

'Parody' and 'Play within a Play' in William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night

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Abstract:

The research investigates aspects of parody and 'play within a play' in William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (1601-1602). One important issue to be investigated is the parodic relation between two interrelated plots in this romantic comedy. The main focus is on the play's subplot with regard to the aspects of 'parody' and 'play within a play'. The play's minor-plot, as the research demonstrates, parodically reflects on the play's main themes and dramatic action. There is also a striking similarity and parodic relation between the two female protagonists in both interrelated plots with regard to female protagonists' witty usage of language and deceptive schemes. Such parodic relationship reaffirms the play's essential message in respect to women's quest for individuality and self-hood. This is in accord with Shakespeare's humanist and feminist perspective with regard to woman's right in determining her own destiny. The current research is significant, for it shed lights on unexplored aspects in Shakespeare's romantic comedies such as 'Parody' and 'Play within a Play'

Keywords: Parody, Sub-Plot, Verbal Skill, Individuality.

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الملخص :

تناول البحث عنصرا 'المسرح داخل المسرح' و'المحاكات الساخرة' في الكوميديا الرومانسية (الليلة الثانية عشرة) لوليم شكسبير. البحث تبرز العلاقة الشائكة بين العقدة الدرامية الرئيسية والعقدة الدرامية الثانوية. البحث تتعمق بشكل خاص العنصر الدرامي 'المسرح داخل المسرح' في العقدة الدرامية الثانوية، والاهم من ذلك تبيان التشابه المحاكاتي بين كلا البطلتان في كلا العقد الرئيسي والثانوي، وبالاخص تشابههما في كيفية اسخدامهما للحوار الدرامي والحيلة الدرامية. ان تبيان العلاقة المحاكاتية بين العقتين الدراميتين لها مغذى خاص لكونها تبرز الدور البارز للبطلتين في كلتا العقتين الدراميتين في تغيير مجري الاحداث وبالتالي بحثهما عن الذات كنساء حرات ذات ارادة.

پوخته :

ئهم توژینه وهیه لیکۆلینه وهیه کی رهخه گرانه یه له دوو رهگه زی درامی گرنگ (شانۆ له ناو شانۆ) و (پارۆدی) له کۆمیدیای رۆمانسی (دوانزه شهوه) ی ولیهم شه کسپیر. لێره دا سه رنجی رهخه گرانه ئه خه رتیه سه رته و په یوه ندیه لیکچووه ی نیوان گریدرامی سه ره کی و گریدرامی لاوه کی له کۆمیدیایه. توژینه وهیه که به تایبه تی له رهگه زی درامی (شانۆ له ناو شانۆ) له گریدرامی دوه م ئه کۆلینه وهیه له شانۆکه دا، ئه وهش به به راورد کردن له نیوان دو پاله وانی ئافه رت له هه ردوو گریدرامیه که دا. لێره دا سه رنجی رهخه گرانه ئه خه رتیه سه ر شیوازی به کاره یێنانی زمانێ ئاخوتنی تایبه ت به پاله وانی ئافه رت له گریدرامی دوه م، ئه وه ی پێویسته لێره دا ئاماژه ی پێدیه ی گرنگی په یوه ندی هه ردوو گریدرامیه جیاوازه که یه له ده رخسته ی رۆژی هه ردو پاله وانه ئافه رته که له گه ران به دوا ی خود و دۆزینه وهیه شوناسیان وه ک دو ئافه رتی به هیزی خاوه ن بپاری ئازاد. ئه مهش هاوتایه له گه ل پرنسیپ و بنه ماکانی میتۆدی فیمینزم ده رباره ی ئازادی و خودگه رایه تی ئافه رت له کۆمیدیای رۆمانسیه که ی شه کسپیردا.

