

How does
shakespeare make
act 2 scene 5 of
twelfth night



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Twelfth Night, written by Shakespeare in the early 17th century, is a romantic comedy containing several sub-plots and one main plot. The main plot is the complex love triangle between Orsino, Olivia and Viola/Cesario. This is seen as extremely strange as Viola, a woman, is dressing up as a man to work for Orsino. She then attracts the attention of a wealthy woman named Olivia - Viola then doesn't know how to react as Olivia is blind to the fact that Viola is actually a woman. When the audience first learn this - it is in Act 1 Scene 2 - Shakespeare uses a technique called dramatic irony. This is where the audience knows something a certain actor doesn't. In this case, the audience knows that Viola is actually a woman and the other characters are aware of this - it becomes very humorous.

One of the main sub-plots is when Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste and Maria devise a trick to play on Malvolio. Throughout the play Malvolio is described as a Puritan. This was a word mainly used in Shakespearian times and it suggests a person that sticks to strict principles and avoids life's simple pleasures. This was a clever move of Shakespeare as he realised the audience would take an instant dislike towards Malvolio due to his Puritan beliefs being put into action. Puritans referred to theatres as houses of sin. Most of the audience attended the theatre regularly and would feel hurt by Puritan beliefs.

In my opinion the most dramatic scene in the sub-plot is Act 2 Scene 5. This is where the secretive trick commences. Shakespeare uses visual humour, stage arrangements, dramatic irony and language to make this scene particularly dramatic. This is highlighted as the trick provides a humorous relief from the complexities of the love triangle. Near the start of the play <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-make-act-2-scene-5-of-twelfth-night/>

Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste's attempts to enjoy themselves would be ruined by Malvolio ordering them around:

' Have you no wit, manners nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night?'

This highlights Malvolio's sense of self-importance and arrogance. It was seen as inappropriate for a servant to talk in this way to his superiors After this scene the decision was made that Sir Toby, Maria, Feste and Sir Andrew would devise some plot to gain revenge on Malvolio. Maria cleverly decides to write a letter, addressed to Malvolio, that would lead him to believe Olivia, his lady, was attracted to him:

' By the colour of his beard, the shape of his leg, the manner of his gait, the expressure of his eye, forehead and complexion, he would find himself most feelingly personated'

The audience would then be held in anticipation as to what Maria will write in this crafty letter. Also their dislike to Malvolio would make them feel involved within the plan. They see this as a way to mock the Puritan ways in general. This is an example of dramatic tension as the audience are gripped and are anxious about what the following scenes hold. Shakespeare then adds to the dramatic tension by devising another plot which is totally unattached to the plot on Malvolio.

Throughout Act 2 Scene 5 the playwright includes various references to hunting. This is also seen as humorous as the more intelligent of the

audience will realise that this ties in with the other characters setting a trap for Malvolio.

‘ For here comes the trout which must be caught with tickling’

This metaphor refers to Malvolio as a fish and Sir Toby is simply wanting to reel him in.

‘ Wouldst thou not be glad to have the niggardly, rascally sheep-biter come by some notable shame?’

Metaphorically speaking this means a nasty person who stabs the backs of the innocent. Sir Toby is referring to Malvolio. He then asks Fabian if he, too, intends to make Malvolio look a fool.

Within the depth of the play Malvolio’s actions develop and the audience can now recognise that Malvolio only acts like a Puritan when it suits him. At other times in the play Malvolio appears selfish and embodies greed and vanity, especially with his appearance. This goes against all that Puritans believe in. After reading the letter Malvolio imagines what it would be like to be married to Olivia:

‘ Calling my officers about me in my branched velvet gown’

We all know that Malvolio is just dreaming about his marriage with Olivia but he seems deeply concerned about the possibility of wealth and power that he would receive once married to a lady like Olivia. This again is contradicting Puritan beliefs. The audience find it very amusing that Malvolio can even dream about marrying someone so superior to him. Malvolio’s

arrogance would make the audience detest him even more as he thinks they may actually be suited in marriage. Shakespeare keeps mounting up negative sides to Malvolio's personality in order to prevent the audience from feeling sympathetic towards him in later parts of the play.

Sir Andrew also provides humour within the scene. However, likening his character to Malvolio, the audience is laughing at him, rather than with him. The audience do find it funny how Sir Andrew is trying to fit by agreeing with all of Sir Toby's comments. His comments seem to have no significance to the scene, moreover this adds a comical value to the scene as it is almost transparent that he is simply sucking up to Sir Toby

One may wonder why Shakespeare chose Fabian to participate in the scene. In my opinion he did this to calm down Sir Toby and make sure that their rowdiness is not overheard by Malvolio. Fabian is constantly trying to settle the group down:

' Oh peace, peace, peace! Now, now'

Shakespeare also chose, intelligently, when not to include Feste within the scene. His intelligent and witty remarks would have dominated the scene. However, Shakespeare intended for Malvolio to be the main character in this particular scene. If Feste had been put in this scene, he speech would be limited and therefore this would contradict his character.

