

Question: Compare Orsino and Olivia and discuss how their attitudes about strong emotions are similar or different. What does Shakespeare suggest about the nature of love and other powerful feelings in his portrayal of these two characters?

Answer:

In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, strong emotions as experienced by the major characters are portrayed in various ways. Orsino and Olivia spend almost the entirety of the play yearning and soliciting in the name of love, yet they often differ in their approach and their attitudes. The self-seeking nature of their love is shown in the obstinacy of their wooing. The object of both Orsino's and Olivia's affection is shown to be not as important as the sentiments that they poetically declare while the object is absent. In this way it is illustrated that, although strong emotions may be projected onto another, they are essentially experienced alone. The dejecting influence that love has upon Orsino's personality is very different from the uplifting affect that it has upon Olivia; perhaps this is because love serves a very different purpose for each of them. Through them both, however, strong emotions such as love are conveyed as being egotistical rather than generous in nature.

While both Orsino and Olivia are persistent in pursuing what they want, Olivia is less self-indulgent. Orsino is shown to be very much of the opinion that love can be induced so long as the soliciting is conducted with sufficient tenacity,

"There is no woman's sides

Can bide the beating of so strong a passion." (II.4.92)

In contrast, at the beginning of the play, Olivia implies that love is unpredictable and cannot be cajoled. She details all of Orsino's virtues yet concludes that she cannot love him (I.5.251). Once Olivia falls in love with Cesario, however, she seems to change her mind and suggests that her heart might be swayed if he should care to visit again- presumably in the hope that rather he will begin to accept her advances (III.1.160). This change in attitude shows that, in falling in love, she begins to understand the tactics she once scorned. She maintains, though, that "Love sought, is good; but given unsought, is better." (III.1.153) The difference between Orsino and Olivia in their approach suggests that Orsino's love is more self-oriented as he is determined to have his way regardless of the other party's feelings. Olivia seems able to remember that Cesario is an independent being, showing that her love involves less objectification. They are, however, both selfishly motivated. In comparison to other characters such as Viola, who is entirely altruistic in her service to Orsino, they are both relatively egocentric. .

The constant declarations that each make show that, in actuality, Orsino and Olivia are in love with the sentiments and experiences of love. They both become infatuated instantaneously and such a time-frame hardly allows them to gauge the depth of a person's character. Each immerses themselves in their wooing and their pining so that the majority of their love is conducted heedless of the object of their affection. That they are so solitary in love suggests that it is not the person so much as the love itself that is important. Orsino, particularly, indulges himself in what he believes to be the experiences of love, "If music be the food of love, play on, Give me excess of it,..." (I.1.1-2) He seems to enjoy this so much that, rather than venturing out to see Olivia, he sends his manservant to deliver his entreaties so that he might have more time to pine alone. This would be contrary to his aims if he was veritably in love with

her. Olivia is more taken with grand statements of love and so her heart is won by Cesario's romantic description of unrequited longing rather than by Cesario himself,

“Make me a willow cabin at your gate, ...

Write loyal cantons of contemned love

And sing them loud even in the dead of night;...” (I.5.257-265)

Her lack of upset when she discovers that she married Sebastian and not Cesario further reinforces that she, like Orsino, is in love with an idea rather than with an individual.

Love has a polar effect on each character, this contrast often highlighting important themes in strong emotion. Love leads Orsino to wallow in his unrequited affections while it brings Olivia out of her melancholy. Orsino recognizes his irrational behavior and tells Cesario,

“For such as I am, all true lovers are;

Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,...” (II.4.17-18)

This reiterates that he is very self-focused in his feelings as he presumes that his emotional experience represents all 'true' love. He takes a very simplistic standpoint and does not pause to consider the wide range of human relationships. In addition, in his prejudice he often demeans the validity of the feelings of others, saying at one point that women as a whole lack 'retention' (II.4.95) The actions of Olivia contradict his sweeping dismissal. She has enough conviction to vow herself to isolation for seven years of mourning and then, in contrast to Orsino's experience of love, becomes reanimated once she meets Cesario. She is enlivened by their conversations, saying at one point, “Why, then, methinks 'tis time to smile again.” (III.1.124) By using Olivia to refute all of Orsino's self-involved assertions, Shakespeare demonstrates the partial and prejudiced nature of love.

