

Twelfth Night's “Notorious Abuse” of Malvolio: Shame, Humorality, and Early Modern Spectatorship

ALLISON P. HOBGOOD
Emory University

In John Manningham's famous account of a 1602 performance of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, he recalls the play as being most concerned with the gulling of Malvolio:

A good practise in it to make the Steward beleve his Lady widdowe was in Love with him, by counterfaying a letter, as from his Lady, in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparaile, &c., and then when he came to practise, making him beleve they tooke him to be mad. (48)

Here in his diary entry, Manningham inverts the main and sub-plots of *Twelfth Night*, ignoring Olivia's bereavement for her brother as well as the love triangle between Viola, Olivia, and Orsino to focus solely on Malvolio's duping. He describes the play not as a narrative about the limits of mourning or the pleasures of romantic love but about the calculated shaming of Shakespeare's "mad" steward. While Manningham's recounting certainly marks the play as engaged in comedic "good practise," his subsequent inclusion of the epigram "Quae mala cum multis patimur laeviora putantur" in his diary troubles a reading of his reaction as strictly goodhumored.¹ The Latin, according to Michael Baird Saenger, translates in two possible ways depending upon which meaning one takes from the term "laeviora:" it can be punningly deciphered as either "Those evils which are suffered along with others are easier" or "Those evils we suffer in the presence of many appear still more foolish" (67). In its ambiguity, Manningham's epigram seems paradoxically to emphasize both a sympathetic connection with the stage and a less compassionate enjoyment to be found in Malvolio's public humiliation. Significantly, in

both cases, Manningham remarks on the supposed “good practise” that is the steward’s abuse, noting the abuse not in and of itself but rather *as it relates to those who witness it*. He complicates the hilarity of Malvolio’s plight, in other words, by emphasizing the spectator’s explicit relation to the steward’s protracted “suffering” throughout the performance.

Following Manningham’s account, I envision Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* as a play wholly preoccupied with Malvolio’s gulling and its profound impact on playgoers. Many spectators, more contemporary than Manningham, have likewise been provoked by the play’s disconcerting amusement at Malvolio’s expense. Peter Holland, for example, remarks on the difficulty of grappling with Malvolio’s shame. He describes watching as the steward in Trevor Nunn’s 1997 film version of the play endures “a final public humiliation [that] is all the more painful for being witnessed by the servants over whom he would normally have had authority” (“Dark Pleasures” np). Likewise, theatre reviewer D.J. R. Bruckner details a 2000 Gorilla Repertory Theatre Company production in which Malvolio’s shame was its most prominent feature; Bruckner contends, not unlike Manningham, that the way in which “Malvolio . . . becomes the principal character” in the performance “cannot be ignored” (E1 22). He continues: “The fact that he is the only person in the play who is deliberately made a victim of fraud stands out much more clearly here than in most productions and leaves one with the distinct impression that the playfulness of all the other characters is not as innocent as one would like” (E1 22).²

While both Holland and Bruckner attest to the prominence of Malvolio’s shame in *Twelfth Night*, *Times* reviewer Ben Brantley articulates how that shame explicitly involves a theater audience. Brantley reflects on his own experience during a 2002 New Globe production of the play, explaining that as “a simulacrum of its Elizabethan prototype, with an open pit in which most viewers (the groundlings) stand, the Globe makes theatergoing a very public experience. The performers address their soliloquies in a complicitous spirit to the audience. ‘You’re a part of this, you know,’ they seem to suggest” (E1). What disturbs Brantley most, however, is the way that the drama, and its theatrical space, “[make] you feel especially implicated when the play changes tone. You may experience vicarious guilt, for example, when the baiting of the steward Malvolio . . . slips into sadism, or when the hedonistic Sir Toby Belch . . . turns nastily on his best friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek . . .”(E1).

Although London’s New Globe obviously cannot cultivate theatrical experiences synonymous with those occurring in the original Globe, Brantley’s reflection on his *Twelfth Night* experience in 2002 does seem to

parallel, in provocative ways, Manningham's experience in 1602.³ Brantley's recounting, like Manningham's, emphasizes the play's intense affective potential. It also registers *Twelfth Night's* capacity to emotionally unsettle playgoers who feel themselves somehow involved or implicated in shameful stage action. The better question, though, might be: what does Brantley's account *not* offer us as we investigate Shakespeare's play? What does an easy comparison of Brantley to Manningham elide about the crucial historicity of theatergoing and performance? How, in other words, might contemporary performance *seem* to mirror early modern performance but be, in truth, startlingly different?

My goal in posing these questions is not to discount the usefulness of "presentist" accounts to inform "historical" work but rather to more precisely position those accounts next to their early modern counterpoints.⁴ Brantley, Holland, and Bruckner, for example, all present modern experiences of shame in *Twelfth Night* that are useful entry points into imagining the power of shame in early modern performance. Their experiences help us formulate the right questions about how shame affects playgoers—who feels shame, how, when, and why—but, as I demonstrate in what follows, we need to specifically locate those affective questions in the bodies of early modern spectators.⁵ I am suggesting that theatrical performance, as well as the experience of that performance, is always embodied,⁶ and so, as we imagine shame in *Twelfth Night*, we must imagine the kinds of bodies who felt that shame, early modern bodies that were distinctly different from our own: bodies that were pre-Cartesian, highly suggestible, emotionally contagious, and driven by their intensely humoral natures.⁷

