

# The Camera Sees More in *Twelfth Night*

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My favorite play by William Shakespeare is *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. I liked simply reading it last spring for a literature course but then I discovered the 1996 film *Twelfth Night* directed by Trevor Nunn. I began searching for philatelic material that would represent the scenes in the screenplay. For those of you not familiar with the basic plot and characters of Shakespeare's original, Wikipedia provides a succinct summary:

*Twelfth Night, or What You Will* is a romantic comedy by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written around 1601–1602 as a Twelfth Night's entertainment for the close of the Christmas season. The play centers on the twins Viola and Sebastian, who are separated in a shipwreck. Viola (who is disguised as Cesario) falls in love with Duke Orsino, who in turn is in love with Countess Olivia. Upon meeting Viola, Countess Olivia falls in love with her thinking she is a man.

In addition to this convoluted plot, there are comedic subplots involving Olivia's uncle Sir Toby Belch, her jester Feste, her lady's maid Maria, and the steward Malvolio.

*Twelfth Night* the movie is a realistic full color production enhanced by orchestral music, scenic outdoor settings, and special effects. The film begins with a severe storm about to crush an 1850s sailing/steam

ship against rocks off the coast of Illyria (on Balkan peninsula). Just before the ship crashes, oblivious wealthy passengers laugh and applaud the singing of two performers dressed as exotic harem women who in comedic fashion reveal that one is a man, the twin of his sister. Shakespeare liked stories of twins and, in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* used them to link with two other favorite themes—false and/or mistaken identities and confused pursuits of love.



A stamp from San Marino depicting the Gemini constellation, twins

The film producers shot scenes in at least two English locations. Duke Orsino—Olivia's persistent suitor, for example, lives on a hill above a town on the shores of what is really a Cornwall outer island named St Michael's Mount and Causeway ("Karrek Loos yn Koos" in Cornish). The impression is that of a spare severe environment with little greenery to soften a stereotypical military fortress.



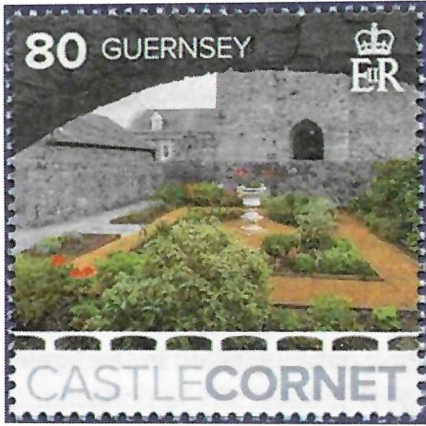
The ship in the movie might have been like the 1840 Royal Mail Ship Britannia on this 2013 UK stamp



During the United Kingdom postal workers strike of 1971, Outer Island agents at St Michael's Mount produced this local stamp

Orsino's domain is across a shallow sea from the estate where Olivia lives. The lush green grounds of Olivia's estate feature landscaping in classical Italian

style with shaped hedges, formal paths, and wide expanses of groomed lawn.



*A formal garden like the one at Olivia's estate can be found at Cornwall's Castle Cornet depicted on this 2017 Guernsey stamp*

Based on the costumes and the ship, this version of *Twelfth Night* might take place in the mid-19th century, a time when Shakespeare's words do not yet sound too out of date. The dresses and aprons worn by kitchen staff, the coats and vests of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio suggest this period, as well as

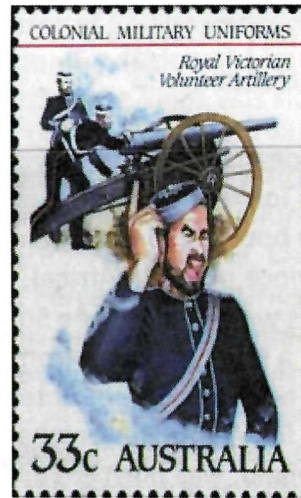
the gowns worn by Olivia and uniforms of the men.

Orsini's staff and soldiers wear long black trousers. The conservative style of their black uniform jackets features small stiff collars with rank distinguished only by brass buttons and/or subdued stripes on sleeves. With everyone dressed in black, the movie director keeps focus on the characters' faces.



*Still from the last scene of the Twelfth Night movie*

The head gear worn by Sebastian and Viola (as Cesario) are garrison caps with visors, which are different from the cylindrical flat-topped shakos worn by others in Orsini's employ. This helps the viewer identify Cesario/Viola when he/she is marching or riding a horse alongside others in a squad across a distant landscape. Practically speaking, garrison caps when not in use are easy to flatten and insert in the wearer's belt, removing otherwise awkward issues of what to do with the hat while filming indoors.



*A simple military uniform appears on this 1985 Australian stamp honoring the Royal Victorian Volunteer Artillery*



*This style of military hat is called a "shako," worn by the 53rd Foot soldiers in 1815. This St. Helena stamp, one of four in a se-tenant issued in 1973, features two hats and two swords or scenes*



*At left, Viola's (aka Cesario) garrison cap worn by actress Imogen Stubbs*

Viewing this film made me appreciate the open-source nature of Shakespeare's work. By "open-source" I mean a quality found in software apps made freely available to any user who wants a basic algorithm but plans to add his own coding ideas for his own purposes. By not specifying the details of every stage set, costume style, blocking arrangement, or how players should recite their lines, Shakespeare's work invites creativity on the part of modern directors and producers. In *Twelfth Night*, Trevor Nunn picked his own settings, changed the order of scenes, omitted lines, added music, employed cinematographic special effects, used flashbacks, and expanded character profiles (especially Sebastian's friend Antonio) to enhance the story quality of the play. All those creative options increased my appreciation and understanding of the original version. I invite you to watch this film too. And to let me know if you find other stamps illustrating what I have tried to share here.