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Although the stage fools and clown characters of *As You Like it* and *Hamlet* entertain audiences, this is not their only contribution to the plays. It is equally important for them to provide significant covert as well as overt social commentary

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Abstract of the Thesis

Although the stage fools and clown characters of *As You Like it* and *Hamlet* entertain audiences, this is not their only contribution to the plays. It is equally important for them to provide significant covert as well as overt social commentary.

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As You Like It and *Hamlet* have as a central consideration the need for the restoration of order and the establishment of good governance. A comparative analysis of the roles of the clowns in both plays, using primary and secondary data, reveals that they expose a corrupt political directorate and offer social and political commentary through dialogue, soliloquies, asides and other forms of direct communication with the audience.

As You Like It is a romantic comedy in which the usurping Duke causes the courtiers to flee from tyranny by going into exile in the forest of Arden. Touchstone, the jester, offers satirical commentary that guides the plot and engages the audience. *Hamlet*, on the other hand is a tragedy, but the political issues are similar. King Claudius has

murdered his brother, the former king, married his sister-in-law, then arranged his own coronation. Prince Hamlet, whom it was anticipated, would be elected, returns home from studies for his father's funeral and is angered by what he discovers. Hamlet's decision to feign madness and assume the role of the clown in order to secretly investigate the circumstances of his father's death proves to be a dangerous move as his uncle is Machiavellian. The comic scenes in which Hamlet acts as a clown, serve as relief from the mounting tension of the impending tragedy.

In conveying their themes, both clown/jester stage characters provoke humor that serves as a temporary veil for significant social and political commentary. So while the actions and words of Touchstone and Hamlet sometimes cause a chuckle or create hilarity, the comic scenes serve to bring a greater awareness to audiences of the dangers of Machiavellian leadership, and the importance of sincerity as well as love.

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Introduction

Although *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* were written several centuries ago and enjoyed much popularity then, both plays still enjoy immense popularity in the twenty-first century. What really appeals to audiences is the skillful presentation of characters who articulate serious social concerns in a non-threatening or disturbing way. This probably explains why clowns are included in a complex tragedy such as *Hamlet*, and justifies the continuous attention researchers have paid to clown characters over the years. The conclusions drawn by various critics are that the fool, clown and jester character types are largely responsible for the popularity of the plays, not merely for their humor, but more for the thought provoking issues that they bring to the forefront. However, fools, clowns and jesters are not character types that originated with Shakespeare. But unfortunately, tracing the history of the clown in pre-Elizabethan England has its limitations because this history is not fully documented.

Records, some of which date back to the twelfth century, describe various jesters who were employed by English kings to provide entertainment for the court. The records show that clowns were often dressed in brightly colored costumes that featured caps with a bell. These court entertainers were usually well rewarded and sometimes served as companions for their monarchs. Sandra Billington, describes as an example Rahere, a minstrel in the court of Henry the First in the twelfth century, as enjoying some degree of independence. However, full details about the fools and their functions might not have been fully documented because of religious objections. For example, in France during the fifteenth century, a festival known as the Ecclesiastical Feast of Fools was subdued. During this festival, the clown character was depicted as a member of the clergy or high official of the Catholic Church, and was mocked. Church objections to this type of derision played a major role in the banning of social commentary

directed at the feudal culture at that time. But with the revival of art, literature and philosophy during the Renaissance, Enid Welsford argues that there was a growing interest in “personality” (128), and this created opportunities for people of different social classes and backgrounds to present various acts. Therefore, it would appear that this movement also helped to give exposure to jesters and other performers, some of whom delighted audiences with their singing, dancing or acrobatic displays while others acted in plays. Welsford also indicates that the popularity of court fools on the Elizabethan stage probably began between 1598 and 1604 (246).

Subsequently, during the Elizabethan period, several plays were performed by travelling companies such as the Chamberlain’s Men, in the Presence Chambers of palaces, as a means of entertaining members of the court. Sometimes, the tradition of having jesters as companions for the royal family was observed. Welsford writes about clown actors such as Richard Tarleton and Will Somers who performed at the courts. She points out that Tarleton was sometimes seen as the jester to Queen Elizabeth. Welsford explains, “At this period the household fools tended to be eclipsed by the theatrical clowns,” and adds, “No Elizabethan fool captured the imagination both of his contemporaries and of posterity as did Will Somers” (171). The Elizabethan audience found Tarleton and Somers more entertaining as well as stimulating than the household fools, and they attracted large crowds at the theaters.

Historical accounts of stage performances confirm some aspects of the acting that thrilled the audience. Arthur Colby Sprague, in describing events in the theater, states, “Sometimes, again, the actor usually, but not always a low comedian, addresses his monologue straight to the front rows.” He adds, “The speaker of asides, like the speaker of soliloquies, sometimes thinks aloud, sometimes talks to himself and sometimes talks to the audience” (62). Bente Videbaek agrees and points out additionally that the characteristics of Shakespeare’s

clowns have many origins in the “distant past” and this includes “the comic servant in Greek and Roman plays, the Vice of the mediaeval morality plays and the *Commedia dell’ Arte* tradition” (2). Shakespeare did not have to be completely original as these genres provided him with rich clown and jester characteristics that he could expand and improve on.

The plays reflect that Shakespeare capitalizes on the historical portrayal of clowns and fools to create characters that would serve his own theatrical purposes. As a result, in *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, he avoids a presentation of natural fools such as dwarfs, buffoons, minstrels or the mentally challenged that Wellsford describes as falling “below the average human standard, but whose defects have been transformed into a source of delight, a mainspring of comedy” (xi). This clown type would not have been suitable for any play that cynically reveals truths about the human condition. So instead, Shakespeare’s focus is on presenting an intelligent, witty social commentator that interacts with other characters and the audience whose perceptions he helps to shape. Videbaek explains, “the historical court fool or jester added to the clown’s part his free license of speech, his professionalism, and many articles of dress” (2). One of the major differences between Shakespeare’s clown and fool characters in the two plays, and the comic characters of earlier plays, is that Shakespeare’s fools demonstrate their intelligence through their clever manipulation of language even when they engage in antic behavior.

Popular talented actors such as Will Kemp and Robert Armin performed in Shakespeare’s plays during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries respectively. Additionally, there is speculation that both actors might have had roles written specifically for them. Robert Bell argues that when Kemp left the company and Armin succeeded him, this represented Touchstone’s progression from “clownish fool” (I.iii.130) to “worthy fool” (II.vii.36), and he refers to this as “the changing of the guard from the roust-about Kemp to the cerebral Armin”

(23). Oscar James Campbell posits, “If Shakespeare had Will Kempe in mind for the part when he began to write *As You Like It*, he undoubtedly altered the role in some important respects to fit the temper of Robert Armin” (47). It was necessary for Shakespeare’s actors to have the kind of sensibility that allowed them the power of discernment to engage in mocking laughter that provoked humor, yet leave the audience with serious issues to consider. Armin in particular, satisfied that need.

Additionally, Shakespeare’s fool is not limited to the court. Shakespeare gives him the flexibility to engage in extensive interaction with several characters, and to function as the satirist. Many Shakespearean clowns provoke humor through their use of malapropisms and various misunderstandings. But they are by no means stupid. However, they do not reflect the same intellectual depth as the fool or jester who commands a greater level of respect and acceptance from the other characters in the plays, thus the fool and jester are given more prominence in the plays under consideration.

As You Like It is an intriguing play which encourages a close examination of Shakespeare’s craft in creating character types such as fools, clowns and jesters, and draws attention to Touchstone, the ‘fool’ character who serves as a ‘touchstone’ not only for other characters, but also prepares readers and audiences for similar characters in other plays such as *Hamlet*, and invites consideration of the roles they play. Therefore, it is instructive to look at the interaction between Touchstone and others with a view to determining the impact he has on these characters, and how he causes them to be introspective and learn important truths about themselves and others, while allowing audiences to see them for who they really are. Additionally, an analysis of the nature of the relationship between Hamlet and the clowns reveals

that their inclusion does not merely contribute amusement to the drama, but also points to similarities and differences between the clown roles in a comedy and a tragedy.

