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Gender Roles Reviewed through Shakespeare's Twelfth Night with Twenty-first Century Applications

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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the Olivet Nazarene University Honors Program for giving me this opportunity. I would also like to thank Dr. Karen Knudson for her guidance in the research portion of my project, as well as Dr. Andrew Hoag for assisting me in the creative writing portion. I would like to thank my family for their endless support and wisdom throughout this process. Lastly, I thank Nicole for her encouragement when I suffered writer's block multiple times and I also thank my wonderful fiancé, Zachary Monte, for being by my side through it all.



Gender Roles Reviewed through Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with Twenty-first Century Applications

Hannah N. Lewis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis accompanies a modern-day adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which aims to emphasize the importance of gender equality as a moral imperative in the twenty-first century. In his original play, Shakespeare drew attention to gender stereotypes in the Elizabethan age through character representation. Although Shakespeare does not put much emphasis on gender equality in *Twelfth Night*, this equality is an important factor in the modern adaptation, in which a young woman named Vivian pursues her desire to start a business but is faced with financial issues and seeks a job under a misogynistic boss named Owen. Owen questions her ability to succeed in the business world, but Vivian's mature influence brings about a change in his perspective on gender roles as Vivian proves to be a strong, independent character. This thesis informs the adaptation by exploring gender roles in both the Elizabethan age and the twenty-first century to critique gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.

Keywords: Shakespeare, gender stereotypes, gender equality, modern adaptations, *Twelfth Night*

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) penned many of the greatest plays in history and is an icon for theater-lovers around the globe. Shakespeare's portrayals of moral truths have been analyzed by readers and critics alike and are still of great impact in the contemporary age. He also addresses issues of immorality and common human experiences that have been interpreted for many years; however, among his other plays, *Twelfth Night* has been under scrutiny by both modern and Elizabethan critics. During the Elizabethan Era, women were hardly given a significant role in theater or in life. Roles of authority were reserved for men, and the general expectation of a middle to lower class woman was to submit. These roles were based on what Elizabethan society labeled "beliefs, ethics, and values" (Ahsan, 10). Within daily Elizabethan lifestyle, "some responsibilities and errands have been conventionally by tradition reserved for men and some for women" (10). Within gender roles, stereotypical assumptions have played a part in the conflict between men and women for centuries. In the Elizabethan era, a woman's role was to be the natural nurturer within the family in which the stereotypical assumption is that women are emotionally weaker in comparison to men and are unable to become effective leaders. However, in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare defies gender stereotypes through the creation of an independent, intelligent female character. Through the characterization of the main protagonist, Viola, Shakespeare addresses stereotypes within gender roles that are under scrutiny today.

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* has received mixed reviews throughout the years as critics find the play either enlightening or absurd. In Homer Swander's article, "'Twelfth Night': Critics, Players, and a Script," Swander talks about audiences' reviews in the mid-twentieth century when they saw the production of *Twelfth Night*. According to Swander, critics branded the play an "outrageous old bore, full of tiresome and

gritty complications, incomprehensible Elizabethan jokes, and a troop of low-comedy characters of really paralyzing inanity." (115). From the outspoken dialogue to the number of unnecessary characters, people could be left in confusion at the end of the play. Although Shakespeare's hope may have been to draw attention to gender stereotypes and the importance of gender equality, many critics miss those elements entirely. Although critics distinguish Viola as an important character in the plotline, there is still some lack of clarity about the role she plays in the discussion of gender inequality.

Though for hundreds of years audiences often ignored the influence of Viola and what she represents, Swander notes several positive reviews in the early twentieth century when *Twelfth Night* was directed with a focus on Viola. When addressing the influence of Viola over Orsino and Olivia, one admiring reviewer stated, "Into this glowing air come Viola and Sebastian, rained down from heaven to settle everything" (118). After viewing Viola as the heroine of the plotline, audience members and critics receive a whole new perspective of *Twelfth Night* from other productions of the play. Swander explains this change by stating, "I think it is clear even on the surface that *Twelfth Night* is more than a harlequinade, that Shakespeare means not only to entertain but to instruct, that one of his purposes is to celebrate certain virtues and to ridicule certain follies, to nourish the good life and defeat the bad" (120).