Introduction:

The insertion of a sub-plot within the major plot is a common dramatic motif in Shakespearean romantic comedy. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602), for instance, contains multiple plots and diverse dramatic incidents. The play's minor plot functions as a 'play within a play'. Such plot contains many meta-theatrical aspects such as play within a play, asides and role playing. These meta-theatrical features have important dramatic functions. The term 'meta-theater or meta-drama, as defined by The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (2008), means a "drama about drama, or any moment of self-consciousness by which a play draws attention to its own fictional status as a theatrical pretence" (Witt, 2013, p. 6). As the research demonstrates, the sub-plot in *Twelfth Night* functions as a minor play' within the larger play, and it draws attention to the artificial nature of the play itself. Whereas the major plot deals with "serious and intense romantic love inherited from the medieval courtly tradition, the sub-plot is entirely comic and even farcical in tone" (Ray, 2007, p.157). Both plots, however, share similar themes such as mistaken identity, self-deception, disguise and courtship. They even share similar dramatic structure. "It is convenient to discuss the play in terms of main plot and subplot, romance and comedy; and the characters of the comic subplot do constitute a distinct society within the play" (Carneage & Houlahan, 2014: 17). Moreover, the romantic plot in the play mainly deals

with the development of a love relationship between two main protagonists, whereas the sub-plot deals with a comic scheme set by a group of low-ranked characters against the main villain. One of the core issues this research tries to investigate is the extent the minor plot provides a parody of the major plot. More importantly, the extent the minor plot elaborates on the female protagonist's quest of selfhood.

Overview of Parody and 'Play within a Play' in Elizabethan Drama:

The dramatic feature of 'Meta-theatre' or 'Self-referentiality', is quite common in Shakespeare's plays. The term 'meta-theatrical' reflects on the dramatic technique common in Elizabethan drama through which part of the play, so often a minor play within a play, reflects on specific issue or theme in the play's major plot. "A well-known classical example of literary self-reference is the play within the play in Shakespeare's Hamlet" (Nöth & Bishara, 2007, p.208). Christopher Marlowe, another significant Elizabethan dramatist, had also employed similar dramatic technique in his play. Such theatrical technique constitutes an important aspect in Marlowe's tragedy Doctor Faustus (1589 - 1592). In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the meta-theatrical subplot functions as satirical parody of the main plot. In the play, "Hamlet enlists actors to perform a play duplicating aspects of his father's murder); parody that mocks theatrical conventions; and reference to the performance's actors" (Buzzard & Don. 2014, p. 92). In Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, similarly, the sub-plot functions as a satirical parody of the main themes in the main plot. The minor plot in such a play centers on the adventures of Robin, a clown, who seems to be a mocking imitation of Faustus's adventures. Theatrically, the minor plot provides a satirical parody of the major plot. Robin's uncalculated mistakes in the minor plot parodically reflect on Dr. Faustus's own mistakes in the major plot. And the dramatic function of the minor plot as a "parody" of the main plot " seems clear" (Kendrick, 2004 , p.227-228). The theatrical device of 'play within a play' is also a common feature in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. In Twelfth Night (1601-1602), for instance, there is a parodic relation between the major plot and subplot . The play's sub-plot offers a scene which can be termed a 'play within a play'. Moreover, the sub-plot reflects on major themes of the play, and the minor plot offers an equivalent parody of the major event in play's major plot.

Maria's Tricky Scheme as a Parody of Viola's Deceptive Role-Playing

Maria's playful deceptive scheme in the sub-plot against Malvolio, the play's main villain, signals a shift from romance to comedy. Such dramatic shift is marked by a change in the linguistic style from "verse to prose". Comic characters in Shakespeare's comedies mostly talk in " prose", whereas "essential characters deliver their speeches in verse" (Caenegie & Houlahan, 2014 , p. 17) The major plot deals with two developing love stories among young lovers, whereas the subplot deals with a less serious issue. The seriousness of the love stories among the conflicting young lovers in the major plot, moreover, is contrasted against the trivial and

