like *Everyman* (death, the "mighty messenger" from God), *The Castle of Perseverance*, and *The Pride of Life* suggest something like the figure of a sergeant, but, more strikingly, a most interesting account of a late morality left behind by a contemporary mentions a detail in the play which gives in a flash the picture of Death as a sergeant-at-arms with his mace.9

The account is to be found in R[obert] W[illis]'* Mount Tabor or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner* (London, 1639), pp. 110–13, and it is by a man of seventy-five recalling his experience of witnessing at the age of about six the performance of a late morality entitled *The Cradle of Security*.4 He describes the scene of a king or great prince in his court, entertained by his courtiers and then lulled to sleep by the sweet song of three ladies. His account continues:

Whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another doore at the farthest end of the stage two old men, the one in blew with a sergeant-at-arms his mace on his shoulder, the other in red with a drawn sword in his hand and leaning with the other hand upon the others shoulder... the foremost old man with his mace stroke a fearful blow upon the cradle, whereat... all vanished; and the desolate prince starting up bare-faced, finding himselfe thus sent for to judgment, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carryed away by wicked spirits.... This sight took such impression in me that, when I came towards mans estate, it was fresh in my memory as if I had seen it newly acted.

That this particular morality had a considerable vogue for itself can be gathered from the inclusion of it in the four moralities the choice of one of which the Cardinal's players offer the guests in the More household in the play of *Sir Thomas More*. It is not unlikely that Shakespeare, an exact coeval of Robert Willis, saw a performance of *The Cradle of Security* (cf. "Security is mortals' chiefest enemy," *Macbeth*, III. v. 32–33), and was impressed by it in his own way. If so, he may have had the play's image of Death at the back of his mind while he referred to Death the sergeant in Sonnet 74 and in *Hamlet*. This scene in *The Cradle of Security*, and its background in the Morality tradition, would seem to have at least as valid a claim to be regarded as a source of the Shakespearean phrase as Sylvester's *Du Bartas*.5

9 Futhermore, the phrase "mutes or audience to this act" in the previous line of Hamlet's speech suggests theatrical terminology, "mutes" meaning "actors without speaking parts." Also compare the opening lines of Milton's Latin "Elegia Secunda. In Obitum Praeconis Academici Cantabrigiensis" on Richard Ridding, Esquire Beadle: "Fierce Death, the last of beadles, shows no favour even to her own profession. She seizes you, a fellow-beadle—you who, resplendent with your glittering mace, used to rouse Pallas' flock so often with your call" (John Carey and Alastair Fowler, eds., *The Poems of John Milton* [London: Longmans, 1968], pp. 31–32).

### Malvolio's Fall

**DAVID WILLBERN**

MALVOLIO, THAT HUMORLESS steward, sick of merrymakers and self-love, seems almost a stranger to the festive world of Illyria. His very first words reveal his acri-

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3 Harold F. Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeare," in *Christopher Marlowe* (Mermaid Critical Commentaries, ed. Brian Morris [London: Ernest Benn, 1968], pp. 81–82) points out: "Some important dramatic motifs in Shakespeare and Marlowe are specifically from the medieval tradition. Richard II's image of death; Mercade with his news of the royal Father's death, at the end of Love's Labour's Lost; the death of Zenocrates in Tamburlaine; and of Tamburline himself, which with its strict arrest sets the limit to his aspiring conquests, are all of them in direct line from Death, God's messenger in *Everyman*, and *The Castle of Perseverance* and *The Pride of Life* and from the Dans Macabre."

monious opinion of Feste, the soul of festivity:

Oli. What think you of this fool, Malvolio? doth he not mend?
Mal. Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool.

(I. v. 73-77)¹

Everything about Malvolio’s character sets him apart from frivolity.

Even his vocabulary isolates Malvolio. When he chastises a rowdy Sir Toby by demanding “Is there no respect of place, person, nor time in you?” Toby quips, “We did keep time, sir, in our catches” (II. iii. 91-94).

For the solemn steward and the carousing knight, the word “time” has different meanings. Malvolio hears only a cacophonous violation of decorum; Toby hears only melody and lyrics.² When, a few lines later, Toby and Feste “converse” with Malvolio in song, Malvolio simply does not understand (II. iii. 102 ff.).

But while Malvolio may have no use for festivity, festivity has considerable use for him. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall consider the steward’s collusion with the merrymakers, the nature of the damage he suffers, and its relevance to the general theme of festivity.

