



PARALLELISMS AND CONTRASTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S TWELFTH NIGHT

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Abstract

Twelfth Night is one of the greatest comedies by Shakespeare. Since it is a romantic comedy, most of the discussion of the play centres on different aspects of love while there is also some discussion on how disguise and mistaken identities contribute to the romance as well as to its comic dramatization. Besides the two sub-plots, Shakespeare has used in the play wit and physiological humours, all of which contributed to creating his paragons of romantic and comic characters. In respect of all these elements there are obviously some similarities as well as differences among the characters of this play. This study seeks to reveal the parallelisms and contrasts that exist in *Twelfth Night* regarding all these elements and the extent to which they are used. If these elements of love, disguise, wit, physiological humours, and sub-plots are considered together, *Twelfth Night* can be seen as pervaded with a crisscrossing pattern of parallelisms and contrasts. To read the play thus can give insight into its characters and themes and help understand better what make *Twelfth Night* such an enjoyable romantic comedy.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Romantic comedy, Disguise, Wit, Physiological humours, Plot

Introduction

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1623/1997) is called "the most harmonious of Shakespeare's human romances" (Knight, 1932/2002, p. 127), "the most delightful, harmonious and accomplished of Shakespeare's romantic comedies" (Salingar 1958), and "the greatest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies" (Jenkins 1965, p. 76). *Twelfth Night* has some very important elements like love, disguise, wit, physiological humours, and sub-plots, where analogy can be explored in order to see which similarities and differences exist among these, their nature, and to what extent they exist.

There have been numerous studies on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* which cover different aspects of the play; however, one that would discuss aspects like love, disguise, wit, humour, and sub-plots at the same time might show how these can be studied to find out comparisons and contrasts among the characters of the play. Some criticisms, for example, have explored the romantic aspects of the play, like the theme of love (Schalkwyk, 2005), friendship (Osborne, 2011), sexuality (Smith, 2011; Hutson, 1996), forms of masculinity (Stanivuković, 2011), and the handling of gender boundaries (Charles, 1997). Some studied the comic aspects of the play, for example, comic matter in *Twelfth Night* in relation with the other Shakespearean comedies (Crane, 1955), Shakespeare's comic art (Leech & Margeson, 1965), the pattern of revelry and reverie (Royle, 1964), the extent of pleasure in the play (Logan, 1982), the play's sub-title (Taylor, 1974), and even the element of detective fiction in the play's plot construction (Lewis, 2011). Some critiques explored social and moral aspects, for example, the connection between art and human nature (Palmer, 1967), complex relations of language and reality (Eagleton, 1967), madness and social ranks (Kamps, 2011), and the play as a moral comedy (Hollander, 1959). Some studies investigated the aspect of performance of the play, for example, the exotic in theatricality (Carles, 2011), and the play's theatre history (Potter, 1985), while some other studies discussed the minor characters (Preston, 1970); and some even examined the textual editing of the play (Turner, 1975), use of modal auxiliary verbs in the play (Tyson, 2014), and even the aural quality of the dramatic language like puns (Gay, 2003).

J. F. Bernard (2018) has discussed melancholy as a humour in *Twelfth Night* as well as in Shakespeare's other plays; however, no comparisons and contrasts are made between the characters in terms of melancholy

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while the other humours are not addressed. J. P. C. Brown (2014) has discussed forms of doubleness in the play and made comparisons between the locales of the play, the factual and the figurative, the genres of romance and satire, the play's interest in text and performance, as well as the mistaken identities of the twins. However, a discussion that makes a comparative study of Shakespeare's use of the elements like love, disguise, wit, physiological humours, and sub-plots all at the same time can show what kinds of parallelisms and contrasts exist in *Twelfth Night*, how they exist, and the extent to which they pervade the play. Such a study might not only give some insight into the various characters and the playwright's dramatic art, but it can also enhance the enjoyment of the play itself and help achieve a better understanding.

Discussion

The play abounds with splendid parallelisms and cogent contrasts that weave a complex pattern to highlight that it is a romantic comedy at its best. Love, presented as the major theme of the play, on the one hand, connects all the characters which show great similitude as well as difference, and on the other, it propels the action of the main plot and the sub-plots, which run parallel to one another. Striking similarities and contrarities exist too between the characters in respect of disguise, wit, and physiological humours, and thus contribute immensely to a pattern of parallelisms and contrasts in the play.

