

Music as the Food of Romantic Comedy and Progression: The Exploration of Music Within
Twelfth Night and *She's the Man*

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* opens with the iconic line "If music be the food of love, play on. / Give me excess of it" (1.1.1-2). Similar to food, songs provide taste and texture to the romantic comedy genre and establish the nuances within said genre, which radiates through both *Twelfth Night* and its 2006 interpretation, *She's the Man*. In *Twelfth Night*, our primary musician and composer, The beloved Fool, plays melancholic, folky tunes with lyrics centering around love and death. Whereas *She's the Man* removes the Fool all together, allowing for the film supervisor, Nathan Wang, and the composer, David Arnold, to step into his role and create a risque soundtrack emblematic of how teenagers experience lust before love. By exploring the lyricism and instrumentals in the beginnings and ends of both *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man*, we can understand music's role in driving forward our perception of two different romantic comedy genres— the foundational, wholesome route versus a provocative, modern day interpretation. Furthermore, *She's the Man*'s strategic musical changes make Shakespeare palatable and enjoyable to a new generation of viewers.

Within both the party scene of *Twelfth Night* and Viola's male transformation scene in *She's the Man*, the songs foreshadow the romance plot, characterize the movie/play, and use their respective genres to uniquely define how love operates within their respected art forms.

The Fool's party song to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night* contributes to the wholesome romantic plot, with the Fool's lyrics shining wisdom on how the play will progress (2.3.40-54). With lyrics like "Your true love's coming, / ... Journeys end in lovers meeting," the audience eases into the "journey" of the romantic plot that begins in the next scene with a hopeful tune (2.3.41-44). Here our Fool establishes himself as a lending hand to all, driving

characters and the audience through the play with his music being the comforting touch, especially through the line “trip no further, pretty sweeting” (2.3.43). Additionally, within the beginning of the last verse, he raises the question of “What is love?” followed by the answer “Present mirth hath present laughter” (2.3.48-49). As a result, The Fool’s tune defines how romance exists within the film through a key characteristic of the standard romantic-comedy genre: “laughter” (2.3.49). Every lyric within this first song helps us establish the texture and tone of *Twelfth Night* with a jovial tune that carries us into future scenes.

Unlike their point of inspiration, *She’s the Man* defines love using Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, “Love is all Around,” deepening our understanding of the modernized romantic comedy by leaning into the provocative, angsty spirit of the early twenty-first century (10:28-11:23). Similar to the role of act two scene three, Viola’s transformation scene is the starting grounds for the romantic plot of the movie—as she too is about to meet her “Truelove” (2.3.41). Although the song merely acts as background music supplementing Viola’s transformation, the movie has additional instrumentals that further contribute to tone. The heavy drums, strong bass, and loud background vocals provide texture to the scene and correlate well to Viola’s sassy attitude that she continues to lean into as she explores her masculinity. The instrumentals combined with the lyrics help deliver the deeper meaning of how love operates within the movie while establishing the movie’s punk aesthetic. With lyrics like “Who can turn the world on with her smile” and “Love is all around / No need to fake it,” the song evokes sexual connotations through subtly stating “turn on” and “no need to fake it” (10:30-35, 10:47-49). As a result, love becomes defined with lust, straying away from *Twelfth Night*’s family-friendly romance. Despite the undertones, the song choice brilliantly encompasses the complexity of *She’s the Man*’s genre—even with the sensuality, the movie stays true to traditional

romantic comedies. Jett's alternative tune deep down highlights a girl's coming-of-age journey with lyrics like "this world is awfully big, / And, girl this time you're all alone," which not only connects to *Twelfth Night*'s established idea of the romantic "Journey" but also takes us one step closer to modernity through emphasizing Viola's personal coming of age (11:03-07, 2.3.44).

She's the Man's "Love is all Around" highlights how genre and tune can help Shakespeare's plot evolve to fit early 2000s teenagers, establishing desire and angst as key components in twenty-first century romantic comedies.

