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The Low-Status Character in Shakespeare's Comedies

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THE LOW-STATUS CHARACTER IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

A Thesis
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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THE LOW-STATUS CHARACTER IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Just as the audience which viewed Shakespeare's plays was a diverse group made of all social classes, so are the characters which Shakespeare created. Kings, beggars, merchants, and farmers walk across the Shakespearean stage. No matter what their social standing, these characters are realistic. One of Shakespeare's greatest virtues is his ability to create realistic characters. As S. C. Sen Gupta writes, "Elizabethan and Jacobean comedy outside Shakespeare never reaches the highest level of dramatic art. . . . This failure is due to the inability of the dramatist to portray character that is mobile, subtle, complex—in a word—living."¹ Most Elizabethan comedy, like that of John Lyly, followed the classical models of Plautus and Terence and used type or stock characters such as the "pedant, the rascally servant, the duped parent, the parasite, and the aged lover. . . ."² These remained flat, farcical characters who only moved the plot along. Later comic dramatists, especially Jonson, developed another kind of comedy using stereotyped humor

characters which were stylized rather than individualized. While Shakespeare often used characters which could be grouped according to classical models, he always added little twists of language and manner which turned them from stiff cardboard figures into individualized Englishmen.

H. S. Bennett says that "perhaps the vitalizing power of Shakespeare is best seen in the loving care that he sometimes spends on subsidiary characters, whose connection with the plot is but slight. . . ." It is true that Shakespeare often expands a servant's role beyond what is called for by the plot only. The subsidiary characters are usually of low social status--servants, guildsmen, and townspeople who contrast with the main characters of noble birth.

The low-status characters in Shakespeare's comedies deserve a comprehensive treatment. Most critics have ignored the servants in favor of their masters, despite the fact that these characters which are involved in romantic intrigue, such as four lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream, seem much flatter than the comic weaver, Bottom, and the other unlettered tradesmen who are his friends. This study will, therefore, attempt a comprehensive survey of

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the low-status characters in Shakespeare's comedies, illustrating their involvement in parallel action, their use of language, their comic technique, and their importance to plot, theme, and characterization.

One of the primary difficulties in such an undertaking is to determine its domain, that is, to decide which characters are low-status. The classification of characters into the lower status group has been based upon a combination of the social position a character holds and Shakespeare's treatment of that character. For example, servants are definitely low-status on the basis of their menial tasks. Yet, one group of servants, the court fools, has been exempted from this status because Shakespeare's treatment of them is markedly different from that of the other low-status characters. Some characters which seem to be handled as low characters have also been exempted because their social position cannot be considered menial. For example, Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night* is as stupid as any of Shakespeare's servants or country bumpkins, yet no one could say a knight is lower class. Borderline groups such as townspeople, guildsmen, and underworld characters have been assigned to the low-status position primarily on the basis of Shakespeare's treatment of them.

Several generalizations can be made about Shakespeare's low-status characters. They can be referred to as clowns, for often that is a part of their function.
Shakespeare did not fully invent the low-status clown, but he did create a uniquely alive character by distilling and combining elements from various sources. Sen Gupta points out that Shakespeare's clowns recall the stock characters of Latin comedy, the "domestic jester of Tudor times," and the "clever servant of the Miracle plays." Wilhelm Creizenach states that many of the characteristics of Shakespeare's clowns derive from the commedia dell'arte which came to England from Italy "as early as the seventies of the sixteenth century." Oscar James Campbell believes that Shakespeare's earliest clowns owe much to the Vice of the Morality plays. He also points out that Shakespeare adds much to his clowns by making them resemble the "country lout," newly arrived into urban life. This portrayal of the rustic is Shakespeare's most original and realistic character. John Draper states that "the 'University Wits,' to whom Shakespeare's art shows a more unquestionable indebtedness, rarely depict the Elizabethan countryside and rarely the lower classes. Their servants appear, usually without names, in the miscellaneous list
at the end of the *dramatis personae*."\(^8\)

Shakespeare's clowns do many of the traditional farcical tricks. The physical farce tricks of being clumsy and taking beatings are not always in the script, but probably Kemp or the other actors supplied them on their own. Such padding of parts was usual in the Elizabethan theater.\(^9\) Other farcical tricks which Shakespeare utilizes are those in which the servant is to perform a simple errand but fails in some ridiculous manner as when Launce delivers his own dog to Silvia instead of the lap dog which Proteus asked him to deliver. Creizenach mentions another trick, the "clown's habit of bursting into burlesque tears," which Shakespeare uses well in Launce's description of the parting from his family (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II. iii).\(^10\) This same scene also serves as an example of what Campbell calls the "impersonation of two or more figures in a farcically acted duologue [sic]."\(^11\) Another trick which Shakespeare uses is that where the clown addresses the audience.\(^12\) Such broad farce is

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\(^10\)Creizenach, p. 299.

\(^11\)Campbell, p. 5.

\(^12\)Creizenach, p. 297.
almost always performed by the low-status characters. David Cecil gives other characteristics of the low-status characters: their names are English, such as "Bottom" and "Dogberry," rather than Italianate names which adorn the noble characters such as Orsino and Orlando; "they speak in prose and make a number of topical allusions and jokes of robust coarseness. . . ." Campbell states that "malapropism became the favorite, indeed the distinguishing trick of the lout." Puns are also used, but as John Dover Wilson points out, "the quibble . . . a kind of word play in which one character makes a remark or utters a word, and another immediately picks it up and uses it or replies to it in a different sense . . ." is used more often.

