

Twelfth Night : Act One: Answer

Question One: With close reference to both language and action, discuss Shakespeare's presentation of the Duke and his court at the beginning of the play. (25)

The scene begins with the phrase “*If*” means that a lot of this scene will be open to interpretation and the numerous possibilities create deliberate confusion. It sets a tone of uncertainty and ambiguity that continues for the rest of the play, aligning with the carnivalesque spirit of the play. The lack of normality and how the world in this play does not seem to follow the rules the rest of us are bound to follow, adds to the confusion. This is often echoed in the fluidity of gender and sexuality which occurs throughout the play, compounded by the cross-dressing taking place.

Orsino opens the play in an overly melodramatic exclamation of love, as Orsino claims that he wants to be so stuffed full with his own love that it exceeds his boundaries and he dies when he says “*Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die.*” This pose of love sets the play in a comedic sphere in **which the characters are so hyperbolic and ridiculous that they are not meant to be taken seriously**. With characters such as Orsino opening the play, the audience understands that they must suspend their disbelief about the comedic, slapstick situations that the characters get themselves into. The archaic term “*surfeiting*” refers to excessive indulgence in things like food or drink in an effort to gratify one's appetite or senses. By wanting to surfeit himself, Orsino wishes to be overwhelmed with pleasurable things so he can distract himself from thoughts of his love, Olivia. This touches on the theme of love that runs through the play and how desire and love can be so overwhelming that he feels as if he were drowning in it. Alliteration is used in the phrase “*sweet sound*” which adds a rhythm and cadence to the text and also helps emphasize on the personification of music which will follow.

Orsino muses on love in this opening speech, lamenting its melancholy nature while noting that it manifests itself in different ways, which makes it magical. While dramatic and excessive, this speech not only gives the audience insight into Orsino's views on love, but the last two lines also foreshadow the many "shapes" and disguises that the characters wear during the events of Twelfth Night. Thus, Shakespeare uses a pun on words to help foreshadow the upcoming action. Another use of a pun is when Shakespeare uses the word “hart” referring to a deer but contextually, the word “heart” fits well. The reference to the deer refers to how Orsino is trapped in a web of desire which lends a touch of eroticism to the play. The phrase cruel hounds also seems to refer how he is being hounded by his desires to have Olivia, which are both physical and superficial.

Love and music are taken synonymously, the word “*strain*” referring to a strain of music note, as an extended metaphor is employed here. If music is the food of love, then more music will nurture this love, and relative to the third line, he wants to listen to more music so he sickens of this love. This constant reference to sickening of his love for Olivia, makes it seem to the reader that Orsino is more in love with the idea of love than the object of love itself. This is further confirmed by the transactional terms he seems to view love in as the phrase “*'tis not so sweet now as it was before,*” seems to be built on the concept of **marginal diminished utility**. This concept maintains that the pleasure coefficient attained from something diminishes as you experience more of the said thing, and this along with the transactional terms he talks about love such as *validity* and *low price* seeks to reinforce how Orsino seems to love the concept of love and acts as a cliché in his depiction of love, acting like the norm states those in love should act like. He seems to talk about love as a commodity he desires and wants to attain which makes us not trust his proclamation of love as his very idea of love seems superficial and transactional. The phrase “*debt of love*” also builds on his view of love as a transactional emotion.

This point is furthered by Orsino's ending speech in these scenes, where in reaction to Valentine's news that Olivia has decided to take on the veil, and *not behold her face at ample view* out of grief for her brother, Orsino's pining for her only increases, which leads to believe that he is only pining for her because she is untouchable. The extent to which Olivia is shielding herself from the world, out of grief for her brother also seems to be an occurrence which only takes place in the world of Illyria. Olivia's sadness and ardent commitment to keeping that sadness “*fresh*” in her “*remembrance*” can be seen as a pose of melancholy. Like Orsino who affects the tropes of love-sickness, Olivia plays the role of melancholy. Together, these two characters represent the two sides of theatrical performance: tragedy and comedy.

This scene gives us deeper insight into the infatuated, and hyperbolic nature of the Duke. Though to the audience, Orsino's behavior seems not like that of a Duke, the praise and high regard his people seem to hold him in later contradicts our opinions. This once again reflects on the topsy-turvy nature of the world of Illyria.

LINES: ACT ONE SCENE ONE

If music be the food of love, play on... Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers.

