

# Shakespeare in Mzansi

## Twelfth Night

From tragedy comes joy, from confusion comes love and from life comes laughter...

Twelfth Night is a rollicking, rambunctious comedy of mistaken identity and true love finally revealed. Set in a modern day Jozi the story captures the life of an affluent businessman, a haughty shebeen queen, her lovelorn manager, a drunken uncle and his dissolute friend all wrapped up in the tale of twins separated by tragedy but united by love.

A story to make everyone laugh, Twelfth Night takes the essence of one of Shakespeare's most loved comedies and transfers it perfectly to characters everyone will recognise and delight in. The story gives a wonderfully comic view into urban South African life, capturing the colour, vitality and energy of our lifestyle and human foibles.

Drawing us in as direct spectators to the story through the character of MSIZI, we get first hand experience of each of the characters and their story lines. As the plot complications mount we are joined to the narrative tension through the comedy and our empathy with all of the characters – even the ones we love to hate. The resolution releases us into a sense of joy as each of the characters get what they deserve and we celebrate the vitality of life in Mzansi!

### The Format

We are intimately involved with the story. Drawn in initially by MSIZI who operates as the 'everyman' in the tale, we are then given access to and acknowledged by the characters in the story. Sometimes they speak directly to us, at other times we can observe them undetected. By knowing the complications of the story so intimately we are captivated by the rising tensions and elated by the resolutions.

So the camera operates in much of the story as our eyes and ears. The characters have a relationship with the camera (us) as appropriate to their part in the story, personalising our reaction to them. We feel as if we have status in their lives and involvement in the resolution of their complications.

Set in a modern Mzansi we recognise the characters and geography as people and places we are totally familiar with; the businessman who owns the local mall, the local bar and nite-spot owned by the feisty Mama, the rural twins who overcome their initial tragedy to succeed in the big city, the surly manager of the bar, and of course the drunken ne'er do well who sponges off his relatives.

Whilst most of the language is modern and urban we capture the essence of the original text through translating a few the most famous speeches directly and so capture some of the lyricism of the original text. In doing so we further take ownership of the text as being relevant to Mzansi in the here and now.

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## The Characters

- TUMELO:  
(TEBOGO)** mid-20's. An attractive, intelligent and brave girl from out of town. She becomes more worldly as the story progresses and she takes control of her destiny.
- THEMBA:** mid-20's. TUMELO's twin brother. Handsome, intelligent, brave and likeable. He succeeds in the city through hard work and his personality.
- MASEGO:** 50+. A successful businessman who owns the 'Illyria Mall'. He dresses well and enjoys his success. He's a little vain but not flashy. An old style romantic at heart.
- NOMBEKO:** late 40's. An attractive, full-figured lady of undisclosed age. As owner of 'The Elephant Bar and Nite-Spot' she is strong willed but welcoming.
- MSIZI:** 30's. The ordinary man. The audience identifier. Musical and much liked by all, he works as a medical orderly. Is the camera's (the audience's) closest friend and welcomes us in to the story.
- MOTHUDI:** late 50's. Works as NOMBEKO's manager at 'The Elephant'. Very self important and rude, he acts as if he owns the place. He secretly harbours an absurd love for NOMBEKO.
- BHODLO:** Late 50's. NOMBEKO's ne'er do well uncle. He freeloads unashamedly on NOMBEKO's generosity and is trying desperately to match NOMBEKO with MHLOSHANA so he can access MHLOSHANA's money.
- MHLOSHANA:** late 30's. An effete, well-to-do coloured gentleman from the Cape. He is flamboyant but a coward and vain with it. He is desperate to marry so that he can secure his inheritance.
- MARIA:** late 30's. NOMBEKO's maid and waitress/barmaid at 'The Elephant'. A straight forward, honest woman with a wicked and hearty sense of humour. She can hold her own and eventually gets her way when BHODLO agrees to marry her.
- ANELE:** early 20's. A young wheeler-dealer who befriends THEMBA. He is a typical youth of the city who is not necessarily educated but has great street smarts.

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## The Synopsis

We open on a bus travelling through the night. On board are TUMELO and THEMBA, twin sister and brother who are travelling to Jozi to seek their fortunes. Suddenly the bus swerves and crashes.

Fade up in a hospital with MSIZI talking to us (the camera). We enter a hospital ward to find TUMELO lying in bed. She is confused and thinks that her brother has been killed in the crash. She doesn't know what to do. MSIZI suggests that she disguise herself as a boy and seek work. He tells her that MASEGO, a successful local businessman is looking for an assistant. She resolves to get the job.

TUMELO (now disguised as TEBOGO) gets the job with MASEGO. MASEGO sends her/him to take a love message to NOMBEKO, the owner of 'The Elephant Bar and Nite-Spot'. NOMBEKO rejects the love message but is intrigued by MASEGO'S new assistant and instructs MOTHUDI to follow the youth and tell him to return the following day.