Love is the most dominant theme in *Twelfth Night* as it is a romantic comedy, and its four principal lovers display a variety of love which stand out as they are marked by parallelisms and contrasts. There are elements of sentimentality, mutability, egocentricity, and imagination in the romantic love that Shakespeare presents in the play, but these elements amalgamate in peculiar combination to constitute particular modes of love represented by the principal lovers – Orsino, Olivia, Viola, and Malvolio. As love permeates the whole play, its elements demand a separate and rather thorough discussion.

At the very lifting of the curtain, the audience meets Duke Orsino, who can be regarded as a sentimental lover as he indulges unboundedly in the realm of love, pines for Countess Olivia, and is presently having recourse to music, “the food of love” (1.1.1); but Orsino finds love declining in value along with emotions other than love because love has a power of mutating everything else that it incorporates into itself. His successful resorting to love-songs later vindicates his insight into his own sentimentality, his “sweet pangs” of love (2.4.16). Since Orsino thinks that Viola will also be a sentimental lover, who, unbeknownst to him, is in the disguise of a young man, calls herself “Cesario” and undertakes the task of his servant and emissary, and since he is ignorant that she has already fallen in love with him, he implores his remembrance in her love and defines what sentimental love is:

such as I am, all true lovers are,
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,
Save in the constant image of the creature
That is belov'd. (2.4.17-20)

Viola, however, is no such sentimentalist. Olivia, on the other hand, is a sentimentalist, which Orsino not only knows, but also highly appreciates, expecting that he will become her “one self king”, when love called “the rich golden shaft / Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else / That live in her” and when her “liver, brain, and heart, / These sovereign thrones, are all supplied and fill'd” with the passion of love only (1.1.34-38). Olivia has vowed to renounce the world in order to keep alive a dead brother's memory with “eye-offending brine” and also to keep her “brother's dead love” “fresh / And lasting, in her sad remembrance” (1.1.29-31). Olivia's eventual falling in love with “Cesario”, her persistent lover Orsino's messenger, corroborates that she is always swayed with emotions and that love for her proves to be a stronger emotion than sorrow. The centrality of *Twelfth Night* essentially rests on producing “unrequited love” which is “expressing itself through unreliable messengers” (Leggatt, 1974/2005, p. 221). H.B. Charlton (1938/2005) observes in this regard, “*Twelfth Night* is largely preoccupied with the disclosure of unbalanced sentiment. There is the enervating sentimentality of Orsino, there is the unrestrained emotionalism of Olivia” (p. 288).

As for mutability, it is a prominent feature of sentimentality and in the play it highlights “the protean, contradictory nature of love” (Salingar, 1958). All the three true lovers – Orsino, Olivia, and Viola, evaluate and compare the nature of love of both men and women, and then pass their personal judgements, which in most cases prove to be ironically true in an exquisite manner. Orsino observes,

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn
Than women's are. (2.4. 33-35)

Such a judgement absolutely applies to Orsino's own case because he shifts his object of love from Olivia to Viola without much distress and irresoluteness, while this applies but partially to Olivia because, though she wavers several times since the commencement of her experience of love, she is finally satisfied with someone who has the same appearance of her beloved "Cesario" but has the essentially opposite sex, that is, with Sebastian, who has a countenance similar to his sister Viola's but is in fact a male. Even the following contradictory reflection of Orsino proves to be a half-truth for Olivia:

Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,
No motion of their liver, but the palate,
That suffers surfeit, cloyment and revolt. (2.4.97-99)

This is evident in the stages of experience Olivia undergoes. When she has fallen in love with "Cesario", who is in fact Viola in disguise, she questions herself in a soliloquy: "Even so quickly may one catch the plague?" (1.5.295), and answers herself: "ourselves we do not owe" (1.5.310). She only half-heartedly assures the unemotional and dispassionate "Cesario": "Be not afraid, good youth, I will not have you" (3.1.131). When "Cesario" decides to discontinue her emissarial task for Orsino, Olivia thinks momentarily of preferring Orsino to "Cesario": "Yet come again: for thou perhaps mayst move / That heart which now abhors, to like his love" (3.1.163-64).