Consequently, there is validity in the argument that while the fools of *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, provoke humor, one of their most important contributions is to provide significant overt as well as covert social commentary. It is clear that entertaining audiences is not Touchstone's primary role. Consequently, in Part One, an examination of Touchstone's interaction with Celia, Rosalind, Corin, William, Audrey and Jacques reveals what Touchstone wants us to know about their characters, and what we can learn about him from them. Similarly, when Hamlet plays the 'fool' character, how he impacts Claudius, Polonius and the clowns in the graveyard, highlights what is both comical and serious. In this way, Shakespeare brings into sharp focus issues that include corruption in the court, class discrimination and attitudes to madness. As a result, in considering the interaction between characters, an in depth analysis of the language used in dialogue shows how humor is created and how the choice of diction causes introspection on the part of the characters.

Therefore, Shakespeare's portrayal of clown characters in *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, allows us to see the interconnectedness of the 'fool' characters in both plays, although one play is a tragedy and the other a comedy. The common 'fool' characterization styles guide us to a better understanding of the characters, the plot, turning points in the play and major themes that are explored.

In discussing the range of stage clown types that are in Shakespeare's plays, Videbaek classifies Touchstone as an "allowed or artificial fool" and a "jester clown" who is highly intelligent and plays a major role in the drama (86). This is different from the role Hamlet plays.

Videbaek states, “Hamlet chooses to make himself into a combination of the ‘natural fool’ and the court jester clown, and to draw on this figure’s license in order to expose the truth he needs” (178). Therefore, the audience feels compelled to pay close attention to the dialogue that is filled with irony, cynicism, double entendre and innuendo. So, if the clown characters were excluded, the dramas would not be as fascinating, enjoyable or meaningful.

Part One considers the nature of the interaction between Touchstone and other characters with a view to determining the impact he has on each of these characters, in particular how he causes them to be introspective and learn important truths about themselves and others. Similarly, an analysis of Hamlet’s relationship with others in Part Two, not only highlights what is entertaining about the play, but also points to similarities and differences between clown roles in a tragedy and in a comedy.

The discussion in Part One considers in detail the other functions that Touchstone performs through his clever communication style and includes how he guides the development of the plot, allows the audience to decide whether through his behavior he establishes the criterion by which others can be judged, and how he reveals the make up and lifestyle preferences of others. The section ends with a comparison and contrast of Touchstone and Hamlet as ‘fool’ characters, and considers their effectiveness in this role.

Next, Part Two continues the discussion by looking at what other ‘fool’ characters, who are neither court jesters nor natural fools, have in common with Touchstone. By comparing Hamlet and the gravediggers as clowns, we appreciate the significance of the social commentary that the three engage in. Although Yorick, the court jester, is deceased, how his life impacts Hamlet is observed in the graveyard scene. Additionally, Part Two discusses what the

characters learn about themselves and others, how this learning takes place, and what the audience learns.

A detailed discussion of Touchstone's character, his relationships and communication style, reveal how as court jester and 'fool' character, he has a major influence on how the play develops. This section also considers how Touchstone introduces us to a character type, and how this prepares us for the 'fool' characters in *Hamlet*. The section ends with a discussion of how these characters are equally effective in a tragedy and a comedy. In this way, the argument transitions to the tragedy *Hamlet*.

This discussion will reveal how Shakespeare's clown characters, serve a significant dramatic purpose, particularly in *Hamlet*, where they are carefully crafted to be satirists and pessimists, functioning as critics of what is absurd, and reflecting on the deeper meaning of life and death. Therefore, the graveyard setting in this play provides the background against which word play, to the unobservant, can mistakenly pass as mere lighthearted exchanges between clown characters.

A complex character such as Hamlet is allowed to 'play' the clown when he assumes "an antic disposition" so that under the disguise of madness he can be free to imitate the speech patterns of the clowns and communicate with them at their level. He also uses this 'madness' to ridicule Polonius and Claudius harshly to the extent of being disrespectful. The impact of Hamlet's words causes audiences to engage in debates about real and assumed madness, and whether there is a callous and vindictive side to Hamlet's character. One can definitely conclude that feigned madness provides a cover for ulterior motives.

Part One

Since the jester was a court character that served, not only as a companion for the nobility, but also as their entertainer, he was given the privilege of criticizing them and their system of governance without fear of reprisals. Shakespeare's 'fool' Touchstone is not merely an entertainer, neither is he limited to the court. Therefore, he is able to engage in extensive interaction and social commentary with other characters he comes into contact with, especially as he plays the role of the satirist. Many other Shakespearean clowns, though, provoke humor through their songs, antics and verbosity.

Touchstone serves first as jester in the court where he enjoys a close, confidential relationship with the court cousins Celia and Rosalind. When they decide to go into exile in the forest of Arden, he does not hesitate to give up his status in the court and join them. It is apparent that they value his companionship and guidance, and it is noteworthy that the Shakespearean text classifies him as a fool.

Nevertheless, critics differ regarding the classification of clowns and fools. Robert Hillis Goldsmith makes the distinction between the wise fool and less wise fool. The former, like Touchstone, is a keen observer who mimics others and changes his approach depending on which character he is mocking. The less wise fool is not as confident and is less skillful at parody. He concludes, "Touchstone is a wise and thoroughly witty fool" (51). Oscar James Campbell, on the other hand, describes Touchstone as a clown who "seeks to amuse by a combination of impudence and verbal shiftiness" (61). Theodore Weiss indicates that Shakespeare's clowns are "illuminators" and many of them are fools (8). Welsford, however, refers to Touchstone as the fool who is a "privileged truth-teller" (251).

Although Touchstone is introduced as a fool character, he is not the character type that is uneducated, or provokes laughter by his own stupidity, psychotic behavior, or ridiculous costume. Instead, through various literary techniques such as satire, irony and cynicism he highlights what is absurd about how the other characters think and act. His strategy is to amuse, but at the same time, teach important lessons. The meaning of his name gives some indication of the role he plays. Traditionally, a touchstone was a black siliceous stone used to determine if gold and silver were pure, based on the color of the mark that resulted from rubbing the stone on the metals. A touchstone is therefore a stone designed to test or establish a standard or quality that should be observed. The metaphorical use of this name then, suggests that when Touchstone engages others, he, by example, provides the criterion by which they should live, and he also helps to sharpen their wits.

While we do not see him setting the trend for courtly conduct, Touchstone parodies what takes place in the court to highlight the undesirable corruption in that political setting. Also, he does present challenges to other characters, mainly through his cynical comments, and forces them to analyze and rethink their positions. Therefore, Touchstone serves significant theatrical purposes. He engages in dialogue in almost every Act of the play, with the exception of Act IV, and has the flexibility to function as a character inside the action of the play, to echo and scorn the folly of other characters, interact with a range of characters, and also function as a detached commentator that guides the audience.

Because of his complex functions in the play, it is difficult to classify Touchstone in precise terms. This is because there are times when he is an active participant in the proceedings, on other occasions he is the silent observer, and in other circumstances he appears to signal turning points in the play. Celia attempts unsuccessfully to define Touchstone's personality, and

in so doing, playfully refers to him as a fool sent by Fortune to interrupt the lively jest that she enjoys with Rosalind. But Touchstone cannot readily be classified as a character, since, whenever he appears, even when he establishes distance from the action, his presence on stage allows him to serve a specific dramatic purpose.

When he first appears on stage at Duke Frederick's court, he engages in light-hearted jest with Celia and Rosalind. Although this is entertaining, it establishes that Touchstone as the court jester, not only has a close relationship with the ladies, but is also so skillful in using puns that he is able to match wits with as well as outwit the ladies. It is through this first interaction with Celia and Rosalind that we see his brilliance in word play. At the outset, therefore, Touchstone allows the audience to see that he is no ordinary fool. Nevertheless, this does not prevent Celia from poking fun at him when she refers to him as "the whetstone of the wits" (I.ii.55).

This light hearted exchange contains a lesson for the audience that might not accurately assess Touchstone, but would now realize the importance of paying attention to what he says especially if they are to appreciate the deeper meaning of his words, the insight that he demonstrates and understand how the plot unfolds. His sharp wit is without malice and he cynically comments on those who consider themselves wise but are too foolish to appreciate the wisdom of the fool. This is evident during an amusing banter with Touchstone, when Celia responds flippantly to his criticism of someone Touchstone alleges her father loves. Touchstone's repartee causes us to reflect on inaccurate assumptions we might make about someone's lack of intelligence.

CELIA. My father's love is enough to honor him. Enough. Speak no more of him;
you'll be whipped for taxation one of these days.

TOUCHSTONE. The more pity that fools may not speak wisely what wise men

do foolishly.

