Character Analysis Viola

For most critics, Viola is one of Shakespeare's most delightful and beloved feminine creations from his comedies. Surrounded by characters who express the extremes of emotionalism and melancholy — that is, Viola is caught between Duke Orsino's extreme melancholy and Lady Olivia's aggressive emotionalism — yet she represents the norm of behavior in this strange world of Illyria.

Due to her circumstances, she is, first of all, a very practical and resourceful person. As a shipwrecked orphan who has no one to protect her, she must resort to some means whereby her safety is assured. She knows that a single woman unattended in a foreign land would be in an extremely dangerous position. Consequently, she evaluates the sea captain's character, finds it suitable, and wisely places her trust in him; then she disguises herself as a boy so that she will be safe and have a man's freedom to move about without protection. Consequently, Viola is immediately seen to be quick-witted enough to evaluate her situation, of sound enough judgment to recognize the captain's integrity, resourceful enough to conceive of the disguise, and practical enough to carry out this design.

Viola also has a native intelligence, an engaging wit, and an immense amount of charm. These qualities will help her obtain her position with Duke Orsino, and they are also the same qualities which cause Lady Olivia to immediately fall in love with her. It was her charming personality, we should remember, which won her the sea captain's loyalty, without whose help her disguise would have never succeeded. And within a short three days' time, her wit, charm, loyalty, and her skill in music and conversation won for her the complete trust of Duke Orsino. We should also remember that even though she is in love with the duke, she is loyal in her missions when she tries to win Lady Olivia's love for him.

For the modern audience, Viola's charm lies in her simple, straightforward, good-humored personality. She could have used her disguise for all sorts of connivings, yet she is forthright and honest in all of her dealings with Lady Olivia and with Duke Orsino, albeit she does use her disguise to entertain the audience with delightful verbal puns. Perhaps the most surprising thing about Viola is that a young lady in possession of so many attributes falls in love with someone who is as moody and changeable as the duke.

John Ruskin says,"Shakespeare has no heroes but heroines." He perhaps means that heroines of Shakespeare surpass the heroes in romantic comedies. Whether As You Like It or Twelfth Night or The Merchant of Venice the heroines are the queens of beauty, witintellect,wisdom and faithfulness. They are more sensitive to intuition and responsive to emotion. Such a heroine is Viola in Twelfth Night.

As F.S.Boas says-

Equally removed from the Duke….and from Olivia….stands the figure of Viola,perfect in its balance of sensibility, gaiety and strength. In her,Shakespeare has united qualities,which he usually tends to divide between two different types of women. She has the softness of hero Priavea combined with the resolute will and ready tongue of Portia and Rosalin.

When Viola's ship is wrecked and she is helpless and shelterless,she decides to shelter in the court of Duke Orsino. But she is a young girl and cannot protect her modesty herself.So,she decides to disguise herself as a boy and assumes the name of Cesario. Clearly, her disguise, iintelligent and clever device to meet her differently.This also points out of her presence of mind,boldness and sharp intellect.

Disguise may be a common devise for most of the heroines of Shakespeare as Portia and Rosalind do,Viola does not use for roguish pleasures. Again though she disguises herself as a boy,she is unable to change her nature and heart.When she listens to Orsino's story of love and sorrow,she moves to pity. Her tender, loving heart goes out for him. She begins to love him without telling him know that she is a woman.Though he finds that she has all the resemblance to a woman, that she has "Diana's lips and a maiden's shrill small voice,"he does not doubt her sex identity.This points out her intelligent handling her situation.

Viola's love is pure noble and sacrificing.Her love is not the sentimental love of Duke, Orsino for Olivia not the impulsive love of Olivia for Sebastian, nor the sensual love of Sir Toby Belch for Maria, nor the shallow love of Sir Andrew for Olivia, nor the self love of Malvolio. Viola's love is sincere and noble love

of the heart. She loves Orsino and never speak of .She suffers in her love when she,goes to woo,Olivia for Orsino. She is not zealous in her love.Her love is a monument of patience smiling at grief. Clearly her love is noble, ideal, and self-sacrifice.

