



TWELFTH NIGHT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

The Human Race Theatre Company

In-School Tour

TWELFTH NIGHT

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**“What is love? Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter . . .”**

– Twelfth Night, Act Two, Scene 3

William Shakespeare and *Twelfth Night*

Very little is known about Shakespeare's life; what we do know comes from detective work and supposition based on the few surviving documents. There is a record of Shakespeare's baptism on April 26, 1564, in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Historians have guessed that his birthday was April 23 for two reasons: one, babies were typically baptized three days after being born, and two, the monument placed at his grave stated that he died at age 52. He died on April 23rd, 1616, so he must just have reached his 52nd birthday.

Stratford-upon-Avon was a small town about 100 miles from London, in an area noted for sheep-raising. Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, was a glovemaker and a butcher; he held various municipal offices in the town of Stratford, eventually rising to the highest post of high bailiff (something like being the mayor of the town as well as a justice of the peace). Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, came from a well-to-do farming family who owned land near the Forest of Arden (a location which would turn up in Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*).

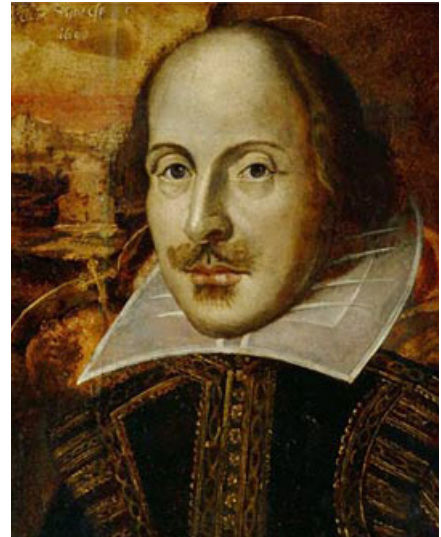
Shakespeare had a number of brothers and sisters: older sisters Joan and Margaret, who both died young, and younger siblings Gilbert, Joan (named for the elder sister who had died), Anne, Richard, and Edmund.

There was a grammar school not far from the house where Shakespeare grew up. Historians assume that he would have attended school there, learning Latin and the classics.

Shakespeare next turns up in the public record at age 18 when he married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than he was. Their daughter Susanna was born in 1583, followed by twins Hamnet and Judith in 1585. Hamnet died at the age of 11.

There are no records of what Shakespeare did during the next eight years of his life. Some historians have theorized that he worked at various trades or perhaps entered military service. Shakespeare was also rumored to have been forced to leave Stratford when he was caught poaching deer, but this is unsubstantiated.

In 1592, we know he was already working as an actor and playwright in London – a jealous rival playwright wrote of an “upstart Crow” who thought himself as good as any university-educated playwright and believed himself “the only Shakes-scene in a cuntrye.” In 1593 and 1594, the theaters in London were closed for most of the year due to plague (the city banned any activity where people would gather in groups to cut down on transmitting disease). Shakespeare may have toured with a group of actors, or may have traveled to Italy.



William Shakespeare



Shakespeare's Birthplace



Shakespeare's Grave

When the theaters reopened in 1594, Shakespeare was working for a theater company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most prestigious acting companies in London. He acted in small roles in his own plays and others and wrote about two plays a year for the company to perform.

The company performed in the first playhouse built in London, simply called "The Theatre" in Shoreditch, at the time a suburb just north of the City of London. It was more convenient to perform outside the city limits in order to avoid censorship and other interference by city officials. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* were both performed here. In 1599, when the lease on the land that The Theatre occupied ran out, the landlord claimed that he owned the theatre building as well. The company surreptitiously disassembled the structure and ferried the lumber across the river Thames, where they built the Globe Theater. This is where the rest of Shakespeare's plays would be performed until the theater burnt down in 1613 during a performance of *Henry VIII*.

Shakespeare found financial success as a playwright. He was able to return to Stratford-upon-Avon and buy the second-largest house in town, where he retired in 1610.

