

The play *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare discusses the concept of masking one's identity and true self in exchange for the attainment of social prominence. The masking of the characters presented in the play leads to situations that benefit the play in its comic vision. Shakespeare places attention on identity and the social consequences of deviation from societal norms and values. Masking is shown as an effort of an individual to avoid social prejudice and to invent a new identity. People mask themselves in *Twelfth Night* to disguise their true identity and to express themselves. Masking is an essential motif in Shakespeare's comedy.

The masking of Viola eventually leads to her exposure as a woman. She masks herself in order to gain social acceptance, due to the fact that a man would be more likely to have a higher social standing. Viola disguises herself as a man named Cesario. She explains to the Captain that she will not reveal her true social standing until she "had made mine own occasion mellow, / What my estate is." (I. ii, 45-46). Viola plans to not reveal herself until she had improved her situation in life. She presents herself as a eunuch so that she can serve as a page in Orsino's male retinue. Viola believes she can sing and "speak to him in many sorts of music / That will allow me very worth his service" (I, ii, 61-62). Viola reveals her identity as a woman on several occasions. Olivia asks her about her parentage, and she replies, "Above my fortunes, yet my state is well. / I am a gentleman" (I, v, 282-283). Viola wishes to secure her good social standing, because she is in a strange country. She makes certain to imply that she and her family had great fortune before she lost her parents. She tells Olivia that she is her fool, and tells her, "I am not what I am." (III, i, 148). Viola fools Olivia into loving Cesario, which is an extension of Viola's personality. Viola uses her disguise to reveal her love for Orsino, saying, "My father had a daughter loved a man / As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman, / I should your Lordship." (II, iv, 118-120).

Malvolio is shown to be wearing the mask of purity. Sir Toby, Feste, and Sir Andrew are interrupted in their party by Malvolio, who asks them, "Is there no respect of / place, persons, nor time in you?" (II, iii, 92-93). This shows Malvolio's false portrayal of himself as superior in his wit and manners. Malvolio fools himself into believing he is greater than the others because he is a better gentleman. Maria tells Toby that he is a false puritan "that cons state without book and utters it by great / swaths" (II, iii, 147-148). Malvolio speaks in high words but he is a fool. These vices are Maria's motivations for unmasking Malvolio as a false puritan and a fool. Malvolio's reading of Maria's forged letter leads to his resolution to "do everything / that thou wilt have me" (II, v, 182-183). Malvolio is "in yellow stockings, and cross-gartered" (II, v, 175), because he is convinced that Olivia wishes that he would be in such dress. Malvolio is easily persuaded that the letter is from Olivia. Malvolio believes that he is not fooling himself. He is proven to be foolish by the Fool in several other instances, such as his disbelief in Pythagoras' theory.

Feste the Fool is a character who masks truth in foolery. He is a servant, but in his disguise he is able to express his truth and attitude in fooling. Although he is a master of his occupation, he is restricted by his role as a Fool. Maria says Olivia "will hang thee for thy / absence." (I, v, 3-4). Shortly after, Olivia bids her attendants, "Take the Fool away." (I, v, 36). Feste proves Olivia to be the Fool, and tells her, "Misprision in the highest degree! Lady, *cucullus / non facit monachum*." (I, v, 53-54). Feste proves Olivia to be the Fool, because she implies that a person's dress or appearance defines them. The Fool uses masks to reveal others' folly.

The masks of the characters in *Twelfth Night* are finally removed at the end of the play. The characters resolve their confusions, and the story ends with all the characters unmasked, excluding Feste the Fool. Orsino realizes that the character Cesario was a mask, but he chooses to marry Viola because he knows that he has fallen in love with Viola's personality. With the

mask of Cesario removed, Viola is able to admit her love for Orsino. Malvolio is wronged, and he has also been unmasked as a false puritan. Shakespeare exposes the folly and inconsistency of love when the characters realize that they have been deceived by their masks.