CELIA. By my troth, thou sayest true. For, since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a great show.(I.ii.82-89)

Touchstone does not specifically identify any wise men by name, so we can conclude that in this generalized response, he not only comments on the folly of silencing those who are not considered important, or stifling opposition, but also makes a veiled reference here to Duke Frederick, whose character neither Celia nor the audience has fully analyzed as yet. Duke Frederick is a usurper who exhibits the characteristics of a despot. Shortly after, Rosalind and Celia are forced to analyze the Duke's behavior. His eyes are "full of anger" (I.iii.39). He also exhibits an intense and uncontrolled temper. His decision to banish his niece, Rosalind, who has not committed any offence, demonstrates that he is an insecure ruler. The Duke's actions mimic a dictatorial trend in which the ruler holds power by creating an atmosphere of fear and oppression. History shows that such regimes eventually topple, and so the audience can anticipate the time when Duke Senior, and his courtiers come out of exile and return to their rightful positions in the court.

As a result of Duke Frederick's irrational behavior, Rosalind decides to make immediate arrangements to go into exile. Celia willingly gives up her position in the court as she refuses to be separated from her cousin. Therefore, the women agree to avoid the wrath of the Duke by escaping to the forest of Arden. When the Duke learns they have left, he also discovers that Touchstone is with them. The second lord advises Duke Frederick, "The roinish clown," a reference to Touchstone, "is also missing" (II.iii.8-9). The audience realizes that Touchstone has great insight into the mindset of the Duke and supports Rosalind and Celia's action.

Touchstone makes the decision to give up his privileged employment as a court jester, a position that allows him the scope to say what is pleasant or unpleasant, and even mock members of the court without fear of reprisals. Palmer refers to Touchstone's decision as the actions of "a loyal servant who, without any illusions to the sequel, is ready at a word to 'go along o'er the wide world' with his mistress" (36). This establishes the high esteem in which Touchstone is held by Rosalind and Celia, and his willingness to be supportive of them.

Campbell describes the forest of Arden as "the place to which Orlando and Rosalind flee when driven away from society by injustice and tyranny" (48). Several members of the court meet in the forest, but only to discover that Arden is not a paradise and the shepherds face many challenges. Nevertheless, the courtiers' experiences in the forest give them a new outlook on life and prepare them to return to the court as human beings with compassion and respect for others irrespective of their social standing.

Although Touchstone feels that when he is in the court he is "in a better place" (II.iv.16), the forest allows him greater freedom of speech. His candid, uninhibited intervention aids the development of characters in the play, advances the plot and guides us to a better understanding of the drama. For example, later, in the Forest of Arden where Rosalind is disguised as a man, Touchstone exposes her naivety. His comments force her to realize that emotional maturity is necessary if a love relationship is to be meaningful and lasting, therefore, she has to change her outlook. It is clear then, that despite his keen sense of humor, Touchstone is a voice of wisdom, one that helps Rosalind to grow mentally and emotionally. He tells her not to "infect" herself with "false" verses (III.ii.113-114) coming from her suitor. She does not fully appreciate the advice he gives and becomes offended.

When Rosalind continues to be flattered by the poems that Orlando, places on trees throughout the forest, small wonder that Touchstone is unimpressed and his reaction is hilarious. He tells her that the particular verse she reads is as tedious as the jog-trot of dairy women taking butter to the market. Here, he is reacting not only to the lack of substance in the verse, but also to Orlando's silly rhyming of the end lines to repeat the 'ind' sound in Rosalind. In fact, Orlando's verses are so poorly written that they seem to make a mockery of the tradition of courtly love. Undoubtedly, Touchstone is more perceptive and mature than Rosalind, and he wishes her to be sensitive to the words she reads.

However, Rosalind is dismissive and suggests that he is like a "medlar" (III.ii.120), after Touchstone indulges in cynicism by creating another verse for her, one that is quite different from Orlando's as it contains many sexual overtones. He also comments on the superficial nature of Orlando's verse. This is his method of jolting Rosalind to an awareness of her shallowness and folly. His intention is for her to take corrective measures. His mockery can cause pain, but this is the best strategy he knows to get the desired change in her attitude. Touchstone's verse is comically structured so that every other line ends with Rosalind and rhymes with the previous line. The words mockingly suggest that Orlando is obsessed with Rosalind and teasingly imply that sexual activity is tantamount in a superficial relationship. He does not, however, suggest that sexual activity is not an essential part of sincere relationships.

TOUCHSTONE: For a taste:

If a hart do lack a hind,

Let him seek out Rosalind.

If the cat will after kind,

So be sure will Rosalind. (III.ii.100-104)

This seemingly silly verse reveals that his use of well-crafted innuendos such as “lack” “seek out” and “after” compare animals in heat with Rosalind, and this is humorous. Touchstone’s use of animal imagery suggests that sexual passion in animals is the same as that in human beings. He also implies that Rosalind might be excited by the prospect of having sexual intercourse, and the audience is given the opportunity to question whether there is any parallel between Rosalind’s intellectual depth and her emotional maturity.

She demonstrates that her mind is agile when she matches wits with Touchstone earlier. For instance, when Touchstone speaks in riddles about an imaginary knight who swore oaths about good pancakes and bad mustard, Touchstone does this an effort to create humor through punning on the word “swore.” Rosalind’s repartee is swift and equally funny. She tells Touchstone, “Unmuzzle your wisdom” (I.ii.70). This response shows that she is analytical and articulate. Despite her ability to think deeply and her sharp wit, Rosalind’s emotions take the better part of reason when she finds herself attracted to Orlando.

It is attraction at first sight based mainly on her admiration for his bravery and success in a wrestling match. Celia observes this and tells her, “Wrestle with thy affections” (I.iii.21). Rosalind’s answer, “O, they take the part of a better wrestler than myself“ (I.iii.22-23), indicates that she suddenly has a strong liking for a wrestler whom she hardly knows. Touchstone is concerned that she might not be making the right decision, and that her reaction is immature. He seems to reject the concept of Petrarchan love, which endorses love at first sight, and accepts that the lover does not need to know anything about the object of his or her affection in order to fall in love. Thus, the humor that Touchstone provokes at Rosalind’s expense through his silly verse prepares the audience for her changing outlook, and gives them the opportunity to observe her as she evolves.

Touchstone's reaction here reminds us of the speech he makes earlier about his own relationship with a former lover, Jane Smile (II.iv.47). We have no evidence that such a lover ever existed, or that he has ever been in love, but Touchstone's use of highly suggestive sexual language is striking to the point that we are compelled to carefully examine his message about the folly of love, to both Silvius and Rosalind who are lovesick. His views are given spontaneously, primarily through double entendre. The "sword" he speaks of represents the penis and the "two cods" is a reference to the testicles. Touchstone also speaks of "the kissing of her batler, and the cow's dugs" (II.iv.48-49). While this is an obscene joke that makes reference to erotic sex, these terms are also used in mockery of Silvius and Rosalind's immature responses to being in love. The suggestive terms provoke laughter, but Touchstone's serious message follows quickly. He says "We that are true lovers run into strange capers. But as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly" (II.iv.53-55). While Touchstone accepts that sexual desire is natural, his words make it clear that relationships based on folly will not endure.

Undoubtedly, Touchstone has to be the one credited for opening Rosalind's eyes early in the play and guiding her to be introspective. As he uncovers her folly, his words help to direct her to an acceptable level of maturity. That is why, after this incident, her behavior changes as she can now appreciate the difference between love and the superficiality of infatuation. Therefore, her approach to Orlando also changes. We no longer see a character filled with childish excitement and immediately accepting every word. Instead, when Celia approaches and in a cynical tone reads another of Orlando's verses, Rosalind begins to see her own folly and refers to the verse as a 'tedious homily of love' (III.ii.158).

Celia's expressive reading causes Rosalind to realize how disjointed the verse is and that rhyme for its own sake can be nonsensical. Additionally, Orlando's references to mythological

figures such as Helen who was abducted, Atlanta who agreed to marry only the one who could outrun her, and Lucretia who committed suicide after being raped, do not make sense. He appears to be trying to impress Rosalind that he has had exposure to classical literature, but he seems only to know names and not the details. Celia's reading is therefore very entertaining for the audience as it provides humor at Orlando's expense.

