

Topic: Act 3- High drama

Course Title: *Twelfth Night*

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Act3, scene1 begins with the two most proficient wordsmiths on stage, viz. Viola-Cesario and Feste. The key phrase to look out for in this playful encounter is “**wanton words**”. In this **apparently** insignificant exchange of words, both Viola-Cesario and Feste parry and quibble with an intention to outwit the other. Actually, there is a bigger, subtler plan and that is to emphasize the **unreliability of language itself. Language proves to be insufficient and limited as the two most fair users find out. Shakespeare draws our attention to this aspect of language and representation: if language fails to communicate, confusion and plurality of meanings follow. In other words, “*What you Will*”**. The series of quibbles or verbal duel therefore might not have a direct bearing on the plot (it could be viewed as the playwright’s bonus) but it leaves viewers / readers pondering.

The clown's views on marriage (the general cynicism) are entirely his own. His views have no impact on the romantic comedy **at this point of time in the plot.** (Check Arden editors Lothian and Craik) But if we place Feste's words in the context of the contrived closure, where protagonists are shown to switch affections at the drop of a hat, beating all logic and reason, we would find a lot of sense in Feste's words:

Feste: No indeed sir, the Lady Olivia has no folly. She will keep no fool, sir, till she be married, and fools are like husbands as pilchards are to herrings, the husband's the bigger. I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter of words. (3.1)

If Feste's jests appear harsh (“**I do not care for you**”) it is for a reason. Feste has no malice or ill-will, he is a realist and wisely so. Viola-Cesario rightly observes “**This fellow is wise enough to play the fool....**”. This is the order

of life and Feste knows once the “play is done” life returns to normalcy where there is no make-belief Illyrian illusions. He serves bitter truth in his jests.

The other half of the scene brings back the reveling rebels face to face with Cesario. And this heralds the beginning of Sir Toby’s plotting to keep Sir Andrew’s rivalry alive, so that he can continue to milch Sir Andrew. More importantly, this twist heralds the gradual unraveling of Cesario’s identity and discovery of Sebastian.

The scene concludes with a vital encounter between Viola-Cesario and Olivia. Olivia indulges in no fine speech or verbal jugglery; she is honest in her brutal admission of the pain that Cesario's indifference has caused. She declares her love and appeals for an answer. Her stoic demeanour is remarkable, as she expresses her willingness to wait until Cesario is ready (reminds us of Viola's “Patience on a

monument” speech) and most importantly, wooing someone below her status in a world that is extremely hierarchical, makes her stand out like Shakespeare’s Helenas (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *All's Well that Ends Well*).

- **Olivia chooses to be at the receiving end in this situation, despite her position. Shakespeare pushes the boundaries of conventional femininity to portray Olivia as one of the strongest female subjects who can dare to pursue their loved ones.**
- **Viola can only pity Olivia and struggle in her mask. She can only assure that “no woman” shall ever have her heart.**