



## The Wisdom of Foolish Character: Exploring The Role of The Foolish In Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and Stoppard's Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead

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### ABSTRACT

In literature, the clown or the Fool is considered an attractive character that has frequently caught the interest of modern critics and audiences. The humour or the Laughter of the Clown is used as a form of social activism, as it historically serves as a mechanism for critique and transformation by exposing the undesirable realities of society at particular moments in time. Moreover, it has been recognized as a crucial element of human communication and expression, with Charles Darwin recognizing it as a foundational feature of social interaction preceding speech. From antiquity to the modern era, folly has been manifested in various forms, from ancient jesters to contemporary clowns. This paper examines how Shakespeare and Stoppard utilize humour to provoke social change, specifically centring on the role of black humour portrayed by the Fool in Twelfth Night and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. Feste represents the artificial Fool in Twelfth Night, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent the natural Fool in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. These characters expose the meaninglessness of life, reject social norms, and highlight the limitation of man's thinking through their wit and ridicule actions in both Elizabethan and modern eras.

### Introduction

As Charles Darwin explained (cited by Brudevold, 2015), Laughter is connected explicitly to human communication and language development. Furthermore, humour can be manifested through literary genres such as puns of words, sudden actions, gestures of a ridiculous, jokes, and irony. Erasmus (1668) confirmed that it is a clever aspect of human structure, and the figure of the Fool has experienced multifaceted archetypes that have been improved over history. This character served various social, religious, and entertainment needs of different societies. The

foolish character can be manifested in multiple forms, such as an enslaved person, prophet, entertainer, traveller, and mischief-maker.

The Fool appears in history in different names and various shapes. Brudevold (2015) admits that the first appearance of the Fool can be known as the Danga in Ancient Egypt. They were valued for their deformity. Ancient Greece saw the rise of the first professional fools. Athenaeus wrote *The Sophists at Dinner*, a long literary and historical work of the most famous jesters in the Hellenic world. In wealthy families' houses, fools were professionals known as "laughter-makers". They had a constant position. During the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare discovered the character of the Fool through his plays; however, there were two types of Fool: natural and artificial. The natural Fool "embodies a failure to uphold social norms and either a rejection of social mores and standards or being ousted by the rest of the group" (Al-Azraki, 2021). This kind of foolish character lacks the wit to manipulate others and cannot expose the truth, and he is characterized as naive and innocent. This type is sometimes embodied as a clown, physically deformed, or an enslaved person. In contrast, the artificial Fool is a court jester or a professional clown who can comically utter the truth and highlight the other characters' foolishness. The function of this type of Fool is to entertain the Master through jokes, songs, and playing with words such as Feste (Brudevold, 2015).

Brudevold (2015) claims that During the Renaissance period in Italy, the tendency to have artificial and natural Fools was raised among the wealthy class. Robert Armin was both a literary critic and a professional fool, and Shakespeare took some of his knowledge and profession in folly. Accordingly, the Fool had a long stretch of improvement, and Shakespeare was influenced by many ways to create his court jesters, such as questioning authority and examining human nature's complexity through mixing humour and wisdom. Critics consider Shakespeare's Fool, Feste of *Twelfth Night* (1602), as an artificial clown. John Towsen (1976) states that "In many cultures, the artificial fool – the clown, the jester – is an individual selected by the society to enact a significant role, and clowning thus becomes institutionalized, an integral part of the community life" (Towsen, 1976, p.6). Shakespeare seems preoccupied with madness and folly in *Twelfth Night* (1602).

Historically, the clown has performed various social, political, religious, and psychological entertainment functions. The existence of a fool character is a teacher expressing the unexplored philosophical aspect in a tragic theatrical work. This character can change the audiences' perspectives about the play's mood and reveal the play's hidden message as a turning point in the events. As Videbaek (1999) points out:

No matter how minor it may be, every clown part is important for the audience's understanding of the play, or the point of view on which we base our final interpretation. Even a clown in a minor role can be a teacher and a guide for the audience, open hitherto unexplored approaches, and lend depth or dimension to the character with whom the clown interacts. This effect can be accomplished with great economy because the clown usually appears at a turning point in the action, and so his very presence comes to signal a change and opportunity for greater insight. (p.7)