Despite the recognition of Shakespeare's moral purpose in *Twelfth Night*, the question of Viola's relation to the topic of gender stereotypes is still unanswered. Instead, a majority of critic reviews center around the topic of gender regarding cross-dressing and homosexuality within Viola's male counterpart, Cesario. When referencing Cesario's interactions with the Countess Olivia, critic Peter Berek states that their relationship would "intensify both allure and anxiety by their attention to same-sex attraction" (Berek 361). Apart from gender identity, critics and viewers struggle to define what Viola represents other than a protagonist with an important secret. Critic Thad Logan pointed out that "part of the extraordinary appeal of Viola and Sebastian comes from their air of innocence" (231). Although Viola is viewed as an innocent female lead, many critics struggle to understand her as a female who rejects the traditional form of a woman. Thus, gender stereotypes in relation to Viola's character are still yet to be discussed.

The purpose of this project is to reveal how Shakespeare's critique of stereotypical gender roles in *Twelfth Night* are still relevant in the twenty-first century through his representation of Viola. With the creation of an original adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, this project draws attention to gender equality as a significant moral truth often opposed by negative gender stereotypes in the modern day. One technique Shakespeare used to identify stereotypes within gender roles is the characterization of Viola and her interactions with Olivia and the Duke. In Kietzman's article, "Will Personified: Viola as Actor-Author in *Twelfth Night*," she goes into detail about Viola's influence over the other characters and how Viola breaks the female gender stereotype of the Elizabethan age. In the play, Viola is "plainspoken and businesslike," and she upholds herself with a "directness of spirit" (Swander, 120). On the other hand, Orsino's character

is childlike and pathetic in nature, which demonstrates his lack of maturity and self-control. According to Kietzman, Viola takes control of her own life and is “no longer restricted by the fiction of femininity” (263). Instead of finding a man to care for her, she takes matters into her own hands and secures a position under the Duke. Thus, by proving herself to be reliable and intelligent, Viola defies the typical outlook on women during Shakespeare's time. Particularly when juxtaposed with other female characters within *Twelfth Night*, Viola's traits of dignity and strength give women a greater reputation. Few sources solely address the topic of gender stereotypes in *Twelfth Night* in relation to Viola's characterization, though critics have much to say about how Shakespeare presents moral issues in his productions such as the corruption of greed and the unfairness of outward judgement. There are several authors who have analyzed the significance of Viola's character and the role of women during the Elizabethan era, but its connection to gender inequality is hardly addressed. This project is unique among *Twelfth Night* critiques because it experiments with how the problem Shakespeare presents about negative gender stereotypes can still be relevant to the twenty-first century.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *Twelfth Night*, the representation of gender stereotypes reflects the patriarchy of the Elizabethan era. A comparison of gender roles in the Elizabethan era and the twenty-first century demonstrates that stereotypes are still in existence. In Novy's book on *Gender Relations in Shakespeare*, she explains that “Patriarchy takes a different form in America . . . than it did in England in the year sixteen hundred. Yet the action of the plays allow audiences of different times to see recognizable motivations in the characters” (6). Thus, the study of Elizabethan history in regard to gender roles is used to exhibit Shakespeare's step away from the Elizabethan patriarchy in *Twelfth Night*, and also to display how the female protagonist overcomes traditional expectations of a woman. Thus, both Viola and her modern counterpart are faced with the same issue of gender stereotypes: that a woman's leadership is far less effective than the leadership of a man.

Gender roles in Elizabethan history

During Shakespeare's, Elizabethan England was a patriarchal country that governed lives of men and women under strict, traditional principles. While women were unable to purchase land or live independently, men were given absolute authority over their property and family. According to Susan Amussen's article on Elizabethan England, “power resided primarily in the male head, who was expected both to represent his family to the outside world and to govern all those in it so that it was orderly and peaceful” (86). As a result, women were considered the weaker sex and were denied the pleasures of individualism.

