

## Plot construction in *Twelfth Night*

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* impresses the readers with its perfect blend of romance and comedy. Although the play has a main plot and a subplot, the structure of the play has been skillfully handled in order to give importance to both. Herein it is worth mentioning that *Twelfth Night* violates all the three unities. The action of the play extends over several months and the shifts from one place to another at rapid succession. Again there is the sub-plot which produces a comic effect in the play. However, it is important to note that the non-observance of the unities in no way does any damage to the play which remains one of the best executions of the dramatist's design in writing the play.

Act I serves as the exposition as it introduces most of the characters of the main plot. Viola's disguise as Cesario also initiates the love triangle, for Viola falls in love with the Duke at first sight, while the Duke is in love with Olivia. Olivia is initially attracted to, and then eventually falls in love with Cesario/Viola. Act II presents the rapid rising action of the main plot with Viola's twin brother, Sebastian traveling to Duke Orsino's court. The audience now waits for the complications that will arise because Viola and Sebastian look alike. Olivia declares her love for Cesario/Viola indirectly through a ring sent to her. The action is also focused on the subplot. Sir Toby Belch, Maria, and the other minor characters are determined to teach the conceited Malvolio a lesson. This is the introduction to the subplot, which rapidly rises as Malvolio reads the letter and then follows the instructions of the letter.

Olivia, now passionately in love with Cesario/Viola decides to tell Cesario/Viola about it. The opportunity arises when Viola visits her again on behalf of the Duke. Olivia's open declaration of love for Cesario/Viola marks the climax of the plot. Following the declaration, matters slowly begin to move in the direction of resolving the complications arising as a result of Viola's disguise. The first of these situations is when Viola is mistaken for Sebastian by Antonio. The audience, who waited for such complications to arise, can now enjoy the humor of the situation. Hence one finds that towards the end of Act II, the falling action of the main plot gradually moves towards a final resolution of the complications.

Act III also contains the climax of the subplot with a totally changed Malvolio in scene 4. While conversing with Olivia, Malvolio constantly alludes to the letter written by Maria. Now, since Olivia has no idea about the letter, she asks Maria and Sir Toby to look after Malvolio. His being shut up in the dark room is the beginning of a rapid falling action of the subplot.

In Act IV, Sir Toby loses interest in the intrigue after being rebuked by Olivia. It is left to Feste, who after teasing him for some time, promises to help Malvolio out of his predicament. Olivia marries Sebastian in Act IV, mistaking him for Cesario/Viola. The plot thus moves closer to the resolution of the complications.

Act V serves as a conclusion for the main plot as well as the subplot. Although it consists of just one scene, the scene is long, the action fast paced, without any omissions or superfluous details to detract the audience. The revelation of Viola's real identity resolves the complications present throughout the play in the main plot. In keeping with the idea that "*Twelfth Night*" is a romance, Viola, who has always loved the Duke, will now marry him. The Duke and Olivia are quite willing to shift their affections to Viola and Sebastian. The main plot concludes on a happy note. The subplot too draws to its logical end, as Malvolio is released from the dark room, and Fabian provides Olivia with the details of the intrigue against Malvolio.

Hence on the basis of the above analysis, it can be asserted that the main and the sub plot of *Twelfth Night* are intricately connected to one another. Interestingly the key point which unites the main

plot with the sub-plot is parallelism and contrast. The characters in the main plot, except Viola represent some kind of excess of emotions. Thus Olivia nurses her melancholy after her brother's death, so much so that she refuses to entertain or receive any guest. Duke Orsino at the same time represents the eccentricities of love as he claims his love for Olivia in hyperbolic terms though he is not able to convey his own feelings to her. Only Viola represents the much talked about balance in the social life. Interestingly, the same kind of excess is repeated to portray the characters of the sub plot like Sir Toby. He is the very embodiment of comic boisterousness of life. Truly, he seems to sum up the spirit of Illyria- love of life and wine. He declares that he would go on drinking until the last drop of wine is used up. Malvolio on the other hand impresses to be a solemn man with Puritan morality. He is an antagonist to merry world of festivity, and hence he becomes an insufferable character to those who make merry. But Maria, one of the principal characters in the sub plot, stands out to be an intelligent character, who exposes Malvolio's inflated ego by employing trick and word-play. Herein, it should be mentioned that, though Maria in no way equals Viola, in her wit and intelligence, she certainly appears to be the shadow of Viola in the sub-plot.

The duel scene of Act III sc. iv is the meeting point of the main plot and the sub plot. The incident unites the main and the sub plot together by bringing the characters of each plot- namely Viola, Sebastian and Olivia of the main plot and Sir Toby, Andrew and Fabian of the sub plot.

Last but not the least, the uniting force behind the sub plot and the main plot in *Twelfth Night* is mainly love. The play begins with courtship and concludes with marriage. We have a couple of marriages at the end- Viola and Orsino, Sebastian and Olivia and Sir Toby and Maria. So, it is no exaggeration to say that the theme of love and marriage unites the whole play together.