

Is the comedy cruel in 'twelfth night'? assignment

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They plot their revenge, consequences of which are initially playful encouraging Million to act in an outrageous way, the such as wearing yellow tights but, according to some, like Penny Gay, are cruel. 'Cruelty' is defined as delighting in someone else pain and suffering; to decide whether the comedy here is cruel, we must first consider how the comedy concerning Million is generated. If the comedy is a product of Maillot's suffering, then it may be considered as cruel. Alternatively, the comedy may be generated in other ways, and therefore is not as harsh.

Some argue that the comedy is generated through incongruity theory. This states that we laugh because something is out of place. This can be applied to the gulling of Million; when Olivia calls Million 'upon a sad occasion' he appears 'in yellow stockings' and he 'does smile' constantly. The yellow stockings are in particular incongruous; yellow is a bright color, associated with joy and silliness, which contrast with Olivia's black 'like a cloister's'. The audience laugh because of the juxtaposition of Maillot's jauntiness with Olivia's stern sadness; he looks out of place.

This implies the comedy isn't cruel, because we're not laughing directly at Maillot's ridiculousness, but instead at the contrast this ridiculousness provides against Olivia. An alternative theory of comedy is Superiority Theory when a person laughs about misfortunes of others, because these misfortunes assert the person's superiority. In Act 4 Scene Two, when Million complains of the room being 'in hideous darkness', Fest taunts him, saying the 'bandwidths [are] transparent as barricades'.

This is obvious nonsense; 'barricades' refers to barricades, which would block out any light, and therefore couldn't be transparent'. Fest is mocking Million; his wordplay makes Million appear foolish. This creates comedy, because the audience feel superior to Maillot's stupidity. This suggests that the gulling of Million is cruel, because we're laughing at his misery and stupidity; it makes us feel superior, and thus we take delight in it.

Alternatively, if the superiority theory is to be applied to all comedy, then it can be argued that all comedy is cruel, at least to an extent, because all comedy comes from laughing at others' misfortune. So, the gulling of Million is no crueler than any other comedy. Another argument is that the cruelty intensifies as the play progresses. In terms of structure, the mocking begins as playful; in the second act, Toby and Fest sit over the top of Million.

This escalates gradually; the fake letter follows, then the humid location of Million in front of Olivia, until, in the fourth act, Million is locked away, accused of being possessed. Shakespearean use of a climactic structure is clear, and from this so we may argue that the comedy gets crueler as the play progresses. However, the cruelty of the comedy depends on other factors. These factors may lead to someone perceiving the comedy as cruel from the start, or as never being cruel at all. We must also consider Shakespearean intentions when he was writing *Twelfth Night*.

One may argue that Million was written as a stock character. A stock character is a character based on a common literary or social stereotype. With reference to Topographer's definitions, Million may be considered as

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Added, the unpleasant man. For ins dance, he ' marvels' that Olivia takes delight in such a barren rascal', referring to Fest. T his can be interpreted as unpleasant as Fest is making harmless, playful jokes, so insult feels unnecessary. We laugh at stock characters because they represent universal a attributes that people can relate to their own experiences.

If Million is a stock character r, then the moody is not generated from his suffering, but instead from his traits, and h owe the audience can relate to them. The comedy isn't cruel as it doesn't originate fro m Maillot's misfortune. Million may have been written as a caricature. According to Maria, Million ' is a kind of Puritan'; someone who adheres to strict religious principles and opposes any form of merrymaking. Million fits this definition so neatly that even Olivia, who is oft en serious, thinks Million is ' sick of selfless, and taste with a distempered appetite'.

Purr tans were prevalent in the 16th century, so Shakespearean audiences would've been FAA liar with them. They opposed theatre as they saw it as frivolous, therefore would have clashed with Shakespeare' ideals. In light of this, one may consider that Million may not have been written as a three dimensional character, but as a caricature, written not with the intention of mocking Million himself, but the intention of mocking a whole group with n society with whom Shakespeare and his audiences would have conflicted.

This suggests the e comedy isn't cruel, as Million is not a ' real' character, and that any mocking is not dir acted at one person. Over time this caricature has become less obvious as Puritans aren't s prevalent, so this caricature is not immediately recognized. When viewed from a modern n

perspective, the comedy is cruel, as Malvolio isn't representing a section of society that was detested, but is a lonely man who's under the attack of others. This idea that audiences and perceptions of comedy have changed can be extended to all aspects of Malvolio.

In Elizabethan times, activities such as bear baiting were very popular, which reflects their superiority approach to humor, as the comedy came from feeling dominant. To them, the suffering of Malvolio seemed normal. Over time, as our society has become more sophisticated, it has also become more sensitive, and so modern audiences may find the gulling of Malvolio cruel. This means many modern audiences would agree with Gays statement that 'less socially competent than ourselves'.

In Act 2 Scene 5, Malvolio concludes that the letter must be addressed to him because it includes an 'M!' which 'beings [his] name!'. This demonstrates his naivety as he fails to recognize that the letter is obviously a trick. The audience don't blame him for this, however, as it is seen as a trait which is out of his control. Sir Toby mocking seems unfair, because he's taking advantage of someone who lacks intelligence. The audience pity Malvolio for this, and this pity is amplified by the use of exclamation marks.