

TWELFTH NIGHT OR WHAT YOU WILL

1. Think about the title. What is twelfth night? What does “What you will” mean? Why two titles?
2. What kind of place is Ilyria? What about the different parts of Ilyria (Orsino’s house, Olivia’s house, the street, and so on). Think about who appears in which places and who moves among them.
3. How would you stage the first scene? (How old is Orsino? What does his name mean? What kind of music is playing? What is he wearing? Can you think of an appropriate prop to give him — maybe a rose? Examine the imagery he chooses to use for love. Think about the relationship between him and Curio, and so on.) What effect would you want to create for an audience by the end of this scene?
4. What about the second scene? What continuities and discontinuities would you try to establish between them? (What would change if you rearranged the three introductory scenes — as directors often do — so that we meet Viola first; or so that we meet Orsino first, then go to Olivia’s house, and only afterward meet Viola?)
5. Compare 1.2 and 2.1, two scenes in which a twin washes up on shore, each of which introduces a new movement in the play. What do the similarities and differences suggest?
6. As you know, in Elizabethan England all actors were male; men played the men’s roles and boys played the women’s roles. In 1.5, where Olivia falls in love with Viola/Cesario, how much would you choose to remind an Elizabethan audience that Viola is really a boy? Why? Does Viola make direct contact with the audience (compare 3.4 when she comments on her disguise)?
7. Why does Orsino disappear from the middle of the play? Is anything happening while he’s gone to remind us of him?
8. Antonio and Sebastian appear again at 3.3. How does the presence of the scene between them at this point comment on what just went before and what happens after? Who is Antonio — what kind of person? What motivates him? Is he like any of the other characters?
9. There are two practical jokes in this play — one on Malvolio and one on Sir Andrew. How do they relate to one another? To the “main” plot about Orsino, Olivia, and Viola?
10. Feste is one of Shakespeare’s famous “wise fools.” Of what does his wisdom consist? What role does he have in the plot? As a representative of a certain attitude and way of life, what other functions does he serve? He has been portrayed as a typical court jester, as a homeless vagabond, as a fragile old man, as a slow-witted boy. How would you portray him in order to make him most effective?

11. The love of Orsino for Olivia frames the action of *Twelfth Night* — just as the love of Theseus and Hippolyta frames the action of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — but with a difference: this one fails. Compare the various couples and would-be couples in the play and explore their role in shaping our response to the relationships that do finally work. Has Shakespeare's attitude toward love changed since *Dream*?
12. Appropriately enough for a play called "Twelfth Night," Act 5 represents the epiphany which changes this world. Is it a happy ending? Compare the reactions of all the different participants. What kind of closure does the "showing-forth" of the twins provide?
13. Feste's last contributions are his explanation of his disguise and his final song. How do they contribute to the play's closure? [Remember that "That's all one" means *both* "Whatever" *and* "That's all unified and coherent."]