We meet BHODLO, MARIA and MHLOSHANA, who is attempting without success to woo NOMBEKO. The three of them and MSIZI are seen drinking and making merry at 'The Elephant' on NOMBEKO'S account.

At the entrance to the Illyria Mall we meet THEMBA and ANELE. THEMBA thinks his sister drowned but has started to make a success of himself in the town as a rep. for a beer company. We learn from ANELE that he is not welcome in MASEGO'S mall and the two agree to meet later at 'The Elephant'.

MOTHUDI finds TEBOGO (TUMELO) and attempts to get him to return to NOMBEKO'S. TEBOGO (TUMELO) realises that NOMBEKO has fallen in love with him/her. MOTHUDI catches BHODLO, MHLOSHANA and MARIA drinking after hours at 'The Elephant'. When he threatens to tell NOMBEKO, MARIA hatches a plan to write a forged text message of love that MOTHUDI will think comes from NOMBEKO.

MOTHUDI receives the forged text message and falls for the deceit that NOMBEKO is in love with him. The message contains the instruction for MOTHUDI to appear in an outrageous outfit to show his love for NOMBEKO.

NOMBEKO confesses to TEBOGO (TUMELO) that she has fallen in love with him/her. MHLOSHANA overhears the conversation and is convinced that TEBOGO (TUMELO) will capture NOMBEKO'S love. BHODLO convinces MHLOSHANA to challenge TEBOGO (TUMELO) to a fight.

MOTHUDI appears before NOMBEKO in the outrageous costume suggested in the text message. NOMBEKO is outraged and thinks he's gone mad. BHODLO and MARIA appear and promise to lock MOTHUDI in the cellar for his insanity.

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MHLOSHANA threatens to fight TEBOGO (TUMELO) but both are so terrified that they barely hit each other before ANELE appears and rescues TEBOGO (TUMELO) thinking him/her to be THEMBA.

MHLOSHANA feeling defeated goes after them but instead comes across THEMBA who he hits and is, in turn, thoroughly beaten by. In the middle of the beating NOMBEKO arrives and, mistaking THEMBA for TEBOGO (TUMELO) proposes marriage. THEMBA is flattered and delighted and agrees.

A little later MASEGO arrives at 'The Elephant' with ANELE in handcuffs. MASEGO demands to speak to TEBOGO (TUMELO) who ANELE claims is THEMBA. NOMBEKO arrives and MASEGO threatens to harm TEBOGO (TUMELO) if he/she will not go with him. NOMBEKO says that she and TEBOGO (TUMELO) are married and MASEGO is outraged at the perceived betrayal. There is further confusion when MHLOSHANA arrives and claims TEBOGO beat him.

Luckily THEMBA then appears much to everyone's amazement. TUMELO and THEMBA recognise each other and they rejoice. The confusion solved, MASEGO asks for TUMELO'S hand in marriage. MOTHUDI appears looking very ragged and proceeds to accuse everyone of mistreating him. He leaves in a fury and promises revenge. BHODLO comes in and announces his marriage to MARIA.

With everyone matched a great celebration kicks off at 'The Elephant'!

### The Geography

Besides the bus and the hospital of the opening scenes, the action takes place in 4 main locations;

1. MASEGO'S HOUSE; affluent and well appointed, the house of a successful businessman in the suburbs near the ILLYRIA MALL.
2. THE ILLYRIA MALL; a small but modern suburban mall serving the middle income community around it.
3. 'THE ELEPHANT BAR AND NITE-SPOT'; a well kept and popular township bar with a shady exterior beer garden.
4. NOMBEKO'S HOUSE (attached to 'The Elephant'); a modest but well to do house, clean and a peaceful haven from the bustle of the bar.

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### The Style

**Camera:** Almost exclusively hand held, the camera is the audience representative in the story. As such the image is not shaky but fluid; like a person's normal vision – we want to feel intimate with the story, not jangled by it. The characters refer to and treat the camera as another person in the story.

The colour grading is bright and clean, supporting the comic elements of the settings. The edit is crisp; driving the comedy and holding the narrative tension that supports the laughter.

**Settings:** Costume, props and dressings are entirely modern, urban African. MASEGO wears suits and drives a good car. NOMBEKO wears modern-traditional clothes that suit her figure. Characters use cell phones and other modern technology. TUMELO and THEMBA stand out slightly in that their tastes, being from out of town, are simpler, even though they remain stylish. The most flamboyant character is MHLOSHANA who wears an unusual and not entirely successful mixture of Old Colonial with flairs of Cape minstrel colour.

**Language:** Whilst taking ownership of the text through this re-imagining and re-telling, there are some of the passages of the original text that have unique lyrical value. These are translated as closely as possible into the vernacular to provide viewers with not just the linguistic access to the story but also to the brilliant language of the original. Most of the language is however entirely colloquial to the setting of a modern, vibrant, multi-faceted urban South Africa.