

## QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSOR CUMMINGS

### 1. What is the specific assignment for this essay?

The assignment was to pick one scene, one theme, or one major character in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for close textual analysis.

### 2. How did this assignment fit with your goals for the course?

The essay demonstrates very careful close textual analysis of the verbal means of character creation.

### 3. Why did this essay stand out for you as an example of strong writing?

The essay stands out because it meets or surpasses expectations for student writing with regard to mechanics, style, subject control, pacing of the argument, and use of textual evidence.

## QUESTIONS FOR WILLIAM COUCH

### 1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?

As with the beginnings of any piece of work, this paper started with an idea. This idea was sparked from conversations in class regarding the disputed complexity of Malvolio's character in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. While Malvolio was held by some to be a man of a relatively simple nature, one characterized by priggish sobriety, I felt that while this sentiment held water at the outset of the play, it tended to expand and contort as the play progressed. In this way, while there may be no change or development in Malvolio's stiff and selfish character, there is room for a change in the reader's view of the lowly steward of Olivia's house. That is, Malvolio changes from a man the reader would rather use "a stonebow, to hit him in the eye" (2.5. 43), to a man who earns the audience's sympathy, respect, and a kind of honest nobility. My final feeling was that the "things" that happen to Malvolio reveal a sort of harsh reality about the celebration of Twelfth Night (the Feast of the Epiphany), giving Shakespeare's play something more than just what seems to be a happy ending.

From here I then had to go about finding those moments in the text where Malvolio could be seen as the Puritan upholder of rules (allowing the audience's initial distaste for his character), then as a man who draws sympathy and respect from the reader, and finally as a character who warrants recognition as displaying some sort of honest nobility. After these were found, I was then able to implement them into an essay, following the order in which their relative topics were presented in the introduction. Each body paragraph followed a technique I learned in high school called the "ABC Method." The "A" part introduces the quote, explaining its position in the text as a whole (its context), and briefly outlining what it will tell the reader. The "B" part discusses what the quote is literally saying, picking out specific words from it in order to produce a kind of understandable paraphrase. Lastly, the "C" part actually relates the quote to the overall

goal of the essay, again drawing on the specific language used within the quote's lines and making connections obvious for the reader. In short, I wrote my introduction first (of course having to make slight revisions and what not along the way in order to make sure that it properly and clearly outlined the paper to follow), then a body paragraph for each relevant and relatively concise and to-the-point quote I had (following the ABC Method), then a conclusion discussing the last bit of my introduction.

## **2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?**

The most challenging aspect of the assignment came with finding the proper quotes to support my thesis. While it wasn't difficult to find places in the text that left room for the audience to detest Malvolio, it was difficult searching through all the lines of dialogue to find moments where Malvolio could be seen, contrary to many people's opinions, as both drawing sympathy, respect, and, most importantly, upholding a sense of honest nobility. After this was completed, the most difficult part for me came with crafting a title to adequately capture it all in a short, attention-grabbing line or two.

## **3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?**

One of the main things I learned in the course was that in order to grab the most complete understanding of one of Shakespeare's plays, one must not only conduct a detailed analysis of the written text, but also witness that written text's stage interpretation. For each can be fairly different, neither right nor wrong, but may leave out some important piece that is crucial to one's understanding of the play as a whole or of a specific character. In seeing a stage interpretation of *Twelfth Night*, I disliked Malvolio, dismissing him for nothing more than a man who enjoyed ruining others' fun, deservedly meeting his comeuppance near the conclusion of the play. However, in analyzing the text of the play and writing this essay, I developed a very different sentiment. For while Malvolio's character may very well stand for priggish sobriety, he also, just as strongly, deserves respect, sympathy, and the characterization of a man maintaining honest nobility.

## **4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?**

From working to complete this essay I learned that, at least for Shakespeare, one needs to go beyond a first reading of a play in order to fully grasp the facets of characters and the workings of the plot. One needs to be open to different interpretations not only in reading but also in the transformation from text to stage. For doing either one or the other is insufficient, and sometimes even through experiencing both repeatedly details are still missed. But this is not frustrating, it is what keeps literature fascinating and worth reading over and over again, as is what has clearly happened with Shakespeare's work.