

On *Culinary Complete Works: 38 Plays. 38 Chefs*:

As a theatrical chef, Shakespeare can serve you up some pretty wild dishes. His menu might begin and end with *Richard III*, starting with a vegetarian first course with ingredients of Richard's "green and salad days," and ending with "good strawberries" from the Bishop of Ely's garden. The featured dish in the middle of course will come from *Titus Andronicus*, where Titus prepares a pasty made from Queen Tamora's two evil sons. Tending bar will be the two Sirs, John Falstaff and Toby Belch."

-Clark Hulse

On *Shakespeare a cappella* (Chicago *a cappella* + Chicago Shakespeare Theater):

"The value of a celebration like Shakespeare 400 is that it provides us all opportunities to do for Shakespeare's work what Shakespeare's work does for its audiences: it makes the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Hearing Shakespeare's words sung not only highlights the innate musicality of the language, but plucks that language out of its native environs, allowing the audience to watch it bloom in new surroundings."

-Lise Schlosser

On *Battle of the Bard: High School Shakespeare Slam* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater + Chicago Youth Shakespeare):

"They used Shakespeare to examine their own multilingual and multicultural worlds—to work through very modern concerns in ways that made Shakespeare's historically distant and rhetorically difficult language seem completely familiar and immediately relevant...This is what Shakespeare should be. This is what Shakespeare will be. And this, the students definitively demonstrated, is what Shakespeare is."

-Timothy J. Duggan

# Shakespeare 400 Chicago

*Reflections on a City's Celebration of Shakespeare*

Chicago Shakespeare Theater

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## Malvolio's Revenge; or, Disabusing the Audience

Elizabeth Elaine Tavares

Experimental thespian Tim Crouch's *I, Malvolio* is a study in what it means to laugh at another's sorrow. The play is part of a sequence focusing on lesser, unsung, and often unlikable characters from Shakespeare's oeuvre, including Caliban, Peaseblossom, Banquo, and Cinna. Comedies like *Twelfth Night*, from which Crouch draws for the roughly ninety-minute piece, were and are vehicles for compelling ensemble work, while tragedies often serve a celebrity front-man. Part of the ingenuity of this one-man Shakespearean comedy is to explore, in form and in content, where exactly that sweet spot between comedy and discomfort lies.

### *You find this funny, do you?*

"You find this funny, do you?": Crouch's Malvolio asked this of us over and over as he subjected himself to a series of embarrassments. While cracking wise at the average age of the afternoon matinee audience, he summoned up three students to aid in his public shaming. One, a boy he nicknamed "Bluey" for his blue shirt, he had kick him in response to the signs on his back: the first read "turkey cock" and second "kick me." Another, "Pinky," for his pink shorts, was asked alongside a young woman to help facilitate an on-stage hanging. While at first the audience's laughter was immediate in response to these antics, by the time we reached the hanging scene the laughter was forced and uncomfortable—the audience uncertain of the script they were to follow. Routinely pointing at the audience to accuse us of sins varietal, as much as Malvolio inquired of our sense of humor he also intoned that he would certainly have "revenge on the pack of you."

### *Mourning, interrupted*

Structuring the arc of Malvolio's interrogations of us was his re-narrativizing the plot of *Twelfth Night*. Crouch makes two particularly astute observations about the possible motivations compelling his character's puritanical attitude. First, he reminds us that Malvolio not only organized and served for the lifetime of Olivia's recently deceased brother, but also her father. Second, he reflects on the fast approach of Sir

Toby Belch, whose behaviors interrupt the fragile routine the household has barely had a chance to cobble together after these deaths. Aside from the interloping Sir Toby and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, arguably Malvolio and the Fool are the only male members of the household left—reorganizing the flow of power in the household into a matriarchy. Not only is Malvolio a Puritan trapped in the world of a play, but he is trapped in a household now run by women. Accosted by the constant interruptions of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, the Duke Orsino and his household, Malvolio is unable to move through the natural progression of mourning.

