

# Malvolio' legwear in *Twelfth Night* in the Elizabethan Culture and Society: Color Symbolism of Yellow

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## 1. Introduction

In most of Shakespeare's plays, there are subplots in addition to the main plot, and they interact with each other to create deep dramatic effects. Even the minor characters play an important role in each play as well as the main characters. Among such meaningful characters, I would like to focus on Malvolio, a sub character in the masterpiece of Shakespearean comedy, *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602).

*Twelfth Night* is a comedy of mistaken identity, especially the love triangle between Viola, dressed as a eunuch, Duke Orsino and the countess Olivia. In the subplot, the sub characters except Malvolio, who are Maria, Olivia's maid, Sir Toby, Olivia's nephew, Sir Andrew, a wooer for Olivia, and Feste, Olivia's clown are having a midnight binge at Olivia's residence. Because of Malvolio's constant strictness like a puritan, he is antagonized, and they join together to try to make Malvolio an object of folly.

There are two subplots in *Twelfth Night* concerning Malvolio. One is let him wear yellow stockings and crossed garters. To make fool of Malvolio, Maria copies Olivia's handwriting, sending him a love letter pretending to be addressed to Malvolio, to get him to be merry and write instructions on how to behave. Malvolio, who seriously takes the letter's advice to wear yellow stockings and crossed garters and puts it into practice, is ridiculed by all of the subplot characters, and Olivia thinks Malvolio turns to be mad. The other plot is that Malvolio is locked in the dark room because he was thought to have gone crazy following the instructions to wear yellow stockings and crossed garters. Maria, Feste and Sir Toby, who entrusts with his care, despise Malvolio in many ways, such as "the devil" (4. 2. 27), because Malvolio is dressed in weird yellow stockings and crossed garters. Then, the sub characters make fun of Malvolio's asking for help. This

may represent puritan bullying because these affairs start with Maria's lines, "he is a kind of puritan." (2.3.119). Finally, when Malvolio is let out of the room, he says; "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.354) and Malvolio leaves the play. (1)

During the twentieth century, researchers on *Twelfth Night* focused on studies of Malvolio in a carnival-like world and interpreted him through the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and seasonal festivals, as typified by C.L. Barber's. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (1966) However, recent advances in the study of Elizabethan material culture and historical research have developed the various aspects of society at the time, and studies that look at Malvolio as both a cultural and social construction have become the mainstream of Shakespearean criticism. In addition, researches have advanced as represented by Patrick Collinson's article; "The Theatre Constructs Puritanism" which seeks Elizabethan Puritans was made by theatres or societies at the time. (2) There have been many issues related to puritanism which was very controversial at that time, however, I will concentrate the color symbolism of yellow in this article to show how yellow stockings contribute constructing the unique quality of Malvolio.

To pursue the significance of Malvolio's yellow stockings by using the color symbolism of yellow, I would like to focus on a few things about legs first. There are more references to legs in the subplot than in the main plot. The subplot's leg-related references are mainly to Malvolio's yellow stockings and crossed garters, but in addition there are many leg references to Sir Andrew.

In particular, the first scene that references about legs appears in Act 1, scene 3. Sir Toby praises Sir Andrew's legs as follows:

Sir Toby: What is thy excellence in a galliard, knight?

Sir Andrew: Faith, I can cut a caper.

Sir Toby: And I can cut the mutton to't.

Sir Andrew: And I think I have the back-trick simply as strong as any man in Illyria.

Sir Toby: Wherefore are these things hid? Are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture? .....I did think, by the excellent constitution of thy

leg, it was formed under the star of a galliard.

Sir Andrew: Ay, 'tis strong, and it does indifferent well in a dun-coloured stock.  
(1, 3, 97-110)

Also, we can see references to legs in relation to Feste by Sir Andrew: “I had rather than forty shillings I had such a leg, and so sweet a breath to sing, as the fool has.” (2, 3, 17-19) Thus, in addition to Malvolio’s yellow stockings and crossed garters, legs appear very often in the subplot, indicating that they are getting a lot of attention.

