List of characters

Illyria

The Duke’s court
ORSINO Duke of Illyria
VALENTINE a courtier
CURIO a courtier
Musicians
Lords
Officers

The Countess’s household
OLIVIA a countess
SIR TOBY BELCH her uncle
MALVOLIO her steward
FESTE her fool
MARIA her gentlewoman
FABIAN a servant

A PRIEST
A SEA CAPTAIN

The visitors
VIOLA later called Cesario
SEBASTIAN her twin brother
SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK suitor to Olivia
ANTONIO a friend to Sebastian
Sailors

The action of the play takes place in Illyria
Orsino calls for music to feed his hunger for love. He reflects that love is like the sea, absorbing and devaluing every other experience. He claims to be completely obsessed by his love for Olivia.

Themes

Love – or infatuation? (in fours)

The opening lines of the play suggest that it will be about love. But they also introduce questions that the play will revisit as it progresses. What sort of love? What is love? Orsino appears to be the most ‘in love’ of all the characters, but many people believe that he is not truly interested in Olivia – he just enjoys wallowing in his emotions. Is Orsino in love, or just infatuated?

a. Prepare four versions of lines 1–15 (for example, spoken thoughtfully, sadly, pompously and comically), with one person working on each. Think about which lines you will stress, where you will pause and what actions you will add.

b. Perform your versions to each other; then talk together about which is the most effective. Do you think Orsino’s language is that of a true lover, or of someone who is in love with being in love?

1. Play on!

In the production shown in the image above, subtle lighting and music were used to draw the audience into the world of Illyria. Orsino directly addressed the audience and demanded that they listen.

a. How would you present this scene on stage? What type of music would you use? Would you play up the comedy at the point when Orsino changes his mind (‘That strain again’, then ‘Enough; no more’)?

b. Make notes on the set, the costumes and the general impression you would wish to create of Orsino and his court. These should form the first part of a Director’s Journal, in which you can record your ideas about staging the play as you read on.

surfeiting over-filled
That strain again play that again
dying fall fading rhythm

quick and fresh alive and vigorous
validity and pitch high value
falls into abatement is lessened
fancy love
high fantastical intensely imaginative

hart male deer (Orsino puns on ‘heart’)
purged rid/removed (often in medical or religious sense)
pestilence plague
fell savage
Twelfth Night
or What You Will

Act 1 Scene 1
Orsino’s palace

Music. Enter ORSINO, Duke of Illyria, CURIO, and other Lords

ORSINO If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.
That strain again, it had a dying fall;
O it came o’er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour. Enough; no more.
’Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity,
Receiveth as the sea. Nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe’er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy,
That it alone is high fantastical.

CURIO Will you go hunt, my lord?
ORSINO What, Curio?
CURIO The hart.
ORSINO Why so I do, the noblest that I have.
O when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires like fell and cruel hounds
E’er since pursue me.

Enter VALENTINE

How now, what news from her?
Valentine tells of Olivia's vow to mourn her dead brother for seven years. Orsino says that this reveals how she will love him totally. Viola, landed safely after shipwreck, fears for her brother's life.

1 Olivia – first impressions (in pairs)
Valentine returns with bad news – Olivia has vowed to become a nun for seven years, not even seeing the sky, to mourn for her brother.

- Discuss what her decision and Orsino's response tell us about these two characters.

Stagecraft
Shipwrecked
It is clear from the first few lines of Act 1 Scene 2 that Viola and the Captain have been shipwrecked on the coast of Illyria. However, Shakespeare provides no stage directions and it is therefore up to the director to decide whether the shipwreck is seen or not. In some productions of the play, each scene flows swiftly into the next without delay for scene shifting. The shipwreck scene can provide an opportunity to use special effects and transport the audience from Orsino's palace to the coast.

- Write a list of reasons why you might 'stage' or 'not stage' the shipwreck. Share and discuss your ideas with a partner or a small group.

This production showed the shipwreck with flashing lights, crashing waves sounds and real water on the stage. Write a description of what theatrical effects you would use to heighten the dramatic impact of the shipwreck.

Elysium heaven, a peaceful welcoming place
Perchance (line 5) perhaps
perchance (line 6) by good fortune
perchance (line 7 – Viola now plays on both meanings of the word)
Twelfth Night Act 1 Scene 2

The sea-coast of Illyria

Enter VIOLA, a CAPTAIN, and Sailors

VIOLA What country, friends, is this?
CAPTAIN This is Illyria, lady.
VIOLA And what should I do in Illyria?
CAPTAIN My brother, he is in Elysium.
VIOLA Perchance he is not drowned: what think you, sailors?
CAPTAIN It is perchance that you yourself were saved.
VIOLA O my poor brother! And so perchance may he be.

