

# Twelfth night – feste's self

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Feste is an observer. He sees through people. Though he's a kind of entertainer, who will only perform for money, what he chooses to sing to people is intentionally relevant and disturbing to them. People find the truth very hard to deal with, for example, 'Peace, you rogue... here comes my lady'. This story shows people avoiding the truth at every level.

Especially since they are being called 'fools' or 'clowns', and not really taken seriously. For example, the fool in King Lear was constantly being threatened with hangings and beatings, but this was only as he was a 'witty fool'. Again with Feste in Twelfth Night, who also is threatened with hangings, due to his absence. But Feste does not fear this threat, and in fact makes a joke of it; mocking Maria and using a sexual pun at the same time.

This confidence comes from the fact that it wasn't their job to simply provide amusement, but also to make critical comments and provide advice, as Olivia asks him: 'What's a drunken man like, fool?'. And because he is an 'allowed fool' he was able to say what he thinks, without fear of punishment, 'there's no slander in an allowed fool'.

Since the only relationship that involves Feste, is that between Olivia's family, he has the ability to mediate between the whole cast. He is regarded as a close friend to Olivia, 'What is a drunken man like, fool?', as well as Sir Toby, by engaging in their 'folly' and songs.

But he also has the ability to distance himself from everyone when needs be. Because he is constantly mocking people with puns and soliloquy, the audience gets the feeling that he doesn't really feel close to them.

As well as being incredibly comic, Feste is probably the most perceptive character in the play. He comments on people in ways other people overlook, whether be their appearance or their 'mind'. For example, in Act ii: iv, he point blank tells Orsino what he thinks of him, saying his 'mind is very opal' and 'the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta' (a silk which changes colour). The joke here is Feste telling Orsino that he is very fickle and has a very changeable mood, so changeable that he should have matching clothes.

He then goes on to say that he is so changeable that he would sail around the world to justify purposeless busyness. Feste hardly knows Orsino, who in turn scarcely knows Feste, but for Feste to cast this view shows his perceptiveness. This view is so accurate, that it leads Orsino to make Cesario go to Olivia's and tell her that his love is 'more noble than the world'.

Furthermore, he also suspiciously notices Viola, and is the only one start suspecting her, 'send thee a beard' he says, hinting that he knows of her 'such disguise'. Feste's perception was depicted in Trevor Nunn's production of Twelfth Night, where he has Feste give Viola a necklace. A necklace that she abandoned in Act 1 scene 2, on the seacoast, showing that he has always known of Viola's situation.

This interpretation of Feste means that throughout the play, Feste has always known of Viola's situation and was always playing along, again showing his nature.

Feste's Language:

Feste has a very sophisticated way of speaking that allows him to climb up and down the social ladders of Illyria and be able to talk with Lord Orsino, Sir Toby and Fabian. This becomes significant when he is able to get himself out of situations or even to make other people react, which may otherwise be tricky and use his language skills to make mockery. Such as the 'the more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brothers soul...' a. This is the first scene that he is present in and he immediately proves Olivia to be a 'fool'. This kind of humour was taken kindly by Olivia and an Elizabethan audience would of enjoyed it more.

However, Feste has proved two things here, the first is that he is not 'dry' and the second that he can provide the humour if is someone does 'minister occasion to him' or invites him to 'make that good'. By getting set up for this comedy, or getting invited, the audience would get ready and find the punch line slightly more comical.

Another key figure of Feste's language, are his uses of Latin. He talks and refers a few times in Latin, and all times, he is either talking to Olivia or Orsino. This again proves his versatility talking appropriately with people and it also shows the audiences his education.

All his Latin sayings convey messages. For example, the first, to Olivia, 'cucullus non facit monachum', which refers to an overriding theme in the play; don't judge by outward appearances, as if preparing her for his foolery.

The last Latin reference is to Orsino in Act 5. 'Primo, secundo, terito is a good play...', here simply begging for a third coin.

Feste's songs do hold a dramatic function, and depending on the scene, the dramatic function changes.