Shakespeare uses low-status characters fully and wisely. They often provide most of the truly comic material of the play. Also they are often used in a situation parallel to that of the noble characters and hence help the audience to grasp a different insight into the main action. Often they make statements which reveal the true personality of the noble characters. Sometimes they say

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14 Campbell, p. 5.

things which foreshadow the action to come. All in all, the low-status character is very important in Shakespeare's comedies.

This study will attempt to reveal in detail the techniques, purposes, and results of Shakespeare's use of the low-status character in the comedies. It will be shown that Shakespeare's use of low-status characters was not static. For example, the early low-status characters are more farcical than those of later plays. The characters of the middle plays are more satiric and those of the last plays are sometimes almost allegorical abstractions. Some low-status characters such as his comic law officials are used to develop satiric themes which run throughout his career. At other times, he uses the low-status character to develop serious themes such as the nature of art or reality. For these and other reasons low-status characters of Shakespeare's comedies deserve a comprehensive treatment.
THE EARLY COMEDIES

Four plays, The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost, and The Two Gentlemen of Verona, are usually considered Shakespeare's earliest comedies. The seeds of the later comedies can be seen in these plays. There are plot elements, character types, and special techniques, such as parallel action, which he will use again in the later comedies. The use of the low-status character is frequent in these early plays, and one can see that these are becoming the most typically English characters of the play. The low-status clown is already fully developed with his farcical tricks and misuse of language.

The Comedy of Errors is drawn from two comedies of Plautus. Shakespeare made several changes, one of which was to make twin servants as well as twin masters. When he invented the two Dromios, he made them quite different from the servant in the source. Draper points out that Plautus's servant "is didactic rather than comic in speech, is the merest type rather than an individual, and seems to reflect very little of contemporary Roman local color."¹ When Shakespeare's play is didactic, it comes

¹Draper, Stratford, p. 12.
from Luciana or the abbess, not from the Dromios. They also provide some local color, particularly Dromio of Syracuse in his allusions to the folklore of witchcraft and fairies and his description of hell. There is disagreement among the critics concerning the amount of differentiation of character between the two Dromios. Hardin Craig says that Dromio of Ephesus is "exactly like" Dromio of Syracuse. Draper, however, feels that Dromio of Syracuse is more realistic than Dromio of Ephesus.

Except for the scene with Dr. Pinch, the two Dromios supply all of the farce. Draper states that since all of the action rests on such preposterous coincidence, Shakespeare "clearly casts aside all thought of convincing realism, developing his play as a farce for its laughter rather than its truth to life or meaning." Yet the play is not all fun and games, and Shakespeare could have added the two Dromios "to save the play as comedy, to insure, in fact, that there should be any fun at all." As Gwyn Williams further points out, "the confusion of identity has been painful and potentially dangerous for the two Antipholuses." Antipholus of

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2Craig, p. 81.
3Draper, Stratford, p. 15.
5Draper, Stratford, p. 42.
Ephesus, especially, has suffered humiliation and jealousy, and as Williams says, "he is more violent than his brother and he might easily have killed his wife." The two Dromios, therefore, help to ease tension, and they help their masters to gain a proper perspective on what is happening. This is especially true in the case of Antipholus of Syracuse because "the fact that his servant is also taken for someone else extends the predicament outside himself and makes it possible to hold the theory of witchcraft as a cause, thereby saving his reason."\(^6\)

This use of common characters to ease tension and resolve the plot will be seen again and again, for as Craig says, "Shakespeare loved to play with edged tools. Somebody's life or somebody's happiness must be at stake even in his comedies."\(^7\) The most obvious example of this is in Much Ado About Nothing where Dogberry not only makes us laugh but also manages to save Hero's reputation. This function of the low-status character is hinted in Antipholus of Syracuse's statement about Dromio, "A trusty villain, Sir, that very oft, / When I am dull with care and melancholy, / Lightens my humor with his merry jests" (Errors, I. ii. 19-21).\(^8\)

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\(^6\)Williams, pp. 64-70.

\(^7\)Craig, p. 81.

\(^8\)All references to the plays are made to the following edition: William Shakespeare, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. by Hardin Craig (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1961).
The jesting in this play is mostly "physical slapstick," and as Larry Champion points out, there are at least five scenes containing a beaten Dromio. There is very little misuse of language; instead, both Dromios have a command of the language which allows them to play with words. Most of the spoken jests are quibbles made by the Dromios. For example, in answer to Antipholus of Syracuse's question about his money, Dromio of Ephesus says, "I have some marks of yours upon my pate, / Some of my mistress' marks upon my shoulders, / But not a thousand marks between you both" (I. ii. 82-84).

The Dromios are clever not only in words. Despite what some critics say, it is not Antipholus who first mentions witchcraft, but his servant, Dromio (II. ii. 190-194). The cleverness arises again in the third act when Dromio describes Nell the kitchen maid. E. M. W. Tillyard says that this account "succeeds by modern as well as by contemporary tastes. It . . . builds up a monster. Having built it up, Shakespeare was wise not to bring her on the stage but to trust to our imagination." But this is more than a character description. During this scene one is lifted out of Ephesus and set into Elizabethan

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England, for the description is filled with contemporary satire as various countries are compared to Neil's anatomy.

The Dromios are more than clever; they are also loyal. They obey their masters despite beatings. Dromio of Syracuse runs back to Adriana's to fetch money to bail out his master even though he fears the kitchen maid, "Thither I must, although against my will, / For servants must their master's minds fulfill" (IV. i. 112-113). None of the confusion results from trickery or stupidity of a Dromio. The two Antipholuses are not frustrated by their servants as are the masters in some of Shakespeare's later plays.

