William Shakespeare's

TWELFTH NIGHT
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Twelfth Night, or
What You Will

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Directors' Note

When *Twelfth Night* was first performed, the setting in Illyria was foreign and pleasurably exotic to the original English audience. But with today's technology, we have access to all parts of the world, so a setting in a different country does not have the same effect as it once did. To achieve the feeling of a bizarre yet fascinating and enticing location, we had to go beyond Earth. What is more foreign to us than an alien planet? We have placed our characters on the planet Illyria in the year 2428. We chose this year because the play was first performed in 1594, which was 417 years ago, and 417 years from 2011 is 2428. The people on Illyria work in glass skyscrapers and get around in flying cars, but business attire has not changed much from today, and the English language has returned to its more eloquent days. Shakespeare has survived another 417 years and is revered even more than he is today.

Here on the planet Illyria, technology has come a long way, but some societal debates are still unresolved. Issues regarding gender identity and sexuality are still as important to discuss as they are today. Today, as in 2428 on Illyria, there are many examples of people who explore and cross the boundaries of gender and sexuality, and society as a whole still shuns them for not conforming to what is “normal.” The play seems to put everyone back in the “normal” balance of heteronormative gender roles, but the fact is that some characters remain androgynous despite society’s efforts.

Though originally performed in the 1590s in England and now set in the distant future on a different planet, this play is still relevant to present-day audiences. We want audiences to connect to this play today as they have in the past and as they hopefully will in the future.

Plot Summary

*Twelfth Night* opens on Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, who is in love with a woman named Olivia. Olivia is not interested in love, because her brother has just died and she is mourning. At the same time, Viola reaches the shores of Illyria, having just survived a shipwreck which she believes has killed her twin brother Sebastian. For reasons not made clear, she decides to pose as a eunuch boy named Cesario to go to work for the Duke. Orsino decides to send “Cesario” to speak to Olivia on his behalf. Cesario does, but Olivia falls in love with “Cesario” instead of the Duke. Meanwhile, Viola has fallen in love with Orsino, yet she cannot say anything because he thinks she is a boy.

At the same time, Maria, a gentlewoman in Olivia’s house, along with Olivia’s uncle Sir Toby and his friend, decide to play a joke on Olivia’s steward, Malvolio, who wants to marry Olivia. They leave a letter for him to find, which suggests that Olivia is in love with him. The letter instructs Malvolio to act in a variety of strange ways to prove his love, such as wearing yellow cross-gartered stockings and being rude to Olivia’s uncle. Malvolio follows these instructions, and is consequently locked up in a dark room for being “mad.”

Elsewhere in Illyria, Viola’s twin brother Sebastian, who is identical to her Cesario disguise, washes ashore, having been rescued from the shipwreck by Antonio, but believing that Viola died. Antonio is wanted by Duke Orsino for piracy. Antonio lends Sebastian money to explore the town, and the two part ways.

Sir Andrew, a friend of Olivia’s uncle Sir Toby, also wants to marry Olivia. Though he is ready to give up, Sir Toby convinces him to stay. In order to win Olivia’s love, a plan is devised for Sir Andrew to challenge “Cesario” to a swordfight. Sir Toby is the go-between, and he speaks to each in a way that convinces them that the other is the superior fighter. When the two finally meet, both are confused, but neither is ready to fight. Antonio happens by at this moment, and, believing that “Cesario” is Sebastian, steps in to save him. “Cesario” of course does not recognize Antonio, and shuns his requests for help and his money back when officers appear to arrest him.

Sebastian appears later at Olivia’s house, looking for Antonio. Olivia speaks to him, thinking that he is “Cesario,” and the two get married. He later is attacked by Toby and Andrew because they think he dishonored his friend Antonio.

In Olivia’s court, Viola tells Orsino that Antonio rescued her, but again denies knowing him, much to his confusion and anger. Olivia then enters and speaks to “Cesario” as her husband, which confuses Viola and Orsino. Toby and Andrew accuse “Cesario” of attacking them, which also confuses
everyone. Sebastian comes in at this point, and the confusion of who is who is discovered. Viola reveals her feelings for Orsino and the two plan to marry. Maria and Toby are married offstage. The trick played on Malvolio is also explained because Olivia recognizes Maria’s handwriting.

**Theme**

**IN THE PLAY OF TWELFTH NIGHT, GENDER PLAYS A HUGE ROLE** in the overall plot and humor of the play. Whether it is character switching gender roles or the boys in that time playing a woman (who is then pretending to be a man) gender confusion definitely never leaves any scene of the play. In *Twelfth Night*, every character thinks they know who they are and yet they never fully do. Women’s and men’s roles are switched. The women are dominant, strong, and very well spoken women in a medieval setting.