In regard to the daily functions of Elizabethan life, having a certain occupation was essential for both men and women, regardless of social rank. A vast majority of England's population came from the middle to lower class and most people, especially women, were denied an education. In contrast, the nobility were an elite group of

men and women who carried significant social titles and were given a well-rounded education. Despite social rank, every man was viewed as authority figures within their homes and were worthy of complete respect from their wives. On the other hand, “individual women [were] deemed unworthy of mention unless they were of high rank” (Horwood, 3). The world of decision-making was solely reserved for men, and women were to be dependent on them in order to survive.

In his play *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare demonstrated this divide of social rank when comparing the protagonist, Viola, and the Countess Olivia. In order to secure a stable future, Viola disguises herself as a man since she understands that as a woman her freedom of movement is severely limited. By avoiding her stereotypical obligation as a woman, she asks to be concealed “for such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke . . .” (1.2.57-58). However, Shakespeare's female characters such as Viola demonstrate intelligence and play a crucial role in strengthening the plotline, something unheard of in most Elizabethan plays (Vijayalakshmi, 67). Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, Olivia is a privileged woman portrayed as an immature character of noble birth. Due to her social rank, Olivia's actions throughout the play are hardly ever questioned by the minor characters. She ignores the immoral consequences of her decisions and lives according to her own principles. It is not until Viola enters the scene that Olivia understands that as a figure of the nobility she should uphold herself with more dignity and maturity. In Jenkins's article, “Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night,’” the author describes Viola as the center of the plot that brings forth a new outlook on female potentiality. Jenkins explains that “it is [Viola's] role to draw Orsino and Olivia from their insubstantial passions and win them to reality” (30). Shakespeare describes Viola as an unshaken individual who does not allow her emotions to compromise her responsibilities.

As the driving force between both members of the nobility, Viola oversteps her boundaries as a woman in the Elizabethan age and acts as the voice of reason for men and women alike. She is “very practical, resourceful and skillful” as a mediator between a lover's quarrel, as well as a woman who is posing as a man (Vijayalakshmi, 67). In contrast with traditional views of gender roles, Viola breaks barriers forced upon her by Elizabethan standards. In Carol Neely's article, “Shakespeare's Cressida: A Kind of Self,” the author explains that “Viola forgets that society has bound her sex by regulations regarding proper roles; therefore, she sets out on a quest, trans-gendered, removing all restraints, and becomes a liberated individual” (144). To survive in a male-dominated society, Viola conceals her gender but still demonstrates her noble, independent character as a woman. However, as her characteristics are only displayed behind a masked identity, this implies that within Elizabethan community a woman's virtuous traits are hardly recognized. Thus, Viola's role as an independent individual exhibits Shakespeare's step away from Elizabethan expectations but it also reflects the struggle of a woman who must use a man's voice to be heard.

Gender roles in theater

In the Elizabethan theater, both male and female roles were strictly performed by an all-male cast. Shakespearean scholar Phyllis Rackin explains that “all the female

characters on the professional stage in Shakespeare's time were cross-dressed, because all the actors who played their parts were male" (114-115). The traditions of a male-dominated cast dated back to the ancient Greeks, a society in which women were also under the authority of their father or husband. Their legal status was based on the premise of inferiority, and they were considered to be minors throughout their lives (Kemp, 6). Likewise, in Elizabethan England women were restricted from the stage because it was considered vulgar and indecent for a woman to perform. Women only played the part of the caretaker, and their "stage" was their husband's property. Elizabethan historian Babula explains that "English women were on their own stages all over England, just not on the public stage in London" (Babula, 10). Thus, young men at a prepubescent age would typically portray the female characters in Shakespeare's plays due to their small physique and ability to mimic a woman's voice.

However, Shakespeare critiques gender stereotypes by interrogating the exclusionary nature of the constructed categories of sex and the representation of gender in *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare integrates the ambiguous connection between male and female through the characterization of the main protagonist, Viola. Like several other plays of the period, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* "dramatizes the consequences of this ambiguity by casting its heroine Viola, played by a boy, as a character who cross-dresses as the male page Cesario" (Charles, 123). In the doubly androgynous role of male actor playing a woman playing a man, Shakespeare not only compares the ambiguity behind both male and female behavior but also the similarities between the two genders (Charles, 123). In doing this, Shakespeare deconstructs gender stereotypes and demonstrates the interchangeable qualities that both men and women possess.