### *Many a good hanging*

In this light, the play quite literally adds insult to Malvolio's emotional injury when Sir Toby and his crew bait him with the forged letter. The letter makes an appearance on stage, crumpled at the outset and then orbited around by Malvolio as if it were the gravitational center of his injury—a site of trauma he can't help but rehearse. Rotating, he weighs his own sanity, insisting that despite the "ontological duality" of his presence in a theater—simultaneously in Illyria and in Chicago—he is "not mad." Working through this ontological duality with a speedy set of jokes of local color (no few references to the presidential race were made), Malvolio works through the sanity of his cross-gartered response to the letter. We are reminded briefly of the darkest moment in *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio's entrapment in a pit by the Fool to keep him from impeding the more procreatively and hierarchically suitable coupling of his lady to a mysterious twin she has only just met. (Again, his desire to slow that courtship seems anything but insane outside the world of Shakespeare's play.) More than the letter, the pit is the catharsis, the event that underscores the line where laughing at the ways in which the ego and the body will out crosses into schadenfreude. He concludes: we, the audience, are Sir Toby in this Chicago theater; we are the bully on which he must have revenge.

### *Malvolio's revenge*

And he does get it. In the last act of *I, Malvolio*, our leading man rejects his noose and instead strips out of his soiled undergarments down to a leopard-printed thong. From there, he gradually applied face

powder and period costume to reassume his position as rule-maker and enforcer of the hierarchy that bullied him so. At the end of the first act, we were told to sit up straight and stay exactly as we were while he stepped off stage; he returned rather immediately from what seemed like an otherwise pointless exercise. Now re-dressed, we were instructed by Malvolio once again to sit up straight, keeping just as we were until his return. He left, and we waited. And waited. Awkward shuffling commenced. A clever member of the audience shouted out, "Come back, Malvolio! All is forgiven!" Crouch had sacrificed his applause so that Malvolio might have his revenge on the audience, and by extension, Sir Toby. We never knew when the play had ended—and still don't. We never knew when it had started, for that matter, since Malvolio had been on the stage waiting for us since we arrived and the black box space used universal lighting throughout.

By examining Malvolio's motivations for clues as to why he may have been such a target for abuse in the world of *Twelfth Night*, *I, Malvolio* confirms that this character is in fact deserving of dislike, but not for the reasons one might assume. While Malvolio spends the adaptation accusing and coercing the audience into playing the role of the bully, as the Puritan valet he has far greater bullying to answer for—in upholding the social norms and mechanizing aristocratic hierarchy—than his audience. By exploring the zone where humor transforms into hate, *I, Malvolio* asks us to consider what is to be gained by troubling the rule-makers.

## CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL + CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER SILENT SHAKESPEARE

featuring Judith Buchanan



Still from "Romeo and Juliet" (Fox, 1916)

### Silent Film's Visual Poetry

*Regina Buccola*

On Monday, June 6, Chicago Shakespeare Theater and the Chicago Humanities Festival partnered to bring Judith Buchanan, Professor of Film and Literature at the University of York, to the Music Box Theatre for a delightful 90-minute, multi-media presentation devoted to Shakespeare on silent film. In introducing Professor Buchanan, Chicago Humanities Festival Board Chair Clark Hulse observed that it might seem oxymoronic, given the emphasis placed on Shakespeare's language (as both poet and assiduous neologist), to consider his oeuvre performed in silence. Buchanan echoed this sentiment in her opening remarks, but assured us that the silent celluloid would have a poetry all its own, which proved to be true in her captivating collaboration with actors Erika Haaland and Joe Bianco, and musician Matt Deitchman.

Buchanan framed her lecture, part of the Shakespeare 400 Chicago festivities, by invoking the corresponding celebrations for the tercentenary in 1916, including dramatic readings by Haaland and