One of the most dramatic things, are the songs that he sings. They are not just for entertainment, but they hold meaning and are sung for a reason. Such as when Feste asks 'would you have a love song or a song of good life'. He feels as though he has to please; it's his duty as a fool, and his song will reflect the audience's mood at this current moment in the play. Or as he said in his final song at the end of the play '... And we'll strive to please you every day.'

The meanings of Feste's songs, are always significant. They are either used to create dramatic effects or represent/ echo his feelings about a situation or a scene. In Act 2, Feste sings 'Come away, Come away, death...', a melancholy song to Orsino about a lover who dies for love, which echoes Orsino's mood and his situation. The listener can read into this as Orsino being the lover and Olivia being the 'maid', making sense as the lover is 'slain'.

The words that are used mirror what Orsino has already said, such as 'My part... share it' hold similar meaning to that in 'If music be the food of love...'.  
'If music be the food of love...'

Orsino then immediately acts on the song and tells Viola/ Cesario to go to Olivia's.

This is one example of the role of Feste; do we value what he says or laugh at what he says? Here, Orsino values what he says, we know this as he sends

Viola to go to Olivia and tell her 'that nature pranks her in attracts my soul' not her money.

However, after the song is sung, Feste then casts a point blank opinion, face-to-face of Orsino. This creates a lot of tension, especially with the use of words like 'pain' and '.. bones shall be thrown'. Here is a good example of the dramatic significance of Feste; as this scene ends in tension. This is the part where Viola nearly reveals of her true love for Orsino, and the audience think that Viola might reveal who she really is, so the audience are anticipating and waiting for Viola's next words . And the next scene starts in comic humour. The drama in each scene seems heightened due to the massive contrast.

At the end of the play, Shakespeare provides what seems to be an epilogue, like other plays, such as A Midsummer Night's Dream and All's Well That Ends Well. However, unlike these, Feste sings it. The song is about Feste growing up, about being tolerating in childhood, rejected in adult hood, unsuccessful in marriage and drunk in old age... but nothing really matters, the actors will always try an please.

Although this song is about Feste, the overall meaning of it reflects the whole play. For example, he talks about himself growing up with bad experiences, his life circle from childhood to being an old man. This is a slight re-iteration of a song he sang earlier: 'What is love... youth's a stuff will not endure', This song is telling the audience that we should enjoy the present because nobody can know what the future holds, it could be good e. g. Viola-Orsino and Sebastian-Olivia, or it could be terrible e. g. Malvolio.

Feste uses word play frequently throughout this play. These word plays, or puns, can make the audience laugh or even add to the tension so far. A good example is in Feste's first scene: 'he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours'. The first interpretation of this pun, is the word 'colours' which can mean enemy or war. So, logically, someone who is already dead, can't fear.

However, an Elizabethan audience could have heard it as 'collars' (meaning noose or hangmen's nooses) so they don't fear them. The Elizabethans enjoyed such punning jokes, and the pun itself would relax the mood. With Maria threatening Feste with death, and then Feste making the whole audience laugh. This is an example of the dramatic significance of Feste.

The role of Feste:

Feste's appearance in the play is held off until the fifth scene of act I. In this scene the reader is introduced to the clown through a conversation with Maria. In this scene his contribution to the play is revealed through: " Wit, an't be thy will, put me in good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee, do very oft prove fools, and I that am sure lack thee may pass for a wise man... better a witty fool than a foolish wit". These lines indicate that Feste's presence is not merely comic relief through foolish acts and show that the role of the fool requires much intelligence, or being a 'wise man'.

Feste's contribution to the exposure of underlying themes of love is essential to the understanding of the play's messages. The clown's most profound comments often take the form of song:

'O mistress mine, where are you roaming?... Youth's a stuff will not endure.'

It's in this song where we could possibly see Feste uncovering Viola, 'Trip no further, pretty sweeting;', where the 'pretty sweeting' may be Viola, and the 'wise man's son' is Feste. If this is so, then it suggests that Viola-Orsino may end up as 'lovers'.

This song is performed due to the requests of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for a "love-song." The song plays on the events of Twelfth Night itself. The song echoes the cheerfulness of this play and how the uncertainty of 'what's to come' shouldn't be a negative prospect as 'there lies no plenty'. Feste also foresees events that will occur later in the play. When he speaks of journeys ending "in lovers meeting," he hints at the resolution in which several characters are married.

