

The truth and nature of love in 'shakespeare in love'

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



Describe an idea that interested you in a text you have studied. Explain why this idea interested you using visual/verbal techniques to support your answer. John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* is a 'romantic comedy' set in the class-dominated society of Elizabethan England. The two protagonists and "Star-crossed lovers" of the film come from completely different ends of the class spectrum. Will Shakespeare is a "lowly player" with writer's block searching for his muse and wealthy Viola De Lesseps who dreams of "love as there has never been in a play" are fortune's fools as the viewer must come to realise that love cannot conquer all.

Madden conveys the division between Will and Viola through use of dialogue, mis-en-scene, camera shots and costuming. It is through these techniques that as a twenty-first century viewer I became able to understand the harshness of "the truth and nature of love" in sixteenth century England and began to appreciate more the risks Will and Viola took to defy these truths. The idea of the "truth and nature of love" in sixteenth century England defines marriage as a method of obtaining social or financial gain. This divides our unfortunate protagonists who are separated by their respective social standings.

Madden positions the viewer to see this separation through use of dialogue in Will and Viola's conversations. Viola is quicker to see the consequences the two will face if she continues her romance with Will saying "it is too flattering sweet too be substantial." Too good to be true. Will and Viola's love is a brief exert from the realities of the time, a dream that can only last until Viola's inevitable marriage to Lord Wessex. "Master Will, poet dearest

to my heart, I beseech you, banish me from yours- I am to marry Lord Wessex- a daughter's duty. However Will and Viola continue to pursue their risky love coming to each other in disguise. Will gets caught up in the romance having finally found his muse and boasts to Viola " For one kiss, I would defy a thousand Wessexes! " As a twenty-first century teenager the concept of a class-system preventing two lovers from being together seemed foreign to me as although today's society is not perfect there is no hierarchy preventing young couples from being together. However I admired and appreciated the two protagonists for going against the laws of society and seeing each other in secret struggling to convince themselves that " love knows nothing of rank or riverbank. " Throughout the film the viewer is constantly reminded of the difference between Will and Viola's respective positions in the hierarchy of the age and however strong it may be their love is not one that will last the expectations and realities of Elizabethan England. Madden engrains this into the viewer through mis-en-scene and camera shots. Viola's stately home is an immediate indicator that she will serve as a foil to Will.

Despite their shared passion for the arts almost everything else about Will and Viola differs. When the viewer is introduced to Will Shakespeare he does not live up to the expectations viewers of today have based on the playwright he will become. Will currently lives in what appears to be a run-down, dirty London boarding house. His room is compact and the walls stained and bare. It is void of furniture save a small writing desk, table and stool. His bed is in a small loft atop a ladder and we viewers are reminded, "

actors are two-a-penny” a strange contrast to today’s idolism of all those to grace the silver screen.

Viola’s mansion completely differs to Will’s world, the sheer size of the grounds and the long driveway are symbols of her wealth. Viola’s bedroom is furnished with detailed tapestries, carved wooden furniture and a giant four-poster bed all illuminated by a gentle golden glow heightening the sense of her regality. Viola’s world continues to contrast to Will’s as she has a place at court and therefore is invited to festivities at places such as Greenwich and Whitehall, vast palaces with luxuries such as theatres, audience chambers and ballrooms. Will’s entertainment is in the crowded, dark taverns with cheapfood, drink and love.

Madden also enhances the separation between the two lovers through use of camera shots and angles. As Viola is the social superior she is shown to be at a higher level than Will through use of low angle shots illustrating to the viewer how she is too above Will for their relationship to work. This is seen especially in the balcony scenes shared between Will and Viola in reality and as Romeo and Juliet in the opening performance of the play. She is always above him and this is reciprocated through high angle shots of Will as he is near the bottom of the Elizabethan hierarchy.

This shows that although it is in Will and Viola’s nature to fall in love the truths of the era separates them making it impossible for a highborn lady like Viola to “ love happily with a bankside poet and player. ” Shakespeare in Love won an academy award for its use of costuming in the film, which is apparent when we see Viola throughout the film. She is dressed

immaculately in elaborate gowns with intricate beading often shown in regal colours such as red, silver and gold which highlights her wealth and status and reminds the viewer that she is too above Will for their relationship to be acceptable in Elizabethan society.

This is contrasted when we first see Will, he is clearly one of the masses in his worn workman boots, plain white shirt and ink stained hands. He relies on his words for a living. Viola and Will are from separate worlds and are only equals in the opening performance of Romeo and Juliet where Will is dressed in equal amounts of finery as Viola. This shows that only in the make-believe world of the theatre can these two be equal and accepted. The idea that they cannot marry each other even though they are in love is hard to grasp in the modern day and is the reason why many were unsatisfied by the ending of the film.

However it was interesting to see how “ love can spring between a queen and the poor vagabond who plays the king. ” We see Will and Viola defy “ rank and riverbank” in an awe-inspiring way but we learn that despite their risk taking, there is not always a happy ending. So it can be seen that the truth of love in Elizabethan England separates the two protagonists who are without control over their own relationships and life choices, a reality for the time that is hardly seen in twenty-first century New Zealand making this theme in the film almost alien to a modern teenage girl like myself.

John Madden successfully portrays the constrictions of Elizabethan England and the trials Will and Viola must undergo to be together through his use of dialogue, mis-en-scene, camera shots and costuming. It was interesting to

me as a modern day teenager to learn that we don't always get a happy ending in life. " Those whom God has joined in marriage not even the Queen can put asunder. "