

Feste analysis in the first and second act of twelfth night

Law



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Fools in Shakespeare's plays appear often. In *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* and many others, the buffoon is represented as an eclectic person paid to say the truth in a comic manner through songs and jokes. Even though Feste in *Twelfth Night* does not speak frequently in the first and second acts, he says enough for us to see that he is an observant and clever man. Firstly, well associated with the spirit of the twelfth night, the night where society reverses roles, Feste reflects joy. His name is a great example of the happiness he expresses. Feste sounds a lot like the French word « fete », which means party.

In every scene he plays in the second act, he starts to sing. He says to Orsino that he takes « pleasure in singing » which truly proves his delight in what he does. In other words, he is a man that likes his job. But the name Feste associates with the twelfth night in a traditional way too. He is allowed to say whatever he wishes because he is a licensed fool, as we found out when Olivia referred to him as « an allowed fool ». This freedom of speech fits in well with the reversal of roles involved in the 12th night ritual. When Olivia orders « take away the fool », he answers « take away the lady ».

This disrespectful answer would have ended the employment of any of the other servants of the lady. But, even considering the fixed hierarchical structure of society at the time, Feste can say whatever he thinks as long as he says it in song or in a comic manner. Moreover, Feste's job contrasts with his abilities. Since he is a fool, we expect him to be illiterate, certainly not very perspicacious, but on the contrary, he turns out to be the most intelligent character of the play. This is shown by his developed sense of repartee hidden through his role of jester.

<https://assignbuster.com/feste-analysis-in-the-first-and-second-act-of-twelfth-night/>

For example, in the last scene of the first Act, Maria criticizes Feste of having no real bravery, as he pretends to have, compared with soldiers. He answers that everyone should do what he is good at (« And those that are fools, let them use their talent. »). This response seems wise and philosophical. But Feste as a fool is obviously someone with a great sense of humor. Over five hundred years, many ideas about life and society have changed and evolved, but humor has remained universal. Feste's talent and ability is to shield himself with his persona as a fool, but to offer insights and insults of a very wise man.

He never behaves badly or in a juvenile way: playing around with food, drinks or other accessories. His only accessory is language. Scene 3 of Act 2, Sir Andrew jokes about Feste because of his status but Feste replies: « How now, my hearts! Did you never see the picture of “ We Three”? » implying that Sir Andrew, Sir Toby and himself are fools. This short answer is hilarious because Sir Andrew is wordless but the silky tone emphasize the comic feature of the quote. It seems to me that fools like Feste have two roles in Shakespeare's plays.

First, they provide comic relief to what might otherwise be a heavy, if not depressing story. We look forward to their appearance to give us an uplift from the more serious developments in the plot. Without the fool this story would have had a totally different tone, simply a depressing tragedy. Second, they are the characters with which we, the audience, identify. Yes, we too are really insightful and we too see all the foibles and vices of the characters and we too would express our thoughts and observations through

witty banter if we lived in these social circles in these times, or so we like to think.