

Twelfth Night questions

What makes the three final couples "well-matched"? How do they differ from the three potential couples that are not ultimately united in marriages? What do these pairings teach about what Shakespeare and his audience viewed as an "appropriate" match?

Consider the comical effect of the gender-bending caused by Viola's masquerade as a young man, "Cesario," who is later confused with her own (supposedly dead) twin brother, Sebastian. (Given that women's parts in Shakespeare's time were originally played by young boys, the gender-bending gets even more complex.) How does the gender-bending within the play add to our picture of what the Renaissance and early seventeenth century saw as "appropriate" behavior for women?

Notice the various uses of the theme of deception within the play (e.g. deceptive appearances, deceptive words/language, and the related theme of self-deception). Which characters are most clear-sighted about their own qualities and motives? Which are manipulating appearances in order to deceive others?

What is it about Malvolio that the other characters so dislike? Why does Olivia put up with him? Is his punishment by the trickery of the comical "low lifes" deserved? Why or why not? Is the Malvolio subplot there only for comic relief, or does it convey a more serious message? If so, what?