

The malvolio subplot bringing out why you think shakespeare included it in the pl...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Malvolio subplot, although only a subplot, has a great influence on the audience viewing the play. When reading the play as a book, we are informed of the twists and tangles that occur in it. However, when studying the play, we must think of it as theatre as the script was written for an audience to watch. This is very important when especially delving into the Malvolio subplot. This fascinating subplot supplies the reader and the viewer with entertainment in the form of mainly humour but also suspense (which may only be obtained from a watching viewer. Indeed I agree that the Malvolio subplot does delay the main plot but it is my point of view that this only makes the play more delightful to watch and study.

This subplot, entwined with the main plot (the discovery of the existence of twins) makes the script a great deal more comic and the fact that some characters are present in both make everything even more interesting. We must remember that the play is intended as a comedy. However admittedly pupils do not find the script humorous because senses of humour have changed since 1600 when the book was written. This subplot provides us with most of the laughter we experience and if it were not present, this book may not deserve its state of “ comedy”. It is the part of the main plot to keep us intrigue and tense, waiting for a final outcome. It is also worth noting that actors need time to change costumes in between different scenes and this subplot, by delaying the main plot may help give the actors such as Olivia, a chance to get ready for another scene.

Malvolio is the chief-servant in Olivia’s house. This is shown in the direct, arrogant and sometimes rude language he uses to people who he sees as

not as good as him (e. g. Maria, Fabian and even Feste). He gives out the orders and although he is strict, he keeps the house running smoothly. His arrogance and harshness therefore create a wall of hatred in between himself and the lower-class workers who despise him. It is a wall that remains unbroken by many (but for a sense of sorrow for that may be felt for him), even after revenge on him has taken place. Workers who Malvolio has under his authority include Maria and Fabian. Fabian has been in trouble for bear-baiting because of Malvolio. Feste, the jester, is also an enemy of Malvolio as Malvolio has made a habit of trying to give him a bad name in front of Olivia.

“ I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal”

However, Malvolio's attempts are never to any avail as Olivia is too close to Feste. Malvolio is probably jealous of this.

Sir Toby belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are two “ friends” who also are at an extreme dislike to Malvolio. Sir Toby's constant drinking and Sir Andrew's constant stupidity annoys and irritates Malvolio. Maria is friend of both these two dozy men and Fabian and so she also hates Malvolio's persistent pest-like presence. The group make fun of Malvolio and this is shown in Act two Scene Two when they are up in the early hours of the morning singing and generally being loud whilst everyone else is trying to sleep. Malvolio comes raging in accusing them of making an “ alehouse” out of his lady's house.

He also threatens Maria about her job. After Malvolio leaves that night, after telling off the group of friends, the group start plotting revenge on him. Sir

Andrew Aguecheek comes up with the idea of asking him for a duel but to break their promise and leave him as to make him a fool. However, this is quickly disposed of. Eventually, Maria shows her wit and intelligence with a creative plan to make a fool of Malvolio. This is where she is at the height of her powers and both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are very impressed with her. The plan involves using the weaknesses that Malvolio's personality possesses against him, that is, his vanity.

Malvolio thinks very high of himself and is truly a very vain man. He is in love with himself and thinks that he is perfect. In the play he says,

“ Some are born with greatness

Some achieve greatness and,

Some have greatness thrust upon them”

This is the height of his vanity and Olivia herself acknowledges his self-love. Nevertheless, Olivia also claims that he does have some good points. She gets Malvolio to give Cesario the ring back and to greet Cesario (Viola) every time “ he” comes to her home. He is responsible and will do anything to please her. Olivia probably already knows that Malvolio feels attracted to her. His failure before to court her is probably a reason why he loathes and degrades everybody else. Maria also speaks of Malvolio's vanity,

“...the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look upon him will love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.”

Maria plans to write a love letter and plant it where Malvolio will find it. She plans not to say from whom it is from. She can write similarly to Olivia and Malvolio is to mistake this letter to be from Olivia herself. Although the letter does not say whom it is to, the letters MAOI are present. The consequence of his vanity in this plan leads him to believe the letter is from Olivia - to him. Maria uses Malvolio to fool himself. Then Maria tells Sir Toby and Andrew to watch and laugh at him when he discovers the letter. The letter itself instructs Malvolio to belittle everyone. However, more importantly in terms of entertainment for the audience, the letter instructs Malvolio to wear yellow, cross-gartered stockings and to smile in the presence of Olivia.

This scene where Malvolio finds the letter is immense in terms of its impact on the play and how the audience perceives the play. The scene provides us with physical humour. We can get a feel of the atmosphere in the theatre when this scene is happening by just reading this part of the book. The loss of this scene would be a massive loss to the play because I feel that it makes the play's comedy more sharp, clever, original and more slapstick.

Otherwise, the play's humour would not have a climax and a climax is always very effective on the emotions of the audience.

There is potential for humour everywhere in this plot. For example, when Feste and both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew make fun of Malvolio when he is telling them off in the early morning, this makes the audience laugh. Then, there is when Malvolio reads the letter whilst Sir Toby and Sir Andrew make fun of him. It is not only the way that he reads the letter but also the content of the letter that will make the audience laugh.

However, as said, the entertainment from this plot does not only come in the form of humour but also suspense. After hearing about the yellow, cross-gartered stockings and the smiling which he must do, we wait anxiously for the scene to come where we can see Malvolio do these things. We then keep expecting it in the next scene but we are kept waiting. This is where the suspense, anxiousness and maybe even tenseness comes from. Here delayed pleasure is pleasure achieved.

Laughter comes in Act three Scene four when Malvolio finally comes into the presence of Olivia. Malvolio reads the letter in Act two Scene five. This scene can be acted out in many ways and a director can use his own talents to enhance the already superb script. The surprise of the yellow and cross-gartered stockings can be used on the audience in a number of ways. For example it can be hidden when Malvolio first comes on stage and then suddenly displayed or it can be showed to the audience straight away.

When Malvolio comes on to the stage at this point, Olivia thinks he is ill because of his stockings. Olivia tells Malvolio to go to sleep and then Malvolio actually says that he will go bed with Olivia. Malvolio ends up being locked up by Maria and her friends. To add to the fun, Feste dresses up as a clergyman (Sir Topas) and comes to Malvolio. One of the themes in this play is things not being as they seem and situations being turned upside down. Here Malvolio is turned from a respectable man who is chief-servant to a “madman” locked up in a cell. Feste, as Sir Topas makes fun of Malvolio and the head-servant is made to beg.

Without this sub-plot, the play would be a lot less worth watching and the main plot of the twins would have to be made a lot more complex and long. The only other part of the play which may make the play comical is where Sir Andrew and Sir Toby mistakes Sebastian for Viola and fight the wrong person.

The Malvolio subplot also helps to change the mood from anxiousness to humour. The Malvolio plot gives the audience mainly laughter whilst the main plot keeps us intrigued. They are in contrast in terms of how they make us feel. However, it can be said that they complement each other because opposites attract. Moreover, if you get bored with one plot-strand, there is the other to watch so Shakespeare is targeting a wider audience. In conclusion, yes the Malvolio plot does delay the main plot but it is for the better and helps with the acting in that it gives some actors a chance to get ready for their next scene. It provides humour and suspense to make the play an actual comedy rather than a romantic story that simply ends happily.