The characters of the clown in Shakespeare's plays possess a dual role. He is the source of comedy and the key to consciousness and realization. Shakespeare usually represents his fool characters as the world's conscience because his drama is symbolic. In *Twelfth Night*, the Fool that Olivia's father delighted in is Feste. This would make Feste a mature man who passed on

to Olivia after her father died. This supports the idea that he is the character of wisdom because Feste is an older man. Despite his foolishness, he seems to be the only character in the play who truly has his wits about himself and others. In other words, he pretends to be a fool to be allowed to tell the truth. Shakespeare presents a universal image of the absurdity of the world through Feste. He mirrors each of the main characters, revealing their weakness and showing the unacceptable facts about them that no one dares to speak. As Quennell (1995) admits that:

Feste is a wise fool, a mature, sensible wit who is conscious of his superiority to the fools who surround him. He has little to do with the plot until the last act. His function is to indicate to the audience the foolishness of the main characters (p. 76).

The Fools in Shakespeare's plays are probably the most humane characters and, ironically, the most intelligent characters in the plays, showing their wisdom and wit through their language. The Fool in *King Lear* (1608) is ridiculous, yet he shows loyalty and devotion to King Lear. In *Twelfth Night*, Feste and King Lear's Fool are the truth-tellers, and even the Gravedigger in *Hamlet* (1623). They perceive the absurdities and flaws of the other characters. Fools and clowns can also be found in the modern age, as Dario Fo (cited by MacManus, 2003, p.11) said, "Clowns can be found at all times and in all countries" (p.11). In a sense, the artists in the twentieth century used the clown as a means and way to present the contemporary tragic impulse. He states that:

Clown makes an ideal protagonist of twentieth-century theater because theatrical modernism was preoccupied with breaking the expectations of older genre systems and exposing the mechanism of art-making. If a character in twentieth-century theater looks like a clown and acts like a clown, but does not make us laugh, it is usually because our attention is being channeled in a new direction. What was once a joke has now been presented as an insight, question, or commentary. Clown has become, in contemporary theater, a character from whom audiences can expect philosophizing, angst, or political criticism as much as physical comedy and fractured language. (p. 11-12).

Modern artists approach clowns to break the traditions of the classical clown. They are concerned with how theatrical artists have used older visions of a clown to create their work in a different form. The modern clown may expose the joke differently, which may be in question form or as a comment on severe events, and they do not need to wear clown costumes, but the important thing is that they have clownish characteristics.

This research discusses the foolery in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night* and the modern play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) by Tom Stoppard. In the first play, we have a minor Foolish character, a court-jester, who represents an artificial fool, while in the second play, we have a black comedy play in which its main characters have clownish characteristics, as Feste the Fool of *Twelfth Night* said, "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit" (TN, I, V, 325).

As this paper will clarify, Feste is the truth-teller in *Twelfth Night*. He is one of the most ironic characters in that he is a clown but wiser than any character in the play. He presents Malvolio, Olivia, Sir Andrew, and Orsino as foolish characters who cannot observe the reality of the world they are living in. Feste is well aware of his role. He holds himself somewhat apart from

the other characters; he sings songs, tells jokes and riddles, and puts on voices- sometimes for a price, but he is so conscious about his foolery since he is an artificial Fool.

The second play analyzes the main characters and themes of the modern play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Tom Stoppard. William Shakespeare created the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in his play *Hamlet* as secondary characters. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is based on the fate of these two characters and incorporates aspects of black comedy used to lighten dark matters. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will be studied as fool characters representing the second part of what Feste said in *Twelfth Night*: "a foolish wit". They never succeed in any mission and never understand the world's logic. They lack consciousness of the absurdity of the universe they live in. They keep questioning all the time, yet never attempt to find solutions as they represent the nihilism of modern life. Stoppard represents the condition of the modern man living in an absurd world but unaware of its absurdity through these two characters.

Then, the Janik study of Fool (1998) will be applied to Feste, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. According to her, different types of Fools depend on how much they can understand about themselves and others around them. Accordingly, Feste is the wise Fool who perceives and acknowledges his weaknesses and desires and reveals the weaknesses and desires of others. At the same time, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will be discussed as innocent or ridiculous characters, as they remain blind to their shortcomings and desires and those of others.

