

Love Through Service in Twelfth Night

Zoe Hall

William Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night* depicts several relationships with various entanglements. Obstacles such as unrequited love, mistaken identities, and class barriers add to the confusing situations. Prevalent themes in the relationships include love, desire, and service. Not every relationship in *Twelfth Night* is based on romantic attraction, however. Shakespeare writes of powerful friendships and master-servant dynamics in addition to romantic relations. The relationships portrayed in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* demonstrate that there is a connection between service and love through actions. Relationships that particularly showcase this connection are those of Viola and Orsino, Antonio and Sebastian, Olivia and Cesario/Viola, and Olivia and Malvolio.

Before delving into these unique relationships, it is important to define love and service for the context of this paper. Love is described as "A feeling or disposition of deep affection or fondness for someone, typically arising from a recognition of attractive qualities, from natural affinity, or from sympathy and manifesting itself in concern for the other's welfare and pleasure in his or her presence" ("Love, n.1."). Each of these aspects can be found in *Twelfth Night*, especially that of an individual's concern for another's wellbeing. Service is defined as "The action of serving someone or something; performance of the duties, role, or function of a servant; work done in obedience to and for the benefit of a master, mistress, etc." ("Service, n.1."). Service in the literal sense is evident in the play through the servants in Orsino and Olivia's households, but service can also refer to actions that benefit an individual not performing the action. These two themes,

love and service, are paired together throughout *Twelfth Night*; characters in the play desire to show other characters their love or affection for them through service -- or acts of service.

One prevalent example of the connection between service and love is present within Viola and Orsino's relationship. After surviving a shipwreck incident, Viola seeks out a service position under Orsino while disguised as a man called "Cesario." This situation creates a master-servant dynamic between the two characters. Viola secretly falls in love with her master after joining his household. In this relationship, service preceded love; nonetheless, there is still a correlation between the two concepts. When speaking about Viola and Orsino's relationship, among others, David Schalkwyk asserts that "Service facilitates the erotic dimensions of these relationships" (90). In other words, service may not have derived from love but instead service kindled the "erotic" feelings that Viola experiences. Because of Viola's position and consequent proximity to Orsino, the fond feelings she holds for her master grow into desire for a romantic relationship. Michelle M. Dowd insists that "Viola pleads for her own romantic desires using language borrowed from an older, courtly tradition of romantic service." In this claim, Dowd is referring to the way in which Viola expresses her affection to Orsino. Viola obscurely admits her love for him, then immediately carries out actions that please Orsino, despite his unrequited attraction (Shakespeare 2.4.96-137). Viola's actions and dedication to Orsino connect love and service to each other because of her desire to please him out of love. This correlation relates back to the idea that serviceable actions can also stem from love.

A strong bond between the characters Antonio and Sebastian also ties love and service together in a powerful way. The two men come from differing backgrounds; Antonio is a sea-captain, while Sebastian descends from a noble family. In this relationship, it is Antonio who shows devotion to his friend. He discovers and rescues Sebastian at sea, and this first act of service creates a close bond between them. Antonio explains, "His life I gave him and thereto add / my love, without retention or restraint / all his in dedication. For his sake / did I expose myself, pure for his love" (5.1.78-81). In these lines, Antonio reflects on rescuing Sebastian and perhaps nursing him back to life. His statement clearly showcases the connection between service and love. Antonio is suggesting that his act of service caused him to bond with Sebastian, and the passion that developed for his friend influenced him to crave Sebastian's happiness and wellbeing more than his own. An example of this behavior is when Antonio offers Sebastian his change purse for an outing, an act that took trust and devotion (3.3.41-52). It is interesting to consider the brotherly bond experienced by Sebastian next to Antonio's deep devotion. Perhaps Antonio is experiencing romantic attraction towards Sebastian, in which case their situation would result in unrequited love as well. Nevertheless, Antonio insists on providing for, being near, and supporting Sebastian. He pleads, "If you will not murder me for my love, let me / be your servant" (2.2.34-35). In this line it appears as though Antonio believes service to Sebastian will cause Sebastian to reciprocate love. Schalkwyk presents a similar thought when he suggests that Antonio "...is in fact pleading to be allowed to be Sebastian's servant in the literal sense, because such service offers the opportunity for him to indulge his passionate attachment to his friend" (94). To restate, Schalkwyk argues that reciprocated love could derive from service. In Antonio and Sebastian's relationship, neither service nor love precede the other, but there are

instances of both throughout their encounters. Love and service were met together in several ways to form a passionate attachment.