comic situation of the comic characters in the minor plot. In the major plot, "Shakespeare has created a group of downstairs roisterers whose antics parallel, mimic, or mingle with those of the upstairs aristocracy" (Shurgot & Owens, 1998, p.144). In *Twelfth Night*, the minor-plot serves multiple dramatic functions. Theatrically, it reflects on many contrasts in the play, juxtaposing falsehoods and truth, self-delusion and self-realization, virtue and evil. For instance, Malvolio's delusion about the prospect of marrying Olivia, the Lady of the household, is a satiric parody of Duke Orsino's delusion about Countess Olivia, or even Olivia's delusion about Cesario, who is in fact a woman in disguise. Moreover, Malvolio's delusion about Lady Olivia can be considered as the satirical equivalent of Orsino's 'love-sickness' for Countess Olivia as well as Lady Olivia's own delusion about Viola/Cesario's disguised character. These false and deceptive love situations in the play are contrasted against Viola's sincere love for Orsino and Sebastian's growing affection for Olivia, or even the growing romance between Sir Toby and Maria. Noticeably, a parallel can be drawn between the two female protagonists in two different plots. Viola and Maria, two heroic female figures in major and sub-plots, share personality traits and characteristics. Both female protagonists share similar personality traits and characteristics. They are intelligent and skilful in using witty speeches. They also employ tricks and deceptive schemes in order to reveal truth from falsehood.

There are many differences between major and sub-plots in the play. In the minor plot, a group of minor characters perform the deceptive scheme against Malvolio. Unlike Orsino and Olivia in the main plot, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek represent two comic figures in the subplot. "Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew, though they belong to the aristocracy, cannot be taken seriously for Sir Toby does not have a serious attitude and Sir Andrew is a fool" (Ray, 2007, p.157). Other marginal figures in the sub-plot such as, Maria, Malvolio, Feste and Fabian don't belong to aristocracy and "are not nobly born" (Ibid). Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch share similar personality traits. They are typical prototypes of comic figures common in the Elizabethan comedies. These characters "can be seen as a classic comic pairing: fat and thin, witty and foolish, joker and straight man" (Caenegie & Houlahan, 2014, p. 17). Malvolio, on the other hand, represents a typical embodiment of 'comic villain' in the play. His arrogant attitudes and rigid assertion of authority in Olivia's household is in clear contrast with Maria's tolerant and fun-loving personality. "He fantasizes himself as contentedly wed to Olivia for three months. He intends to use his power as the Countess's husband to command staff members and to demoralize Sir Toby for merry-making" (Snodgrass, 2008, p 5). Contrary to Malvolio, Maria is morally and intellectually superior to other comic characters. Her wit and cunning rhetoric ultimately enables her to rise above her modest social class. Similar to Viola in the main plot, Maria plays two different roles; one as a servant, and another as a trickster." It is Maria's literacy skills, however, that ultimately characterize her as a witty and resourceful servant worthy of reward via marriage" (Dowd, 2009, p. 40). Notably, Maria's role-playing in the subplot proves to be as much effective as Viola's disguise in the main plot.

In Olivia's household, Maria has been given liberty to express her opinions openly without being punished. She frequently speaks on her lady, and acts as if she is in charge of the household. Lady Olivia, somehow, has chosen the life of solitude "since she is mourning her dead brother" (Novy, 2017, p. 132). Maria's strong rhetoric is proven during her witty dialogues either with Malvolio, or with both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Through witty speeches, Maria could deliver her covert critiques against the characters' wrongdoings. Sir Toby Belch finds Maria's witty speeches amusing. He admires her quick wit and cunning speeches. She nonetheless expresses discontent about both characters' ill-mannered attitudes. Her criticism, however, is mostly directed against Sir Andrew's foolish attitude in Lady Olivia's household. There is nonetheless a hidden affection between Maria and Sir Toby Belch. The following speech, for instance, provides hints about Maria's leading role in Countess's household:

MARIA

Ay, but you must confine yourself
within the modest limits of order.

SIR TOBY BELCH

Confine? I'll confine myself no finer than I am.
These clothes are good enough to drink in,
and so be these boots too. And they be not,
let them hang themselves in their own straps. (1.3. 7-12).

