

# An exploration of the different types of love in shakespeare's twelfth night

[Life](#), [Love](#)



What does Shakespeare convey about the nature and variety of love in this play?

Shakespeare explores a great variety of themes in this play, the main one being love and its many different natures. The aim of this essay is to examine the text to discover ways in which Shakespeare portrays love using characterisation and style.

Orsino is the first character to speak in "Twelfth night"; his first words are "If music be the food of love, play on". The main part of his speech describing his love for Olivia consists of refined and eloquent language, which seems to be used to impress rather than to express his feelings, he also talks more of love itself than Olivia which makes you doubtful of his sincerity:

"O spirit of love, how quick and fresh thou art"

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"Love thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers"

He also thinks himself to be "as all true lovers are" in that the love he feels for Olivia is so intense that it is painful:

"And my desires like fell and cruel hounds,

E'er since pursue me"

He is also portrayed as inconsistent, in the first seven lines of the play he tires of the music, which had been played proclaiming that it, is "not so

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sweet now as it was before". This also hints at the fact that when he possesses something he will lose interest in it.

Orsino is Shakespeare's representation of the melancholy, he is a man who will worship a woman he does not know, and is often thought to be in love with the idea of love rather than Olivia herself. It also appears that Orsino is lacking in self confidence for two reasons; the first is that he does not woo Olivia himself and the second is his craving for Olivia to adore him and be obsessed by him:

" When liver, brain, and heart,

These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd

(Her sweet perfections), one self same king!"

The next main character to appear is Viola. Viola represents true love in two forms; the first is her love for her brother. Her sincere love seems to contrast Olivia's weeping and obsessive grieving for her lost brother. It also appears as if she almost feels obliged to mourn him in this way, to keep his memory fresh;

" A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh

And lasting, in her sad remembrance."

This suggests that the grief is in some way an act to attract respect and attention. The language used by Valentine to describe her, in that it is eloquent and ends in a rhyming couplet, echoes this.

Viola is also shown as a true lover in her love for Orsino. She is willing to sacrifice her own happiness for his and attempts to woo Olivia for him. Any other character would have tried to sway Olivia against him for selfish reasons.

" My lord and master love you. O such love

Could be but recompensed, though you were crowned

The nonpareil of beauty"

The way in which she speaks to Olivia also reveals her true love, in that she describes how she would woo Olivia were she in Orsino's place. It expresses the way she feels about Orsino and proves her to be self-sacrificing because she will not tell him, and will try and win Olivia.

" Make me a willow cabin at your gate,

And call upon my soul within the house;

Write loyal cantons of contemned love,

And sing them aloud even in the dead of the night"

She is also in a position to love Orsino sincerely as she knows him completely;

" Thou know'st no less but all: I have unclasped

To thee the book even of my secret soul"

Another fact, which proves her love for him, is that she expresses her thoughts in soliloquies. This shows that she is not attempting to impress or influence any one in the manner in which she speaks or by the content;

" I'll do my best

To woo your lady. Yet a barful strife!

Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife."

The next lovers to be encountered are Maria and Sir Toby. These two represent love between friends and also sexual love, lust. They seem to be brought together by similar pleasures, for example the love of playing tricks. In this sense their love is more true than Orsino's obsession with Olivia.

Sir Andrew joins Maria and Sir Toby in the above scene. He is depicted as similar to Orsino in that he is an unrequited lover with little chance of attaining his desire. His love seems even less genuine as there is very little mention of his feelings for Olivia or even of him seeking her love.

Olivia then enters the play and mentions love almost immediately when declaring to Malvolio that he is " sick of self love". The self-love Olivia mentioned is shown as another kind of love and also as a means to insert comedy into the play. Because Malvolio is so proud he is gulled by Maria's trick and thus follows humorous circumstances.

Olivia seems to be as inconstant a lover as Orsino in that she immediately comes out of mourning when Viola attempts to woo her. She also transfers

her affections from Olivia to her brother without realising that they are not the same person.

Antonio is similar to Viola in his love for Sebastian. He is devoted to him and would do anything for him without looking for recompense, for example he gives him his purse in case he wishes to buy a trinket or toy.

In conclusion I feel that Shakespeare depicts the multiple natures of love very successfully throughout the play and shows strong contrasts between them.