

Minor Characters in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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Abstract

This paper aims at discussing the role of the minor characters in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The study assumes that without the first group of minor characters, associated with Olivia, the play *Twelfth Night* would lose much of its humor, and without the second group, associated with Sebastian, the play would fall apart. On the other hand, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* minor characters play important roles, without them, the action dose not ran smoothly, or does not ran at all.

The paper falls into three sections. Section one deals with the role of each minor character in *Twelfth Night*.

Section two focuses on the minor characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Section three is a conclusion which sums up the findings of the study.

Keywords: drama; Shakespeare; minor characters.

الخلاصة

يهدف هذا البحث الى مناقشة دور الشخصيات الثانوية في مسرحيتين كوميديتين لوليم شكسبير هما الليلة الثانية عشر وحلم ليلة صيف. وتفترض الدراسة انه بدون وجود المجموعة الاولى من الشخصيات الثانوية المرتبطة بشخصية اوليفيا فان المسرحية الاولى تفقد الكثير من هويتها الكوميدية وبدون المجموعة الثانية من الشخصيات الثانوية والمرتبطة بشخصية سباستيان ستضيع المسرحية. ومن الناحية الاخرى فان في مسرحية حلم ليلة صيف العديد من الشخصيات الثانوية ذات الادوار المهمة في المسرحية والتي بدونها لن تسير حبكة الاحداث بمرونة او قد لا تحدث اطلاقا .

ان هذا البحث يقع في ثلاثة مباحث :

المبحث الاول يدرس ادوار الشخصيات الثانوية في مسرحية الليلة الثانية عشر

اما الثاني يركز على الادوار الثانوية في حلم ليلة صيف .

اما المبحث الثالث فيلخص الاستنتاجات لهذه الدراسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراما , شكسبير, الشخصيات الثانوية.

1. Minor Characters in *Twelfth Night* :

Twelfth Night is constructed of two plots, a main and a subplot, namely, the story of Viola's love for Orsino and the latter's infatuation with Olivia, and the comic subplot involving the deception and imprisonment of Malvolio. By carefully manipulating both plots, Shakespeare manages to produce a well integrated work. His skill is most evident in the conflict between Sir Toby and Malvolio from its inception, to its climax, and end. (Wilders, 161)

The revelers, who are associated with Olivia, are introduced in the play's third scene – that is, they have equal dramaturgic importance with the Viola and Orsino plot, which were introduced in Act I, scenes i and ii. Their appearance creates a lively 'kitchen' world of the carnivalesque, the amoral realm of fleshly pleasure. 'I am sure care's an enemy to life', (I, iii, l. 2) asserts Sir Toby in his opening speech. Malvolio, labelled by Maria a 'kind of Puritan', (II, iii, l. 119) prefers repression and obsessive

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order to this thoughtless indulgence. This opposition (signalled by the word Puritan) would have been particularly resonant to the play's first audiences, for the Puritan movement was gaining increasing power among city merchants and among religious leaders. (Gay 100-1)

Sir Toby, Maria and Fabian are responsible for much of the play's humour which is directed towards both Sir Andrew and Malvolio:

SIR ANDREW: Bless you, fair shrew.

MARIA: And you too, sir.

SIR TOBY: Accost, Sir Andrew, accost.

SIR ANDREW: What's that?

SIR TOBY: My niece's chambermaid.

SIR ANDREW: Good Mistress Accost, I desire better acquaintance.

MARIA: My name is Mary, sir.

SIR ANDREW: Good Mistress Mary Accost –

SIR TOBY: You mistake, knight. 'Accost' is front her, board her, woo her, assail her. (I, iii, ll. 38-47)

Sir Andrew is only there because Sir Toby is 'sponging on him' (Wilders,161) and whenever there is chance he is made a subject for ridicule. Sir Andrew is a silly minded person who cannot cope the intelligence of Sir Toby. When Toby asks rhetorically "Does not our life consist of the four elements?"(II,iii,10) meaning air, water, dust, and fire, Andrew answers wrongly "consists of eating and drinking"(II,iii,12). (Jameel,587). The mistaken answer is a mark of his foolishness, a feature that will lead Sir Toby and Fabian to arrange for the duel between him and Viola. Fabian gives Viola mistaken description for the coward, stupid Sir Andrew :

VIOLA: Pray you, sir, do you know of this matter?