Similar to Viola's role-playing in the main plot, Maria could easily shift social roles. Role-playing and disguise, from a feminist perspective, can be viewed as effective strategies against patriarchy as they provide means for the victimized women to alter and transform their personas as well as their social classes. By implication, Maria's deceptive scheme against Malvolio can be considered as equivalent parody of Viola's multiple disguises in the major plot. To cure Orsino from excessive 'lovesickness', Viola has disguised herself as a male page by the name of Cesario. Furthermore, Viola's disguise enables Olivia to leave her unrealistic delusion about love. At the final Act, both Orsino and Olivia acknowledge their past mistakes and ultimately reconcile their differences. Similarly, Maria's high moral standards and her witty character make her quite unique among the surrounding characters. She relentlessly instructs others to behave in proper manners in Countess Olivia's household. She blames Sir Toby for bringing Sir Andrew Aguecheek 'a foolish knight', to be Lady Olivia's 'wooer'. Sir Andrew, contrary to Maria, is an illiterate and shallow character whose sole interest lies in merry-making and drinking. He foolishly fancies that he has all the potentialities and means to marry Lady Olivia: 'I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues / that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. / O, had I but followed the arts!' (1. 3. 27-9). This comic character, ironically, can be considered as an equivalent parody of

Malvolio's self-delusion about Lady Olivia. Maria constantly criticizes Sir Andrew Aguecheek's ignorance and ill-mannered personality. This is apparent in the following speech in which Maria sarcastically mocks Sir Andrew's shallow manners:

SIR ANDREW

Good Mistress Accost, I desire better acquaintance

MARIA

My name is Mary, sir.

SIR ANDREW

Good Mistress Mary Accost. (1.3. 50-53).

Sir Andrew in the above speech confuses the term 'accost' for Maria's name. It clearly displays his ignorance and lack of knowledge about the prescribed norms and codes of courtship. Similar to Malvolio, Sir Andrew is a self-deluded character whose prospect of marrying Olivia ends tragically. They both represent satirical parody of ill-mannered courtiers. Noticeably, the aspect of parody recurs constantly through satirical representations of characters. The dramatist on multiple occasions reflected on themes of delusion and love-sickness by contrasting opposite characters. Malvolio's foolishness has been set in contrast against Orsino's love-sickness. Sir Andrew, similarly, has been set in contrast against both Malvolio and Duke Orsino. Sir Toby wittingly exploits Sir Andrew's ignorance and amuses himself by tricking the courtier into believing that he is a perfect choice of his niece Lady Olivia. He had taken 'some two thousand strong, or so' from him (3.2. 52-53). The most amusing moment occurs in the final Act when Sir Toby tricks Sir Andrew into challenging Cesario/Viola. Sir Toby's wit and playful manners make him a perfect match of Maria. He praises Maria's witty character as 'Penthesilea' and 'a beagle true bred'. Their union in a happy marriage constitutes a significant part of multiple weddings at the end of the romantic comedy.

Aspects of 'Play within a Play' in the Minor Plot

The conflict in the play's subplot arises because of power struggle between Malvolio and Maria in Olivia's household. Olivia's steward is a power seeker, and he tries desperately to overtake Lady Olivia's household, while Maria courageously resists the steward's lust for power. The following lines, for instance, underline Malvolio's authoritative personality in Countess Olivia's household:

MALVOLIO

Mistress Mary, if you prized my lady's favor
at anything more than

contempt, you would not give

means for this uncivil rule.

She shall know of it, by this hand. (2 . 3.118-121).

Maria finds Malvolio's shallow manners and his pretence of authority in Olivia's household unbearable. She displays a strong-willed character when she decides challenging Malvolio in front of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew: 'If I do not gull him into a nayword and make him a common recreation, /do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed. I know I can do it' (2 . 3. 131-133). Maria plans her revenge by tricking Malvolio into believing that he is a favourite match for Olivia. Her staged deceptive scheme, which can be viewed as 'a play within a play', aims to bring Malvolio to disclose his malicious scheme to overtake Olivia's household. Both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew joyfully join Maria's deceptive scheme against Olivia's Steward. This is evident in the following exchange in which Maria and two other courtiers mockingly criticize Malvolio's reserved and seemingly 'puritanical' manners:

MARIA

The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser; an affectioned ass that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him. And on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (A. 2 . S 3, 142-1248).