### **The Fool is *Twelfth Night's* Sole Voice of Wisdom**

*Twelfth Night* discusses characters trying to find a balance among these conflicting ideas. Feste can outwit the other characters in the play. In literature, Welsford (1966) believes that the court Fool character is allowed to expose the unpleasant truth. He appears as a clown and his function as a commentator in the play. Thus, he can show the foolishness of the rest of the characters and criticize their actions. For instance, when he mocks Olivia because she has been prolonged mourning for a brother who is in heaven and refers to her as a "fool":

Clown: Good Madonna, why mourn'st thou?

Olivia: Good Fool, for my brother's death.

Clown: I think his soul is in hell, Madonna.

Olivia: I know his soul is in heaven, Fool.

Clown: The more Fool, Madonna, to mourn for your  
Brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the Fool, gentlemen (TN, I, V, 21-27).

Feste questions Olivia's mourning as he establishes himself as a commentator on Olivia's emotional situation. He replies in an insensitive manner about her brother's soul being in hell. However, this is not a heartless way; he mocks her and uses his voice of reason to assert to her that her brother's soul resides in heaven. Feste turns the table on Olivia, placing her in the position of the Fool because her prolonged mourning upon someone who is in paradise is itself a foolish issue; he says, "The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (TN, I, V, 21-27). He puts the seeds of doubt in her mind; he compels her to feel the absurdity of her grief. He proposes that her grief is disproportionate, but she is clinging to her sorrow when she goes against Feste's logic as she dismisses him: "Take away the fool, gentleman" (TN, I, V, 21-27).

Comparing Feste to Olivia, Feste represents logic and sanity because he is the one who shows how ridiculous Olivia is. This is the play's central theme: man's judgment must not be based on appearances, as they can be deceptive. In this way, Feste serves as an emotional and critical outlet for the subjects of rulers. Zijderveld states that the fool "is irreverent in the face of authority and tries his best to undermine the impression management that is staged by the powerful" (1982, p.28). Zijderveld claims that rulers always need Fools and folly; however, Feste's wisdom puts him in a position that accentuates the folly of those around him. The comparison between Feste and Orsino is evident in this quote:

Feste: Now the melancholy God protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere, for that 'sit that always makes a good voyage of nothing. Farewell. (TV, II, IV, 970-975)

Feste mirrors the idea of inconsistency in Orsino, and he gives these wise lines by uttering the unwelcome truth of Orsino that he is consistently inconsistent and uncertain about anything he does because he is a changeable and cunning man. This demonstrates Feste's wisdom and sanity because Feste knows Orsino's reality that the woman who loves him should accept that Orsino does not love her back. Orsino is foolish since he cannot figure out the woman who loves him. As a result, Feste compares Orsino to men in a sea who constantly change their directions to nowhere and "makes a good voyage of nothing" (TV, II, IV, 970-975). This line refers to Orsino's efforts to achieve a purpose, "a good voyage". This voyage symbolizes his proposal of marriage to Olivia, who rejects him, but in reality, he does not have any valuable goal. At the end of Feste's speech, the word "farewell" serves not only as a departure for the Fool but also as a way for him to leave the audience to think about the message of his speech and to know the reality of Orsino.

Finally, Feste can be considered as a foil to Malvolio. Feste represents Shakespeare's best character in the play, while Malvolio's figure seems to embody a series of antithetical traits that do not fit Shakespeare's values. Feste can sing, speak prose and verse, and communicate with lower or higher-class characters, which shows him as different from others in the play. Malvolio pretends to be wit and noble when he speaks Latin words to show himself higher than any character in the play since he is "sick of self-love" (TV, I, V, 380). At the beginning of the play, Malvolio insults Feste by describing him as a Fool with a stone instead of a brain. He said: "I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone" (TV, I, V, 375). However, in the end, Feste defeats Malvolio; he dresses up as a wise man to Fool Malvolio into thinking he has lost his wits, which proves what Feste said in Act One, Scene Five: "Better a witty fool, than a foolish wit". This juxtaposition emphasizes that wisdom is not a matter of possessing wit; instead, it is about using wit meaningfully.