The fact that legwork like dance and steps, as well as the beautifulness of the legs, are attracting attention naturally leads one to believe that attention will be paid to legwear as well. One of the reasons for the focus on the legs is the structure of the stage at that



Viewpoint of the stage from the front row of the yard at Shakespeare’s Globe (photo taken by the author on September 22, 2023)

time. When a play is performed on the high platform of an amphitheater's thrusting stage, the audience's view point is naturally close to the legs.

The stage ground is at eye level because the stage is very high. Therefore, the distance between the audience's eyes and the actor's legs is very close.

Also, dance classes were fairly popular along with swordsmanship at that time in London, and gallants, fashionable gentlemen, were sensitive to trends and came to the theater to see what kind of shoes and stockings the actors would wear. (Korda 91) Since there were no actresses at the time and the female roles were played by boy actors, it was thought that the costumes served as symbols and that the audience came to see the gorgeous costumes. (Lublin 1)

There is no mention of legs in the main plot, and descriptions of the upper body, including the face and voice appear. When Orsino praises Viola, he says:

Diana's lip

Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe

Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,

And all is semblative a woman's part. (1, 4, 30-33)

Also when Olivia meets Viola who disguised as Cesario, Olivia says to her maid Maria, "Give me my veil; come throw it o'er my face." (1, 5, 137)

The fact that there are no references to the legs in the main plot, but only to the upper body, emphasizes the large number of leg statements in the subplots. While the main plot is full of references to the upper body, the subplot is full of references to legs, which can be seen as a focus on the lower half of the body and a sexual image which is related one of the symbolic meanings of the color yellow.

Especially in this article, I will focus on Malvolio's signature legwear, yellow stockings. To pursue why his stockings had to be yellow, I would like to look at the color symbolism of yellow and what it means when it is associated with legwear. A love letter by Maria to Malvolio, written in imitation of Olivia's handwriting, makes Malvolio look like a laughingstock. In the letter, there are instructions to wear yellow stockings and crossed garters, and although Maria says in the play that she chose the color yellow

because it is the color Olivia dislikes. She says to Sir Toby:

If you will then see the fruits of the sport, mark his first approach before my lady. He will come to her in yellow stockings, and 'tis a colour she abhors, and cross-gartered, a fashion she detests; (II, v, 164-166)

It can be said that yellow had a deeper meaning than just being a color Olivia doesn't like. This is because colors are assigned symbolic meanings.

Before we get into the yellow, looking at Malvolio's crossed garters first. They were said to have been used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Puritans, scholarly men, squires, servants, lovers, gentlemen, courtiers, and others who wanted to look especially well-groomed. (Linthicum 92) Maria chose the crossed garters as a Malvolio bully as Olivia disliked the fashion. But it is not just a fashion Olivia dislikes, it has a deeper meaning for Shakespeare, as it was used by Puritans and people who wanted to be seen as a serious person.

## 2. Yellow at the Elizabethan Society

In pranks on Malvolio of the sub plot, he is instructed to wear yellow stockings by the love letter written by Maria pretending to be Olivia in Act 2, Scene 5. She writes in the letter; "Remember who commanded thy yellow stockings and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered: I say, remember." (2, 5, 126-128) Maria provides instructions on legs which are stockings and crossed garters in a fake love letter. And they indicate the color of the stockings as yellow. As the focus on legwear has meaning, so it is believed that the color of the stockings also has it.

We may find the reason for that in Michel Pastoureau's fine work of color symbolism: *Yellow— The History of a Color* (2019), "at the end of the Middle Ages, the number of vices associated with yellow continued to grow." (111) He emphasizes the specific meanings of yellow as follows:

Of course, all the colors are ambivalent and each possesses its good and bad

aspects, but no other color, not even black, presents such an imbalance. Only when yellow is likened to gold is it considered positively; when considered alone, simply for itself, it is always negative. (111)

Thus, every color has a symbolic meaning, however, especially yellow, it is a color with many negative aspects' characteristics. To clarify the reason that why Shakespeare chose yellow for Malvolio's stockings, I would like to examine the quality of yellow. In introduction, I mentioned the importance of costume and legwear, focusing on the material aspects of plays in the Elizabethan England. Based on this, I would like to discuss what the color yellow means at first, and then look at how yellow has been used in literature. Next is to identify the presence of yellow in Shakespeare's works and advocate the significance of Malvolio's yellow stockings.