While Rosalind's new approach to her suitor might be seen as shrewd or deceitful, she uses her disguise as a man to find out whether Orlando's verses are the result of infatuation or sincere love. She is convinced that Orlando will be open and honest with someone he thinks is a friend of his own sex, rather than with the woman he is pursuing. However, she would not have taken any action whatsoever, if Touchstone had not caused her to engage in an analysis of her situation. Therefore, the plot is advanced as the audience is now prepared for the comical pretended courtship between Orlando and Rosalind, and we can anticipate that when this play-acting ends, the real courtship will begin, and there will be the marriage of the two characters. Touchstone therefore influences one of the turning points in the play as he helps to guide the plot in a direction that will result in the happy ending the audience expects in Shakespeare's romance comedy plays.

Touchstone's satirical responses give him the freedom to offer commentary on the social, comic and romantic concerns of the play. Because of this, the audience can look to him for guidance. Welsford makes the point though, that Touchstone as a social critic "has a rival in the person of that self-constituted critic of society, the melancholy Jaques" (251). When we observe these two characters carefully, we realize that in many respects they are different.

While they both interest and entertain the audience, Touchstone is highly intelligent and hilarious but Jaques is melancholy and pessimistic. Jaques willfully misrepresents who Touchstone is. Jaques tells Duke Senior that he met “a fool i’ th’ forest” (II.vii.12), he refers to Touchstone as “a motley fool” (II.vii.13), indicating that Touchstone wears the uniform of the court jester. Completely missing the sexual overtones in Touchstone’s double talk, Jaques repeats the statements Touchstone made about heaven sending him “fortune.” In a vain effort to impress Duke Senior that he is more suitable as a jester, Jaques continues by maliciously reporting that Touchstone’s brain “is as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage” (II. vii.40-41). Because he is envious of Touchstone and wants to be more favored, he completes his derision by saying that Touchstone “vents in mangled forms” (II.vii.42-43), implying that Touchstone’s words are unintelligible.

Jaques’ ulterior motives are made clear when he tells Duke Senior, “ I am ambitious for a motley coat” (II.vii.44). Jaques’ pessimistic view of the world prevents him from being sociable. His interaction with other characters is often cynical or negative, and it is understandable that he is even unhappy with himself. Therefore, it is no surprise that in the last Act of the play, he opts not to return to the court, unlike the other characters.

Jaques’ expressed wish to be a licensed jester like Touchstone serves an important dramatic purpose. Besides highlighting the fact that Jaques’ criticism of Touchstone is unjustified and malevolent, it elicits a response from the Duke who points out that Jaques, as a satirist, cannot meet the requirements of the fool and so does not qualify to be a fool. The audience, having observed the wit and wisdom of Touchstone, can thus agree that although Jaques portrays himself as being wise, he cannot fulfill the role of a fool who has wisdom,

perception and a keen sense of humor. By repeating words he cannot see the hidden meanings of, Jaques exposes his own shallowness.

JAQUES.

Thus we may see," quoth he, "how the world wags.

'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,

And after one hour more 'twill be eleven.

And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,

And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,

And thereby hangs a tale. (II.vii.24-29)

Jaques completely misses the parallels between hour and whore, ripe and search, rot from venereal disease, tail, tale, and penis. Jaques' reaction also demonstrates how anyone can be easily misled when attempting to interpret Touchstone's personality. Touchstone's comments are all very pointed and advance the concept that the meaning of love is often misunderstood.

Once again, Touchstone is pointing out that often no distinguishing lines are drawn between lust and love. However, he appears to be preoccupied with the concept of physical lovemaking without which relationships will not last. At this point, the audience is given an opportunity to laugh, "sans intermission" (II.vii.33) not only at Touchstone's play on words, but also at Jaques for his naivety. This is definitely a warning to all not to be quick to determine who Touchstone really is, as he is a complex clown whose satire serves multiple purposes. Duke Senior sums up Touchstone's shrewdness in these words, "He uses his folly like a stalking horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit" (V.iv.110-111). This is an apt description of Touchstone's style. He is present for the greater part of the play, sometimes unnoticed, observing and analyzing others. His humor is well directed, but often surprises those it is aimed at. Duke

Senior helps Jaques to see that this is exactly what Touchstone has done to him. In a later meeting between Touchstone and Jaques, Touchstone creates humor about the court. He points out the objections of an imaginary courtier who reacts when Touchstone expresses displeasure with how that courtier's beard is cut. Touchstone explains the seven degrees of the lie, namely, "the retort courteous," "quip modest," "reply churlish," "reproof valiant," "countercheck quarrelsome," "lie circumstantial" and "lie direct"(V.iv.75-85). Jaques questions Touchstone, in an attempt to match wits and Touchstone gladly accepts the challenge, seizing the opportunity to poke fun at the nobility.

TOUCHSTONE. All these you may avoid but the lie direct, and you may avoid that too with an "if." I knew when seven justices could not take up a quarrel, but when the parties were met themselves, one of them thought but of an "if," as: "If you said so, then I said so." And they shook hands and swore brothers. Your "if" is the only peacemaker: much virtue in "if." (V.iv.100-107)

This clever parody of the court traditions by Touchstone highlights ways in which gentlemen should protect their honor. The example of the beard is intended to provoke laughter, as it appears to be something too simplistic to argue about. A gentleman is expected, either to deny what he said, prove that his statement is truthful, or challenge the courtier to single combat, and for Touchstone all of these options are laughable. He also points to the handshake as superficial and meaningless. Undoubtedly, the criticism is also directed at Duke Frederick who is a usurper. Campbell points out that in Touchstone's explanation there is the "ridicule of swearing and forswearing with a final thrust at the perfidy of Duke Frederick" (62). On another level, though, Touchstone cleverly defends Jaques' challenge to his 'honor' as a court jester by outwitting him. We are left in no doubt that Jaques is no match for Touchstone.

The argument presented by Videbaek makes the contrast between Jaques and Touchstone strikingly clear. She points out that Jaques “ instead of becoming parallel to the fool, maybe even his successful rival... is an abuser of the license to which he aspires” (87). Every attempt Jaques makes to downplay Touchstone fails. Touchstone outwits him whenever Jaques asks questions that are potential traps. The answers Touchstone makes cause Jaques to comment to the Duke “ Is not this a rare fellow, my lord? He’s as good at anything and yet a fool” (V.iv.108-109). Jaques is compelled to concede defeat. The exchange between the two, therefore, gives Touchstone the opportunity to reveal to the audience that Jaques is, after all, a poor judge of character, and a self-absorbed condescending cynic. Welsford rightly concludes, “Although Jaques and Touchstone stand side by side as showmen, their points of view are not equally valid; and it is the fool, not the cynic, who is the touchstone of the play” (252). Jaques does not explain or guide us to a deeper understanding of the play, and his cynicism stands out in sharp contrast to the happiness of the married couples in the final Act. This does not mean that he does not play an important role in reminding us of the stages of life that move from childhood to death, but throughout, we look to Touchstone, not Jaques, to enlighten, entertain and amuse us.

While Touchstone takes the upper hand with Jaques, in contrast, he does not succeed in outwitting Corin the shepherd. In the exchange that takes place between the two, it is clear that Touchstone wishes to highlight their class differences, while at the same time continuing to parody the court by praising it ironically. But he also makes mockery of the shepherd’s life that he describes as being “naught” (III.ii.15). He adds that if the shepherd has never been to court then he is damned because he knows nothing about good manners. This comment has a double edge. First, it is an ironic statement about a court that is corrupt, and secondly, Touchstone is now in the forest escaping the courtly life that he praises. The scene is amusing partly because

Corin is sharp-witted and promptly responds to every ‘assault’ by Touchstone. Corin teaches Touchstone not to take others for granted and to realize that the shepherd’s honest humble occupation is just as valuable as the courtier’s.

CORIN. Not a whit, Touchstone. Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court. You told me you salute not at the court but you kiss your hands. That courtesy would be uncleanly if courtiers were shepherds.

(III.ii.45-50)

Furthermore, there is biting sarcasm when Corin tells Touchstone “You have too courtly a wit for me. I’ll rest” (III.ii.69). Clearly, a pointed response of this type is not one the audience would expect. This argument highlights the fact that shepherds now have the opportunity to laugh at courtiers, including Touchstone, who are out of place in the forest. Corin is in full control and remains undaunted even when Touchstone tells him that his response is shallow, or uses sexual innuendos to berate the shepherd’s practice of breeding sheep to earn a living. Once again, Touchstone harps on his favorite subject of copulation. Emphasis is not placed on earning an honest living from selling sheep, but rather, on the act of reproduction through forced sexual engagement, rather than intimacy by choice. Touchstone refers to this as getting a living by betraying “a she-lamb of a twelve month to a crooked-pated old cuckoldly ram” (III.ii.80-81). Videbaek states that Touchstone “invests even the ideal life of a shepherd with rampant sexuality” (88). His use of language filled with sexual overtones, suggesting that shepherds make prostitutes of the ewes, is one way in which Touchstone amuses the audience. But he also causes us to draw a parallel between animal and human copulation, which he sees as a natural part of life.