Another early play, The Taming of the Shrew, has a loyal, clever servant also. In fact, The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew have much more than that in common. Both plays deal with reality and appearances, and as Champion points out, in both "the major device for creating comic distance . . . is a layer of material outside the main action." Furthermore, Champion states, the "level of characterization" and the use of farce are similar.11

The outside action of The Comedy of Errors involves Aegeon, who is not a low-status character, while the outside action of The Taming of the Shrew centers around a drunken tinker, Christopher Sly. For a joke a nobleman

11Champion, pp. 39-41.
takes Sly, who is in a drunken stupor, home with him. He dresses Sly in fine clothing and puts him in a fancy room in order to persuade him that he is not Christopher Sly at all, but a nobleman who has been having delusions caused by disease. Part of the process of persuading Sly is to have him watch a play which is, of course, the main action in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In the version of *The Taming of the Shrew* as found in the folio, Sly is forgotten at this point except for a brief statement at the end of the first scene. In *The Taming of a Shrew*, long believed to be the source for Shakespeare's play, Sly is not dropped, but he is seen at the end of the play and resolves to go home and tame his own shrewish wife in the manner of Petruchio and Kate. Peter Alexander believes that Shakespeare's play originally ended in the same manner. He supports his theory by contending that *The Taming of a Shrew* is not Shakespeare's source, but a pirated version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which reveals the ending somehow lost in the folio. The ending may have been lost accidentally, or the play may have been altered to allow for fewer actors. Cecil C. Seronsy, however, believes that the disappearance of Sly

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12 Cecil C. Seronsy, "'Supposes' as the Unifying Theme in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XIV (Winter, 1963), 17.

is intentional and not simply an accident or a cut for some practical playing purpose. Shakespeare, he rears, was using the case of Sly to point toward the theme of the play, that appearances are sometimes false. Shakespeare, therefore, dropped Sly's shrewish wife as unnecessary. The theme is "supposes"—just as Sly is supposed to be a lord, Kate is supposed to be a shrew, and Tranio is supposed to be his master, while his master is supposed to be a tutor.\textsuperscript{14} Sly, then, has an important function in relation to the theme of the play. He also has an important structural function, for as Champion points out, the idea of Sly watching a play is a necessary device of comic distance.\textsuperscript{15}

Whatever his role in the relation to the theme and structure of the play, Sly is certainly a unique character as the following description shows:

He [Sly] speaks dialect at times, and he possesses the tastes and attitudes of his class. He is fiercely proud of his identity and can concoct a mock lineage to prove himself as noble as anyone else. At times he seems content with his lot... His tastes are low and physical... He is a breath of the real life of the English countryside which seems to set off the artificiality of some of the Italianate characters of the main play.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}Seronsy, pp. 25-27.

\textsuperscript{15}Champion, pp. 38-39.

\textsuperscript{16}Margaret Ranald, Monarch Notes on The Taming of the Shrew (New York: Monarch Press, 1965), pp. 94-95.
There are suggestions of later, more well-known Shakespearean characters in Sly. His debts and his constant refusal to pay remind one of Falstaff. His longing for his usual pot of ale rather than the more expensive Spanish wine reminds one of Bottom's desire for a "bottle of hay." Furthermore, Sly's rather direct and practical solution to his supposed wife's grief at "being all this time abandon'd from your bed" (Shrew, Int. i.) is reminiscent of the practicality Bottom exhibited after his transformation. In fact, one could easily compare Sly's ready acceptance of lordship and its rewards with Bottom's acceptance of fairy servants.

The other characters of low status in the play are servants and belong to the main action of the play. Tranio and Biondello are servants of Lucentio. Petruchio has several servants, but Grumio is the most important.

Tranio is perhaps the most important of the group. Lucentio says of him, "My trusty servant, well approved in all" (I. i. 7). He is completely loyal to his young master. He continues the charade to the point of declaring that the real Vincentio is a fake until Lucentio returns and he is sure the marriage has taken place. This was a dangerous thing to do, for Vincentio could have punished him severely. Tranio is also clever and practical. When Lucentio says that he intends to study vigorously while in Padua, Tranio says, "Let's be no stoics nor stocks, I
pray . . . " (I. i. 31) suggesting that they should also enjoy the pleasures the city has to offer, and therefore saving themselves from the trap which the king and his men fall into in Love's Labour's Lost. It is this practical cleverness combined with his loyalty which impresses Lucentio enough for him to ask his servant's advice concerning his love affair. He says, "Counsel me, Tranio, for I know thou canst; / Assist me, Tranio, for I know thou wilt" (I. i. 162-163). This is no usual servant-master relationship, for Tranio is no usual servant. Both Lucentio and Tranio arrive at the plan of the tutor at the same time, but Tranio is practical enough to point out that Lucentio cannot leave his real duties in Padua unattended. Once this difficulty is corrected, Tranio carries out his part of the plan magnificently, because, as Tillyard says, "he has picked up enough tags of Italian to carry conviction in polite society. . . . It is when he impersonates his master that he comes into his own. He dominates the other suitors from the beginning."17 While Tranio seems to enjoy the masquerade, he deals in the deception because of loyalty to his master.18 He has none of the knavery of Launcelot, who plays tricks on his blind father; he also has none of the stupidity of Launce to make him unreliable and a source of confusion. Furthermore, Tranio does not

17 Tillyard, p. 92.

let the masquerade interfere with his personal social relationships, for he tells Biondello that "when I am alone, why then I am Tranio" (I. i. 248).