Viola is sincere, honest and truthful.She performance her duty to win Olivia for Orsino, does it honestly and faithfully when she meets Olivia,and Olivia falls in love with her,she tells Olivia truthfully that she will never marry any woman. She tells Olivia-

I have one heart,onebosom,one truth and that no woman has;nor never more shall mistress him of it,save I alone

Viola is not ungrateful to anyone.She hates ingratitude.When Antonio charges her with ingratitude she repudiates it saying–

I know of none nor know you by voice or any feature.I hate ingratitude more in a man than lying vainness…

Viola is essentially a woman.She may disguise herself as a man,but she has woman's tenderness, pity lack of physical boldness and courage.She is afraid of blood shed and violence. She nearly faint at the sight of bright swords in the brief comic scene of her fight with Sir Andrew.

Above all, Viola is witty. She is as strong a wit as any other heroines of Shakespearean comedy. When she meet Olivia for the first time, Olivia asks her if she is a comedian. Viola replies,"I am not that I play." Again when Olivia wants to know about her beauty from Viola, she tells Olivia-

Lady you are the cruelest

If you will lead those graces to grave

And leave the world no copy.

Once again,when Olivia wants to know how much Orsino loves her,Viola says-

With adorations,fertile tears,

With groans that thunder love,with sighs of fire.

Thus,Viola is typical Shakespearean heroine.She has beauty,wit and honesty,truthfulness,wisdom ,delicacy and tenderness.She has compound of beauty,Portia's wit and Rosalind's loveliness.She is an example of one who is born great and achieved greatness.She is a heroine.Drama is completely in live with other great heroines of Shakespearean comedy.

CROSS DRESSING IN TWELFTH NIGHT

What strikes most modern audiences as unusual about Twelfth Night is the fact that its chief female

character is dressed like a boy for most of the play. The play then raises questions about gender, identity

and sexuality and how all of these things can be performed. Of course, in Shakespeare's time, boy actors

played the female roles in the London theatres, so in a play like Twelfth Night, we have a disorientating

scenario in which a boy actor plays the part of a young woman, who plays the part of a young-ish boy;

this gender confusion provides a productive route for thinking about the elasticity of identity and how

selves are performed in everyday life, topics Shakespeare was deeply interested in.

It is useful to understand that in Shakespeare's day, people relied upon outward appearance to determine

one's social background and their gender. The Tudor sumptuary laws (laws that dictated what materials,

colours fabrics could be worn by each social class) were, in most instances, adhered to very carefully.

Wearing clothes that were not suited to one's class and gender would have been viewed as a fairly

significant transgression of social boundaries. Some writers even felt that religious boundaries might be

crossed if men and women started wearing each other's clothes. In the Bible, Deuteronomy 22:5, for

example, forbids male cross-dressing, so it could be interpreted as a sin to wear clothes belonging to a

different sex/gender. There seemed to be quite a bit of opposition to cross-dressing: sermons preached

in church cried out against it from time to time, and in the early seventeenth century two pamphlets were

published which spoke out furiously and anxiously against male and female cross-dressing: Haec-Vir

and Hic Mulier, both published anonymously in 1615. The writers of these pamphlets argued that crossdressing was 'monstrous', unnatural and made one look like they didn't belong to any one gender.

But while there was an opposition, it didn't stop the practice of wearing clothes that were deemed

inappropriate to one's sex. A very bold woman, known famously as Moll Cutpurse, used to dress as a

man, sometimes referring to herself as Tom (though her real name was Mary Frith), may have been a

thief (hence the name 'cutpurse') but what she was most well known for was her tendency to wear a

man's doublet and hose, smoke pipes in public, drink and swear. She was so famous and interesting to

people, that Thomas Dekker (a fellow playwright) wrote a play about her called The Roaring Girl.

The most visible examples of cross-dressing were those that took place on the commercial stages of

London. Boy actors, aged between 12 and 21, played all the female roles in the plays performed between

1567 and 1642. Women did not start acting publicly in England until the 1660s. The audiences that

attended plays in this period - numbering in the tens of thousands- would have grown accustomed to

seeing boys play the parts of women, therefore. These performances were apparently very convincing.

