



Historicist and Presentist Interpretation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

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Abstract

Historicism and Presentism are two recent, mostly discussed phenomena in the ethos of Shakespearean studies. While historicists like Stephen Greenblatt argues that historicism pursues historical aspects to explain a text and keeps away present-day political, social and cultural affairs to avoid the misunderstanding of it, the presentists like Terence Hawkes advocates that Presentism offers an unending dialogue between present and past, which is deeply rooted to the present. In addition, Presentism is the re-evaluation of the historical facts upon which our early modern understanding depends. Therefore, Presentism could be an excellent idea to interpret the appropriacy of early modern literature, especially Shakespeare's oeuvre. This paper, however, elucidates *Twelfth Night*, one of Shakespeare's masterpieces, from both historicist and presentist points of view, which looks especially at the way Shakespeare views gender while applying these both approaches. This article also clarifies the reasons for selecting this text for explicating Shakespeare from these two approaches. Finally, this study advocates for combining these two approaches, which might offer a better way to understand Shakespeare's works and to make him more relevant today.

Key words: Historicism; Presentism; *Twelfth Night*; Transvestism; Gender; Renaissance; Marriage; Feminism

Introduction

Historicism as a term was developed by German philosopher Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1968). However, it is not clear who coined the term Presentism but it is believed that it had been used since the 1870s. Johann Gottfried Herder, a German Romantic theorist, who in 18th century defined historicism-conception by underscoring on its "changing ideologies, assumptions, and mental frameworks as history developed from one era to the next" (Dipietro & Grady, 2013). Backed in 1980s, Stephen Greenblatt, a prominent historicist termed this as "New historicism".



As proven by the works of Greenblatt and some other historicists, cited by Singleton Ariella, historicism looks forward to pursuing historical facts in order to explain a text while it keeps away the present-day social, political, or cultural affairs so that it can evade the misapprehension of it. In addition, historicist scholars argue that historical context of a given text not only echoes the social and cultural time in which the text was written, but also it greatly assists a reader to ‘a fuller understanding of the text itself’ (Singleton, 2017).

The literary scholars prefer historicism to interpret early modern literature texts because such an approach gives the texts a historical context. The scholars also like it because it has lots of scholarly appeal and it bears enough responsibility; for it requires a tremendous search into the past and thus establishes a good relation between a text and the historical events which likely played a great role in the progress of the text. Therefore, historicism is so popular especially to the historicists.

Presentism on the other hand, is quite opposite to historicism, and it is inseparably connected to the past and has great influences over the past literary works especially Shakespeare’s. As Terence Hawkes, a remarkable presentist scholar, writes in his **foreword** to *Shakespeare in the Present* (2004) ‘Presentism presents us with an unending dialogue between present and past, and demands interaction between what we call “facts” from both ends of that 400-year channel of time’ (Hawkes, 2004). So, we must understand fully the past’s meaning which has a deeper root to the present without which it is likely that we are engaging ourselves in an investigation for facts which is quite dangerous and empty.

In addition, presentism, as DiPietro states, is to ‘re-evaluate the historical, ideological and semantic foundations upon which our understanding of the “early modern” rests, and to assess the function and value of the “early modern” in the present’ (DiPietro, 2007). Therefore, this study is likely to contend that presentism as a critical frame work is an excellent idea which can play a vital role in interpreting the appropriateness of early modern literature, Shakespeare’s works exclusively.

The present article explains *Twelfth Night*, one of the most important comedies of Shakespeare, from both historicist and presentist point of view and looks specifically at how Shakespeare addresses the issue of gender while employing both historicist and presentist approaches. This study also describes the reasons for choosing this text for explaining Shakespeare from these two approaches. Finally this article argues that synthesizing these two perspectives opens a better window for understanding, teaching and researching Shakespeare’s relevance today and in future.