Biondello, Lucentio's other servant, is quite different from Tranio. He has none of Tranio's grace and tact. He likes to joke, as illustrated in the scene (IV. iv. 75-108) in which he informs Lucentio of the marriage plans. He laughingly refers to the marriage as a "copyright," and then suggests that his master's marriage is a casual affair by comparing it to "a wench married in an afternoon as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit..." (IV. iv. 99-101). Tillyard refers to Biondello as "the stock cheeky page." He certainly seems to enjoy the deception, although he may wish he had Tranio's role, but as a matter of fact, he does play an important role, for it is he who spots the pedant destined to become Lucentio's father. Biondello seems to fear punishment more than Tranio or Lucentio do because he urges Lucentio to deny his father "or else we are all undone" (V. i. 114). Biondello's part in this discovery scene (V. i.) is, for the most part, a farcical one, since he is beaten and runs wildly on and off the stage.

Another farcical character is Petruchio's servant, Grumio. He performs this comic function from his first

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19Craig, from a note on p. 177.

20Tillyard, p. 92.
entrance (I. ii.) where he takes literally Petruchio's command to "knock me here soundly." He is too stupid to understand that he is to knock on the door, but he is not stupid enough to knock his master in the head, even on his own command; therefore, he does nothing and receives a painful punishment from his master. Petruchio calls him "a senseless villain" (I. ii. 36), but he is basically harmless, and Hortensio refers to him as "your ancient, trusty, pleasant servant" (I. ii. 46). The critics are divided about Grumio's importance to the play. Champion calls him a "minor comic pointer" whose main purpose is to "insert numerous quips to enhance the comic potential of his master's action" and to provide "broad humor arising from the physical cuffings."^{21} Draper, however, feels that Grumio is of major importance to the play, and asserts that while Grumio "has the malapropisms, the word-play, and the comic stupidity of these early rustic servants . . . he also has some mother wit, and so can understand Petruchio's motives in looking for a wife."^{22} Grumio often points out Petruchio's true character, especially in his first scene where he says of Kate and Petruchio, "an she knew him as well as I do, / she would think scolding would do little good upon / him . . ." (I. ii. 108-110). Here,

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^{21}Champion, p. 41.

^{22}Draper, Stratford, p. 16.
as Draper shows, "he foretells the outcome of the wooing."

Another important function which Grumio plays is to relate the "journey homeward" which is an important comic scene and also an important part of the cure. As Draper states, "Petruchio's part is both fuller and more significant than in Shakespeare's source; and his [Grumio's] repeated comment makes us see the action from a countryman's point of view, as the audience must be made to see it if they are to give full sympathy to Petruchio's endeavors. Thus Grumio is made essential to the plot, to characterization, to setting, and to the theme."²³

Another function which Grumio serves is to point a contrast to the city servants, Biondello and Tranio.²⁴ Grumio is far less polished than Lucentio's servants. Petruchio's other servants, who are even less polished, may also serve this function, but their main job seems to be that they are simply slapstick characters used to enhance the comic, farcical scenes.

Unlike The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost is not primarily a farce; it is a sophisticated satire on learning and language practices. The main action is, of course, a direct poke at various contemporary learning societies and their excesses, but as Campbell says, "the low comedy figures attached to the

²³Ibid.
²⁴Ibid.
plot also display various affectations of learning."25 Ashley H. Thorndike expands this with his statement that "a group of eccentric persons provide the low comedy. Braggart, priest, pedant, clown, constable, and page are all familiar types but offer a chance for good-natured satire on some contemporary fashions, and especially at the unnatural and extravagant fads in diction and vocabulary."26

*Love's Labour's Lost*, as Wilson shows, "exemplifies and holds up to ridicule at least three types of linguistic extravagance or corruption. . . ." These are "(a) the stilted preciosity of court circles in Armado . . . (b) the pedantic affectation of Holofernes, the schoolmaster . . . [and] (c) lastly there is Dull . . . and Costard . . . who represent the rustic misunderstanding and misuse, or the deliberate distortions by the jester, of the new wealth of words."27

Holofernes, the schoolmaster, is perhaps the most fully drawn of these low-status characters. It is true that he derives partially from the stock character, the pedant, and, as Campbell points out, "like his Italian prototype is fond of uttering proverbs, Latin, and other

25Campbell, pp. 32-33.


27Wilson, pp. 61-62.
foreign phrases, and strange ink-horn terms. In particular, he delights in stringing together long lists of synonyms." However, as Campbell continues, Holofernes is to be more than a stock character; he is a direct poke at English grammarians.\textsuperscript{28} Wilson's portrait of Holofernes, which follows, shows that Shakespeare is attacking the narrow-mindedness of many English scholars:

The terrible portrait of a renaissance schoolmaster, self-complacent, self-seeking, irascible, pretentious, intolerant of what he calls "barbarism," and yet himself knowing nothing but the pitiful rudiments, the husks of learning, which he spends his life thrusting down the throats of his unfortunate pupils. Holofernes moves upon Shakespeare's stage as the eternal type of pedant, the "living-dead ran," who will always be with us, because as long as there is a human race to be educated there will always be many to mistake the letter for the spirit.\textsuperscript{29}

What makes Holofernes such a ridiculous character is that, as Campbell asserts, "his ignorance extends to just those subjects of which he fancies himself a master." He misquotes his Latin, botches the musical scale, and "his ideas on etymology are often grotesquely wrong." "But," as Campbell alleges, "it is his ideas about the correct pronunciation of current English that writes him down indelibly as the eternal learned ignoramus. Being a mere grammarian, he regards every change in pronunciation as a vulgarism." Holofernes is so narrow-minded that "he derives even his