Neil Cornwell states, "The works of Shakespeare, of course, include plentiful instances of fools or foolery, absurdities of one kind and another" (Cornwell, 2006, p.39). Feste is the only character in the play who is conscious of the absurdity of life. Feste's final song lessens the hope of a completely happy conclusion by showing that life has two sides: glad and sad. His song states, "The rain it raineth every day"(TV, V, I, 2608); the purpose of the song suggests that the happiness that now occupies the characters in Illyria could at any time be swept away because the events of life are unpredictable. With this song, Feste suggests that even as a person goes through life, with its chaos, they must remember that humans live in an unfamiliar place with a completely different life, maybe good or bad. Feste is not only a wise Fool but also a

man in complete intellectual and emotional control of himself. He has chosen the role of professional jester: he operates throughout the comedy as a truth-teller who reminds the characters and the audience that a holiday is not eternal by its very nature.

A great while ago the world began  
 With hey ho, the wind and the rain,  
 But that's all one, our play is done,  
 And we'll strive to please you every day (TN, V, I, 398-401).

These lines prove that the Fool is not a fool but is wise enough to know about the reality of this world. Brudevold (2015) admitted that:

This final song is the perfect closing argument for Feste's power to link worlds. No sooner does he finish with "our play is done" than he acknowledges that the show goes on tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. This time he goes beyond connecting plot with subplot, or household with household, or even humor with seriousness. Here, in this final stanza of this closing song, he links actor to character and the world of Ilyria to the world of the audience (P.39)

Feste not only joined the world of Ilyria and the audience's world at that time but also linked the Elizabethan world with the modern world by presenting the absurdity of human life. In this world of exaggeration and excess, he handles the critical role of telling and reminding the audience of the truth that in life, there is no eternal happiness. Within the play, he unifies the two main plots of Olivia, Orsino, Viola, Malvolio, Sir Toby, and Maria.

Through his last song, he forces the audience to rethink the end of the play since life is uncertain and unpredictable. As Bindu Sharma argues, "Absurd drama, by its very nature, subverts logic. It deflates the normal and celebrates the unexpected" (Sharma 2013, p.172). Shakespeare leaves things somewhat absurd, especially in the Orsino-Viola relationship. Even once everything is revealed, Orsino continues to address Viola by her male name (Cesario). The audience wonders whether Orsino is truly in love with Viola or is more in love with her male disguise, and Olivia may not love Sebastian since he has a different personality from Cesario (Viola).

Correspondingly, Terence Hawkes put it slightly: "When the king shows himself to be a fool, then the Fool has a good claim to be a king" (Hawkes 1995, p.170). This is evident when the countess shows herself as a fool, and her Fool shows himself as a wise man. This represents a more considerable irrationality that cannot be logical. Only Feste (the Fool) observes the absurdities in his Master's behaviour obviously and does not hesitate to reveal the harsh and disturbing truths. Paradoxically, Shakespeare used a Fool to present his main ideas in the play and affirmed how life should not be taken seriously.

### **The Absurdity of Existence: Characterizing The Fools in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead***

Tom Stoppard is a British playwright and screenwriter. He was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937. Cleaver's actions, ingenious language, and complex themes characterize his works. In 1960, Stoppard wrote his first play, *A Walk on the Water*, which was re-titled *Enter a Free Man* (1968). His works tackled controversial themes in the modern age, such as identity and self-discovery, existentialism, absurdity, and loss of faith. In 1966, he wrote *Rosencrantz and*

*Guildestern are Dead*, a comprehensive play on the themes of the modern era. In the following years, Stoppard produced several works for radio, television, and the theatre, including "*M*" *is for Moon Among Other Things* (1964), *A Separate Peace* (1966), and *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* (1966). Stoppard's works have sought greater interpersonal depths while keeping up their intellectual playfulness (Encyclopedia Britannica 2025).

Meyer (1991) argues that Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966. London's National Theatre produced the play. This production was awarded many times: Plays and Players Award for Best Play. In 1968, the play was performed in New York, receiving two awards: the New York Drama Critics Award and the Tony Award. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* addresses the absurdity of life, fatalism, and free will. It is an absurd and tragi-comic play, reflecting the thoughts of modern man. The play is based on two minor characters (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) derived from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (the original play). Stoppard rewrites the lives of these characters as they want to understand the goal of their existence. Accidentally, they are encountered by a group of actors called "Tragedians" led by the Player; they find themselves being involved in a performance of *Hamlet* as they find their lives are being determined by a script of another person's story. Claudius summons them to spy upon Hamlet to reveal the fact behind Hamlet's madness. Throughout the play, their identities fade as they repeatedly question their existence and the reality of life in a meta-theatrical mood and become indistinguishable from each other. As they engage with events of the performance, they face their incapacity to regulate their destiny. Their inability to escape this performance highlights the constraint of man's agency in the face of the laws of the universe. The play ends with their inevitable death, as mentioned in the title. Finally, they realize they are inferior figures from the main events of Hamlet's original story. The play was written in a time of absurdism, existentialism, and experimentation, where everything is questioned, and the crisis of belief is one of the significant problems. Thus, it seems that Stoppard's play has the spirit of absurdity.

