

Elizabeth Jones

Shakespeare

Part A: Number 4

This passage between Viola and Olivia represents the play's theme of confusion, both in the sense of mistaken identity and in the sense of a confusion of gender roles. It also shows the importance of other people's opinions: Orsino wants to know what Olivia thinks of him, Viola wants to know how Orsino thinks of her, and Olivia wants to know how Viola/Cesario thinks of her. Which, in and of itself, is a confusion of gender roles and mistaken identity. The lines themselves also show the importance of confusion in the play: they are riddle-like and can have several different meanings, both to the characters and the audience.

When Olivia asks Viola, in the guise of Cesario, what she thinks of her, the question is directed at a man but replied by a woman. During the time that this play was written, it was more common for a man to ask this question and court the lady's favor, not the other way around. Therefore Olivia's pursuit of Viola/Cesario is odd and aggressive for a female of the time; however, she is saved from any bad label because the world she is in is skewed, the man she seeks is really a woman, and any independence from the norm could theoretically be explained away by the confusion of gender identity. The fact that the entire play stays with no specific characteristic for gender but rather tosses them all about keeps Olivia from getting a bad reputation.

Viola/Cesario's riddle-like response could be

interesting

considered the motto of the play. "That you do think you are not what you are," holds true for practically every character: Viola is ~~not~~ pretending to be a man when she is really a woman, Olivia thinks she has fallen in love with a man but hasn't, Orsino loves Cesario as a man but she isn't, even Malvolio thinks himself destined for greatness, but he isn't. Every character, excepting perhaps Feste and Maria, thinks of themselves as something they truly are not, confused by either switched identity or by their own hubris.

The following lines are representations of the desires evident in the play. Olivia says she wants Viola/Cesario to be what she wants her to be, which in this case is her lover; all of the other characters wish that someone would be what they want them as. But the longing in Olivia's words show the fruitlessness of that; only Viola really gets exactly what she wanted - everyone else was thwarted by something or someone.

Viola/Cesario ends the dialog with, "I wish it might, for now I am your fool." The play makes a fool of everyone through their desires and through their confusion. The concept of using gender roles and identity for the purpose of this play is seemingly to show what fools people can be. In a more puntanical sense, it could also be taken to mean that when people step out of their defined roles, when they "confuse" those roles, everyone is made a fool until the roles can go back to order.

I see
it as some
one doing
different
identities
and
roles?



Part B: Number 7

This passage, spoken by Lady MacDuff, shows not one but two major concepts of the play: first, that goodness is no longer valued in a world where only bad deeds guarantee success, and secondly, of course, gender roles. Lady MacDuff is placed in an untenable situation, a metaphor perhaps for the idea of heroic or at least decent behavior as well as an example of the prescribed characteristics of both genders and to which she must adopt in order to survive.

She presents the fact that she has done no harm, the self-same cry of every man, woman or child unjustly convicted of a crime they did not commit. Also, historically, the time that Macbeth is set in is known for the many wars and the violence that seeped the land, innocent bystanders punished by death for merely living in an "enemy" village when they had done nothing themselves to provoke the anger of the invading army. Good people were just as likely to suffer, perhaps more likely to suffer, than the bad.

But, Lady MacDuff points out, good deeds were often dangerous while bad behavior brought more rewards. This is proven in the play by the fact that Macbeth has become king through murder, Banquo is killed because of his good morals, and good men must flee because they do not support the evilness of Macbeth. The play and this passage is a good example of Social Darwinism. The strongest will survive. And, in this case, the strongest are those willing to go to any lengths to succeed, not really allowing for anything

good but using only the bad.

Lady MacDuff also says that to protest she had done no harm would be a "womanly" defense. This play definitely concerns itself with gender and which roles are acceptable and defined to each sex.

Lady Macbeth has already broken the gender lines by portraying masculine traits, and it is obvious she is not supposed to be celebrated for it. Now Lady MacDuff questions whether she should plead for mercy on the defense of her innocence and die knowing she will be praised for her woman-ness, or should she flee or fight and thus gain a reputation like Lady Macbeth's?

Also these two lines suggest that claiming innocence and goodness is feminine. That, were she a man, she could instead engage in bad behavior, i.e. the masculine domain of fighting. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that saying you had done nothing wrong is either womanly or only acceptable for women, because, after all, nothing they do can be considered laudable unless it is a masculine trait.

So though these lines do point out that it is unfair to harm the innocent, it is also weak and womanly to use that as a defense. Females are pretty ~~much~~ much screwed either way.

Strongy

strong
might