The motivations and experiences of these two characters are so markedly different because each love fulfils very different wishes. After the death of her father and of her brother, Olivia would have needed something entirely new and foreign to free her from her mourning and her expected role. Falling in love with Cesario presented an opportunity to break social code and the servant's fresh enthusiasm presented a level of passion not often encountered amongst the stifling nobility. Even the fact that she pursues her own interest goes against convention as in Elizabethan England matches tended to be heavily influenced by family input (Forgeng 2010, p. 64). For Orsino, whose advantaged background meant that he had time to fritter on whimsy, any beauty of good breeding would suffice. This rather shallow criteria is prove at the end of the play when he easily transfers his feelings to Viola upon learning that she is a woman of good family (V.1.317-323). Shakespeare's portrayal of love is seen here to be quite cynical, not demonstrating any of the noble sentiments often associated with romance. In the cases of both Olivia and Orsino, love is used as a convenient means for satisfying their wants.

Twelfth Night addresses a range of behaviors in regards to strong emotion. Through the methods of Orsino and Olivia, it is demonstrated that love is often selfishly motivated. In such cases, the enamoured is not so much in love with a person as with the feeling of being besotted. The attitudes of these two characters are often contradictory and show that personal emotion can lead to unfair judgement against the depth of feeling experienced by others. Ultimately, love is used by Orsino and

Olivia as a way of fulfilling their fanciful whims. Through these characters, Shakespeare acerbically illustrates that strong emotion is often self-serving in nature.

Question; Disguises and changes of clothing are central to the plot of *Twelfth Night*. Which characters in the play spend time in disguise, and how is this thematically important?

Answer:

Many people in *Twelfth Night* assume a disguise of one kind or another. The most obvious example is Viola, who puts on the clothing of a man and makes everyone believe that she is a male. This disguise causes great sexual confusion, as a bizarre love triangle results in which Viola is in love with Orsino, who loves Olivia—who loves Cesario, the male identity that Viola assumes. Thus, by dressing his protagonist in male garments, Shakespeare shows how malleable and self-delusional human romantic attraction can be.

Another character in disguise is Malvolio, who dresses oddly (in crossed garters and yellow stockings) in the hope of winning Olivia. In his case, the change of clothing suggests his belief that altering his wardrobe can lead to an alteration of his social status. When he dreams of being Olivia's husband, he imagines himself above all in a different set of clothes, suggesting that class and clothing are inextricably linked. Later, after Malvolio has been declared mad and has been confined to a dark room, Feste, pretending to be the fictional priest Sir Topas in order to deceive Malvolio, puts on a disguise—even though Malvolio will not be able to see him since the room is so dark. This scene is particularly suggestive: Feste's desire to wear a disguise even though his victim won't see it implies that the link between clothes and reality goes deeper than mere appearances. For Feste, at least, the disguise makes the man—in order to be Sir Topas, he must look like Sir Topas. Ultimately, then, Shakespeare raises questions about human identity and whether such classifications as gender and class status are fixed entities or can be changed with a simple shift of wardrobe.

Question: How is romantic love depicted in the play? What points does Shakespeare seem to be making about romance?

Answer:

Despite *Twelfth Night*'s comic action and happy ending, Shakespeare paints an ambiguous picture of romance and infatuation in the play. Love is generally represented as something sudden and irresistible, something that attacks its victim from the outside in a fashion similar to a disease. Like a disease, love is extremely difficult to get rid of or cure. People seem to suffer painfully from it—or at least they claim to suffer. Orsino describes it as an "appetite" that must be satisfied (I.i.1–3); Olivia calls love a "plague" (I.v.265); Viola sighs that "[m]y state is desperate for my master's love" (II.ii.35). Because love makes those who suffer from it desperate, it has the potential to result in violence, as in Act V, scene i, when Orsino, thinking that Cesario is Olivia's lover, threatens to kill him. At this point, the play is only a few delicate steps away from turning into a tragedy—a testament to how violent and terrible the power of love can be.

At the same time, however, Shakespeare subverts these images of love as a terrible disease or appetite, suggesting that it may not be as serious as characters like Olivia and Orsino think. Both of them tend to be melodramatic and self-centered, and both seem more interested in being in love than in any particular love interest. This egotism is apparent in how readily the two switch the objects of their

affection near the play's close: Orsino loses Olivia but happily takes up with Viola, while Olivia gladly exchanges a pretend man, Cesario, for a real one in Sebastian. The ease with which these supposedly lovesick characters jump from one love interest to another suggests that love may be more of a game than anything else—and that, like everything else in *Twelfth Night*, it should not be taken too seriously.