Yet, according to Swander, several critics deem Shakespeare's cross-dressing protagonist insignificant in an already "poorly structured" play (114). In his article, Swander pulls an example from *New York Times* writer Atkinson's critique, who states, "Not realizing that he was writing for the ages, [Shakespeare] took less pains with *Twelfth Night* than . . . he should have done. It is an improvised entertainment" (115). Thus, both critics and spectators of *Twelfth Night* often overlook how the ambiguous protagonist defies traditional female stereotypes by disguising herself as a man.

Gender roles in the twenty-first century

Shakespeare's emphasis on gender roles and their negative connotations towards women are applicable to the twenty-first century dilemma on gender stereotypes. Whether in the workplace or the household, the patriarchal mindset still comes into play concerning women in leadership in America. In Coleman's article, "Gender and Headship in the Twenty-First Century," the author explains that, in the workplace, women in leadership often feel isolated and report experiences of discrimination and sexism. They feel "at some time they have to justify their existence as women leaders" (2). Although gender equality is a greater reality in the twenty-first century, the patriarchal mentality continues to put men as the predominant, primary source of authority in many social systems. Women, consequently, are often deemed unqualified to hold a position of authority due to their soft nature. Coleman emphasizes this point by explaining that "the stereotype that women leaders tend to be soft and caring and that

men tend to be tough and dominant tends to act against women who aspire to be leaders as it may be assumed that they will not be as good at leadership as aspiring men" (3). However, if a woman were to act more assertive in a leadership position, it would be less effective than if it were a man since they are viewed as natural caregivers instead of leaders. The assumption that men are better leaders is built on the overarching belief that a man's contribution to the public lies within their natural ability to lead and make decisions, a belief that dates back to the Elizabethan age.

Along with the fact that women are faced with issues of sexism and discrimination in the workplace, their roles in the household are also similar to the patriarchal practices of Shakespeare's time. Modern American culture has "reinforced an unequal structure of parenting and assume[s] that women alone should be asked to sacrifice career opportunities for parenting involvement" (Gerson, 164). Even though not every traditional family practices gender stereotypes, these roles are similar to the Elizabethan family setting. In Hansson's article, "Gender Role Attitudes," the author explains that "in the first half of the twentieth century, people shared a traditional understanding that men and women should fulfill distinct roles: the breadwinner's role being a natural role for a man, whereas the caregiver's role was considered the best option for a woman" (Hansson, 184-185). Although these roles are established to uphold the traditional family structure, women are deprived of career opportunities in a male-dominated culture.

Therefore, gender inequality in *Twelfth Night* is still as relevant as it was during Shakespeare's time. According to Shakespearean authors, Findlay and Oakley-Brown, "*Twelfth Night* makes it possible to believe that there is no such thing as a stable normality where gender is concerned, either in Elizabethan times or in our own" (Findlay and Oakley-Brown, 2). As gender inequality remains prominent in the twenty-first century, audience members become more receptive to Shakespeare's focus on gender stereotypes in *Twelfth Night*. The issue of inequality in the Elizabethan era is relevant to modern audiences by applying their understanding of gender. Thus, *Twelfth Night* exhibits gender stereotypes as a controversial topic that has failed to be completely addressed in both the Elizabethan era and the twenty-first century.

Shakespeare's use of characterization

Shakespeare's use of characterization plays a vital role in the development of the storyline in *Twelfth Night*, primarily when focusing on the theme of deception. This is seen primarily through the "fool" of the play, Feste, and Viola. In Shakespeare's most famous plays, deception is demonstrated through the "fool." Although the other minor characters believe the "fool" to be the most unintelligent member of the group, his intellectual character proves otherwise. In *Twelfth Night*, Swander explains that Feste "provides for all the other characters what they would have wanted; affectionate fooling for Olivia, ancient romance for Orsino, nonsense for Sir Andrew, songs of love and drinking for Sir Toby, wit for Viola" (Swander, 120). Through the fool's character, he proves his skill in observing and understanding other characters.