Another relationship to consider when focusing on love and service is the dynamic between Olivia and Cesario/Viola. Their interactions showcase love preceding service, and their story focuses more on the literal aspects of servantry. Olivia, a noble lady desired and courted by Orsino, falls in love at first sight with Viola disguised as "Cesario" from Orsino's household. Olivia experiences unrequited love from "Cesario." A lack of reciprocated affection could possibly motivate characters to show more serviceable traits, such is the case for Olivia. She is so motivated to capture Cesario/Viola's heart that she continuously seeks their presence and discreetly offers gifts, such as jewelry (1.5.307-309). By seeking out a physical closeness, Olivia hopes "Cesario" will develop feelings for her. Schalkwyk insists that the literal condition of being someone's close servant and dedicating oneself to them creates a potential for growth in affection, or vice versa (93). In Olivia and Cesario/Viola's relationship, service itself does not necessarily create romantic feelings between the two characters, but instead, acts of service succeed the love and desire of Olivia. Service is sought out as a means to receive love in this relationship.

Relationships in which characters do not display affection for each other, such as the one between Olivia and Malvolio, still present a connection between love and service. Malvolio, Olivia's head servant, is dedicated to serving her but hides his ambitions of marriage. The class status that Malvolio would gain by marrying Olivia is his primary motivation for attempting a relationship with her; it appears as though he does not truly love Olivia. He dreams of becoming "count Malvolio" and pictures,

Calling my officers about me, in my /
branched velvet gown, having come from a
daybed / where I have left Olivia sleeping....
And then to have the humor of state; and / after

a demure travel of regard, telling them I / know my place, as I would they should do theirs... (2.5.46-53).

Overhearing these “ridiculous” fantasies, another member of Olivia’s household, Maria, decides to play a trick on the man she deems foolish for desiring advancement. Maria plays a key role in connecting themes of love and service together in what otherwise would be presented merely as a vain attempt at marriage for the purposes of upward movement in society by a servant. She forges a love letter from Olivia to Malvolio, adding an element of romance to the servant’s selfish schemes. Dowd makes a connection about Maria’s actions and argues that her “...plan to deliver a forged message of love to Malvolio parodies Viola’s own role as Orsino’s servant, a role that requires her to serve as Orsino’s love emissary.” In referencing Viola’s role as a messenger for Orsino and Olivia, Dowd hints at Maria’s equal importance in creating an association between love and service for Olivia and Malvolio. Dowd later explains that Maria manipulates “...the role of a servant as love emissary...” The most prevalent connection between service and love in Malvolio and Olivia’s relationship is Malvolio’s literal service to Olivia and the imagined feelings from “Olivia” presented by Maria. Because of Maria’s trickery, Malvolio is believed to be mad, and he gains neither love nor social status. Despite there being no real love connection

between Malvolio and Olivia, Shakespeare still manages to relate the themes of love and service to each other through these characters’ interactions alongside Maria.

Shakespeare presents possibilities for individuals to marry outside of their class, suggesting an absence of class barriers, yet by the end of *Twelfth Night*, characters have been paired with partners who are equal in social status. Those who have not found a partner in their own class, such as Antonio and Malvolio, are left without love at all. Shakespeare writes of these characters’ desire to love without boundaries, while also emphasizing the apparent impossibility of breaking the social and class barriers of his time. Despite the issues his characters face in their search for “true” love, Shakespeare successfully connects ideas of service and love to each other throughout the entirety of *Twelfth Night* through the characters’ relationships, thoughts, and actions. The ideas that love derives from service or that service is a consequence of love are both valid and present themes in Shakespeare’s work. Service can influence love, and love can cause one to perform acts of service. Perhaps Shakespeare recognized that the concept of love, in all its forms, includes acts of service and would continue to for centuries to come. The presence of universal themes in Shakespeare’s work is one possible reason why he remains such a timeless poet to this day.

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