Malvolio's Puritanism, as described mockingly by Maria and others, has invoked different interpretations from critics. Probably, the dramatist had presented such comical figure to satirically allude to certain norms and manners by the Puritans during the Elizabethan era. In this respect, the comical depiction of Malvolio's excessive pretence of virtue on stage is meant to make "the Puritan(s) detestable and ridiculous" (Walsh, 2016 , p. 97). Malvolio's 'Puritanism' can be taken as parody of the theme of 'excess' in the play. A Similarity can be drawn between Malvolio's hypocrisy, particularly his excessive pretence of piety and virtue in the sub-plot, and Orsino's excessive display of sentimentality in the main plot. Parallel to Viola's attempt to temper Orsino's excessive passion, Maria in the minor plot undertakes the task of tempering the excess in Malvolio's rigid manners. Significantly, the theme of excess versus confinement recurs in most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. In *As You Like It* (1601-1602), for instance, Rosalind plays essential role in changing Orlando's personality. "Through linguistic grappling, Rosalind hopes not to kill Orlando's love for her but to temper its excess (Hunt , 2008 , p. 21). Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, similarly, addresses the theme of excess versus 'confinement'. Maria's trick in the play is set to disclose Malvolio's evil intention, namely his excessive desire to take charge of Olivia's household. The deceptive scene, ironically, provides a parody of the main plot in which Viola, disguised

as Cesario, tricks Orsino to reveal his 'excessive' desire for Olivia. Ironically, the relationship between Maria and Malvolio does not end up so much romantic as it is the case with Viola and Orsino. In the main plot, Viola, disguised as Cesario, is "attending and ultimately curing her beloved's love-sickness" (Schiffer, 2011 ,p. 8). Contrary to Viola, Maria executes her deceptive scheme in order to punish, or even reform Malvolio's personality. The scene in which Maria tricks Malvolio contains many metatheatrical elements such as , asides, role-playing, disguise, mimicry, and 'play-within-the-play':

the play within the play is often used as a form of irony and can be disguised as a simple performance within the play itself, a character masquerading as another character, a character pretending to be out of his mind, or a complex fusion of theatrical realities". (Fischer & Greiner 2007 :15).

Maria's act of individuality begins when she takes upon herself the task of restoring order and harmony to Olivia's household. As a proof of her strong-willed character, Maria impersonates Olivia's character by forging her handwriting. Her impersonation of Lady Olivia's personality, implicitly, alludes to Viola's impersonating of a male character in Orsino's court. To execute the staged trick, Maria writes an anonymous love letter and leaves it "on the garden path for Malvolio to find" (Snodgrass, 2008: 4). She then asks Sir Toby, Fabian, and Sir Anrew to hide and monitor Malvolio's trivial manners once he discovers the anonymous love letter. In the letter, Malvolio has been instructed by the group plotters to wear "yellow hose and tie his garters around his knees" (Ibid, p. 5). The purpose of the witty trick, as described by Maria and other conspirators, was to expose the steward's hypocrisy as well as "his egotistical posturing" (Ibid, p.4). After finding the letter, Malvolio discloses his evil intention to overtake Olivia's household. In a soliloquy, he refers to a real-life incident in which a steward married his Lady:

MALVOLIO

There is example for 't.

The lady of the Strachy

married the yeoman of the wardrobe(2 . 5. 36-37).

Malvolio, as the above speech demonstrates, is deluded about the prospect of marrying Lady Olivia. Apparently, "he misunderstands the structure of the English peerage, wrongly anticipating that marriage to a countess would make him a count" (Garber, 2004 , p. 529). Maria's trickery, as she has planned, would expose Malvolio's evil intention to overtake Olivia's household. In a scene which parodies Viola's deceptive schemes in the major plot, Maria hatches a witty scheme against Malvolio in the minor plot. Through a staged scene, she instructs a group of conspirators such as Feste, Sir Toby and Sir Tony Belch to hide themselves and witness

how Malvolio behaves as he appears in front of Olivia; 'dressed in yellow hose and tied his garters around his knees' (2 . 5. 111-112). The deluded steward performs what the letter had instructed him to do so. He smiles when he sets his eyes on Olivia, and acts as the letter required him to do so. He recites the lines written in the anonymous letter: 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them' (2 . 5., 141-143.). The scene in which he reads the letter on stage through a monologue is one of the most comic moments in the play:

MALVOLIO

'Tis but fortune, all is fortune. Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than anyone else that follows her. What should I think on't? (2 . 5., 21-26.).

