

Dr. Md Sharique Haider
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Maharaja College

P.G. Semester-I

Trace the development of the comic sub-plot in Twelfth Night.

Or

Write in your own words an account of the fooling of Malvolio.

Ans.: The plot conceived by Maria: Malvolio is Lady Olivia's steward. The plot against him is conceived by Maria. Maria has no liking for this man. She thinks him to be a hypocritical Puritan, and calls him a self-conceited ass. When Malvolio rebukes Sir Toby for his rowdyism late in the night. Sir Toby feels much annoyed with this fellow. But Maria tries to pacify Sir Toby by saying that she will teach Malvolio a lesson.

Malvolio's weakness: Maria tells Sir Toby that she knows Malvolio's chief weakness. Malvolio has too high an opinion of himself and she will make use of that weakness. She will drop in Malvolio's way a letter which will appear to be written by Olivia. The letter will be so written as to give Malvolio the impression that Olivia is in love with him. This trick, she says, will provide "sport royal" for the entertainment of Sir Toby and his friends.

Malvolio's foolish notion: Malvolio has been "practising behaviour to his own shadow". Maria tells Sir Toby that the letter forged by her will make a "contemplative idiot" of Malvolio. Malvolio appears, talking to himself. He already has a foolish notion that Lady Olivia is in love with him. He imagines himself as Olivia's husband and rehearses the role he will play in that position. Sir Toby and the others enjoy the fun of the situation from their biding place.

Malvolio falls into Maria's trap: Malvolio then sees the letter lying on the floor and picks it up and gets a confirmation of his belief that Olivia is in love with him. He picks it up and recognizes the handwriting as Olivia's. He reads it. The letter has urged him to wear yellow stockings because they suit him well, to appear before Olivia always cross-gartered, and to keep smiling. Malvolio is over-joyed to read the letter. He thanks Jove for his good luck and resolves to carry out the instructions contained in the letter. Sir Toby and his friends are greatly amused to see that Malvolio has fallen into Maria's trap. Sir Toby says that he could marry Maria for her clever device. Sir Andrew says that he could do the same. Fabian says that he would not miss this sport even for a big pension.

Malvolio carries out the instructions: Malvolio now puts on yellow stockings and comes cross-gartered. He obeys every directive in the forged letter. He keeps smiling so that there are more lines on his face than in the new map of the world. He addresses Olivia as "sweet lady" and quotes a few bits from the letter so as to assure her that he has noted its contents. Olivia is puzzled by his conduct, while Maria enjoys the situation she has created. Olivia goes to meet Cesario, leaving instructions for Sir Toby to look after the crazy Malvolio.

Malvolio is declared to be mad: Malvolio feels more convinced than ever that Olivia loves him. Why else did she refer to him as "this fellow" and not as Malvolio or as the steward? Once again he expresses his thanks to Jove: Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked." When Sir Toby and Maria try to talk to him, he is scornful towards them and speaks insolently. This situation too affords much amusement to Sir Toby and his associates. Fabian says with reference to Malvolio's

behaviour: 'If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction. They all now pretend that Malvolio is possessed with the devil. Sir Toby says that he will have Malvolio bound and confined to a dark room because he has gone mad.

The Clown's fooling of Malvolio: We next see Malvolio actually confined to a dark chamber. Maria has yet another trick up her sleeve. She asks the Clown to pretend that he is the priest, Sir Topas, and to speak to Malvolio as to a madman. The Clown calls out to Malvolio from outside the chamber and speaks as if Malvolio were possessed with the devil. Malvolio pleads that he is not mad at all and that he has unjustly been put in hideous darkness. But the Clown says that ignorance is the only darkness. Malvolio offers to be subjected to a test of his sanity. The Clown asks him his opinion of Pythagoras's belief in the transmigration of the soul. Malvolio says that he does not accept Pythagoras's view, whereupon the Clown says that Malvolio is surely mad. Sir Toby and Maria are enjoying this persecution of Malvolio. This scene is the climax of the comic sub-plot.