The Characters In Twelfth Night: How They Are Presented In Act 1 And Act 2

Throughout Act 1 and Act 2, the characters of the play prove that they are dependent on each other to progress the play, and have a lot more to them than what is first presented to us, the audience.

In Act 1 and 2, Viola is at the forefront of plot development and also has some very virtuous character development herself. She is presented as a very amiable, with lots of personal features that are clearly enjoyed by audiences seeing the play, as well as those reading along. She is determined and clever., shown by her actions towards other characters.

In Act 2, Viola, or Cesario as she is known here, is described as ‘fortified against all denial’ showing us how dedicated she is to whatever her cause may be. This is backed up by her determination towards delivering Orsino’s message to Olivia in Act 2, despite her love for him herself. When others would be put in that situation, there is no doubt that they would react entirely differently and less effectively to Viola. Viola is also very resourceful, as she adapts to her situation to guarantee her safety in the unfamiliar, mysterious land of Illyria. She trusts the captain of her shipwrecked ship, and also devises a cunning plan to protect herself by appearing as a male eunuch to Orsino. ‘I’ll serve this Duke, thou shalt present me as a eunuch to him’. This also progresses the theme of Deception, as well as Gender and Identity. Subsequently, Viola is immediately seen as sharp and well suited to the situation presented to her.

Finally, Viola contributes to the theme of love by being arguably the only character to experience true love. She formed a close bond with the duke Orsino, and is clearly the only character experiencing love that is not capricious or infatuated. This is shown by her ability to put her love before herself, when she agrees to deliver a message of affection from Orsino to Olivia, with her own personal gains aside.

Malvolio provides a less major role towards the story and plot, but undoubtedly has a very interesting trajectory of development and lots of points of analysis.

To the audience, Malvolio could be viewed as their kill-joy uncle, and has character traits of a librarian who takes the job very seriously. He takes very little joy in anything except, apparently destroying everyone else’s. He is very much the antithesis of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and was quite likely put in the play partly as an addition to build up that comedic feud style side plot. He can be viewed to go out of his way to stick a leg into the way of most characters fun. Malvolio is described as ‘the devil a Puritan’ by Maria, and lives up to the name with the way he acts.

Malvolio becomes easy game for the mischief-makers of the play, and does not leave without a well-deserved windup, in the form of a fake love letter from Olivia. His vanity allows him to fall for the inept joke, causing more of a fool of himself than before. Despite his unloving exterior, if looked upon close enough, Malvolio craves both Olivia’s love, and her position of power. This is evident in his distant dislike of Cesario, as he sees Olivia’s affection towards him. Despite his

admiration of Olivia and her position, the relationship between Malvolio and his mistress is highly professional, and she requires and enjoys his services.

Although despite any opinions anybody has of him, it cannot be ignored that he has some form of severe sadness, and gets no support from any other characters in the play. He would not be doing the actions that are viewed as rude, puritan and annoying if he was happy with his own life, or at least didn't dislike it as much. He still seems to build up a slither of hope for himself and his situation, with his ambition to become noble.

Orsino is basically characterized by a few key speeches. In Act 1, the majority of his time speaking is filled with downhearted words and phrases such as 'surfeiting' and 'dying fall'. He has put himself under the impression that he is so madly in love with Olivia that without her he would perish. Of course, this is not true, and he is merely attracted to the idea of having that kind of affection for someone, or in love with love. Despite his immediate appearance as a suffering, expired man going through a mid-life love crisis, he is actually described and seen by the other characters and the audience as he perfect gentleman further on through the play. He is described as principled and honourable as well as loyal and devoted. If he were to fall for Viola, it is expectable that they would have a very loving relationship. Not a fickle love, but a true, loving relationship.

However, Orsino is extremely unpredictable and unreliable, and 'like an opal in the sunlight'. His monologue at the start of the play is where it is most evident; He talks about his undying love for Olivia, yet quickly decides the idea is stupid, as if he is bored of it, yet still returns to the idea later on in the Act, and the next one. It is not obvious why he acts like this, whether it may be a simple character trait, or an underlying problem with his opinions about the aspects he talks about. Nevertheless, Orsino is the crux of the play, and his desire for Olivia is essential to the overall plot, and each individual character's development.

In summary, throughout Act 1 and 2, all the characters have a pleasing character development, and all move away from their original appearances, or at least give us a reason to discount, or argue against it. As the play progresses, Viola goes from unsure of what to do, and how she'll live with the loss of her brother, to independent and forward thinking about her intentions and their consequences. Malvolio appears as a boring, sponge-esque character, with the way he ruins everybody's good experiences, and appears to enjoy doing so. Orsino has a lot more character than meets the eye, in reality he is not just the melancholiest character ever created by Shakespeare, not just sentimentally in love with love. But he is in fact a well-rounded individual caught up in himself and his ideas. In truth, without even one of these characters, Twelfth Night would lose a lot of value as a play.