The final song choices during both of Violas' big reveals at the end further illustrate the dichotomy of *Twelfth Night*'s light-hearted, ambiguous tone versus *She's the Man*'s provocative nature. Additionally, how music is uniquely placed in regards to the reveal provides two different means of texture to the romantic comedy's "happy ending:" *She's the Man* sets the tone for the reveal to come, whereas *Twelfth Night*'s song closes out the entire play post reveal.

Twelfth Night closes with one last song from Feste, as he sings a mysterious tune to finish out the play's "happy ending" post reveal (5.1.412-431). Although *Twelfth Night* technically follows the traditional romantic comedy conclusion with Viola's reveal, Sebastian and Viola's reunion, and every character within the love web marrying one another, Viola never removes her disguise and the marriages occur off-screen. As a result, readers are left to decide on their own if the ending feels satisfactory. The Fool's song further contributes to the play's lasting ambiguity and adds bittersweetness to the play's symphony, speaking on the hardships of life and the inevitability of suffering. Nonetheless, some of his final lines do reinsert us into the romantic comedy with the lines "A great while ago the world begun, / ... our play is done, / And we'll strive to please you every day" (5.1.428-431). Specifically, "The world begun" symbolizes the ending of the play's "romantic journey" introduced in the Fool's first song and marks the

beginning of the rest of the couples' lives (5.1.428, 2.3.44). Furthermore, "We'll strive to please you every day" plays into the jovial nature of the genre, as Feste directly reaches out to his audience looking for validation (5.1.431). The characters' hopes in creating a work of art that brings joy to the audience balances out the debatable ending and highlights the romantic comedy's true purpose.

She's the Man's decision to open Viola's reveal with the song "Dirty Little Secret" by the All-American Rejects perfectly encompasses the early 2000s spirit of the film while using the song's lyrics play up the provocativeness of the film: a theme that shines through Viola's end reveal (1:17:18-1:18:29). Using a punk-rock song that was popular during the time period excites readers who anticipate the rivalry game and reveal, setting the stage for the chaos to ensue. Additionally, the lyrics perfectly highlight the movie's subtle sultry with lyrics like "I'll keep you my dirty little secret," holding the double meaning of Sebastian (unknowingly) keeping Viola's secret as he plays in the game for her and Viola keeping the secret of her identity all along (1:17:57-58). The line "Find out games you don't want to play" also holds a double entendre: referring to the soccer game and to the "game" that is the love web Viola orchestrated (1:17:45-47). The diction of an implied "game" and the title "Dirty Little Secret" lean into the throughline of using music to emphasize teenage angst and lust (1:17:45, 1:17:57-58). With Viola's reveal also including a dramatic hair whip out of the wig and flashing the crowd, the movie further leans into the song's themes of seduction and teenage infatuation (1:27:24-25, 1:28:11). *She's the Man's* musical choices—especially through the incorporation of "Dirty Little Secret" within the film—create a modernized interpretation of *Twelfth Night* that feels fresh and palatable to young viewers and create a subsection of the romantic comedy genre Shakespeare never fully leaned into.

Through the analysis and comparison of the music in *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man*, we understand the power the soundtrack has to drive forward art's specific genre and to bookmark artistic progression. Modern society tends to shudder at the sound of Shakespeare due to their inability to understand his language, but his niche names, messy love triangles, and intense battles are staples within modern movies and television shows; most are simply unaware of Shakespeare's role in defining the key elements within our favorite forms of art. Nonetheless, the little changes made to adaptations like incorporating sports within the plot to highlight Shakespeare's gender themes or adding new texture through a seductive soundtrack give Shakespeare a legacy that continues into today. As a result, the *She's the Man* soundtrack highlights Shakespeare's versatility as a playwright, giving creators the chance to add new perspectives and layers to well-established and loved plays.

Works Cited

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