Twelfth Night Important Quotes:

1. Context: The ruler of Illyria, Duke Orsino, is in love with Olivia, a young, beautiful, and very wealthy countess who is in mourning for a dead brother. The duke's affection is not requited by the countess, who will not admit his emissary or hear his protestations of love and pleads mourning for her brother as the reason she may not. At the beginning of the play, Duke Orsino is listening to melancholy music as he waits for his messenger to Olivia, Valentine, to return with news from her. (Over 150 years later, in 1775, another English dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, paraphrased, in The Rivals, this famous quotation thus: "Is not music the food of love?") (In modern times, the phrase "a dying fall" is used by T. S. Eliot in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, l. 52.)

DUKE  
If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it; that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.  
That strain again–it had a dying fall.  
O, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet sound  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing, and giving odour.  
. . .

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| 1. God bless thee, lady! |
| OLIVIA | Take the fool away. |
| Clown | Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady.  … |
| OLIVIA | Sir, I bade them take away you. |
| Clown | … Good madonna, give me leave to |
|  | prove you a fool. |
| OLIVIA | Can you do it? |
| Clown | Dexterously, good madonna. | 38 |
| OLIVIA | Make your proof. |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | … |  |
|  |  |  |
| Clown | Good madonna, why mournest thou? |  |
| OLIVIA | Good fool, for my brother's death. |  |
| Clown | I think his soul is in hell, madonna. |  |
| OLIVIA | I know his soul is in heaven, fool. | 48 |
| Clown | The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's |  |
|  | soul being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. |  |
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1. Context: Malvolio is a self-loving, pompous steward in Countess Olivia's household. He nurses ridiculous aspirations for Olivia's affections, and is disliked by Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's bibulous uncle, and Maria, Olivia's waiting woman. They, together with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Sir Toby's friend and hopeless suitor for the countess' hand, seek revenge on Malvolio because he has officiously interfered with their drinking and merrymaking late one night. Maria prepares, in imitation of Olivia's handwriting and style, a love note to drop in Malvolio's way. He, walking in the garden, finds the note, recognizes the handwriting, breaks the seal, reads the contents and becomes convinced that the epistle is from Olivia and is meant for him. Thus he is completely gulled, and the revenge of the tricksters is well in train. The letter proper begins:

MALVOLIO [reads]  
If this falls into thy hand, revolve. In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy fates open their hands, . . .

1. Context: A self-loving steward, Malvolio, nurses ridiculous aspirations for the affections of his mistress, Countess Olivia. He is greatly disliked by Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's bibulous uncle, and Maria, the countess' waiting woman. They, together with Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a ridiculous and hopeless suitor to Olivia and tool of Sir Toby, seek revenge on Malvolio because he has interfered in their affairs. They accomplish their aim by dropping a love note for him to discover in the garden. He finds it and, completely duped into believing it to be from Olivia and meant for him, obeys its injunctions to appear before her in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, smiling idiotically and kissing his hand. Olivia, in mourning for a dead brother, is amazed by the sober and civil steward's appearance and behavior, and thinks he is mad.

MALVOLIO  
Remember who commended thy yellow stockings–  
OLIVIA  
Thy yellow stockings?  
MALVOLIO  
And wished to see thee cross-gartered.  
OLIVIA  
Cross-gartered?  
MALVOLIO  
Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so–. . . If not, let me see thee a servant still.  
OLIVIA  
Why this is very midsummer madness. . . . Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. . . . Let some of my people have a special care of him, . . .

1. Context: Viola (in her disguise as Cesario) delivers this speech to Olivia after Orsino has sent her to carry his messages of love to Olivia. In this speech, however, Cesario sets aside the prepared messages and instead tells Olivia what he would do if he were in love with her. This speech is significant, then, because it sets the stage for Olivia’s infatuation with the person she thinks is Cesario: instead of helping win Olivia for Orsino, Cesario’s passionate words make Olivia fall in love with him. This development is understandable, when one considers what Viola says here—she insists that she would be outside Olivia’s gate night and day, proclaiming her love, until Olivia took “pity” on her. This kind of devotion contrasts sharply with the way Orsino actually pursues his courtship of Olivia: instead of planting himself outside her door and demonstrating his devotion, he prefers to remain at home, lolling on couches and complaining of his broken heart. The contrast, then, between the devotion that Viola imagines here and the self-involvement that characterizes Orsino’s passion for Olivia, suggests that Viola has a better understanding than Orsino of what true love should be.

*Make me a willow cabin at your gate  
And call upon my soul within the house,  
Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,  
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;  
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,  
And make the babbling gossip of the air  
Cry out ’Olivia!’ O, you should not rest   
Between the elements of air and earth  
But you should pity me.   
           (I.v.237–245)*

1. Context: Orsino speaks these words as he discusses his love for Olivia with Cesario. Here, he argues that there can be no comparison between the kind of love that a man has for a woman and the kind of love that women feel for men. Women, he suggests, love only superficially—in the “palate,” not the “liver,” implying that for men love is somehow deeper and less changeable. While his love is constant, he insists, a woman’s love suffers “surfeit, cloyment, and revolt.” This speech shows the extent of Orsino’s self-involvement by demonstrating that he cares only about his own emotions and assumes that whatever Olivia feels, it cannot “compare” to his own feelings for her. But there is also an irony here, since Orsino ascribes qualities to women’s love that actually apply to his own infatuations. He claims that women love superficially and can have their feelings change easily; in fact, later in the play, he happily transfers his affections from Olivia to the revealed-as-female Viola. It is the woman, Viola, whose love for Orsino remains constant throughout. Indeed, Viola answers this speech by citing herself as an example of a woman who remains constant in love (without revealing that she is talking about herself, of course). Thus, given what the audience sees onstage, Orsino’s opinions about love seem to be wrong on almost every count.

*There is no woman’s sides  
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion  
As love doth give my heart; no woman’s heart  
So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.  
Alas, their love may be called appetite,   
No motion of the liver, but the palate,  
That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt.  
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,  
And can digest as much. Make no compare  
Between that love a woman can bear me  
And that I owe Olivia.   
           (II.iv.91–101)*

1. Context: This exchange follows the climax of the play, when Sebastian and Viola are reunited, and all the misunderstandings are cleared up. Here, Orsino ushers in a happy ending for his long-suffering Viola by declaring his willingness to wed her. This quote thus sets the stage for general rejoicing—but it is worth noting that even here, the -gender ambiguities that Viola’s disguise has created still persist. Orsino knows that Viola is a woman—and a woman, apparently, to- whom he is attracted. Yet he addresses her as “Boy” in this speech, even as he is accepting her vows of love. This incident is not isolated: later, Orsino continues to call his new betrothed “Cesario,” using her male name. This odd mode of address raises,

*ORSINO: If this be so, as yet the glass seems true,  
I shall have share in this most happy wrack.  
[To VIOLA] Boy, thou hast said to me a   
thousand times  
Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.  
VIOLA: And all those sayings will I overswear,  
And all those swearings keep as true in soul  
As doth that orbèd continent the fire  
That severs day from night.  
ORSINO: Give me thy hand,  
And let me see thee in thy woman’s weeds.   
            (V.i.258–266)*