In 1616, Shakespeare contracted a fever (thought to be typhus). He hurriedly created a will, dividing his estate among his children. (His wife is mentioned in the will as receiving "the second best bed, with the furniture." Historians have puzzled over this, wondering whether it was an insult of some kind, or whether the "second best bed" may have been the wedding bed, carrying emotional significance). Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. He was buried in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. An inscription at his grave reads:

Good frend for Jesus sake forbear,
To digg the dust enclosed heare.
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones,
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear,
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.

When the church was renovated in 2008, great care was taken not to move Shakespeare's remains, out of respect for Shakespeare's "curse."



The Writing of *Twelfth Night*

Historians believe that *Twelfth Night* was written in 1600 or 1601. As with many of his other plays, Shakespeare adapted the story from previously existing sources. The plot is drawn from an Italian play titled *Gl'Ingannati* (translated as *The Mistaken Ones* or *The Cheats*), although scholars doubt whether Shakespeare read the play in the original Italian. Shakespeare more likely encountered the story in *Farewell to Militarie Profession*, a collection of tales by Barnaby Riche, who titled it "Of Apollonius and Silla."

At the time when he wrote *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare was at the peak of his creativity. In the years following *Twelfth Night*, he would write *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* (among other plays).

Twelfth Night: Synopsis

“If music be the food of love, play on.”

The Duke of Illyria, Orsino, is in love with Countess Olivia; she, however, has decided to remain veiled and in seclusion in mourning for her late brother.

“What country, friends, is this?”

“This is Illyria, lady.”

Viola has been shipwrecked, separated from her twin brother Sebastian. She hears of Duke Orsino’s wooing of Countess Olivia. She decides to serve the Duke (a friend of her father’s) as a page, in male disguise.

“What is thy excellence in a galliard, knight?”

“Faith, I can cut a caper.”

At Olivia’s house, Olivia’s maid, Maria, takes Olivia’s uncle, Sir Toby Belch, to task for his boisterous behavior. She further criticizes the man that Sir Toby has brought to the house to woo Olivia, the knight Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Sir Andrew enters and attempts to flirt with Maria, although she is having none of it. When she exits, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew commiserate over the difficulty that Sir Andrew is having in his pursuit of Olivia. At Sir Toby’s urging, Sir Andrew consents to keep at it.

“Whoe’er I woo, myself would be his wife.”

At the Duke’s palace, Viola, in disguise as “Cesario,” a page, has been in the Duke’s service only three days and is already in his favor. Duke Orsino gives “Cesario” an assignment: go to Olivia and convince her of the Duke’s love for her – he believes that she will be more agreeable to hearing from a young man (such as he believes “Cesario” to be). Viola/“Cesario” is reluctant but agrees. As an aside to the audience, she admits that she has feelings for him, herself.

“Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes.”

At Olivia’s chambers, Feste, the clown, engages Olivia in a battle of wits meant to amuse her. He asks if her brother’s soul is in heaven. Olivia replies that she believes so. Feste counters that he believes her brother

Where is Illyria?

Illyria, which last existed when conquered by the Romans in the second century BC, covered parts of what is now Croatia and Albania.



must be in hell. When Olivia protests, Feste says that he cannot believe a relative would mourn as Olivia does if their beloved one were enjoying heavenly bliss. Olivia admires his wit; her steward, Malvolio, finds Feste irritating. Olivia chides Malvolio, saying that he is so arrogant that he can't bear to see anyone else praised.

Maria tells the Countess that a young man has arrived to see her. Olivia sends Malvolio to see if he has been sent by the Duke, and if so, to send him away. Viola/"Cesario" is so insistent on seeing Olivia, that Malvolio finally allows "him" in. Alone, "Cesario" tells Olivia how much Orsino loves her. Olivia replies that she cannot love Orsino, and sends him away. Olivia finds herself attracted to "Cesario" and sends Malvolio after him with a ring that she pretends he left behind, knowing that "Cesario" will have to come back to return it.

Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, has survived the shipwreck, although he believes Viola is dead. With his new friend Antonio, who saved his life, Sebastian decides to travel to Duke Orsino's court. Antonio goes along with him, even though he is a wanted man in Illyria.

Malvolio gives "Cesario" Olivia's ring, and informs "him" that Olivia desires him to return to confirm that Orsino has given up his love for Olivia. Viola is completely confused, knowing the ring is Olivia's. Viola realizes that Olivia is attracted to "Cesario," and that she herself is attracted to Orsino.

