

THE UNIFYING ROLE OF FOOLS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *AS YOU LIKE IT* AND *TWELFTH NIGHT*

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Abstract: Shakespeare makes a great contribution to develop the king's fool and adds a different dimension to the notion of foolery. Shakespeare's clowns and fools are realistic. Although Shakespeare himself never actually uses the word "reality", its presence is crucial for an assessment of his comedies and fools. In order to present this reality in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, he creates two witty fools or, more precisely, "jesters": Touchstone and Feste. They both are the fools of aristocracy who are valued by the courtiers. Since Shakespeare's fools are "realist" in a sense, they certainly play a critical role in the implementation of the task which is to expose the facts implicitly. On the one hand, they are given the crucial role of telling the truth to the audience. In other words, they act as mediators between the play and the audience. On the other hand they reconcile the characters; hence maintain the balance from beginning to end. The plays are kept in unity thanks to them. How do these fools manage to carry out such kind of a mission and, amidst all the clash of values, where do they stand? Shakespeare does not eliminate opposite ideas; rather, he provides an equilibrium by "juxtaposing" these values. In *As You Like It*, for example, there is an agreement between romantic and anti-romantic ideas. In *Twelfth Night*, likewise, the central theme is "ambivalence". There exists the clash of values throughout the play. The play is based on illusion of the lovers, however, illusion brings its own reality in the end. In the light of these contrasts, the concept of the "foolery" in two works and the relation of fools to the other characters will be touched upon herein. Besides, their unifying roles will be highlighted through examples of how Touchstone and Feste are created by Shakespeare in order to keep the harmony between appearance and reality or, in more general terms, between antithetic values.

Keywords: Shakespeare, fool, juxtaposition, unity

William Shakespeare'in *As You Like It* ve *Twelfth Night* Eserlerinde Soytarıların Birleştirici Rolü

Özet: Shakespeare, kralın soytarısını geliştirmek adına büyük bir katkı sağlar ve soytarılık kavramına yeni bir boyut getirir. Onun palyaçolarıyla soytarıları gerçekçidirler. Shakespeare'in kendisi "gerçekçilik" sözünü aslında hiç telaffuz etmese de bu kavram onun komedilerini ve soytarılarını değerlendirmede oldukça önemlidir. *As You Like It* ile *Twelfth Night*'ta bu gerçekliği sergilemek için iki akıllı soytarı, diğer bir deyişle saray soytarısı yaratır: Touchstone ve Feste. Her ikisi de saraylılar tarafından itibar gören, soyluların soytarılarıdır. Onlar bir bakıma gerçekçi olduklarından gerçekleri üstü kapalı bir biçimde seyirciye aktarmada önemli bir rol üstlenirler. Diğer taraftan da kendilerine, oyunla seyirci arasında uzlaştırıcılık görevi verilmiştir. Karakterleri yatıştırıp oyunun başından sonuna kadar dengeyi sağlamaya çalışırlar. Böylece, onlar sayesinde, oyundaki birlik bozulmaz. Bu soytarıların bunu nasıl başardığı ve bunca değer çatışmasının arasında nerede durdukları merak konusudur. Shakespeare, karşıt fikirleri ortadan kaldırmak yerine değerlerin bir arada bulunmasını (yanyanalık) sağlamaya çalışır. Örneğin, *As You Like It* eserinde romantik ve anti-romantik öğeler arasında bir uyum olduğu görülür. Aynı şekilde *Twelfth Night*'ta da ana tema "iki değerlilik"tir. Oyun, aşıkların yanılışına dayanır, ancak bu yanılışta en sonunda kendi gerçekliğini de beraberinde getirir. Bütün bu zıtlıklar göz önüne alınarak, her iki eserdeki "soytarılık" kavramı ve karakterlerin birbirleriyle olan ilişkileri bu doğrultuda ele alınacaktır. Bunun yanı sıra, Touchstone ile Feste'nin görünüşle gerçeklik arasındaki dengeyi korumak için Shakespeare tarafından nasıl yaratıldıkları da örneklerle vurgulanacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Shakespeare, soytarı, yanyanalık, birlik

