

# Shakespeare`s comedy `twelfth night`

[Art & Culture](#), [Comedy](#)



Shakespeare's comedy 'Twelfth Night' is mainly comedic due to the dramatic irony which is consistent throughout the play due to Viola, Sebastian's twin, pretending to be a man named Cesario. This is evident in Act 1 Scene 4 when Orsino is praising Cesario for how much of a woman 'he' looks. 'Diana's lip/ls not more smooth and rubious' would be highly entertaining to the Shakespearean audience as they would be completely aware that Cesario was in fact a girl, and therefore would obviously have a smooth lip. This would be even more dramatic to the Shakespearean audience due to the fact that at that time only men were permitted to act.

This was one of the problems created within the play as Viola constantly had to hide her true identity. This therefore supports the idea that 'a comedy then is a problem-solving story, ending in resolution and order' particularly when looking at Act 5 as this is when the rest of the characters find out Viola's true identity when she says 'that I am Viola' and that she 'hath been between this lady and this lord'. It also supports that the resolution is often 'symbolised by marriage' as Viola goes on to marry Orsino.

The marriage of Orsino and Viola also resolved another issue within the play- Orsino's unrequited love for Olivia. We were first made clear of this love in Act 1 Scene 2 when the captain explained that 'he did seek the love of fair Olivia'. As well as this, in Act 2 Scene 4 we hear from Orsino himself that his love for Olivia is 'more noble than the world' portraying the idea that his love is true, and not just due to her status or wealth, however Olivia claims 'I think not of him' due to the fact that she is in love with Cesario.

Despite this love that Orsino has for Olivia, he quickly directs that love to Viola in Act 5 when he asks Viola 'give me thy hand '. Throughout the play it is often made clear that Olivia is in love with Orsino, for instance when he asks her to declare his love for Olivia, Viola replies 'whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife' but due to her masked identity is unable to confess resulting in their marriage resolving her unconfessed love for Orsino as well as his unrequited love towards Olivia.

Furthermore, the separation of the twins is a major issue that needed to be solved in 'Twelfth Night' being the root also of Viola's hidden identity. During the entire play the audience are aware that Sebastian is alive and therefore great suspense is created as to when Viola is going to find out, which again, is Act 5. Viola claims that her 'father had a mole upon his brow', Sebastian's response of 'and so had mine' made clear to both of the twins that they were in fact related, as proven by this intimate fact.

This certainly was a problem resolved, however in disagreement to the given statement indicating that resolutions to problems were 'normally symbolised by marriage' the uniting of the twins was not symbolised by marriage in Act 5. When discussing the topic of unrequited love within 'Twelfth Night' it is also necessary to mention the love that Olivia has for Cesario, Malvolio for Olivia as well as the hinted homosexual admiration that Antonio has for Sebastian. Out of these three, only one of these cases are resolved, that being Olivia's love.

'Even so quickly may one catch the plague? ', this quotation from Act 1 Scene 5 portrays how quickly Olivia fell in love with Cesario. The use of 'plague' being a quickly spread disease reinforces this idea of speed and  
<https://assignbuster.com/shakespeares-comedy-twelfth-night/>

unwillingness the love for him was due to his lower status. Due to Cesario actually being Viola, they could never be together as homosexuality wasn't accepted in that era. However, Olivia's marriage to Sebastian provides her with the resolved, happy ending symbolised by marriage.

In addition to the issues that have already been discussed, Sir Toby is a heavy burden to Olivia throughout the play and it is clear he is using her for her money and lifestyle. Despite Sir Toby being a knight, he is still a rather corrupt individual. His drinking habits are made clear multiple times in the play, one instance of this is in Act 1 Scene 3, Sir Toby says 'I'll drink to her as long as there's a hole in my throat and booze in Illyria' in reference to Olivia. Not only is he a burden to Olivia, the only reason he continues his "friendship" with Sir Andrew Aguecheek is to gull him out of his money.

The fact that he can tease Sir Andrew is only his second purpose of him, the first being his money in order to be able to continue his drinking habits. This is another problem resolved in Act 5, also symbolised by marriage, as he leaves Illyria to wed Maria who had been well suited throughout the play due to their lack of morals shown in their sinister behaviour towards Malvolio. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is another character who loves Olivia, and unfortunately is one who is left at a loss at the end of the play.

This therefore indicates that a comedy isn't a 'problem-solving story, ending in resolution and order' as throughout the play we laugh at Sir Andrew Aguecheek as he is merely a foolish man, who is easily gulled by Sir Toby, and obviously at that. Another reason why we laugh at him is due to the fact that he loves Olivia, for he is foolish to believe that such a woman of high status would consider Sir Andrew. He is also a coward throughout the

play which adds to the comedy in the play, for instance when he is tricked into fighting Cesario.

Sir Toby sums up Sir Andrew in Act 5 as 'an ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave; a thin-faced knave, a gull'. This, arguably, may have been harsh however portrays that Sir Andrew was left alone with no progression in his life apart from a possible realisation that he has been used by Sir Toby and stands no chance with Olivia. In conclusion, I would agree with the idea that 'a comedy is a problem-solving story, ending in resolution and order and normally symbolised by marriage' in Act 5 as majority of the problems caused within 'Twelfth Night', particularly the major ones, were solved, and symbolised by marriage.

At the end of the play; Olivia was married to Sebastian who was happy to be with her in return; Viola was with the man that she loved, Orsino, who supposedly loved her back and was therefore no longer longing for Olivia; Sir Toby had gone off to wed Maria and so was no longer using Sir Andrew or Olivia. Despite characters such as Malvolio, Sir Andrew, Feste and Antonio being left unmarried and also the resolution of the twins being reunited not symbolised by marriage, the main issues which the comedy within the play was based around were resolved by marriage.