My essay addresses, then, what Brantley's narrative does not (and does not attempt to) engage: the nature of audience response as it was defined in and by early modern humoralities.⁸ While critical scholarship has certainly addressed representations of affective responses like shame *on* stage, my essay explores more fully how those representations may have resonated in the embodied experiences of Renaissance *spectators*.⁹ Put another way, I investigate how playgoers might have responded to Malvolio's shame in *Twelfth Night* and consider how those responses might have been simultaneously the result of *and constitutive of* early modern humoral subjectivity. Ultimately, I argue that Renaissance notions of embodied selfhood were inextricably linked to affective experience in public theatre and that performances of *Twelfth Night* encouraged emotional responses in their audience members, mandating that they acknowledge, assess, and react to the shameful spectacles they witnessed on stage.¹⁰

In act two, scene three of *Twelfth Night*, Maria, perturbed by Malvolio's chastisement, vehemently labels the steward "a kind of Puritan," "a time-pleaser," and "an affectioned ass" (125, 132). The handmaiden's nicknaming serves, according to critics, to satirically brand Malvolio's character a consummate Puritan.¹¹ His decrying of idleness, alehouses, and unmitigated enjoyment, as well as his stoic emphasis on appropriate "respect of place, / persons, [and] time," (78–83) seem likewise to confirm the assumption that Malvolio, in the words of Paul Yachnin, is a Puritan "killjoy who conceals his appetite for status, wealth, and power beneath a shell of rectitude" (781).¹² As Yachnin's language intimates, however, Malvolio hides his truer "appetites" beneath a constructed outer persona, a "shell" of sobriety, moderation, and propriety. The steward merely *acts* the role of a Puritan, that is, and hence is perhaps much more *un*-puritanical than one might imagine. Ironically, his character seems to secretly revel in the theatrical, to harbor an explicitly anti-Puritan investment in dissembling, imitation, and performance.¹³ Malvolio spends much of *Twelfth Night* actively staging himself—"practising behaviour"—before an early modern audience (2.5 14). Initially, he performs a reserved, puritanical body that betrays none of the "distempered appetite" that Olivia, for example, accuses him of harboring (1.5 77–78). Much of his shame in the drama ensues, however, from his inability to act this Puritan part consistently, from a failure to play his role convincingly enough; his ambitions as an actor exceed his capabilities. Ultimately, spectators see through Malvolio's erratic performance, labeling and judging him for what he most "successfully" acts throughout the play: a duplicitous fraud and phony.

Malvolio's inconsistent nature, one defined more by humoral excess and impassioned intemperance than moderation and propriety, becomes visible in the presence of early modern spectators. The success of his performance of Puritanism is undermined by those who can identify his gross theatricality and see it for what it is: the unconvincing antics of a "poor fool" who has been utterly "baffled" throughout the play (5.1 358). The steward's humiliation requires quite literally an actor and an audience, or, as Stanley Cavell suggests in his searching account of shame in tragedy, a recognition and reciprocity that involves two active agents: "shame is the specific discomfort produced by the sense of being looked at; the avoidance of the sight of others is the reflex it produces . . . Under shame, what must be covered up is not your deed, but yourself" (49). Put another way, Malvolio's shame stems not from some disgracefulness inherent in

his person but rather from the confrontation between his character and early modern spectators. His failed performance, and resultant shame, depends on a visual and emotional recognition that comes specifically from the presence of Renaissance playgoers.¹⁴

In *Twelfth Night*, many of Shakespeare's characters experience shame, but none so thoroughly as Malvolio, who is subjected to harsh duplicity, imprisonment in a dungeon cell, and then a final, very public shaming endured at the play's close.¹⁵ As I suggest above, most often the steward's shame stems from the untimely exposure of his body or character to a witnessing audience; the play specifically acts out, in other words, his most vulnerable moments of personal disclosure *as they are made public*. Spectators watch Malvolio in act two, for instance, discover Maria's phony love letter and desperately imagine himself as Olivia's "unknown beloved" (2.5 82). They see him in act three as he publicly parades across the stage to greet the Countess, "yellow in [his] legs," smiling broadly, and compulsively kissing his hand (3.4 24). They witness too how this humiliating cross-gartering only further perpetuates his shame, as his seemingly inexplicable, madcap actions leave him bound, "laid . . . in hideous darkness" (4.2 26), and tortured by the ruthless and "most exquisite Sir Topas" (55). In each of these cases, spectators are privy to the clash between a private and public Malvolio, to a concealment and subsequent exposure of his character manifested on stage and, more importantly, witnessed and acknowledged in the instant when one becomes the other. Malvolio's shame occurs explicitly within the scope of the spectator's gaze, in moments of revelation when his body, self, and subjectivity are looked at and recognized.

In the play's infamous letter scene, Malvolio's shame first begins to take shape. The truth of his intemperate, passionate nature is betrayed in the lengthy "mock soliloquy" he delivers to an unacknowledged audience.¹⁶ Early modern spectators participate in Malvolio's extended, overheard aside, watching as his "imagination blows him" and as he adopts "the humour of state" (2.5 37–38, 47). Unbeknownst to the steward, of course, are these spectators who, both on and off stage, witness his innermost thoughts and humoral perturbations. Spectators come to know exactly what he fantasizes about underneath his shell of decorum and how fragile that composure actually is. As Malvolio performs an imaginative daydream in which he parades about in a "branched, velvet / gown, having come from a day-bed where [he has] left Olivia sleeping" (42–44), an early modern audience becomes more attuned to what John Draper calls the "symptoms of [Malvolio's] critical condition" (108). Spectators

become more aware of what his “element” (3.4 112) and “complexion” look like beneath his seemingly moderate exterior (2.5 22). As Draper further explains, “Malvolio’s moving passion betrays his choleric nature: he displays a personal pride that brings about his efficiency as a steward, but makes him arrogant even towards his superiors, and encourages him in the preposterous notion that he might wed the Countess” (103). Under his staged, puritanical façade in act one, the choleric steward secretly suffers from extraordinary humoral unrestraint and uncontrol. In the letter scene, these appetites and elements show themselves; “he has been revealed,” as Emma Fielding states, “to be a man of seething, overwhelming passions, all the stronger for being concealed” (31).