\textsuperscript{28}Campbell, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{29}Wilson, pp. 73-74.
terms of abuse from his profession. When Moth . . . en-
rages him, he shouts, 'thou consonant' at him." The simple
touches such as this where the "character ridicules him-
self by the words that issue from his mouth" is Shakespeare's
chief satiric method in the play; as Campbell states, "it
is the manner of caricature and parody rather than that
of formal satire."\(^{30}\)

But Holofernes is more than a caricature or satiric
figure. Combined with Armado, who illustrates other abuses
of language, he is an essential element in theme. According
to Tillyard, G. D. Willcock, in her book *Shakespeare as
Critic of Language*, "makes the point that the abuses of
language committed by Armado and Holofernes were current." He
goes on to quote Willcock as saying, "practically every
remark of Holofernes is a pointer to something going on in
the world of language." Tillyard believes this is signifi-
cant "because it shows the pedant as parallel to the court-
tiers," who illustrate everything going on in the intellec-
tual climate.\(^{31}\)

Nathaniel, the curate, seems to be introduced chiefly
as an admiring follower of Holofernes. To Nathaniel, Holo-
fernes can say no wrong, and this encourages the schoolmaster
to exhibit his "learning" and thus expose to the whole world
his real ignorance. But Nathaniel is not the only person

\(^{30}\) Campbell, pp. 33-36.

\(^{31}\) Tillyard, pp. 159-160.
impressed with Holofernes, for as Tillyard declares, "Holofernes must . . . have established a remarkable ascendancy over the family of one of his pupils to be able to bring Nathaniel and even Dull along with him to dine." Holofernes is inflicted with a very strong case of intellectual snobbery, as illustrated by his remark to Dull when the constable disagrees with him, "Twice-sod simplicity, his coctus! / O thou monster Ignorance, how deformed thou look!" (IV. ii. 23-24). However, not everyone is as impressed with Holofernes as Nathaniel, or Holofernes himself is. Moth says, "They have been at a great feast of language and stolen the scraps" (V. i. 39-40). But Holofernes does not hear this comment and continues with his delusions and his rantings.

The other low-status characters, Moth, Costard, Dull, and Jacquenetta, serve mainly as comic pointers, who through their statements or their actions reveal a truth about the other characters, either intentionally or accidentally.

Champion states that the subplot of Costard and Jacquenetta parallels the main plot. He states, "Costard's arrest . . . on the charge of cavorting with a woman in defiance of the law of Academe, preplots the similar fall of the male principals." Costard's honesty in readily

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32 Tillyard, p. 170.
33 Champion, p. 46.
admitting his involvement with Jacquenetta is set against
the deceitfulness and slyness of the king and his men,
who try to hide their love, and of Armado, who has reported
Costard primarily to remove him from competition for the
affections of Jacquenetta. Costard reveals this function
when, after the letter mixup, he says as he and Jacquenetta
leave the four lovers, "Walk aside the true folk, and let
the traitors stay" (IV. iii. 215). Costard's mixing up
of the letters is typical clown behavior, but here it serves
the plot because it allows Biron's letter to fall into the
king's hands, and hence, he is also exposed.

Moth, Don Armado's page, is, except for Robin in
The Merry Wives of Windsor, Shakespeare's most useful page.
Most pages enter or leave to carry a message and then dis-
appear and say no more than a word or two. Moth, however,
comments upon his master and most of the others who inhabit
the play. Draper suggests that Shakespeare may have added
Moth to the play "merely because in Roman comedy a miles
gloriosus like Don Armado had as a foil some diminutive fol-
lowers. . . ."34 But Moth helps to expose the excesses of
his master and so has an important function in the play and
its satire. Moth also adds comments on Jacquenetta; as
Draper says, he is "a pert but lovable rascal, a chatter-
box, yet shrewd enough to have his own opinion of the

34Draper, Stratford, p. 221.
'immaculate Jacquenetta,' whom his master loves.\textsuperscript{35} He answers Armado's, "Sing boy; my spirit grows heavy in love" with, "And that's a great marvel, loving a light wench" (I. ii. 128-129). Moth has a command of the language and often uses puns to reveal hidden truth in someone's statement. For example, when Costard pleads not to be imprisoned, "Let me not be pent up, sir; I will fast, being loose," Moth tells him, "No sir; that were fast and loose; thou shalt to prison" (I. ii. 160-162). 

There is one other low-status character in the play. This is Dull, the constable and prototype for Shakespeare's other rustic law officials, Shallow, Dogberry, Verges, and Elbow. Shakespeare was not the only dramatist of his time to have a bumbling constable, for as Draper states, "the Elizabethan stage regularly portrayed them as fools, or knaves, or both." He was more than a stock character since he contained elements of satire aimed at a very real problem. The real Elizabethan constables were usually ignorant or dishonest since the job was not a high paying or high status position, and therefore, not attractive to many people.\textsuperscript{36}

A comparison of Dull with Dogberry is interesting, for although the two have much in common, there are some

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36}Draper, \textit{Stratford}, pp. 269-270.
differences. Both are ignorant, although Dull does not seem quite as stupid as Dogberry. This may be, as Evans suggests, because Dull keeps his mouth shut most of the time. Dull seems to be aware that he does not have much language ability, and he is not ashamed to admit it. In answer to Holofernes' comment, "Via goodman Dull! thou hast spoken no word all this while," he states, "Nor understood none neither, Sir." Dogberry, of course, would never admit something like this, yet he utters more malapropisms than does Dull. Dogberry seems more incompetent than Dull, but this may be simply because we never see Dull do anything more complicated than deliver letters or hold Costard in custody.

