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## “All The Daughters of My Father's House, and All The Brothers Too”: Shakespeare’s Portrayal of Gender Fluidity

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Sebastian Lopez

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History and Theory III

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“All The Daughters of My Father's House, and All The Brothers Too”:

### Shakespeare's Portrayal of Gender Fluidity

This paper analyzes how Shakespeare's personal life influenced the relationship between Viola and Cesario in *Twelfth Night* through a feminist lens and an analysis of gender fluidity in the Elizabethan Era. It is a common misconception that conversations revolving around gender are a modern discussion. Shakespeare popularized the idea of gender fluidity in English literature in his play, *Twelfth Night*.

At the height of Shakespeare's career, he wrote many comedies, yet few tragedies, however, a tonal shift occurred after the death of his son, Hamnet. Shakespeare was father to a pair of fraternal twins, Judith and Hamnet. However, the death of Hamnet and the bereavement of Judith's twin inspired the plot of *Twelfth Night*. My methodology of research focuses on Early modern England's confounding stance on crossdressing, the duality of gender, and the psychological impact of losing a twin. Additionally, my primary sources are textual evidence regarding twinship from *Twelfth Night* and *A Comedy of Errors*.

In the Elizabethan era, there were many beliefs on gender fluidity, especially that of women becoming men. Shakespeare incorporates this belief in Viola's character after shipwrecking in Illyria and takes upon the identity of her late brother, Sebastian, under the alias Cesario. Through Shakespeare's deconstruction of gender, he challenges the power play instilled in the world for a character like Viola to find a voice within Cesario.