In this scene, the actor who plays the steward, paradoxically, acts Malvolio *not* performing. In this moment of prolonged daydreaming, Malvolio “performs” his innermost passions, and yet, in this fantastic rehearsal, the steward is anything but theatrical. Instead, Malvolio’s puritanical guard comes down, betraying the fact that he is not what—or who—he seems to be in act one. He is not the picture of mental poise and humoral health he previously portrays but instead is so distempered by desire that he reads the forged letter, Olivia’s M.O.A.I., as the Countess’s absurd, lovesick confession. It is Malvolio’s excessive, impassioned bodiliness, as it becomes visible in this scene, which ultimately shames him. As Dymrna Callaghan has argued, Malvolio’s body, as he spells Olivia’s CUT in the letter, becomes “feminized, ridiculed, [and] castrated” by his association with Olivia’s female anatomy: “his corporeal being in its entirety has been reduced to the most denigrated body part—a ‘cut’” (436). But Malvolio’s shame, as Callaghan articulates it, has little to do with an audience’s realization of his theatricality. In Callaghan’s formulation, Malvolio is unaware of the onlookers who feminize and denigrate him. By contrast, I would emphasize how act two, scene five sets Malvolio up for the shame he experiences—and *is consciously aware of*—during the rest of the play. What matters, in other words, is how the presence of an early modern audience to Malvolio’s hidden humoral nature sets the stage, in this scene, for his later shame. Most important is the way his unknown, public exposure to a witnessing, early modern audience cultivates his graver shame at the close of the drama. The fact that Shakespeare’s audience members were very much “in the know”—the fact that they were on the inside of this character and hence, to echo Jeremy Lopez, “aware of and superior to those who [were] not” (200)—significantly shapes Malvolio’s shame.

In focusing on an early modern audience’s possible complicity in Malvolio’s shame, I do not mean to suggest that spectators are solely account-

able for it. Many of Malvolio's disgraceful exposures are induced by the fancies and desires of other characters in the drama, and, in more than one instance, the steward seems fully responsible for his own shame. For example, note Malvolio's confidence in the fact that he might become even the husband of a countess. Olivia rightfully deems him "sick of self-love," a narcissistic social climber who lives the fantasy of public advancement (1.5 77), while Maria calls him "the best persuaded of himself, / so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his / grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (2.4 133-35). Throughout *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio is blindingly self-consumed, and by means of a flagrant certainty of his social potential and esteem, he establishes himself as an "overweening rogue" in the minds of both his fellow characters and the audience (2.5 25). This persona is interwoven tightly into the social circles in which he moves, and his self-worth is explicitly connected to his understanding of himself as highly valued in Countess Olivia's household. His pride and resultant shame are enmeshed in an intensely public and hierarchized social structure, which he sees as ripe with the prospect for significant advancement.¹⁷

As such, the play represents the overweening Malvolio as experiencing a humiliating loss of face for which he might be responsible. His foolish gullibility, his misplaced desire, and his resulting dungeon "exorcism" all work to facilitate a fall from prestige, and these shameful experiences reveal his dreams of social advancement to have been just that, dreams. The fact that Malvolio "falls" from a position of *imagined* stature makes it no less debilitating or humiliating for his character, however. The fact that his status potential was only mere fantasy conjured in his self-absorbed mind makes his shame no less real. It is no less real precisely because it still bears itself out in a public forum. His dreams of advancement and his passion for Olivia are always public knowledge in the play, and this exposure makes him particularly susceptible to shame.¹⁸ Malvolio's precarious placement of himself atop Illyria's social and domestic hierarchy makes him even more vulnerable to the penetrating awareness of all those who witness his tragic fall.

While the steward's character might be understood, at least in part, as responsible for his shame, this is, of course, not nearly the whole story of shame in *Twelfth Night*. One might likewise argue, for example, that Malvolio's shame is driven by the weakness, fear, and shame of *other* characters in the drama. Consider Maria, Toby, and Fabian's elaborate plan to "have the niggardly rascally / sheep-biter [Malvolio] come by some notable shame" (2.5 4-5). While the play certainly establishes motivation

for this trio of pranksters to disgrace Malvolio, their actions are blatantly hypocritical and serve as a method of stigmatizing him as something that they are not. The vindictive tricks they play work to exclude and separate Malvolio from other characters in the play, making it appear as if he is the only one who dreams of an elevation in status and prestige.¹⁹

In truth, however, almost all the characters in *Twelfth Night* exceed the boundaries of their social position in certain ways.²⁰ Take for instance Maria who, in writing the letter to Malvolio, literally attempts to substitute her hand for Olivia's: "I can write very like my lady your niece; on a forgotten matter we can hardly make distinction of our hands" (2.3 155–61). In this act, Maria proposes to impersonate someone of higher social standing in much the same way Malvolio does. The fluidity of the "great P's" she pens in a forged hand signify, in capital letters, her desire for social fluidity. Through her ability to write in both upper *and* lower case hands, explains Bianca Calabresi, Maria toys not only with the steward's social positioning but also her own (19). Just as the steward reads 'MOAI' to "wrest an identity from the sequence of letters that will suggest a shift in his servile and sexual status," Maria similarly forges a new social identity through her falsely penned letters (Calabresi 19). Cunningly, however, Maria stigmatizes Malvolio as the play's ultimate geck and gull so as to shift the dramatic focus from her own presumptuous desires to pass herself off as the rich and powerful Countess. As Malvolio's supposed madness occupies center stage in act four, scene two, both audience and characters come to either ignore or excuse Maria's actions as well as the rampant overreaching of the play's other characters. As Maria, Toby, Fabian, and Feste gain pleasure from tormenting Malvolio and justify his shaming as necessary, they absolve themselves of their own audacious attempts at altering their social identities.

