

One of the major characters in Shakespeare's play "twelfth night", Malvolio, is branded 'puritan' (Charles, 1997, pg.123). During Shakespeare's time, puritans in England were members of English national church and they emphasized on the values of the bible. They hoped to eliminate catholic Episcopal hierarchy. The hierarchy focused on church traditions, sacraments and liturgy. Puritan's private and public lives were guide by the scriptures from the bible. Puritans were opposed to people going to the theater. Many people hated the Puritans for their "superior" mentality and trying to force their "conservative lifestyle" (Charles, 1997, pg.123) on them.

Most of Shakespeare's neighbors who were Puritan probably did not wear hats with the buckles. But steeple-hats can be seen in the Rembrandt paintings of well off people in Holland. In published plays, Malvolio mostly wears anachronistic buckle-hat. There were many types of Puritans, separatists and self styled puritans. Most self-styled Puritans wanted the national religion of England to be based on their principles and be made mandatory. They were political activists and tried to force laws based on their "biblical" (Charles, 1997, pg.123) standards. When they eventually took over the government, for two decades, they closed the theatres in England.

Malvolio, whose name literally means "I mean I will", is affected by implications of his name. His personality is seen as negative and is supported in the entire play. This leads to mockery and eventually to his down fall. The first evidence is seen in his debut appearance in the play where he insults the wit and brain power of Feste. By doing this he acts on his own personal belief of superiority, and this greatly contributes to his downfall. These first impressions are later supported by vices in his character which leads further to his downfall. He acts as a strict puritan and he is echoed when Maria says "The devil a puritan that he is" (<http://www.pathguy.com/12n.htm>). He denies himself pleasure but at the same time begrudging these things of others.

He goes on to take moral high ground over Feste, Maria and most importantly, Sir Toby, his superior, when he scorns them for their "disorders". This makes them to avenge him and bring him from his fake authority and make him receive orders but not to give them. Malvolio is a man of theoretical purity and self-denial in reality. He desires to live in a high social status and thinks that through the love of Olivia, he could realize his dream. At the same instance he has some desires which are against the puritans teachings.

These desires for superiority make him to be tricky and mark the beginning of punishment and later he suffers. In order for him to please Olivia so as to win her love, he did things at the expense of others. He goes to an extent of reporting to Olivia the wrong doings of his superior sir Toby.

More hypocrisy of malvolio contributes another vice which is against the puritan philosophy, is vanity. He feels he is superior to all but Olivia, through using language memorized from books. He also is very proud of his physical appearance which he assumes is one to be desired. He is generally proud about everything about himself. The point that he is totally satisfied with himself makes him convinced that it is so easy to achieve love.

The letter written by Maria refers to each malvolios character's weakness. Malvolio was being punished to an extreme extent by carrying out orders of Maria's letter. By believing and following them, he shows himself as a fool, obtuse, gullible and lacking the superiority that he strongly believes he has. This makes sir Toby and the servants achieve their goals.

Malvolio is secretly humiliated by the accomplished conspiracy. This should have been revealed to him and immediately be brought to an end. The pranksters continue the mockery out of sheer cruelty

and selfishness. They go to an extent of conniving Olivia that Malvolio's behavior is as a result of insanity rather than their actions. They at the same time try convincing him by imprisoning him and twisting his words.

Malvolio goes to an extent of seeking help from a priest while locked in prison cell. At this juncture he has lost his pride and dignity. He suffers great injustice thanks to his tormentors as he is abused beyond mere teasing. He does not deserve this kind of treatment as his only crime is his bad character and wronging his peers with words only.

After being released from prison cell, his behaviors have not even slightly changed. He is full of resentment both for Olivia and his peers.

Malvolio could be the most virtuous person in the play but Sir Toby still shares the cake. Sir Toby says both virtue and sins goes hand in hand. No one can do without either of the two. Malvolio is not sober because he loves himself very much. He loves Olivia because he is after his wealth and power (Charles, 1997, pg.123).

After Sir Andrew, Maria, Feste and Sir Toby are interrupted by Malvolio at their singing, dancing and roistering, Maria thinks malvolio is a puritan. Though she quickly drops the term after Sir Andrew starts using the term. Malvolio accuses the revelers of no respect for persons, place or time. It is an interesting kind of complain as he fuses two kinds of complains, one which is theatrical in nature and another one social in nature.

He is also accusing them of violating theatre decorum something that made Shakespeare to be censored for failing to observe. These were more than one charge yet the same charge. On stage actors of opposite sex, cross-dressed transforming themselves into sexual and social beings and all this happening in a easily changeable space. Who knows what one might become or see?

Anti theatrical critics, mostly of who were puritans and abomination were both exciting and disturbing to early modern audiences. Theatre was mostly offensive. Twelfth night is normally thought to suggest shake spears feelings towards Puritanism. The word Puritanism occurs three times in the entire play. It is applied to malvolio. In the first place, there was a long stand-ff between play writes and the puritans (Charles, 1997, pg.123).

Bibliography:

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