FABIAN: I know the knight is incensed against you, even to a mortal arbitrement, but nothing of the circumstance more.

VIOLA I beseech you, what manner of man is he?

FABIAN: Nothing of that wonderful promise, to read him by his form, as you are like to find him in the proof of his valour. He is indeed, sir, the most skilful, bloody, and fatal opposite that you could possibly have ound in any part of Illyria. Will you walk towards

him? I will make your peace with him if I can.

VIOLA: I shall be much bound to you for't. I am one that had rather go with sir priest than sir knight. I care not who knows so much of my mettle. *Exeunt* (III, iv, II. 200 – 210)

Sir Topy Belch who is one of the main mirth causers in the play and who is responsible for most of the disturbance in Olivia's house is known in his pursuit of his pleasures by scheming against the characters in the play. Being rude, selfish and having no consideration for the feelings of others, he is engaged in many jokes with others. Sir Andrew is his main victim when he keeps him in hope of obtaining Olivia and cheats him to obtain his money. As when he arranged the duel between the foolish knight Sir Andrew Viola\ Cesario :

Enter [SIR] TOBY and [SIR] ANDREW

SIR TOBY: Why, man, he's a very devil. I have not seen such a firago. I had a pass with him, rapier, scabbard, and all, and he gives methe stuck-in with such a mortal motion that it is inevitable; and on the answer, he pays you as surely as your feet hits the ground they step on. They say he has been fencer to the sophy.

SIR ANDREW: Pox on't. I'll not meddle with him.

SIR TOBY: Ay, but he will not now be pacified. Fabian can scarce hold him yonder.

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SIR ANDREW: Plague on't, and I thought he had been valiant, and so cunning in fence, I'd have seen him damned ere I'd have challenged him. Let him let the matter slip, and I'll give him my horse, Grey Capilet.

SIR TOBY: I'll make the motion. Stand here, make a good show on't. This shall end without the perdition of souls. [*Aside*] Marry, I'll ride your horse as well as I ride you. (III, iv, ll. 211-226)

But it is Maria who is responsible for the most hilariously comic scene of the play, namely when Malvolio is tricked and comes in wearing yellow, cross gartered stockings (III, iv). She is witty in both Elizabethan and modern senses of the word. Indeed, she even matches Feste in 'wit':

FESTE: Let her hang me: he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours.

MARIA: Make that good.

FESTE: He shall see none to fear.

MARIA: A good lenten answer. I can tell thee where that saying was born, of 'I fear no colours.'

FESTE: Where, good Mistress Mary?

MARIA: In the wars, and that may you be bold to say in your foolery. . (I, v, ll. 4-11)

Her considerable intelligence is presented when she suggests, writes and drops the false letter, then she plays an important role in the original plot against Malvolio when she convinces Olivia of his madness. The witty personality of Olivia's gifted handmaid becomes clear when she is engaged in a conversation with Feste :

FESTE: Well, God give them wisdom that have it; and those that are fools, let them use their talents.

MARIA: Yet you will be hanged for being so long absent - or to be turned away : is not that as good as a hanging to you ?

FESTE: Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage; and for turning

MARIA: You are resolute then?

FESTE: Not so neither, but I am resolved on two points -

MARIA: That if one break, the other will hold, or if both break, your gaskins fall.

FESTE: Apt, in good faith, very apt. Well, go thy way; if Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve's flesh as any in Illyria. (I, v, ll. 12-24)

The fascinating language of *Twelfth Night* is enriched by "words being torn from their material contexts to become self-generating, a tangled chain of metaphor which nowhere seems to button down on reality" (Eagleton 26). The following conversation between Maria and the silly minded Sir Andrew Aguecheek foreshadows how the gifted, intelligent personality of the maid contrasts clearly with the foolishness of the knight:

SIR ANDREW: ... Fair lady ,do you think you have fools in hand?

MARIA: Sir, I have not you by th' hand.

SIR ANDRE: Marry , but you shall have ; and here's my hand.

MARIA: Now sir, thought is free. I pray you ,bring Your hand to the butt'ry bar and let it dtink.

SIR ANDREW : Wherefore, sweetheart? What's your metaphor?

MARIA : It's dry , sir.

SIE ANDREW : Why, I think so; I am not such an ass but I

Can keep my hand dry. But what is your jest?

MARIA : A dry jest , sir.