Nevertheless, Corin's message is not lost on the audience who can laugh, but at the same time appreciate that all shepherds are not uneducated, and can defend themselves in an argument. Additionally, Corin exposes the fact that the court Touchstone has fled from has a number of undesirable negative influences that make courtiers appear not to be of good breeding. He tells Touchstone, "I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness" (III.ii.73-74), which are all veiled statements that the courtier's life is the opposite. Therefore, Corin draws attention to the ironic situation where Touchstone and others are exiled in the forest of Arden in order to learn important lessons about life so that they can return to the court as better courtiers.

While Touchstone fails to get the upper hand of Corin, the situation is reversed when Touchstone humors Audrey. The laughter that is provoked is the result of Audrey's inability to understand the full depth of Touchstone's sexual overtones. The humor is, therefore, at Audrey's expense. Touchstone takes advantage of the situation knowing full well that Audrey will be confused and baffled. But this ridicule, though entertaining, is not venomous. He tells her that he is with her in the same way "Ovid was among the Goths" (III.iii.7-8). Although his words imply that he is superior to Audrey educationally, he also points out that she has no knowledge of poetry, and by extension, his puns on goats as lascivious creatures, or the historical context of his words. He uses the term "capricious" to describe Ovid, realizing that the implication of the pun on a wild goat or lascivious poet, would also be lost on Audrey. Therefore, it is no surprise that she does not understand what he means by, "Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical" (III.iii.14-15). So, his comments on sensuality, insincerity and the pretentious words of poets who write love poems are not intelligible to her. However, the audience gets the message and can appreciate the connection between his present comments and those he made earlier while

mocking Rosalind about Orlando's superficial love. Touchstone therefore forges a link in the plot.

AUDREY. I do not know what "poetical" is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

TOUCHSTONE. No, truly, for the truest poet is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry, and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign. (III.iii.16-21)

Touchstone appears to be justifying the overt sexual statements he makes to Audrey later on, knowing that she would not understand much of what he says. However, there is no offence or outrage intended, partly because Touchstone never engages in an open physical relationship with Audrey despite his constant references to sexual engagement. William, her suitor, unlike Touchstone, has not made a commitment or "interest," therefore Audrey rejects his infatuation. Consequently, the audience gets an opportunity to laugh at William when he is confronted by Touchstone, although Touchstone seems to be furious and threatens his rival that he will kill him "a hundred and fifty ways" (V.i.37). This too must be taken as light-hearted humor, as Touchstone is not the physically violent type, but puts on a show for the audience. Throughout, Audrey maintains her dignity, and encourages William to leave peacefully. He honors her wish and leaves showing respect for Touchstone with the words "God rest you merry, sir" (V.ii.60).

It is obvious that Audrey knows exactly who she is and what she wants and will not settle for less. When Touchstone uses the term "foul slut" (III.iii.35), Audrey does not react to being called foul as she interprets this word literally, but she defends her honor indicating that she is not a slut. While Touchstone tries to prove his superiority at rhetoric, Audrey is pragmatic.

She makes it clear that she will remain chaste until marriage and she stands firm in that belief, not allowing Touchstone to seduce her.

As a result, the audience can enjoy the relationship between Touchstone and Audrey from the perspective of what Videbaek terms “comic clown courtship” (89). In this situation, Touchstone cannot take Audrey for granted and use her as an object to satisfy his sexual desires. She insists on being married and Touchstone has no choice but to comply. This is amusing, primarily because ironically Touchstone has shown contempt for the shepherd’s life, but chooses to have a relationship with a goat-keeper.

Undoubtedly, the audience is aware of Touchstone’s condescending tone when he addresses Audrey and the shepherds. This certainly reveals that he has a sense of his own importance as someone of higher social rank. But as the scenes unfold, he is forced to realize that he is not superior to any shepherd. Therefore, his reluctant marriage to Audrey supports the argument that love should not have any social boundaries. Videbaek states that in his mock wooing of Audrey, Touchstone’s “whole ploy is set up and fails” (92). Nevertheless, events that lead up to the marriages at the end of the play, though humorous, highlight the folly of all of the marriage partners, the lessons they have learned, and their new and improved outlook on life.

Part Two

While Touchstone functions as the one who opens the eyes of other characters and initiates change, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark has a clown role that reflects some similarities but also has major differences because his experiences are different. Hamlet’s father dies in circumstances that are suspicious. His mother hastily marries Claudius, his uncle. Although

Claudius says that Hamlet is “the most immediate” to the throne (I.ii.109), Claudius takes swift action through a legal technicality to be crowned King of Denmark, and his marriage to Hamlet’s mother, Queen Gertrude, makes it almost impossible for Hamlet to challenge that kingship. Although Hamlet does not make an overt or direct claim regarding not being considered for election to the throne, through his soliloquies he demonstrates his anguish. The haste with which everything is done proves troubling for Hamlet.

Therefore, the audience is kept on alert to see how Hamlet will deal with this difficult situation. His immediate reaction on his return to Denmark from studies abroad reflects his immaturity in dealing with a matter of such a delicate nature. Despite the fact that several months have passed since his father’s demise, Hamlet still dresses in black, a color used in mourning, but also one that symbolizes melancholy. He sighs frequently, is downcast in spirits and this is reflected in his demeanor. All of this suggests that he is deeply depressed. Claudius delivers a well-calculated speech, chastising Hamlet for mourning the way he does, but at the same time tries to impress everyone that he is pious, caring, rational, offers sound advice and is in full control. All of these are qualities expected in a competent monarch. Claudius’ speech to Hamlet is carefully thought out, his words are well chosen and have the desired impact of impressing all present that he is the most suitable choice as the King of Denmark.

KING. But to persever

In obstinate condolment is a course

Of impious stubbornness; ‘tis unmanly grief.

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,

A heart unfortified or mind impatient,

An understanding simple and unschooled. (I.ii.92-97)

While we can agree that Hamlet's reaction is naïve, these comments by the king make us aware that he is portraying himself as the father figure, but we also question whether these words are a veiled warning to Hamlet not to challenge his authority. The king's next decision that Hamlet should remain in Denmark rather than return to Germany to resume his studies compels us to question his motives. Since there is no clear indication that Hamlet is a danger to himself or that he will not be able to successfully pursue his studies, Claudius must have ulterior motives aimed at controlling Hamlet in order to secure the throne. It is noteworthy here, that while Hamlet makes no response to Claudius, once the King exits, Hamlet unburdens his soul in a soliloquy. In this way, he is able to communicate his thoughts and feelings directly to the audience so that there is a better understanding of his character and the audience can try to anticipate his subsequent actions.

HAMLET. O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem all the uses of this world! (I.ii.129-134)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet reveals that committing suicide would be an option for him if the church accepted it. The imagery he uses of his flesh melting, thawing and resolving "itself into a dew" (I.ii.130) shows a mind that is so deeply disturbed by his mother's hasty marriage to a "satyr" (I.ii.140) that Hamlet appears to be mentally unstable.

Nevertheless, he is still somewhat rational, despite his passionate contemplation of suicide as he ends by stating, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I.ii.159). His

words clearly indicate that he knows he must act in secrecy or face danger. However, tension mounts soon after, when he learns of the appearance of a ghost that resembles his dead father. He asks those who have seen the ghost to be silent. Hamlet says, “All is not well” (I.ii.255), and he also states, “Foul deeds will rise”(I.ii.257). These words are important as they advance the plot. The audience can anticipate that the ghost will provide important information that might prove there is corruption, but the concern at this time is that a scholar such as Hamlet should accept, without any proof, that the ghost is authentic.

