

How successful is  
shakespeare in  
making the opening  
of twelfth night  
interesting ...



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Shakespeare uses various devices and character portrayals to successfully make the opening of Twelfth Night entertaining and interesting for the audience.

In this essay I am going to analyse Twelfth Night and find out how Shakespeare achieves this.

Shakespeare starts the play with a speech from Orsino. This speech is very important and interesting for many reasons. Firstly, it introduces the Duke. The audience would get the impression that he was a wealthy man from many clues, such as his language. He would use longer, and more complicated words, occasionally speak in poetry, rhyme and uses metaphors. Evidence of this are words such as 'fantastical', 'sweet sound', and an example of rhyme is 'Enough, no more; 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.' This would show the audience that he was, one of the main characters, wealthy, and educated. Another suggestion that the Duke is wealthy is that Curio suggests that they go hunting, to try and take the Duke's mind of Olivia, hunting was only available to rich people, because to hunt you needed to own your own land to hunt on.

(Lower characters, such as servants etc used prose in their speech).

The Duke would appeal to other wealthy people in the audience, making them interested in his character.

Props on the stage may also give the audience an impression of what status Orsino has in society, such as a couch for example. Or costumes, the actor

that played Orsino would perhaps have on a jacket so he would stand out more than the other characters in the audience.

The Duke's mood in this speech is love sick and frustrated, which he is like for most of the play, so this speech shows the main moods for his character to the audience, which is important because it will remain like that for most of the play.

The speech also introduces Olivia, and even before the audience has seen her, they get the impression that she is beautiful and 'perfect' 'Her sweet perfections with one self king!' The Duke stated this in line 39. Shakespeare uses this narrative device to keep the audience interested and wondering who Olivia is.

Then Valentines returns from Olivia's and tells the Duke that he was not allowed to see Olivia but her handmaid told him from Olivia that she is mourning her brother for seven years 'The element itself, till seven years' heat...'

This suggests to the audience that she is in great pain at that present moment in time, and was very close to her late brother. It also tell the audience she is quite a passionate person and Orsino picks up on this, he states, 'To pay this debt of love but to a brother, How will she loves, when rich golden shaft hath kill'd the flock of all affections else That live in her... These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd Away before me to sweet beds of flowers!' He is saying that he respects what she is doing, but if she can love a brother this much, then her love for him one day will be much

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greater! Which shows he must be pretty big headed to assume that she is going to fall in love with him just because he is a Duke etc.

Love is the main theme of the play and this impression is defiantly set in scene one. This scene is interesting more than entertaining I think because it introduces one main character, and mentions another, Olivia the audience would then be curious about her, and wanting to find out more and see her for themselves.

In Scene 2 however, there is a totally different mood and atmosphere compared to Scene 1.

The scene starts with Viola and the captain washed up from the shipwreck. The audience does not actually see the shipwreck because Shakespeare couldn't stage the shipwreck in Elizabethan times because the effects and props needed either didn't exist or were far too expensive and complicated to do. Also, the shipwreck didn't have to be shown for the plot of the play to make sense to the audience, because the conversation Viola has with the Captain, Shakespeare uses a narrative device and describes non-staged events. He tells the audience the information they need to know about her brother and the shipwreck etc.

The main characters dialogue is very different compared to the first scene, Viola's tone in this scene is not richly poetic it is straightforward and plain instead of puns, sonnets and poetry, which is used throughout the first scene. "Perchance he has not drown'd: what think you sailors?" This is a

question but said in a straightforward fashion. This shows her sensibility later on in the scene.

When Viola is washed up on the shore with the Captain, she is worried about her brother Sebastian, who she thinks is dead. The captain tries to lift her spirits and hopes by saying " Hung on to our driving boat, I saw your brother...Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back, I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves..." Arion was a Greek musician who was carried to safety from drowning by a dolphin. This is using imagery to create hope for Viola and the audience that her brother might still be alive.

In Elizabethan times, Greek Mythology was more well known than it is today, so an Elizabethan audience would of found this more interesting and understood it more than an audience today.

The Captain uses a formal and respectful register in the way he speaks to Viola, referring to her as ' lady' and ' madam'. Viola also seems to gave respect for the Captain and thinks highly of him, she states " There is a fair behaviour in thee, Captain" Which means she thinks he is honest.

Shakespeare included the captain in this scene because he knows all about Illyria and informs Viola and the audience of her surroundings, without someone there to inform her of this information, the scene wouldn't have worked! This scene I would say is more informative than anything else, also Olivia is mentioned again, making the audience more interested to find out whom she is.

When Viola learns of Olivia, she finds out their situations are similar as they have both lost their brothers, Viola can empathise with this, and this creates a bond between them, from Viola's point of view at least.

Viola's sympathy counts in her later relations with Olivia, with Viola being especially sensitive and caring toward Olivia.