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SIR ANDREW : Are you full of them?

MARIA : Ay, sir , I have them at my fingers' ends ;
marry , now I let go your hand, I am barren. (I, iii, 60-75)

It is her 'wit' which makes Sir Toby wed her at the end of the play, which is foreshadowed earlier in the play: 'SIR TOBY: I could marry this wench jest.' (II, v, ll. 150, 152)

Fabian helps Sir Toby arrange a confrontation between Sir Andrew and Cesario\Viola. It is this challenge that brings Antonio to see Cesario\Viola and reprimand her for her treachery thinking that she is Sebastian. This foreshadows the resolution of the plot which gets complicated when Olivia convinces Sebastian to marry her, which would cause Cesario\Viola much embarrassment with Orsino whom she was supposed to woe for:

ORSINO: Come, away!

OLIVIA: Whither, my lord? Cesario, husband, stay!

ORSINO: Husband?

OLIVIA: Ay, husband. Can he that deny?

ORSINO: Her husband, sirrah? ...

ORSINO: *[To Viola]* O thou dissembling cub! What wilt thou be

When time hath sowed a grizzle on thy case?

Or will not else thy craft so quickly grow 155

That thine own trip shall be thine overthrow?

Farewell, and take her, but direct thy feet

Where thou and I henceforth may never meet.

VIOLA: My lord, I do protest-

OLIVIA: O do not swear!

Hold little faith, though thou hast too much fear. (V, I, ll. 131-134, 153-160)

The last character associated with this group is their subject of ridicule and attacks, Malvolio. Malvolio, whose name means 'ill-will', (Gay 100) has aspirations to rise above his natural status as steward: (Wilders 163)

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 any one else that follows her. What should I think on't? ... There is example for't: the Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe – ... Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state – ... Calling my officers about me, in my ratched velvet gown, having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping – ... And then to have the humour of state; and after a demure travel of regard - telling them I know my place, as I would they should do theirs - to ask for my kinsman Toby – Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make out for him. I frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my - some rich jewel. Toby approaches; curtsies there to me – ... I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control – ... Saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech – ... 'You must amend your drunkenness.' (II, v, ll. 20-60)

Scholars differ in their interpretation of the reference to 'the Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe' (Donno 100n). It is clear that he is aspiring to go above his status which would be a violation of the natural hierarchy in Olivia's house. The ridicule Shakespeare darts at Malvolio stems from this fact despite the fact that Malvolio is not altogether bad. His objection to Sir Toby's reveling (II, iii, ll. 75-79)

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stems from their breach of the decorum that obliges them to respects their hostess's mourning. Another reason for the ridicule is the fact that he is a puritan (II, iii, l. 119), one of the favourite subjects of ridicule for Shakespeare.

Malvolio who is "the only character who cannot be included in the final harmony of *Twelfth Night*" (Welsford,468) turns to be almost a tragic character in the dark room scene (IV, ii) with a very suitable tragic flaw diagnosed by Olivia as early as (I, v) when she says "O you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite." (ll. 73-4) This is Shakespeare: he closes his comedies with a bit of foreboding ending them with a bit of bitterness that threatens that authenticity of the 'happily ever after' of a comedy.

The second group of minor characters is associated with Sebastian, Viola's twin brother. Antonio, who cherishes the ship-wrecked youth, is indispensable to the play since he gives Viola the hope of seeing her brother:

ANTONIO: But O how vile an idol proves this god!

Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.

VIOLA: He named Sebastian. I my brother know

Yet living in my glass; even such and so

In favour was my brother, and he went

Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,

For him I imitate. O if it prove,

Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love. (III, iv, ll. 316-317, 330-335)

Sebastian himself is a very important character because without him the play would fall apart. How could Viola\Cesario marry Olivia or Orsino? The play would reach an irresolvable standstill without him. He is the *dues ex machina* in this play who resolves all the complications of the plot.

The last character is the captain who appears in (I, ii) with Viola. Without him Viola would not be presented to Orsino as an 'eunuch' (I, ii, l.56), and thus there would be no play. Although he appears briefly in this scene, without him there would be no play.

2- Minor Character's in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, consists of many minor characters that play significant roles along the action which develops vitally depending on their existence. The focus is going to be on the important minor characters from the world of fairies : Puck, Oberon and Titania in addition to Bottom who is engaged with her in a short love affair due to the spell.