Therefore, when Hamlet meets the ghost and is told that Claudius murdered his father, King Hamlet, this information triggers a number of reactions. The ghost insists that Hamlet must avenge his father’s “foul and most unnatural murder” (I.v.25), and it constantly pressures Hamlet when it repeats this demand. Additionally, it points out that it is confined “to fast in fires,” a suggestion that it is condemned to purgatory because King Hamlet was unable to ask forgiveness for his sins before being killed. The ghost continues by using angry, emotive, metaphoric language such as, “The serpent that did sting thy father’s life, now wears his crown” (I.v.38-39), to stir Hamlet to anger and revenge. The serpent, and therefore Claudius, is portrayed as a symbol of the devil that must be defeated. In this instance, the ghost acts like a puppeteer manipulating Hamlet’s emotions. Stephen Greenblatt argues that the fear of oblivion and extreme suffering in purgatory influence how Shakespeare portrays the ghost as well as how Hamlet responds to it. He explains further that the Catholic Church places strong emphasis on the torture souls would be forced to endure in purgatory and reasons that Hamlet’s first opportunity to kill Claudius was not taken because Claudius was in prayer and so would not go to purgatory (230). Although Wittenberg as a strong Protestant area, is opposed to the Catholic concept of Purgatory, Greenblatt suggests that Hamlet has “a distinctly Protestant temperament”

but “is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost” (240). What the audience does observe here is the development of a vindictive trait in Hamlet. Maybe he reasons that if his father went to purgatory, then so should Claudius. He questions if killing his uncle while he prays is in fact revenge when Claudius “is fit and seasoned” (III.iii.86) to journey to heaven. Hamlet therefore decides against killing Claudius at this time.

Faced with all of the expectations for him to be the avenger, Hamlet vacillates and assumes the role of a tortured soul because of the serious dilemma he faces. The conventions of that period require him to take swift action and avenge the king’s murder. As angry as he is, he finds himself unable to act quickly because once he begins an analysis of the situation he becomes absorbed in thought. He cannot prove whether the ghost is genuine or a “goblin damned” (I.iv.40), and as an intellectual he needs to have information that is verifiable. Additionally, he is uncertain if the ghost speaks the truth. His position is also awkward since he resides in the court with Claudius, his uncle. Therefore, he cannot openly investigate whether his father died of natural causes or if Claudius murdered him.

As a result, Hamlet experiences mental and emotional turmoil as he tries to figure out how to deal with his situation. He has few safe options at his disposal. Since he is so angry about his mother’s marriage he will not ask her a direct question about his father’s death. Additionally, Horatio, his closest friend, has been away in Germany at University and would not be able to verify the ghost’s accusation that King Hamlet was murdered by his brother, the present king. In *To Be or not to Be: The Soliloquy Redefined* there is the question, “But what is a man to do when the offender is the king himself, when the king could be conceived as being above the law as God’s anointed representative on earth?” (2). Hamlet is in a desperate situation as to what line of action he can safely take, and the audience empathizes with him.

Hamlet therefore, goes into deep contemplation and comes up with a plan to feign madness and act the role of the clown. He confides in his friend Horatio telling him that he will put on an “antic disposition” (I.v.172). Horatio is sworn to secrecy when Hamlet explains that he will present himself “arms encumb’red” along with “this headshake” and use ambiguous phrases such as “there be, an if they might” (I.v.174-176), so under this disguise, he hopes to arrive at the truth. This seems to him to be the logical approach as he assumes that no one will see through his motives, as the disguise is a safe cover from which he can observe the king. In this way, the audience is prepared for the scenes when Hamlet pretends to be mad, when the plot changes direction, and the ways in which Hamlet’s acting might impact other characters.

As a result, the audience is not surprised when Hamlet meets Claudius and begins his act. He uses words that might seem unintelligible, but are in fact a skillful use of double entendre that mocks his uncle, but at the same time, in a covert way, allows Hamlet to express his displeasure. Claudius addresses Hamlet as his “cousin” and “son” meaning his kinsman and royal stepson. Hamlet interacts with the audience through an aside stating, “A little more than kin, and less than kind” (I.ii.64-65). The comment is facetious and is probably aimed at provoking a mocking laughter. The audience is prepared for the strained relationship between Hamlet and the king and can anticipate further conflict between the two.

Consequently, the clown acting that develops as the play progresses is critical to an understanding of Hamlet, the protagonist, and the play. Videbaek asserts that protagonists with the ability “to assume elements of the clown’s part” enrich the drama and “give us a broader basis for our own interpretation” (190). Hamlet intrigues audiences with his changed behavior and dress as he accurately mimics someone suffering from love melancholia. His act convinces Polonius and Ophelia, but Claudius is not impressed. The audience, meanwhile, is left to debate

whether what they observe is feigned madness or real madness. Hamlet has suffered a devastating loss as a result of his father's death. He has lost interest in the world and shows signs of depression. It is therefore possible that he has crossed that thin line which separates sanity from insanity.

Alternatively, Hamlet could very well be employing the same cunning tactics that Claudius uses. The main difference, though, is that Claudius is experienced and shrewd while Hamlet does not have that level of cunning. The journal article, *To Be or not to Be: The Soliloquy Redefined* identifies Claudius as Machiavellian and points out, "Throughout the play Hamlet matures with Machiavelli's brilliant student Claudius as his teacher" (3). The characteristics Claudius reveals include deception, manipulation and vindictiveness. Hamlet follows this very pattern but does not have the finesse that Claudius uses to cover his tracks. Claudius is an impressive public speaker who convinces the court that his actions in claiming the crown and marrying his sister-in-law are legitimate and above board. Since no physical evidence exists to link him to any involvement in King Hamlet's death, he presents himself as standing on moral high ground. Hamlet is no match for Claudius who remains in control of the situation. Claudius arranges for Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to watch Hamlet and report everything to him. He even persuades Gertrude to do his bidding by agreeing to interrogate her son and report the details to him. Claudius is unmatched in his ability to control others.

As the plot develops, the audience has the opportunity to see Hamlet advance in his "antic disposition," and while this serves as a distraction from the impending tragedy, it creates pain for Ophelia who is in love with Hamlet. The timing as well as setting of one of Hamlet's planned performances is well selected. Hamlet correctly anticipates that Ophelia is being

monitored and so he shows up when she is sewing in her private room. Ophelia relates the incident to her father Polonius.

OPHELIA. Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors - he comes before me.

POLONIUS. Mad for thy love? (II.i.78-84)

While the spectacle of a member of the royal family untidily dressed and behaving as if he has completely lost his mind, is shocking for Ophelia, the audience understands Hamlet's motives and questions whether this is really an act or a symptom of love melancholia. However, Polonius is satisfied that this behavior stems from unrequited love, and it is interesting that both Polonius and Hamlet try to get evidence to support a theory. Here, Hamlet ignores all princely protocol and assumes the role of the Machiavellian politician, callously hurting even the vulnerable as he pursues his objective. He is convinced that by assuming this persona, he will have a distraction that allows him to investigate his father's death without detection or interruption. Polonius though, is anxious to satisfy Claudius with a logical explanation for Hamlet's actions. Therefore, Polonius monitors his daughter's every move, and eavesdrops when necessary in order to prove that Hamlet has gone mad for Ophelia's love.

In this scene, Hamlet guides the action of the play and helps the audience to see the motives of other characters, as well as critical themes such as deception and the need for justice. Therefore, the audience is influenced by Hamlet, especially since he is constantly before them. For all five acts of the play he maintains a presence on stage, and when he does not speak, he is spoken about.

Both Hamlet and Polonius, in their encounters, display clown-like behavior, though in different ways. Polonius acts like the buffoon, doing and saying everything, no matter how silly, just to please Claudius and confirm his loyalty. In contrast, Hamlet, like a clown jester, uses double entendre as he aims his ‘daggers’ at Polonius, making him appear to be a senseless being. On the contrary, Polonius is not stupid but plays a game that gives him the opportunity to analyze Hamlet and his motives without making it obvious.

POLONIUS. Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET. Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS. Not I, my lord.

HAMLET. Then I would you were so honest a man.

POLONIUS. Honest, my lord?

HAMLET. Ay, sir. To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out
of ten thousand.

POLONIUS. That’s very true my lord.

(II.ii.173-180)

In this exchange Polonius checks to ensure whether Hamlet is lucid. Therefore, Polonius’ question is aimed at verifying whether the melancholia has progressed to the point where Hamlet

cannot recognize people he knows. Polonius is surprised by the insult he receives in Hamlet's reply. The term fishmonger has different levels of meaning, but Hamlet's intention here is to create humor at Polonius' expense. On one level, Polonius, a courtier who is of high rank is termed a fishmonger, or a fish seller, who comes from one of the lowest social ranks. On another level, the terminology is used to describe someone who uses women for profit. Polonius is polite and respects Hamlet's position as Prince of Denmark, therefore his reply does not give away his thoughts or emotions. He realizes that Hamlet implies that Polonius, like a pimp, is using his daughter to procure information for Claudius' benefit.