But if Malvolio, through shaming, is to be held accountable for his overweening, should Maria not likewise be held accountable for hers? How is the steward's interpretation of the counterfeit letter more offensive than Maria's own attempts at social counterfeiting? In act five, scene one, arguably the most poignant moment of Malvolio's shame, the play stages the possibility that the poor steward has, in fact, been wrongfully shamed.²¹ Unlike his overheard aside in the letter scene of act two, Malvolio now emerges on stage to *wittingly* perform his grievances to a waiting early modern audience. As he is retrieved from his cell "within" and returns to court, Malvolio brings with him the claim that he has been "notoriously abused" beyond the penance he deserved. He reappears on stage so as to publicly confront his abusers and to right his good name, demanding that Olivia (and others) answer the following query:

Why have you suffered me to be imprisoned,
Kept in a dark house, visited by the priest,
And made the most notorious geck and gull
That e'er invention played on? Tell me why? (5.1 330–4)

More than just a performance of lamentation, Malvolio demands that someone be held accountable for his shame, formally acting out the promises he makes in his letter to Olivia where he vows “but to do myself much right or you much shame” (297–8). As he willingly cites the wrongs inflicted upon his person, he strives to transform, through performance, his original, shameful exposures into a scene of personal honor instead. By calling attention to the ill actions and culpability of those who shamed him, he might expose their overzealous cruelty and hence the shameful-ness inherent in their own beings.

In this final scene, Malvolio is expressly theatrical. He does not recall his stoic performance of Puritanism in scene one, however, but rather proposes to “speak out of [his] injury” instead (299). He re-exposes himself through direct address to his audience, precisely listing the shameful operations acted upon his battered body by his tormentors—imprisonment, darkness, visitation, exorcism—and noting exactly how his humoral weaknesses—his overwhelming passions—have been forcibly exposed to them (an exposure performed in part, ironically enough, during his concealment in a dungeon).²² In other words, when Malvolio returns to court at the play’s close, he attempts to restage his earlier disgrace by calling direct attention to all the ways his body has been shamefully violated throughout the play. His performance in this scene is self-induced and deliberate, a body re-exposed on different terms. He does not avoid or ignore his shame, but rather draws extra notice to it precisely to manipulate it into something else altogether. His demand for redemption and righteousness of course calls attention to his egocentric gullibility but, more importantly, marks publicly the cruel actions of his beguilers. *He* attempts to shame *them* by exposing their “sportful malice” and by forcibly requiring them to recognize their accountability (354).

In this moment, Malvolio begins to transform the way his shame might have been played in the space of Renaissance theatre.²³ More specifically, when Malvolio forces an acknowledgment of his public defamation, he exposes the presence of early modern theatergoers who witnessed that defamation. Contrary to his gulling in the garden, here Malvolio both knows and recognizes audience presence. The question becomes, then, whether he, in calling upon spectators to react, might “successfully” re-perform the scene(s) of his shaming. Might he note an audience’s role as

an always public eye and share his shame with them, or can he somehow recapture his honor and avoid shame altogether?²⁴

Drawing on Joseph Roach's seminal ideas about an early modern actor's power to manipulate his audiences, one might imagine Malvolio's affective connection to spectators in this scene as characterized not just by a unilateral "irradiation" of emotion, as Roach would have it, but rather defined by the exchange of multiple and reciprocal emotive forces that moved between and around actors and audience members, flowing not in one direction out towards an audience but in, around, and back towards the stage as well (27).²⁵ As they witnessed Malvolio's performance of his shame, early modern playgoers might have engaged in what Marvin Carlson calls "active" theatrical experience, "creat[ing] a meaning for a line or action not at all intended by the producers . . . [and wresting] interpretive control entirely and openly from expected patterns" (14).²⁶ I am suggesting, in other words, that it may have been possible for Malvolio's character to acknowledge an audience's potential for interpretive power, and in doing so, to transform his shame. The steward might have manipulated his shame—become "both the plaintiff and the judge of [his] own cause"—by deliberately playing upon the passions and emotions of a reactive and receptive early modern audience (5.1 342–3).²⁷

When Malvolio attempts to restage himself in scene five, he exposes not only his fellow characters but a complicit audience as well. He betrays not only the shameful natures of Maria, Toby, Feste, and the others but also directly implicates the audience in his shame.²⁸ By deliberately foregrounding his "notoriously abused" body, he asks spectators to do two things: first, to acknowledge the shaming he endured since they, with only a few other stage figures, were privy to his *every* humiliation; and secondly, to invoke their own capacity for shame. An early modern audience, for Malvolio, might become an ally since they beheld, for example, the scene in his secluded torture chamber. They witnessed all of his private humiliations and are, in this complicity, capable of—if not responsible for—making them public knowledge. Spectators have the ability to resist the steward's final shaming, his humiliating defeat by the "whirligig of time," and to enact shame upon those who persecuted him instead (364).

Malvolio's redemptive re-exposure is based not only upon this privileging of audience, however, but also upon the successful staging of his own bodily abuse in their eyes, for as Callaghan states, "command over one's body consists of command over its representation, its reproductions" (437). Malvolio must own his act and, in that act, must control his body;

he must be able to perform his abuse strictly on his own terms, within the scope of his own power, and to do so in a way that both recognizes and demands a particular audience response. Just as he performs the role of a “niggardly rascally / sheep-biter” in act one (2.5 4–5), here Malvolio acts the part of a “madly-used” man who has been “most notoriously abused” (5.1 300, 366). Cruel treatment and wicked beguiling have “induced” him to “put on” yet another “semblance” (296), to play yet another part, and the success of this particular part requires assistance from his audience.