### **Playing the Fool: Faded Identity and Meaningless Existence in the Absurdity of Life**

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a play with flavours of absurdity, identity crises, and tragedy, but the most important one is that it is full of comic events. As John Goerlich (2011) admits, "Finally, in a 1989 conversation with Thomas O'Connor, Stoppard tells him "I saw a stage production of [Rosguil] just a couple of years ago...It was still funny, which was the main thing. If it's not funny it isn't anything" (Goerlich 2011, p.104). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are presented as foolish figures in this tragicomedy; they are classified by lack of reason and awareness in regard to their circumstances and their attempt to change the external forces others instrumentalize them in acting the roles of the others without understanding their agency in life. As Noorbakhsh Hooti and Samaneh Shooshtarian admit (2011):

They lack information and while being off-stage, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are portrayed as two fools in a complicated world of theatre that is beyond their understanding and constantly question everything they experience in their nonsense world to give order to their confusing situation and handle the unknown and complicated character of Hamlet (Hooti and Shooshtarian 2011, p.148)

From the beginning of the play, when a tossed coin turns up heads 89 times in a row, Ros and Guil play to understand their position in the universe. Guildenstern is more conscious than Rosencrantz about the strange circumstances they find themselves in, beginning with

Rosencrantz's deep concern about the coin-flipping episode but still acting foolishly. Guildenstern attempts to discover the truth through the unfolding incidents around them, as he "takes the position of an active seeker of truth" (Holdin 2007, p.47) but could not find it. He could not change his fate since his life is already determined in *Hamlet* (the original play).

Guildenstern wants to know the reasons for things like why Hamlet would want to die. And why could a coin spin a hundred times and always land heads up? The question game in Act One becomes comforting for Guildenstern to understand their existence. Holdin argues, "The flaw in the question game, as a means of creating security, is that it produces only questions and no answers for the duo. Time and again, Guildenstern realizes the shallowness of his and Rosencrantz's existence" (Holdin 2007, p.49). Holdin asserts that the coin game, with its unsolvable questions, serves as a reminder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's failure to construct a constant identity, control their own lives, or change their fate. The question game underscores their condition as mere puppets inside the large game of life. Their lives are manipulated, and their fates are determined by laws they do not comprehend. The lack of answers to the question game signifies the lack of solutions in their lives, raising the sense of alienation inside them.

During the play, Rosencrantz maintains a positive attitude and tries to discover things. On the other hand, he feels terror during his discussion with Guildenstern about what it would be like to be in a coffin. He feels afraid at the realization of his fate. Later, at the end of the play, he feels fear as he realizes that death is approaching him since their death is determined in the title. Rosencrantz is an innocent, childish character who always needs someone to guide him and order him, just as presented by Martin (2007),

Rosencrantz's childlike innocence returns during his last moments before disappearing: "We've done nothing wrong. We didn't harm anyone did we?" (97). For Rosencrantz, the thought of wronging another person seems to be the concern. At the end, Rosencrantz is the innocent bystander, incapable of malice. Rosencrantz's realization that he is a victim of circumstance is what brings poignancy to his last moment before disappearing. (p.53)

Rosencrantz's foolishness is not attributed to his failure. Instead, it is a consequence of the absurdity of life he is involved in. He is the product of circumstances, trapped in a situation he does not understand. His questions of "What would it be in a coffin?" and "We didn't harm anyone, did we?" clarify the absurdity of life when people ask puzzling questions but cannot find clear answers. They are trapped in a life whole of ambiguity and uncertainty; they find themselves in foolish situations when they try to understand unbelievable issues. In this context, Rosencrantz's foolishness symbolizes humans' struggle to seek meaning or a purpose for their existence within the universe.