1. INTRODUCTION

Who is a fool or clown in a piece of dramatic work? In terms of physical qualities, it generally conjures up an ugly, often humpbacked small man in "motley". Mentally, as the word "fool" itself suggests, he is maybe an idiot, an insane man who can barely talk or talks nothing but nonsense. No matter what the word itself reminds us of, a fool is, out of question, a comic character who plays one of the most important roles in Shakespearean tragedy and comedy. This comic figure has taken different names throughout the history of literature, such as "vice"¹, "buffoon", "court jester", "fool" or "clown". What's more, his function has changed as well. As a court jester, his purpose was to entertain the king. He only served the purpose of arousing laughter. Whatever he said and whomever he mocked, he was tolerated because he was believed to be a "fool" by nature. That's why this kind of fool was characterized as a "natural" or an "allowed" fool in the Middle Ages. With the coming of Renaissance, he became the faithful fellow of the king with his ability to see the reality. He was not a pure fool anymore; rather, his unique wit blended with his clownish appearance and comic interpretation of the events made him an "artificial" fool, who became a touchstone of the comedies and tragedies after the fifteenth century.

However, can we separate the concepts of "natural" and "artificial" fool into two distinct categories? A fool is capable of entertaining and teaching at the same time. What sounds funny may well be equally didactic. As the fools have a paradoxical nature, it is not enough to fit them into one concept for a thorough analysis. Walter Kaiser argues that "the Renaissance developed the oxymoronic concept of the wise fool, who embodies some paradoxes and capitalizes upon the equivocation in the word *wit*" (1964, p. 12). On the one hand the word "wit" refers to being wise, on the other hand it means the talent to amuse and make people laugh. This duality in the meaning of "wit" can easily be discerned in the situation of "wise fools". Kaiser maintains that "as wisdom and folly confront each other in the same person, sustained irony becomes possible for the first time since the classical age, and in the laughter of fools the voice of wisdom is heard" (1964, p.13). The witty fools both mock and criticise the disabilities of the characters as well as the ills of the society. It is this juxtaposition of wisdom and folly in which the audience finds the comedy.

¹ They are the comic characters of *Morals*. For detailed information, look Thomas Marc Parrott, *Shakespearean Comedy* (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), pp. 12-28

2. AS YOU LIKE IT

As You Like It is a highly complex love story which is full of illusions and disguises for the sake of love. Touchstone is a clown in Duke Frederick's court who later travels to the Forest of Arden together with Rosalind and Celia. He is a court jester which makes his manners nobler than an ordinary clown. In fact, he is the first creation of Shakespeare as an intellectual fool who is aware of his foolishness. David Frail (1981) has pointed out that "as the 'wise fool', Touchstone's function is to blur the line between wisdom and folly". He mocks others' stupidity whereby he removes the curtain between the audience and the play. However, the audience witnesses a shift in his mind as well. That is, the contrasts in the play appear in his character from time to time. The reason is that he serves to two different purposes at the same time: to entertain and to tell the truth. As Goldsmith indicates, "While Touchstone's wit takes the form of parody, his temper is essentially realistic" (1953, p.894). In addition, he is constantly engaged with clashing of values between romantic and anti-romantic characters, court and country life, even comedy and tragedy. Nevertheless, it is Touchstone himself who presents these contrasts in agreement. Phialas proposes that "Shakespeare's comic view sets as its aim the crystallization of bringing together idealism and realism by gently mocking different extremes into mutual qualification [] (1966, p.214). Touchstone is the tool of Shakespeare to fulfil this aim. Moreover, this can be taken as evidence that he is the "touchstone" of this comedy who personally sees, experiences and eventually brings the oppositions together into a single unity.

Touchstone incorporates both comic and miserable experiences. He has a great part in arousing the comic relief in the audience up to a point. However, there is a moment when comedy is mingled with misery. As James Smith puts forward, "Touchstone is on the way to tragedy because he has allowed desire to get out of control" (1940, pp.31-32). This probably has to do with his love affair with Audrey. She is the object of mockery for him. While he keeps making up excuses at first, finally he accepts to marry her. He simply explains the situation by telling "As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires; and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling." (III. iii. 506). What really makes him take this decision? The answer to this question may help to make out his paradoxes at the same time. Phialas points to this contrast by stating that Touchstone, on the one hand, parodies Orlando's poems and refuses to woo Audrey by using romantic and pastoral mediums; on the other hand, he writes verses

to her after some time. This is the "irony in action" (Palmer, 1946, p.44). One can claim that he surrenders to the romantic atmosphere of the play, or it may well be attributed to Shakespeare's desire to sustain the balance in the play. However, it is fair to conclude that no matter how ignorant Touchstone seems to be, his realism accounts for his reverence of love and marriage. His marriage to Audrey contributes to the realistic atmosphere of the story.