VALENTINE So please my lord, I might not be admitted, But from her handmaid do return this answer: The element itself, till seven years' heat, Shall not behold her face at ample view; But like a cloistress she will veiled walk, And water once a day her chamber round With eye-offending brine; all this to season A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh And lasting, in her sad remembrance.
ORSINO O she that hath a heart of that fine frame To pay this debt of love but to a brother, How will she love, when the rich golden shaft Hath killed the flock of all affections else That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart, These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and filled Her sweet perfections with one selfsame king! Away before me to sweet beds of flowers: Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers.

Exeunt
The Captain reassures Viola that her brother may also have survived the shipwreck. He tells of Orsino's love for Olivia, and says that Olivia's grief for her brother's death has made her a recluse.

1  ‘Arion on the dolphin’s back’ (in threes)

The Captain uses imagery (see pp. 164–5) from classical mythology to describe Sebastian’s escape from the shipwreck. He compares it with that of Arion, a legendary Greek musician. Arion leapt overboard to escape sailors who wished to murder him. A dolphin, enchanted by Arion’s music, carried him safely to shore. The Captain's story gives Viola hope, and it also echoes the power of music suggested in Scene 1. Some stage productions show Sebastian’s struggle to survive. Others leave it to the audience’s imagination.

a  Imagine you are directing the play, and want the audience to see what happens to Sebastian. Prepare a performance of lines 11–17. Use pictures, projections, action to one side or at the back of the stage or even tableaux (freeze-frames) to show Sebastian’s ‘acquaintance with the waves’.

b  Perform your scene to another group. Afterwards, discuss the success of your staging, and consider different effects that you could create to maximise the scene’s dramatic impact.

2  Reports are coming in (in pairs)

You are a television or radio crew in Illyria. Reports are coming in that a ship has crashed on the coast, but none of the passengers has been found (remember that no Illyrian has discovered Viola or Sebastian).

a  One of you should be the news presenter in the studio and another the reporter on the scene. Prepare a dialogue in which the presenter interviews the on-scene reporter, and known details of the events of the shipwreck are revealed. You should also speculate about what might have happened, and about the possible identities of the missing passengers.

b  With another pair, extend the news segment by having the reporter interview witnesses at the scene or having the presenter speak to shipwreck experts in the studio. Think about all the possible sources of news details – for example, the Captain who saved Viola might be able to pass on some details to you. You need to be quick, though, as your interview will be transmitted live after only a few minutes of preparation!
CAPTAIN

True, madam, and to comfort you with chance,
Assure yourself, after our ship did split,
When you, and those poor number saved with you,
Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother
Most provident in peril, bind himself
(Courage and hope both teaching him the practice)
To a strong mast that lived upon the sea;
Where like Arion on the dolphin’s back
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
So long as I could see.

VIOLA

For saying so, there’s gold.
Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope,
Whereto thy speech serves for authority,
The like of him. Know’st thou this country?

CAPTAIN

Ay, madam, well, for I was bred and born
Not three hours’ travel from this very place.

VIOLA

Who governs here?

CAPTAIN

A noble duke in nature as in name.

VIOLA

What is his name?

CAPTAIN

Orsino.

VIOLA

Orsino! I have heard my father name him.
He was a bachelor then.

CAPTAIN

And so is now, or was so very late;
For but a month ago I went from hence,
And then ’twas fresh in murmur (as you know
What great ones do, the less will prattle of)
That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.

VIOLA

What’s she?

CAPTAIN

A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count
That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her
In the protection of his son, her brother,
Who shortly also died; for whose dear love
(They say) she hath abjured the sight
And company of men.

VIOLA

O that I served that lady,
And might not be delivered to the world
Till I had made mine own occasion mellow
What my estate is!

CAPTAIN

That were hard to compass,
Because she will admit no kind of suit,
No, not the duke’s.
Viola says that she trusts the Captain. She plans to disguise herself as a man and become an attendant to Orsino.

In Scene 3, Sir Toby Belch complains that Olivia’s mourning prevents all enjoyment.

