

Analyse the different  
methods that  
shakespeare essay



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Disguise is a popular method that Shakespeare uses which supports dramatic irony to inject humour into the play, where the audience members are aware of something (in this case the true identity of the characters) that characters in the play are not. This of course creates tension in the play and excites the audience as well as also playing a key part in providing comedy for the audience through the dramatic irony and at the same time, also maintaining interest.

As only men were able to act during the Elizabethan times, any female roles were played by men, which was in itself, probably greatly humorous for the Elizabethan audiences. An example of a character who utilises such disguise in 'Twelfth Night', is of course, the role of Viola which during these times, would have been played by a male actor. However, when she dresses up as her brother during the play, the male actor dressed up as a woman (to play Viola), then needs to look as though he is dressed up a man (to play the part of Cesario) - a rather complicated scenario.

As well as being complicated, this would have definitely provided extra elements of comedy for the Elizabethan audiences along with the dramatic irony involved that the audience would know about the disguise, however some characters would not. It is my belief, that the Elizabethan audiences were more likely to have found the method of disguise, more humorous than a more modern audience may find it. My reason for believing so is that as mentioned above, female roles were played by men during the Elizabethan times, however more recently, female roles are played by female actresses.

This, I believe denies the modern audiences of that extra element of humour which played a significant part during the Elizabethan plays. An example during the play where disguise plays a large part in contributing to the humour of that scene is in Act 1 scene 5, lines 290 - 295. During this soliloquy by Olivia, it is revealed to the audience that she " May [have caught] the plague" or in other words, may have fallen in love with Cesario who is really Viola but dressed up as a man.

This entire situation of Olivia falling in love with a woman as a result of disguise being used and causing the dramatic irony, would definitely have made marvellous comedy for the audience. Again, in this example, the audience are responding to the fact that they know something (the real identity of the character) which the other characters do not know and in this case, are mocking Olivia for finding attractive and falling in love with another woman.

I also believe, in this instance, that Olivia's status in the play: an aristocratic woman with lots of wealth and prestige, makes it even more funny and humorous for the audience. They ridicule the fact that such a woman is in love with another female. Shakespeare uses disguise, not only to provide humour for the audience, but disguise also allows more possibilities for the main plot of the play and again, helping to maintain the audiences interest.

Shakespeare cleverly uses the literary device known as dramatic irony, supported by disguise, frequently throughout this play and many other of his comedies and tragedies as a successful method of injecting humour for his audience into the play. Action takes place on the stage, of which the

audience knows the import, but characters on the stage do not and this also creates a setting for a great deal of irony where characters make comments that then take on a double meaning.

The audiences first encounter of dramatic irony is in Act 1 Scene 4, lines 30 – 39. Duke Orsino comments on the femininity of the character Cesario, he says, “ For they shall yet belie thy happy years, That say thou art a man. ” Here, commenting on Cesario’s very youthful appearance. “ Diana’s lip is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe is as the maidens organ, shrill of sound,” These lines are a good example of dramatic irony used throughout this play as we the audience know something that the character Orsino does not know.

And all is semblative a woman’s part”, Orsino feels that it is as if Cesario was playing the role of a woman. The Duke uses the simile “ thy small pipe is as the maidens organ”, comparing his unbroken voice to a girls. The audience would have found this whole piece of dialogue by the Duke very humorous, as they of course know that Orsino’s feelings are correct and that in fact Cesario is not only like a woman but in fact he is a woman.

In a way, I believe that Shakespeare creates this rather tense and strange relationship between these two characters during the play in order to convey to the audience the importance and power of feelings and intuition : The Duke Orsino feels inside that he is in love with Cesario but it is looks and the outward appearance of Cesario that holds him back, this is a lesson for the audience. As well as having a humorous effect on the audience,

Shakespeare, I believe, also has this underlying message and lesson for the audience to discover.

Another rather ironic relationship that Shakespeare creates in this play is of course, between the Countess Olivia and Cesario, the Duke's messenger. The irony again here, is caused by the disguise of Viola, leading Olivia to believe that this messenger is male, when in fact, we, the audience know that actually he is not. Viola's speeches throughout the scenes where she attempts to woo Olivia for the Duke provide a great deal of irony such as when she tells Olivia, " I swear, I am not that I play (Act 1, Scene 5, Line 180).

It is of course, also quite humorous when Viola quite unwittingly earns Olivia's affection - for herself and denies her saying, " By innocence I swear, and by my youth, I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, and that no woman has, nor never none shall mistress of it be save I alone (Act 3, Scene 1, Lines 157-160). " These lines said by Viola during this scene, is extra amusing and humorous for the audience as by knowing of the disguise, these lines take on a double meaning - one that is understood by Olivia - and another, understood by the audience.

In both of these examples, through humour and comedy, Shakespeare creates the failure of characters to realise the truth as being lessons for the audience. In this play, Olivia's readiness to fall in love with appearances, adding to the humour of the play, is also a lesson about love that Shakespeare illustrates through the comedy. Satire is yet another common device used by Shakespeare in many of his plays to inject comedy and

humour for the audience and spectators. Satire is when a character is held up to be mocked or ridiculed, and in this play, it is of course Malvolio and also Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

Just watching a character being made fun of, mocked and ridiculed in such a way is certainly humorous for the audience and they enjoy joining in, laughing and jeering at these characters also. Shakespeare deliberately creates characters such as Malvolio and Andrew Aguecheek primarily for this purpose: to be mocked, ridiculed and laughed at. In some cases, it may be certain beliefs or qualities of the person which is the cause of the ridicule and sometimes it is these things which are targeted by Shakespeare in particular.

