

To what extent does shakespeare

Literature, William Shakespeare



To What Extent Does Shakespeare Present Love as ' Foolish' In ' Twelfth Night' Gemma Hanham William Shakespeare wrote ' The Twelfth Night' in the midst of his career, during the early 1600s. The play is considered by most to be one of the author's greatest comedies. The play explores issues of deception, disguise and the extremities characters will go to as a result of love. Shakespeare presents love as foolish in ' Twelfth Night' by using the inadequacy of characters affected by love as a catalyst for the ludicrousness of events which occur. This entertains the audience by portraying the idiocy of love in the play. The manner in which Shakespeare presented characters held importance to the theme ' foolish love' as it highlighted, through unfortunate situations, the lack of benefit from love. An example of the negative portrayal of a love struck character would be Orsino. Orsino is shown as using melodrama to emphasise his sorrow when referring to his unrequited love for Olivia. His exaggerated caricature of a lovesick character is comedic as the audience are made aware of his melodrama. Shakespeare used a character of high respect and status such as the duke, and portrayed him as a character the audience pity as a result of love. Displaying the Duke's character as someone to pity gives Olivia a sense of empowerment, this ties in with the ' Twelfth Night' celebration. Traditionally, a major theme of the Twelfth Night event is the positions of people, for example, a servant and master switch characters in terms of hierarchy. Shakespeare wanted to incorporate this idea into his play through the emasculation of the Duke contrasting with the strength of Olivia. When talking of love in Act 1 Scene 1, Orsino appears to thrive on the drama of his situation, which is perhaps why he overplays it. This suggests to the audience that he dotes on the drama

and tragedy of love. This theory is enhanced by his description of love as 'so full of shapes' he is seemingly enchanted by the notion of love, rather than Olivia herself. This could be considered humorous as Orsino is allowing himself to feel misery when there is no benefit for him. Interestingly, Shakespeare presents Orsino's love for Olivia as all-consuming, yet shows Orsino swiftly switching his infatuation from Olivia to Viola. This highlights how fickle love and relationships were in 'Twelfth Night'. Similarly to this, Olivia is seen as lusting after Viola, seemingly obsessed. We then see that her melancholy may have been exaggerated by how swiftly she becomes infatuated with Sebastian. This fluctuation between love interests suggests that relationships are treated with a manner considered erratic; an example of this is Olivia's haste to wed Viola. Shakespeare shows this to suggest that Casual or courtly love is obsolete in 'Twelfth Night' as everything is vastly overplayed; this also links to the celebration itself, typically a day of erratic behaviour. This act appears foolish as one should be careful when committing to marriage. With Olivia's haste in love comes a suspicion of repercussions from the audience, this is confirmed when Olivia unknowingly marries Sebastian instead of Viola. She is presented as foolish and slightly ignorant for mistaking the man she supposedly loves for someone else. The presentation of her as idiotic is out of character, as Olivia is usually seen as sharp and witty. This suggests that love has blinded her to her own idiocy, therefore associating love with foolishness in 'Twelfth Night'. There is comedy in Olivia's dramatic change in character when pursuing Viola. She is shown first as adamant in refusing Orsino's advances with little sympathy for him; therefore it is amusing that she then falls irrationally in love and is

unintentionally misled by Viola. Olivia is originally in control, mocking Viola with a sense of empowerment, these contrasts to her desperation for Viola later in the play, ' O! What a deal of scorn looks beautiful in the contempt and anger of his lip'. Shakespeare uses the setting of Illyria as an alternate reality to allow himself to create situations as preposterous as this, further highlighting the illogicality of love. The setting allows the writer to mirror the Twelfth Night celebrations (January 6th). In Shakespeare's time, this holiday was celebrated in a chaotic manner, with everything being turned ' upside down' and causing great confusion. This was obviously a concept the author wanted to incorporate into the play. To allow this, a setting without rules or restrictions was fashioned. The confusion of love is shown by Shakespeare in the fast paced love plots and triangles in the play, characters such as Viola are used to demonstrate the complexity of different relationships between characters. Viola would be considered the female protagonist of the play, her disguise acting as a catalyst for later confusion. Orsino use of Viola to assist him with persuading Olivia; is suggestive of his high status. Consequently, Olivia falls in love with Viola whilst Viola is quickly falling in love with Orsino. This love is shown in the quote " Who' er I woo, myself would be his wife." Viola's states that although she will attempt to woo Olivia for Orsino, it is she who intends to marry him. This intention could be considered selfish on Viola's part as she was not yet aware of Olivia's lack of interest for Orsino, in this sense we see who love can make one act selfishly. However, it is Viola's loyalty to Orsino which eventually leads to their relationship. The love triangle appears to be almost as baffling for the characters as it is for the audience, Viola's confusion is shown in the quote ' Oh Time, thou must

untangle this, not I. It is too hard a knot for me t' untie'she longs for her problems to be solved in time. Viola's hopelessness is expressed in this quote; this enhances the ridiculousness of love and its current lack of benefits, particularly for these three characters. William Shakespeare creates diversity in his different kinds of love in order to compare and contrast the characters and increase drama. In 'Twelfth Night' Shakespeare explores love through Antonio and Sebastian. The relationship between Antonio and Sebastian is fascinating as it is open to interpretation, whilst some claim that their love is of a passionate nature others believe it is strictly friendship. Dr Vicente Lopez, Author of 'Shakespeare through performance' sees Antonio in 'Twelfth Night' as a parallel to Antonio in another of Shakespeare's works, 'The Merchant Of Venice' as many critics believe that both of these characters contain the implication of homoeroticism, although it is never explicitly exhibited. This could have been left as a mystery as Homosexuality was not considered socially acceptable in the 1600s. Despite this, many critics believe that Shakespeare still begins to probe at the topic of homoeroticism. The playwright certainly implies One-sided love from Antonio with quotes such as 'if you will not murder me for your love, let me be your servant'. This presents Antonio as desperate to help Sebastian, perhaps to earn his affections. Despite his sacrifices, Antonio receives nothing in exchange; this selflessness could be interpreted by some as romantic love. However it also presents him as a fool in the sense that he gains nothing as a result of helping Sebastian, here Shakespeare is emphasising how love could be blinding characters to the consequences of their actions. Shakespeare takes a humorous approach when it comes to exploring and

raising issues of love and its consequences. The playwright illustrates the concept of love as foolish using the imbecility of the characters as well as the folly of situations they found themselves in as a result of love. Word Count:

1, 271 Bibliography * Shakespeare Through Performance By Dr Vincente Lopez * The Twelfth Night By William Shakespeare