

# Dramatic comedy assignment

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Shakespeare dealt with cross-dressing in other comedies including *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice*. In addition, as many critics have noted, Shakespeare has explored other comic features of *Twelfth Night* in other comedies, such as twins (as in *A Comedy of Errors*), separation and re-unification (as in *The Tempest*) and struggles of young lovers (as in *Measure for Measure*). Firstly, Viola-the plays main protagonist- dresses up as a man in order to serve Rosin the Duke of Lariat, where her ship has been wrecked. She adopts the name Corsair and successfully convinces others that she is male, though hither this is due more to Viola's acting skills or to the ignorance of those who interact with her is debatable. This is an example of subverting contemporary social norms, as- in Shakespearean lifetime- women were seen as inferior to men and not allowed to have the same interactions as their male counterparts. However, as Viola's disguise has convinced the other characters that she is male, she has choices available to her which are not available to other women.

Such subversion of social norms is a recurring theme in Shakespearean dramatic comedy (such as in *As You Like It*). Also, this s a source of humor, as the audience is of course aware that Viola is in fact a woman, whereas the other characters are completely oblivious to this fact. In Act 1 , Scene 5, Viola comes to speak with the Countess Olivia, whom Rosin claims to be in love with. When asked by Olivia about Viola's age, Olive's servant Million replies: Note old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy... Its with him a standing water between boy and man.

This shows that Viola is a good enough actress to convince everyone that she is male, as they think she is a teenage boy, implied by reference to her as being halfway teen being a man and being a boy. Viola is in one sense in a state of gender transition, rather than age-related transition as other characters have been led to believe. In a way, Viola is playing a eunuch throughout the play. In fact, Viola is such a gifted actress, that her act unintentionally causes Olivia to fall in love with her. In the second scene of Act 2, Olivia gives Viola a ring as a token of Olivia's affection.

Viola sympathetically says: Poor lady, she were better love a dream.

Disguise, see thou art a wickedness, Wherein the pregnant enemy does much. How easy it is for the proper false in women's waxen hearts to set their forms... What will become of this, As am man, My state is desperate for my master's love; s I am woman, now alas the day, What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe? Here Viola questions the morality of her disguise, as it has misled Olivia into what Viola thinks will be inevitable heartbreak. In addition she expresses a dilemma concerning her androgyny, as shown by the As I am man...

As I am woman part of this monologue. Viola has a twin brother Sebastian. At first, he is presumed dead after the shipwreck. However, it becomes apparent in Act 2 that, like his sister, Sebastian is alive and well. Viola's cross dressing has convinced other characters so much, that when they meet Sebastian they mistake him for Viola and vice versa, usually with disastrous consequences for both twins. This is a source of humor for the audience, as one twin (usually Viola) is made to deal with the consequences of the other twin's actions, reinforcing the element of confusion in dramatic comedy.

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In the play's final act, when Sebastian and Viola appear together for the first and only time, Sebastian's friend Antonio is along with all other harassers present—confused as he asks Sebastian: How have you made division of yourself? As this shows, Viola's disguise is so convincing that Antonio thinks that Sebastian has performed a trick and made it look like there are two of him, when it is in fact due to nothing more than the fact that his twin sister is dressed as a man. Million is the other most notable character who embodies the difference between appearance and reality and he is a servant of Olivia.

Until Act 3, he is depicted as puritanical and severe, frequently reprimanding Sir Toby Belch and others for their raucous behavior. This suggests that the severe character of Million could be saturating the Puritans, a deeply Protestant group who argued that plays were sinful and unholy and called for them to be banned. Because of Maillot's conduct, Sir Toby, with the help of Sir Andrew Cheesecake, Maria, Fabian and Fester decides to play a humiliating practical joke on him. Therefore, Maria writes a love letter (forging Olivia's handwriting) and leaves it in his path, where he finds it.

As Toby and his friends intended, Million falls for the prank, mistakenly believing that Olivia loves him. The letter says that Million must wear bright yellow stockings to impress Olivia and always smile in her presence. In this sense, there is another reference to the difference between appearance and reality, as Million is seen behaving in a way that contradicts his usual behavior. In his next encounter with Olivia, in the fourth scene of the third act, Million flirts with her. When a confused Olivia asks Million why he is smiling when she sent for him on a sad occasion, he replies: Sad, lady? Loud

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be sad. This does make some obstruction in the blood this cross-gartering, but what of that? If it please the eye of one, it is with me as the very true sonnet is: “ Please one, and please all” This shows how bold Million has become in Olive’s presence, in order to flirt with such a high-ranking woman in such a blatant manner, as he tells Olivia that if his cross gartering pleases her, as far as he is concerned, it pleases others-most importantly Million himself. Falsely believing that Million is mad, a worried Olivia has him imprisoned.

With Million imprisoned, Sir Toby and his friends decide to play further pranks on him in order to get further revenge for his previous conduct towards them. In ACTA, Scene 2, they recruit Fest to disguise himself as the priest Master Topaz, which is yet another example of the interest this play has with appearance and reality. When Million insists that he is sane and that his cell is dark, Fest replies: Madman, thou reset. Say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

This shows that Sir Toby and his friends are continuing to antagonize Million by reinforcing the notion that he is insane. Also, Festers disguise has reinforced Maillot’s delusion. This practical joke is an instance where infusion is humorous to the audience, as Million is completely fooled and genuinely thinks that Fest is Master Topaz, whereas the plays audience is aware that it is Fest-as Fest is seen changing into his costume shortly before this scene takes place- and so therefore laugh at Maillot’s ignorance concerning the reality of the situation.

In modern performance however, this scene is sometimes acted in a more serious manner, making the audience pity Million instead of laughing at him, leaving the audience to wonder if the practical joke is cruel, as Million suffers much in his imprisonment, leading the audience to be sympathetic towards him. When Million is released in the play's final scene, he angrily tells Olivia that she has treated him unfairly. However, he finally learns of the prank played on him by Sir Toby and his friends, to which Olivia says: Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee!

In this line, Olivia—though arguably in a sympathetic manner—openly refers to Million as a fool, perhaps suggesting that despite his sensible, severe appearance, Million is arguably no less of a fool than Sir Toby or his friends, ironically, characters who have been criticized by Million for foolishness. Viola and Million are not the only characters who could be said to embody a difference between reality and appearance. For example, Rosin could be said to be such a character, as he professes to love Olivia.

In Act 1, Scene 4, he says to Viola: O then unfold the passion of my love, surprise her with discourse of my dear faith. However, Olivia does not believe Rosin to be sincere, as in Act 1, Scene 5, when Viola refers to Rosin's love as a chapter in his heart, Olivia replies: O, I have read it, it is heresy. Another character who differs in appearance and reality is Fest. Despite behaving foolishly (as part of his job), he is nonetheless one of the most intelligent characters in the play.

In the fifth scene of the first act, Fest attempts to prove that Olivia is a fool. As Olivia is mourning for her dead brother, Fest states that he thinks his soul

is in Hell. When Olivia angrily replies that her brother's soul is in heaven, Fest responds: The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. – Take away the fool, gentlemen This demonstrates Festers wisdom, as he argues that mourning for a good person is foolish, as they have been given an eternal reward in Heaven.