Moreover, one can encounter the ongoing balance in the affinity between Touchstone and his master Rosalind. Throughout the play, Touchstone does and is expected to burlesque others' follies. However, when he is with Rosalind, he fails to live up to this expectation. The king's fool is tolerated even when he harshly criticises his master; nevertheless, as Goldsmith points out, he is supposed to serve "their sense of self-importance" as well (1953, p.885). For example, when Rosalind comments "Thou speak'st wiser than thou art ware of" (II. iv. 491), "the fool feeds the complacent superiority of the noble lady by agreeing with her" says Goldsmith (1953, p.885). One of the reasons, according to him, is that "Touchstone alters his manner to fit the quality and the mood of the persons on whom he jests". Rosalind is a powerful character who represents the romantic side of the story. She characterizes appearance versus reality. Besides that, her intellect may well surpass that of Touchstone. On the contrary, Touchstone corresponds to the realist aspect of the play. This is an explicit sign of the disparity between them. In order to hold these oppositions in a line, he changes his attitudes where necessary.

Furthermore, in the characters of Rosalind and Touchstone, there seems to be the conflict of romantic and anti-romantic values. Rosalind's idealistic love for Orlando is the object of mockery for Touchstone. Rosalind is the traditional romantic lover of the story who is full of passions. On the other hand, anti-romantic characteristics rest in the character of Touchstone, a feature which gives him the freedom to embed the irony into the play. When Rosalind, with full enthusiasm, reads the verse which she finds on a tree in the Forest of Arden, Touchstone makes fun of her: "I'll rhyme you so eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping hours excepted. It is the right butter-women's rank to market." (III.ii. 499) However, surprisingly enough, he wishes Audrey would be more "romantic" by telling "... I would the Gods had made thee poetical." (III.iii. 505) because he believes that the lovers lie in their poems and that if she lies about her chastity, then he may find an excuse to leave her after marriage. It can be inferred from this paradox that Touchstone has some inner conflicts.

Here we must refer to Touchstone's relation with another witty clown in the play who is Jaques. He is a traveller who is known as "melancholy Jaques", yet he is as humorous as Touchstone. Also, he uses parody as successfully. If he is analysed deeply, the audience can realize that Jaques is, in fact, a purely comic character. However, he tends to be a serious man who is only concerned with the dark sides of the life. He is completely obsessed with the evil of real life. In the light of this dominant feature of his, it can be argued that his feelings are extreme. The excessiveness of his malign thoughts collides with the pastoral spirit of the play. That is, he cannot compromise with the "romantic" characters and the pastoral nature. This conflict, therefore, makes him a counter-balance in the play. Despite the imbalance that he causes, the harmony between the conflicting parts is maintained from beginning to end. The person who manages to unify these opposite sides is none other than Touchstone.

Jaques is a double-sided character. This duality of his personality can be discerned both in his mood and relationships. To begin with, while he is melancholic by nature, he may be funny and the object of fun, as well. According to Berry, he is "an ideal philosopher, however ... presented as an incorrigible moraliser" (1972, p.180). He tends to chasten everyone, including Duke Senior. However, he not only moralises but also ridicules the foolishness of others. For example, from the first moment he meets Touchstone, he makes fun of him. While Touchstone is given the role of poking fun at others' folly, meanwhile, he becomes the target of Jaques. He refers to Touchstone as "a material fool" (III.iii. 505). However, it is not the "materialism" but the folly of Touchstone that he emphasizes throughout the play. Merrily, he tells Duke Senior: "A fool, a fool! I met a fool i'th'forest / A motley fool- a miserable world." (II.vii. 493). This exclamation can be attributed to his desire for being superior. Even for the Duke he says: "... He is too disputable for my company..." (II. v. 492)

He behaves like a "circus master" and treats Touchstone as one of his performers who is in charge of satisfying the spectators (Palmer, 1946, p.50). Berry points out that "he oscillates between a scornful wish to be a fool and a consistent attempt to patronize Touchstone when they meet" (1972, p.182). Nevertheless, he never reaches this aim because, as one reason, Touchstone does not mind him at all. Touchstone's main business is to entertain and to keep the balance between opposite ends. Based on his relationship with Jaques, once again, it becomes evident that he carries out this task successfully by fitting the mood of the persons whom he teases.

This power struggle, though one-sided, may be based on the antithesis of court and country. Jaques is introduced to the audience in the forest as a traveler. He is a man of country. From the very beginning, Touchstone's being a court jester makes Jaques envious. "...This is the motley-minded gentleman that I have so often met in the forest. He hath been a courtier, he swears" (V. iv. 522). However, as Touchstone himself criticises courtly manners of the romantic lovers, this conflict is finished by him.