Twelfth Night as the chosen text

Twelfth Night offers exclusively apt starting points for navigating historicist alongside presentist dialogues of the ubiquitous topics of gender. *Twelfth Night* is certainly appropriate to topics of gender. Pertinent historicist works divulge possibilities for understanding the play that look significantly unlike from its present-day performances and adaptations. With historical context in



mind, the question of performing the roles of women by men is at the forefront of explaining the play's events. As Maslen (2008) views the condition of the theatre of Elizabethan era, "since women were not allowed to perform on the public stage, boys took the female roles in plays." However, a presentist approach to *Twelfth Night*, supports the feminist readings of Viola's cross-dressing. Waller puts it "the play asks us to applaud Viola's resumption of a properly feminine subjectivity" (Waller, 1994).

Moreover, a presentist approach to *Twelfth Night* appeals for a re-essentializing of a gender in the play with a view to making it a suited current feminist agenda, while a historicist approach allows the readers to support "Shakespeare's ideas with Judith Butler's by lending itself, to a reading of gender in the play as non-essential" (Singleton, 2017).

Historicizing Gender in Twelfth Night

Gender is a predominant theme in *Twelfth Night*. As Maslen (2008) senses that it was in Elizabethan literature, Shakespeare's comedy in particular that gender concerns were the focal point and disguise on the stage was an obvious technique to carry out these issues. Indeed, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* dedicates itself to discover the mere strangeness of attitudes to gender in the early modern period through cross-dressing, where men especially the boys performed the women's part, and thus women were, in fact, viewed from a male perspective. Lesley Ferris, cited by Penny Gay (1994), argues: "the absence of women in [Elizabethan and earlier] theatre created the notion of woman as a sign, a symbolic object manipulated and controlled artistically by male playwrights and male actors: unavoidably, it would seem, the Shakespearean text presents its female characters from a male point of view" (Gay, 1994).

It is Viola who adopts the disguise of a man named Cesario for much of the piece and thus she becomes the servant of the duke, Orsino, and for whom she works as a messenger of love to Countess Olivia. At the same time, under the disguise Cesario pretends to be Viola to win the love of the duke by professing himself ready to die "a thousand death" to satisfy Orsino (5.1/129). Thus, performing this play in Shakespeare's day meant a man had to dress as a woman who disguises herself as a man and also, at times, pretends to be a woman—making gender out to be rather flexible and malleable (Singleton, 2017).

Stephen Greenblatt argues in his famous book *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) regarding transvestism on Shakespearean stage that this cross-gender phenomenon is pertinent to both early modern understanding of gender and that of our own when masculinity and femininity are two distinctly prevailing issues:

Within the imaginary women bodies, there are other bodies—the bodies of the actors playing the parts of Shakespearean women. From the perspective of the medical discourse . . . this final transvestism serves to secure theatrically the dual account of gender: on the one hand, we have plays that insist upon the chafing between the two sexes and the double nature of individuals; on the other hand, we have a theater that reveals, in the presence of the man's (or boy's) body beneath the woman's clothes, a different sexual reality. The open



secret of identity—that within differentiated individuals is a single structure, identifiably male—is presented literally in the all-male cast . . . Presented but not represented, for the play . . . cannot continue without the fictive existence of two distinct genders and the friction between them. (p.98)

Here Greenblatt reminds us that an early modern spectator was expected to foresee that the female characters on stage were truly women, notwithstanding the fact that they discerned all the parts were performed by men and boys. And while these performances usually portrayed clear unlikeness between the gendered parts, they concurrently emphasized that it was all an act; this, in turn, would have reminded audiences of the single gender represented on stage below the costuming—that which, in the presence of early modern ideas of anatomy and biology, was also the base for the bodies of women.

