

How does  
shakespeare  
manipulate the  
audience to dislike  
malvolio essay



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Shakespeare manipulates the audience using a variety of different techniques and tries to make the audience feel certain emotions towards characters. The play Twelfth Night is centred on love, being someone you are not and social class. The play itself is set in the land of Illyria and has two grand households; the heads of which are Olivia and Orsino. Malvolio is the steward of Olivia and highly ranked amongst the servants. He is a Puritan and is deeply religious; this fact is played upon repeatedly as they play goes on.

Malvolio is a character that would be more reacted to and more relevant at the time this play was shown for the first time to an Elizabethan audience, and Malvolio may bring across different emotions in a modern audience. The first time Shakespeare introduces us to Malvolio is in Act 1 Scene 5 and he talks to Feste when he remarks, "... such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone...

Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged." He belittles Feste and this does not help Feste as he was already in an unfavourable position with Olivia for not being around for a long time. The word barren would be interpreted by modern audiences differently to Shakespearean audiences, because in Elizabethan times 'barren' meant infertile and would be perceived as a more vicious remark, as modern audiences think of 'barren' as meaning stupid or empty.

These comments from Malvolio, only judging from the first few lines he speaks, soon make him appear, to the audience, to be an unattractive character. The next we see of Malvolio is in Act 2 Scene 3, and he enters

after it has been made clear to the audience that all characters on stage (Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste) were all having a pleasurable party. They were singing, drinking, dancing and joking around. The audience themselves feel involved in the party.

A Shakespearean audience would feel even more involved in the party as they were physically closer to the stage and the characters, whereas with a modern stage the seats are often placed far from the stage so the audience's reaction to the party would be different in different times, however, both audiences recognise this scene as an enjoyable experience. Amid the revelry, Sir Andrew is shown to be a figure of fun, as his words get twisted by Feste into a pun: "... Begin, fool. It begins, ' Hold thy peace. '" and Feste replies, " I shall never begin if I hold my peace".

This shows the audience this character can be played with for amusement, as Sir Andrew is only indicating the beginning of the song, however, ' Hold thy peace' meant to be quiet, and Feste interprets this literally saying he cannot begin if he has to be quiet! This adds to the audience's amusement, and the joke appears here in the play to let the audience know fairly early on that Sir Andrew is a character whose purpose is to bring comedy. Malvolio enters with a rhetorical question in line 75, " My masters are you mad? " He recognises Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's social superiority but then goes on with something extremely rude, ' are you mad!

The use of his monosyllabic line makes him sound extremely angry. Malvolio adds to the abuse by saying '... have you no wit, manners, nor honesty... ' Calling his superiors stupid, ill-mannered and untruthful is a very risky

approach. Considering the fact that there was a colossal and complex social hierarchy in the Elizabethan time this comment seems unbelievable, linking back to Act 1 Scene 5 calling Feste ‘ a barren rascal’ had more effect in Shakespeare’s time, the same could be said for these comments to Malvolio’s social superiors.

A modern audience see people as more equal and it is not so much of a shock. Another effect Shakespeare uses is in Malvolio’s language. At the time there were different ways of saying ‘ you’ whereas in the 21st Century there is only one form of the word. In the Elizabethan era, you would say ‘ you’ in a formal context, but ‘ thee’ or ‘ ye’ was another form used for intimate or contemptuous language. Malvolio starts off by using the formal form clearly acknowledging superiors, but he changes as anger sets in and says in line 76 “ Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house... and uses the contemptuous form.

The audience were formerly getting involved and thoroughly enjoying the party with the characters on stage on, and for Malvolio to come on stage being unspeakably rude and halting the revelry, clearly shows us Shakespeare wants the audience to dislike Malvolio even more. On the other hand, it could be argued that Malvolio might have a point. Olivia is in bereavement and her house is a house of mourning for a death. Sir Toby’s role was to protect Olivia, as he is the only male left in the family. His drunken behaviour would be inappropriate in this house at this time.