They never act out of wisdom, even when they know that Claudius has sent them to England to deliver a letter that includes a command to murder Hamlet, their best friend. However, both face their potential death because Hamlet changes the letter and sends it to the English King, asking him to kill both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They do not have any control over their life or decisions, and even their death is decided by others. When they choose to act, the results become fruitless and go in the wrong direction as said by Martin Lee Holden (2007):

With their decision to capture Hamlet, a choice that leaves the duo standing with their pants around their ankles, it became evident that this scene was the

perfect summation of their ridiculous journey. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are slow to “act,” always waiting for outside stimulus and when at last they move beyond their static situation, the duo always do so in the wrong direction and with poor results.(p.98)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern present the crisis identity as the beginning of the play indicates "Two Elizabethans passing the time in a place without any visible character" (Stoppard 1). This line shows the play as being an absurd one as Eugene Ionesco's definition of Absurdist Theater, quoted in Esslin's book, "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (Esslin 1961, p.3). The players do not have an aim because their fate is settled, the ending is determined, and death is their potential fate. The play is made absurd by minimalist sets, meaningless conversations, a lack of character motivations, an unknown setting, and a darkly comic tone throughout the play.

For their identities, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no distinct identity because they are the same. They act as one; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot be seen without the other; they are the head and the tail of each other. They are the two faces of the same coin. They are two characters but have the same mentality and questions, even when talking as if a conversation between a man and his mirror. As Homan asserts, “our upturned expectations— are they Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?—mirror their divided state” (Homan 1989, p.108).

Tom Stoppard does not give a remarkable identity for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as said by Hoffman (2012),

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no fixed identities. Stoppard is exploring the 20th century notion of existentialism, which is essentially concerned with the problem of self-identity. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as representatives of the human condition have no control over their fate and are the victims of arbitrary circumstances. They have no past and no future and only exist through other people’s definitions of them, and are unable to accept the lack of guidance and fashion their own future out of the here and now. Their existential position is echoed throughout the play as they continually try to find an explanation for their existence. (p.12)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the representatives of the human condition, which cannot control their fate and are the victims of an absurdist world. They have no past and no future, and they only exist through other people’s definitions of them in the way they are defined in Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Confusion of identity is seen as a common theme in the play and it is most clearly when characters introduce themselves incorrectly, mixing up their names like other people in the play do. When confusing their names, they look like ridiculous characters. "ROS: My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz. (GUIL confers briefly with him.) (Without embarrassment.) I'm sorry – his name's Guildenstern, and I'm Rosencrantz" (Stoppard 1966, p.4).

In addition, King (2013) admits that:

When the two friends are interacting with each other only, the audience sees the differences between the two because they are acting differently. However, when they are encountered together in a scene with others, they often play a similar role and it becomes harder to distinguish the two. Simply by giving the two their own scene (something Shakespeare does not do) Stoppard gives us a better sense of their individual identities (p.22).

Stoppard wants to differentiate between these two characters especially in the first scene, and he employs these fool characters to act for the audience's benefit as they mirror the individuals' experiences during the post-wars. Guildenstern is well aware of the abnormality of the coins when they keep coming up heads in which he thinks they entered an alternate universe, where customary laws of probability, time, and chance do not apply.

### **Better a Witty Fool (Feste) Than a Foolish Wit (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)**

In literary works, particularly theatre, the characters represent the roles of the Fool and are the wisest characters among other characters. Sometimes, there are characters from the noble class, but they act like foolish characters in the play more than the Fool itself. As *Twelfth Night's* Feste the Fool says, "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit." Feste gives advice and reveals unwanted truths to most of the play's central characters. Though he is only a fool, he seems to be the only character in the play who truly has his wits about himself. He proved that, as Viola admits;

Viola: This fellow is wise enough to play the Fool;  
And to do that well craves a kind of wit:  
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
The quality of persons, and the time,  
And, like the haggard, cheque at every feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practise  
As full of labour as a wise man's art  
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;  
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit  
(TV, III, I, p.1295-1300).

In contrast, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent the naturally foolish characters in the play. Even though they are the king's right hand and are supposed to be clever, they do not show intelligence. They are inactive characters who constantly question without having any answer or even trying to have it. They keep being passive until the end of the play and never prove themselves as wise men since they do not even succeed in any mission. It is evident that when Hamlet encounters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he shows them as a ridiculous, foolish character:

GUIL: I think we can say we made some headway.  
ROS: You think so?  
GUIL: I think we can say that.  
ROS: I think we can say he made us look ridiculous. (p.81)

According to Janik (1998), there are different types of Fools, depending on how much they can understand themselves and others around them. The wise Fool would be the one who perceives and acknowledges his weaknesses and desires and the weaknesses and desires of others. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot identify their own and others' weaknesses and desires, they are the dupes or victims. Finally, the innocent or holy Fool never understands and realizes neither his weaknesses and desires nor those of others.

