

The Disguise of Viola: Shakespeare's Frigate to Infuse the Spirit of Renaissance

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Abstract

This paper primarily concern with the exploration of the Renaissance spirit in William Shakespeare's comedy play Twelfth Night. The in-detailed explanation mainly lies on the sociological approach since the story of this play represents the daily life of English society in Renaissance period. Shakespeare reveals the idea of human equality through the portrayal of Viola, the main female character of the play, who disguises herself as a man in her attempt to pursue the love of Orsino. This instilled idea is the Shakespeare's breakthrough of the old persistent value concerning women in medieval period.

Key Words: *renaissance, sociological approach, woman's disguise*

Introduction

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), The Father of Literature, had produced many great plays, both tragedy and comedy. He brought various ideas in his plays such as love, betrayal, jealousy and disguise. Disguise seems to be one of Shakespeare's favorite ideas. Through it, he alters the identity of an individual (frequently female characters though not always). Shakespeare clearly uses the art of disguise in order to employ a literary device known as Dramatic Irony, where the audience members are aware of something (in this case the true identity of the characters) that characters in the play are not. This of course, creates tension in a play and excites the audience. The example of Shakespeare's plays which discussing about the disguise of the character is *As you like it* and *Twelfth Night*.

Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's famous comedies. This is justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies. It is full of sweetness and pleasantly. It tells about the struggle of a girl to get her love and to find his loss brother. *in full Twelfth Night; or, What You Will* comedy in five acts by William Shakespeare, written about 1600–02 and printed in the First Folio of 1623 from a transcript of an authorial draft or possibly a playbook.

One of Shakespeare's finest comedies, *Twelfth Night* precedes the great tragedies and problem plays in order of composition. Twins Sebastian and Viola are separated during a shipwreck off the coast of Illyria; each believes the other dead. Viola disguises herself as a boy named Cesario and enters the service of Duke Orsino, who thinks he is in love with the lady Olivia. Orsino sends Viola-Cesario to plead his cause to Olivia, who promptly falls in love with the messenger. Viola, meanwhile, is in love with Orsino, and, when her twin, Sebastian, is rediscovered, many comic situations of mistaken identity ensue. There is a satiric subplot involving the members of Lady Olivia's household—Feste the jester, Maria, Olivia's uncle Sir Toby Belch, and Sir Toby's friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek—who scheme to undermine the high-minded, pompous Malvolio by planting a love letter purportedly written by Olivia to Malvolio urging him to show his affection for her by smiling constantly and dressing himself in cross-garters and yellow. Malvolio is thoroughly discomfited and even locked up for a time as a supposed madman—a fate ironically suited to one who has set himself up as the apostle of sobriety and decorum. Malvolio's animosity toward merriment is a challenge not only to the merrymakers but to the play's more serious characters as well; all must learn to embrace life's joys before those joys are overtaken by aging and death. At the play's end, Malvolio is the only solitary figure among the pairs of happy lovers.

Twelfth Night is created in 1600 – 1601, which is considered include in The Renaissance Era. It is considered to have begun a little before 1500 and have lasted until the Commonwealth Interregnum. It consisted of early the Tudor Age (ca 1500 – 1557), the Elizabethan Age (1558 -1603), the Jacobean Age (1603 -1625), and the Goroline Age (1625 -1642). (Renaissance, which means “rebirth”, is commonly applied to the movement of period which marks the transition from the medieval to the modern world in Western Europe. (Holman,1981:p 376).

Samekto in his book *Ikhtisar Sejarah Kesusastraan Inggris* states that

“Renaissance change the attitude and mental of European. Church authority and tradition changed with scientist Authority. The characteristics of accept everything set by the church turned to find it by them. Therefore, there are some crucial characters of Renaissance which is called Renaissance Spirits such as hard willing, dare to effort and free spirit”. (1998:19)

The spirit of certain period can be seen in literary works since literature can “represent” life. As Hardjana explores that literature basically always blows the spirit and the life of its time production. (1981: 10). Hence, Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* can represent the spirits of renaissance through the story especially through the main characters, Viola who disguises as man whose name is Cesario. In her disguise as man, she has spaces to do things that can not be done by her as a woman such as going or traveling, Fighting and confessing her love to Orsino.