Starting with Bottom, the weaver of Athens and player for the Duke, who has an important role that reaches to the climax in the meeting between him and Titania. This comic character who is described as "the shallowest thick- skin" (III, ii, 1043) wants to play all the parts in Pyramus and Thisbe for he thinks that he can succeed in any part he plays:

FLUTE: What is Thisby? a wandering knight?

QUINCE: It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE: Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming.

QUINCE: That's all one: you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM: An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll

 speak in a monstrous little voice. 'Thisne,

 Thisne;' 'Ah, Pyramus, lover dear! thy Thisby dear,

 and lady dear!'

QUINCE: No, no; you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisby.

Later on he adds that he wants to play the "Lion" too:

BOTTOM: Let me play the lion too: I will roar, that I will
do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar,
that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again,
let him roar again.' (I, ii, 327 -330)

Eagleton believes that Bottom "may want to play several parts at once, but he is a grotesquely bad actor, unable to transcend the limits of his own solid identity to perform anyone but himself." (Eagleton 25). At the same time, his behavior mirrors what the other lovers try to do along the comedy. Since he is reluctant to confine himself to a single part in his drama, wishing to play several at once; and this , of course , is precisely what the lovers do in the forest, exchanging roles with dizzying speed. (Ibid, 22)

In fact Bottom is unaware of the discrepancy between his conception of himself and the impression which he makes on less partial observers . Bottom thought that his ability to play Pyramus affectingly is an evidence not of his "imaginative vitality" but of illusion nurtured by complacency .Yet, his performance in that role proves ,in one way, to be very imaginative. (Allen,107).

Being unable to be more or less than himself, the ass's head then is very perfect to reflect the animalistic aspect of his personality. There is a loss of identity and confusion which can be considered a kind of self- delusion because:

When Bottom wears his ass's head there is a rift between how others view him and how he views himself , since he cannot see his own face; and the same is true of the revolving misperceptions of the four lovers,... . (Eagleton, 23)

In this sense he is very similar to Malvolio who lives in a state of self-deception that leads to his final suffering. Yet, he differs from him that at the end he returns to his normal state with memories of a vision about being an ass. As he states :

BOTTOM :... I have had a dream, past the wit of man to
say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go
about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there
is no man can tell what. Methought I was,—and
methought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if
he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye
of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not
seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue
to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream
was. (IV, i, 1767-1777)

Bottom, in fact, is the "polar opposite" of Puck who "cannot be merely one thing" whereas, "Bottom can be no more than one". This can be figured when the 'inhuman' Puck "can assume any shape or persona because he is nothing in himself". Puck proves that he "is the delusive space towards which the hunters in the forest are drawn, even when they believe they are pursuing each other." (Eagleton, 24-25). Sagar, believes that Shakespeare's Puck is the same "Trickster and shape-changer of the popular imagination, but he is not in the least satanic". He does no harm beyond 'mad pranks and merry gesticulations'. He claims to be glad when his mistakes cause 'jangling', but: "Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,/ You do their work, and they shall have good luck".(II i 40-1) (Sagar, 2002).

Puck is Oberon's jester who is the reason beyond the complicated relations in the comedy since he commits mistakes all the time leading to the development of the plot.

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OBERON: What hast thou done? thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight:
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true.

PUCK: Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth,
A million fail, confounding oath on oath. (III, i, 1123-1129)

And it seems that he enjoys making these mistakes without paying attention to the consequences, as he states:

PUCK: Then will two at once woo one; 1155
That must needs be sport alone;
And those things do best please me
That befall preposterously (III, i, 1155- 1158)

His foolish quick decisions contrast with Oberon's wisdom, specially, when the latter wants him to follow his orders to reunite the relations between lovers or to stop the fight between Helena's two lovers.

OBERON: Thou see'st these lovers seek a place to fight:

Hie therefore, Robin, overcast the night;
The starry welkin cover thou anon
With drooping fog as black as Acheron,
And lead these testy rivals so astray 1415

As one come not within another's way. (III, i, 1411- 1416)

Oberon is the king of fairies with somehow two sided personality. He insists on saving Helena from her tricky situation and at the same time uses his spell against his wife Titania to take the Indian boy from her. The play is presented as "a rebellion of the feminine against the power of masculine authority". Oberon's dominance is restored when "Titania is conquered". (Bamber, 470) . This plot of Oberon and Titania is the corner stone in the beginning and development of the play since it leads to many consequences. Titania has suffered from the spell when she falls in love with Bottom with the head of an ass.

