

***Shakespeare's Twelfth Night as a comic play***

William Shakespeare is regarded as one of the most outstanding and brilliant playwrights, poets, sonneteers, actor, and a stage craft of Elizabethan Period. He is basically known for his skill of bringing the knowledge and excellence of universal thoughts and actions, played by his heroes and heroines in his dramas. Shakespeare has written almost 37 plays and 154 sonnets. His dramas are the fusion of both love and intellect. The theme of love, friendship, forgiveness and reconciliation are very prominent in Shakespeare's comedy as well as his tragedy. The present comedy *Twelfth Night* is a wonderful comic play of love, passion and sexuality. The atmosphere and the setting of the comedy is romantic in which each character wants to breath the fresh air of love and the music of happiness. The play opens with the songs of the Duke Orsino who is completely lost in the world of love and music. And has gone mad with the love of a beautiful lady Olivia. *Twelfth Night* also describes the theme of tringle love. And also focuses a love which is based on the intimacy of eroticism.

. The plots of *Twelfth Night* deal with the frustrated love of Olivia for Viola-Cesario and its happy resolution in the marriage of Olivia and

Sebastian. The first interview of Olivia and the disguised Viola is a brilliantly contrived comic exchange, the end of which is tempered by Olivia's confession of love for the supposed youth. Here are all the elements of a romantic plot of frustrated love in the manner of Beaumont and Fletcher. Shakespeare however, is content to develop the emotional possibilities of this situation for only one additional scene; then, using, precisely such a casual, perfunctory, and mechanical device as he had unblushingly exploited in the farcical *Comedy of Errors*, he substitutes Sebastian for Viola and packs the lovers off to a priest. No one tells us of the profound psychology that Shakespeare here displays in making Viola and Sebastian identical twins in wit and intellect as well as in form and feature. Shakespeare is merely hustling his minor characters off the stage with the least possible trouble, whatever the cost in plausibility. In this respect, at least, *Twelfth Night* is no less a romance than *The Winter's Tale*.

Note, however, that the story of Viola, Olivia, and Sebastian, like that of Malvolio, turns on Olivia's awakening from a deception-actually a double deception, produced partly by a disguise and partly by lack of self-knowledge. She first is made to realize, when she becomes infatuated with Viola, that her determination to mourn her brother seven years can overcome in a twinkling:

*"Even so quickly may one catch the plague?"*

*Methinks I feel this youth's perfections*

*With an invisible and subtle stealth*

*To creep in at mine eyes".*

Similarly, she must presently abase herself before the young page, beg his hand in marriage, and hale him before a priest, offering no seemlier excuse for her unladylike haste than

*"Plight me the full assurance of your faith*

*That my most jealous and too doubtful soul*

*May live at peace"*

The most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty has indeed learned to humble herself. From this point forward, she has little to do in the play but to help complete the confusion of Malvolio. The plot also tells the story of Viola and Orsino. Just as Malvolio is deceived by Maria and Sir Toby, and Olivia by Viola, so Orsino is baffled partly by his infatuation for Olivia (which steeps him in a fashionable melancholy) and by his inability to penetrate the disguise of the unfortunate Viola. This is a comedy of errors in which the only character who is fully aware of the situation is powerless to remedy it, and can only apostrophize her page's garments:

*"Disguise, I see thou art wickedness*

*Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.*

*How easy is it for the proper false?*

*In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!*

*Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we!*

*For such as we are made of, such we be.*

*How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly";*

Now, whereas we take satisfaction in the untrussing of Malvolio, and we never really fear that the awakening of Olivia will pass beyond the boundaries of comedy (as is made altogether plain by the simple and mechanical contrivance that extricates her from her predicament), the story of Viola and Orsino is some Thing else again. Although unmistakably, comic in outline, in its development this action seizes every opportunity to develop sentimental suggestions and implications. It may be argued that comic decorum does not exclude sentiment. On this point authorities disagree; nevertheless, when Rosalind permits her mind to run on Orlando and her wished-for joys, she almost at once mocks herself for so doing. Viola cannot; not only is her situation beyond her control, but she is temperamentally one with Hero and Celia, not with Rosalind or Beatrice. In other words, she is the kind of heroine whom

one does not expect to find playing a leading role in comedy, but rather serving as a Julia to a Kate Hard castle.

Now the curious thing about *Twelfth Night* is not only that Viola plays the leading feminine part, but that the patently comic action of Malvolio, central though it be

the structure of the play, is clearly the action that least engages to Shakespeare's attention. In short, here is a play that inverts what we may regard as the normal order of elements in a comedy, with respect to the importance it assigns to each. The sentimental story of Viola and Orsino is in first place; closely connected with it but clearly subordinate to it is the more overtly comic story of Olivia, Viola, and Sebastian; and in last place is the comic gulling of Malvolio. All three plots have fundamentally the same structure: a comic protagonist is gulled by another person, and is at length forced to recognize and take account of the imposition that has been practiced upon him. But it makes a very great difference whether, on the one hand, the gull is Orsino, unwillingly deceived by Viola, or whether, on the other hand, Maria and Sir Toby are joyfully hoodwinking Malvolio. Shakespeare has so harmonized the three actions that they answer one another on different levels and with different effects; but there can be no doubt as to which of these actions seemed to him of paramount interest and importance. He invented the

story of Malvolio, and used it with rare skill as the foundation of his play; but he was concerned first of all with Viola and secondarily with Olivia.

Similar patterns appear in the other comedies of this period of Shakespeare's career. Rosalind's half-willing, half-unwilling deception of Orlando is echoed in her dealings with the shepherdess Phebe; but the gay mockery of the uninhibited heroine, confident of her power, lends the play a unity of comic tone that is beyond *Twelfth Night*. The deception of Beatrice and Benedick offers a comic counterpart to the grim and implausible loves of Hero and Claudio; here the comic underplot usurps the place of the more serious action and imposes its tone on the entire play.

*Twelfth Night*, together with Shakespeare's other great comedies, leads one to conclude that Dr. Johnson's praise of Shakespeare's comic genius was hardly exaggerated, although one hesitates to affirm with him that the comedies surpass

the tragedies in excellence. One cannot agree with Dr. Johnson, however, that Shakespeare's plays were neither comedies nor tragedies. The early comedies, such as *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, are surely true comedies; and in them Shakespeare employed a comic structure and method that he, like his colleagues, had inherited from the ancients and turned to his own uses. The dark comedies depart from Shakespeare's

normal practice in comedy because in them he fails to reconcile conflicting elements of romance and satire. The great comedies such Twelfth Night as show, on the contrary, Shakespeare working effectively within the tradition of classical comedy and enlarging it to encompass a rich and harmonious development of fundamentally comic matter.

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