

Twelfth night is one of
shakespeare's best-
loved



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Twelfth Night, also known as What You Will, is a romantic comedy written by William Shakespeare in the 17th century. The play has become very popular, and is now looked at as one of Shakespeare's greatest works of art. This essay will be discussing the reasons why Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's best-loved and most performed comedies. At a glance, the play seems to be just a light-hearted romantic comedy, where the main theme is love, and the other themes throughout the play are heavily involved with love and romance. However, a deeper look into the play reveals a more complex purpose and more intricate themes.

The characters in the play all seem to be light-hearted, and all have essential roles to play. They are all cleverly involved in several sub-plots and themes throughout the play, and make everything fit into place. These characters, the themes and the overall interpretation of the play will be examined throughout the course of this essay. It is obvious that the main themes in the play are love, comedy and folly. Love being mocked by the themes of comedy and folly are regular occurrences in Twelfth Night, which makes it easier for the audience not to take the play too seriously.

A good example of this mockery is that almost everyone in the play thinks they are truly in love with another character in the play. Orsino thinks he is in love with Olivia when it is obvious that he is not, Olivia thinks she is in love with Viola, and again it is evident that this is not true love. Also, Olivia was supposed to be in mourning for 7 years for her brother, yet she unveiled herself for Viola with little reluctance, proving that she didn't care enough for her brother and that she'd rather chase after men than mourn for her dead brother.

An example of how Twelfth Night is not just a light-hearted romantic comedy is the cruel treatment of Malvolio throughout the play. Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is on the other end of a practical joke played by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria. Malvolio, being Olivia's steward, thinks he is of a higher social status than Sir Toby, which has led to them having a bitter relationship. As a result of this, a practical joke is played upon Malvolio. Maria writes a letter, pretending to be Olivia, and addresses it to Malvolio.

This letter, which Malvolio thinks is from Olivia, expresses her love for him. Malvolio, assuming Olivia is writing this, becomes very excited. However, he is not so much excited by the fact that a beautiful lady is in love with him, but by the fact that if he were to marry Olivia, he would reach a higher level of social status, and therefore be able to boss around Sir Toby. This is an example of how love is portrayed as a way of taking advantage of people, as Malvolio is thinking more of his social class than of Olivia's love being stated in the letter, which is actually written by Maria.

This scene in the play is very amusing for the audience, as they know that the letter is part of a practical joke, whereas Malvolio does not. The letter, which tells Malvolio to wear yellow cross-garters and always smile at Olivia, is quite amusing for the audience and the characters playing the practical joke, but later on during the play we realise how cruel this practical joke ends up being on him. When Malvolio meets Olivia, wearing his yellow cross-garters and ridiculous smile, Olivia thinks he is mad and has him locked away in a dark cell.

Malvolio has no place in the disordered world of Twelfth Night, except to suggest that, even in the best of worlds, someone must suffer while everyone else is happy. Another interesting point is how the words ' fool', ' folly', ' foolish', and ' mad' are used so frequently in the play, and often in conjunction with the words ' love' and ' romance'. If studied carefully, there is only one real occurrence of true love in the play, even though three couples get together at the end. Sir Toby and Maria getting together is the only example of true love in the play, as they love each other without another motive, like money or power.

However, this is still not the ideal situation of true love as there is a big difference in social status between Sir Toby and Maria, and so this would not have been considered respectable in Shakespeare's time. Sebastian does not even know Olivia, but Olivia mistakes him for ' Cesario', and they end up getting married. Viola marrying Orsino is not an example of true love either, as Orsino was in love with Olivia throughout the play, and only after Olivia had stated her love for Sebastian (who she thought was Cesario) that Orsino decided to marry Viola.

Also, although three couples are brought together happily at the end, there are still characters like Feste, Malvolio, and Sir Andrew, who either suffer from unrequited love or just do not have feelings for anyone by the end of the play. Antonio is not counted among these characters, because his relationship with Sebastian can be considered as brotherly love. Basically, they had grown very close to each other after Antonio had saved Sebastian from the shipwreck. The one person who is supposed to be a fool, Feste, seems to be the cleverest character by the end of the play.

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No one is truly insane in Twelfth Night, yet a number of characters are accused of being mad, and this is an important theme through the play, as love seems to make people act differently. The play has a lesson to teach in unrequited love, as there are so many examples of it in the play. Viola suffers from unrequited love throughout the play, and only at the end does she marry Orsino. Malvolio and Sir Andrew experience unrequited love at the hands of Olivia, and they remain alone at the end of the play.

Also, Feste seems to be suffering from unrequited love, and this could be because he might have picked up an STD while he was at the war. It is possible that Feste is in love with Olivia, but this is not certain. Even Sir Andrew wanted to marry Olivia, but never stood a chance anyway. These occurrences of unrequited love show that the play does not necessarily have a happy ending for all the characters. Many characters at the end of the play still end up single, so it is not a happy celebration of romantic love for all the characters.

Shakespeare shows that love can cause pain and many of the characters seem to view love as a kind of curse. Even the less overemotional Viola says unhappily that " My state is desperate for my master's love". A common attribute of many of the characters in the play is selfishness. All the main characters perform an act of selfishness, and this counteracts all the romantic love in the play. Examples of this are portrayed from as early as the first scene. Orsino is speaking of his love for Olivia, but his selfishness is shown by the following quote: " O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame to pay this debt of love but to a brother,

How will she love, when the rich golden shaft hath kill'd the flock of all affections else... " Here, Orsino is expressing his love for Olivia, however, he is also proving he is not thinking of her feelings, as he is seeing her brother's death as a way for him to make her fall in love with him, as she would be emotionally unstable. This proves that he is not truly in love with her, and is blindly getting loved up over her in vain. Olivia also proves herself selfish when she forgets all about mourning for her dead brother when she meets Viola (Cesario) and unveils herself.

