

In twelfth night, what
are your impressions
of malvolio



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Malvolio initially seems to be a minor character, and his humiliation seems to be a little more amusing than the Viola- Olivia- Orsino- love triangle, but he becomes more interesting as the play progresses and I see him as one of the most complex and fascinating characters in Twelfth Night. When I first met Malvolio, he seemed to be a simple type, a puritan, and a stiff and proper servant who liked nothing better than to spoil other people's fun. He behaves like an egoistic killjoy who thinks he's above the rest although he is only a steward, for we readily recall the early scene where he attempts to end the noisy, drunken revelry of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Feste:

“ My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of the night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady's house that ye squeak out your coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?”

This statement makes him sound like a killjoy, but isn't Malvolio speaking sense? The fact is that the three drunkards in Olivia's house (who is mourning her brother's death) are actually being noisy, thoughtless and selfish. Olivia's maid Maria becomes involved, and clearly she isn't a friend to Malvolio, as she herself has made one or two remarks about him:

“ What a caterwauling do you keep here! If my lady have not called up her steward Malvolio and bid him turn you out of doors never, trust me.”

After Maria's comments you can't help feeling sorry for Malvolio. After all he simply is obeying his orders as Countess Olivia's dutiful employee:

“ Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbours you as your kinsman, she nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanours, you are welcome to the house. If not, an it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.”

Sir Toby responds with ‘ Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ales? But then he responds quite snobbishly, ‘ Art any more than a steward?’”

Here Malvolio is in a sticky situation: he is doing the right thing by obeying Olivia’s orders, as this is what he does for a living, but he suffers humiliation at the hands of idle noblemen.

The reason why I refer to Malvolio as a puritan is because in the days when Twelfth Night was first written, Puritans were a strict religious group: they did not like merrymaking in any form; they disliked drinking, they despised theatre and entertainment, they were often associated with merchants and were sometimes thought to be self-seeking, they condemned anything bawdy, they disliked all sports and they dressed very plainly. Similarly, Malvolio dresses very plainly, and does everything with perfection. He is very strict with those around him, especially with those like Sir Toby Belch (even though Malvolio has no authority over Belch, as we have seen above).

The situation in which Malvolio carries out the errand of telling Sir Toby and his associates to stop their immature behaviour provokes Maria, Toby and Andrew who hatch the plot in which Malvolio is duped by the forged love letter “ from Olivia” saying that she loves him. This very action changes <https://assignbuster.com/in-twelfth-night-what-are-your-impressions-of-malvolio/>

Malvolio; he enjoys the delusion of being head of the house, a kind of social promotion, which leads him to believe he can finally get rid of Toby and boss the household servants about.

The reason why he believes that Olivia loves him is because of the sort of person he is: serious, egoistic and vain. Watching this happen is naturally thought to be quite funny – a loathed person to finally have is comeuppance and be humiliated. He wears absurd and grotesque clothes (yellow stockings and cross garters, as ordered in the love letter) to try and “woo” Olivia; both the colour yellow and cross garters are things she really detests. This humiliation would be thought to have taught Malvolio a lesson, but the joke goes too far. Consequently he is mocked and eventually thought to be a madman.

The comedy becomes sour. To me Malvolio has been “abused.” To be locked away in the dark and made to believe you are mad would today be thought to be a sickening act. In times when the play would have been first performed (back in the Elizabethan days) a madman would be the joke of a play and something to really laugh about. Today, a mad person would be a very serious and an unfortunate issue.

In conclusion, I believe that Malvolio is treated far too harshly. The first part of the joke i. e. the love letter, I believe is quite funny but the torment which follows is quite sickening. Malvolio doesn't deserve the destructively relentless humiliation and mockery that he receives. The reason why he comes across as a killjoy is because that is what he is paid to do. He is not only the errand boy and a general manager but also a “household

policeman" whose duty is to keep the house in order and fulfil his Countess's wishes. If he imagines himself to be loved by Olivia, it is totally harmless and he is not the only one to feel this way; Orsino and Sir Andrew feel exactly the same way as they both have similar delusions. Anyone who doesn't believe that Malvolio was treated far too harshly is evil. To watch a man break down in front of you is quite sad. My opinion is clearly recognised in the text. As "Sir Topas" baits his victim, Sir Toby says:

" I would we were well rid of this knavery. If he may be conveniently delivered, I would he were, for I am now so far in offence with my niece that I cannot pursue with any safety sport the upshot."