

What types of love does shakespeare explore in twelfth night

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From the very first line 'If music be the food of love, play on' Shakespeare tells us that Twelfth Night is going to be a play almost entirely centred around love of some description. There are numerous types of love, some that Shakespeare condones and rewards, and some that he condemns and punishes.

The first, and most apparent one, is family love. This particular form of love only applies to a few characters. It's the strongest type of love we see in Twelfth Night and the strongest family bond we see is between the twins, Sebastian and Viola. It becomes apparent during the play that they've endured a great deal together. At the end of the play, when the two siblings are reunited, we learn that their father had died when they were thirteen years old.

Viola says 'My father had a mole upon his brow' and 'And died that day when Viola from her birth had numbered thirteen years.' The passing of their father would certainly strengthen their love for each other, and we first see this bond when they each land on the shores of Illyria. Viola's first thoughts when she and the captain land on shore are for her brother, and she fears for his life. 'My brother... perchance he is not drowned... O my poor brother! And so perchance may he be' (saved).

Similarly, as soon as Sebastian arrives on the shores of Illyria, he is almost ready to break into tears, 'I am yet so near to the manners of my mother that, upon the least occasion more, mine eyes will tell tales of me'. Like Viola, Sebastian also presumes that his twin is drowned. When he is talking to Antonio, Sebastian says:

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'She is drowned already, sir, with salt water, though I seem to drown her remembrance again with more'. This would also suggest that he is crying tears of grief for his sister.

The love the twins show for each other is definitely the most obvious example of family love in Twelfth Night, but if the play is examined carefully one more character emerges that this particular sort of love can be applied to. This is Olivia. When Viola and the Captain appear on the shores of Illyria, the Captain explains to Viola who Olivia is. He tells Viola that Olivia is:

'A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count

That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her

In the protection of his son, her brother,

Who shortly also died; for whose dear love

(They say) she hath abjured the sight

And company of men.'

This tells us that she is refusing the company of all men in a rather extreme act of mourning for her father and brother's death. Although she soon breaks this vow when Viola/Cesario appears, it is still a very severe vow to make and this shows just how much she loved her father and brother. This is why I think Olivia deserves to be put into the category of family love.

The next type of love we see is self-love. This applies to only the very selfish characters that think a little too highly of themselves. The most noticeable

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character with this trait is Malvolio. We begin to see this as soon as we first meet him, in Olivia's house when Feste returns from being absent without leave. Feste proves Olivia to be a fool, and for this Olivia forgives him, but Malvolio's sour attitude becomes apparent as he tries to convince Olivia that Feste is not the great fool she believes him to be. He says 'I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he's out of his guard already. Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged.'

Malvolio is trying to prove that Feste is not as important as him and that he should not be forgiven. This is a clear act of jealousy and self-love, and Olivia knows this: 'O you are sick of self love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite' and tries to convince him to forgive Feste and be a bit more open minded, 'To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets... There is no slander in an allowed fool'

As the play progresses its also plain to see that Malvolio thinks Olivia has great affection for him. At the end of act 2 he daydreams about Olivia and him being married. 'Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion.' By saying this he shows us that he thinks Olivia likes him in a way which she clearly doesn't.

He also thinks about how he would treat Olivia's kinsmen if he were married to her, especially Sir Toby, whom he detests. 'Toby approaches; curtsies

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there to me... I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control... saying Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech, You must amend your drunkenness'. Malvolio wants to rank above Sir Toby and all the rest of Olivia's kinsmen, just so he can feel superior and have control over them.

Malvolio is certainly the most severe case of self-love in Twelfth Night, but there are other milder cases of it in both Orsino and Olivia.

Orsino's self-love is seen at the very start of the play. He is listening to music, ordering his servants to play on, then to stop, then to start again. Later on he sends kinsmen to go and woo Olivia for him. He's the sort of person who loves having the power to make people do whatever he wants. He likes being in charge and ordering people about. He says:

'If music be the food of love, play on'

...'Enough; no more.

Tis not so sweet now as it was before'

Olivia's self-love is more vanity than selfishness. We see this when Viola/Cesario appears. She likes him (or her depending on how you look at it) and fishes for compliments by pointing out all her good features. She asks 'Is't not well done?' when she's talking about her face, and while Viola is trying to woo her on behalf of Orsino she is seductively pointing out the features of what she clearly thinks is a perfect face,

'item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them' and she continues with her inventory of beautiful features. She thinks very highly of herself and this is possibly another case of self-love.

The next type of love Shakespeare explores in Twelfth Night is the exact opposite of self-love, selfless love. This is only really shown between two characters, Antonio and Sebastian. This is almost a brotherly type of love, and could be classed as family love.

