WS 10: Gender Roles – Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

1. Pair or group work: Rephrase the following quotes by Olivia. Read and reread the quotes very closely to be able to unlock the full meaning of Olivia and Viola-Cesario's dialogue.

OLIVIA

"I bade you never speak again of him; but would you undertake another suit
I had rather hear you solicit that, than music from the spheres."   (CSS, III, i, l. 92)

Do not speak of Duke Orsino again.

If you want to tell me that someone else loves me, I would enjoy hearing that more than I would enjoy

listening to angels sing.

"Give me leave, beseech you. I did send, after my last enchantment you did here,
A ring in chase of you. So did I abuse myself, my servant, and, I fear me, you.
Under your hard construction must I sit, to force that on you in a shameful cunning
Which you knew none of yours. What might you think?"   (CSS, III, i, l. 96)

Please let me speak. After the magic spell you cast on me the last time you were here, I send that ring to you.

(Enchantment = magic, Olivia does not know why she did that – love?)

With that trick I degraded myself, my servant, and you, I am afraid (not ladylike). I must then accept your

judgement of this act, which you probably condemn for I forced that ring on you through trickery,

and without your consent. What must you think of me?

"Stay! I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me."   (CSS, III, i, l. 122)

Stay, please and tell me what you really think of me (Olivia does not want to accept the rejection of

Viola-Cesario).

"Cesario, by the roses of the spring, By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride, Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide." (CSS, III, i, l. 134)

Cesario, I swear by the roses of the spring, by virginity, by honour, by truth, and by everything, that I

love you. I love you so much that neither my wit nor my reason can hide my passion, despite

your pride.

Vocabulary
to undertake … suit: to take up another cause, try another way – **to solicit:** to plead for
enchantment: bewitchment (causing Olivia to love Viola-Cesario) – **in chase of you:** after you
I fear me: I am afraid – **hard construction:** harsh judgement – **shameful cunning:** a trick (that does not present Olivia well) – **maugre:** in spite of

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2) Read the text below and underline/highlight important information about the role of women. Examine your present knowledge of Olivia in the light of the information given by the text. List typical and atypical character traits of Olivia in her role of a noble woman. Make use of your rephrased quotes in task 1.

- Olivia as an 'untypical' representation of a woman in Elizabethan society, a strong female character
- Own knowledge of Olivia's character in the play:
• Marital status (no husband)
• No dependence on male figures (brother has died)
• She runs her own estate/household which she probably inhibited from her brother
• Veil to not have a man for seven years (perhaps a convenient excuse to dismiss unwanted attention of Duke Orsino)
- behaviour that is expected of Elizabethan women:
• regal, look down at people, keep the family lines pure, not marry beneath her class, follow rules concerning dress and appearance
• chaste, obedient to males, silent, must marry so as not to be a burden on the family, marriage partner usually chosen for her by male relatives, not allowed to make huge decisions, must not be too outspoken
- The last point is especially important, as she displays sexually aggressive behaviour towards Viola-Cesario in the dialogue (see rephrases).
- Even after the rejection of Viola-Cesario (CSS, III, i, l. 109) she continues to pursue him which is not ladylike, also she herself mentions the ring she sent after him and struggles with her inappropriate behaviour.
- The students can also refer to the quote 'I am not what I am' – possibility to compare Olivia and Viola in how they differ from traditional women's roles (Olivia: acts in conflict with her class expectations; Viola: changes class to gain more freedom, struggles to fill out the male role at times)

3) Make use of the info boxes above and form three groups. Each group is expert on either A, B or C. Discuss the provided questions. Take notes to present your findings later:

A. Which expressions of 'proper' femininity and masculinity exist (appearance, clothing, how someone moves) in different spaces? Where can such images be found (film, advertising, text books, music videos etc.)? Where are there breaks and irritations to concepts of femininity and masculinity?
Expressions: clothing – suits vs dresses, moving – e.g. models doing a fashion walk (male/ female)
Spaces: advertisement – beer vs beauty products, film – action vs romance, music videos – rap vs pop (or other genres such as Metal/Rock/Indie)
Breaks and Irritations: unisex style, genderqueer spaces, movies, different cultures?

B. Which norms are conveyed in gender images (key question: how can men and women behave 'correctly')? To what extent do these norms limit people's possibilities (perhaps also: how do these norms empower individuals)?
Behaviour – men as aggressive vs women as submissive (stereotypes), norms such as in dating life: men has to pay for dinner, give the woman his jacket when she is cold, has to protect a woman, men are more competent than women (stereotypes!)
Gender pay gap, beauty standards for women/men, etc.

C. Where can one find processes of change in traditional gender images? What strategies exist to question such structures (for example in a playful/activist way, in theater, in queer interventions, etc.)?
Processes of change – more inclusive society in Europe, clothing and styling (show pictures of modern artists such as Harry Styles), changes in the music and entertainment industry (#metoo)