At the beginning of the scene, Viola is confused and fearing for her brother's safety, " And what should I do in Illyria? My brother he is in Elysium..." another quote that shows more fear for her brother is " O my poor brother..." But Viola bears her optimistic and mild nature, even though she fears that she has lost her brother forever, she hopes that he is still alive, and tries her best not to give in to her grief.

She manages to form a plan to survive, with the Captains help. She states, " Conceal me what I am, and be my aid for such disguise as haply shall become the form of my intent. I'll serve this Duke..." (I noticed that she states ' I will serve this Duke' not ' I will try...' This shows she is determined, and very positive.) She is saying to the Captain to conceal the fact that she is a woman. She needed to disguise herself as a man because in Elizabethan times women couldn't work to earn money for themselves and it would be dangerous and socially unacceptable, audiences in Elizabethans times would have been able to relate to this better than a modern day audience because these days women are independent and equal to men, but in Shakespeare's day it was very different.

Disguise, along with love, is one of the main themes of the play, Viola is disguised as a man is the main disguise storyline, another involves Olivia's servant Malvolio, who is supposed to be a puritan, but to try and win Olivia's love, dresses up in yellow garters, and smiles, which is totally opposite to the 'real' Malvolio, so either the real Malvolio is a disguise, or what he becomes is.

Another disguise scene is when Feste disguises himself as a priest and visits Malvolio in prison and torments him.

At the end on the scene, Viola gives a short speech, announcing that she is going to work for the Duke etc, this is really a cue to the audience, explaining and summarising what she intends to do, interesting the audience as she is really addressing them.

The Captain agrees not to tell her secret, and Viola thanks him " I thank thee, lead me on" Then presumably the Captain leads Viola to the Duke.

The way Viola acts in this scene would make the audience admire her and interested in how she survives by herself in the world disguised as a man.

Scene 3 changes to one of comedy very suddenly, Shakespeare does this by firstly introducing three new characters, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Maria. The names Belch and Aguecheek are humorous, as belch, is another word for a burp, and Ague means pain, and a cheek is close to your neck, so his name translates basically into ' pain in the neck', but Elizabethans would have understood this more than a modern audience. The

names would have been amusing before the characters had even properly shown what their character was like.

A lot of changes would of happened in this scene, which the audience would notice and it would grab their interest. Firstly, three new characters are introduced, the language would be different, and the scene itself would be one of comedy, very different from the two previous scenes.

The actor appearances would also amuse and entertain the audience straight away. The actor that played Sir Toby would probably be very large and quite small, and the name ' belch' suggests he is quite fond of food and drink, which he is. The actor would probably also be quite old, as Sir Toby doesn't come across as a very young character.

Sir Andrew would probably be played by a skinny, tall actor and would be younger than Sir Toby. The pair would be opposites, one fat and small, and the other tall and skinny, this would also add to the comedy. These characters are examples of characterisation as all their features are exaggerated, with mistakes such as " Good Mistress Mary Accost-" and them being drunk. This sort of portrayal of the characters is an audience appeal device, which Shakespeare used to make them appeal to the audience.

The Actors that played Sir Toby and Sir Andrew would be acting drunk, stumbling about, being noisy etc with exaggerated gestures. Facial expressions would vary, but normally happy, sometimes confused (Sir Andrew).



The actress that played Maria would act quite cross and annoyed that Sir Toby is ignoring her warnings. She probably wouldn't make too many gestures, and she is annoyed but not expressing it through movement. Her facial expressions would probably be a bit disgusted at their behaviour in her Lady's house.

The language is simpler, full of slang and rude jokes in this scene, compared to the poetry used in the first scene, and formal polite language in the second. A lot more slang is used, such as "housewife" which means prostitute, but this would have made more sense to an audience in Shakespeare's day, they would have found this scene on a whole more interesting and amusing than an audience today because slang and issues happening at the time are obviously not around now.

Some language in this scene, simply doesn't make sense, to add to the humour "Why let her except, before excepted", in this quote Sir Toby is just rambling on about nothing, as he is drunk.

Twelfth Night as a theme introduces itself in this scene; Twelfth Night was on the sixth of January and was associated with having fun, drinking, singing songs, and playing practical jokes on people, etc. When the audience in Shakespeare's day saw this as a title of a play, they would know instantly that the play would be a comedy. This is shown throughout the whole play, but really introduces itself for the first time in scene 3, after what I would call the 'introduction' scenes had finished.

I think the order of the scene's are fine how they are because it keeps the audience's attention more, by giving them pieces of information gradually, and then after two scenes of not much action and comedy, he brings in the scene with Maria, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, which keeps the audience continually entertained and interested about what is happening on stage.

I would say that Shakespeare is very successful in making the opening of the play interesting and entertaining for the audience, he uses a lot of clever devices and portrays the characters very well and makes them all easy for the audience past and present to relate to.