Sir Toby takes control of the situation and questions Malvolio’s comments. In line 97 ‘ Art any more than a steward? ‘ How dare Malvolio say such things to

Sir Toby, a nobleman, far superior to him? He goes on to attack his Puritanical side by saying ' Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale? The Puritanical element being the word ' virtuous' which means morally excellent and religious. This Puritan side to Malvolio is more relevant to an Elizabethan audience as they know puritans to be " kill-joys" and they do not want any gambling or any fun as normal people would see it.

An ironic element Shakespeare uses by making Malvolio a Puritan is that they wanted to close the theatres, and as Shakespeare needed them for his livelihood this adds another layer to audience dislike of him. After this verbal attack Sir Toby asks Maria for another glass of wine, just to annoy Malvolio even more! This puts Maria in an awkward position, and then Malvolio turns his attack to her. He blames her for the noise and disruption and he threatens her. Line 103, "... you would not give means for this uncivil rule; she shall know of it, by this hand. shows the threat.

Malvolio's threat to tell Olivia it was Maria that started the unacceptable behaviour would have been a real threat, as Maria would have nowhere to go. She obtained her money, food and clothes all from Olivia's household. This threat links with events earlier in the play by being more relevant during the play's first years, because the audience understood that her whole life revolved around being in Olivia's household and she relied on her job for everything. Modern audiences would not appreciate the severity of the threat.

The audience like Maria for her wit and her part in the revelry, and now Malvolio has threatened her, the audience naturally concurs he is a malevolent character out to bring misery. After Malvolio has left the stage, Maria makes a plan of revenge and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew agree and say how excellent the idea is. She says she will drop a letter for Malvolio to find and it will be written in Olivia's handwriting as Maria can write very much like her, and this is Shakespeare using dramatic irony, when the audience knows something but the characters do not and, it causes great amusement amongst the characters.

We do not get to the scene with the joke until another scene that goes back to the main plot, with Sebastian and Viola. In the beginning we see a soaked Viola come to shore and make a plan to dress like a young boy that can sing and go and work for Orsino, who she falls in love with after meeting him. She thinks her brother has died at sea but he survived. This scene is where it is in play because the play is a love story at heart and this scene adds to the structure of the play and brings the element of love back to the audience's minds.

The next scene is when Malvolio is in Olivia's garden and he is imagining himself with Olivia. He totally arrogant in line 41, "... having come from a day-bed..." imagining he has just come back from making love to Olivia. This makes the listening Sir Toby very angry and he can hardly contain himself from his hiding spot. . Linking back to Act 2 Scene 3 when Malvolio was acting well out of his status, he is only a steward; a servant to Olivia, and he is imaging himself getting married to her and saying how good he

looks. All the characters (apart from Malvolio) on stage have a reason to dislike Malvolio.

A Shakespearean audience went bear baiting in their leisure time and all that went considered it fun. Fabian went bear baiting and he was seen by Malvolio. Malvolio then let Olivia know about Fabian's escapades out bear baiting and this unnecessarily put him in a detrimental position with Olivia. This contributes to the dislike of Malvolio. Sir Toby and Feste's revelry was interrupted by Malvolio and in Act 1 Sc 5 he is made fun of by him as well. His vanity and pompous behaviour in Olivia's garden manipulate the audience to think he is self-important and adds on to the dislike already created by Shakespeare in earlier scenes.

The letter he finds soon after is used as a dramatic device in the play, as it has an immediate effect on Malvolio as a character and is rather ironic as the letter states what he has been imagining just a few moments ago. The letter the reads makes him overjoyed and he thinks Olivia is in love with him. When he reads about distinctive clothes he remembers that Olivia said that she liked the yellow stockings and wished to see him ever 'cross-gartered', but she actually hates them.

This is more fitting for a Elizabethan audience as cross-gartering was a fashion in those days and is hardly ever seen in modern days, this could come across as more funny for an Elizabethan audience. What follows are four scenes that prolong the resolution of the joke and concentrate on the main plot and themes. There are two reasons Shakespeare puts in the gap between scenes with Malvolio's action; firstly, to create suspense and builds

up anticipation and the more they build up Malvolio in his own self-importance the higher and more spectacular his fall will be; secondly, to concentrate on the main plot.