Question: Discuss the role of the explicit comic characters, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste and Maria. What function they do serve?

Answer:

Sir Toby:

Surname Belch, not very complimentary but sadly, accurate. He is Olivia's ill-behaved uncle, and spends most of his time drinking, fooling, and carousing with Sir Andrew. He takes part in the pranks against Malvolio, and arranges the duel between Sir Andrew and Viola as well. He is hot-tempered, and usually unruly, but not a bad fellow either.

Sir Andrew:

Surname Aguecheek, also not complimentary, but correctly describing his thin, pale face. He is a complete, very dense fool, who can't help but misconstrue every word his friend Sir Toby says. He hopes to win Olivia's affection, though they have few interactions in the play. Jealous of the attention that Olivia pays to "Cesario," he challenges the young man to a duel, that is never quite completed.

Feste:

A jester and musician who lends his services to Olivia, and to Orsino as well. Feste is quick-witted and quite skilled at wordplay; but he is also somewhat cruel, as seen in his behavior toward Malvolio. Feste may act the part of the fool, but in fact he is very wise and perceptive about people's natures; he knows the perfect song for any occasion, but resents when his services are taken for granted

Maria:

Olivia's gentlewoman-maid, a witty, wily woman who has some affection for Sir Toby. It is she who resolves to get revenge on Malvolio, after he embarrasses the party; she claims to have handwriting like Olivia's, and will use that gift to trick Malvolio. She is actually a good-natured woman, though she loves a good joke, and holds her own with the "boys" (Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste).

Question: Discuss the Role of mistaken identity in *twelfth night*. Who is mistaken for whom, and what do these mix-ups signify?

Answer:

Identity

Most of the characters in *Twelfth Night* are in a state of identity confusion. Thematically, Shakespeare sets up the plays to actions to reinforce that identity will always be fragmentary and incomplete until one is able to love, regardless of whether one is loved in return.

The instances of mistaken identity are related to the prevalence of disguises in the play, as Viola's male clothing leads to her being mistaken for her brother, Sebastian, and vice versa. Sebastian is mistaken for

Viola (or rather, Cesario) by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and then by Olivia, who promptly marries him. Meanwhile, Antonio mistakes Viola for Sebastian, and thinks that his friend has betrayed him when Viola claims to not know him. These cases of mistaken identity, common in Shakespeare's comedies, create the tangled situation that can be resolved only when Viola and Sebastian appear together, helping everyone to understand what has happened.

Mistaken Gender Identity

One level of identity confusion in *Twelfth Night* is gender identity. Viola embodies this confusion when she assumes the identity of a boy, Cesario. Of course, in Shakespeare's time, all female roles were played by boys, so in this case a boy actor plays a woman character (Viola) who dissembles herself as a boy (Cesario). In a patriarchal culture, sexual difference is held to be an immutable law; traditional gender role behaviour was based on a natural biological fact rather than social convention.

The indeterminacy of Viola/Cesario's sexual identity would show that maleness and femaleness were just aspects of a role, qualities that are learned, not immutable physical traits. When Cesario and Sir Andrew face each other in a duel, it is revealed that both are acting the role of being a man. The biological fact of Sir Andrew's maleness is obsolete. Both characters are pretending.

Love and the Self

Shakespeare, especially through Olivia, gets to the heart of the relationship between self and love. When we fall in love, we almost necessarily lose our self-composure, cease to be able to see our actions with our own eyes. Yet even though Olivia fears that her attraction to Viola will come to naught, she is willing to risk it, because love, or at least intense attraction, allows her to leave her "mind" behind and give herself up to fate.

The Danger of Love

In *Twelfth Night*, love is seen as similar to death, because both pose a threat, or at the very least, a challenge to the singular self that is afraid of change. To be able to love another requires that one must accept change, to accept that one cannot entirely control one's fate, or even one's will. The very language that one uses to communicate with another may end up demanding more, or at least differently, than what one intended.

The characters in the play that cling to a singular sense of self that does not allow for change are often the ones for whom change happens most violently. Malvolio is the most notable example of this, but Orsino, too, although he claims to be open to love, is, beneath all his high rhetoric, deeply afraid of any mutual love relationship. In some ways, it's much easier for him to pine for Olivia and send middlemen to woo her, precisely because it flatters his ego to feel he loves more than she loves him back.