I

When Malvolio falls into Maria’s cunning trap and makes his sole concession to frivolity by donning yellow cross-garters, the desires he has previously hidden beneath a staid composure suddenly emerge exultant. On the surface Malvolio’s wish is to be a social climber, “to be Count Malvolio.”³ Yet there is a deeper desire here, and even though cross-gartering “does make some obstruction in the blood,” as he complains, it does not obstruct an unwitting expression of the steward’s strongest yearning: to sleep with his lady Olivia. In the forged letter scene, he alludes to a daydream of “having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping” (II. v. 48-49). And he jumps eagerly at an imagined opportunity when Olivia, thinking that a man who dresses so oddly and smiles so incessantly must be deranged, suggests rest: “Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?” she asks. “To bed?” he exclaims. “Ay, sweet heart, and I’ll come to thee” (III. iv. 29-31).

But Malvolio’s latent sexual wishes are also evident in his reading of the forged letter. While his fantasy of leaving Olivia in their shared day-bed is romantic enough, his remark to Toby about fortune “having cast me on your niece” (II. v. 69-70) may be less so, and his spelling lesson betrays the crudest carnality. “By my life,” he swears, “this is my lady’s hand. These be her very c’s, her u’s, and her t’s, and thus makes she her great P’s.” After thus spelling out the carnal focus of his fantasies, he sounds out the word itself, hidden within a term of disdain: “It is, in contempt of question, her hand” (II. v. 86-88). It must have been important to Shakespeare that the bawdy secret be heard, for Andrew immediately repeats, “Her c’s, her u’s, and her t’s: Why that?”

Some fine and famous Shakespeareans have been unable or unwilling to hear the answer to this question. Arthur Innes reasoned in 1895 that “probably Shakespeare merely named letters that would sound well.”⁴ G. L. Kittredge considered Andrew’s question “impossible to answer.” Once the bawdy note is sounded, of course, the question is embarrassingly easy to answer.⁵

¹ References are to The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. B. Evans, et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
² Specifically, Malvolio complains that the revelers are violating the traditional “three Units” of Renaissance dramatic criticism. John Hollander has noted this analogy in his excellent essay, “Twelfth Night and the Morality of Indulgence,” Sewanee Review, 67 (1959), 220-38.
³ For a brief discussion of Malvolio from this point of view, see Frank L. Hoskins, “Misalliance: A Significant Theme in Tudor and Stuart Drama,” Renaissance Papers 1956 (University of South Carolina), pp. 72-73.
In one sense, the event illustrates Shakespeare's insight into the psychology of the bluenose censor, secretly fascinated by and desirous of the eroticism he contemns. But it may also demonstrate Shakespeare's playful insight into his own wordplay, so frequently erotic. As the body lies at the basis of metaphor, bawdiness is basic to much punning: playing around with language.

II

But Malvolio is not playing; he is being played, for a fool. His hidden desire emerges, but only cryptically. Later, Feste, with his characteristically well-disguised perspicacity, mockingly underscores Malvolio's latent wantonness. "Sir Topas, Sir Topas, good Sir Topas," cries Malvolio from his prison, "Go to my lady." To which the dissembling Feste replies, "Out, hyperbolical fiend! how vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?" (IV. ii. 23-26). Until his surrender to festivity, Malvolio's black suit and anticomic bearing have concealed his "fiend"; now it is out in the open.

Up to the moment of his fall, Malvolio had been able to keep his overt behavior and his covert desires neatly separate, thereby maintaining the condition he had earlier demanded of Toby the reveler: "If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house" (II. iii. 98-99). But Malvolio's careful division between act and desire, reason and fantasy, collapses when he falls into Maria's trap, even though he himself is certain he has maintained it yet. "I do not now fool myself," he asserts," to let imagination jide me, for every reason excitse to this, that my lady loves me" (II. v. 164-65). From the inverted perspective in which reason "excites" rather than informs, Malvolio finds the way to shape the letter in terms of himself, and then to reform himself in terms of the letter: "M. O. A. I. . . . If I could make that resemble something in me!" (II. v. 109-20). It requires only a little "crush" to make the fit. Excited by false reasons, his reason fails him. His "madness" is thus his conviction that he is not mad, his illusion of maintaining control over circumstances when in fact he has lost control. "O peace!" Fabian cautions the impatient Andrew as they watch Malvolio drawing the net more tightly about himself: "Now he's deep in. Look how imagination blows him" (II. v. 42-43). As he cleverly deciphers the forged letter, Malvolio believes that his supreme reason is shaping his destiny; "Thou art made," he reads, "if thou desir'st to be so" (II. v. 155). Instead of making him, however, his desire unmakes him. His efforts to reform his image lead to disgrace: a fall from grace which is not only personal and social, but has spiritual resonance as well.