Henry Jackson, a scholar at Oxford University, saw a performance of Othello at his college and remarked

how moved the audience was by Desdemona's (or rather, the boy actor's) performance. We might

wonder how did boy actors perform the parts of women so convincingly? Well, femininity is defined

by gesture, height, gait (how one stands and walks), clothes, hair, make up or complexion and voice.

Preadolescent and some adolescent boys that hadn't grown facial hair and whose voices hadn't broken

yet or still 'piped' like a woman's could easily play female parts by simply putting on skirts and gowns,

elaborate wigs and make up. This kind of 'transvestism' as many scholars now refer to it, upset the antitheatrical writers, like the Puritans, who worried that the parade or 'pageant' of young boys dressed as

women on stage would corrupt the hearts and minds of the spectators. It was seen as immoral, sinful and

potentially harmful to their own masculine development for boys to dress as and impersonate women.

Cross-dressing also took place in rural as well as urban communities in Shakespeare's England. The early

modern calendar was marked by religious occasions when people would celebrate through festive rituals

and entertainments. On holidays such as Easter, Whitsuntide, Midsummer, Christmas, Twelfth Night and

Candlemas, communities would gather for games, feasting, drinking, pageants, amateur plays, revels,

disguising, mummers plays, morris dances and more. The idea behind such festive occasions was social

release: a time to forget every day troubles and routines, a time to live for a day as a lord or to play the

fool; these holidays provided an excuse to be or live for a day as the opposite of what you are in real life.

Cross-dressing was quite common during such festivities.

In such a social context, cross-dressing may not seem quite as odd when we encounter it in Twelfth Night.

Viola dresses as a boy because she arrives alone (apart from the Captain) in a strange or foreign land.

Some women dress as boys in Shakespeare for protection, like Rosalind in As You Like It. By dressing as a

boy, Viola is able to serve the Duke in his courtship of Olivia, while getting close to him. She realises how

much she loves Orsino and beneath the disguise finds the freedom to share her feelings as if she/he is

talking about his/her sister. When Sebastian- her twin brother- arrives on the scene, Shakespeare is able

to exploit the comical effects of such identity confusion.

Only when Sebastian returns can Viola/Cesario return to her female self. Significantly, the reunion of

the twins enables the play's love matches to take place within 'appropriate' social boundaries (well,

appropriate to Shakespeare's conservative society), that is, a match between a man and a woman.

While this is the case in the fiction, we may do well to remember that the actors who played the parts of

Olivia, Viola and perhaps Maria (who might have been played by an older actor) were young adolescent

boys, reminding us that gender is a fluid category and, with the right clothes, wigs and makeup, can be

performed with style and eloquence.

MALVOLIO

Malvolio appears in most scenes and is characterised throughout as a puritanical, fun-spoiling, pompous, humourless man. He is a snob, and jealous of his status as head of the household. He has an inflated opinion of himself and considers himself to be perfect. At the same time he has no idea of how to deal with people.

He interferes with anyone having fun, reprimanding them for getting drunk and disorderly, keeping late hours and being noisy. He does that in an aggressive, confrontational way. They decide to punish him for it.

His humourless and social-climbing attitude to life make him an easy target for everyone – servants, guests and relatives of Olivia alike – and he becomes the victim of a cruel joke that drives most of the comedy in the play.

Some of the household, led by Sir Toby and Maria, one of Olivia's ladies-in-waiting, devise a plot that plays to his delusionary opinion of himself. They write a letter that seems to have been penned by Oliva, and leave it where Malvolio will find it. The letter suggests that she's fallen in love with him.

Malvolio falls for it and that drives his behaviour, in which he makes a fool of himself and provides entertainment for the whole household. The letter writer instructs the black-suited puritan to wear the latest fashion, which is yellow stockings and garters that cross each other up the wearer's legs (cross garters).