Similarly, Shakespeare uses the theme of deception in his critique of gender roles in *Twelfth Night*. “Shakespeare also seems to suggest that the theme of gender is something based on how you act, rather than something based on what you were born with” (Hatfalvi and Roy, 34). Although the theme of deception is mainly exhibited through Viola's disguise as Cesario, it is also shown in her character. Through Viola's characterization, Shakespeare creates a clear distinction between her and the Duke. Despite the Duke's shallow outlook on women, Viola answers truthfully about the faults in men's words. While disguised as Cesario, she tells him, “We men may say more, swear more: but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows, but little in our love” (2.4.114-117). Through a “man-to-man” conversation, Viola takes advantage of her disguise to influence the Duke as his servant and friend so that he can see the fault in his actions and gain a different perspective on women. In Maurice Hunt's article, “Love, Disguise, and knowledge in ‘Twelfth Night’”, the author explains that through the main protagonist's words, “Viola . . . has within herself the power to marry Beauty and Truth” (Hunt, 493). Through her character, Viola uses her elegance as a woman and her understanding of moral truth to change the Duke's immature idea of a woman. She tells him that, “Too well what love women to men may owe / In faith, they are as true of heart as we” (2.4.103-104). In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare integrates the theme of deception by creating a storyline where the woman acts with wisdom and discernment that contradicts the shallow image of women in the Elizabethan era. In integrating the distinction in character between the two characters, Shakespeare demonstrates how gender roles are reversed in the play. With the man as the fool and the woman as the wise, he challenges the stereotypical norms of how gender is portrayed.

METHODOLOGY

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare uses gender roles to combat gender stereotypes in the Elizabethan age. Thus, in writing a twenty-first century adaptation of Shakespeare's play, I desired to reveal the fallacy of gender stereotypes and emphasize the importance of gender equality. The modern adaptation tells the story of a young woman named Vivian who hopes to open a tailoring business but struggles financially and works at a minimum-wage job. When her twin brother temporarily leaves his job to finish his last semester of college, Vivian decides to apply for her brother's position as an assistant to Owen, CEO of a famous tech company, in hopes of saving money for her future business. However, Owen acts as an immature human being who lacks respect for women. Moreover, he assigns Vivian the task to win over his past lover, Olivia Wilson, while disguised as a man. Although Shakespeare's use of cross-dressing simply serves as a disguise for Viola's true gender, Vivian takes a risk of entering into a gender controversy as she dresses as a man. Concerning the topic of cross-dressing and the LGBTQ+ community, many Americans in the twenty-first century have become more comfortable embracing it with open arms. It is becoming generally accepted that “nonheteronormative identities and relationships are equally legitimate” (Breux, 74). Since America is far more progressive in that sense, ambiguous gender identity is well-received among a majority of American citizens. Indeed, if anyone opposes or ridicules what is largely accepted in the twenty-first century, people will often call attention to

the problem on social media platforms and reject the target person for their opinions. This form of ostracism is known as cancel culture and is prevalent within social media. Thus, in my adaptation, the idea of cancel culture plays a role in Vivian's disguise in that she must avoid offending those who practice cross-dressing. It also reflects how modern-day America has become more progressive over the years and continues to develop views on gender identity in new perspectives.

Furthermore, while Vivian acts as his assistant and personal wingman, she also finds herself struggling to navigate her own romantic feelings for Owen as well as her goals and financial situation. Through the use of character representation, this play is written to reflect the original script as well as Shakespeare's methods to emphasize the issue of stereotypes in gender roles. Overall, this modern adaptation critiques gender stereotypes in the workplace and daily life that are still in question today.