Feste is not merely joking when he refers to Malvolio's "fiend." For indeed, the steward behaves, as Toby and Maria maliciously observe, as though he were "possessed." Maria claims that "Yond gull Malvolio is turn'd heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be sav'd by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings" (III. ii. 69-73). Malvolio's plight is comical, of course, but there is an undercurrent of seriousness throughout. Malvolio surely means to be saved by believing rightly, but erroneous beliefs and impure desires have placed his soul in precarious balance. A bit of Feste's seeming nonsense clarifies the situation. After paralleling himself and Malvolio (incarcerated) with the medieval figures of Vice and Devil, Feste departs with a song whose final line is "Adieu, goodman devil" (IV. ii. 120-31). A typical Festean riddle, the phrase makes appropriate sense. It is a syntactic representation of the basic Morality Play scheme: "man" is centered between "good" and "devil" and should turn in the right direction, "à Dieu." This moment of mini-allegory prefigures Feste's later banter with Orsino, when the Duke tells the clown, "O, you give me ill counsel," and Feste continues: "Put your grace in your pocket, sir, for this once, and let your flesh and blood obey it" (V. i. 31-33). Feste's counsel here echoes the voice of the arch-deceiver, perched on his victim's left shoulder: "let your flesh and blood run free," he advises, "just for this once. Don't worry about your soul, just hide it and the possibility of grace away temporarily, 'in your pocket, sir.' " Such brief transgressions, however, will not be forgotten. "Pleasure
will be paid,” Feste reminds us, “one time or another” (II. iv. 70–71).

III

The underlying seriousness of Malvolio’s fall is further suggested by the nature of the punishment he suffers. On one level, he is imprisoned for the “madness” of being rigidly sane in a frivolous world. On another level, his humbling is a direct rebus to his social-climbing aspirations. On a yet deeper level, he is punished for his hidden concupiscence, with the punishment combining various symbolic “deaths.” Malvolio is not only mortified; metaphorically he is also mortally assaulted, killed, and buried. “I have dogg’d him,” gloats Toby, “like his murtherer” (III. ii. 76). The steward who wanted to possess his lady is instead thrown into a small dark hole: having wished for a bed, he finds a grave. He complains to Feste, the singer of “Come away, come away, death, / And in sad cypress let me be laid” (II. iv. 51–52), saying that “they have laid me here in hideous darkness” (IV. ii. 29–30). Malvolio does symbolically “die,” but not as he had hoped; his is not the sexual death of Feste’s ambiguous song, but the comic scapegoat death of a victimized gull.7

Even when released from his symbolic cell, however, the unrepentant steward refuses to participate in the lovers’ celebrations. Faced again with merriment, he steadfastly clings to sobriety. His letter to Olivia from his cell—signed, accurately, “the madly-us’d Malvolio”—is calm, reasonable, and correctly descriptive of his treatment (V. i. 302–11). His only request is “Tell me why.”

Why have you suffer’d me to be imprison’d, Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest, And made the most notorious geek and gull That e’er invention play’d on? Tell me why! (V. i. 341–44)8

He receives no answer, and although Olivia promises him future justice, he is not appeased. The steward who earlier declared to Toby, Maria, and Fabian, “I am not of your element” (III. iv. 124), is thus alone at play’s end. While Feste remains to sing his lovely and melancholy song, Malvolio exits, snarling promised revenge.9

As Malvolio departs, he leaves behind an unresolved conclusion to the play, taking with him the key to any clear resolution. For all its conventional comic devices of repaired unions, the ending of Twelfth Night is indeterminate. We look for the settlement of disputes and the reunion of fragmented relationships, “confirm’d by mutual joinder of their hands,” as the priest says of Olivia and Sebastian (V. i. 157). But though the final scene of Twelfth Night is in fact constructed so as to allow “mutual joinder,” no such resolution occurs. The prolonged hesitation of Viola and Sebastian to identify each other, which includes a careful scrutiny of all the evidence (names, sex, moles, age, clothing), finally results not in any embrace of recognition but in Viola’s odd provision of postponement:

Do not embrace me till each circumstance Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump That I am Viola. (V. i. 251–53)

One expects a coherence of circumstance, place, time, and fortune at the conclusion of a successful comedy—and Twelfth Night has often been viewed as a paradigm of the form.

