

# Shakespeare and Culture Politics and Society



Selected Papers Presented in the National Seminar  
on

**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2016**

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# Repartees on Apparent Ignorance: A Study of Feste

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Shakespeare: a man who knows the importance of all emotions in life and tries to accept all the happiness and struggles of fate. Through his works he encouraged his audience to admit all these emotions, happiness and difficulties. Unknowingly his audience accepts the nature of life through his plays. As a man of wisdom, he discerns the prominence of laughter, humour and wit in life. Now, the modern directors, having all sorts of specialties like 3D, Dolby, High Definition cameras couldn't satisfy their audience. But without even a curtain the Elizabethan audience relish and learned the life in theatre.

The clown is a person whose work is to evoke laughter with his ignorance. A fool evokes laughter through his wit and humour. Shakespeare's Feste in *Twelfth Night*, is a court jester of the countess Olivia. From the very name we can understand the festive spirit of the character. He is the keen observer of men and matters. His character is a combination of wise and witty. He is a licensed critic of the other characters in the play. He is the mouthpiece of Shakespeare and he expresses his own ideas and reflection through Feste.

The character Feste is a fool and court jester but he is the intelligent character in the play. Except Malvolio who is sick of self-love Feste is eagerly welcome by the graceful Olivia, love-sick Orsino, Sir Toby. He exhibits the foolishness of other characters through his wit and quick repartee. Like other fools, he wears the parti-coloured dress of a clown 'but not in a brain'. He says, "I wear not motley in my brain. Good Madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool" (1.5.49-50).



From these lines we can understand Shakespeare choose him to prove the foolishness of other characters in the play. We can also see Feste call Orsino a fickle: he says, "for thy mind is a very opal!" (2.4.77-78). His desire to prove the love of Orsino for Olivia is very apparent in his words. He compares the mind of Orsino to Opal. Because, Opal is a stone the colour of which can easily change. Like that Orsino's mind is also changeable and fickle. He always sermonizes on the weakness of the other characters. When Olivia is in grief of his brother's death, he makes Olivia to realize the reality of life. He says,

CLOWN. I think his soul is in hell, Madonna.

OLIVIA. I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLOWN. The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. (1.4.60)

In a short period of time he changes the reluctant nature of Olivia through his intelligent words. Like this, he impresses Viola also. When Viola asks to know whether he is Olivia's fool, he replies that Olivia has no fools and that she won't keep fools till he is married. He also says that husbands are the bigger fools.

VIOLA. Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?

CLOWN. No, indeed, sir; the Lady Olivia has no folly: she will keep no fool, sir, till she be married; and fools are as like husbands as pilchards are to herrings - the husband's the bigger. (3.1.31-34)

When Olivia calls him 'a dry fool', he immediately replies that if the drink is given to him he won't be dry. With his quick and witty reply he proves that Olivia is a fool.

OLIVIA. Go to, you're a dry fool; I'll no more of you: besides,

You grow dishonest

CLOWN. Two faults, Madonna, that drink and good counsel will



Amend: forgive the dry fool drink, then is the fool not dry . . . (1.5.36-37)

In the play itself Viola confesses and praise that he is good enough to play the role of a fool. She says, "This fellow is wise enough to play to the fool" (3.1.57). At this perspective, Viola is a mouthpiece of Shakespeare. Feste is the fool character which contains all the essential qualities of a fool. So, the character of Feste is the benchmark of the fools.

Feste is a wise observer of the play *Twelfth Night* and he reveals the foolish human nature to the audience. He escapes from the dramatic hurricane that throws the other characters around. The work of a fool is not that much easy that need intelligence and at the same time understanding of the character which they kidding. They have to make their audience to laugh, immediate word pun, supply readily both songs and witty replies, moralize and sermonize to the characters and the audience as well. In this approach Feste does his work undoubtedly. He expresses the foolishness and ignorance of the other characters to audience without any vacillation. The Elizabethan audiences are lucky enough to be sermonized in the theatre itself.

#### Works Cited

- Bryson, Bill. *Shakespeare*. UK: William Collins, 2016. Print.  
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