"I am the man: if it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream."

She pleads to Time:

O time! thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie!

At Olivia's, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste are drinking, ignoring Maria's admonitions to quiet down. Malvolio enters, complaining about the noise. He threatens to make Maria look bad to Olivia, since she can't keep them under control.

Maria, annoyed by Malvolio, vows to have her revenge by writing a letter that will make Malvolio believe Olivia loves him. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste, all of whom dislike Malvolio, join in the plot to humiliate him. They decide to hide nearby when he reads the letter Maria will write.

Orsino notices that Viola/"Cesario" is showing all the signs of being in love. The Duke quizzes "Cesario" about who he is in love with:

DUKE ORSINO: What kind of woman is't?

VIOLA: Of your complexion.

DUKE ORSINO: She is not worth thee, then. What years, i' faith?

VIOLA: About your years, my lord.

The Duke does not realize that Viola/"Cesario" is really in love with him. Viola tries to tell him that Olivia does not return his affections, but the Duke does not accept that, sending "Cesario" to Olivia with a jewel for her.

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some
have greatness thrust upon 'em."

Malvolio starts to wonder if Olivia might possibly fall in love and marry him. He finds the letter that

Maria wrote in Olivia's hand. It instructs him to "be opposite with a kinsman and surly with servants" and to wear yellow stockings, cross-gartered (meaning that he should wear his garters, the straps that hold the stockings up, criss-crossed over his legs, which was a particular fashion at the time). Malvolio is completely taken in by the letter. Maria tells Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste that she has guaranteed Malvolio's humiliation:

He will come to
her in yellow stockings, and 'tis a colour 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 it cannot but turn him
into a notable contempt.

"Cesario" meets with Olivia. Viola does her best to dissuade Olivia from falling in love with "Cesario," but Olivia will not listen. Sir Andrew is ready to give up pursuing Olivia upon seeing that this youth "Cesario" is now the object of her affections.

Feste and Sir Toby convince Sir Andrew that Olivia is only making a show of affection toward "Cesario" in order to inspire Sir Andrew to woo her more strongly. They convince Sir Andrew to challenge "Cesario." Maria arrives to tell everyone to come see Malvolio making a spectacle of himself in yellow stockings.

He does obey every point of the letter
that I dropped to betray him: he does smile his
face into more lines than is in the new map with the
augmentation of the Indies: you have not seen such
a thing as 'tis. I can hardly forbear hurling things
at him. I know my lady will strike him: if she do,
he'll smile and take't for a great favour.

Sebastian and Antonio are in Illyria. Antonio is apprehensive: it's dangerous for him to be on the streets since he once committed a crime against the Duke. He gives Sebastian his money-purse and directions to the lodging where they will be staying. They part ways.

Why, this is very midsummer madness.

Malvolio makes a fool of himself in front of Olivia, taking her every word as a come-on and displaying his yellow stockings and his crossed garters. She declares that he is suffering from "midsummer madness" and has him taken away.



Sir Toby successfully incites a duel between Sir Andrew and “Cesario,” neither of whom truly wants to fight the other. Antonio rushes in to help protect “Cesario”/Viola, whom he believes to be Sebastian. Viola, of course, does not recognize him. Antonio is about to be arrested. When he asks “Cesario” for his money purse (thinking him Sebastian), Viola truthfully denies that she has it. Antonio is angered by this lack of gratitude – but Viola begins to figure out that he thinks she is her twin. This means Sebastian is still alive.

“O, if it prove,
Tempests are kind and salt waves fresh in love.”

Outside Olivia’s residence, Sebastian talks with Feste, who wonders why Sebastian pretends that he doesn’t know him. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew arrive. Sir Andrew rushes at Sebastian, assuming he’s “Cesario.” To his surprise, Sebastian fights him expertly. Olivia arrives and takes Sebastian into her house. He is amazed at her beauty and her charms, falling instantly in love.

Feste, dressed as a priest, taunts Malvolio, who has been locked up for his madness. Meanwhile, in Olivia’s garden, Sebastian is wondering at his good fortune. Olivia appears with a priest and asks him to come with her and pledge their love officially. Sebastian enthusiastically agrees.