One last thing should be mentioned in discussing Love's Labour's Lost and the use of the low-status character. This concerns the purpose of the play-within-a-play, the Nine Worthies. The purpose is probably similar to the purpose of Pryamus and Thisbe in A Midsummer Night's Dream; it allows Shakespeare to satirize current and lately extinct dramatic practices. This play, then, contributes to the theme of language excesses.

The fourth early play, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, is involved with human friendship and love and so is not

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as intently satiric or farcical as the other early plays, although bits of satire and farce can be found in the play. The low-status characters of this play, Lucetta, Launce, and Speed, are introduced "for no reason whatever but to be unmistakable dolts" according to H. B. Charlton. Most critics disagree, and even Charlton seems to weaken in this position when he says that once Launce and Speed see through Valentine and Proteus, "one begins to feel that it will be extremely difficult to make a hero of a man who is proved to be duller of wit than the patent idiots of the piece." Most critics believe that Speed and Launce contribute much to the themes of the play. As Harold Brooks says, "from Launce's entry, each of his scenes refers, by burlesque parallels, to the theme of friendship on one hand and of love on the other." He goes on to comment that this burlesqueing seems to be Launce's main role, for in only one way can he be shown to "contribute to the progress of events." This is when Launce's blunderings anger Proteus so much that he is willing to fire him and hire the disguised Julia. The main role of each of the low-status characters, besides providing the broad comedy,

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is to be a comic pointer, either through speeches which reveal the character or their masters or in parallel actions. In every scene in which they appear, they throw light upon the main characters or the themes of the main action.

Speed is the first to appear (I. i.). He has been sent by Proteus to give a love letter to Julia. Brooks describes the significance of this scene in the following manner: "Speed . . . has his mock-disputation (like Dromio of Syracuse) and his routine of witty begging (like Feste). The episode . . . is not irrelevant clownage. It underlines at a single stroke both Proteus' friendship and his love: the friendship with Valentine has allowed him to make Speed, his friend's man not his own, carry his love letter to Julia. So, at the outset, a clown is linked with both themes." ⁴⁰ (If this is so, then it answers Clifford Leech's comment that "It is odd that Proteus did not use . . . [Launce] in Act I when he was sending a letter to Julia," and his suggestion that from this "we may assume that he was not in the first plan, or perhaps even the first draft of the play.") ⁴¹ Leech believes that this scene is important because "the love is made

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⁴⁰ Brooks, pp. 93-94.

comic through Speed's refusal to look with sufficient seriousness on his mission." In II. i. Speed proves to be a comic pointer in several ways. He reveals to the audience that Valentine is in love with Silvia. In doing so, he has, as Champion points out, "provided a comic definition of the 'romantic' lover." Furthermore, it is Speed who has to reveal Silvia's love to Valentine. Brooks comments that "so ultracourtly a gambit has to be explained to him by the uncourtly Speed is humorous . . . and it is ironical that Speed should do this office of a good friend in his love, when his courtly friend Proteus is soon to be a false rival."

Lucetta, Julia's maid, makes her appearance in I. ii. Her primary function is to "prove her mistress' disdain for Proteus is mere hypocrisy by receiving a letter in Julia's name and manipulating her into a furious rage." Furthermore, she is important as part of the effort to make Proteus look like a trustworthy man, for she sees him as the best of Julia's suitors. Later, her role changes slightly as she foreshadows Proteus' unfaithfulness in a comment as Julia prepares to go to him. When Julia says, "His heart as far from fraud as heaven from

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42 Ibid., p. 10.
43 Champion, p. 35.
44 Brooks, p. 95.
45 Champion, p. 37.
earth," Lucetta answers, "Pray heaven he prove so; when you come to him!" (II. vii. 78-79).

Launce's famous tale of his farewell to his family (II. iii.) is his first entrance, and it is generally seen as a parallel of the main action. Leech believes that we are supposed to compare this farewell scene with that of Julia and Proteus. As Leech says, "we are meant to recall the silence of Julia as we hear Launce's reproach" against Crab's lack of tears. As he points out, "This does not mean that Julia's love is brought into question, but it does prevent us from taking her grief too seriously. Moreover, the vocal Proteus and the vocal Launce and his family are brought into juxtaposition that makes us ready to doubt the profundity of Proteus's feelings." 46 Tillyard sees some satiric pokes in Launce's soliloquy which only vaguely relate to the main theme, but they seem worth mentioning. He says Launce's

mother must be the shoe "with the worser sole," and of course she thereby indicates a pun and the medieval dispute on whether the woman's soul was equal or inferior to a man's, even whether the woman had one at all. When Launce says his sister may aptly be compared to his stick, "for she is white as a lily and as small as a wand," he is glancing at the heroines of medieval romance or ballad. 47

46 Leech, p. 12. The same views can also be found in Campbell, p. 6, and Champion, p. 36.

These stereotypical views of womanhood are as ridiculous as the stereotypical lovers, such as Valentine or Proteus, and combined with other comments of Launc and Speed, they fill out Shakespeare's satire of the courtly love tradition.