The irony here is that while Polonius arranges for his daughter to lure Hamlet to the room where she is, and he uses her for his purposes, Hamlet uses them both to get the message of his love melancholia back to the king. Additionally, by questioning Polonius' honesty, Hamlet indicates his mistrust of not only Polonius, but also the political directorate. The audience must now decide whether Hamlet gives away too much information or whether he assumes that Polonius, as one of the "tedious old fools" (II.ii.221) would not fully understand his meaning.

However, before this dialogue ends, Polonius communicates with the audience through an aside. Polonius surmises that although Hamlet might appear to be mad, "yet there is method in't" (II.ii.207). In another aside, Polonius comments that Hamlet's replies are "pregnant" (II.ii.211). This is an invitation by Shakespeare for the audience to see that, although Polonius realizes that Hamlet's language is filled with double meanings, he still might not accurately interpret Hamlet's motives because Hamlet's acting is so impressive. Therefore, Polonius concludes that Hamlet is lovesick just as he was when he "suffered much extremity for love" (II.ii.191-192). However, when Polonius reports everything that has transpired, Claudius' reaction causes him to rethink his position. Claudius remains the one who is in full control.

When Hamlet takes his plan a step further by engaging players to enact a scene similar to the murder of his father, he prepares the audience for a climax that, not surprisingly, ends up being an anti climax. Hamlet is convinced that the play will allow him to “ catch the conscience of the king” (II.ii.617), and publicly expose Claudius as his father’s murderer. Throughout the staging of the play, Hamlet plays the role of the clown by giving a continuous satirical commentary on the action. Claudius interrupts the play at the point of the murder. He shouts for lights and leaves the stage. Hamlet’s optimism that the play has exposed the king is seen in his conversation with Horatio.

HAMLET. O good Horatio, I’ll take the ghost’s word for a thousand pound.

Didst perceive?

HORATIO. Very well, my lord.

HAMLET. Upon the talk of poisoning?

HORATIO. I did very well note him.

HAMLET. Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!

For if the King like not the comedy,

Why then, belike he likes it not, perdy. (III.ii.292-300)

Hamlet’s apparent ecstasy and desire for celebratory flute music, shows that he is not experienced enough to accurately interpret Claudius’ reaction. Although Hamlet is convinced that Claudius’ sudden exit is a demonstration of guilt, Claudius’ actions could be interpreted otherwise. By bringing the play to an abrupt end, Claudius prevents public speculation and allows himself time to arrange for the disposal of his challenger. The play therefore, does not meet Hamlet’s stated objectives.

Nevertheless, despite claiming that he has exposed Claudius, Hamlet is unable even now to avenge his father's murder. He comes across Claudius praying and could kill Claudius while he is defenseless.

CLAUDIUS. O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. (III.iii.36-38)

Hamlet debates whether he should kill Claudius now but decides against it because he questions whether it is true revenge "to take him in the purging of his soul" (III.iii.84). Hamlet maliciously concludes that it is better to kill Claudius while he commits some sinful act such as sleeping from drunkenness, displaying extreme anger or engaging in incest. From this type of reasoning, the audience realizes that Hamlet is preoccupied with trying to ensure that Claudius' soul goes to purgatory. Hamlet, the growing Machiavellian, therefore expresses vindictiveness, not a desire to ensure that justice is achieved by avenging his father's murder. This vindictive behavior extends to other characters who are connected to the king.

Whenever Hamlet engages in dialogue with Polonius, who is a faithful councillor to the king, Hamlet leaves the audience with his perceptions of Polonius and gives them time to judge who Polonius really is. How the audience views Polonius will determine whether they sympathize with him or are satisfied that he meets a just fate when Hamlet kills him later on. But Hamlet convinces them that he thinks he has stabbed Claudius through the arras while the king is eavesdropping. The audience therefore accepts that killing Polonius is a genuine mistake and not an act of cold-blooded murder. So, while the audience agrees with Hamlet that Polonius is a

“wretched, rash, intruding fool” (III.iv.32), they might be amused by what Hamlet tells Claudius, who comes in search of Polonius’ body.

KING. Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

HAMLET. At supper.

KING. At supper? Where?

HAMLET. Not where he eats, but where ‘a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. (IV.iii.16-21)

This exchange demonstrates how Hamlet makes mockery of Polonius’ lack of statesmanship and indicates that Polonius has met the fate that all flesh must meet by dying. As a result, few might empathize with Polonius, but they can see a trend in Hamlet’s behavior. Once again, Hamlet acts the role of the clown as he assumes madness when he responds to Claudius. But this answer is given in true Machiavellian style. Hamlet disposes of those who stand in his way, so Polonius’ death is not something he takes seriously. While the imagery of the maggots eating Polonius’ body is gruesome, Hamlet’s callous responses confirm in Claudius’ mind that Hamlet is a real threat that must be removed.

Hamlet’s antic behavior therefore prompts a turning point in the play and the audience can anticipate possible actions that Claudius would take to secure his position as King of Denmark. Claudius analyzes Hamlet’s behavior very early in the play and sums up his suspicions of Hamlet’s motives when he says that Hamlet’s discourse, “though it lacked form a little, was not like madness” (III.i.166-167). At this point, the audience realizes that Claudius has uncovered Hamlet’s clown disguise. Claudius as the experienced Machiavellian stands out in contrast to Hamlet who is inexperienced in politics and is no match for Claudius. Hamlet’s “antic

disposition” and presentation of a play that is intended to serve as a “mousetrap” (III.ii.243), all seem childish and ineffective. In fact, Hamlet plays a dangerous game that can be used against him. Therefore, the tension and pace of the drama heighten as we wait to see how Claudius will dispose of Hamlet whom he deems “will be some danger” (III.i.170).

It is therefore no surprise that Claudius seizes the opportunity to use Hamlet’s acts of feigned madness against him. Even up to this point, Hamlet continues to underestimate his uncle, who makes hasty arrangements for Hamlet to travel to England, explaining that this is a decision made for Hamlet’s “especial safety” (IV.iii.40). Again, Hamlet continues to jest using double entendre, and is not fully aware of the serious danger he is in.

HAMLET. For England?

KING. Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET. Good.

KING. So is it, if thou knew’st our purposes.

HAMLET. I see a cherub that sees them. But come, for England! Farewell dear Mother!

(IV.iii.47-52)

Hamlet assumes that Claudius will not understand his implication that he knows of his father’s murder, and he continues by speaking indirectly of the incestuous relationship between the king and queen, by referring to them as “My mother-father” (IV.iii.51)

Claudius sends Hamlet to England with orders for him to be killed, an action that is taken under the disguise of sending Hamlet where mad persons are usually sent to benefit from being in a different environment. This is a shrewd move that is well calculated. Claudius chooses a line of action that would not turn public opinion against him. Under no circumstances, would

he wish the people of Denmark to favor or sympathize with Hamlet, who is a highly respected prince. But he needs to get rid of any threat to his position as monarch. When events take an unexpected turn, there is mounting tension because Hamlet alters Claudius' document in order to direct, instead, the killing of his former classmates and betrayers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet's return to Denmark where he resumes playing the clown, this time in the graveyard, creates intrigue. We question Hamlet's motives and predict that the outcome might not be in his favor since Claudius is unrelenting in his determination not to tolerate any opposition.

But the audience also gets another opportunity for comic relief. We are introduced to the gravedigger clowns who, though not highly educated, are rational beings. The clown's limited education is reflected through the misuse of terms such as "crownner's quest" (V.i.23) meaning coroner's inquest. Although this might provoke a chuckle, it is clear that the clown is aware of the legal procedure that must be followed to account to the public for a death surrounded by uncertain circumstances.

OTHER. But is this law?

CLOWN. Ay marry, is't – crownner's quest law.

OTHER. Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial.

CLOWN. Why, there thou say'st. And the more pity that great folk should have

count'nance in the world to drown or hang themselves more than their even-Christen.

(V.i.22-30)

Here, the clowns focus attention on Ophelia. She loses her mind, becomes incoherent and ends up drowning. Two possible explanations are advanced for her death. The Queen refers to it as an

accidental drowning. However, the audience is aware that Ophelia has suffered extreme grief through the sudden loss of her father who was murdered by Hamlet, and from the cruel words he says to her when in feigned madness he announces that he never loved her. It is quite possible that she is unable to cope with life and so commits suicide.

