

BA (Eng - H) - II; Paper - IV; Topic: Twelfth Night
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Twelfth Night: Typical Shakespearean Comedy.

"Twelfth Night" is one of the most delightful Shakespearean Comedies because of its abundance of sweetness. Shakespeare's Comedies have an abundance of conceit and quibbles, too. It is to be understood that Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous sense either tragedies or Comedies, since they have a fair mingling of good and evil and joy and sorrow. Shakespeare united the power of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided into serious and joyous. His happy Comedies have a surfeit of high spirits. His characters experience absurd situations, and do ridiculous things. This makes ^{us} to laugh, but the characters laugh along with us. Most characters are laughed at by other characters of the play as well as by the audience. Laughter on stage is the hallmark of any Shakespearean Comedy. This laughter on stage is to a substantial extent generated by the clown or the fool, who is fundamental to Shakespearean comedy. In 'Twelfth Night' Feste not only furnishes the very salt of

of the play but also is the an embodiment of what is one of the most remarkable features of Shakespearean Comedy in general. He is at once a butt and a critic. A Shakespearean Comedy is primarily romantic. Almost every character falls in love - passionately and intensely, with little or no scope for logic. In 'Twelfth Night' everyone including the grim Malvolio is in love. The only person who is not in love is Feste, but he has a distinct purpose in the play.

Another typicality of Shakespearean play is its settings. His Comedy is invariably set in remote and distant lands which exist nowhere except the imagination of the dramatist. In the 'Twelfth Night', the action occurs on the shore of Illyria. Though some critics have identified it as a region on the east-coast of the Adriatic, Shakespeare, however, does not really connect the events of 'Twelfth Night' with any precise locality, and this ambiguity is apt for a romantic Comedy.

Characterisation, undoubtedly, is the main strength of Shakespearean plays. His Comedies possess a predominance of exquisite characters. Through his Comedies Shakespeare has given such exquisite characters as Portia and Rosalind. The women in Shakespeare's

Comedies hold the front of the stage. They are more enterprising than their male counterparts, and when things go wrong it is the heroine of the play who takes charge, and through her ingenuity and effort resolves the problematic situation.

'Twelfth Night' is no exception, since Viola is the life and soul of the play.

Shakespeare often prefers giving his female characters, especially his heroine, the disguise of man.

Though such disguisements, in Shakespeare's time, were not allowed, they were outlawed, as females were not allowed to act on stage. But it was Shakespeare's hand which converted this law into delicious dramatic irony, with an abundance of humour. In 'The Merchant of Venice' both the heroine of the play, Portia, and her nurse in waiting, Nerissa are disguised as male, for the crucial trial scene; In 'As you like it' Rosalind is disguised as male for the major part of the play, especially in the forest of Arden. In 'Twelfth Night' Viola is disguised as male throughout the entire play.

Disguise also causes enormous anguish to another lady, Olivia, who falls ardently in love with Viola disguised

as male.

Music holds another important position in Shakespearean Comedies. It is music and melody that is the food of love in his comedies. Shakespeare primarily lets his clown sing these songs in the play. 'Twelfth Night' opens with music, and Orsino's love for music makes him endearing to us from the very beginning of the play.

Shakespeare never showed himself to be a pedantic, nor did he wish to preach or rectify the follies of the mankind. He ridiculed and exposed the follies and vices of mankind in such a manner as to rectify them.

Since Shakespearean Comedy is primarily romantic in nature, its prime motive is to provide innocent, good-natured amusement. There is abundance of fun and laughter. The laughter is kind and gentle and is rarely sarcastic.

Though Shakespeare is predominantly romantic in the treatment of his comedies, he is also an authentic realist.

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