Proteus, of course, will prove a cad despite his vow that, "If I can check my erring love, I will" (II. iv. 213). In the next scene, as Champion states, Launc acts as a pointer, for he "anticipates Proteus' crass transformation by suggesting through bawdy jest that, now that his master is traveling, he will not make a match with Julia." It is also Launc who first sees and comments upon Proteus's deceitfulness in a speech, "I am but a fool, look you; and yet I have wit to think my master is a kind of knave..." (III. i. 262-63). From here, he moves into a conversation with Speed concerning a proposed match with a milkmaid. This, at first glance, seems to have nothing to do with the main action, but actually it is a useful device concerned with the love theme. Champion believes that the scene describing Launc's love, "with its practical view of love involving a woman with pragmatic abilities, parodies the 'impractical' passionate love for which Valentine has been banished and for which Proteus sacrifices his fidelity both in romance and in friendship." Brooks

48 Champion, p. 36.

49 Ibid.
agrees that this scene is significant. He says that the letter describing the faults and virtues of the milkmaid contrasts "with the two romantic letter scenes" (I. ii., II. i.). Furthermore, Launce's "mercenary" and "uncourtly" romance contrasts with the courtly romance of Valentine and even more strikingly with the courtly actions "used by the faithless Proteus as cover for his own pursuit" of Silvia. As Brooks states, "Beside the moral deformity of Proteus' conduct in love, the comic deformity of Launce's is nothing."  

Launce's next scene (IV. iv.) in which he describes the fiasco which results when he tries to give Silvia his dog Crab after losing the small dog which Proteus asked him to deliver, is also significant. It, too, parallels the main action. Crab has not handled himself as a gentleman, yet Launce, out of affection, has saved him from punishment. Brooks suggests that Proteus is parallel to Crab in a statement that just "as Crab is only saved by Launce's quixotic self-sacrificial affection, so Proteus is only saved by the extremes to which Valentine is ready to carry his friendship and Julia her love."  

Tillyard agrees and suggests that the main hint at intended parallelism comes

50 Brooks, pp. 97-98.

51 Ibid., p. 99.
in the similarity between Launce's cry, "How many masters would do this for his servant?" (IV. iv. 31-32) and Julia's cry, "How many women would do such a message?" (IV. iv. 95). Leech draws other parallels from this scene. He says that just as Launce has used Crab, a most unlikely "love-ambassador" to tell Silvia of Proteus's love, Proteus sends "the wrong ambassador" in the disguised Julia.

The scene of Launce's tale of Crab is important for another reason. It is one of the few times when the play leaves Verona and one suddenly finds himself in Elizabethan England. As Draper states, the "description ... is a compound of authentic Elizabethan detail."

The outlaws, who might also be considered low-status characters, may also be a reflection of England, rather than Italy. During the Elizabethan Age, the roads were unsafe because of such roving bands of highwaymen. Furthermore, this band of outlaws resembles Robin Hood's band, and Shakespeare may have been influenced by this English myth.

As previously mentioned, the Englishness of Shakespeare's low-status character is one of its most noticeable traits. It is the Dromios who refer to folklore and who

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52 Tillyard, p. 125.
53 Leech, p. 15.
54 Draper, Stratford, p. 15.
make satiric pokes at the Elizabethan enemies, France and Spain. Christopher Sly, with his desire for a pot of ale, illustrates the typical English rural craftsman. Holofernes, despite all of his Latin utterings, is an English grammarian, and Dull is an example of the incompetent English rural constable. Already in these early plays, Shakespeare is relying heavily upon the low-status character whenever he wants to comment on the current topics of English life. In the middle comedies, this is even more evident.
THE MIDDLE COMEDIES

The comedies generally considered to be Shakespeare's best are those of the middle period, which are often referred to as the Romantic comedies. This group includes: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. The low-status character continues to be important in these plays. Indeed, in a few plays, the low-status character leaves a more lasting impression on the audience than the main characters do. This is true for Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and for Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. The low-status character continues to be a clown who provides most of the play's broad humor. As in the early plays, the low-status character is more English than the higher figures. In these comedies the low-status character is not likely to be woven deeply into the plot as were the Dromios or Tranio. Instead, the low-status character may appear in parallel action as did Launce. In some of these dramas there is one main low-status character who is surrounded by a company of his peers; the primary function of these satellites is to act as a foil to the main character or to provide a more realistic situation in a satire. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first play to be discussed, is such a play.
A Midsummer-Night's Dream, generally considered to be Shakespeare's first comic masterpiece, is successful partly because, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch says, in the fairies and the mechanicals "Shakespeare has found himself." The play has four plot lines woven together masterfully. These are the Hippolyta-Theseus plot, the four lovers plot, the fairies plot, and the Rude Mechanicals plot. Of these, only the latter concerns low-status characters. The generally acknowledged source for this play, Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," provides the idea for the other three plots, but the rustics and their play are "apparently original with Shakespeare." The Rude Mechanicals, as they are called because that is what Puck calls them (III. ii. 9), are a group of tradesmen who have come together to present a drama in honor of the wedding of their ruler. This group of characters has several functions. They provide most of the clownage. Their drama is used by Shakespeare to satirize current dramatic practices. Shakespeare uses Nick Bottom, the main character of this group, to comment on such themes as appearance versus reality and the theme of the qualities of love. Much happens in the play, and many critics feel that Bottom is the character who draws it all together.