The seminal book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990) by Thomas Laqueur, goes in line with Greenblatt's above idea, which provides us with a clear picture of how body was perceived and thus portrayed in Renaissance era. He writes in it “the more Renaissance anatomists dissected, looked into, and visually represented the female body, the more powerfully and convincingly they saw it to be a version of the males” (Laqueur, 1990, p.70). Different early modern paintings discovered this idea and undoubtedly it was conspicuous on the stage, which portrays Renaissance culture as awfully male gender oriented which Greenblatt buttresses thus: “characters like Rosalind and Viola pass through the state of being men in order to become women. Shakespearean women are in this sense the representation of Shakespearean men, the projected mirror images of masculine self-differentiation” (Laqueur, 1990, p.90). This, however, testifies the superiority of men to women. While Greenblatt and Laqueur express their views on early modern ideas regarding biology, which give us some perceptions into the minds of Shakespeare's audiences, Shakespeare remains still distinctive in his concern with ‘gender performativity’. His ideas of gender were unlikely to be influenced by his contemporary culture, which Malcolmson emphasizes that comedies like *Twelfth Night* dramatizes the superiority of women to men and explicitly compares the success of women to the failure of men (Malcolmson, 1996).

Shakespeare was not only wary of *Twelfth Night's* gender-blurring that it might introduce a scholarly challenge for his audiences, but he likely had enough reasons for doing that. If we could think him as forward of his time, his notions visa-vis gender would go parallel with those of Judith Butler who evidently discarded the ideas that we are essentially one gender or another, instead, views gender as performative. It follows, then, that while Laqueur believes in biology, Butler does in performativity. So, in order to draw a conclusion from Laqueur to Butler, we have to but envisage how the former views on early modern anatomy—which led people finally to trust that male biology was the basis of female biology, which ultimately evokes the sense of genderlessness. Therefore, Butler's ideas of performativity can propel us to a better perception of what Shakespeare had in his mind with the gender-blurring which is a major focus in *Twelfth Night*.



Butler's influential book on gender, *Undoing Gender* (2004), I think, is a better option to quote from concerning this issue to establish a good connection between Butler's notions of performativity and Shakespeare's gender-blurring:

If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance. Although there are norms that govern what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can . . . be exposed as nonnatural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation. What this means is that through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction. (p.218)

People, from Butler's point of view, preserve leading social ideas of how a person should think or act, but they are not fundamentally feminine or masculine. With the nature of casting early modern plays and the comfort with which Viola dupes those around her in mind, it is not a leap to envision that Shakespeare, too, assumed of gender as performative and anticipated to express this to his audiences. That is not to say that anyone from the Renaissance would have pledged to Butler's ideas, but her work is advantageous in that it offers us some of the terminology essential for explaining and then enunciating Shakespeare's moves regarding gender and performance, which we can undoubtedly comprehend to be the consequence of his longtime association in the theatre, and their effects. In what is possibly the most eminent quote from *As You like It*, Jacques declares that "All the world's a stage" (2.7.140). And it is one of a many of hints that aware us to Shakespeare's obsession with a kind of performance that is not limited to theatre alone. The hazy gender of the Viola/Cesario character, elevated by the fact that an organically male artist lies just underneath the costume, shows an idea of gender performativity similar to that which we see reconnoitered all the way through Butler's work. Viola is, of course, Shakespeare's prime means of proving the idea that gender is performative, non-essential.

However, though, from the above discussion we come to know that gender is non-essential, the study feels, it urgent to discuss our present play in such a way that it may give us a clear stand of women and their social position in Shakespeare's time in order to historicize the gender issue. For this purpose, this study will analyze the foregrounding article 'What You Will: Social Mobility and Gender in *Twelfth Night*' (1996) written by Cristiana Malcolmson, which clearly portrays the women's condition in Renaissance era from male point of view.

As Malcolmson writes that *Twelfth Night* was written in such a period when women has not a distinct place in society rather they were deemed as 'social inferiors'. She insists that 'Shakespeare, and other authors, constructed literary representations to challenge this ideology'. Likewise, the issue of 'social inferiority' of women is dramatised in this play by the dramatist. Even though these women are merely servants, are equally potential to their male masters, and



eventually come out of their typical roles in order to become their ‘master’s mistresses’. In 16th century Renaissance, unlike today marriage was such an institution which used to define the social advancement, but which in this play is shown as an open market, and which in fact relies more on personal “choice and ‘status exogamy’ than it is in traditional society”. It is, though, very interesting that both male and female change their fortune by the means of this market, and the playwright shows a sharp contrast where females are more victorious than their male counterparts. Malcolmson then argues that “the purpose of dramatizing the superiority of women to men is to call into question the rigid structures of the traditional order. Nevertheless, such questioning is contained through the play’s model of marriage, which requires a ‘loving ‘ commitment to others” (Malcolmson, 1996).