We first see this when the two land on the shores of Illyria. Sebastian does not want Antonio to come with him into the main town of Illyria because he fears for his safety and he doesn't think he'll be very good company, being overcome by grief of losing his sister. Sebastian says:

'I shall crave of you your leave that I may bear my evils alone. It were a bad recompense for your love to lay any of them on you' He fears for Antonio's safety because he is a wanted man in Illyria, the result of a battle that happened a while ago. We find this out later in the play when Antonio is arrested. But Antonio hints at it when he says 'That danger shall seem sport, and I will go'.

Antonio's love for Sebastian is even stronger than this. He follows Sebastian into the town, even though he knows there is a risk he'll be arrested, and later on in the play, when he sees what he thinks is Sebastian in a sword fight, he intervenes to protect him.

'Put up your sword! If this young gentleman

Have done offence, I take the fault on me;

If you offend him, I for him defy you.'

This proves that Antonio is willing to risk his own life for Sebastian, showing a great deal of courage and love towards him.

A very lonely sort of love shown in Twelfth Night is the love of being in love. This is shown by only one character in the whole play, Orsino. Orsino does not truly love Olivia; he just thinks he does, and he likes thinking he does. It gives him some sense of being human. Without her he has no reason to sit and listen to slow, sombre, love music all day and he has no reason to order his servants and kinsmen about. If he really, truly loved Olivia, he would attempt to woo her himself, he would try and persuade her to love him himself but instead he sends ViolaCesario to do it for him. Orsino says to ViolaCesario:

'Therefore, good youth, address thy gait unto her,

Be not denied access; stand at her doors,

And tell them there thy fixed foot shall grow

Till though have audience...

O then unfold the passion of my love,

Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith.'

He has a very fickle personality and likes to change his mind, like at the start when he keeps changing his mind about the music he likes. But he likes being moody and changeable; it makes him seem more dramatic. He feels he's going to be the odd one out if he doesn't have someone to love and that explains why, at the end, when everyone begins to pair up and he realises that Viola loves him, he says 'I shall have share in this most happy wreck.' He is going to secure a bride because he needs to feel as though he's not being left out.

This would suggest to me that he's very insecure and unsure of himself, although he's confident enough at the end to propose to Viola. But Orsino loves the feeling of loving someone else. This isn't a selfish love, but it's quite clearly false.

Probably the least obvious love is that between Feste and Olivia. It is less of a love and more of a genuine affection for each other. Feste has been absent without leave for a while and we know this because Maria cautions him as soon he arrives back in the house 'My lady will hang thee for thy absence', but Feste replies with wit, and does not seem particularly worried about what Olivia might do to him. He knows her well and knows that if he says the right things that she loves him enough to forgive him.

As Olivia enters she tries to send him away, but he refuses to go. She's trying very hard to be serious at this point and keeps saying 'Take the fool away' to which Feste replies to the attendants 'Do you not hear, fellows? Take away the lady', implying that she's the fool. He asks if he can prove her a fool. At this point she's given up trying to be haughty and disdainful and

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agrees to hear him try. He catches her out about mourning for her brother and she acknowledges his cleverness with good grace. She forgives him and then has to convince Malvolio that Feste is forgiven. This shows a real affection for each other. Feste knows her well enough to know how to get himself out of trouble and Olivia loves him enough to forgive him, and even smile at his humour.

There are many cases of self-deluded love in Twelfth Night, people who are convinced they love someone, but in fact something has convinced them that they do, or they feel they should do. The most immediate person that comes to mind is poor old Sir Andrew and his love for the Lady Olivia. Sir Toby has Sir Andrew convinced that he's a dashing, handsome young man, who has a real talent for dancing and that he's going to win Olivia with the minimum of effort. He just has to have a swordfight to impress her. Basically Sir Toby and Fabian are having a laugh at Sir Andrew's expense.

Sir Toby convinces Sir Andrew that he has beautiful hair, 'Excellent; it hangs like flax on a distaff; and I hope to see a huswife take thee between her legs and spin it off' and when Sir Andrew decides to go home because he's not getting anywhere with Olivia, Sir Toby persuades him to stay, 'She'll none o'th'count' she'll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years nor wit. I have heard her swear't. Tut, there's life in't man.' Essentially Sir Toby has just convinced Sir Andrew that Olivia has said that she won't have anyone above her in status, wit or intelligence. Sir Andrew knows he is above her in none of these fields and so still has a chance. His love for Olivia is not

genuine or true love; it's false and only exists because Sir Toby has made him believe in it.

Both Malvolio and Orsino also have self-deluded love for Olivia. Malvolio is convinced Olivia loves him by the forged letter that Maria and Sir Toby produce and the only reason he loves Olivia is because of the status and rank it would give him if they were married. He dreams of marrying Olivia and controlling all her kinsmen, 'Toby approaches; curtsies there to me... I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control... saying Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech, You must amend your drunkenness'. He is deluded, he believes he's in love with Olivia because he wants to be Count Malvolio, and the letter only encourages this. A part of the letter reads: 'I may command where I adore' , indicating that she loves one of her staff, 'I may command where I adore,

But silence, like a Lucrece knife,

With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore;

M. O. A. I. doth sway my life.'

Malvolio believes that M. O. A. I. is him because all of those letters are in his name and so his deluded love for Olivia becomes stronger.