**Themes**

**Appearance versus reality (in pairs)**

In lines 48–9, Viola states one of Shakespeare’s favourite themes: you can’t judge by appearances. A beautiful appearance may conceal corruption (‘nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution’). Much of Twelfth Night is about the difference between appearance and reality.

a Work out a tableau to illustrate Viola’s comment. Show this to another pair; holding the tableau for thirty seconds. Discuss the similarities and differences between your tableaux and respective interpretations of Viola’s line.

b Within moments of Viola’s wise words about appearance, she is seeking to disguise her own ‘outward character’ to meet the ‘form of [her] intent’. What is her purpose here? Discuss this with your partner; and try to refer to the play script to support your ideas.

c Discuss what you think Viola is hoping to achieve in her disguise. Is she trying to hide something other than her femininity? Why does she, as a noble woman, disguise herself even when she is told a noble duke rules this country? Would he not help her return home?

Shakespeare provides very little direction about the casting of characters, but the choice of actor can have a big impact on the ‘physical’ comedy of the play. The Maria and Sir Toby in this image are not ‘funny to look at’ and yet their actions are comical. In pairs, discuss the ways in which actors playing Maria and Sir Toby might add actions to their comic lines to make the audience laugh more.

---

**fair behaviour** trustworthiness

**bounteously** generously
**Conceal me what I am** disguise my true identity

**haply** appropriately
**The form of my intent** my purpose

**It may be worth thy pains** you will be rewarded
**allow** prove
**hap** happen

**Only ... wit** do as I say and don’t tell anyone about this

**eunuch** castrated male servant
**mute** dumb servant

**plague** pain, annoyance

**By my troth** honestly

**cousin** close relative (in Elizabethan times, ‘cousin’ was loosely used)
Twelfth Night Act 1 Scene 3

A room in Olivia’s house

Enter Sir Toby Belch and Maria

Sir Toby: What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care’s an enemy to life.

Maria: By my troth, Sir Toby, you must come in earlier o’nights. Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions to your ill hours.

Sir Toby: Why, let her except, before excepted.

Maria: Ay, but you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order.

Sir Toby: Confine? I’ll confine myself no finer than I am: these clothes are good enough to drink in, and so be these boots too; and they be not, let them hang themselves in their own straps.

VIOLA

There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain,
And though that nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I well believe thou hast a mind that suits
With this thy fair and outward character.
I prithee (and I’ll pay thee bounteously)
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent. I’ll serve this duke.
Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him –
It may be worth thy pains – for I can sing,
And speak to him in many sorts of music
That will allow me very worth his service.
What else may hap, to time I will commit,
Only shape thou thy silence to my wit.

CAPTAIN

Be you his eunuch, and your mute I’ll be;
When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes not see.

VIOLA

I thank thee. Lead me on.

Exeunt
Maria warns Sir Toby that his drunkenness will be his downfall. She is scornful of Sir Andrew Aguecheek (a wooer of Olivia), thinking him stupid. Sir Andrew enters and immediately displays his foolishness.

Language in the play

Word juggler (in threes)

Sir Toby is a great juggler with words, even when drunk. His description of Sir Andrew is full of mockery – he says one thing but means another. Sir Toby calls Sir Andrew ‘tall’, meaning courageous, when he probably thinks him cowardly. Sir Andrew is cast in many productions as tall but slight and weak to accentuate this. Other descriptions also had double meanings for Elizabethan audiences:

‘viol-de-gamboys’ a sexual joke: a musical instrument held between the knees, like the cello
‘without book’ implies Andrew learnt by heart without understanding
‘nature’ picked up by Maria and turned into ‘natural’ (meaning ‘idiot’)
‘Castilian vulgo’ ‘Look solemn’ (like a Castilian from Spain), or ‘Think of all Sir Andrew’s money’ or ‘Talk of the devil’ or ‘More Spanish wine’.

For a modern audience, wordplay can often be lost without such explanations, and this lessens the impact of the comedy.

1 A ‘foolish knight’?

Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s entrance provides the opportunity for great comedy, as we have heard so much about him (not much of it flattering) before he appears on stage.

a Read through lines 11–35, and complete a table like the one below to explore what Maria and Sir Toby mean in these lines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Maria says about Sir Andrew</th>
<th>What she means</th>
<th>What Sir Toby says about Sir Andrew</th>
<th>What he means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

b Draw one picture of Sir Andrew based upon what Maria says, and another based on what Sir Toby says. Label the features shown in the picture with quotations from lines 11–35. Consider how the pictures are different, and why.