However, henceforward the story of Olivia's love is one of regeneration from sentimental changeability to unequivocal, unflinching, and practical passion for "Cesario", as is evident not only in her observation that "youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd" (3.4.3), but also in this appeal to Sebastian whom she takes to be "Cesario":

Plight me the full assurance of your faith
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace. (4.3.26-28)

Orsino's last comment on the comparative evaluation of love of a woman and of himself has a two-fold irony, and thus it throws light not only on his own sentimental and variable emotion of love but also on the unsentimental and constant love of Viola; he advises "Cesario", who is in fact Viola in disguise:

Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia. (2.4.101-103)

He himself proves to be a greater sentimentalist than Olivia and is oblivious of how superbly exquisite a woman's love for him can be. Even before knowing that Olivia is secretly married, he calls her an "uncivil lady" as his love for her begins to recede (5.11.112). Olivia's love, once engendered, is both centripetal and centrifugal at the same time before it becomes finally concentrated; however, Orsino's love is at first sonorous, then sinuous, and finally channeled into a different stream. The steward Malvolio, on the other hand, is neither a sentimental lover like Orsino and Olivia, nor an unselfish lover like Viola. Malvolio is egocentric, motivated by social aspiration, and thus he is "sick of self-love" (1.5.90); hence his is a love uniquely unrequited.

Cogently contrasted with these lovers – Olivia, Orsino, and Malvolio, who either show sentimental and mutable love or self-love, the only composed and selfless lover is Viola, whose love is a sane and serene norm, suitable to judge the heroines of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, for example, Rosalind of *As You Like It*. Viola's natural, unflinching love works as a touchstone in judging the other lovers and it also reveals their differences in love. H. Jenkins argues, "In the emotional pattern of the play Viola represents a genuineness of feeling against which the illusory can be measured" (1965, p. 79). Viola is a paragon of constancy: "I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth" (3.1.158). Endowed with emotional sobriety, she can condone Olivia's weakness for her, "Alas [our] frailty is the cause, not we, / For such as we are made [of,] such we be" (2.1.31-32); and as "Cesario" she can lucidly contradict Orsino's verbal onslaught on women: "In faith, they are as true of heart as we" (2.4.106).

Parallelisms and contrasts can be found to exist in *Twelfth Night* also on the psychological plane of love, for example, in the light of Freud's psychodynamic theory. This is a play which "deals with the psychological value of revelry and its limits as well" (Salingar, 1974/2004, p. 242). As Viola courageously undertakes to be

Orsino's messenger of love, she suffers mental agony, an inner conflict, when she has to keep secret her love for the Duke as well as her identity though she faces all the social odds and is forced to sacrifice her emotion of love in order to carry out her duty. In an inner conflict, according to S. Freud (1923/1961), repression of the emotion of love in the id may get an upper hand of the intention to rebel against the social norms of obligation and the moral convictions of sacrifice, both of which are represented by the superego (p. 37). While Viola is sacrificing her love and repressing it for a nobler cause, the other lovers like Olivia, Orsino, and Malvolio are not undergoing any mental conflicts since for them the id is omnipotent, and the superego is an aide to the id. Moreover, only in Viola's case the superego is active since she is not egocentric, a fact which is pellucid to the audience as well as to herself. Her self-determined position defined by her sacrificial bent of mind is all the time engaged in a "barful strife" with the id (1.4.41). Hence, though she rightly claims that

she never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i'th' bud
Feed on her damask cheek; (2.4.110-112)

many a time she has expressed her love indirectly as in this situation and often with brilliant but futile puns before Orsino and with wit before Olivia. Viola indeed is a study in the complex psychological phenomenon of love.

All the four principal lovers, Orsino, Olivia, Viola, and Malvolio, are endowed with the faculty of romantic imagination, but their individual stance in this regard is as diverse as their intensity of and motivation behind imagination vary. Romantic imagination in the play directly and naturally springs from the type of comedy *Twelfth Night* is. G. H. Hartman (1985) observes that the characters in this play "seem in love with words rather than with each other. More exactly, the embassy of words and the play of rhetoric are essential tests for both lover and object of love" (p. 47-48). Orsino, the paragon of imaginative love in the play, has what can be described more precisely as the power of imagination rather than the power of fancy, for his mental images are created with an excellent artistic blend of fact and fancy and mythology. He says about Olivia:

Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me. (1.1.19-21)

He can introspectively define the nature of his imagination, which, however, he calls "fancy": "So full of shapes is fancy / That it alone is high fantastical" (1.1.14-15). When Orsino sees Olivia in the final scene, immediately before he assails her with words that emit out of the dwindling superstructure of his imagination, he exclaims in ecstatic admiration: "now heaven walks on earth" (5.1.97).