From the explanation above, It can be sum up that Viola’s action to disguise as a man can blow the spirits of the Renaissance. It attracts my attention to dig it up further. To assist me in analyzing this problem, then sociological approach is applied since the author is seen as the member of society and can be studied as a social being. Therefore the author’s work can be analyzed as the result of the author’s thought, feeling, and view toward the condition of society in that period of creation.

Method

Shakespeare wrote many different forms of literary works and one of them is comedy. At the end of his professional life he had written four famous comedies which were later called his "romances". Shakespeare's comedies were not primarily love stories but they all included a love plot. His romances all had the happy ending of a comedy, but in a way they hinted on violence.

His focus and emphasis was clearly towards the structure and language of his comedies, which made his comedies quite distinct from others. Some of the ideas and concepts that we have encountered in the past are also found in Shakespeare comedies. The idea of love triangle is very important in *Twelfth Night*. The love triangle formed conflicts and complications which developed into the main plot. Many characters became involved into the love triangle, and with the help of other characters the situation became more intense and sometimes very amusing.

Another concept that we see in the play is the reversal of role between male and female. The ancient idea of metamorphosis is also expressed in Shakespeare's comedy. People are changing their understanding their feelings and their images throughout the play. With the love juice of cupid both Viola and Orsino learned to change the receiver of their affection. We see in the play that love can turn people around, and sometimes make asses of them. Bottom transforming into an ass was a good example of metamorphosis. The structure, the language, the ideas and concepts are all important parts of a Shakespeare comedy and with these apparent characteristics it is quite easy to distinguish a Shakespeare play from another.

The more thoroughly and impartially this spirit is observed and extracted, the more will it be found to consist in the subjection of all things to what may be called the romantic process of presenting them in an atmosphere of poetical suggestion rather than as sharply defined and logically stated. But this romantic process is itself characterized and pervaded by a philosophical depth and width of conception of life which is not usually associated with romance. And it is enlivened and made actual by the dramatic form which, whether by separable or inseparable accident, the writer has adopted. Thus, Shakespeare—as no one had done before him, and as people have done since far more often in imitation of him than independently—unites the powers and advantages of three great forms: the romance (in verse or prose), pure poetry and the drama. The first gives him variety, elasticity, freedom from constraint and limit. The second enables him to transport. The third at once preserves his presentations from the excessive vagueness and vastness which non-dramatic romance invites, and helps him to communicate actuality and vividness.

The analysis of the value in this play is conducted by applying sociological approach. Viola disguise is considered as the reflection of new atmosphere in English society, in particular, in Renaissance Period which upheld the idea of humanism.

Discussion

In Illyria, the Duke of Illyria, Orsino states he is sick in love with Olivia. Valentine reports to him, however, that she will not see him or any other man for seven years while she mourns the death of her father and brother (both died within the last six months). On the seacoast, Viola and her ship's captain come ashore after their ship sinks. Viola fears her twin brother Sebastian is drowned, but the captain thinks he saved himself by holding onto the floating mast. Upon learning that she is in Illyria, governed by Orsino, she convinces the captain to help disguise her as a male so that she may become a servant to Orsino, and it seems, perhaps try to win his love.

VIOLA:

".....Conceal me what I am, and be my aid for such disguise as haply shall the form of my intent. I'll serve this duke, thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him?"

Viola who has now disguised as man, cesario, has been taken into the service of Count Orsino, and have become close to him in short time; indeed orsino has told Viola of his great love to Olivia, then he asks Viola (pretending to be a male servant named Cesario) to approach Olivia and woo her on his behalf.

DUKE ORSINO:

Give me thy hand;
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds.

VIOLA

The captain that did bring me first on shore
Hath my maid's garments: he upon some action
Is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit,
A gentleman, and follower of my lady's.
(Shakespeare, Act V Scene 1)

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Viola disguises as a man triggered by some reasons. First, after gotten a terrible shipwreck and lands in Illyria, Viola is convinced by the captain to keep her hopes of finding her twins brother, Sebastian. Furthermore, the captain recall seeing her brother in the water after the shipwreck changing onto a mesh. Hence, to enable her to find her twins brother, Olivia asks the captain to be presented as man, since as woman, her chance to search freely or have adventure is limited, especially because at that period, Renaissance era, woman have no right to go around freely.