Therefore, Feste is the wise Fool who can observe his weaknesses and desires and others' weaknesses. For example, when he gives Orsino a description of how changeable his feelings, emotions, and thoughts are, Feste compares Orsino's mind with an opal "and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal" (T N, II, IV. 970), and points out that the duke's clothes are made of a type of silk that changes its colour depending on the angle where it is looked from just like Orsino's mood. Feste has a remarkable ability to look inside the characters; he can sometimes predict things that will happen later in the play. He recognizes that Viola is disguised as a man and he tells her:

Feste: Now Jove, in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard!

Viola: By my troth, I'll tell thee, I am almost sick for one;

[Aside] though, I would not have it grow on my chin. Is thy Lady within? (TV, III, I, p.1276-1280).

In contrast, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent innocent or holy fools who do not know their weakness or desires. They do not have that mentality that enables them to discover what is around them, and they try to understand what is wrong with Hamlet, but in vain. Part of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to be aware of their weakness lies in the lack of character development given to each in Shakespeare's original work. They are unaware that the king is using them just like a sponge to absorb information from Hamlet but cannot know what is wrong with him. Rosencrantz states, "We were sent for" and "That's why we're here," while he is talking with Guildenstern in which he makes it clear that he and Guildenstern exist only because they have been sent for, which means they are fooled and used by others. They cannot act independently and never try to be independent characters.

Also, they don't know even their weakness. They keep questioning silly questions, and even at the end, they don't know whether they made mistakes in their life or not. As Rosencrantz said at the end of the play, "We've done nothing wrong. We didn't harm anyone, did we?". When Guildenstern asks Rosencrantz, during the question and answer game, "Who do you think you are?", they confirm that they do not know who they are. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know nothing, and their life is entirely confusing. They keep being Fool in most of the events, whether they are severe or not, such as:

Rosencrantz: So, we've got a letter which explains everything.

Guildenstern: You've got it!

Rosencrantz: I thought you had it.

Guildenstern: I do have it.

Rosencrantz: You have it?

Guildenstern: You've got it!

Rosencrantz: I don't get it!

Guildenstern: You haven't got it?

Rosencrantz: I just said that.

Guildenstern: I've got it.

Rosencrantz: Oh, I got it!

Guildenstern; Shut up!

Rosencrantz: Right. (p.106)

Finally, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem oblivious to the absurdity of the world around them. They do not understand the meaning of their existence and cannot distinguish their weaknesses, which reflects a broader existential confusion. Moreover, they do not recognize the importance of the mission they have been called to and are even desperately trying to remember their names. Through the predicament of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Tom Stoppard critiques the modern individual, mirroring modern experiences, as they often find themselves feeling similarly lost and, at times, even more foolish. Modern individuals neglect to seek answers to the ambiguities of life, demonstrating a universal unconsciousness regarding its inherent absurdity.

## CONCLUSION

*Twelfth Night Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* discuss the significance of the foolish characters, bridging the representation gap of the Fool between the Elizabethan and modern times. This paper tackles the Foolery concept as a vibrant role for social commentary, the guide for the audience, revealing the truth, and challenging traditional wisdom; it corresponds with the idea of the chorus in ancient Greece. Feste presents this character in an obvious way: he transcends his traditional role of entraining the audience to be a character of critical insight, and he employs his wit to bridge the audience and events of the play. This contrasts Molvilio, who thinks he has a wit, which makes him worthless.

The Fool in these plays exceeded the entrainment function; they exposed the hidden reality of life where individuals struggled in circumstances beyond their control. Through humour, the characters clarify the meaninglessness of human existence in the ridiculous universe through the intersection of humour, intellect, and the human state. For instance, when Feste belittles Olivia's mourning upon her brother, he questions her sorrow for someone in heaven. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who were unwillingly destined to die in their alternative time, suffered from identity fragmentation when they confused their names in a chaotic world. Shakespeare and Stoppard proved that, the foolish characters perceived the profound reality of life better than others did.

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