

12th night essay

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Did Shakespeare's characters get what they deserve? To what extent? The majority of Shakespeare's characters did not get what they deserved in the end, there definitely is a strong scent of injustice that hangs in the air around Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. This, however, does not mean that it made life harder for his characters. In quite a few cases, it actually leaves them better off. Nevertheless, this is not to say that they are not punished for their wrong deeds, sometimes in ways that are completely unfair.

Shakespeare shows us painful truth of the injustice that exists within humanity. In the case of Malvolio, we are quick to act, but not to investigate. We also learn that love can fix many things, but it can also tear them apart, as we see with Olivia, Orsino, Sebastian and Viola. Also, as seen through the character of Antonio, bad things can be forgotten if a good enough deed replaces it. As many of us know, humanity is infamous for their willingness to judge and act against a person before they fully investigate the situation; Malvolio is just one example of this.

We are aware that Malvolio did treat others in a derogatory manner, "Go hang yourselves all! You are idle, shallow things; I am not of your element," – Malvolio, Act 3 Scene 4. He never actually incapacitated anyone; he never broke the law or strayed from his duties. He was simply just a spiteful individual and did not deserve to be imprisoned in a cage for however many hours of his life. I feel that this was an extreme measure and in the end, it may have inflicted more anger and discourtesy towards Sir Andrew, Sir Toby and Maria, reversing the entire effect their 'plan' was intended to make.

When the truth was eventually exposed, and Malvolio freed after facing an invalid punishment, he was understandably furious, proclaiming, "I'll be
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revenged on the whole pack of you! ” – Malvolio, Act 5 Scene 1. Perhaps this was a harsh act of karma, all we know is that Olivia was quick to accuse him without further evidence, proving that for once and for all that humanity is unjust. Twelfth Night is a romantic comedy, and romantic love is the play’s main focus. Despite the fact that the play offers a happy ending, in which the various lovers find one another and are married, Shakespeare shows that love can cause pain.

Many of the characters seem to view love as a kind of curse, a feeling that attacks its victims suddenly and disruptively. Various characters claim to suffer painfully from being in love. At one point, Orsino describes love miserably as an “ appetite” that he wants to satisfy and cannot, Act 1 Scene 1; at another point, he calls his desires “ fell and cruel hounds,” Act 1 Scene 1. Olivia more bluntly describes love as a “ plague” from which she suffers terribly, Act 1 Scene 5. These metaphors contain an element of violence, further painting the love-struck as victims of some random force in the universe.

Even the less melodramatic Viola sighs unhappily that “ My state is desperate for my master’s love,” Act 2 Scene 2. This desperation has the potential to result in violence, as in Act 5 scene 1, when Orsino threatens to kill Cesario because he thinks that Cesario has abandoned him to become Olivia’s lover. Love is also exclusionary: some people achieve romantic happiness, while others do not. At the end of the play, as the happy lovers celebrate, Malvolio is prevented from having the objects of his desire.

Malvolio, who has pursued Olivia, must eventually face the realization that he is a fool, socially undeserving of his noble mistress. Love, therefore,

cannot overcome all obstacles, and those whose desires go unfulfilled remain no less in love but feel the sting of its absence even more severely. Sometimes in life, we can make up for our crimes, merely by doing respectable deeds instead. This is what Shakespeare demonstrates for us through the character of Antonio. We become conscious that Antonio's past is shadowed with unlawful activity when he voices to Sebastian of "many his enemies in Orsino's court," Act 2 Scene 3.

Nevertheless, he still follows Sebastian, showing courage and loyalty. He then defends Viola (Dressed as Cesario but identical to Sebastian) from Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, bringing himself to the attention of the officers, who recognise him from his shady past and drag him away. Yet it is when Orsino sees him and Viola takes Antonio's side, reimbursing the favour he did for her, that Orsino concludes that Antonio is free to go, insisting that he is a, "Notable pirate" and wonders how he, "Hast made thine enemies? Act 5 Scene 1. So he is pardoned of all of his corrupt deeds, purely because he was kind and displayed courage and determination. As a result, it is quite clear that no one in Twelfth Night truly gets what he or she deserves. Shakespeare's plays are just as unjust as the world itself, perhaps this is why we love to read and watch his works, we can relate to them. Twelfth Night has helped to show me just how one-sided life can be, but also that that unfairness can also work in my favour.