Twelfth Night: Act One

First you comment on **setting**: the land of Illyria is very important since it allows us to take these happenings as something that is acceptable because of this setting.

Question one:

How does Shakespeare allow us to see into the mind and motives of the characters? Does he use asides, soliloquys or other dramatic devices?

Question Two:

What sort of language do different characters use? (Social economic status, their mental and intellectual states- sir toby is always drunk so whatever he says is taken with a pinch of salt-

Question Three:

Are the events presented in a chronological (linear) order? Is the time scheme altered in some way, which highlights the plot and the setting of the play?

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I told him you were sick; he takes on him to understand so much, and therefore comes to speak with you. I told him you were asleep; he seems to have a foreknowledge of that too, and therefore comes to speak with you. What is to be said to him, lady? he's fortified against any denial.

Malvolio invokes humor; whatever excuse I come up with. He has an answer; he's armed against denial and excuses, I cannot dissuade him. Comical

- **Sheriffs post**: decorated post which is elaborately carved. Reiteration of what Orsino told viola to do: stay like post; simile
- **Be a supporter**: be as rigid but fix
- **What kind of man**: intentionally dissuades her

Theme of androgyny: not old enough for a man and not young enough for a boy; a young lad. Theme of gender

Olivia is full of disdain and not very interested in what the messenger has to say; an oft repeated tale. Comment on shift when Olivia more interested in messenger than message. A shift in Olivia's conversation with Viola; androgyny and gender fluidity is an inherent theme in the novel.

- Look at way viola speaks; articulate, a person who knows art of articulation and persuasion despite being messenger; **"speaks shrewdly"** as Malvolio said.
- Three adjectives strung together at start; knows how to cajole, and convince. **"most radiant, exquisite, and unmatched beauty"** - a hyperbole. There are some attributes that you fall in love with. Viola is good looking woman/man and also knows art of speech.
- An ordinary messenger would not be able to speak the way she speaks. **Olivia is interested in the messenger, not the message.**
- He's also stubborn/persistence. **I have studied**: memorized the lines and have gone to a lot of pains to present the message which Orsino gave but audience knows that isn't true since Viola is making up the lines which makes the audience understand why Olivia would fall in love with Viola.
- Would a messenger say **my profound heart**? No. Viola gives away her social economic status in the manner which she speaks, by calling her my profound heart.
- **I am not what I play**: a clue about the structure of the play as you can't take it at face value. It will betray you; and this is repeated throughout the play. Also ironic since she is playing someone. Audience knows it but Olivia has no clue so **dramatic irony**; situation is ironic. Literal plus hidden meaning.

- **Usurp:** Play on words. If I claim what is not my own (if I know who I am) but Viola says oh you're not acting naturally (not being true to your own self) and not marrying the man you should be marrying.
- It's not your right to keep yourself to love but it's not in my commission to tell you what you're supposed to do, I'm supposed to give u message from Duke; but Viola has done everything she said she isn't supposed to tell her but still following Dukes order to convince you.
- **Heart of my message:** the crux of my message.

Come to what is important isn't: I forgive you the praise.

Just say what you have to say, I don't need you to praise me, just cut to the chase.

***It is the more like to be feigned: I pray you,
keep it in. I heard you were saucy at my gates,
and allowed your approach rather to wonder at you
than to hear you. If you be not mad, be gone; if
you have reason, be brief: 'tis not that time of
moon with me to make one in so skipping a dialogue.***

It doesn't seem like poetry, please keep it to yourself. You were so adamant that I had to allow you to meet me to get rid of you. If you aren't mad and can't read my body language then leave. If you have a brain and can read the room, be brief. Yet, she indulges in it; saying something but acting contrary.

Will you hoist sail; extended metaphor used later.

How Maria speaks is directly in contrast with how Viola speaks.

Hull: Lie adrift here for a little longer; the extended metaphor on the dialogue Maria said. Maria is crude and crass; to the point and not skilled in the way of speaking articulately. She is witty but no finesse.

Maria is a **giant** and Olivia is **sweet lady**; Maria is giant since she isn't giving them space.

***Sure, you have some hideous matter to deliver, when
the courtesy of it is so fearful. Speak your office.***

Olivia: The way you are speaking is already making me not want to hear it so please get it over with.