While Orsino nourishes romantic imagination, Olivia is its professed antagonist. She says that Orsino's "poetical" message of love is "more like to be feign'd" (1.5.195-196). Nevertheless, when she falls in love, her romanticism enkindles her imagination. Oppressed with "unmuzzled thoughts" (3.1.119), she imploringly says to "Cesario": "Love's night is noon" (3.1.148). All complications having been resolved, Olivia exploits a poetic image and suggests that "One day shall crown th' alliance on 't" (5.1.318). While Orsino's is an abrupt renunciation of romantic imagination when the light of practicality dawns upon him, Olivia's is a sudden plunge into imagination which, however, subsides in power as she passes through different stages of love in her attempts to unite with her lover. Romantic imagination in these two sentimental lovers, Olivia and Orsino, undergoes depreciating changes whereas Viola's romantic imagination stands out, which is typically characteristic of the heroine of a Shakespearean romantic comedy. Viola's romantic imagination is uniquely active all the time, and instances of this evenly pervade all the love-scenes. Before the demure Olivia, Viola gives vent to her own romanticism in a lyrical outburst with ebullient phrases though designed to incline the Countess to grant Orsino's suit. Disguised as "Cesario", when Viola phrases Orsino's love for Olivia, she is in fact expressing her own repressed passion for Orsino in her intention to

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;

Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" (1.5.268-274)

While the romantic imagination of Viola, Orsino, and Olivia is, in terms of psychology, sublimation of the sex impulse, what Malvolio shows can be termed as nothing more than romantic phantasy since he is devoid of romantic sentiment which produces beautiful romantic expressions. Malvolio is stirred into imagination by the pranksters Maria and the others, and he says, "I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me" (2.5.164-65). J. R. Brown (1962/2005) observes that however hard Malvolio tries, he "is one to whom life has never given a part answerable to his imagination" (p. 170). Malvolio's imagination is downright tainted with carnality, materialism, and vindictiveness which are marks of his extreme egocentricity. He aspires "To be Count Malvolio" (2.5.35), and phantasizes that in "my branch'd velvet gown; having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping" (2.5.47-48), he would contemptuously denounce Sir Toby for snubbing him.

While the principal characters of *Twelfth Night* can be compared and contrasted on the basis of Shakespeare's conception of romantic love in the play and its major elements of sentimentality, mutability, egocentricity, and imagination, there is another aspect of this romantic comedy which also shows some similarities and dissimilarities between the characters, and this is the element of wit which contributes to making the play a comedy. Wit in *Twelfth Night* is responsible for a considerable amount of comic effect, and the characters are different from each other due to their attitudes to and display of wit. All the characters, both the bona fide lovers and the pranksters, except the misfit Malvolio, appreciate the display of wit which they consider to be a part of human existence in the face of life's tragic adumbration.

Unlike Orsino, Olivia at first had a temporary distaste for wit display, and condescended to it "for want of other idleness" (1.5.65). Neither of them dissociated wit from foolery, but when Viola and Feste infused into them the full light of practicality, both Orsino and Olivia fortified themselves against what they later came to regard as mere foolery; and thus in the ultimate scene of the play, while Olivia dismisses Feste to prefer straightforward Fabian for reading Malvolio's letter, Orsino says to the clown Feste, "You can fool no more money out of me at this throw" (5.1.40). On the contrary, Malvolio, who betrays his foolishness on many an occasion, is devaluating Feste's witticisms, plainly or ironically, all the time: "Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool" (1.5.76). While Sir Andrew Aguecheek, like Sir Toby Belch, is prompt to reward and applaud Feste's "gracious fooling" (2.3.22), his claim to do fooling "more natural" (2.3.83) is ironical with the punning on "natural", which means both naturally and like a born idiot. Though Feste commends Sir Toby's "admirable fooling" (2.3.80), Sir Toby's exhibition of his wit suffers a setback in a wit confrontation with "Cesario". In fact, it is Viola who has the greatest potential among all the characters to counter Feste in a wit combat, which even Feste acknowledges: "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn'd outward!" (3.1.12-13). Viola, in turn, commends Feste's witty foolery, "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool, / And to do that well craves a kind of wit", because the "folly that he wisely shows is fit, / But wise [men], folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit" (3.1.60-68). Viola in the last line here makes an implicit reference to Orsino and Olivia, either of whom is more a connoisseur of wit than a wit himself or herself.