Viola's disguise as a man especially eunuch has already discussed previously. She conceal her true identity as woman to enable her to get her aims those are first, to find her twins who is believed still alive after the ship wreck and second, to win count Orsino's hearth. Related to the period when this story made, Renaissance, Viola's disguise portrays the spirits of Renaissance, that is dare to effort. The Renaissance, which means "rebirth", is commonly applied to the movement of period which marks the transition from the medieval to the modern world in Western Europe, hence it influence the characteristics of its people, and dare to effort is one of them. Renaissance people start to dare to struggle to get their aims, especially it influenced by the characteristics that all the authority of church is turned to scientific authority, which means that people start to decide something by themselves. Viola as renaissance's woman dare to effort to grabs her purpose though she has to break the society role. As we know that in Renaissance, the society had a rule that woman who dress like a man would be as a strong taboo. In the Renaissance times a Renaissance Woman was supposed to marry well, be loyal to her husband and give birth to boys. A Renaissance Man, on the other hand, had to be well-educated, have cultural grace, be a gentleman and understand the arts and sciences. He also had to have refinement, be of noble birth and have courage. Many women did not fit the mold of what they called a "Renaissance Woman." Many of them would fit in as more of a "Renaissance Man" or what we would call a "Renaissance Woman" in our day and age .

Olivia's disguise shows the spirits of dare to effort. She dares to against her society code for not dressing like a man. Moreover, her conceal is not only on the dressing like a man, but also doing actions like a man. In her disguise as Cesario, she has a duty to seduce Viola, therefore she have to face Sir Andrew's Challenge to have duel since Sir Andrew thought that she (Cesario) has taken Olivia from him.

SIR TOBY BELCH:

Come, Sir Andrew, there's no remedy; the gentleman
will, for his honour's sake, have one bout with you;
he cannot by the duello avoid it: but he has
promised me, as he is a gentleman and a soldier, he
will not hurt you. Come on;

.SIR ANDREW

Pray God, he keep his oath!

VIOLA:

I do assure you, 'tis against my will.

[They draw]
(Shakespeare Act III Scene IV)

Viola clings to the part of Cesario. It allows her to escapes (for a time) from the limitation of being a woman who always been the object of man's love. In her disguise, Viola (cesario) has a freedom to struggle for her love to Orsino. Viola (cesario, has been taken into the service of Count Orsino, and have become close to him in short time; indeed orsino has told Viola of his great love to Olivia, Actually Viola (Cesario)try to declare her feeling to Orsino, telling her love to him many times implicitly, for example when Orsino asks Viola (Cesario) to approach Olivia and woo her on his behalf. Viola (as Cesario) promises to do so, but privately reveals she will not try hard, since she desires Orsino.

VIOLA :

I'll do my best to woo your lady. (aside) yet a barful strife!
Whoever I woo, my self would be his wife

The struggle of Viola in gaining the love of Orsino emphasizes the idea of the spirit of Renaissance which upheld the equality between man. As one of the dweller of the universe, Viola as a girl, deserves to reach whatever things she dreams of. Shakespeare deliberately exposes the idea that every human being must be able to determine their own fate. Love expression no longer belongs solely to a man because love is the most universal feeling that every human being should dare enough to soar up and actualize.

Shakespeare's comic gives the most amusing exaggeration of the prevailing foibles of his characters, but in a way that they themselves, instead of being offended at, would almost join in to humour; he rather contrives opportunities for them to shew themselves off in the happiest lights, than renders them contemptible in the perverse construction of the wit or malice of others.-There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposterous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those, who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have.

Conclusion

Twelfth Night is justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies for it is full of sweetness and pleasantries. It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy. It has little satire, and no spleen. It aims at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes the readers laugh at the follies of mankind, not despise them, and still less bear any ill-will towards them. The great and secret charm of *Twelfth Night* is the character of Viola who becomes the perfect frigate for Shakespeare in infusing the idea of human equality.

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