Duke Orsino, along with “Cesario”/Viola, arrives at Olivia’s house, intent on seeing Olivia. Officers bring in Antonio, whom Viola recognizes as the man who interceded in her duel with Sir Andrew. Duke Orsino also recognizes him as one of the men who attacked his ship. Antonio tells the Duke that he saved his page (still believing that Viola/“Cesario” is Sebastian) from drowning in a shipwreck and has been his friend and companion for three months – but that the ungrateful young man denied knowing him or having his money purse. Orsino tells him he’s mad, since “Cesario” has been constantly at his side for three months.

When Olivia enters, all the misunderstandings come to a head. Olivia chastises “Cesario” for not keeping his promises. The Duke is enraged that “Cesario” seems to have become his rival for Olivia’s love. Olivia reveals that she and “Cesario” are now married (or so she believes). Viola denies this. Confusion reigns until Sebastian enters, and the misunderstandings are now made clear. Sebastian and Viola are reunited; Olivia and Sebastian are happily husband and wife. The Duke realizes that he indeed loves Viola, who loves him passionately. And we learn that Sir Toby has married Maria since she carried off the trick against Malvolio so expertly. Malvolio declares “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you,” while the company departs to the Duke’s palace for his wedding to Viola. Left alone, Feste concludes the play with a song.

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.
But that’s all one, our play is done,
And we’ll strive to please you every day.



The Characters of *Twelfth Night*

VIOLA

Shipwrecked on the shores of Illyria, she disguises herself as a man, “Cesario,” to work as a page in the court of Duke Orsino, who was a friend of her father’s.

SEBASTIAN

Viola’s twin brother. Sebastian and Viola each believe the other died in the shipwreck which left them in Illyria.

A SEA CAPTAIN

A friend to Viola, who helps her disguise herself.

ANTONIO

A friend to Sebastian, who accompanies him through Illyria.

DUKE ORSINO

In love with the Countess Olivia.

VALENTINE

The Duke’s attendant.

THE COUNTESS OLIVIA

Beloved by Duke Orsino. She has sworn off love for seven years, vowing to remain veiled, in mourning for her late father and brother.

SIR TOBY BELCH

Olivia’s uncle, a boisterous and mischievous man.

SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK

A suitor to Olivia. Timid and cowardly.

MALVOLIO

Olivia’s steward. Pompous and arrogant.

FESTE

A jester in Olivia’s service.

MARIA

Olivia’s maid. Practical, shrewd, no-nonsense.

What’s in a Name?

Shakespeare was always conscious of the meaning and sound of the names he gave his characters.

- **Viola:** Music figures very prominently in *Twelfth Night*: the very first line of the play is the often-quoted “If music be the food of love, play on.” Viola’s name calls to mind the viola da gamba, a stringed instrument of Shakespeare’s time that was the forerunner of modern string family of instruments (the violin, viola, cello, and bass).

- **Sir Toby Belch:** *Belch* is self explanatory: as fond of eating and drinking as Sir Toby is, he would no doubt be belching often.

- **Sir Andrew Aguecheek:** “Ague” was a term for a fever, especially the type that produced sweating, chills and shivering (as in malaria). These were also considered signs of weak character – someone who shivers, shakes and sweats in the face of danger. So Sir Andrew’s name could be taken to mean he is cowardly or weak.

- **Malvolio:** In Italian, *Malvolio* literally means “I mean ill will.”



Viola



The Festival of Twelfth Night

In Shakespeare's time, Christmas celebrations extended for twelve days (the "Twelve Days of Christmas" of the Christmas carol), a tradition which began some time in the fourth century. The festivities culminated on the night of January fifth, "Twelfth Night," followed by the Feast of the Epiphany, which commemorates the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem.

As the final night of the Christmas season, Twelfth Night celebrations were a time for unbridled frivolity, joyousness, and merrymaking. Shakespeare's title gave his audience a sense of the tone of his play: optimistic, festive antics, with romance and broad comedy in equal measure.

The play may have indeed premiered as part of Twelfth Night festivities, although there is no definitive historical evidence. The first recorded performance took place on February 2, 1602, at Middle Temple Hall, in London.



