

To what extent does
shakespeare provide
his audience essay



Shakespeare ends Twelfth Night with a resolution for some characters but others have endings which are less satisfying for the audience.

Viola's first problem is that she believes her brother is dead.

'My brother, he is in Elysium.' (A1S2L4) Elysium to an Elizabethan audience would mean 'heaven'; a place where the dead go, meaning that Sebastian has died. To a modern audience this may seem to be a different place, e.g. another island, but Viola's next line

'Perchance he is not drowned: what think you sailors?' (A1S2L5) explains to a modern audience that she believes her brother has died. This is resolved by Viola finding her brother alive,

'Of charity, what kin are you to me?' (A5S1L215). This would be satisfying to both Elizabethan and modern audiences although the discovery continues for a prolonged period of time, which may bore some audiences.

The second problem is that Viola is secretly a woman, disguised as a man to get work in the Count Orsino's house.

'Conceal me, what I am' (A1S2L53)

'Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him' (A1S2L56). Orsino believes her disguise and allows 'him' to work there under the name of 'Cesario', but she is often at risk of being discovered. When Viola discovers her brother is alive she reveals that she is a woman. This would not be completely satisfying to Shakespeare's original audience as they would not see Viola in her woman's clothing, but a modern audience would be more accepting of the

masculine style of dressing, as well as modern productions, e. g. the film ‘ Twelfth night’, including a final scene showing the two couples together and viola in her feminine clothes.

Another problem for viola is her love for Orsino.

‘ What kind of woman is’t?

Of your complexion’ (A2S4L24). In this scene viola is confessing her love for Orsino very subtly. Orsino, unsuspecting of her true identity, informs ‘ him’ that he should love a man younger than himself. At the end of the play Orsino discovers it is a woman he has grown fond of and ‘ falls in love’ with her.

‘ You shall from this time be

Your masters’ mistress’ (A1S2L304-305).

This would be a satisfying to both audiences as viola, despite all of the cross dressing (in Elizabethan theatre it would have been a man playing the woman that pretends to be a man!) and confusion, gets her happy ending.

Violas final problem arises when Olivia announces her love for Cessario.

‘ Love sought is good, but giv’n unsought is better.’ (A3S1L141)

Viola has a hard time rejecting Olivia without revealing her true identity.

More confusion is added when, having met and married Sebastian, Olivia calls Cessario ‘ husband’. The identities are revealed and viola is relieved to discover it is in fact her brother that is Olivia’s husband.

Orsino has one main problem throughout the play. This is his love for Olivia, and her constant rejection. Orsino appears to be in love with the idea of being in love,

‘ If music be the food of love, play on’ (A1S1L1), and has courtly love for Olivia. He sends Cessario to court her for him, but this increases the problem, when Olivia ‘ falls in love’ with Cessario. Olivia seems colder than ever towards the end of the play, and rejects Orsino further.

‘ It is as fat and fulsome to mine ear

As howling after music’ (A5S1L98-99)

Orsino reacts to this by threatening to kill Cessario despite his ever growing fondness of him, purely to spite Olivia.

‘ I’ll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,

To spite a raven’s heart within a dove’ (A5S1L119-120)

When viola reveals herself Orsino ‘ falls in love’ with her instead.

‘ I shall have share in this most happy wreck’ (A5S1L250) This may satisfy an Elizabethan audience as true love often happened instantaneously in plays, but a modern audience may be more sceptical of Orsino’s fickleness, as he changes his mind from

‘ Here comes the countess, now heaven walks on earth’ (A5S1L86) to

‘ But when in other habits you are seen,

Orsino's mistress and his fancys queen.' (A5S1L364-365) within one scene.

This also solves the problem of Orsino's confusion over his feelings for Cessario, despite the possibility that Orsino simply agreed to 'love' viola.

Olivia has a few problems, the first of which is that she is mourning the death of her brother.

'Till seven years' heat' (A1S2L26)

'A brother's dead love,' (A1S2L31)

Olivia uses this '7 years mourning' as a shield from Orsino's courting, as she claims she can not stand the sight of men.

'(They say) she hath abjured the sight

And company of men.' (A1S2L40-41)

However during this time of mourning Olivia falls in love with Cessario and gives up her mourning.

'Why then, methinks 'tis time to smile again' (A3S1L111) Olivia stops wearing her black dress and hints at her love for Cessario.

This is not a very satisfying ending to this problem a Olivia is being very fickle, although Elizabethan audiences, especially the higher classes, may be able to empathize with her as women were often married against their will, and 'mourning' would have been a cunning excuse.

Another Problem for Olivia is that Cessario refuses to love her.

' And that no woman has; nor never none

Shall mistress be of it, save I alone' (A3S1L144-145) Cessario claims that no woman has ' his' heart but himself, hinting about her true identity. Olivia doesn't accept this and persists. Olivia asks Sebastian to marry her, thinking it is Cessario. She is embarrassed when the truth comes out,

' Betrothed to both a maid and a man' (A5S1L247) but is relieved that she married the man.