The scene in which Maria and her group of plotters conspire against Malvolio provides typical example of meta-drama, or ' Play within a Play'; for it clearly draws attention to the artificial nature of the play itself. More importantly, Maria's deceptive scheme in the minor plot provides a parody of Viola's deceptive scheme against Duke Orsino and Lady Olivia in the major plot. The meta-theatrical aspect of Maria's plot against Malvolio is quite evident in the following speeches :

SIR ANDREW

(aside) Fie on him, Jezebel!

FABIAN

(aside) O, peace! Now he's deeply in.

Look how imagination blows him.

MALVOLIO

Having been three months married

to her, sitting in my state

SIR TOBY BELCH

(aside) O, for a stone-bow, to hit him

in the eye!

MALVOLIO

Calling my officers about me, in my

branched velvet gown, having come

from a daybed, where I have left

Olivia sleeping—

SIR TOBY BELCH

45(aside) Fire and brimstone!

FABIAN

(aside) O, peace, peace! (2 5.38-48.).

Noticeably, the first trick on Malvolio contained many ironic asides and humorous exchanges, either between Sir Belch and Fabian, or between Sir Toby and Maria. Such humorous scenes reflect satirically on main themes and motifs in the main plot such as mistaken identity, self-delusion and disguise. Interestingly, Maria's staged trick on Malvolio can be considered as equivalent parody of Viola's deceptive tricks on both Duke Orsino and Lady Olivia.

The Significance of the Second Deceptive Scheme in the Minor-Plot:

The most humorous moment in the play takes place when Malvolio appears in front of Lady Olivia dressed awkwardly, and reciting lines from the anonymous letter by Maria. Lady Olivia has been puzzled by Malvolio's strange outlook and cannot comprehend his strange utterance. She asks Maria to care for the confused Steward. Maria cunningly uses this opportunity to further torment the proud and arrogant steward. Her next trick aims to bring Malvolio into confessing his wrongdoings. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste once again join Maria's next deceptive trick on Malvolio. Sir Toby suggests to Maria "to have Malvolio bound and locked in a dark room" (Bloom, 2008, p.12-13). Here, the dark room symbolizes Malvolio's self-delusion. The plotters try to justify their actions by alleging "Malvolio is possessed by demons and needs an exorcism" (Minigan, 2006, p.20). The staged scene in which characters perform exorcism on him is another 'play within a play'. Such staged scene, moreover, parodies another scene in the main plot in which Viola tries to cure Orsino from excessive 'love-sickness'. "After the conspirators have massed suitable 'evidence' for Malvolio's possession, the stage is set for the exorcist to appear" (Kallendorf, 2003 , p.4). Through a pre-arranged plot, Maria divides roles among her fellow plotters. Feste, disguised as Sir Tubas, or 'the priest', begins interrogating and performing exorcism on Malvolio. Such a scene, interestingly, offers a parody of Viola's witty speeches with Olivia and Orsino.

Through a pre-arranged plot, Maria divides roles among her fellow plotters. Feste, disguised as Sir Tubas, or 'the priest', begins interrogating and performing exorcism on Malvolio. Such a scene, interestingly, offers a parody of Viola's witty speeches with Olivia and Orsino. Symbolically, Malvolio's forced imprisonment in a dark room provides a satiric parody of Duke Orsino's self-imposed exile from society, or even Olivia's self-imposed isolation for seven years. Similar to previous deceptive scheme, Maria's second deceptive scheme against Malvolio contains many meta-theatrical elements such as, asides, role-playing, mimicry, and the 'play-within-the-

play'. This is evident through several exchange of speeches among the conspirators who perform the mocking act of exorcism such as the following lines:

FESTE (as Sir Topas)

(disguising his voice) What ho, I say! Peace in this prison!

SIR TOBY BELCH

The knave counterfeits well. A good knave.

MALVOLIO

(from within) Who calls there?

FOOL

Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic.

MALVOLIO

Sir Topas, Sir Topas, good Sir Topas, go to my lady

FOOL

Out, hyperbolical fiend! How vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?

SIR TOBY BELCH

(aside) Well said, Master Parson. (4.2.18- 24).