Alternatively, her melancholia could have been so extreme that without understanding what she is doing, she could have walked straight into the water and drowned. Since by law the king is accountable for every citizen, Claudius will never allow himself to lose face. He therefore decides that the cause of death is accidental drowning. Even if this were not the case, it is doubtful whether the coroner would go against Claudius' decision. The dialogue of the clowns therefore brings into focus one of the social inequalities that exists. Gentlewomen like Ophelia, are given privileges that other women do not have, and the clown humorously points to the injustice of allowing the gentility more privileges to drown or hang themselves than their fellow Christians, then grant them a Christian burial although it is against the rules. So, although it is widely believed that Ophelia committed suicide, the coroner's determination that this is not the case, and the king's orders that Ophelia should have a Christian burial, are final. This does not sit well with the clowns and they are happy to voice their views publicly.

Hamlet's timely arrival at this scene creates important links in the plot. Hamlet has escaped being killed and wants information to plan his next line of action. He needs to make the clowns comfortable with him, and it is immediately noticeable that his speech pattern changes to match that of the clowns. He converses using their dialect and discovers that the clowns have just dug up a skull belonging to Yorick, the former court jester and companion to Hamlet. We notice at this point that Hamlet's mood changes. Not only does he unveil his philosophy that death is no respecter of social class as we all must return to the dust, but he also reflects on his happy

childhood when he enjoyed the clown's humor and playful companionship. This is one of the signs of Hamlet's growing maturity as he is ready to accept the reality of his own mortality.

There are a few important truths the clowns unintentionally make Hamlet face. He learns that mad people are 'banished' to England where, if they do not recover their wits "tis no great matter there" (V.i.154). Hamlet can therefore conclude that Claudius must have reasoned that once the people of Denmark are satisfied that Hamlet is mad, they would see nothing wrong with Claudius' sending him to England, and if Hamlet did not return to Denmark it would be assumed that he could not be cured of his madness. Hamlet's experience on his journey to England when he discovers Claudius' letter ordering his death, together with this information that is disclosed by the clowns, should signal to Hamlet that his life is in grave danger and he has to be cautious how he deals with Claudius. Hamlet's discussion with the gravediggers therefore advances the plot, as we can now anticipate what the king's next move will be once he discovers that Hamlet is still alive.

Consequently, the graveyard scene serves a number of dramatic purposes. Through their humorous exchanges, the clowns uncover discrimination and object to it. Also, Hamlet's morbid humor as he comments on the human remains in the graveyard shows him to be callous. However, the clowns are unaware of who Hamlet is, and so Shakespeare uses dramatic irony to allow them to speak openly about Hamlet to his face. In this way, the audience has a deeper understanding of how shrewd Claudius is and realizes that Hamlet faces a daunting challenge that cannot be overcome by pretending to be mad. Also, this scene is the last one in which the audience will see Hamlet playing the fool. It thus represents a major turning point in the action of the play, and this transition is effectively signaled through the dialogue between Hamlet and the clowns.

HAMLET. What man dost thou dig it for?

CLOWN. For no man, sir.

HAMLET. What woman then?

CLOWN. For none neither

HAMLET. Who is to be buried in't?

CLOWN. One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul. She's dead. (V.i. 132-138)

This witty exchange shows that the clown thinks quickly and gives vague responses to vague questions when the words can have more than one meaning. However, he makes it clear that the deceased cannot be referred to in human terms such as man or woman. Death changes that. There is also dramatic irony here as the audience is aware of Ophelia's death, but Hamlet is not. The conversation also prepares us for impending conflict over the circumstances of her death. Soon after this conversation, the funeral cortege approaches and it is at this point Hamlet is shocked as he realizes who the deceased woman is.

This revelation should open Hamlet's eyes to the major crisis that he has contributed to. Hamlet is responsible for the deaths of two members of a family. He should therefore anticipate a challenge from the surviving son and brother, Laertes, who will not hesitate to take his revenge. The audience can now anticipate further tension and a violent confrontation. But from this point onward, we notice a change in Hamlet. The negative experiences seem to have had the positive impact of maturing him. Videbaek observes, "Hamlet's choice of the clown's role was made in order to become as different from himself as possible, but also because of the freedom such a role would give him. Now, at a more mature stage, he does not need to put on a show" (189). Not only does Hamlet no longer need to pretend, but he is also unable to conceal his genuine shock and pain at the passing of Ophelia.

Consequently, with the removal of his clown disguise, Hamlet can be open and honest with Laertes. He states “I loved Ophelia” (V.i.271). He continues by declaring that not even a number as large as “forty thousand brothers” (V.i.271) could experience the amount of love he had for Ophelia. Also for the first time in the play, he takes partial responsibility for his actions.

HAMLET. Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged;
His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy.
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot my arrow o’er the house
And hurt my brother. (V.ii.239-245)

Hamlet has even matured enough to offer an apology, but he is crafty when he continues to blame his madness for his actions. It becomes evident that Hamlet does not understand Claudius’ propensity for cunning behavior, when he fails to accept that Claudius cannot be trusted. His fatal error is agreeing to a duel with Laertes, knowing that Claudius, who planned his death earlier, is the mastermind behind its organization. What he says earlier to Horatio in describing his journey from England is prophetic but he does not apply this philosophy to his own situation. Hamlet explains, “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends” (V.ii.10). Maybe we can conclude that Hamlet’s destiny is predetermined and that he would die in that duel irrespective of what actions he takes to avoid it. However, his clown behavior highlights a major weakness in his character, that he fails to be perceptive enough to accurately judge Claudius’ propensity for malice and murder. This makes Hamlet the clown, leave the audience with mixed feelings. While we experience pathos at his death, we are also convinced that he does not have the critical qualities that are necessary for effective kingship.

Conclusion

The Elizabethan audience had certain expectations when they attended performances of comedies and tragedies. These included interaction between the audience and certain characters on the stage through soliloquies, asides and the comments of a detached observer. They also anticipated opportunities for merriment delivered by fools and jesters who were witty, yet served as voices of reason. *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* have satisfied these needs over the centuries and remain immensely popular today, although they are different dramatic genres.

As You Like It is a romance comedy in which the jester, Touchstone, plays a critical role. He is a source of humor throughout the play even when he offers commentary on serious issues like corruption at the court, relationships and the life of the shepherds. His satirical style is entertaining and appealing to the audience who can momentarily put aside their cares and become engaged in a mentally and emotionally stimulating drama that provides an avenue for escape. At times, we can identify with Touchstone, especially when he matches wits with the melancholy Jaques or guides characters like Rosalind from naivety about love, to a more mature and realistic appreciation of what love entails. Furthermore, it is through Touchstone's constant interaction with the audience that they are able to follow the plot, development of characters, and emerging themes.

But Touchstone is also appealing in other ways. His jokes, though sometimes lewd, are neither offensive nor worded in such a way as to show disrespect for any one. His directness and honesty are expressed spontaneously, without inhibition, and this is one of the reasons why the audience gravitates towards him. At times, he actively participates in events in the play, while on other occasions he behaves like the detached observer who mediates between the audience and

the stage. Nevertheless, whether he is inside or outside the play, Touchstone remains the focal point of the audience.

The protagonist/jester and gravedigger clowns in the tragedy *Hamlet* serve different purposes, although there is sometimes a similarity in their behavior and that of Touchstone. This stems from their directness. The gravediggers appear in only one scene of the entire play, serve their purpose, and are not seen or heard of again. Hamlet, though, is present for most of the play and is actively involved in influencing the direction the plot takes, and he even helps to determine what happens to the lives of several characters. Additionally, the comic characters in *Hamlet* are important as they allow the audience temporary distraction from the intensity of the impending tragedy.

While Touchstone and Hamlet often serve different purposes in the plays, some of their functions are similar. For example, they both have strong appeal and influence the mood of the dramas by keeping the audience interested, shocked and amused. Individuals of high rank are ridiculed and disrespected by both and the audience is expected to participate in this ridicule by laughing. Additionally, their constant presence on the stage invites the audience to follow them closely and anticipate the final outcomes, not only of their lives but also of the lives of all of the other characters with whom they interact.

Without the inclusion of fools and jesters in *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, critical aspects of stage acting as well as social and political commentary would be lost. Therefore, while humorous entertainment pleases audiences, this is not the playwright's only goal. Touchstone and Hamlet appeal to reason, reveal important truths about life, and remain timeless as they disseminate relevant messages about human existence.

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