This was uncommon for women in the Renaissance. The play gives us the idea that women are, in fact, capable of taking on the "man’s" position and playing more of the active, masculine role. On the other hand, the men in this play are cowards, clowns, drunks, lovesick, and very unintelligent. We wouldn’t usually think a "man" would be one to be so obsessed with falling in love or being such a foolish person, especially now. These role switches make us think critically about the role of these characters and why they have switched their roles, but also historical formulations of identity beyond the play. *Twelfth Night* brings up several questions: What constitutes masculinity and manhood? Is it subversive for a woman to dress up like a man? Why is it hard for characters in the play (and for that matter, Shakespeare’s theatergoers) to discern sexual difference? Ultimately, the hazy lines between genders tell us that gender is not fixed, and there are no traits or behaviors which are naturally found in one gender only. Gender is historically malleable, both in Shakespeare’s time and in our own.

**Symbolism**

- **YELLOW CROSS-GARTERED STOCKINGS:** In Act 2 scene 5, Malvolio is reading a letter, thinking that it is written to him about all the things that he can do to get Olivia when really it is just an elaborate joke.

> MARIA:
> If you will then see the fruits of the sport, mark his first approach before my lady. He will come to her in yellow stockings, and 'tis the color she abhors, and cross-gartered, a fashion she detests; and he will smile upon her, which will now be so unsuitable to her disposition, being addicted to a melancholy as she is, that is cannot but turn him into a notable contempt. If you will see it, follow me.” (2.5.160-165)

This symbol represents the aspects of misinterpretations and trickery in the play. Malvolio is manipulated into thinking that Olivia is going to fall for him if he is doing all the things listed in the letter and that he believes this letter is even addressed to him. He also plays the role of a love sick individual who is trying to impress a woman. He is acting similar to a teenage girl who has a crush on a boy.

- **BEARD:** In Act 3 scene 1, Feste and Viola meet in the street and exchange witty banter. Feste makes a comment about Viola (as Cessario) not having a beard, and she responds that she wants one, but not on her face (meaning she wants a man, or husband).

> FESTE:
> Now Jove, in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard!

> VIOLA:
> By my troth, I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one: [aside] though I would not have it grow on my chin.” (3.1.35-37)

This symbol represents the malleability of gender throughout this play, and in life. The beard that Feste mentions has two meanings. Feste takes it to mean that Viola wants a beard on her face, which she would want if she were a man. Viola takes it (in her head) that she wants a man, or a husband, specifically, Orsino. That Viola could want a beard, and it would make her more of a man, even though she is clearly a woman, is another way the beard symbolizes that gender is not fixed.
In Act 3 scene 4, Malvolio talks to himself about why Olivia reacted the way she did, and he realizes that everything that is happening fits exactly with what the letter he found says. The letter is a fake, of course, which means that his doing what the letter said still makes him look like a fool.

MALVOLIO:
Oho, do you come near me now? No worse man than Sir Toby to look to me! This concurs directly with the letter. She sends him on purpose that I may appear stubborn to him, for she incites me to that in the letter... Why, everything adheres together, that no obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance- what can be said?- nothing that can be can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes.

(3.4.55-58, 65-71)

The letter is a symbol of miscommunication in the play. Throughout the play, characters are representing themselves as what they are not (for example, Viola pretending to be Cesario), and there is a great deal of miscommunication which follows (Viola winning Olivia’s love rather than winning it for Orsino). The letter which Maria writes to Malvolio (which adds a layer of false representation, because Maria disguises her handwriting to look like Olivia’s) is a great example of miscommunication. Malvolio believes that he must dress and act in certain ways to prove his love to Olivia, but the entire letter is a sham dreamed up by Maria. This letter is the best physical representation of this theme of miscommunication.

Designers’ Note

After reading through our group’s response to the play, we tried to pull apart the pieces that we felt would be most important to convey on a poster. A main theme we found to be predominant throughout Twelfth Night was gender roles in society. There were also multiple love interests and one character choosing to take on the identity of her twin brother. In order to collaborate with our group’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s play, we decided to focus on this identity and gender switch.

After looking at multiple Twelfth Night and non-Twelfth Night poster designs, we decided to focus on silhouette figures and bright colors. With the idea that the main character dresses as her twin, we aimed to keep the silhouettes looking similar, except for hair. We strived to portray the female-looking figure in both images. It was difficult to convey this message without giving the impression of a love scene – man and woman staring into one another’s eyes, for instance. The image left a confusing middle focal point that we have filled with a futuristic cruise ship or space ship to incorporate the setting of our group’s revised play – 2428 to be exact. The ship played an important role in the play itself. A storm and a sinking ship were major turning points in the play that led to the mayhem which occurs in Shakespeare’s story.

Our original intent was to have the focal color yellow in order to emphasize the yellow stockings that were a symbol in the play. The final colors we found most appealing and eye-catching help create a foreground and really play up the silhouette figures. The black background and contrasting yellow figures play on both the stocking symbol and a night landscape. It was very important to have images and colors that would stand out from a far distance. We believe that the main aspects of our poster can be read from a distance and maintain their meaning and symbolism.
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).
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