When Malvolio finally appears in scene five battered, bruised, and bleeding from his torturous experience “within,” he gives the vulnerable state of his body center stage. He acts out the ways he has, as Sir Toby predicted, been “fool[ed] . . . black and blue” (2.5 9). The notorious abuses he verbally recounts verify the troubling spectacle his person visually represents. In this moment, Malvolio uses his broken body to reveal the shame he has suffered thus far. His character stages his violation, ironically calling attention to his disgraces. In order to counter his shame, the steward performs himself as an unruly, abused body and risks the truth of his humoral nature as it must be exposed to and acknowledged by a reactive audience. His language in scene five, as well as the language others use to describe his plight, theatrically calls audiences back to his body’s material abuses, to the “injuries [that must] be justly weighed” (5.1 356). The steward’s language explicitly recollects the humiliating scene of his imprisonment in which his humoral body is likewise foregrounded. Within his dark cell, Malvolio laments again and again, “there never was a man so notoriously abused” (4.2 80); and in the play’s closing scene, Olivia repeats these lines: “He hath been most notoriously abused” (5.1 366). In *Twelfth Night’s* final moments, Malvolio actively orchestrates recognition of this corporeal excess. Paradoxically, he controls through performance what appears to be an utterly uncontrollable body.

Malvolio’s character orchestrates his intemperance by playing upon, as we know from Gail Paster’s influential work, an early modern investment in humorality and by reacting to profound anxieties in the period about the relationship between body and subjectivity. He stages his shame, as it is represented in and on his body, in order to contain that risky bodiliness within the space of performance. The steward realizes that his ability to reshape his shame is contingent upon the performative, upon having an audience to witness and testify to his body’s seeping excess and oozing abuse.²⁹ A body that leaks, bleeds, or oozes is not shameful, that is, except in that it publicly exposes itself inappropriately; it must act out—or up—in front of an audience who knows it should be more properly

regulated. The steward's character understands that his shame occurs explicitly within the scope of an audience's gaze, in moments of mutual regard when what was hidden about his body is laid bare for all to see. He believes, however, that his shame might be redeployed, perhaps reissued on others more deserving, if he can successfully re-perform the very abuses that have initially disgraced him. To put it another way, the act of performing a shamed, humoral body might itself serve as a redemptive method of bodily regulation. Here in scene five, Malvolio's performance confirms his body to be a highly uncontrolled, passion-driven vessel and recognizes how that shamefulfulness is inextricably linked to the spectators who have witnessed it. And yet ironically, in performing that uncontrol, the steward might actually save face. If he can convincingly act the part of a man notoriously abused, he begins to take possession of the very intemperate body that seems, previously, to have shamed him.

The trouble, of course, is that early modern spectators already know Malvolio's character to be a profoundly intemperate being. In light of the letter scene, they know him to be an immoderate body beyond his own control, a body often outside the bounds of performance. Their understanding of his nature has been irreversibly tainted by the earnest lovesickness and self-indulgent passions he betrays in act two (as well as by his fearful, pathetic desperation in act four) such that when he attempts to perform that intemperance as something deliberate and orchestrated, spectators are hard pressed to believe his act. Additionally, the terms *abuse* and *injury* that Malvolio needs in order to restage himself and revoke his shame, only further confirm spectators' suspicions. While this language does serve, on one level, to expose the body as Malvolio intends to, it likewise implies a certain bodily harm or violence that *exceeds* Malvolio's control; his language too emphatically emphasizes the unregulated, humoral distemper spectators witnessed earlier in the play. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that "abuse" would have resonated on a specifically corporeal register in the early modern period: "to be wronged, done violence to, *violated*." Injury was likewise understood both as "wrongful action or treatment; violation or infringement of another's rights; suffering of mischief willfully and unjustly inflicted" and as "a bodily wound or sore."³⁰ The language Malvolio uses, then, to try and perform his way out of shame also marks the humoral body, *his* humoral body, as something penetrable that leaks and bleeds uncontrollably.³¹ Malvolio, in other words, even in his aggressive attempt to re-subjectify himself and recast his shame, cannot escape a predisposition towards humiliating, bodily exposure. His desire to portray, through performance,

control over his corporeal vessel is forestalled by the inevitable unpredictability of the precise body upon which he is forced to rely.

Although Malvolio exposes his faulty body to reshape his shame, it is this very attention to the body that finally prohibits his “success.” His unruly body, the very body he needs in order to signify the heinous transgressions he has suffered, thwarts his successful re-exposure and instead doubly shames him. The steward’s attempt to recuperate his shame requires a reactive audience who sympathizes with his desire for retributive justice. Their willingness to accept Malvolio’s reimagining of shame was contingent upon his effectively mastering his shame through performance, however, and the necessary acknowledgement that he *lacks* that mastery was perhaps, I suggest, something far too real for early modern spectators to confront. So although Jean Howard argues that by the end of *Twelfth Night*, we “leave the third movement hungry for a theatrical and a moral norm: for action that is action, not chaos or stasis; for behavior that is neither self-regarding nor exploitative, but merely decent,” early modern theatergoers, ultimately, might have refused that decency (191). These spectators may instead have taken on postures of indifference, purposefully failing to recognize Malvolio’s plea—to help to reissue shame on other bodies—because the stakes were too high. If early modern audiences had responded to his call in *Twelfth Night*’s last moments, reciprocally shaming those who shamed him, they would have had to confront the possibility of something shameful in themselves.³²

Put another way, early modern audiences might have denied Malvolio’s call because, in hearing it, they had to acknowledge things too difficult to face: first, that they were complicit in his initial shaming simply by standing idly by and laughing while he was mocked, tortured, exorcised, and forgotten. They chose to do nothing.³³ Secondly, and more importantly, perhaps early modern playgoers regarded Malvolio’s faulty body as a mirror for their own. Their need to absolve his shame was tied closely to an understanding of their *own* bodily potential for embarrassing, humoral exposure. In other words, helping Malvolio in his vindication might have betrayed their own hopes for vindication. They needed Malvolio to be “unshamed” so that they too might entertain that possibility in their own lives. And yet, for these very reasons, spectators shamed Malvolio again even in the precise moment when he asked most for a new kind of recognition.