Director's Concept: America in 1927

For his production at the Human Race Theatre Company, director Aaron Vega found a modern equivalent for the feeling of self-indulgence and merrymaking implied by the Elizabethan festival of Twelfth Night: the manic culture of America in 1927, the peak of the decade known as the Roaring Twenties.



The Roaring Twenties

In 1927, America was reaching the height of an economic boom unlike anything the country had seen before. In 1926, the country had about two hundred millionaires. In 1927, that number had skyrocketed to 15,000. Most of the newly-minted rich made their money in the stock market. Optimism in industry was high because of the improvements brought to manufacturing by electricity and refinements in industrial processes. Consumer spending grew, not only because of demand for new electrical appliances such as vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, and washing machines, but because of the availability of easy credit. Consumers could now buy things on “time payment” (paying for an item in small installments spread over time). Before this financial innovation, an item had to be paid for in full, in cash; expensive household items were only purchased by the very rich. Time payments allowed the middle and lower classes to buy things that they might not have purchased otherwise.

Economic growth seemed unlimited, and investors were confident that progress would continue unabated. Companies’ value increased, at least on paper, making millionaires of their stockholders. There was no sense yet that the economic bubble would burst in just two years.

The divide was growing between the wealthy and the middle and lower economic classes. The wealthiest one percent of Americans saw their net worth rise by seventy-five percent over the course of the decade, while the average American’s financial standing rose by only nine percent. In *Twelfth Night*, Orsino, Olivia, and her uncle Toby are members of the wealthiest class. One source of humor that Shakespeare draws upon in *Twelfth Night* is the division between social classes: the Elizabethan audience found it hilarious that Countess Olivia’s steward, Malvolio, would ever dream of being able to marry her, when she is above him in social standing. Maria, being Olivia’s maid, would be considered part of the working class, making it all the more surprising and impressive that Sir Toby ultimately chooses to marry her.

The sense of economic optimism brought by ever-increasing prosperity brought greater and greater excesses in the culture of 1920s. Jazz music, with its rhythmic and harmonic complexity, brought jangly urban rhythms to the dance floor. Dances became freer and wilder – the Charleston, the Black Bottom, and the Shimmy, to name just a few. Entertainment was racier: “vamps” such as the actress Louise Brooks, with her Cleopatra bob and kohl-rimmed eyes, were the new sensual face of female stardom.

For most of the 1920s, movies were silent (and in black and white); dialogue was written on title cards, with underscoring provided by live pianists or organists. “Talkies” (movies with synchronized sound) made

Discuss!

Why do you think a director would choose to set *Twelfth Night* (or any of Shakespeare’s plays) in a particular historical period? What can the setting (time and place) tell an audience about a play? Have seen any plays or films set in the 1920s? What do you know about the time period?

Write!

Choose either Duke Orsino’s speech which opens the play (“If music be the food of love, play on...”) or Viola’s “Ring Speech” from Act 2, Scene 2. Go through the following steps to create your own version of these speeches:

1. Write out the literal meaning of each sentence (looking up the definition of any word you are unfamiliar with).
2. When you have the literal “translation” of the speech, rewrite the speech for a character in your own version of *Twelfth Night*, set in the present day at your school.
3. Have someone read the speech out loud to the group.



their debut in 1927, further feeding the sense that technological progress was unstoppable in all areas of modern life.

Although the Eighteenth Amendment had outlawed the sale of alcohol starting in 1920 (starting a period known as Prohibition which would last until 1933), it was widely available illegally. “Speakeasies,” illicit nightclubs, offered easy access to alcohol for those who wanted it. The prevailing feeling was that American life was a non-stop party: riches and glamour were within anyone’s reach.



Explore!

Research the year 1927, choosing a particular field to focus on (see example list below). If you like, you can narrow your focus to a particular month or week (perhaps choosing the month or week of your birthday). What was happening in the news? You could investigate any of the following areas:

- Politics
- Economics (what do things cost?)
- Science/Industry (inventions, etc.)
- Music
- Literature
- Movies
- Fashion
- Sports

Report your findings to the group.