During the act of exorcism, the plotters press Malvolio to acknowledge his previous misakes and confess his sins. Feste, disguised as Sir Tobas, presses Malvolio to confess his sins otherwise he would be kept locked inside the dark room. The plotters' staged performance is meant to trick Malvolio into confessing his wrongdoings in Lady Olivia's household. Their cunning role-playing, in fact, give impression as if "Malvolio is possessed by demons and needs an exorcism" (Minigan, 2006, p.20). No matter what Malvolio says, the conspirators take Malvolio's words as proofs to condemn him. Malvolio's denial of plotters accusations, ironically, " only corroborates their accusations"(Kallendorf, 2003, p. 34). To further humiliate Malvolio, Feste and other plotters questioned the steward's state of mind: "But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit? (4.2.114-115) , for which the steward replies, ' Believe me, I am not; I tell thee true' (4. 2.116). In a mocking tone, Feste orders the imprisoned Malvolio to "leave thy vain bibble-babble' (4. 2. 96-97). The speech is satiric in its intent, for it ridicules " Malvolio's supposedly exaggerated behaviour and language" (Elam, 2008, p.308). The scene of exorcism, with its sarcastic and comic nature, provides a satiric parody of Viola's witty trick to cure both Olivia and Orsino from their state of 'love-sicknesses'. A parallel can be drawn between Malvolio's delusion and Orsino's self- imposed exile in his court, or even Olivia's self- imposed isolation in excessive grief for a dead brother. After the scene of exorcism, Malvolio's fate is left up to Lady Olivia. The Countess, nonetheless, expresses her admiration for Maria's witty scheme while at the same time expresses her deep concern for

Malvolio:

OLIVIA

Alas, Malvolio, this is not my writing,

Though, I confess, much like the character.

But out of question, 'tis Maria's hand.

And now I do bethink me, it was she

First told me thou wast mad,(5.1.339-343).

Ironically, the discovery of Maria's deceptive letter happens at a time most dramatic confusions and conflicts in the main plot are getting resolved. Like other typical villains in Elizabethan plays, Malvolio is portrayed as an element of disruption and discord against the play's romantic atmosphere. And his degradation also signals a new beginning in the play as the conflicting young lovers reconcile among themselves. After the trickery scene, Malvolio appears weak and confused. Lady Olivia has taken Maria's trick on Malvolio less seriously and she even expresses admiration for her witty trick. This angers Malvolio and his threatening speech: 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (5.1.378). Contrary to Malvolio's degradation at the end of the play, Viola and Maria gain higher social status through two happy marriages.

By impersonating Lady Olivia's character, Maria has symbolically challenged society's conventional prejudice and misconceptions about women's gender roles in society. In a way, both Viola's cross-dressing in the main plot and Maria's deceptive role-playing in the subplot constituted two effective subversive strategies for both victimized women against Illyria's patriarchal society. From a feminist perspective, Maria's role-playing in the subplot empowered her since her acting theatrically challenged and debunked false notions and misconceptions about women in Illyria's male-dominated community. Indeed, her cunning role-playing empowered her as much as disguise and cross-dressing empowered Viola in the main plot. The happy romantic ending in the play, through multiple marriages among the conflicting young lovers in both sub-and main-plots, in fact signals the restoration of order and harmony to Illyria's community.

Conclusion:

The sub-plot in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, as the research demonstrated, provided a typical example of 'Play within a Play'. Such a minor plot, parodically, reflected on major themes in the main plot such as mistaken identity, disguise, and self-delusion. Noticeably, the aspect of meta-drama or meta-theater is apparent in the play's sub-plot, since it draws attention on the artificial nature of the play itself. In the sub-plot, the female protagonist staged a deceptive trick on the play's main villain for the sake of revealing his false manners and evil intentions. The female protagonist's trick in the sub-plot, remarkably, offered the equivalent parody of the

heroin's tricks on essential characters in the play's major plot. A parallel can be drawn between both female protagonists in two different plots. Both females were intelligent and skilful in using witty speeches. Moreover, they both employed deceptions and trickeries for the sake of revealing truth from falsehood. Most importantly, the sub-plot revealed significant aspects about women's quest for selfhood in the play. Through witty trick and cunning use of verbal skills, both female protagonist could transcend their humble social status and reach higher social class. This asserts Shakespeare's humanist and feminist ideas with regard to women's struggle for equal right and their quest for selfhood.

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