

December 12, 2018

Dr. Jimmy Bickerstaff

TA 322

Ahnika Lexvold

*Twelfth Night* Costume Design

A. First Reading

My first reading of the play, I was immediately drawn to was the characters of Orsino, Olivia, and Cesario and the characters of Sebastian and Antonio.. Orsino right away seems over dramatic and a little unstable. I think that an actor could even play him as possibly bipolar. Olivia also seems very dramatic with how much she is mourning when she actually doesn't have any strong emotional connection with the deceased. Cesario, however, seems more down to earth in a sassy yet loyal way. What I found fascinating was how into Cesario Orsino and Olivia are not despite of but because of Cesario's androgynous features. Then, when Antonio and Sebastian show up, their friendship seems especially close for two men, especially on Antonio's end. It almost read as though Antonio were in love with Sebastian. All of this was very intriguing to me because it read to me as Shakespeare supporting the idea that sexuality is fluid and writing gay characters way before any of that was acceptable. To me, that makes this play have the potential to be especially powerful and pertinent to a contemporary audience.

## B. Given Circumstances

a. Geographical location: It is set in Illyria, which is by the coast. That is how Viola and Sebastian are able to get there easily without any horses. The environment would mean it is pleasant outdoors. Some of the scenes also take place indoors, which would be inside stone palaces.

b. Date(s): At the end of the play it mentions that the events have been spread across three months, however that is the only mention of timing in the script. The play itself would have been written around 1601-1602 AD and was first performed in 1602.

c. Key features of the surrounding physical environment: Illyria would be full of greenery and would be subtropical. The sea is nearby, so it would likely be windy and noisy. Light sources would be limited to natural sources of light or candles and lanterns.

## C. Cultural Background:

As I stated earlier, the play was written around 1601-1602 by William Shakespeare and was performed in 1602. It was put on in England during the Elizabethan age. Theatre was very popular during this time and was seen by all people - upper class and lower class. Theatres were often crowded and rowdy and seeing a show was a common part of people's lives. This play in particular was written for the celebration of epiphany in christian Christmas tradition, or "twelfth night" and was likely performed on this day. During this time, London was a very diverse city and a major power in the world. Theatre in Elizabethan England was very concerned with human issues - human flaws and weaknesses and also their strengths. *Twelfth Night* shows this in its plot about a love triangle and how the three pursue their loved ones, as well as in Malvolio's plot line.

#### D. Ideas:

An important idea present in Elizabethan drama is that of the renaissance problem. The problem is that humans have amazing potential but because of their flaws will never achieve that potential. This idea can be seen in *Twelfth Night* through its themes of love and the downfalls of ambition. Human potential is shown in the possibility of true, selfless love. Viola/Cesario is close to that sort of love with Orsino. However, Orsino's human limitation of obsession makes it impossible to achieve their full potential. Viola/Cesario's disguise also shows the human flaws in Olivia, as she marries Sebastian because he looks like Cesario and she can't tell the difference.

The dangers of ambition are shown through Malvolio's plot line. Malvolio wants to be rich and high class - which in this show is presented as a flaw. It is suggested that it is this ambition that prevents Malvolio from achieving his potential. He would have been happier and more successful if he was satisfied with the position he already had in life.

#### 4. Creative process

I started by researching the period of the show by looking at museum galleries of portraits from the time. I noticed that facial hair was extremely popular at the time because there were hardly any pictures at all of men without any kind of facial hair. So I decided to use facial hair as a big way of conveying character and the ideas of gender in the show.

The beauty of having 16th century costumes for a comedy is that clothes of that period are already so hilarious by themselves. I loved playing with pumpkin breeches and doublets and ruffs, varying their designs and sizes to fit the characters. As the fool, Feste got the roundest of pumpkin breeches. I gave Malvolio a codpiece because it fit with his character of wanting to be more important than he currently is. Olivia, being a lady of high status, would have been very concerned with the trends of the time. This meant copying Queen Elizabeth's look, so I was inspired for her design by portraits of Queen Elizabeth I. My color concept for the show was that I would use jewel tones: warm colors, specifically red, for Orsino and his people; and cool colors, especially blue and green, for Olivia's people. Those not affiliated with either household would be dressed in neutral grays or browns. Since Viola gets men's clothing from the sea captain, it would make sense that her Cesario clothes would be gray despite Cesario being an employee of Orsino. I thought red fit with Orsino's passionate character, and I wanted Olivia - and only Olivia - to be in all black and have purple. The all black dress is because she is in mourning, but the purple underskirt represents her dramatic personality that comes out when she is not mourning. I decided to play with the idea of Antonio's sexuality being questionable by not giving him any visible breeches, but by extending the bottom of his doublet - which was something that was done at the time.