' Nature in her bias drew that.' (A5S1L244) meaning that it was fate that she happened to marry a man, rather than be deceived.

This would satisfy an audience, and may make the Elizabethan audience laugh at Olivia's confusion when the man, playing a woman dress as a man (Viola/Cessario) reveals him/herself to be a woman.

Olivia's final problem is Orsino, Sir Andrew and Malvolio are all trying to win her love. Orsino is constantly rejected, and Sir Andrew is so stupidly ridiculous that he fails to gain Olivia's attention, even for a moment, despite his firm belief that he is the one to win her over:

But Malvolio, believing that Olivia loves him goes to her, as if mad, in yellow cross gartered and in yellow stockings.

"" Wilt thou go to bed Malvolio?"

" To bed? Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee"

“ God comfort thee! Why does thou smile so and kiss thy hand so oft?”

(A3S4L27-30) Olivia believes Malvolio to be sick or mad and tells him to go to rest, but Malvolio takes this as an invitation to go to bed with her. Olivia sends for someone to care for him.

This would make a modern audience laugh but would affect a Shakespearian audience deeper, as the richer part would be amused at the idea of the scandal of a servant believing his mistress loves him, and the poorer part would be satisfied with the idea that the poor downtrodden servants and outcast family members got their revenge.

Malvolio has one main problem throughout the play, and that is his love of Olivia. About half way through he discovers a note and he believes it to be Olivia writing of her love for him. He follows the note to the letter,

‘ Be opposite with kinsmen, surly with servants,’

‘ Yellow stockings ... ever cross gartered’ (A2S5L124&127). He goes to Olivia cross-gartered, in yellow stockings, smiling, and being rude to the servants.

Olivia believes he is mad and sends for someone to look after him, but he convinces himself that she really is in love with him. Malvolio is locked up for insanity and begins to believe he truly is mad. Eventually, after sir Toby has decided they have pushed it too far and left, feste allows Malvolio to write a letter to Olivia. When he is freed he discovers he was tricked and swears revenge on everyone:

‘ I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you!’ (A5S1L355)

This would satisfy an Elizabethan audience, as the 'bad guy' gets what he deserves, but a modern audience may pity Malvolio because of his cruel treatment. Also this ending isn't completely tied up as it would leave an audience wonder what his revenge may be.

Sir Toby's first problem in the play is his drunkenness. Sir Toby does not see this as a problem so therefore it is not resolved. Despite this, it is a source of great comic entertainment and therefore would satisfy any audience; e. g.

'I hate a

Drunken rogue' (A5S1L185-186)

His next problem is his love for Maria, which he gradually realises throughout the play. Maria and Sir Toby get married, but this is unsatisfying to an audience as they do not get to see them get married, they are only told at the end of the play.

'In recompense whereof he hath married her.' (A5S1L343) This also raises the idea that Sir Toby may have just married her to keep her out of trouble for the prank they played on Malvolio.

Sir Toby's final problem is his debt to Sir Andrew. He does not pay Sir Andrew back throughout the play and then it is forgotten at the end, which would leave audiences unsatisfied.

Sir Andrew is the stupidest character in the play.

'[Reads] Fare thee well, and God have mercy upon one of

Our souls! He may have mercy on mine, but my hope is better,

And so look to thyself, thy friend, as thou usest him, and thy sworn

Enemy,

Andrew Aguecheek' (A3S4L140-144 Sir Andrews duel letter to Cessario)'

Although to a small extent his character is given added depth with the line

' I was adored once too.'

He believes he has a chance with Olivia,

' A foolish knight that you brought in one night

Here to be here wooer' (A1S3L12-13), and that Sir Toby is his friend. He soon realises he does not have a hope with Olivia,

' Faith, I'll home tomorrow, Sirtoby; your neice will not

Be seen' (A1S3L86-87), in fact Olivia ignores him throughout the play. Also, at the end of the play, Sir Toby snaps and tells him what he really thinks.

' Will you help – an ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave,

a thin faced knave, a gull? (A5S1L190-191), and Sebastian leaves without saying anything else.

This is more dissatisfying for modern audiences more that elziabethan audiences, as the modern audience would pity him and would want to see a reaction, whereas the elizabethan audience would laugh at the foolish man

being told ' where to shove it', but wonder why the character has no real ending, but fades into the background.

Sebastian comes in about halfway through the play, rescued by Antonio and believing that his sister is dead,

' For some hour before you took

me from the breach of the sea was my sister drowned' (A2S1L14-15).

He goes to orsinos court and is repeatedly mistaken for Cessario. When Olivia mistakes him for Cessario she proposes marriage to him

' 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.' (A4S3L23-26).

Confused, Sebastian accepts this offer and later Cessario is mistaken for Olivias husband. This causes chaos until Sebastian arrives and all is revealed. This would satisfy both audience as the chaos and confusion would be funny to both shakespearean people, and modern audiences.

Antonio is a Fugitive in Illyria. He risks life to ensure sebastians safety.

' I have many enemies in Orsino's court' (A2S2L33)