Two things come to mind when we think of yellow stockings in the sixteenth century England. One is the yellow stockings of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. The other is the yellow stockings of Children's uniform at Christ's Hospital, which opened on November 21, 1552 and was officially founded on June 26, 1553. (Giese 235) It is a royal charter public school located south of Horsham, West Sussex. Since its establishment, Christ's Hospital has been a charitable school whose main purpose is to provide children from poor backgrounds with better educational opportunities. They still wear yellow stockings as their uniform even now.

The reason why stockings of Christ's Hospital were yellow is described in the "History of the Uniform" on the school's official website, along with the reason for the blue coat at the time:

There has been much speculation as to why blue and yellow was chosen. It was thought that both these colour dyes were not expensive, and blue and yellow could also have been chosen to distinguish the children in the care of Christ's Hospital from those attending other schools. The linings of the coats were dyed yellow and their 'stockings' were always knee length and also dyed yellow.

It was found that the yellow color was chosen because the cost of dyeing the color took

precedence over color symbolism here, and also to differentiate the school from others. Therefore, in the case of the yellow stockings in Christ's hospital, yellow is not considered to have any nefarious meaning at all.

The fact that this uniform has remained unchanged for more than 450 years also suggests that the yellow stockings at Christ's hospital do not have any nefarious meaning.

### 3. Various Meaning of Yellow Symbolism

On the other hand, what meaning is hidden in "yellow" of Malvolio's stockings? To discuss the significance of Malvolio's yellow stockings, the various studies of material culture of early modern England will. Before beginning to clarify the reason why Malvolio's stocking is yellow, I would like to look at the color symbolism of yellow at first.

Yellow has a tradition of rich color symbolism. Michel Pastoureau divides yellow into six definitions in *Dictionnaire des couleurs de notre temps* (1999). The first is as the color of light and heat. The second is as the color of prosperity and wealth. The third is as the color of joy and energy. There is no negative meaning to these three. However, the other three definitions have nothing to do with gold and they have negative meanings. The first of the bad meanings, that is the fourth of the six definitions, is the color of sickness and madness. Then fifth is the color of falsehood and betrayal. And finally, the sixth definition is as the color of decay, melancholy, and autumn. (Pastoureau *Dictionnaire* 62) It might be understood Malvolio's yellow stocking by focusing on the color symbolism of yellow that leads to these negative meanings.

Moreover, Pastoureau states that envy is the first vice associated with yellow, and then lying, treachery, hypocrisy, and betrayal are related to the color. (Pastoureau *Yellow* 111) The fact that yellow has long been associated with vices suggests that yellow was commonly recognized as the color of vice by audiences at that time *Twelfth Night* was performed. Yellow also became the color of heresy and rebellion:

the guilty one's coat of arms was painted backward or hung from gallows in a public space for all to see; then the culprit himself was depicted on the walls of his own residence in humiliating positions or scenes; finally the residence

itself was painted, partially or totally in yellow. This last ritual, initially reserved for counterfeiters or forgers, gradually expanded to heretics, relapsed heretics, and those guilty of crimes against the prince or the public peace. (Pastoureau *Yellow* 117)

It is also clear from this slanderous use of yellow by people in the society that the image of yellow as a bad color was attached to people at the time even in their daily life.

Since the Middle Ages, the color yellow has also been considered “the color of the Jews”, and after the Council of Lateran in 1215, all European countries commonly required Jews to wear the yellow mark, in order to prevent Christians from mistakenly identifying them as Jews. The reason for this was to prevent Christians from mistakenly identifying themselves as Jews. In Venice in the sixteenth century, Jewish doctors, with few exceptions, usually had to wear a ‘bareta zala’ (yellow rimless hat). (Ito 123)

Prostitutes were also required to wear yellow as a sign of “sluttiness”, and in 1564, prostitutes were required to wear a yellow veil or at least a yellow ribbon the width of one finger. (Ito 125) Thus, it can be seen that yellow has been used since the Middle Ages as the color of those excluded from society.