Jaques, on the other hand, helps Touchstone at some points by playing the realist fool as he does. It can even be assumed that they act in synchronicity. First of all, both of them represent the anti-romantic aspect of the story. Touchstone mocks Rosalind's love, while Jaques ridicules Orlando and his highly poetic language. For example, Jaques despises Orlando's love by telling "The first fault you have is to be in love." (III. Ii. 502). As Bate indicates, "Jaques and Touchstone ... spar with each other because the satire of the former and the witty foolery of the latter are rival models of mocking courtly pretensions" (Bate & Rasmussen, 2007, p.473). Their extreme attitude towards romanticism coincides with the extremity of pastoralism.

However, as mentioned before, Jaques has more to do with the real life rather than the "idealized life" (Phialas, 1966, p.234). He contributes to the realism of the play together with Touchstone. Even when Touchstone deviates from his aim, he heartily undertakes this responsibility. This is proven in the marriage scene of Touchstone and Audrey when he warns Touchstone about the procedures of marriage: "... Get you to church, and have a good priest that can tell you what marriage is..." (III. iv. 506). While Touchstone is more engaged with romantic and "idealized life", Jaques' primary concern is real life and the darkness of it. Phialas aptly summarizes their relationship with this sentence: "Jaques is included among the objects of Touchstone's mockery since he is the most vulnerable pseudo-idealist in the play."

In short, Touchstone takes an active role in *As You Like It* as the primary balance-keeping factor. In addition to his own paradoxes, the extent of his impact on the ongoing battle of extremes has been examined. In this context, his affinity with Audrey, Rosalind and Jaques has been analysed. His relation to Jaques has been given in detail because his part in the representation of antithesis of values is regarded as important as Touchstone's. In view of these considerations, one can conclude that no matter how minor Touchstone's part is, he may well be accepted as the central figure in the play, who keeps the

events under control and facilitates the play to come to an end. Together with Jaques, he is the key figure to understand what is going on. "Touchstone, in fact, is the reduction of ideas latent in *As You Like It*" says Berry (1972, p.194).

3. TWELFTH NIGHT

Feste of *Twelfth Night* is another wise fool of Shakespeare who is also referred to as "clown". Although his function as a fool bears slight differences as compared to that of Touchstone, he is equally critical in terms of his unifying role in *Twelfth Night*. As Berry puts forward, ambivalence forms the basis of the play (1972, p.198). Conflicting values, such as romance and realism, "sentiment and fun," (Parrott, 1962, p.178) love and indulgence (Phialas, 1966, p.267), constitute the major composition of it. Humour and reality are closely intertwined. Blending of these contrasting elements is, once more after *As You Like It*, conducted by Feste the clown.

The word Feste is "connected with the Latin *festus* and the English *feast*" (Parrott, 1962, p.190). As his name suggests, he is an essential figure in this comedy. He provides the play with a festival-like atmosphere through his songs. In fact, his songs are of vital importance in his contribution to the comic nature of the play. Whereas Touchstone becomes a major figure thanks to his relationships, Feste is mainly concerned with buffoonery. He does not give as much importance to being intimate with other characters as Touchstone. This is one of his dominant features: "his detachment from other characters" (Novelli, 1998, p.188). He always stands at a certain distance, observes what is going on and finally announces to the audience the hidden meanings behind the appearance. This is a distinct quality of wise fools. That is, as they are responsible to tell the truth to the audience, they are supposed to be objective to a certain extent. In view of his contribution to the play with his songs as well as his objectivity, it can be inferred that he partakes in the events mainly as a complementary figure. On the other hand, Berry suggests that "he, in the design of *Twelfth Night*, is the reality figure, and the mediator of reality" (1972, p.201). It is, perhaps, the best description that introduces him. Greif (1988, p.63), similarly, emphasizes "... Feste's role as mediator between the worlds of illusion and everyday reality...." In addition, Berry states that Feste is intrigued by "the antitheses of appearance and reality" (1972, p.203). However, his accessibility to nearly each stage of the story helps him combine different thematic threads into one.

The discrepancy of fantasy and reality in the play becomes evident in the relationships of characters. For example, Orsino corresponds to illusion whereas Olivia represents reality in the play. Feste's position in this duality is, of course, somewhere in the middle. He perpetually keeps the distance to both sides equal. He mocks Orsino as harshly as Olivia. He also makes fun of Duke's melancholic love in the same manner. According to him, they all live in a world of fantasies. Even if he sometimes gets into this imaginary world, eventually he succeeds to take the audience to the real world. At this point, as Berry says, "illusion creates its own reality" (1972, p.202).

