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Freshman Honor's English

25 April, 2016

Refusing the Bonds of Time

Twelfth Night is a comedic play written by English playwright William Shakespeare in the early 1600s, and was also one of Shakespeare's last comedies. Although the essence of the play revolves around ridiculousness and silliness, there are also some very dark and serious themes that make themselves present throughout the storyline.

Twelfth night is full of themes that represent a release from the order of society, such as heavy drinking and gender mix-ups. The reader sees Sir Toby Belch as drunk for the entirety of the play. Sir Toby shows people a world that is free from responsibilities, and the restriction of time. Humans are slaves to time, but not in Illyria. Time is an important theme in this play, it's a creeping thing. Everybody is crazy in this play, and love is madness. Love and sex in this play are both completely ridiculous but are also displayed in a sweet light.

Illyria doesn't exist, it's a magical place where characters transform, but everybody eventually returns to the real world. Illyria is a carnival world, Twelfth night was a time for carnival-like expression, and the reader sees that almost all of the characters fit this idea very well, except for Malvolio. Malvolio knows that this carnival world is not going to last forever, and that the world of reality is bound by time.

Malvolio is a force of work and society, he represents the painful concept of reality in a world of clowns and carelessness. His sin is the sin of self-love, and he is a narcissist. In act two

scene five, the reader sees Malvolio imagining himself as a count. The silliness and joy of the play reject Malvolio, until act five when the world of reality creeps in a little too seriously. In act five, the reader sees images of death and violence and serious elements start creeping into the storyline. When reading the play, it's almost difficult to not look at Sir Toby Belch as some sort of hero, and Malvolio as the enemy.

Malvolio is the enemy purely because he is Shakespeare's best representation of the real world. The reader may grow to hate and possibly even fear the concept of reality while reading this play, because they will begin to fantasize about a world where time does not exist, and where nobody cares, and where love is something that just happens constantly, quickly, and without thinking.

The people of Illyria are insane, they are never really thinking, and most people love this because it is the complete opposite of reality and of what normal people face daily, a routine filled with worries and responsibilities, this routine driven by time that the characters in *Twelfth Night* seem to be completely unaware of, all except for Malvolio. The only other character that the reader really sees saying possibly kind or sympathetic things about Malvolio is Olivia in act three scene four on line sixty-two when she talks about wanting him to be looked after right after Maria had just had an extremely uncomfortable encounter with the creepy man himself, who was borderline sexually harassing her. Malvolio represents everything that love isn't supposed to be.

Malvolio is hated by the other characters because he is everything that humans are bored of daily. Illyria has many clowns and fools, but the only real clown, Feste, is the one character that makes the drastic change from carnivalistic fantasy to the shackles of time and reality. Feste

is no clown, Feste is the realization that Illyria isn't real, and that Twelfth Night, just like every feeling of infatuation or obsession, must come to an end at some point.

For almost all of Twelfth Night, Feste is seen as exactly what he is supposed to be, a source of immediate comedy in whatever necessary or possibly unnecessary moment throughout the clownish and silly play. Feste is the wise man clown that Shakespeare uses in many places. In the text of the written play, he is not called Feste, he is called, "clown." Feste is an extremely complex character, he adds humor and lightheartedness to the storyline, but has a lot of hurt and realization of what it means to live in the real world buried beneath the surface. Feste also commonly appears as quite fearless, he is never afraid to throw out a sex joke or be completely straightforward at the most seemingly inappropriate times, but Feste has fear. Feste is very afraid.

Feste is the one who ends the seemingly never ending cycle of drinking, loving, sex, and pure insanity that is Twelfth Night with what could easily be considered the darkest line of the play. "For the rain it raineth every day," says Feste the clown. The painful reality of time will never leave, and will always be there haunting everyone, even the backwards careless characters of Twelfth Night. The final poem is probably the heaviest part of the entire play, ending the story in such a disconcerting way forces the reader to possibly ask, what has changed?

At the beginning of Feste's heavy final poem, he talks about how he was an easily amused little boy, but eventually had to grow up. This could represent the childlike nature of the characters of Twelfth Night eventually having to escape this nonsensical world of misunderstood perfection, and grow up. By the end of the play, everyone has finished playing false gender roles and stealing each other's lovers, and everybody finally gets married to the person that they were

set up to be with from the very beginning, except for Malvolio, who will probably be forever alone.

Gender and sexuality are two intensely controversial topics in society to this day, but not so much in *Twelfth Night*. In the play we see Viola disguise herself as a man by the name of Cesario, marry another woman (Olivia), and then eventually have her true identity discovered and marry Cesario. Shakespeare speaks and writes about gender roles so freely, that it's somewhat easy to conclude that people didn't care nearly as much about gender and sexuality in Shakespearean England as they do now in modern times and modern places.

Gender mix-ups are just another addition to the mad farcical storyline of the ludacris play *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare's belief in homosexuality and gender confusion may be questioned considering the fact that he decided to put these concepts in one of his most comedic, unreal, ridiculous, senseless plays. In act three scene four, Olivia gives a necklace to Viola who is dressed as Cesario, indicating that she wants a relationship with her, thinking that she is a boy.

The scenes with dialogue between Viola and Olivia are by far some of the most fascinating and interesting because of the fact that there is a homosexual relationship happening that will eventually result in wedding vows, and only one of them doesn't know that they are both women. This relationship between two women may be seen to represent freedom from the order and rules of society. For once, there is a marriage that isn't just between a man and a woman, but between two women. Although they both later go on to marry men after the wild illusion of *Twelfth Night* comes to an end, and everything goes back to being ruled by society and the fetters of time.

Time is everything. Humans are servants to time. Time never stops moving, and as much as one may want it to, it will never go away. The characters of *Twelfth Night*, besides Malvolio, time's loyal servant, seem to be completely unaware that time is even passing, maybe time isn't passing, maybe time really is nonexistent when one is living in a fantasy.

Twelfth Night, until the very end, is one very big seemingly endless dream sequence filled with more fun and carelessness than ever seemed even remotely possible. Malvolio is seen as the enemy, the one everyone is supposed to hate, but Malvolio is really the hero, he is the only one that is willing to face the painful reality that time will keep moving, and that people need to accept that. He isn't going out and getting drunk constantly, or falling in love with people he just met, or giving into this supposed dreamland of perfection that almost anyone would guiltily get easily pulled into very quickly. Even though most of them eventually settle down and get married, will those characters ever be able to free themselves from the dizzying rollercoaster of *Twelfth Night* like Feste eventually did? Feste, like Malvolio, ends up alone without the other people's drama to get in the middle of, he realizes how harsh and painful the real world can be, how harsh and painful the real world is.

The silliness must end, the warm happy carnival must end and the cold cruel force of time must come creeping back in. The comedy is also a tragedy, the *Twelfth Night* eventually becomes the reality of time that almost everyone in this play seems so reluctant to face. Everyone is forced to grow up. "For the rain it raineth every day," says Feste the clown. When even the clown loses all hope and positivity, *Twelfth Night* really is over. Long live the too shortly lived fantasy of *Twelfth Night*. Now all become loyal servants to time, Malvolio's best friend.