Shakespeare through Viola breaks the rigid structure of the Elizabethan tradition of love and marriage. We see in the play that Olivia, the countess falls into love with Viola/Cesario, a servant. Olivia repeats to herself her questioning of Cesario, and reveals her attraction to what she takes to be his ‘gentility’:

‘What is your parentage?’
‘Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.
I am a gentleman.’ I’ll be sworn thou art.
Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit
Do give you fivefold blazon. (I.v.265-269)

Although Olivia senses that her falling in love with a servant is unsuitable, she is in fact trapped in a delusive situation, which is smartly generated, and which is outlandishly represented as a blue-blooded young man, with his tongue, face, limbs, actions, and spirit. As Sir Andrew puts it, ‘That youth’s a rare courtier’ (III.i.88). However, critics argue realistically that the play, in a true sense, is ‘put on’ maneuvering deceptions and masquerading through which Viola’s aristocracy gleams. (Malcolmson, 1996). Viola succeeds at her mission while despite his being male and knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek fails, and who because of his insufficient wit and verbal ineptness will be ‘put down’ by both Maria and Sir Toby (I.iii.79)

In addition to Viola, Maria, the servant of Olivia is another mouthpiece of Shakespeare through whom he breaks the traditional norms of Renaissance era regarding the gender and social rank. While Viola produces the look for a man, Maria does it for her mistress, not only by her hand writing, but through her eloquence which convinces Malvolio that this is indeed ‘my Lady’s hand’ (II.v.84). It is their adept astuteness for which both Viola and Maria are able to marry Orsino and Sir Toby, kinsman to Olivia, who are surely in superior rank in Illyria. It is, therefore, crystallizedly clear that Sir Toby-Maria marriage represents the advancement of women, which is very unlikely in Shakespeare’s age.

Twelfth Night sets free a fluidity between the roles of man and woman, and master and servant in the case of Viola and Maria, however, limits it severely and abruptly in the case of Malvolio. In *A Marxist Study of Shakespeare’s Comedies*, Elliot Krieger (1979) argues that



Malvolio's aspirations are ridiculed and exorcised by the play not in order to preserve the true 'liberty' of saturnalia, but 'to allow the aristocracy to achieve social consolidation'. He claims that whereas identity is generally mutable in the play, Malvolio's attempt to cross the line between servant and master is condemned as transgressive. Whereas Viola's enactment of gentility is rendered legitimate by our discovery at the end of the play of her 'noble' blood, Malvolio's inferior status ensures that his ambition will be viewed as presumption.

Krieger is quite right to point out that the play balances the freedom of Viola's fluid identity against the strictures on Malvolio, and that such strictures finally reinforce class prejudice. But in this play such prejudice is more complex than Krieger suggests. The play as Malcolmson senses 'includes a tentative but radical disruption of conventional categories of identity which is checked but not erased by its ending, and checked in a complicated way'. By reducing Viola's skilled performance to her nobility at the end of the play, the audiences observe that it ignores the part she plays. As a courtier Viola gains her prestige, financial rewards from Orsino and a marriage-proposal from Countess Olivia, which she may achieve by her noble-breeding but, her femininity under the costume of Cesario makes it more significant. Unlike Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night* emphasizes Viola's performative genius rather than her nobility. Her conversation in the first scene with the captain and the sailors proves that she is not a commoner, yet the scene veils her nobility from the audiences for the purpose of familiarizing her through her role-playing.