Even as regards the physiological humours, i.e., bodily fluids that were believed to determine particular personalities, the characters in *Twelfth Night*, both principal and minor, can be compared and contrasted. The four humours of blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile corresponded to the four elements of air, fire, water, and earth, which composed all matter according to the classical anatomy that fashioned even the thinking in the medieval period. These four humours were thought to make people of "four temperaments – sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic" (Paster, 2004, p. 200). According to Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604), the sanguine people are "soone angrie, soon friended"; the choleric are "all fiery, and in a moment, at euery trifle they are inflamed, and, till their hearts be consumed (almost) with choller they neuer cease, except they be reuenged"; the phlegmatic people are "not so soone angrie, nor yet soone pleased"; and the melancholic are "hardly offended, and afterward, with extreame difficulty reconciled" (as cited in Paster, 2004, p. 17). According to this explanation, which however does not reflect all the wider meanings of these humours, Sir Toby and the other pranksters can be considered sanguine and Viola is no exception just like his brother. Though none in the play is choleric in the real sense, Malvolio at the very end of the play seems to be quite so because he vows to be revenged upon the pranksters.

As to melancholy, there is in *Twelfth Night* a “barely perceptible sorrow amidst ecstatic celebrations”, which is the “very essence of comic melancholy in Shakespeare” (Bernard, 2018, p. 154). All the three genuine lovers, Olivia, Orsino, and Viola, evince the humour of melancholy, and therefore the play has what J. M. Murry (1967) calls “a silvery undertone of sadness” (p. 267). Orsino, who savours pathetic songs of love to “relieve my passion” (2.4.4), is the most vocal among the three in expressing a state of lovelornness; Feste says to him, “Now the melancholy god protect thee” (2.4.73). “As both the exemplum of and spokesman for humoral theory, Illyria’s duke is the sign of the excessive, the anachronistic, at a remove from reality” (Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 89). Olivia too is unrealistic from the beginning of the play as she vows to keep alive her dead brother’s “sad remembrance” (1.1.31) for long seven years before she actually divests herself of this sad robe to put on a new robe of lovelornness. Once in love, her sorrows, like Orsino’s, engender from unrequited love, and she suffers from “sad and merry madness” (3.4.15). On the other hand, Viola’s “green and yellow melancholy” (2.4.113) buds from unexpressed love. Love having been fulfilled at the end of the play, each of these three lovers is purged of melancholy. With the melancholy of Viola, Olivia, and Orsino can be contrasted the merry and drunken humours of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Orsino, however, admits of a new humour, “a savage jealousy” (5.1.119) when he feels betrayed before the entanglements concerning Sebastian are unraveled. Sir Andrew’s jealousy, like Orsino’s, originates naturally, but it is fanned by others until it is naturally extinguished. While Malvolio’s role enhances in juxtaposition the subtle melancholy of the play, he is somewhat phlegmatic, as is evident in his slow misconstruing of the fabricated letter. Viola, though not truly melancholic, can be regarded as sanguine because “She sate like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief” (2.4.114-15) and kept the flame of love alive.

Parallelisms and contrasts exist among the characters of *Twelfth Night* even on the level of disguise. In respect of disguise there is little analogy and wide contrast between Viola and Feste who unlike other characters need not have recourse to a mental disguise. As for Viola, it is the stark necessity of an honourable survival which is the reason for her disguise as a young man and as the Duke’s page. She is afraid of being

delivered to the world

Till I had made mine own occasion mellow

What my estate is! (1.2.42-44)