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8 Both J. W. Draper—who terms Malvolio “the only sober man in all this crazy company”—and C. J. Sisson—who concludes that “whatever Malvolio’s faults, in this scene [of his imprisonment] he bears himself with dignity against an outrageous attack upon the citadel of his being”—have written essays stressing Malvolio’s essential sanity and reasonableness (except, of course, his one hysterically funny lapse). See “Olivia’s Household,” PMLA, 49 (1934), 797–806, for Draper’s argument, and “Tudor Intelligence Tests: Malvolio and Real Life,” in Essays on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig, ed. Richard Hosley (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1962), pp. 183–200, for Sisson’s.
9 The figure of the despiser of festivity exits, but he does not disappear. As C. L. Barber put it, “in the long run, in the 1640’s, Malvolio was revenged on the whole pack of them.” See Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 257. Just as Malvolio again subdues his imaginative desires and regains his solemn bearing, the Puritans finally suppressed the dramatic imagination and enforced zealous sobriety.
But Shakespeare deliberately defers a denouement, and the play ends before we see one enacted. Viola maintains that the resumption of her true identity depends upon the old captain who brought her to Illyria, the captain who has kept her "maiden weeds." The captain, however, has been jailed by Malvolio, "upon some action" (V. i. 275–76). Malvolio is therefore essential to a final resolution of the plot; the ultimate coherence of time and circumstance depends upon the mistreated gull. When he stalks out, swearing revenge, he also disrupts the plot, refusing to fulfill his essential role in the final "mutual joinder." Orsino commands, "Pursue him and entreat him to a peace; he hath not told us of the captain yet" (V. i. 380–81). But we hear no more from Malvolio, nor from anyone else, for the play almost immediately concludes, with the loose ends of its unfinished plot knotted abruptly into Feste's final song.

Similar gestures of irresolution occur at the end of almost all of Shakespeare's comedies—as though he was habitually skeptical of the resolutions the genre typically provided. Whether through hints of failed marriage at the end of As You Like It, or the sudden mournful disruption at the end of Love's Labor's Lost, or the preposterous rapid-fire revelations at the end of Cymbeline, Shakespeare usually complicates the conventional comic ending, stressing the fragility of its artifice. As Feste's concluding song suggests in Twelfth Night, the momentary pleasures of plays and other toys are only transient episodes in a larger season of folly, thievery, drunkenness, and old age. To the extent that the tidy finales of conventional comedies deny such larger, extradramatic realities, Shakespeare seems to have been uneasy with them: the ending of The Tempest is his final manifestation of this uneasiness.

IV

An aspect of Shakespeare's distrust of romantic conventions underlies Malvolio's spelling lesson, to return to that scene for a moment. I want to ask Andrew Aguecheek's question once more, and offer a speculative answer. "Her c's, her u's, and her t's: why that?" Why, indeed? Why does Shakespeare so carefully embed this grossesse of verbal improprieties in a play which even Eric Partridge calls "the cleanest comedy except A Midsummer Night's Dream"?

One answer involves what Shakespeare evidently considered the natural and undeniable bases of human behavior. The romantic comedy of Twelfth Night transmutes our basic appetites, sublimating carnal hunger into romantic yearning: food becomes music, as Orsino's opening speech reveals (but melancholy music, with "a dying fall"). Twelfth Night enacts an elaborate dance around a central core of carnality, which Malvolio's unconscious cryptogram literally spells out. The idealized festivity of Twelfth Night is to its secret erotic core as the innocent Maypole dance is to the symbol around which it revolves—except that the joys and celebrations of Maygames are muted in Shakespeare's play by wintry, "dying" tones of mourning and loss. Erotic desire and symbolic death intermix throughout the play, creating a continuous undertone of romantic melancholy best personified in the figure of Feste. Festivity and loss are presented as reciprocal: carnival is a farewell to the carnal (carne-vale).

What makes Twelfth Night ultimately so melancholy, however, is not the sounding of these baser tones in the music of love, but the futile (albeit beautiful) effort spent trying to deny the facts of desire and death with the artificial toys of romantic wish-fulfillment. Finally it won't work. In retrospect, the festive fantasy of innocent indulgence looks like another version of the puritanical Malvolio's effort to deny or repudiate base carnal desire. Illyria's romanticism is psychologically reciprocal to Malvolio's rigidity and restraint: both represent denials and sublimations. Feste's final song seems to admit the futility of both defenses against the real world.

For all their mutual antipathy, Malvolio and Feste are symbolic brothers: both estranged from yet integral to the festive yet melancholy world of Illyria. To achieve a comic world of reunion and restoration, it is

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10 Shakespeare's Bowdy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 45: but see p. 53. C. L. Barber has also noted how "little direct sexual reference" there is in this play: see Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 258.
necessary to omit or deny or banish their respective melancholies. But, since melancholy preceded and prompted the merriment, this is impossible. Malvolio therefore retreats to his threats of vengeance, Feste to his ambiguous lyric. Finally both characters withdraw from the comic world. But without them and the impulses of restraint and loss they represent, that comic world has no motivation, no "reason" for being.

At Malvolio's fall we laughed all. Yet without the (scape) goat, there would have been no carnival to provide either the fall or the merriment attending it.