

A Girl in “a Masculine Usurped Attire”: Gender
and Genre in Shakespeare’s

Twelfth Night



Le 13 Mars 2026, à 14h (Hybride)

Campus Saulcy, Bâtiment B, Salle B12

Séminaire d'études intermédiaires , Master Langues et Sociétés
Mondes Anglophones



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Le 13 Mars 2026 | 14h-16h
Ile du Saulcy, Bâtiment B, Salle B12
Séminaire d'études intermédiales | Metz
UFR ALL, Université de Lorraine

A Girl in a "Masculine Attire": Gender and Genre
in Twelfth Night, by William Shakespeare.
Intervention de Frédérique Fouassier (Université
de Tours)

Dans le cadre du séminaire intitulé:
(Per)forming Gender, Moving Bodies
*(Per)former le genre: Corps en mouvement, corps
émouvants*

Langue de l'intervention : anglais

Lien pour suivre à distance: [Teams](#)

Further details on the seminar's content

‘Like several of Shakespeare’s other comedies, *Twelfth Night* centers on a cross-dressed heroine, indeed doubly so, given the Elizabethan exclusively male stage. The role of Viola was played by a young man embodying a young woman herself dressed as a boy and sighing with love for Orsino, thereby reinforcing the erotic ambiguity at the heart of the dialogues and situations. As is often the case in Shakespeare, the question of gender ambiguity overlaps with a play on literary genres and a reflection on language: when appearances are deceptive, words are costumes too and their meaning is unstable.

In *Twelfth Night* (as in Shakespeare’s other cross-dressing comedies), the play on sexual ambiguity is accompanied by a meditation on the instability of language and a questioning of the conventions of literary genres. After contextualizing cross-dressing practices in early modern England, I will emphasize the strongly metadramatic dimension of the cross-dressed heroine, and finally show that adopting male attire also means appropriating the masculine prerogative of speech. Through this character, the playwright reflects on literary genres and their codes (here, primarily Petrarchan poetry) and on language in general—a reflection through which words appear as the mere costumes of meaning, distorting it... and disguising it.’

Abstract by Dr Frédérique Fouassier

A seminar organised by:

Machkouri Karima

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