Orsino's love for Olivia could also be counted as self-deluded. As I explained in the love of being in love section, Orsino doesn't truly love Olivia, he just feels he needs to, and he feels he wants to. He likes the feeling of loving her,

but if his love for Olivia were genuine he would woo her himself, not send his kinsmen to attempt to do it for him. Orsino says to CesarioViola: 'Therefore, good youth, address thy gait unto her,

Be not denied access; stand at her doors,

And tell them there thy fixed foot shall grow

Till though have audience...

O then unfold the passion of my love,

Surprise her with discourse of my dear faith.'

Physical or sexual attraction does not occur as much as one would anticipate in Twelfth Night. It only occurs twice. The first is Olivia for Cesario. She doesn't know him or spend time with him, but she breaks her vow to abjure the sight of men for him, and indeed every time Cesario tries to leave she tells him to come back the next day. This is pure physical attraction. She even sends Malvolio after him with a ring to make sure he returns:

'Run after that same peevish messenger,

The county's man. He left this ring behind him.'

Later on in the play Olivia starts pointing out her beautiful features to Cesario, just in case he hadn't noticed. She starts talking about her face: 'Is't not well done?' at which point ViolaCesario shows he's not interested by using the witty comeback 'Excellently done, if God did all'. If Olivia had known Cesario for longer then this might be classed as true love, but as

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she's only just met him and has made a vow not to see men, it's clear that she just likes the way he looks.

The second occurrence of physical attraction is right at the very end, and it's the love Sebastian shows to Olivia.

Olivia mistakes Sebastian to be Cesario and so whips him off to plight his troth.

'Now go with me, and with this holy man

Into the chantry by; there before him,

And underneath that consecrated roof,

Plight me the full assurance of your faith'

Sebastian can't believe his luck. He wonders whether Olivia is mad, or even whether he is.

'And though 'ti wonder that enwraps me thus,

Yet 'tis not madness'

'Or else the lady's mad; yet if 'twere so,

She could not sway her house, command her followers'.

This is just physical attraction. He does not know her, but he finds her sexually attractive and she's a woman of high status so he decides to take advantage of the situation.

Finally we find true, genuine love. The most surprising candidates for this category are Maria and Sir Toby. We only find out at the end that they've run away to be married, when Fabian explains the whole plot against Malvolio:

'Maria writ the letter,

At Sir Toby's great importance,

In recompense whereof he hath married her.'

However we've known since fairly near the beginning that Maria loved Sir Toby. At one point Maria is told that if Sir Toby were to overcome his alcohol problems, he would see that she loved him, and that he loved her, Feste says 'if Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria.' We know he loves her and that she loves him because Sir Toby says 'She's a beagle, true bred, and one that adores me'.

The next case of true love is that which Viola shows for Orsino. Throughout the whole play she is loyal to him. She goes to woo Olivia when she's told to and she says what he wants her to say to Olivia, even though she doesn't want them to be together. Even at the end where Orsino is about to lead her off to kill her, she follows willingly. Orsino says

'Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in Mischief.

I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,

To spite a ravens heart within a dove'

To which Viola replies 'And I must jocund, apt, and willingly'

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Meaning she would be glad to go with him. This loyalty that Viola displays shows that she loves Orsino deeply and would do anything for him. This love is not just a one-way love though. Even though Viola has been a man throughout the duration of the play, Orsino still knows her and has still spent time with her, so its perfectly possible that Orsino returns her love.

If Twelfth Night is seen as a performance on stage, it becomes apparent that Shakespeare creates his own set of conclusions in Twelfth Night. He creates almost an awards ceremony in the final act, where characters who suffered at the beginning have a happy ending, and those who where full of themselves at the start receive what they deserved. The twins, Sebastian and Viola, find partners. Maria marries the man she's loved throughout the play; Olivia mourned for her father's death, but finds a good husband in the end; Malvolio got what he deserved for being so 'full of self-love' as Olivia put it and Orsino finally discovered what he needed, someone to truly love.

There are a few exceptions in this happy ending though; for example what ever happened to Antonio? The last time he is seen he is in custody. Why didn't Shakespeare see fit to give him a happy ending? And what about Feste? Maybe he thinks he's better off on his own. And what of Fabian and Sir Andrew Aguecheek? We never find out what happens to either of them.

Shakespeare uses Twelfth Night as a way to poke fun at the fickle world of love and relationships. He makes us realise just how many types of love there are, some which meet his approval, and some which don't.