Also, Christ’s Hospital website states that the yellow stockings on the school uniform originated because it was cheaper to dye them yellow. However, since the school is attended by children from poor backgrounds, it is possible that yellow was used to signify abandonment or exclusion.

There is an old rhyme in Scotland. “Green’s greaf, and yellow’s forsaken.” (3) Queen Anne, the last monarch of England and Scotland, the first monarch of Great Britain and Queen of Ireland, who brought about the union of these kingdoms, states;

Tawny and Black, my courtly colours be,  
Tawny because forsake I am, I weare,  
Black since mine Alba’s Love is dead to me. (4)

Thus, yellow has been used as a color of exclusion and abandonment on many fronts.

*Twelfth Night* is a comedy, and while most of the characters have happy endings.



However, Malvolio is laughed at by everyone, locked up and ends the play with an angry, which also shows that he is an object of exclusion. In the next paragraph, I will focus on the negative image of yellow from western literature.

#### 4. Yellow in Western Literature

In western literature, yellow is used in a particularly negative sense except when it is associated with gold. Two characteristic folklores in which yellow specifically appears. One is the seventeenth century French fairy tale “The Yellow Dwarf” written by Madame d’ Aulnoy (1650-1705), who was a French author known for her literary fairy tales. One day the princess encounters a lion. A yellow dwarf comes along and offers to help her if she marries him, and she agrees. However, the princess falls in love with the gold-mining king, and the angry yellow dwarf kills the king, and the princess dies of grief.

Looking at the illustration painted by Walter Crane, who was an English artist and book illustrator, in 1875, it is clear that the yellow dwarf is not the cuddly dwarfs in Snow



[“The Yellow Dwarf rescues the Princess from the Lions”]  
<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/the-yellow-dwarf-rescues-the-princess-from-the-lions> (August 1, 2023)

White made by Walt Disney Animation studio, but an ugly looking one.

It can be considered the three reasons why the dwarf is yellow. The first reason is that the dwarf is in the orange tree. The second reason is the image of yellow skin which suggests Asian. In the seventeenth century Europe at the time Madame d' Aulnoy wrote the fairy tale, there may have still been an element of discrimination against yellow-skinned Asians as being from an uncivilized land. And the last reason and the most demanding is yellow color symbolism. As I mentioned earlier, yellow is often connected with vice, so especially this yellow may be used for the dwarf as the color of jealousy.

Another yellow example is "Le Roman de Renart" (Reynard the Fox) written around 1180 in France. Renart, a mischievous fox, accidentally falls into the yellow tub of a dye house while on the run. His originally red body turns yellow, and after successfully disguising himself, Renart continues his mischief.

If people were to hide behind something today, they might opt for a less conspicuous black color. Here, however, Renart change is depicted using yellow. Physically, yellow is a bright and flashy color, so it is not a color that is easy to be recognized or to escape from. Therefore, yellow in this case also seems to be deeply related to the color symbolism. The fact that Renart is red and originally got away with a crime, as well as the fact that he also commits lies and betrayals during the course of the story, also makes yellow appear to be a more vicious color than red. The fact that this folklore was produced at the beginning of the Middle Ages also suggests that the color yellow has become associated with evil in literary works as well as the color of exclusion in society, for example Jews.

## 5. Yellow in Shakespearean Works

There have long been stories like "The Yellow Dwarf" and "Le Roman de Renart" that utilize the image of yellow, which is negative in European folklore. Then, what about Shakespeare's works?