Even the male society doesn't believe that women can love equally as men do. In act II, scene IV, we see Viola with her value and power of female intelligence faces the Duke. But it is to be noted that this sort of female intelligence in the then society is subject to women's ability to love. The scene, however, introduces a debate regarding women between two prospective lovers. Shakespeare through this debate confirms the audience's compassion for Viola's stand, which she achieves by her masked identity and love for Orsino. The Duke's claim of women's inability to initiate love for men seems most unlikely since, the scene suggests, women can initiate love as deeply as men do. The scene however, tells the audience that the Duke's love for Olivia is rather shallow, fluctuating and finally exploitive. In her conversation, Viola pursues the Duke to see the things from woman's perspective:

Viola Say that some Lady, as perhaps there is,
 Hath for your love as great a pang of heart
 As you have for Olivia. You cannot love her.
 You tell her so. Must she not then be answered?

Duke There is no woman's sides
 Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
 As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
 So big to hold so much; they lack retention. (II.iv. 89-96)

The Duke refuses to imagine that a woman could desire as he does, and so he loses the point of the scene communicated to us: a woman, Viola, loves as deeply as a man, and recognizes that she



cannot control her beloved's point of view.

The debate about love in this scene is a submerged exploration of the extent to which “Renaissance masculinity depends on denying women a will of their own, and the independent perspective” (Malcolmson, 1996) that goes with it. Viola deflates this masculine conceit by her words and her presence:

Duke Make no compare
 Between that love a woman can bear me
 And that I owe Olivia.
Viola Ay, but I know-
Duke What dost thou know?
Viola Too well what love women to men may owe.
 In faith, they are as true of heart as we.

(II.iv. 101-6)

When Viola interrupts the Duke's masculine and mastering order 'Make no compare', she asserts that her knowledge and experience constitute an identity comparable to his own: 'Ay, but I know.'

In Act II, scene v, which directly follows the debate about love between Orsino and Viola, Malvolio imagines his new estate as 'Count Malvolio', and the play reveals that such self-interest has always motivated his government within the house. It is clear that "Malvolio does not pursue Olivia with the poetic abandon of the other lovers in the play; he sees her as the ticket to a higher social position" (Malcolmson, 1996). His desire for Olivia as well as his ethical severity is a mask for a will to power.

Malvolio's fancy divulges that unlike Viola's esteem for the Duke, he from his craving of dominating, he has taken the 'disciplinary' mission in his hand. For the purpose of showing his authoritativeness within the household of Olivia, he reproofs Sir Toby, 'you must amend your drunkenness', which is like his 'branched velvet gown and imperious looks'. The play shows similarity between Malvolio's aspirated criticism of Sir Toby and Orsino's sympathetic correction by Viola; their respective motives clarifies their difference. It is not Malvolio's offence that he wants to marry his mistress as a gentleman; it is that he desires to use this marriage as a token to establish his superiority and impose his will on others. His virtuousness is only to institutionalize his supremacy in Illyria. By using his 'prerogative', Malvolio has brought Fabian 'out o'favour with my Lady' Olivia for bearbaiting and put Viola's generous captain into jail for nothing (II.v.6-7; V. i 275-6). Although Maria calls Malvolio only 'a kind of Puritan', Malvolio's fantasy of power constitutes the play's critique of London disciplinarians, those Puritan aldermen who were perhaps gentlemen but had originally been merchants, who condemned holiday revelry, bearbaiting and the theatre: such a concern for civil rule, according to the play, masks a self-interested desire to govern, an unwillingness to accept traditional social bonds, and a willingness to disrupt rather than harmonize the social order. London Puritans and Malvolio are like the 'politicians' and 'Brownists' that Sir Andrew fears (III.ii.30-1): each is a type of 'separatist', one who does not



respect the bonds that tie the community together, bonds which may be flexible and fluid, but which must continue to hold if society is to survive (Malcolmson,1996).

***Twelfth Night* from Presentist Perspective**

Unlike historicists who regard gender as performative and non-essential as Butler's theory does, presentist theorists are likely to focus a lot over gender essentialization and they argue that gender is not performative. For more clarification this study is citing Kenneth Branagh (2006), a film director who built the film *As You Like It*, in which Rosalind is portrayed as almost extremely feminine with all sorts of womanish embellishment and a soft voice, and who dressed like a man. But it is noteworthy that the director changes this scene and excludes the costuming details. Branagh did it quite intentionally so that he, being a feminist, can bring forward feminism associated with gender essentialism to his modern spectators, which is extremely different from early modern theatres.

