

# "twelfth night" by william shakespeare essay sample

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## **“ Twelfth Night” by William Shakespeare Essay Sample**

In the dramedy “ Twelfth Night”, William Shakespeare presents to us the many different aspects of love and its effects. All the characters in the play are, in one way or another, intertwined in a relationship or committed to a bond of trust. In a story teeming with humor and melancholy, both Orsino and Olivia stand out as perfect examples of how romance can be so influential and overpowering in one’s life. It is therefore interesting to note the similarities in their attitudes towards love and other strong emotions. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to explore these phenomena and uncover the true message behind these intricacies.

At the start of the play, Orsino can be seen pining away in a melancholic mood for his inamorata, Olivia. He talks about his passionate love for her, and how “ when his eyes did see Olivia first, he thought she purged the air of pestilence”. He continues to wax lyrical about his passion, commenting how “ his desires, like fell and cruel hounds, e’er since pursue him”. Orsino laments how he is so in love with Olivia that he is totally mesmerised by her. One inference which can be made of Orsino’s character at this moment is his masochistic nature; savouring the pain of love, drowning himself in self-pity and acting ever so restless. It is worthwhile to note that throughout Orsino’s lovelorn confessions, he has neither a glimpse nor idea of the physical appearance of Olivia. Bearing in mind this fact, it is safe to say that Orsino’s perspective of love and his viewpoint is one that is totally superficial and shallow in nature. How is it possible for someone to claim he is so deeply in love with another person whom he has no idea or perception of?

Is it then fair of us to classify him as someone who has been totally influenced and affected by the overpowering emotions that love brings? As a Duke, one would have expected Orsino to behave as one; firm and unassuming, yet sensitive and perceptive of the emotions of others. However, love has transformed Orsino into a self-pitying, affected and restless being. He displays none of the much-vaunted characteristics of a nobleman. The feeling of love overwhelms Orsino to the point that he spends so much time just thinking about her, stressing his mind to manufacture a string of beautiful words to describe Olivia's unparalleled beauty. Even when one of his stewards Valentine has told him how Olivia will "like a cloistress, veiled walk" and "the element itself, till seven years' heat, shall not behold her face at ample view", Orsino is still so persistent in his love for her that he is encouraged by this piece of news. He is impressed by Olivia's undying love for her deceased brother, and wonders in amazement if only he can make her fall in love with him, then she will doubtless love him with all her "liver, brain and heart".

Olivia is also greatly influenced in her demeanor after she finds herself falling in love with Cesario. After her little tête-à-tête with Cesario, which incidentally, is her first time coming up face to face with Cesario, Olivia then spoke of how "thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit do give thee fivefold blazon" and how "so quickly may one catch the plague?". Considering that it was her first encounter with Cesario, it is peculiar and at the same time absurd for Olivia to say such things. She is attracted by Cesario's astute physical appearance and the way Cesario speaks with such zest and confidence. Wishing that Cesario would come back to hold audience

with her again, Olivia then sent Malvolio to pass a ring to her, on the pretext of Cesario's carelessness to have left it behind. The incident that greatly magnifies the influence love has played on Olivia is one when Olivia confesses her love to Cesario. She spoke directly to her, commenting how "she love thee so that, maugre all thy pride, nor wit nor reason can her passion hide".

Olivia poured out her hearts and made known her feelings towards Cesario. She mentions how she cannot hide her love for "him" and even in the face of rejection; she manages to love "him" more, motivating her to work harder to get "him". The effect that love has on Olivia is so overwhelming that it drives her to deviate from the norms which a Countess of noble stature should abide by. How is it acceptable for a woman of such high social status to confess her love to a mere steward? Considering that Cesario is actually a woman in disguise, this whole episode comes close to being a mockery. Olivia does not even have the slightest notion of Cesario's true identity, it is then baffling she actually has the temerity to say that she likes "him" [Cesario/Viola].

The similarities between Orsino and Olivia are stark and distinct when it comes to how affairs of the heart influence their actions. Both of these characters' actions are totally governed by their love for their partners. The way Shakespeare has portrayed these two characters; it might suggest that love has an extremely persistent and stubborn nature, albeit interjected with superficial factors. It might also show that when one is in love, he or she is sucked helplessly into the mires of passion, forgoing and losing any notion of

normalcy. Indeed, love bears such a strong impact on human beings that it sometimes evolves into something of a menace when one loses all sense of normalcy and morally-upright ethics. It brings forth with it an overwhelming domination over our body, soul and mind. Love is truly a wonder to behold, but at the same time a bottomless pit from which we might never be able to escape, if ever we initiate the downward spiral towards a mire of depression and delusion.