In order to reconcile his shame, Malvolio hazards a performance of his body as a deficient, faulty vessel. The steward wittingly stages a socialized early modern body, a subjectivity, that is inherently turbulent and

changeable, or as Paster describes, “radically labile, prone to biological alternations and lapses from the temperate mean of civility” (*Reading the Passions* 16). Perhaps, however, because Malvolio’s performance could not successfully contain this turbulent subjectivity and because of an unwillingness to see the hard truth of this failure, playgoers refused his petition and were loath to make the same kind of bold confession he does, reluctant to see their own faulty bodies in his. In his abused, overwrought corporeality, Malvolio’s character constantly threatened an embarrassing loss of necessary restraint, and, to again echo Paster, this threat would have provoked much anxiety in a culture whose “canons of bodily propriety” had begun to uphold an “emergent ideology of bodily refinement and exquisite self-mastery” (*Body Embarrassed* 14). Malvolio’s subjectivity signified to anxious audiences the uncomfortable, corporeal instability in themselves. It confirmed the volatile, excessive potential inherent in the humoral body, a volatility that might always outstrip the rules, regulations, and restraints so rigorously imposed and impressed upon it. Because reconciling Malvolio’s shame forced early modern audiences to look closely at their own bodies and the vulnerable bodies surrounding them, they perhaps avoided any real acknowledgment of his body at all, “rather pluck[ing] on laughter than revenge” so that they might live the lie that they were somehow different from him (5.1 355).

In its final moments of shame, then, *Twelfth Night* became a play whose “success,” its ultimate meaning-making, was determined by audience response—or lack thereof. Performances of shame in *Twelfth Night* anticipated reactive early modern audiences whose subjectivities were bound tightly to their unstable, humoral natures. Shame portrayed on the Renaissance stage gleaned power from its realization of this pervasive, anxious humoral quality. It harnessed the force of the passionate, labile bodies in an audience, breaking down the separateness between stage figures and patrons by insisting on moments of reciprocal recognition and acknowledgement. Early modern public theatre confounded the notion that a group of spectators could sit complacently by and merely watch shame happen on stage. It instead invited audiences who would witness it fully, audiences who would determine, act out, and react to Malvolio’s shame even if that reaction was itself the shameful realization of doing nothing at all.

Notes

¹See Michael Baird Saenger's essay "Manningham on Malvolio."

²This is not to suggest that Malvolio's character has only been imagined this way. He has also been understood as quite deserving of the punishments and shame he receives throughout the play; see especially Barbara Lewalski and C.L. Barber.

³While Manningham's diary acknowledges that one of *Twelfth Night's* earliest, recorded performances was not, in fact, at the Globe but indoors in 1602 at Middle Temple, Peter Thomson and others have convincingly argued that this performance of Shakespeare's play was a revival of a *Twelfth Night* performance first done at the Globe. Thomson, whose work engages in "an investigation of the sprit of the original performances," interprets the play's staging as if it were being performed in variable spaces, many of which would have included amphitheatre spaces like the Globe: "*Twelfth Night* was intended for easy staging in any of the spaces in which the Chamberlain's Men might be asked to present it . . . As a popular play, it would have been a stand-by at the Globe and the indoor Blackfriars, and it would be surprising if it was never part of the touring repertoire" (*Shakespeare's Theatre* 113).

⁴For more on presentism see Terence Hawkes's *Shakespeare in the Present* as well as more recent work by Ewan Fernie and Richard Kearney.

⁵My ideas here take their lead from Alan Dessen's critical impulse to imagine theatre's "potent effect upon the original viewers of Elizabethan performances" and to consider whether "Elizabethan dramatists [were] able to harness this potential in their theater" (18).

⁶I am building, in part, upon Bruce Smith's premise in *Acoustic World* that speech has a bodily "force" to it, that expression, both theatrical and not, is something that "happens *in* the body and *to* the body" (23).

⁷The early modern body was, in this period, imagined as a humoral entity beholden to its passions. These passions were psychological and physiological responses that were part of the body *and* the soul, deriving from the humours—blood, phlegm, choler, and bile—but directed by the mind and spirits. They displayed a connection between microcosmic body and macrocosmic world; the natural world could have a direct impact on one's body and, thereby, on one's emotions and selfhood. As Gail Paster notes, "in the Galenic physiology, 'self' in behavioural terms was the product of invisible, mysterious interactions between an immaterial soul and its material instruments . . . The body and its emotions were understood to be functionally inseparable, with change in one realm producing change in the other" ("Tragic Subject" 143). In other words, early modern bodies were imagined as intensely humoral, porous, and malleable vessels easily impacted by external stimuli and vulnerable to the explicit circumstances in which that vessel functioned.