However, since the concentration of this study in this section is *Twelfth Night*, to describe which from presentist point of view which is mentioned in the introduction, the study would like to refer to Waller's (1994) Introduction: 'Much Joy, Some Terror: Reading Shakespeare's Comedies Today', which is stated before, to make the discussion more meaningful. In his introduction the writer discusses about the influential book *Shakespeare our Contemporary* by Jan Kott who is a Polish director and critic, and which was published in 1964. In this book Kott senses about the importance of studying Shakespeare from presentist framework. As Waller reveals:

Kott unabashedly insisted that we should search for the meaning of the plays here and now, especially in the politics of our post-holocaust, nuclear age. His approach represents an important strand of current criticism that insists that we ask not only 'what does that mean?', but rather 'what does that say to us now?' How can we make that work for us, here in our place and time? (Quoted in Waller, 1994).

Hence, we have to be mindful of *our* Shakespeare, and therefore, Waller (1994) advocates that it is significantly essential that 'we make our Shakespeare as powerful and interesting an intervention as we can, not only in the history of Shakespearean criticism, but also in the broader cultural life of our own time' (Waller, 1994).

Grady, however, in James O'Rourke's introduction points out that the emergence of presentism in Shakespeare studies is much eye-catching and appealing to the modern readers of Shakespeare and Grady includes feminism, cultural materialism, and post-colonial criticism within the periphery of 'presentist methodologies' (O'Rourke,2012). In what follows the study will explore the present text *Twelfth Night* from feminist point of view for which it is preferable to cast a net over the background of feminist readings of Shakespeare before going to the main discussion.

Feminism, in fact, talks about the women's rights and their ranks in society in every age as Callaghan Dympna (2016), a distinguished feminist writer, claims in the preface that "In the Introduction to the first edition of *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, published in 2000, I



confidently defined feminism as a political and intellectual movement that took as its central object of concern the status of women” (Callaghan, 2016). In addition, feminist point of view is deemed as a striking lens and using this lens feminist writers are more likely to analyze the Shakespearean literary texts. Dympna (2016) again emphasizes ‘a feminist perspective remains an immensely powerful lens through which to view literary texts, and its potential, far from being exhausted, continues to generate fresh insights about Shakespeare’s plays and poems as well as about the early modern world in which they were written’(Callaghan, 2016).

With a view to seeing the impact of feminism, it is likely to view it through Waller’s (1994) eyes, who narrates that feminism is the most dominant reading area of all our ‘contemporary’ readings of Shakespearean comedies. If we back to one century when seemingly ideal girls were praised for their sweetness, nobility and virtue, which today appear to be condescending and sentimental. Fifty years later Waller in line with Dympna finds feminism as one of the most critical ‘movements’ in the present era when ‘feminist readings of Shakespeare have developed a tradition of less patronizing , more serious and complex readings of gender in the comedies’. In recent criticism ‘problems of sexual identity’ and ‘family relations’ along with gender issues dominate the ‘feminist theory’ and ‘critical practice’ (Waller, 1994).

Unlike historicist feminists, who view cross-dressing on Shakespearean stage as flexible and malleable, presentist feminists like Catherine Belsey reacts disapprovingly about as Waller (1994) writes, the blurring of sexual identity and the traditional gender roles. So, Transvestism is a much discussed phenomenon in the presentist feminist theory. Waller puts it “Indeed , cross-dressing in the comedies –in particular, the fact that on the stage in Shakespeare’s time women’s parts were played by boys, which afforded the dramatists the occasion for both amusing and disconcerting references-has become a major focus of recent feminist criticism”. In addition, influential presentist and feminist analyst like Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis critically question the ways through which women are traditionally represented as objects of the male gaze, the seemingly unchallenged pleasure of which is disconcerted when the object is a man playing a woman-who is, in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, also playing a man. Moreover, to Waller it seems unlikely that many authors and critics are males while gender problems are the core points to the comedies. Waller again puts some questions like ‘What insights (or ignorances) was Shakespeare articulating about his own or patriarchy’s fear of or curiosity about women? ‘And ‘What differences does gender make to reading?’--which are current feminist and ‘male feminist issues’ (Waller, 1994).

