

Twelfth Night

Viola's Soliloquy

Act 2 Scene 2

There's quite a complicated set up to this soliloquy.

Viola has been shipwrecked in a foreign land and to protect her honour has dressed as a man. She has been employed by Duke Orsino to deliver his messages of love to the beautiful Olivia. Unbeknown to Viola, Olivia was very taken with Orsino's attractive new messenger and has fallen in love with "him".

In order to send a secret hint about her feelings to Viola, Olivia pretends that Viola gave her a ring as a present from Orsino and gets her "churlish messenger" to "return" it to her.

Viola tries to work out what's going on and comes to a surprising, unexpected, and complicated conclusion.

Oh, I forgot to mention that Viola has fallen in love with Orsino.

(I've cut a rather complicated line in which Viola laments that women are such weak and impressionable creatures. Neither Olivia nor Viola are weak nor impressionable.

Viola:

I left no ring with her: what means this lady?
Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!

She made good view of me; indeed, so much,
That sure methought her eyes had lost her tongue,
For she did speak in starts distractedly.

She loves me, sure. The cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger.
None of my lord's ring! why, he sent her none.

I am the man: if it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.

Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.

How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly;
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him;
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.

What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love.

As I am woman, (now alas the day!)
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!

O time! thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie!

A modern translation

*What's all this with the ring?
Oh my God she has been charmed by
disguise!*

*Let's think this through, I thought she
was looking at me and speaking in an
odd way.*

*She's fallen in love, that's what the ring
is all about. My master sent her no ring*

*How awful for her: the "man" she's
fallen in love with doesn't really exist.*

*It's all my fault for putting on this
disguise.*

(pregnant enemy = the devil)

*Okay, how is this going to work out? My
master loves her, I love my master, and
she loves me.*

*What's going to happen? I love Orsino
but there's no chance of him loving me
back because of this disguise.*

*Because I'm really a woman, Olivia's
love is doomed.*

*Oh well, I can't come up with a plan,
we'll just have to wait and see!*