’s character is portrayed as a Puritan and is constantly shown as an outsider to the jovial nature of the play. The scene we chose and the way we staged it exemplified this light-hearted and fun air that is seen throughout the play by using the laid-back setting and natural humor of drunken frat boys on a college campus. Throughout the play, the characters poke fun at Malvolio. Malvolio does not engage in the playful teasing the other characters do and this results in the rather tragic nature of his character. The other characters’ pranks towards Malvolio turn increasingly cruel and lead to him being locked in a dungeon and tormented to the point of declaring “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you” (5.1.355). Malvolio’s tendency towards seriousness, propriety, and upwards mobility puts him in a stark contrast with most of the other characters observed in the play, solidifying his position as an outsider. Twelfth Night is largely based on the abandonment of propriety, as seen in the characters of Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Maria and if a traditional role is abandoned it is either done in a comedic manner or with the understanding of their true positions as is the case with the characters of Viola and Feste.

Puritans in the Renaissance were opposed to theater, claiming that it corrupts people’s minds with its garish extravagance, sexual play, and moral ambiguity. This has of course, placed puritans as outsiders to the world of the theater, just as Malvolio is an outsider to the world of joy and fun in the play. This lack of ability to fool around leads to his downfall, causing people to believe a “midsummer madness” has fallen upon him (3.4.48). The belief that he is mad and the bullying by the other characters portrays the stage as a place of joy and foolery and not of seriousness and propriety.

**Symbolism**

> **A MASK**

**OLIVIA:** Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent. (1.2.53-55)

Throughout the play, disguise and identity confusion play a prominent role in the plot. Although no actual mask is used, changing the type of clothing from a woman’s to a man’s or a fool’s to a priest’s allows the characters to effectively mask their true character. When Feste changes into a priest’s robes, he effectively convinces Malvolio that he is Sir Topas. After completing the joke, Feste removes his robe and regains his identity as Feste. However, Viola’s choice to act as Cesario does not allow such a clean slate when her identity as a woman is found out. At the end of the play, Orsino asks to see her in her woman’s clothing, but they cannot be recovered. Without changing back into her original character’s clothing, the viewer questions whether Viola can remove her “mask” or if Cesario was her true character all along.

> **A LETTER**

**MARIA:** Observe him, for the love of mockery, for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. (2.5.14-15)

Miscommunication is a central motif of the play and is exemplified in a letter which is used to play a prank on Malvolio. An ambiguous letter is left on the ground for him to find and he gives the words meaning. This seems to be a recurring part of the play as words are given meaning by those who hear or read them and thus how we communicate is largely left to interpretation. This miscommunication can range from witty word play between characters to an insincere expression of love to a man making socially fatal assumptions. The letter symbolizes the use of words in the play which as Feste says is comparable to a glove which has can be turned inside out.

> **YELLOW STOCKINGS WITH CROSSED GARTERS**

**MALVOlio:** She thus advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commanded thy yellow stockings, and wished to see thee ever crossed-gartered...She did command my yellow stockings of late, she did praise my leg being cross-gartered; and in this she manifests herself to my love, and with a kind of injunction drives me to these habits of her liking. (2.5.123-136)

The crossed garters with yellow stocking are significant to the play because they represent confusion and identity-blending, central themes in the play. With a letter’s instructions, Malvolio’s hopes to raise his class status become a joke when he is told to dress in crossed garters and yellow stockings.
The crossed garters represent the want to cross over classes and become something he was not born into. The yellow color is a symbol of foolishness, as it was simple to trick Malvolio into thinking he could raise his class. Through this disguise, the play raises questions about what determines a person’s identity, compelling the audience to wonder if things like class (or gender) are set in stone, or if they can be altered with a change of clothing. However, when all is said and done, Malvolio is seen as a fool and a madman for wanting to better himself.

Designers’ Note

ANIMAL HOUSE MEETS SHAKESPEARE—the concept behind this adaptation of Twelfth Night, or What You Will was simple. It opened up a lot of opportunities for fun execution, a welcome change from the stereotypical formal image of other theater posters for Shakespeare’s plays.

In the initial stages of the concept process, we did a lot of sketches as well as a brief search for other poster/playbill combinations. Most of the existing posters for Twelfth Night were done in the traditional style—script style fonts with split or ambiguously gendered faces. Nearly every poster we found had some sort of human component. While several of our sketches had these elements, we wanted to take a more subtle approach. The goal was to imply the overarching gender identity and deception motifs in the play. But how to keep it accurate and still fun?

In the end, we chose to use simple illustrations and typography that would capture the playfulness of the college scene. The beer cup illustrations that appear on both the poster and the playbill are easily identifiable as a part of the college party scene. Originally, these had been part of a larger scale beer pong table with the cups arranged to create competing gender symbols. By using the beer cups, we were able to evoke the Animal House image.

These more detailed images worked well on the poster, but we felt these drew too much attention away from the other content on the playbill cover. In order to adapt to the different scales and formats, we eliminated the complex gender symbols and substituted just two cups. The simple color change helped to retain the idea of gender. What you see before you is the final integration of these elements.
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).