Malvolio shows his selfishness by the following quote, which he says after reading the letter which was part of a practical joke played by Sir Toby and Maria, to make him think that Olivia is in love with him. Malvolio says: " I will be proud, I will read political authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance... " This shows that Malvolio is only seeing this situation as a way for being able to boss around Sir Toby and raise his own social status. He isn't excited because a young beautiful woman is in love with him; he is excited because this is a chance for him to become a man of higher social class.

Sir Toby can also be classified as selfish, as he is only friends with Sir Andrew because all the money for his alcohol comes from Sir Andrew, who is rich but foolish. Sebastian also proves to be slightly selfish in the play, because when Olivia mistakes him for Cesario (Viola) and asks him to marry her, he is baffled, since he has never seen her before. He sees, however, that she is wealthy and beautiful, and he is therefore more than willing to go along with her. The character Feste, a ' fool', plays an important part in the play.

He is able to take on many roles, from serious to comic, learned to absurd; just as the occasion seems to suggest. Since he is a part of both the main and sub plot, Feste is the one character who links both parts of the play together, making Twelfth Night complete. He contributes to the humour of the play, not through acts of foolishness, but through his clever wit. Feste is not a fool at all, and is only considered one because it is his job to be a clown for Olivia. It should also be noted that Feste never takes sides with any of the characters, and in this way he becomes more of a commentator in the play.

Feste is always aware of the physical existence of life, death, and love, and his music often brings a touch of reality to the play. The other characters in the play also realise that Feste is a wise character, and Viola sums this thought up by saying: " This fellow's wise enough to play the fool" Feste does make Twelfth Night seem quite ironic, as he is meant to be a jester yet he turns out to be the cleverest of all the characters, and his songs are filled with grief and sorrow. An interesting point about the way Feste talks is how he says the words ' folly' and ' foolish' so many times in his speech.

Shakespeare has made Feste as one of the deceptive characters of the play, along with Viola being dressed up as a man, Orsino being depicted as a seeker of Olivia's love, and Sir Toby being portrayed as a close friend of Sir Andrew. This theme of deception is important for the play as it creates many sub-plots, and also assists in the humour of the play. Films have been made of many of Shakespeare's plays, and Twelfth Night, being one of his greatest productions, has had a few made on it. There are two film versions of Twelfth Night which contrast in many aspects of the play.

Trevor Nunn's production is based on location, whereas the Granada TV play was produced in a studio. This is quite relevant, as having the play performed in a studio limits the effects and imagery of the production.

Another noticeable variation between the two films is the difference in mood and the tone of the play. Trevor Nunn's production is a lot more light-hearted, comic and cheery, in comparison with the Granada TV production, which is gloomy and not as humorous. Also, the different interpretations of Feste in the two films is quite contrasting.

The Feste being played by ' Ben Kingsley' in Trevor Nunn's production, is played as a rather grave clown, distant and detached from both plots. His only love is shown as his devotion to his lady and employer, Olivia. To Olivia's household, he seems like an old family friend. His performance in the film implies that he has known Olivia all her life and cares for her greatly. In contrast, the ' Feste' played by Anton Lesser in the Granada TV play is shown to be much younger and substantially sadder he is made to look like he is ill and as if he has returned from the wars with a broken heart and a sexually transmitted disease.

The language used by Shakespeare in Twelfth Night plays an important part in the play. The language tells the audience the tone of the play, and Shakespeare effectively changes the way characters speak when they are overcome by certain emotions. All the English in that Shakespeare uses is archaic English, which was how English was spoken at the time of the production of Shakespeare's plays. Throughout the play, the language used by Shakespeare is generally comical and light-hearted, as Twelfth Night is supposed to be a comedy.

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Shakespeare used long and complex words to add to the comedy of the play, because in British comedy using long words is considered humorous.

Shakespeare uses language to make the audience be able to assess the character's state of mind or to consider the emotions the character is feeling.

For example, when Malvolio thinks that Olivia is in love with him, he speaks in a loved-up extravagant fashion. In the play, he says: " Daylight and champaign discovers not more! This is open.

I will be proud, I will read political authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-device the very man. I do not fool myself, to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me. " As we can see, just by reading a letter which seems to be from his lady Olivia, Malvolio loses the plot completely and starts ruminating on how his life is going to change without a care in the world. Also, Shakespeare uses language to identify the difference in social status between the characters.

Characters of a lower social class, like Maria and Sir Toby, always speak in prose, whereas characters like Olivia, Orsino, and Viola, sometimes speak in poetry. Shakespeare also sometimes deviates from his normal style, by writing lines that are longer or shorter than ten syllables, and varying the stress patterns for emphasis. In conclusion, I do not think that Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's best-loved and most performed comedies because it is a joyous celebration of romantic love, because romantic comedy should demand more subtlety and sophistication.

The play can be vulgar, and has a lot more to it than romance and comedy, even though they are shown to be the main themes of the play. Twelfth Night is also known as What You Will, and is called this for a reason. The play, as has been proved by the two film versions, can be interpreted in many different ways, and its alternative title is basically implying that you can make of this play what you want, as it has no definite interpretation. It is still one of Shakespeare's greatest plays without a doubt, but I do not believe that the reason for this is because it is a celebration of romantic love.