⁸I realize that making conjectures about the "feelings" or "reactions" of Elizabethan playgoers (or even early modern actors) may sound tenuous, but both

new historicist and cultural materialist approaches have shown that, with proper attention to one's own contemporary biases as well as to the material realities of a period, compelling arguments might be made even about eras quite distant from our own. I believe, in fact, that it is both possible and necessary to offer readings of early modern audience response from inside a (post)modern perspective. One must point out, of course, the obvious difficulty of translating the language of emotion—the language of shame—across time; scripts about emotion, shared attitudes towards feelings and how to handle them, are certainly culturally and historically bound. But as the editors of *Reading the Early Modern Passions* suggest, this fact should not prevent scholars from making assertions about feeling in the Renaissance period, so long as we are always attentive to the fact of our own historical positioning (11). My essay, then, does not attempt to predict absolutely the emotional responses playgoers would have had to performance but rather offers an analysis of certain kinds of experience and emotional reaction that would have been possible in early modern theatre.

⁹See the work of Gail Paster and Michael Schoenfeldt especially.

¹⁰Early moderns, following the logic of Galenic physiology, would likely have understood their bodies and emotions as distinctly social phenomena. In fact, the threat of real, affective contagion was a fundamental emotional script within the period. Emotions were highly contagious and could be both deliberately shared or accidentally transmitted from one body to another. The possibility of “catching” another's feelings was, according to Katherine Rowe, “an ordinary and pervasive feature of humorally conceived passions” (*Reading the Passions* 176). Emotions, like shame, were part of this communal affectivity. They were marked upon the body—in blush, pallor, posture, and facial expression—and these corporeal significations promoted easy transmission of emotion from one person to the next, especially in such an intensely affective communal space as the theatre.

¹¹See William Holden and Patrick Collinson for more on Malvolio as puritanical. See also Kristen Poole's counterargument for why his character does not exhibit puritan conduct in the play and that our reading of his character in this way is a modern construct.

¹²Yachnin mediates his suggestion that Malvolio is a killjoy Puritan by emphasizing Shakespeare's careful refusal to fully ally the steward with real-life Puritans. He points out that “Maria's second remark suggests that [Malvolio] only acts the part of a Puritan when it suits his individual purposes” (781).

¹³For Puritan anti-theatrical tracts, see John Northbrooke, *A Treatise against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577); Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse* (1579) and *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582); and Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters* (1580).

¹⁴Like Cavell, Lars Engle also confirms shame's mutuality, describing the affect as a vicarious, social phenomenon: “shame presupposes a social community of mutual regard, rather than a voice of law that addresses persons in isolation, and it presupposes a society of people who wish to be able to look one and other in the face and who feel pain when they cannot do so” (191).

¹⁵Early modern playgoers would have encountered shame in many of the performances they attended. They might have perceived, for instance, a defiant Isabella promising to “strip myself to death as to a bed / That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield / My body up to shame” (*Measure for Measure* 2.4 102–4) or a broken Hero whose “blush [was] guiltiness, not modesty” (*Much Ado About Nothing* 4.1 40). In nearly all of Shakespeare's plays the word shame appears quite frequently: four times in *Twelfth Night*, nine in *Coriolanus*, twelve in *Measure for Measure*, and an incredible forty-one times in the *Henriad*. All told, the word shame is used over three hundred and forty times in the body of Shakespearean drama. This catalogue of occurrences only begins to signify the presence of this affect as a theme, trope, and dramatic “passion” in early modern theatre. (Occurrences were documented via *The Chadwyck-Healey Literature Online Database in English Drama*. See also Spevack and Gundersheimer for more on occurrences of the term in medieval and early modern literature.)

¹⁶I borrow the term mock soliloquy from Paul Yachnin in his essay “Reversal of Fortune.”

¹⁷This particular reading of Malvolio invokes Erving Goffman's ideas about the social aspects of shame and humiliation. See Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

¹⁸Interestingly, Olivia too receives shame at the hands of a participating audience. As *Twelfth Night* progresses and Olivia continues to reinforce her chosen (albeit transparent) solitude by disallowing the presence of all but Cesario, an early modern audience is empowered by being privy to her privacy in ways that other characters are not. Audience members witness Olivia in her domestic, “private” spaces, a privileged witnessing through which they continue to transform her private into public. Olivia's shame towards the close of *Twelfth Night*, then, the moment in which she realizes she has “been mistook” and was in love with a woman in disguise, is, in part, predicated upon early modern audience members being in the know throughout the play (5.1 252). Her shame stems, I would argue, from the public exposure of her secret(ed) passion; Sebastian's suggestion that she has “been mistook. . . [and] would have been contracted to a maid” renders to light Olivia's base passion for Cesario/Viola. Olivia's shame comes not only from Sebastian's public exposure of her passion but likewise from an audience's knowledge of how she tried to keep those passions secret but failed. Audience presence connects Olivia's shameful exposure at the play's end directly to her failure to maintain the physiological and psychological control, in this case the bodily and psychic secrecy, she originally asserted. The shame she suffers at the hands of Sebastian and the other characters, the attention they draw to her unruly and mistaking vessel, is magnified in her relationship to a voyeuristic audience for whom Olivia's privacy was never more than obvious illusion. Olivia's shame grows out of their constant witnessing and out of her futile attempt to negotiate this inevitable exposure of her bodily desire *in the first place*. Her attempted concealment—perceived all along by the audience—becomes particularly shameful in light of its complete failure. Her inability to keep her inward

emotions private, to keep her “most jealous and too doubtful soul / . . . at peace,” is marked by the audience and forces them to react towards her character with shame (4.3 27–8). Their omniscient knowledge of her false privacy, and hence the ever-impending exposure of “the cunning of her passions,” places Olivia within an economy of shame specific to her relationship with early modern playgoers and their highly affective, witnessing presence (2.2 20).

¹⁹For further reading on Malvolio as an unfairly victimized character, see Cedric Watts’s “The Problem of Malvolio” and Bill Alexander’s “Why we shall make him mad indeed.”

