

M.A. Semester-I

Dr Sharique Haider

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Maharaja College, Ara

Q.: Write a note on the Clown, Feste, in Twelfth Night. What is his function in the play?

Or

What opinion have you formed of the Clown and his role in Twelfth Night?

Or

Describe the contribution of the Clown to the comedy of the play, Twelfth Night.

Ans.: The wisdom of the professional fool: Feste in Twelfth Night is a professional Clown whose function used to be to amuse his social superiors and he was paid for doing that. The Clown was a kind of licensed jester, who was free to find fault with people and to make satirical or ironical comments on them. Though called the fool, he was not really a fool. He had a vast knowledge of the world and human mind. He was a keen observer and has a shrewd judgment of character. The professional fool was, indeed, a man of abundant wisdom and wit.

The Clown's witty remarks: The Clown in Twelfth Night fulfills all these requirements. Viola ably sums up this Clown's character when she says that he is wise enough to play the fool, and that he knows that he has to observe the mood of those "on whom he jests, the quality of persons, and the time". The Clown provides a number of examples of his wisdom and wit in the course of the play. Most of his remarks are amusing, even though some of them are "forced". Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage, he tells Maria. Many men who think that they have wit often prove to be fools, he says in a brief soliloquy. He employs a logical process of reasoning to prove that Olivia, not he, is the real fool. (Is she not a fool, he says, to mourn for her brother's soul being in heaven?) He mocks at the Duke for his melancholy, his changeableness and his inconstancy of purpose: "Now, the melancholy god protects thee, and the tailor make the doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal". He mocks at Olivia when he tells Viola that Olivia has no folly yet, and that she will

keep no fool till she is married, when her husband will be her fool. He calls himself a corrupter of words. He mocks at Sebastian by saying that he is using the expression "vent thy folly" because he has heard it of some great man.

His role in the comic sub-plot: Thus, the Clown contributes to the comedy of the play with his wit and mockery. But he also takes an active part in the comic under-plot of the fooling of Malvolio. Here he plays the role of Sir Topas, the priest. He speaks like a true priest, treating Malvolio as if the latter were possessed with the devil. He compares Malvolio's puzzlement to that of the Egyptians in their fog. He ridicules Malvolio for opposing Pythagoras's theory of the transmigration of the soul. He plays the role of a priest so well that he earns the tribute of Sir Toby. He also ridicules Malvolio towards the end of play when he quotes some of Malvolio's remarks made earlier. However, he also plays a constructive role by delivering Malvolio's letter to Olivia and thus helping in the resolution of the tangle.