When we eventually get to the scene with Malvolio, Maria ensures the trick is successful, by planting the idea in Olivia's head that Malvolio is 'in very strange manner' and making out he is mad. Malvolio presents himself and acts very strangely; smiling all of the time; wearing yellow stockings, cross-gartered as the letter said! Olivia is very surprised. The audience find the revenge hilarious as dramatic irony occurs, because the audience knows something the characters do not. The audience still feel Malvolio deserved the revenge and find it amusing.

Olivia sends Malvolio away after making some rude jokes. For example in line 27, "Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?" and he replies, "... Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee." Olivia means going to bed out of sickness, however he interprets it differently and thinks she wants to sleep with him! After Malvolio has been sent away Sir Toby, Maria and Fabian taunt him and make out he is in league with the devil and he is mad. It creates a picture of bear baiting in the mind; people gathered round laughing and jabbing him with an insult in turn.

The audience are still going along with the joke; they are still finding it funny. Line 108, "If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction" is usually said to the audience and draws them back into the play, and it is a type of irony as we know it being played on a stage because the audience are watching it! Maria wants to keep the joke going



when she says 'Pursue him'. They send him to be locked in a dark room, as at the time it was normal for a madman to be locked away.

This is the turning point in the revenge. This is a normal punishment for a madman but the audience knows he is perfectly sane. A modern audience would be more sympathetic towards Malvolio, because 'mad' people are taken to special homes nowadays and are not put in dark cells, and it would seem cruel to put a madman in a cell let alone a sane man! However, a Shakespearean audience would still feel sympathy just less as there is a degree of normality to the locking away of a man.

In Act 4 Scene 2, Maria and Feste are outside Malvolio's cell and Maria tells Feste to put on a priest's costume, particularly relevant to his Puritanism. Maria then says in line 2, "Do it quickly". This line can be interpreted in many ways. She could mean get it over and done with as she is starting to feel uncomfortable with joke and wants done with it as soon as possible, or it could mean she is exciting and wants to get it under way so he can enjoy it or it could mean do it quickly so it is ready for when Sir Toby arrives.

Shakespeare does not tell us which of the 3 options it is, and leaves it up to the actors and audience to interpret it as they will. Line 54, "I would we were well rid of this knavery." Also shows us how Sir Toby is beginning to feel the joke has equalled out for all the things Malvolio has done, reasons for his feelings could be that he would be risking his place in the household as Olivia is already upset with him, this trick could be the final straw and he is only her guest, or he might be showing a sensitive side; he knows Olivia is grieving and the trick could upset her even more!

The only character now really enthusiastic to continue with the joke is Feste. You could argue he was the worst done by and had more torment from Malvolio, looking back at Act 1 Scene 5 and all the rude comments made at a time he could have done without! Malvolio asks Feste to get pen and paper to write a letter. His letter is another dramatic device and gets a reaction from Olivia and Feste on stage, and shows the contrast between Malvolio's situation and the now resolved lover's storyline.

To augment Malvolio's downfall, Olivia remarks, " Alas, poor fool, how they have baffled thee! " and before he thought this lady was in love with him a few moments again and now she is adding to his total humiliation by calling him a fool and she makes out he is disconcerted and stupid for letting himself be caught up in this hoax. Feste is still keeping the joke going, by revealing to everyone on stage (which by now is the full cast! what Malvolio said to ' Sir Topas', who was actually Feste at that point in the plot. He mentions his private thoughts, when Malvolio thought he was privately confiding in a priest of his faith, and this is another attack on his Puritanism. Both modern and Shakespearean audiences would feel this joke has gone too far and is not amusing any more but is cruel. After questioning Fabian confesses and says he does not want to ruin the lovers' happiness.

Line 345 says there was a reason for the cruelty, Malvolio did go above his status, and reminds the audience that there was a reason for this revenge. In conclusion, Shakespeare definitely manipulates the audience to dislike him in the early Acts and he does make us feel sympathy towards the end as the audiences feel that the joke has gone too far. It was funny to start with, but the things Malvolio did were not equal to the bullying he received, both <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-manipulate-the-audience-to-dislike-malvolio-essay/>

modern and Shakespearean audiences feel sympathy for Malvolio at the end of the play.