It is noteworthy to see how much and how Shakespeare used yellow in his plays. According to the Concordance of Shakespeare's complete works by George Mason University, "yellow" is used 32 times in Shakespeare's works. Ten of those times are in

*Twelfth Night*. The next play in which the word yellow is used most often is *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yellow is used four times in the play. Then, three times in the Sonnets, twice each in *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Timon of Athen*, and once each in the other 11 plays. This difference in the number of times yellow is used shows the importance of yellow in *Twelfth Night*. In his works, "yellow" is used to represent the color of the season, such as "yellow leaf" (5, 3, 23) in *Macbeth* and "yellow autumn", "yellow leaves" in his sonnets. There were also instances of yellow for creatures and plants, such as "yellow cowship cheeks" (5, 1, 314) in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and "cuckoo-buds of yellow hue" (5, 2, 312) in *Love's Labour's Lost*. And it is sometimes used when yellow is associated with gold, such as "yellow sands", 'yellow gold', and "your French-crown-color beard, your perfit yellow" (1, 2, 76) in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and so on.

The last one I mentioned, "your perfit yellow" *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is particularly interesting. When a weaver Bottom takes on the role of Pyramus in the play "Pyramus and Thisbe" and is not sure what kind of fake beard he should wear. He says, "I will discharge it in either your straw-color beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-color beard, your perfit yellow" (1, 2, 93-96) Bottom utters straw pale yellow, reddish brown, crimson, and a bright yellow false beard like the French gold coins, indicating that the variation of yellow to red coloration at the end of the sixteenth century was enriched with the development of heraldry. (Matsuda (2021) 58) It turns out that there are many different types of yellow.

Up to this point, yellow has been used in a positive sense, roughly associated with gold. On the other hand, Shakespeare also used it in a negative way, in addition to *Twelfth Night*. There are a couple of examples that are particularly tied to the yellow of this vice. The first "yellow Iachimo" (2, 5, 14) in *Cymbeline*, a dastardly Roman who tries to seduce her in order to make her husband Posthumus doubt Imogen's chastity, and here yellow is associated with jealousy. And in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, "I will possess him with yellowness", yellow (yellowness) is used as the very meaning of jealousy.

And finally, it is "a green and yellow melancholy" (2, 4, 109) that appears in *Twelfth Night*. These words were spoken by Viola when she told Orsino about unfulfilled love story:

Orsino: And What's her history?

Viora: A blank, my lord. She never told her love,

But let concealment like a worm i'th'bud

Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,

And with a green and yellow melancholy

She sat like Patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. (2, 4, 105-111)

As Pastoureau stated, yellow is the color of madness in relation to green from thirteenth century (Pastoureau (1992) 62), and here, yellow appears with green. Misako Matsuda states in 'Representations of the Color Green in Shakespeare' in *Seijo Bungei No. 225* (2013), 'Green which symbolizes joyful love, however, connotes the another aspect of love in the English literary tradition; lechery, inconstancy and infidelity'. (138) Also, the annotation to this line, Elizabeth Donno mentions "the pallor typical of a melancholic lover, according to Jaques Ferrand's Erotomania, is either a mixture and yellow or of white, yellow and green." (Donno 106) as the meaning of the word, which conveys Viola's troubled love life.

Nine of the ten appearances of yellow in *Twelfth Night* refer to Malvolio's yellow stockings. However, Yellow here is used in terms of the melancholy of Viola's infatuation, and is the only yellow that has nothing to do with Malvolio. At the same time, this yellow used in Viola's love affair is also the first yellow to appear in *Twelfth Night*. Therefore, it can be thought that the melancholy and insanity of the yellow color here gives a more insane and negative impression to Malvolio's yellow stockings, which appear many times afterwards in the play.