²⁰In his introduction to *Twelfth Night* in the *Norton Anthology*, Stephen Greenblatt also reads Malvolio as a kind of scapegoat, concluding that his fantasy is merely one example of the fantasy of social advancement that governs the relationships of nearly all the characters in this drama.

²¹Malvolio’s shame also takes center stage in 4.2, the “mad scene,” when Feste torments the steward in his space “within.” Certain contemporary performances have indeed acknowledged this scene’s potential not for laughter but disgrace: a 1998 performance by the RSC portrayed Malvolio’s dark room as “a kennel, with the abusive term ‘sowter’ over its locked door” (Cook 8), while a 1999 performance by the Shakespeare Theatre played the scene “in darkness, with stereotypical prison sounds: creaking doors clanging shut, footsteps fading away, dripping water. Candlelight then revealed that Malvolio was blindfolded and bound but seated in a room in Olivia’s house; the sound effects were nothing more than the ingenious creations of Fabian” (Johnson-Haddad 16).

²²In Shakespeare’s Folio, the staging of scene 4.2 notes Malvolio as “within.” The following sources offer useful information on possible stagings of this scene: John Astington, David Carnegie, Peter Thomson, and Mariko Ichikawa. John Astington, for example, explains that this direction could have implied that Malvolio was either offstage and only present audibly or that he was both audible and visible beneath a raised stage in a hell-like space reachable through a trapdoor in the stage floor. Conversely, Ichikawa considers the use of the word *within* to conclude that in early modern theaters players used the space behind the tiring-house facade to signal being *within* and that this space was not necessarily invisible to an audience.

²³One could contrast this scene with other performances of shame in Shakespearean drama. Take, for example, the following instances: Kate is deprived of food and wares so as to break her unruly spirit in *Taming of the Shrew*; Kent is mercilessly placed in the stocks for being “a traitor” in *King Lear*; Claudio is publicly paraded on his way to prison when he impregnates the unwed Juliet in *Measure for Measure*; and Falstaff is pinched, burned, and made to wear the cuckold horns at the close of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Many of these theatrical moments aptly mirror medieval and renaissance rituals of shame that deliberately provoked humiliating, social exposure, techniques like the dunce cap, charivari, the skimmington, and the scold’s bridle.

²⁴Stanley Cavell's work begins to take up this question of manipulating shame in "The Avoidance of Love," when he explains how in *King Lear* Gloucester tries to alter the shame he garners from breeding a bastard son. Cavell argues that Gloucester jokes publicly about Edmund's illegitimate status so as to avoid acknowledging that fact as a flaw in himself. In "brazening out [his] shame" by offering Edmund's bastard status openly, Gloucester tries to render himself shameless. In other words, by announcing the fact of Edmund's illegitimacy, by "calling enlarged attention to the thing you do not want naturally noticed," Gloucester attempts to transform the scene of his exposure (*Disowning Knowledge* 49). In this case, he tries to manipulate exposure against its own threat; he preemptively publicizes his secret to extract it from the shame of its necessary privateness.

²⁵Roach has argued that an early modern actor could conjure up and then exhibit so much believable passion as to communicate an exact emotional impression, an "energia," to all those who witnessed it: "The spirit moves the actor, who, in the authenticity of his transport, moves the audience" (44–5). Roach explains further: "First, the actor possessed the power to act on his own body. Secondly, he possessed the power to act on the physical space around him. Finally, he was able to act on the bodies of the spectators who shared that space with him . . . His motions could transform the air through which he moved, animating it in waves of force rippling outward from a center in his soul. His passions, irradiating the bodies of spectators through their eyes and ears, could literally transfer the contents of his heart to theirs, altering their moral natures" (27).

²⁶For more on theatre semiotics see Carlson's *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* and also Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*.

²⁷It seems useful to note here how Malvolio's ability to manipulate emotion might also have been linked to the material conditions of a public amphitheatre like the Globe. As John R. Ford explains of a 2002 *Twelfth Night* production in the New Globe, "the audience itself was deeply implicated in both the revelry and the shame [of the play] . . . an open stage thrust into an audience requires an interanimating exchange of energy" (52). Theatre structure, the proximity and liminality of the bodies in its space particularly, elicited and invited contagious, emotional response. For further discussion of early modern audience response in the public amphitheatre space, see Kent Cartwright's *Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response* and Andrew Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, chapters two and four particularly.

²⁸Ralph Berry has discussed this shameful complicity, describing a spectatorial "unease" that begins as early as 3.4, when Malvolio appears on stage in his yellow stockings. He suggests that there is not a precise moment in the play when the audience realizes its own discomfort and "queasiness" but that by play's end, "the audience is now conscious that the affair is much less funny than it was." He likewise argues: "there is a certain moral responsibility, even culpability, which the audience assumes in *Twelfth Night*: I don't think the play can be understood without it" (111–119).

²⁹See Paster's *The Body Embarrassed*.

³⁰*The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 1 November 2005.

³¹One reason that "the bleeding [early modern] body signifies as a shameful token of uncontrol," suggests Gail Paster, is because it presents "a failure of physical self-mastery particularly associated with woman in her monthly 'courses'" (*Body Embarrassed* 92).

³²For examples of popular early modern philosophical and medical treatises preoccupied with shame and the body, see Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall. A Reprint Based on the 1604 Edition.*, Nicholas Coeffeteau, *Table of Humane Passions with Their Causes and Effects.*, and Robert Burton (ed. F. Dell) *The Anatomy of Melancholy. Now for the First Time with the Latin Completely Given in Translation and Embodied in an All-English Text*.

³³Ralph Berry suggests, in fact, that *Twelfth Night* is a play whose "ultimate effect . . . is to make the audience ashamed of itself (119).

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