Yellow is, in fact, a colour that Olivia can't abide, and she is also contemptuous of the emptiness of fashion. The letter also instructs Malvolio to smile, something no-one has ever seen him do. So when he appears with a rigid smile, wearing the yellow stockings with cross garters, she thinks he has gone mad, particularly as he addresses her in sexually suggestive language. As a result she has him locked up in a cell.

The other characters have a great deal more fun with him as they take their revenge, visiting him in his cell and goading him, watching his suffering, and laughing at him.

He is released at the end of the play and he sours the celebratory atmosphere as, in true comic mode, the characters are paired up in love relationships after all the misunderstandings and near-misses during the course of the play.

Unlike in most Elizabethan playwrights' work, Shakespeare's comedies, while having that joyous resolution, always have something quite unpleasant beneath it, and it is the cruelty inflicted on Malvolio and his appearance as a broken man swearing to take his revenge on his tormentors that provide the unpleasant taste left in the mouth after watching that scene in Twelfth Night.

FESTE

We use the word 'fool' these days to describe a foolish person but the fool in Elizabethan drama is a man who says and does ridiculous things specifically to make people laugh. That is 'fooling', and so he is a fool. But that is his profession and, in real life, he is a sharp, observant, clever and wise person, who is able to put on a good comic act.

The convention was that if there was a fool in a play you could bet that he would be the man who best knew what was going on. If there is a lot of dramatic irony (where the audience knows things that the characters don't), for example, you can be sure that there will be one character who will have a knowledge and understanding of them. That will be the fool.

A fool should not be confused with a clown. The word 'clown' has changed. In Shakespeare's time a clown was a simple rural man – a country bumpkin, a yokel.

One of the characteristics of the fool is that he has licence to speak truth to power with no holds barred – in a context where no-one else dare do that, for fear of their lives, in the case of monarchs and princes. Feste says outrageous things to Olivia, verging on calling her stupid, making her laugh at things that no-one else would dare say.

Another characteristic is that he acts like the chorus in Greek drama – commenting on the characters and the action for the benefit of the audience.

The fool does not normally have a dramatic role but some fools do, and Feste is one of those. He not only participates in the scheme to humiliate the unpopular steward, Malvolio, but takes a leading part in tormenting him. In that sense Feste is quite cruel, and even though we may think Malvolio deserves what he gets, Feste perhaps lays it on too much.

In accordance with the convention Feste is the most intelligent character in the play. He is by far the wisest. He is probably the most famous of Shakespeare's fools and he is a great example of the fool in Renaissance drama. He moves freely among the other characters and comments on what is going on among them. He has an extraordinary command of language. Olivia constantly asks his opinion. With his dramatic role in the play, and his conventional fool role, where he looks in at the action, he is both inside and outside the play, which makes him a marked innovation in drama, anticipating the postmodern plays of the 20th century.

The best assessment of Feste's wisdom comes in the text itself where, in Act 3, Scene 1 Viola, the other very intelligent character in the play, has an encounter with him. Shakespeare actually pauses the action to allow her to comment on him in a strange soliloquy:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,

And to do that well craves a kind of wit.

He must observe their mood on whom he jests,

The quality of persons, and the time,

And, like the haggard, check at every feather

That comes before his eye. This is a practise

As full of labor as a wise man's art,

For folly that he wisely shows is fit.

But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

Twelfth Night: Title and Theme of Festivity

Twelfth Night, the last day of Christmas feasting, the last night of holiday, is the day before normal life resumes. It is the time to put on masks and disrupt the normal order of life. Carnival, according to the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, "celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank… the feast of becoming, change and renewal." The play Twelfth Night itself is likewise, a suspension in time, but a conscious one, making the spectator aware of the interplay between festivity on one hand and real life on the other. This is because, while the plot is both preposterous and entertaining, its implications are far more serious.

Twelfth Night is a festival in some branches of Christianity marking the coming of the Epiphany. Different traditions mark the date of Twelfth Night on either 5

January or 6 January; the Church of England, Mother Church of the Anglican Communion, celebrates Twelfth Night on the 5th and “refers to the night before Epiphany, the day when the nativity story tells us that the wise men visited the infant Jesus”.