## 6. Malvolio's Yellow Stockings

Since Malvolio's yellow stockings have no apparent relationship to gold, we can assume that they fit into one of the bad meanings of yellow. In the fourth yellow meaning, as I mentioned earlier, Pastoureau defines as the color of disease and madness. He also states it is the color of eccentricity and disguise. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio

is treated as crazy after wearing yellow stockings and is abused in various ways. In particular, when he is locked in a dark room in Act 4, scene 2, he has a conversation with Feste, who is dressed as Sir Topas, in which Feste calls Malvolio “Satan” (4, 2, 26) and “devil” (4, 2, 27). Also, in Act 5, scene 1, Feste refers to Malvolio as “Balzebub” (5, 1, 268) (he wanted to say Beelzebub, it means devil), “madman” (5, 1, 270), “madness” (5, 1, 276), and in many other ways as a madman and a villain. Thus, he is treated unfairly and as a madman by the people around him because of the change in his clothes. This shows that yellow, with its color symbolism of madness, was the appropriate color for Malvolio, who was treated as a madman, and that Shakespeare had to use yellow more than any other color.

I have mentioned the color symbolism of yellow with various examples. However, when yellow is associated with stockings, it adds other meanings. Loreen L. Giese, states that some early modern Londoners understood the wearing of yellow stockings to signal illicit sexuality and marital betrayal. (Giese 235)

The ballad called “A Merry Jest of John Tomson, and Jackaman His Wife, Whose Jealousy Was Justly the Cause of All Their Stife” was entered in the Stationer’s Register in 1586. This ballad, is a lament for the husband. The ballad begins with the husband’s desire to return to celibacy due to his wife’s jealousy. And he describes his wife’s behavior when she is jealous:

When I was a Batchelour  
I liv’d a merry life;  
But now I am a married man,  
and troubled with a wife,  
I cannot doe as I have done,  
because I live in feare;  
If I goe but to islington,  
my wife is watching there.  
Give me my yellow hose againe,  
give me my yellow hose;  
For now my wife she watcheth me—

see younder! Where she goes.

(Roxburghe, 2:137)

For yellow love is too-too bad,  
without all wit or pollicie;  
And too much love hath made her mad,  
and fill'd her full of jealousye.  
Shée thinkes I am in love with those  
I speake to, passing by;  
That makes her weare the yellow hose  
I gave her for to dye.

(Roxburghe, 2:141)

In the former part, the husband wears yellow stockings as an expression of his desire to return to his single life. In the late part from “For yellow love is too-too bad”, the wife wears yellow stockings because she is jealous and worried that her husband is cheating on her. Here, the yellow stockings represent marital misconduct and negative feelings. The wife wears yellow stockings to stop her husband’s unfaithful behavior. This ballad was registered in the late sixteenth century, shortly before 1601, when *Twelfth Night* was firstly performed. This means that by the time *Twelfth Night* was being performed, yellow stockings were associated with jealousy and especially marital misconduct in the society of the time.

This situation is very applicable to the relationship between Olivia and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. Olivia, who had avoided seeing men after the death of her father and brother, and her steward Malvolio would have had a good relationship as the only men close to her. However, with the arrival of Viola (pretending eunuch Cesario), Olivia becomes infatuated with Viola. The fact that Malvolio wears yellow stockings in the subsequent scene suggests that the audience who came to see the play *Twelfth Night* at the time may have understood that Malvolio was jealous of Olivia’s infidelity, like the wife in the ballad. In other words, Malvolio fits the description of the ballad’s jealous wife. When Olivia’s father and brother die and Malvolio is the only man close to her, and he thinks his

master Olivia likes him and dreams of marrying her:

Malvolio: 'Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she (i.e., Olivia) did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than any one else that follows her. What should I think on't? (II, v, 20-24)

However, a love rival Cesario (disguising Viola) appears. Olivia, on the other hand, is the husband of the ballad. because after Cesario appears and she fall in love with Cesario. Here, Malvolio is applied to the wife and Olivia to the husband, indicating that a gender reversal is taking place.

He has strong class aspirations in addition to his infatuation with Olivia. He talks to himself in fantasies of what he would do if he were married:

To be Count Malvolio!  
Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state—  
Calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown, having come from a day-bed, where I have left Olivia sleeping—  
And then to have the humor of state; and after a demure travel of regard—  
telling them I know my place, as I would they should do theirs—to ask for my kinsman Toby— ... (2, 5, 30-46)

Malvolio fantasizes about marrying Olivia. His desire to rise in rank is conveyed in these lines. Shortly after this fantasy, however, he picks up a fake love letter from Olivia written by Maria actually, instructing him to wear yellow stockings and cross garters. Malvolio follows the instructions as instructed, dreaming of marrying Olivia, but this makes him look like a madman.