Feste, on the other hand, impersonates Sir Topas the curate in order to take revenge on Malvolio who denounced his wit. Viola’s disguise, like Feste’s, produces a considerable amount of comic effect, but Viola’s is through puns and wit combats while Feste’s through puns and catechism. Viola’s disguise, unlike Feste’s, gives rise to complications like a triangle of love – Orsino loving Olivia, Olivia loving “Cesario”, and Viola loving Orsino, and mistaken identities like the knights’ challenging of “Cesario” and Antonio’s defending of “Sebastian”. However, it is Viola’s disguise that also resolves all complications through the revelation of the identities. Viola’s disguise, which is “the central deception of the play” (Williams, 1961), also contributes to making Olivia and Orsino practical. Olivia can now redirect her emotion from unreasonable sorrow to realistic love, and Orsino can intensify his emotion so that “surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die” (1.1.2-3), and consequently, he knows “A natural perspective, that is and is not” (5.1.217), assures Olivia of Sebastian’s nobility, discerns Malvolio’s lack of “much of distraction” (5.1.314), and gives a command for a reconciliation with him. Feste’s disguise, on the other hand, redeems Malvolio to some extent, who had to admit in captivity: “I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art” (5.2.88). Viola’s midplay deprecation of disguise, “Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness, / Wherein the pregnant enemy does much” (2.2.27-28), seems to justly apply to each and every character who dons a mental disguise: Orsino is the lover of the sentiment of love; Olivia, a nubile woman pretending to be a mourner; Sir Toby, a parasite; Sir Andrew, a timid, artless fool; Maria, a lover of comic disorder; Malvolio, a social aspirer; and Fabian, a sportful intriguer. Like Feste, Viola “cuts through the subterfuges and disguises of the others with absolute clarity” (Summers, 1968, p. 20).

Besides the characters who show their particular modes of love, wit, humour, and disguise, the plot construction of *Twelfth Night* also evinces some parallelism and contrast. The plot of *Twelfth Night* and its two sub-plots run parallel to one another. The two sub-plots, one concerning Sir Andrew and the other Malvolio, are not only variations of and counterpoints to the main plot which concerns Orsino, but they also have some similarities as well as dissimilarities. The main plot and the two sub-plots pivot on Olivia, the beloved of the three suitors –

Orsino, Sir Andrew, and Malvolio. As Orsino's love is genuine, in the broadest sense of the term, and passionate as suits a romantic comedy, and as it begins and ends the play, its structural development is the main plot. However, the main plot gets increasingly less space for prominent treatment in the latter parts of the play and contributes least to its comical effect. Traditional revelry and comic misrule, with which *Twelfth Night* is celebrated, are purveyed by the sub-plots in *Twelfth Night*, which is called Shakespeare's "last free-and-easy festive comedy" (Barber, 1959/2012, p. 291). The comic sub-plot concerning Malvolio reflects, as J. D. Wilson (1962) observes, "in a kind of distorting mirror the emotional situation of the main plot" (p. 172). L. G. Salingar (1958) went further to say that the action of this sub-plot, "reproduces the main action like a comic mirror-image, and the two of them are joined to form a single symmetrical pattern of errors in criss-cross".

Apart from the theme of love, what the two sub-plots have in common is the question of revenge, but not without a marked difference. While Sir Andrew is to revenge on "Cesario" for superseding him in Olivia's love, Malvolio, the myopic precisian, fantasizes to avenge himself on Sir Toby for defying him, though, in fact, others are taking a revenge on him with Maria the maid at the head. Even Orsino, in the main plot, becomes vindictive when he feels supplanted by "Cesario" in Olivia's love, but his malice is subdued when he is informed that Olivia has married Sebastian and he confirms the news. While love is far more prominent than revenge in the main plot, the combination of love and revenge pervades the two sub-plots. Olivia is the connecting link among the two sub-plots and the main plot, but it is Viola who links the sub-plot centering on Sir Andrew with the main plot, and it is this sub-plot which alone contributes to the comic denouement of the play, where the disentangling of the complications arise out of misplaced love and mistaken identities, and through the figure of Antonio when he brings Sebastian in the romantic scene.

Conclusion

Twelfth Night is a consummation of Shakespeare's comic dramaturgy and is adorned with brilliant colours of divergent elements like love and revenge, melancholy and merriment, as well as appearance and reality. Shakespeare has exploited them consciously and conscientiously, effortlessly and ingeniously so that they do not smack of artificiality and inarticulateness but instead make the comedy more enjoyable. And all these diverse elements not only manifest a penetrating pattern of contrasts, but they also cohere and correlate in the romantic array of characters to illustrate the simple but unaging truth that life itself is embellished with parallelisms and contrasts.

Twelfth Night is a play not only of love and imagination, but also of sentimentality and mutability, merriment and melancholy, revenge and forgiveness; it is a play not only of romantic love and self-love, but also of an unselfish lover and a malevolent heart, merry fellows and melancholic figures, witty personages and foolish dupes; it is a play not only of subtle disguise and consequent comic interest, but also of an almost indistinguishable coalescence of the main plot and the sub-plots, their intricate ramification and dexterous denouement.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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