

## Twelfth Night

### *Character List*

#### **Viola**

A young woman of aristocratic birth who has been shipwrecked in the country of Illyria. She was on the ship with her twin brother, Sebastian, and believes he did not survive the shipwreck. Her father died when she was thirteen and she believes she is now alone in the world. Washed up on the shore of Illyria, Viola decides to make her own way in the world. She disguises herself as a young man, calling herself "Cesario," and becomes a page to Duke Orsino. She ends up falling in love with Orsino—even as Olivia, the woman Orsino is courting, falls in love with Cesario. Thus, Viola finds that her clever disguise has entrapped her: she cannot tell Orsino that she loves him, and she cannot tell Olivia why she, as Cesario, cannot love her. Her poignant plight is the central conflict in the play.

#### **Orsino**

A powerful nobleman and governor of Illyria. Orsino is lovesick for the beautiful Lady Olivia but becomes more and more fond of his handsome new page boy, Cesario, who is actually a woman—Viola. Orsino is a vehicle through which the play explores the absurdity of love: a supreme egotist, Orsino mopes around complaining how heartsick he is over Olivia, when it is clear that he is chiefly in love with the idea of being in love and enjoys making a spectacle of himself.

**Olivia** is a wealthy, beautiful, and noble Illyrian lady of high social status. She is in mourning for her father and brother who have both died within the last year. Without any close family, she is in charge of her household and can decide for herself who she marries. She is courted by both Orsino and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but rejects messages of love from them both, quickly falling in love with Cesario instead (not knowing that Cesario is Viola in disguise). Olivia seems to have no difficulty transferring her affections from one love interest to the next, suggesting that her romantic feelings—like most emotions in the play—do not run deep. Her only family is Sir Toby Belch, who is often drunk and she does not have much respect for him.

#### **Malvolio**

The straitlaced steward—or head servant—in the household of Lady Olivia. Malvolio is very efficient but also very self-righteous, and he has a poor opinion of drinking, singing, and fun. His priggishness and haughty attitude earn him the enmity of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria, who play a cruel trick on him, making him believe that Olivia is in love with him, and then locking him up in a dark room as a madman. Malvolio secretly hopes to improve his social position and one day rule the household as Olivia's husband.

**Feste**

A jester, or fool, who used to work for Olivia's father. He has returned to Olivia's house after some time away and, although she is at first angry with him for his absence, she soon forgives him and is pleased to see him. He earns his living by making pointed jokes, singing old songs, being generally witty, and offering good advice cloaked under a layer of foolishness. In spite of being a professional fool, Feste often seems the wisest character in the play. He seems to be based in Olivia's house but also sings for Orsino.

**Sir Toby**

Olivia's uncle. Olivia lets Sir Toby Belch live with her, but she does not approve of his rowdy behavior, practical jokes, heavy drinking, late-night carousing, or friends (specifically the idiotic Sir Andrew). Sir Toby also earns the ire of Malvolio. But Sir Toby has an ally, and eventually a mate, in Olivia's sharp-witted waiting-gentlewoman, Maria. Together they bring about the triumph of chaotic spirit, which Sir Toby embodies, and the ruin of the controlling, self-righteous Malvolio.

**Sir Andrew Aguecheek**

A friend of Sir Toby's and staying in Olivia's house. Sir Andrew believes that Sir Toby is helping him in his bid to marry Olivia, but Sir Toby is actually taking money from Sir Andrew and using him for entertainment. Sir Andrew believes himself to be witty, brave, young, and good at languages and dancing, but he is generally regarded as foolish.

**Maria**

Olivia's clever, daring young lady-in-waiting. Maria is remarkably similar to her antagonist, Malvolio, who harbors aspirations of rising in the world through marriage. But Maria succeeds where Malvolio fails—perhaps because she is a woman, but, more likely, because she is more in tune than Malvolio with the anarchic, topsy-turvy spirit that animates the play. She gets on well with Sir Toby and Feste.

**Sebastian**

Viola's twin brother, separated from her during the shipwreck which happens before the play begins. Sebastian was rescued by a sea captain called Antonio. After three months with Antonio, Sebastian decides to set out to the court of Orsino. Once in Illyria, Sebastian is mistaken for 'Cesario' (Viola disguised as a boy) by Feste, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Olivia. Olivia is delighted when 'Cesario' seems to change his mind and agrees to marry her.

**Antonio**

A man who rescues Sebastian after his shipwreck. Antonio has become very fond of Sebastian, caring for him, furnishing him with money, even accompanying him to Illyria, despite how dangerous this might be for him. Antonio was once in a sea battle against Orsino's ships and knows he could be arrested for piracy if he is caught in Illyria. Antonio's love for Sebastian seems to be romantic in nature, though it is never fulfilled.