M. Channing Linthicum says that “yellow was worn at court at the time of *Twelfth Night*.” (Linthicum 87) Also, In *The Fawn: Or, Parasitaster* written by John Marston (1604), the page who has pleaded with Puttotta to accept his master’s attention reminds her,

“He may in time grow great and a well-graced courtier, for he wears yellow already.” (4, 1, 44-46) Although yellow has color symbolism associated with vice, it was a color commonly used by courtesans, and Malvolio’s desire to rise in the ranks may have led him to follow the love letter’s instructions without much resistance. But to those around him, including Olivia, it must have seemed ridiculous and crazy for the stern Malvolio to suddenly wear yellow stockings and cross garters.

Here, there is a reversal of hope. He wears yellow stockings and cross garters because he dreams of rising through the ranks himself, but Olivia and everyone else laughs at him, treats him like a lunatic, locks him in a dark room, and treats him badly. Thus, Malvolio, in particular, wears yellow stockings, which puts him in the position of a jealous woman like the ballad’s wife, and instead of rising in the ranks, he becomes the laughing stock of everyone.

## 7. Conclusion

Malvolio wears yellow stockings because he is instructed by Maria in a love letter, in which she imitates handwriting of Olivia. Maria says that she chose yellow because it was the color her master Olivia disliked. However, we now know that there were many factors that led Shakespeare to choose yellow.

While all colors have a double-sided nature, yellow in particular is associated with negative and vicious color symbolism. Even before Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*, yellow was considered the color of heresy in the Middle Ages, and yellow has since been used as a color of exclusion. Shakespeare uses yellow most frequently in *Twelfth Night*, but he also uses yellow in his other works as a vice, such as jealousy, except when yellow is associated with gold. In addition to the negative color symbolism of yellow, when this color is associated with stockings, it has been found to have sexual connotations.

In addition to jealousy, when yellow is associated with stockings, it represents marital misconduct. Thus, it can be applied to Malvolio’s wife who is jealous of Olivia’s new love with Cesario (disguising Viola). Malvolio, with his strictness and desire to rise in the ranks, wears yellow stockings and cross garters in hopes of marrying Olivia and rising in the ranks, but ironically, he is treated like a madman because of it. This must have been



interesting for audiences at the time. And since England was Elizabethan at the time, the colors of the flag of Spain, Queen Elizabeth's sworn enemy, might have been chosen as Olivia's dislike.

By wearing yellow stockings and crossed garters, Malvolio is excluded from the fellowship in both the main plot and the subplot. Yellow as the color of jealousy represents Malvolio's feelings towards Olivia and his desire to rise in class. The use of yellow as a color of exclusion, particularly for Jews, may also suggest that Malvolio is the object of exclusion in the play. Also, Maria's comment about Malvolio that "Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan." (2, 3, 134) started a prank on him and he was bullied. In England at the time, the Church of England was the mainstream of the society. The fact that puritans were definitely excluded in the society suggests that yellow was the right color for Malvolio's stockings in the play. Furthermore, he is the only one who gets bullied and cries with anger: "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!" (5, 1, 354) and then leaves the play while everyone else has a happy ending. This last scene also shows that he is excluded, and it is hard to think of a more suitable color for his stockings than yellow.

## Notes

- (1) The quotations from *Twelfth Night* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. By Donno Elizabeth, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 2004, 2017).
- (2) For detailed discussion, see Patrick Collinson, "The Theatre Constructs Puritanism", *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576-1649*, eds. by David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157-69.
- (3) C. Chambers, *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, quoted from Lean's *Collectanea*.
- (4) For detailed discussion, see M. Channing Linthicum, "Malvolio's Cross-gartered Yellow Stocking", *Modern Philology* vol.25 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927) se. 87-93.

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