

Subject-English

Hons. Core Course

Semester II

Paper -ENGH-H-CC-T-4

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Gulling of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*:

Malvolio is the steward of Olivia's household. He dislikes all manner of fun and festivity and for that reason he reproaches Sir Toby for making late night gathering. Maria calls him a kind of 'Puritan'. His puritanism and aversion to fun misplace him in the jolly society of the Illyrians. He responds to revelry and humour of the household with indignation. His duty is to maintain order in the household. As Olivia is not really in mourning, she enjoys Feste's disorderly playfulness. But Malvolio's reaction to this disorder is 'distempered'. He finds nothing but offence in Feste's remarks. Malvolio is sick of self-love and Olivia says this right on his face, "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite." Actually, he is suffering from the exaggerated sense of self-importance. He also lacks a sense of humour.

Malvolio dislikes parties, drinking, merriment of all sorts, and so he is very critical about the conduct of Sir

Toby and others who are always involved in frivolities. Sir Toby, Maria, Feste and Sir Andrew Aguecheek openly resent Malvolio and Maria calls him an “affectioned ass” who uses high-flown language without necessarily knowing its proper meaning. He is not resented only as a Puritan, but also for the fact that he aspires to marry Olivia. Before he sees the letter, he is indulging his ambitious and substantial day-dreams; they include not only marrying Olivia and thereby becoming Count Malvolio, but also, from that position reproving Sir Toby. The forged letter of Maria in the name of Olivia adds fuel to a blazing imagination. Maria and Toby and others hatch a plan to make a fool of Malvolio. Maria drops a letter in his way, the letter pretends, as if, it is written by Olivia and it says that if Malvolio really loves Olivia, he should come before her cross-gartered, smiling and etc. He does so and wears the strange clothing and behaves in a weird way. Malvolio is serious and ambitious and his this characteristic is made a butt of humour as he aspires to marry Olivia. He is trying to disrupt the social order. Malvolio’s name means ‘ill will’ in Italian. He has the inappropriate desire to marry Olivia and rise in social rank. After Toby and Maria dupe Malvolio into believing that Olivia loves him, he behaves so bizarrely that

he is assumed to be mad and is imprisoned in a dark room. He himself knows that he is sane. At the end of the play, he is brought out of the darkness of the room into a celebration in which he has no part. He says that he will take a revenge on all of them. His exit strikes a jarring note in an otherwise joyful atmosphere of this comedy. About Malvolio's treatment by other characters, many critics have felt that it is undeserved. Some critics like Samuel Johnson says that he deserves it, while others like Charles Lamb urge the reader to look at him with sympathy. Nonetheless the gulling episode of Malvolio heightens the comic effect of the play.