Characterization of Viola, Vivian, and Olivia

In the modern adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, I strove to design characters that draw attention to gender inequality in the twenty-first century as well as Shakespeare's focus on gender stereotypes. At the beginning of the play, the main protagonist is thrust into a male-dominated workplace as her only way to obtain financial security and make her dream a reality; however, her strong-willed character creates a significant impact on Owen that changes his perspective on the capabilities of women. Shakespeare's characterization of Viola represents the modern woman who is “practical, resourceful and skillful . . . to overcome her struggles in a strange land” (Vijayalakshmi, 67). In the modern adaptation, Vivian is portrayed as a determined young woman who goes beyond her comfort zone to help her and her brother financially while proving herself an able and disciplined woman in the workplace. In one of her monologues, Vivian expresses her concern to the audience before meeting Owen:

What am I doing? Am I making a huge mistake? I know I'm applying for this job so I can help make mortgage payments on the house, but with this job I can put some money aside for my business. This is my chance to fulfill the dream that my mom and I both longed for, but if I fail, what will happen then? No! I can't think that way. This may be my only opportunity to turn my life around, to show I can make a name for myself. (20)

As a woman, Vivian recognizes this job gives her the ability to do her part financially and allow her to set aside money for her tailoring business.

In comparison, Shakespeare portrays Viola as a headstrong woman who understands that her disguise is the only way she will survive. Additionally, the disguise gives her the opportunity to go beyond what any Elizabethan woman could ever accomplish. In Crowder's article, the author explains that “it was important for Viola to assume a male role if she wanted to successfully break the barriers that Elizabethan society had forced upon her sex” (Crowder, 4). By recognizing that her gender will only limit her chance of surviving, she endeavors to conceal herself and take matters into her own hands. In the original script, Viola says, “Thou shall present me as a eunuch to him / It may be

worth thy pains, for I can sing / And speak to him in many sorts of music / That will allow me very worth his service / What else may hap to time I will commit” (1.2.59-63). Both the modern adaptation and the original script depict Viola as a representation of a woman who is no longer restricted by gender stereotypes as she endeavors to prove herself in a man’s world.

The secondary female character in the modern adaptation, Olivia, is a famed model in New York City who lacks maturity and self-awareness. Her inability to act with humility makes her appear a spoiled woman who has never learned self-discipline. Yet when Vivian enters the scene, she combats Olivia’s behavior by bringing her down to reality. Similar to the original script, Olivia and Vivian are both strong, independent characters, but the heroine is the only one who acts with wisdom and discretion. Much like Viola, Vivian is designed to be the driving force of the storyline, as well as the character development. However, unlike the original play, Olivia is given an opportunity for redemption at the end of the play when she and Owen finally meet. When talking about Vivian, Olivia says,

I put myself up on a pedestal and no one could bring me back down. But, after being with Vivian, I realized how lonely I was. Even though I had no trouble finding a man and I was always surrounded by those who adored me, they only knew me on the surface. Vivian was the only one who could make me see that (131- 132).

When Vivian strongly opposes Olivia’s behavior, she allows Olivia to better understand the fault of her actions. Though Olivia’s confident composure has similarity to other strong female Shakespearean characters, such as Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, Vivian proves to be a character with better quality. Thus, in comparing Olivia and Vivian, there is a clear distinction between Vivian as a wise character and Olivia as a self-absorbed character.

In the original script, the characterization of Viola plays a vital role in the life of the countess. As Olivia represents the image of lovesickness and lack of self-knowledge, Shakespeare uses her character to further demonstrate how Viola differs from other female characters in the Elizabethan theater. In Williams’ article on relationships within *Twelfth Night*, the author explains that Viola must “teach Olivia all she needs to know about herself and her waste of time, though more than once Viola must remind her” (Williams, 198). Thus, Olivia’s character serves the same purpose in the modern adaptation. In the original script, Olivia is presented as a high-ranking woman who has a poor sense of character. Yet, as Viola acts as the mediator between Olivia and Orsino, Shakespeare illustrates a duality of character between the heroine and the countess. When Viola, disguised as a man, pays a visit to Olivia, Shakespeare paints a comical scene between the two female characters. While Viola composes herself in a mature and professional manner, Olivia finds herself falling in love, even after swearing off men for the rest of her life. She says, “Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections / With an invisible and subtle stealth / To creep in at mine eyes / Well, let it be” (3.1.302-304). Although Olivia comes from the nobility, her naïve nature causes Viola to be greatly

avored by the audience. Jenkins further points out in his article that “there is the risk of the ridiculous about a woman who mistakenly loves one of her own sex” (Jenkins, 36). The foolishness of Olivia’s behavior is demonstrated until the end of the play without much opportunity for redemption; however, in the modern adaptation, Viola acts as the catalyst for the shift in Olivia’s character.