When the group are hiding behind the box tree, this introduces eavesdropping into the scene. This is the type of humour that the Shakespearian audience can relate to. Within this era many playwrights

would introduce this technique in order to create dramatic intensity and humour. This particular technique worked well as the whispering of the characters, and the fear of getting caught, would add to the dramatic emphasis. They were positioned behind the box tree so that the audience could see them, and Malvolio could not. It also creates a humorous image to picture three grown men hiding behind a tree:

‘ Get ye, all three, into the box tree’

This shows Fabian and Sir Toby peering through holes in the hedge whilst Sir Andrew leans

over the top of the hedge. In my opinion, not only a Shakespearian audience, but as modern audience, would find these stage arrangements amusing.

However, when watching a stage adaptation by Keith Brannagh and Paul Kafno, it is easier to highlight the stage techniques used to make the scene particularly dramatic. We noticed they changed the initial box tree idea, and turned it into a Christmas tree. I first thought that this would spoil the dramatic irony but it added to the humour in the fact that they could all fit behind the tree successfully without Malvolio noticing. More than anything this scene is to let the audience know how stupid Malvolio is. He didn't even notice the other characters when they were moving around the tree and making sound effects to stop him from hearing. This adds a comic effect which engages the audience.

In this production Malvolio struts around the garden as if he owns it. When alone he admires his own shadow. Maria often describes him as being full of self love:

‘ You are sick of self love Malvolio’

He demonstrates this at the start of Act 2 Scene 5 when he is in the garden admiring his shadow. It also becomes apparent to us that Malvolio is envious towards people who are more successful than himself. This then shows a lack of self awareness and he, himself, believes he is not to blame for his unsuccessful life. But he reassures himself by saying:

‘ T is but fortune, all is fortune’.

This points out his self love.

There are many opportunities where Keith Brannagh can explore visual humour. Malvolio is made to look ridiculous as he reads out the letter:

‘ If I fall into the hand, revolve!’

Malvolio then turns around 360 degrees which makes him look stupid as the letter is actually talking about another meaning of the word ‘ revolve’. This is a pun, which is a classic example of Shakespeare’s humour. We can spot many examples of this in other parts of the play. One another example of this is when Sir Andrew is trying to sweet talk Maria:

‘ Bless you fair shrew’

When Sir Andrew and Maria first meet, it is at the start of Act 1 Scene 3. He doesn't actually realise that the meaning of the word 'shrew' is 'bad tempered woman' but by saying it, he meant 'a sweet creature'. The audience is shown Sir Andrew's stupidity by using a pun. Shakespeare enjoyed using this technique.

Keith Brannagh also uses visual humour when we see Malvolio smiling after the letter tells him to smile:

'Thy smile becomes thee well'

This encourages him to smile as it says his smile suits him. The audience are then left in anticipation as they are anxious to see Malvolio smiling in front of Olivia. We also must remember smiling in front of Olivia would be disrespectful and inappropriate as she is still in mourning of the loss of her brother

In the 1996 film starring Nigel Hawthorne and directed by Trevor Nunn.

Sir Toby's anger at Malvolio's arrogance when he dreams of being married to Olivia also adds to the humorous value of the scene. The audience must also remember that Olivia is Sir Toby's niece:

'Having been three months married to her' with Sir Toby's response: 'Oh, for a stone bow to hit him in the eye'

Sir Toby is overwhelmed as it seems that Malvolio has no feeling for the importance within social boundaries. He wishes Malvolio would be hit in the eye with a catapult. However, his possible actions become more serious

when Malvolio's topic changes to the power he would gain from being married to Olivia:

' 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, courtesies there to me'.

This angers Sir Toby as Malvolio is picturing himself as superior to Sir Toby. Also he adds to the arrogance by calling Sir Toby, Toby. He leaves out the Sir because he realises Sir Toby would now be his equivalent.

The selection of language Shakespeare chooses is also a key to making the scene dramatic and many of the words he uses are seen as sexual references. Within the letter it says:

' These be her very C's, her U's and her T's: and thus makes her great P's'

By reading out C, U and T Malvolio is made to look ridiculous as of course this spells CUT, which in Shakespearian times is almost slang for the female genitalia. Sir Andrew is also made to look like a complete fool as he is completely oblivious to the joke:

' Her C's, her U's and her T's, why that?' is almost seen as if the playwright is taking advantage and by making Sir Andrew receive more humiliation.