***It alone concerns your ear. I bring no overture of
war, no taxation of homage: I hold the olive in my
hand; my words are as fun of peace as matter.***

Viola: Giving Olivia due importance since the speech is only for her ear.

***The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I
learned from my entertainment. What I am, and what I
would, are as secret as maidenhead; to your ears,
divinity, to any others, profanation.***

- The way you entertained me is how I responded: Viola, witty. Account of behavior I received at your hand; you had so many excuses to not see me. Only possible because of her eloquence. "
- What I am and what I would; question of identity appears again. No one has any idea about it. My words are meant for you so if they reach your ears, it's almost holy. If someone else hears it, it's a violation of trust; sacrilegious. Puts himself out of spot and brings the limelight back to Olivia. This is also ironic because she is not who she is; acting.

Other Analysis

- Messenger almost portrayed as an equal to the lady.
- Viola is able to have a private meeting with Olivia; the tide is shifting.
- Orsino's heart is the top priority; Dude was introduced to us as love-sick.

VIOLA
In Orsino's bosom.

OLIVIA
In his bosom! In what chapter of his bosom?

- Slap stick humor
- Both of them are witty; very important.
- You are the top priority Olivia, only thing which has taken over Orsino's heart. **Top of heart** vs bottom of heart: very shallow heart.

O, I have read it: it is heresy. Have you no more to say?

- Orsino doesn't truly love her, he wants to her love her so there is no authenticity; his words are lent authentic by Viola; there was something going on between the characters.
- **Dramatic irony is that Viola is dressed as a man playing a woman and that Viola herself is a woman.**
- No messenger would ask to see her face ; against protocol as Viola doesn't belong to working class and there's only so much of impersonation you can do as they give themselves away. Violas mannerism is what allows Olivia to fall for him.

Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face?

- Violas word; not an ordinary messenger as she belongs to the aristocracy. (a gentlemen... know the truth.)
- When you asked for the face; it's funny because this isn't Violas place to see it, the lines between the messenger and Viola herself are becoming extremely blurred.
- All of this is Viola. Viola acts as a messenger but she does not belong to the class of messengers and you can see that in the manner she speaks; eloquent and witty.
- The face thing should not have happened and there is a certain eroticism. We sense a certain shift in Olivia character right now as she is more interested in the messenger than the message as she unveils her face.
- Olivia points out his role as a messenger; what you are saying is contrary to what your Lord wanted you to say. Why does she need validation from the message.
- You can see the clear coquettish behavior

Excellently done, if God did all.

- If its natural then it's good; not like me who is so dressed up to play the role of the man (irony.)

'Tis in grain, sir; 'twill endure wind and weather.

Then Olivia is being humble. There is nothing perfect in the world because the world itself is not perfect.

Transience of beauty.

- A universal truth which Shakespeare is imparting; comment on deeper implication.
- This exchange is not about Orsino, but about interchange between Olivia and Viola is fun because they're witty and it invokes humor.
- Understand certain romantic eroticism in this scene; you feel certain tension as Viola talks to Olivia as if she herself is conserving with her vs carrying a message.
- It is suggested; she unveils herself as she is interested in the messenger more than the message (irony comes from the fact that the messenger is also a girl; gender fluidity) as Viola and Olivia are mirrored.
- Comical on one level as dramatic irony (Viola in fact another woman) and later on Olivia falls in love with the exact replica of Viola. The catch is this that it is Violas words which intrigues Olivia; not just the physical self.
- You sense Olivia angling towards Viola more than Orsino. Cesario as Viola is earnestly pleading Violas case because she is in love with Orsino. Title of "What you will" makes more sense now.
- Dramatic irony as Viola is a woman and Olivia fell in love with him, but we know Viola is a woman and Olivia doesn't.
- Shift to I, as we sense the shift, there is no exactness/character definition as no certain role in which the character fits. Shift to I; not speaking as messenger anymore.
- In the course of the scene you can't distinguish if Viola is revealing the message or if she herself is interested; as in the world of Illyria you don't question it.

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white

Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on:

- Praising her and praising her very eloquently; nature has taken time to make her this beautiful.
- You are very cruel person because you are so beautiful and no one can enjoy this beauty because you are veiling yourself. If you don't have children; world devoid of this beauty.
- Your children will be as beautiful as you; says this with a thread of honesty

***O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted; I will give
out divers schedules of my beauty:***