Feste's intuition is comparable only to the perception of Viola. Because both characters are the only ones who are involved in both houses, Orsino's and Olivia's, they rival each other in their knowledge and putting their wits against each other. Namely act 3: i, where, they both delight in using word play, 'a sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit-' and later Viola saying 'I understand you sir', as if showing him that she is clever. Apparently, Viola is the only character who recognises Feste's true intelligence: " This fellow is wise enough to play the fool, and to do that craves a kind of wit... but wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit". This shows Viola's awareness of Feste and his ability to read people in order to say the right thing at the right time. Through this keen observation by Viola, she is perhaps acknowledging that the clown might even have the ability to see through her own disguise.



Although Feste never openly claims to know of Viola's deceptive dress, it is indicated that he might be on to her: " Now Jove in his next commodity of hair send thee a beard".

He's used to change the audience; if Shakespeare wanted to portray thoughts or morals, he would do so with the puns and songs Feste tells the audience. For example, Act 1: v, he says: " many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage" communicates as if you are well 'hung' then you need not love. And if we look back, to Act 1, the Latin quote refers directly to how Shakespeare felt. So, it is possible that Feste was the voice of Shakespeare, and if Shakespeare wanted to make the audience happy, for dramatic effect or other, then he might use Feste to sing a song. And when Feste says lines 359-354 in act5: i, he quotes the things that Malvolio has said, and a feeling of 'what goes around comes around'. This putting down of Malvolio would of been particularly enjoyed by the audience, because of his puritan nature. So by Feste putting down and mocking of Malvolio's nature would of caused great humour.

I detected this in act 2: iv, where we are faced with a melancholy ending about love and 'passion' then straight after, we see the trap that is set for Malvolio. This comic scene gets enhanced because the mood of the preceding scene was sorrowful and sad, but the beginning of this one is very jovial.

The plot in Twelfth Night is very convoluted. This is why fools might of been used in such plays as 'King Lear', 'All's well that ends well' and 'Two gentlemen of Verona'; to underline and reinforce important parts of the plot

to the audience, and make their songs and folly draw parallels to the play. For example, in Twelfth Night, Feste sings to Malvolio '... She loves another'. As if, Feste has seen through Malvolio and knows of his affection for Olivia, and crudely tells him there is no likelihood for him, moreover, he already must know of Olivia's affections for Viola.

With the indictment of Malvolio and other happy endings in the form of marriages, the future seems delightfully optimistic, Feste's final song lessens the hope of a completely happy ending. The refrain of this song, which states " the rain it raineth every day," insinuates that at any time the happiness that now occupies the characters in Illyria could at any time be swept away. The song as a whole seems to show maturation from innocence to experience and through this development was a continuum of " the wind and the rain." With this song, Feste seems to suggest that even as a person goes through life, with its ups and downs, he or she must remember that at any time one can end up in an unfamiliar place with a completely different life, exactly like Sebastian and Viola. There will always be unpredictability, as long as there is 'wind and the rain'.

Ironically, Feste is the only person not to be seen as the fool. Olivia is the fool, as she has fallen in love with a woman, Orisino is seen the fool, because his Viola has tricked him into thinking she is a man. Sir Andrew comes across as the fool because of his foolish remarks, like taking the word 'ass' literally and believing 'Pigrogromitus'!

This irony will add humour and dramatic irony to the audience and again make Feste look the cleverest by default. By acting the 'fool' he comes across as the wise man he is.

The 'Twelfth Night' was known as the "Feast Of Fools", which is very similar to "Feste the Fool". This seems extremely significant, due to the similarity, as the Feast of Fools always appointed a "Lord Of Ridicule". It is possible that an Elizabethan audience would have got this (intentional) similarity and therefore see Feste as this Lord Of Ridicule.

If Feste was this lord, then he would become the master of the household, for this short holiday period, and organise dances, folly, pranks and deceptions, in order to entertain the rest of the household. In this case, it would then explain Feste's songs, drunkenness, writing of letters to Malvolio and of course dressing up as Sir Topas.