Feminist like Marilyn French (1981), however, points out that being disguised, Viola “represents essentially an absence, the searching, uncertain part of the self” (French, 1981, p.117). Among all other artists in the play it is only Viola who willingly disguises herself as Cesario, but the part itself articulates in a negative and passive way. "O Time, thou must untangle this, not I," she protests in her soliloquy; "It is too hard a knot for me t'untie"(II.ii.39-40). The deadlock for Viola, as Wikander senses ‘is represented by her inability to improvise, to venture beyond the part



set down; her passiveness and emptiness are preconditions of her femininity' (Wikander, 2019).

Cross-dressing for Portia is a chance to play "a thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks" (III.iv.77) while for Viola it is 'distaste' and 'philosophical discomfort'. In fact Viola is in trouble for her own identity and she admits that disguise is a 'falsity of external looks' (Wikander, 2019) and a deceptive one. In her soliloquy, we listen:

Disguise, I see thou are a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms! (II.i.26-29)

Wikander (2019) clarifies the disguise and Viola's self-identity more in what follows:

Viola's identification of her disguised self as Olivia's (and womankind's) "pregnant enemy" suggests a very female fear of the social tragedy of unwed pregnancy and casts maleness as an invading and embossing force that sets and fixes female fluidity. Yet at the same time Viola sees the "waxen hearts" of women as regrettably frail. In her "proper false" disguise she yearns for the fixity that only male power can impose (p.359).

However, although Viola deems her disguise as a 'deceptive imposture' (Wikander, 2019), she finally overcomes the marginality and liminality of her femininity by marrying Orsino and becoming the "master's mistress" at the end of the play (Malcolmson, 1996). The presentist approach echoes this and suggests that Viola is such a feminine heroine who, although literally shipwrecked and exhausted, overcomes all the impasses surrounding her, using the tool of transvestism to rescue herself despite being caught up in a male dominated oppressive society.

Conclusion

All through the play Viola proves that women are with no consideration inferior to men and they can prove their worthiness if they intend and remain confident enough. Even in case of love women can be superior to men and they are quite able to introduce to love as it done by men: Viola proves it by loving the Duke and by being ready to sacrifice herself as she is disguised namely Cesario. It is described in this article that although Viola deemed transvestism is deceptive, it was the only mean to overcome all the difficulties and marginalities prevailing in the then society. For historicist feminist, however, Viola's disguise as a boy is not objectionable while for presentist feminist it's a but crucial matter since the disguise disguises the true self of womanhood. For historicists gender is non-essential while for presentists gender is essential and the latter emphasise that women must not be disguised as men. Hence they disapprove Viola's disguise as a boy, Cesario. For the latter again on stage the women's part acted by men is an offence and an abuse and therefore, women must act and represent themselves by their own in the theatre. Elaine Showalter (1985) articulates the same. She pronounces that from the time Shakespeare's heroines are acted by women not by men, they started to get their own voice and the meaningfulness of their existence.



However, with consideration for the benefits of historicist and presentist approaches, comes the concern for what happens when one of them is chosen over the other. As the discussions of *Twelfth Night* in this essay show, the most responsible scholarship and teaching takes place when we are able to consider multiple and competing perspectives. Part of this task, then, is recognizing what is lost when we exclude one approach in favor of the other. The play examined in this article demonstrates, for example, that historicism may unintentionally consider contemporary and current issues as inappropriate and insignificant. In contrast, a presentist approach may lead a learner or a researcher to misapprehend Shakespearean texts, if he/she is unaware of the historical context. This study, therefore, asserts that synthesizing both approaches while interpreting or teaching Shakespeare in the classroom, can offer us a better and fuller apprehension of the texts, and also can expose the way of making Shakespeare germane for today and tomorrow.

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