OBERON: I wonder if Titania be awaked;
Then, what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on in extremity.

[Enter PUCK]

Here comes my messenger.

How now, mad spirit!

What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

PUCK : My mistress with a monster is in love.

Near to her close and consecrated bower,

While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,

A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,

That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,

Were met together to rehearse a play

Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day. (III, ii, 1029- 1042)

At the end , when Oberon celebrates his re-union with Titania and wishes love and happiness for all. Puck comes to remind the audience of the dangers of the night, graves gaping open and wolves howling at the moon. As a traditional Shakespearean fool, Puck makes us aware of the darker side of life, the underworld realm of shadows and magic and, ultimately, death. (Jacobson, 2017)

This point becomes clear when he states as a warning voice in the comedy:

PUCK : Now the wasted brands do glow,
Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
Puts the wretch that lies in woe
In remembrance of a shroud.
Now it is the time of night
That the graves all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide:
And we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic: not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallow'd house (V, i, 2224-2237)

In spite of this dark view of the world that foreshadows the reality, Puck comes to assure the audience that everything is mended and they have seen a dream. A point which sticks to the illusionary world of the play and cannot be attained in the actual life. This will lead us to think that William Shakespeare is not "interested in the actual existence of fairies but in their symbolic potential. What they, as spirits who took over the world at night, symbolized for him was the contents of the inner dark, the unconscious, repressed by day, but taking over the sleeper in dreams". (Sogar, 2002).

3- Conclusion

In conclusion it is fair to say that without the minor characters in both plays, they would not exist, or would lose much of their humour and comedy. In fact, they would not be comedies at all.

The roles of the minor characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are important, they are even more important than the major characters. If there are no minor characters, the play and action will not develop and run smoothly. Each one of the four basic minor characters has his own effect on the play.

Puck plays an important role in the play. He is the main reason of the events that take place in the comedy. Oberon asks Puck to bring the flower love – in idleness, then he asks him use the flower on someone's eyes in order to see its effect. Puck commits a mistake in putting the Juice of the flower in the eyes of the wrong people. This mistake represents the beginning of the events in the play. Also when Titania wakes up from her sleep after the flower is put on her eyes in order to be in love with Oberon, unfortunately, she wakes at the words of Bottom's song, and off curse falls in love with him love him. The play is complicated even further with Bottom's head of an ass.

So, without the action of Puck all the events that come later will not be found. The mistake that is committed by Puck is the reason or the brick on which all the events are built. In this sense, Puck is very similar to Maria and Sir Topy, when they plan for many events in *Twelfth Night* leading to many victims in the play like Sir Andrew and Malvolio. Yet, Puck commits unconscious mistakes, whereas, Maria and Sir Topy do things intentionally. Since they want to revenge upon Malvolio by convincing Olivia of his madness, or when Sir Topy swallows the foolish knight's money by arranging the false duel with Viola\Cesario.

From another point of view, Malvolio can be compared with Bottom in the state of self-delusion. In fact, Malvolio deceives himself by himself when he believes that Olivia might love him. Without the state of self-deception he lives in, Maria and the

others cannot cheat him. Yet, with a humorous sense Bottom is suffering from the same delusion when he foolishly wants to act all roles in the play within the play, a point which reflects his silliness as well as his highly imaginative character. When Malvolio's false dreams lead him to madness, Bottom wakes up to find that he is unable to differentiate between reality and dream. A fact which reflects the suitability of the ass's head for him. It is clear that Malvolio's "mentality .. is of a distinctly higher order than Bottom's. He fills a responsible position with credit, he follows a reasoned line of conduct, he thinks nobly of the soul", still lacks "humor and imagination". (Welsford, 468).

Following the same point, Sir Andrew can be seen as a self-deceptive character when Sir Topy is sponging his money by making him believe Olivia's love, yet his foolishness dominates his behavior more.

Finally, Shakespeare used to give his audience rich wisdom and wit mixed with humor. This can be noticed in the character of Feste and the final speech of Puck. A feature which indicates the importance of reality even in the world of imagination. Also, in both plays love and marriage represents the final solution for many problems and dilemmas.

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