Characterization of Viola and Orsino / Vivian and Owen

The characterization of Viola is further exhibited through her interaction with the Duke Orsino. In the original play, Shakespeare forms an unlikely relationship between Viola and Orsino to demonstrate the idea of false gender stereotypes. As a man of higher rank, Orsino is expected to uphold himself in a professional manner, yet he is portrayed as a fool who allows his emotions to blind him. Crowder explains that “Orsino is the character who suffers from his disguise—the disguise that he creates concerning love” (Crowder, 6). Orsino’s constant pursuit of Olivia is rooted in his infatuation with the idea of love instead of being in love. Yet Viola acts as the voice of reason and continuously attempts to make him see the truth of his desires. She goes beyond her role as a eunuch and acts as a consultant to the Duke in hopes that he will come to his senses.

In a similar way, the modern adaptation portrays Owen as the CEO of a tech company who lacks maturity and humility. When Vivian enters the scene, she proves herself reliable enough to handle Owen’s personal affairs. Although she is only his assistant, she uses her position to give him advice on his infatuation with Olivia, despite her own feelings for Owen. In the modern script, I decided to create Vivian as not only a consultant but a friend to Owen. Despite their differences, Vivian remains loyal to him as his employee but convicts him as his friend. Even though this connection is not made directly in the original script, I believe it further demonstrates how Vivian looks past the divide between genders and sees herself as Owen’s equal. Furthermore, Owen plays an important role in Vivian’s understanding of herself. In the modern adaptation he explains to her, “We’re both workaholics. We believe that once we achieve what we want, we will have time for everything else. But in reality, it’s never enough. If we achieve one thing, we have to achieve something else. It’s an endless cycle” (68). By understanding the root of their desires, both characters realize how they share similar habits. Although Shakespeare uses Olivia as the central topic of their conversation, I desired to have Vivian and Owen connect on a deeper level. In Jenkins’s article, he states that through Viola, “Orsino and Olivia come to their happy ending when they have learnt a new attitude to others and to themselves (Jenkins, 21). However, I wanted to exhibit how Vivian develops a greater understanding of who she is through Owen. By establishing a stronger relationship between the two characters, their outlook on each other is no longer dictated by gender stereotypes but through genuine characteristics.

CONCLUSION

In both the original script and the modern adaptation, gender equality is a moral truth in *Twelfth Night*. During a time when life was governed by patriarchal tradition, Shakespeare created a female character who possesses traits that could only be seen in

a man. Though several scholars have addressed the significance of Viola's character, none have reviewed the main protagonist in regard to gender roles. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare forms a dynamic change within the play with Orsino as the fool and Viola as the heroine. By evaluating Shakespeare's representation of Viola, her sense of wisdom and comradery with the other characters act in opposition to traditional gender stereotypes. As the driving force of the plotline, Viola brings about a new, developed image of a woman in the Elizabethan era.

Similarly, the protagonist of the modern adaptation, Vivian Davis, makes the audience aware of the gender stereotypes that are still in existence today. From Owen's misogynistic mindset to her struggle to climb the social ladder, Vivian demonstrates how gender equality is still not fully established in the twenty-first century. Yet Vivian exhibits maturity with her characterization in similarity to Shakespeare's illustration of Viola. Through the portrayal of an independent woman, both characters create a major change within the other characters and draw attention to gender roles as an opportunity to alter them. Though centuries apart, Shakespeare's attention to gender roles are just as significant in the modern setting. As English playwright and colleague of Shakespeare Ben Jonson states, "Shakespeare was not of an age, but for all time" (Wagner, 180). Shakespeare's moral truths are timeless and still applicable to the twenty-first century.

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