Historically, the twelfth night refers to the festivities of the sixth day of January- a festival of the “ Epiphany or the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles”. Possibly, the play was specially composed for performance at the court of Queen Elizabeth on the twelfth night of Christmas of 1601-02. However this apparently simple explanation of the title is challenged by the sub-title (Or What You Will). All the comic elements being as it where, thrown out simultaneously and held in a sort of equipoise so that, the audience is left to fix the preponderance according to their will. Thus every single spectator may, within certain limits and conditions take the work in whatever sense he wills. This is because, where no special prominence is given to any one aspect of a play, there is a wider scope for individual preference and “greater freedom” as Hudson comments “…for each to select for virtual prominence such parts as will best knit in with what is uppermost in his thoughts.”

In fact the second title may be compared to the title of As You Like It. By appending the subtitle Shakespeare possibly meant to say merely, as Conrad suggests, “ …herein are to be found comicalities of all kinds…disguises and delusions and mad pranks. What to call it, I know not, call it a ‘masquerade’, ‘a twelfth night’, or ‘whatever you like’.” In fact, the play being a broken landscape of the illusory world of Illyria, full of love and laughter, fancy and imagination, it is hard indeed to pin it down to a specific title.

The central game of disguise in Twelfth Night is highly improbable. Orsino employs the shipwrecked Viola (Dressed as a boy), to woo the countess Olivia for him. The situation already contains a potential for a comedy, rendering(giving) a greater cognition(knowledge) to the audience compared to the characters. This position of superior knowledge is reinforced when the audience learn that Viola’s brother (Sebastian) is still alive. The love triangle including Orsino, Viola and Olivia makes the entire situation quite complex. But this dance of courtship takes place against a less frivolous background centered around the inhabitants of Olivia’s household yet it is in this arena that the presence of a single character bridges the gap between the world of play and the reality- Feste. His function includes the uttering of general comments which

bear no specific relation to events taking place on stage but remind us of the complexities which exist in non-festive world.

Malvolio confronting the revelers.

(Act II, Scene 3)

Quite strikingly the phrase “Twelfth Night” is first uttered in a conversation between Toby and Andrew- the two most important figures of the sub-plot. While Toby plots for deliberately deceiving Malvolio, Andrew deceives himself unknowingly. Thus the title is best suited to the temperament of revelry of two drunk men. These characters hold up action, wasting and ignoring the demands of time. But they do conspire together to produce their own action, showing even a kind of cruelty. Thus, while the disguises and tricks go on, there is an air of menace. “Carnival” observes Kate Flint, “… can be cruel; can tread on the edge of danger”. This cruelty, as the play shows, can be present unrecognized in the normal life and attitudes as well as in drama which uses exaggeration to make this more prominent.

In fact, to highlight the more disturbing aspects of the play is, to return to the Renaissance spirit of carnival. Nietzsche, the late 19th century German philosopher wrote, “… a royal wedding or great public celebration would have been incomplete without executions…there is no feast without cruelty”.

The cruelty in gulling of Malvolio, the melancholic music of Feste then is not a deviation but a necessary ingredient of Twelfth Night’s festivity. Indeed, the world of carnival, mingling pleasures with pain, exaggerates tendencies of real life rather than providing an escape from it. On the level of events, every character (except Malvolio) attain what they willed, but in their achievement there is a great deal of dramatic intervention – unrealistic reconciliations that makes the play different from real life.

However the play does not close on a controversial re-establishment of gender relations as the pair of lovers go on to harmonious marital bliss the final focus is on the unpartnered figure of Feste. Alone on the stage he catapults the audience once again back to the cold January of real life. And in the last stanza of his song he links the world of the theatre to the normal order of existence. It marks the commencement of real life, far from the ceremonial joviality of Twelfth Night where “we make take out of it what we will…leave aside what we will, wander in it where we will”(Brooke). It marks the end of an order of dramatic existence and in establishing this difference the title is aptly justified.