Research Images:









NATIONAL GALLERIES SCOTLAND

Tom Derry, fl. 1614. Jester to Anne of Denmark. (Previously called 1st Viscount Stormont), 1614, Marcus...  
Photography by Antonia Reeve

Creative Commons - CC by NC























*Trumpetarius peditum Hisp.*

*Tibicen legonarius Hisp.*

*Prefectus militum, quoniam vel corporatum vocant, vel Sargento.*

*Signiferi Hisp. habentur.*



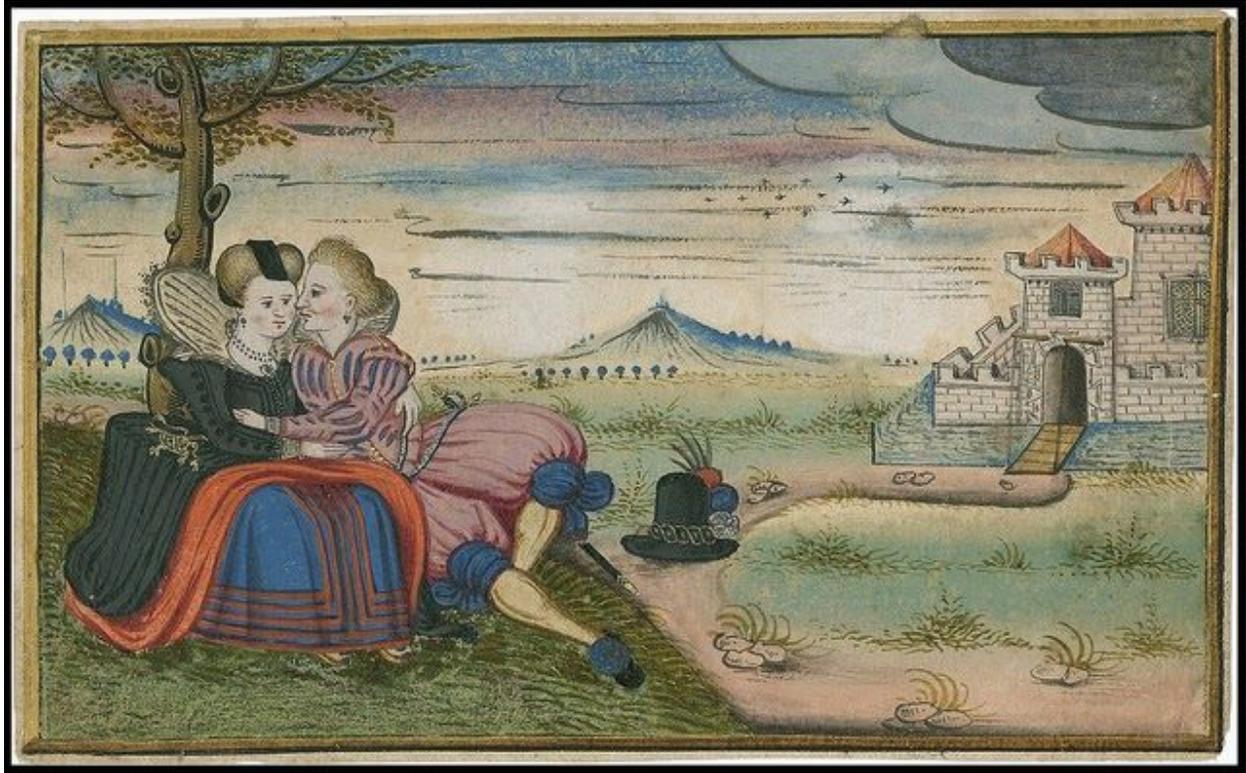








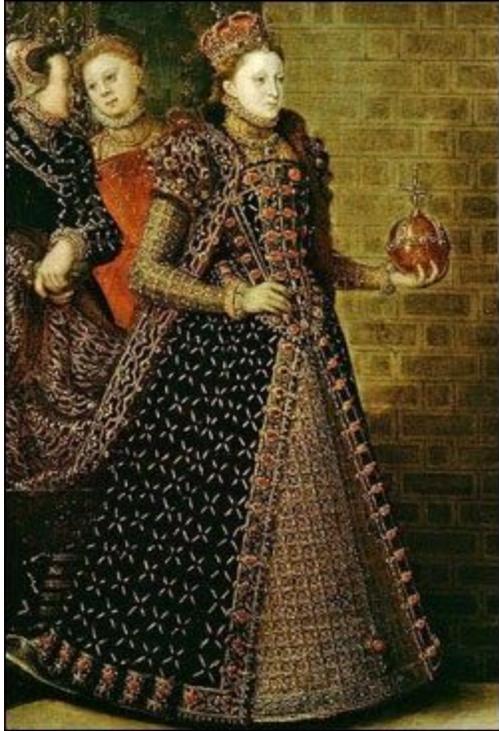


































## Bibliography

*Elizabethan Costuming Page*, Drea Leed, [www.elizabethancostume.net/](http://www.elizabethancostume.net/).

*Fashion History Timeline*, [fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/](http://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/).

*Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) Costume and Textiles*,

[www.lacma.org/art/collection/costume-and-textiles](http://www.lacma.org/art/collection/costume-and-textiles).

Hanson, Paige L. *Renaissance Clothing and Sumptuary Laws*. 14 Sept. 2010,

[www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~cfinlay/sumptuary.html](http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~cfinlay/sumptuary.html).

“The Met Collection.” *Metropolitan Museum of Art*,

[www.metmuseum.org/art/collection#!?perPage=100&department=62|8&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&offset=0&pageSize=0](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection#!?perPage=100&department=62|8&sortBy=Relevance&sortOrder=asc&offset=0&pageSize=0).

Wilson, Edwin, and Alvin Goldfarb. *Living Theatre: History of the Theatre*. 7th ed.,

McGraw-Hill, 2018.