An excellent example of a character which is mocked because of both his beliefs and his personal qualities in this play is Malvolio. Shakespeare makes this humour for the audience by creating Malvolio as a sad, sly, hypocritical, self absorbed, boring, serious, and annoying character. Malvolio is a devout and strict puritan and it is these beliefs and qualities, most of which are common to all puritans that are mocked by Shakespeare through the other characters in the play.

Malvolio, I feel, is included in the play by Shakespeare for one primary reason: satire, or to be mocked and ridiculed by the other characters. He has created Malvolio in this way, to put across his own views and feelings towards puritans to the audience however, in doing so, is also providing humour for the audience as they are able to mock and laugh at Malvolio along with the other characters. Shakespeare has made Malvolio funny for the

audience by portraying him as this serious and boring character who loves to spoil everybody's fun.

By creating him in this way, the audience naturally begin to form a dislike for this character making it even more enjoyable for them when, in the end, the sub plot characters get their revenge on Malvolio. The entire sub-plot in this play revolves around the sub-plot characters trying to get revenge over Malvolio for all the times he has mocked them and spoilt their fun and the plan that Maria comes up with is very humorous for the audience indeed. They are also able to enjoy the mocking and ridicule of the character in the play which Shakespeare intentionally creates to be so disliked by the audience.

Even more so, when this plan is carried out by the sub-plot characters, Malvolio ends up utterly humiliated having been mocked, ridiculed and tricked to such an extent by the other characters. By creating and including a sub- plot such as this, Shakespeare provides huge amounts of comedy and humour for the audience enabling them to join in with the mocking, ridiculing and laughing at of Malvolio the character they most dislike and at the same time, is able to put across his own personal views of puritans and characters or people such as this.

A modern audience may not find this particular example of satire to be as funny as an Elizabethan audience may have found it. This is due to the decrease in puritans, certainly in England and this may have an effect on the more modern audiences. The Elizabethan audiences would have known and been familiar with these qualities of puritans conveyed in the play by

Malvolio therefore recognising these beliefs and qualities being mocked in the play and responding to this intentional humour created by Shakespeare.

Shakespeare creates certain characters to stimulate the humour for the audience through physical comedy. In this case, the audience will laugh at the physical behaviour and movements of the character providing a good contrast to the more literal methods of injecting humour which Shakespeare also uses. In 'Twelfth Night', the character which provides the large proportion of physical comedy for the audience is Sir Toby Belch, the cousin of the Countess Olivia. Most of the physical comedy provided by Sir Toby for the audience actually occurs during the scenes when Sir Toby is drunk, as is easily imaginable.

We are first introduced to Sir Toby's frequent 'drinking habits' during Act 1 Scene 3 when Maria warns Sir Toby "that quaffing and drinking will undo [him]" (Line 14). Act 2 Scene 3 is packed with physical humour and comedy for the audience by Sir Toby's drunkenness. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew ask Feste to "sing a love song" for them and it is easy to imagine this scene being acted out during the play with these two characters drunkenly dancing around and singing to the music much to the delight and humour of the audience.

As well as this type of comedy providing a good contrast to the literal methods of humour used by Shakespeare, the character of Sir Toby Belch also gives a very good contrast to characters such as Malvolio and helps Shakespeare to highlight certain qualities in Malvolio to the audience.

Shakespeare creates Sir Toby's character intentionally as having such a fun



loving nature and as being amiable to the audience by providing humour.

The audience are able to see the contrast in characters of Sir Toby and Malvolio and this helps Shakespeare to increase their love of Sir Toby and their dislike of Malvolio which is of importance for the sub plot.

At the same time, through the humour, Shakespeare is able to convey the message to the audience that it is not good to be serious all the time and never to have fun. Sir Toby, as a character, is a reflection of these beliefs and ideas of Shakespeare and he is able to put them across in this way. Sir Toby also expresses his how he feels about Olivia mourning her brothers' death and will see no one for seven years. Sir Toby says, " What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? " and then goes on to say " I am sure care's an enemy to life".

These lines really highlight Sir Toby's beliefs that Olivia is young, and should be having fun and enjoying life, not grieving her brothers' death for seven years and this also serves as a lesson for the audience. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is also a good contrast to Sir Toby as Sir Andrew's character plays more on wordplay and slapstick humour than on physical comedy. Sir Andrew is described by Toby as being " as tall a man as any's in Illyria" meaning that he is of high social status and good character, which is a probable pun on Sir Andrews lanky build.

Our first introduction of Sir Andrew in Act 1 scene 3 and really sums up his character and how wordplay is used by Shakespeare to provide the humour for the audience. Sir Toby tells him to " Accost, Sir Andrew accost", the Elizabethan Audience will have understood this to have meant ' greet

courteously' however, Sir Andrew, not understanding this meaning took that to be the name of Maria later addressing her as, " Good Mistress Mary Accost". It is examples of wordplay and slapstick humour such as this, which gives the audience another element of humour to consider.

Shakespeare creates Andrew in this way however, like Sir Toby I believe that there is another Underlying idea, which Shakespeare is trying to convey to the audience through wordplay comedy. This character highlights the importance, to the audience, of not only having wealth, but also the importance of having common sense and intelligence as well. This is portrayed by Sir Andrew as he is used by Sir Toby for his wealth and money. This is a lesson for the audience especially for the upper class individuals within the audience.