With regard to the balance of romance and realism in the play, Novelli says that "... Shakespeare captures the intricate interplay between festive and mundane, and the character of Feste knits the two together" (1998, p. 189). Although he is much closer to the realism scale, he has great impact on keeping that balance. How does he manage this? As I pinpointed before, his detachment enables him to be objective. Each character in the play has its own unique personality trait and this diversity leads to a complexity which is difficult to sort out. However, Feste's success in seeing these characters' frailties leads to the resolution of the conflicts. He not only sees, but also helps their self-discovery.

Feste is an objective observer of the characters and events. He is the only person in the play who has the right to enter whichever part of the palace he wants to. In short, he is a "ubiquitous" figure (Greif, 1988, p.75). Here, it would be suitable to compare him to a chameleon because wherever or in whatever mood he is; he finds a way to disguise accordingly. He fits himself into the mood of the person he talks to, and somehow manages to please everybody. Furthermore, he uses his songs for this aim. For example, when Orsino is in melancholy of love, Feste sings:

*Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid. (II. iv. 667)*

Phialas indicates the importance of songs in this sentence: "... the action of *Twelfth Night* presents episodes which expose and reduce attitudes toward love and the related theme of indulgence (1966, p. 277). That reduction is brought about by direct statement, by the juxtaposition of opposed attitudes,

by song." His songs are suitable for the general atmosphere and the dramatic progress of the play. The imagery is strong enough for a better understanding. In addition, his songs are partly in the form of riddles which add a joy to the language and arouse curiosity in the audience.

In order to understand Feste better, the character Malvolio should be discussed here. Malvolio, who is a servant in command of Lady Olivia, is literally a tragi-comic character. His self-love and self-conceit, together with his being an object of fun throughout the play, account for his tragi-comic quality. Due to this combination of tragedy and comedy, he is a perfect butt for Feste. As a matter of fact, it is Feste who includes Malvolio in the play. They are opposite characters on the grounds that Malvolio is a fantasist while Feste is generally accepted as a realist. Besides his realist point of view, he acts as a moralizer as it is illustrated in the case of Malvolio. The bad situation that he is exposed to by Feste and the others is a result of his extreme narcissism. Feste's aim is to moralize and bring him into reality. This, again, creates a funny atmosphere during the play. In addition to his part in arousing laughter, he encourages Feste to weave together the conflicts that exist in the play.

In addition, according to Phialas, Shakespeare includes the theme of indulgence as well as love. He accepts indulgence as the secondary theme to love. Based on this, with his passion for Olivia as well as his self-love, Malvolio is closely connected with this theme. In fact, Phialas argues, he has to do with both of the themes in question. Feste's role to develop the theme of indulgence cannot be ignored. By cheating Malvolio, he punishes him in a way and, most important of all, tries to make him realize his folly by teaching him a lesson. Whether Malvolio sees the reality or not at the end of the play is a bit ambiguous. However it is certain that Feste accomplishes the task of taking the audience into the reality step by step.

Feste is such an important character that nobody can think of a *Twelfth Night* without him. Despite his various functions in the play, only one of them comes to the fore: knitting up conflicting elements. F.B. Tromly (1974) suggests that Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night* with the aim of amusing and moralizing which enables the audience to see the real world "through the spirit of folly." Like Touchstone, Feste's role is to entertain and, in the meantime, to bring the facts into light. Given all these functions of fools, Malvolio's part is regarded as equally significant. Through his assistance, Feste guides the ones who are stuck in the middle of fantasy and reality.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, Feste and Touchstone are literally the balance factors of the plays that they take part in. Although they do not appear as much as the major characters, their roles are as important. From beginning to end, I have referred to some contrasting values and character types. Feste and Touchstone are somehow given the responsibility to keep this adversariness in a unity. It is certain that there are funnier and wiser characters as compared to them; however, these fools possess both of the qualities at the same time. They make use of funny and clever figures like Malvolio and Jaques for their own purpose. Thanks to them, the audience gets to know the concept of "intellectual fool". Briefly, these fools point out that appearance and reality are both different from and similar to each other and that a fool may equally be a wise man who has the ability to show the reality. No matter how fool they appear to be, as Feste uses the expression, they wear not motley in their brain (I.v. 657).

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