Women of the Twenties

After many years of political activism by women's groups, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920, granting women the right to vote. This was an important step toward political and social equality for women, which was soon reflected in the evolution of women's fashion throughout the decade. Previously, fashion for women was based on an hourglass silhouette which exaggerated the female form: a tiny waist between more prominent hips and bustline. This shape was achieved with tightly laced corsets, which squeezed the body into the desired figure (while leaving welts and making it difficult for the wearer to breathe). Hair was kept long and piled into elaborate hairstyles. Soft, rounded shapes were the feminine ideal: rosy, plump cheeks; flowing, curled hair; clothing covered in decorative bows and other drapery.

Women began to cast off heavy, constricting clothing and time consuming hairstyles in favor of a slim silhouette. In place of the hourglass shape created by the corset came the slim, uncorseted "flapper" look: a dropped waist, flat bustline and narrow hips. Hair was chopped off into easy manageable bobbed styles. The dewy "natural" look was replaced by rouged lips and cheeks, pale powdered faces, and heavily lined eyes.

The new style of clothing and hair allowed women freedom of movement, just as they were gaining more freedom of movement within America's political and social landscape.

The Women of *Twelfth Night*

It's interesting to consider the contrasts among the three women of *Twelfth Night*:

- Olivia, who veils herself in memory of her deceased brother and father, representative of the earlier generation of women who were corseted literally and figuratively by a male-dominated society.
- Viola, who decides that it's more prudent to disguise herself as a man when she finds herself alone in an unfamiliar country.
- Maria, of a different social class than Olivia or Viola, who is unafraid to speak her mind. Opinionated and shrewd, she could be taken to represent the new voice of women in 1920s America.

Discuss!

Why do you think women felt it was important to be given the right to vote? What does equality mean to you? Do you believe there is equality between men and women in America today? Why or why not?

Write!

Imagine you are a journalist in 1927 reporting on the latest changes in women's fashion – they've gone from demure long skirts to casting off their corsets and wearing makeup. What's your point of view? Are you shocked? Supportive? Surprised? Write a short column where you explain your opinion to your reader. (To do this, find images of women's fashion from the 1900s and 1910s, and then from the 1920s to fully understand the contrast.)

Explore!

Choose a woman who came to prominence in the 1920s – any notable figure from politics, sports, science, literature, or the performing arts who intrigues you. Read about her life, and then write a paragraph detailing why you find her interesting. The goal is not simply to report facts, but to convey a sense of her personality and character to your reader. The best way to do that is to find as many specific details about the person as you can: bring her alive through your writing, just as Shakespeare brings his characters alive.



Twins and Androgyny in *Twelfth Night* and in the Twenties

The central conceit of the plot of *Twelfth Night* rests on the physical similarity of the twins Viola and Sebastian. The audience is asked to believe not only that Viola passes for a man while in disguise as “Cesario,” but that she (as “Cesario”) and her brother look so much alike that they could be mistaken for one another.

In Shakespeare’s time, the theatrical device of a female character disguising herself as a man had an extra comic layer. Because women were not permitted to act onstage, female roles were played by boys or young men. So, when Viola is in disguise as “Cesario,” the audience was seeing a male actor playing a female character dressed as a man: a triple level of theatricality that Elizabethan-era audiences understood and enjoyed.

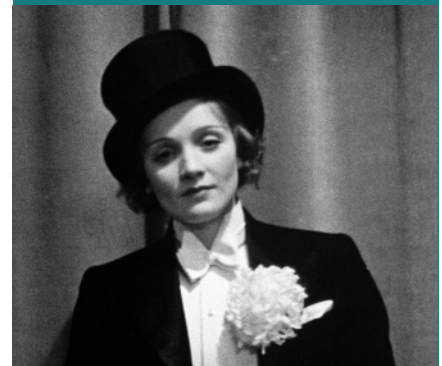
The concept of a Viola and Sebastian with similar physical attributes fits very well in the 1920s. As society cast off old fashions and considered new societal gender roles, the look of the popular actors and actresses of the day changed as well. A number of the silent film stars had androgynous looks – meaning that they possessed both masculine and feminine traits in their appearance.

Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Rudolph Valentino and Ramon Novarro all had this exotic combination of the masculine and the feminine that audiences in the Twenties found appealing. Garbo and Dietrich had angular qualities to their faces and a particular intensity of character that could be perceived as masculine; Valentino and Novarro had a softness and an openness which gave a feminine edge to their screen “Latin lover” personas. Interestingly, all four had a sensual nature to their screen personalities as well as an intriguing, exotic “foreign-ness.” (Garbo was Swedish, Dietrich was German, Valentino was Italian, and Novarro Mexican.) In *Twelfth Night*, it’s interesting to note that Viola and Sebastian are foreigners in Illyria – a possible factor contributing to the attraction the other characters feel for them.

Androgyny was also seen in an “all-American,” athletic form. Aviator Charles Lindbergh captured the public imagination when he made the first transatlantic flight, flying solo from New York to Paris in May of 1927. “Lucky Lindy,” as he became known, had a chiseled, athletic physique. The following year, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to cross the Atlantic in an airplane (although she was only a passenger on that flight; she would later pilot her way across the Atlantic solo in 1932). Chosen for the flight in part because of her physical resemblance



Greta Garbo



Marlene Dietrich



Rudolph Valentino

to Lindbergh, the press dubbed her “Lady Lindy.” Although Earhart was embarrassed by the comparison, she and Lindbergh definitely shared a lean, lanky appearance, which perfectly fit the public’s idea of what an American hero and heroine should look like.

Ramon Novarro



Charles Lindbergh



Amelia Earhart



Silent Film Clowns of the Twenties

The more overtly comic characters of *Twelfth Night* – Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Malvolio, and most especially Feste, the fool – when transplanted to the Twenties are reminiscent of the great clowns of the silent film era: Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd.

Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977)

His character was known as the “Little Tramp”: he wore baggy pants, oversized shoes, a bowler hat, a toothbrush mustache, and carried a bamboo cane. Chaplin directed his own films. He did not write out a script; instead, he came up with the basic idea for a scene (“Charlie comes into a store”) and would improvise hundreds of variations until he felt it was right.

Buster Keaton (1885–1966)

Keaton got the nickname “Buster” when he fell down a flight of stairs as a child but was unhurt. His parents made use of his natural acrobatic skill in their vaudeville act, tossing him around or knocking him over.

Unlike Charlie Chaplin, whose “Tramp” character was emotionally expressive, Buster Keaton was always completely deadpan. (In Spanish, he was called “Cara de palo” – “Wooden Face.”) His lack of reaction to extraordinary events added to the comedy.

The classic Keaton “gag” took place in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*: He stands in front of a house frame, which falls over, apparently about to crush him. Luckily he’s standing in exactly the right spot – the opening for the attic window passes over him and he is unhurt. He keeps his poker face and shows no reaction.

Harold Lloyd (1893–1971)

At first Harold Lloyd tried imitating Charlie Chaplin’s “tramp” persona, playing a character named “Lonesome Luke.” Realizing he needed to find his own style, he developed “The Glasses Character” (sometimes known as “Harold”). “Harold” was a earnest go-getter who wore horn-rimmed glasses and usually a suit. He was an “everyman” who always found himself in precarious situations – dangling from a skyscraper.

Harold Lloyd always performed his own stunts. Ironically, he escaped injury doing his dangerous stunts, but lost a thumb and finger during a photo shoot when a prop bomb exploded in his hand.

Discuss!

The plot of *Twelfth Night* is centered around disguises and mistaken identity. What other stories, plays, or movies can you think of that involve disguises or characters being mistaken for one another? (They may or may not be comedies.) If they are comedies, why are they funny? What is it about disguise or mistaken identity that can be so comical?

Write!

Write a short monologue for a character your own age who has just come home from their first day at a new school where something embarrassing happened.

Now, imagine you are a silent film comedian who has to express this monologue without words. Perform your “silent monologue” for the group (or trade monologues with a partner, and perform them for each other).

Explore!

See if you can find video clips (on YouTube or elsewhere) of Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Rudolph Valentino, Ramon Novarro, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, or Harold Lloyd. Are there any current celebrities they remind you of? Why? Share the clips you’ve found with the group.



Charlie Chaplin

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