2 Champion, pp. 51-53.
The character of Bottom should be examined in detail. He first appears in the scene in which the mechanics have gathered to cast their play. Although it is obvious that Peter Quince is the leader, it is Bottom who takes charge and urges Quince to begin. He continues to give orders and suggestions throughout the scene. Once Quince has begun to announce parts, Bottom tries to volunteer for all of the roles. He has great confidence in his acting ability. He says of his performance as a tragic lover, "if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms." (I. ii. 28-29). He also feels that he could play a tyrant and recites lines to prove it. David Young says, "Bottom demonstrates since he is not capable of describing the way a tyrant rants." This comment is not really fair to Bottom, for he has the power to describe how he would do the lion. It is more likely that he is simply caught up in the joy of make-believe, a quality which John Palmer says both the fairies and Bottom possess. This exuberance and delight are illustrated by Bottom's immediate interest in picking out which beard he will wear as Pyramus. Because of his suggestions and his eagerness, "he has," as Palmer points out,

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"been rated for conceit and pushing himself forward over-
much. But that is unjust. . . . He does not unduly press
either himself or his suggestions on the company but yields
with good grace to the common voice,"\(^5\) as he does when they
tell him that he must not play the lion because he will
frighten the ladies. The other players do not seem to re-
sent Bottom, for they say of him later in the play, "he
hath simply the best wit of any handicraftman in Athens,"
and "yea, and the best person too; and he is a very paramour
for a sweet voice" (IV. ii. 9-12).

Perhaps, the others do not resent Bottom's sugges-
tions because he is so practical. Although it may seem
absurd to the audience when he points out that the lover's
suicide might scare the ladies, the other craftsmen do not
see the absurdity, and they are relieved when Bottom offers
a solution to this difficult problem. He will design a
prologue; he also goes into great detail in setting up
the device of a prologue to explain that the lion is not
really a lion. Other examples of Bottom's practicality are
illustrated by the problem of obtaining moonlight and a
wall for the play. Snout, a realist, suggests that if
there is a full moon that night, they can leave a window
open. Bottom, who is ready to please, agrees to the

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 92.
plan, but Quince suggests that it would be better to have one of the players represent moonshine. Bottom not only accepts this suggestion, he carries it farther by suggesting that someone also represent the wall.\(^6\)

Bottom's devotion to the play and his inherent practicality causes him to think of the play even after his experience with the fairy world. He decides to adapt his "dream" to fit into the play. When he returns to his friends, they are excited and want to know what has happened to him, but he says, "Not a word of me," and continues with his practical suggestions, bidding the lion not to cut his fingernails and telling the rest of the players not to eat garlic (IV. ii. 34-35).

A discussion of Bottom's common sense and practicality leads naturally into a discussion of the transformed Bottom, for as John Allen says, "critics are generally agreed that Bottom as ass is the epitome of common sense."\(^7\) The main piece of evidence for this view is Bottom's reply to the fairy queen's declaration of love, "Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that: and yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days. . ." (III. i. 145-147). Allen concludes that Bottom "further demonstrates matter-of-factness (if

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 101.

\(^7\)John A. Allen, "Bottom and Titania," The Shakespeare Quarterly, XVIII (Spring, 1967), 107.
not precisely common sense) by associating the fairy attendants whom Titania assigns to him with objects familiar to him in the workaday world. . . ." Allen also hints that this is "appropriate to the sensibilities of an ass." Ernest Schanzer takes a much more flattering view of Bottom's actions. He says that "Bottom, with his customary adaptability to any part he is called upon to play, at once fits himself to his new role of Prince Consort. . . . He plays the part to perfection. He is courteous without condescension, well informed about each fairy's family, genuinely interested in their affairs." 

Bottom's actions with the fairies are interesting. Allen says that Bottom is more modest as an ass than as a man. However, Bottom's ready acceptance of four fairy servants and Titania's love, despite its unreasonableness, does not seem to spring from modesty, but from his high regard for himself. A modest man would not be as pretentious as Bottom is when he addresses the fairy servants as "Mounsieur" (IV. i. 10, 18). Nor would he so easily give orders, as Bottom does, when he tells the fairies that he is not to be awakened. If it is true, as Palmer

8Ibid.


10Allen, p. 107.
says, that Bottom is "equal to all occasions and at home wherever he may be," then it arises not from assly modesty, but from a strong sense of self-confidence.

Allen asserts that the modesty which he sees in Bottom comes from his asshood. He says that "Bottom is not only Bottom, but an ass as well. . . ." Whether he is modest as an ass or not, Bottom certainly has some qualities of the ass. He has "a great desire to a bottle of hay" (IV. i. 34-35). Allen believes that Bottom is "funny because he combines humanity and asshood and thus comments obliquely upon the peculiar qualities of each species in comparison with the other." 

Bottom participates in two events, his transformation and the production of Pyramus and Thisbe. Both of these have significance in relation to the themes of the play. The transformation involves what Schanzer calls the "love-madness" theme. He states that "Shakespeare . . . shows us the reductio ad absurdum of this love madness in the Bottom-Titania love scenes. Here, in the infatuation of the Queen of fairies for a weaver metamorphosed into an ass, we have love which is ingendered in the imagination only, uncorrected by judgment and the senses." 

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11 Palmer, p. 92.
12 Allen, p. 108.
13 Ibid.
14 Schanzer, p. 28.
Throughout the play, characters, especially Theseus, make comments such as the following to illustrate the role of reason in love:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
(V. i. 4-8)

Even Bottom, who many would consider an idiot, serves to point out the unreasonableness of the four lovers. Peter Fisher says that after Lysander is drugged, he makes a comment to justify his sudden switch in love objects, that "the will of man is by reason sway'd; / And reason says you are the worthier maid."15 This, of course, is utter nonsense. Reason has not changed Lysander's mind; he has been manipulated by a chemical and the supernatural. Even if he were using reason, he could not reasonably choose one girl over the other because there is no real difference between them. Bottom's comment that "love and reason keep little company together now-a-days," coming as it does in the next scene, serves as a contrast to Lysander's. As Fisher says, "the instinct of Bottom is more honest in its confusion than the reason of Lysander."16

Champion points out that the subplot of the rustics "parallels and burlesques" the four lovers in each of their

16Ibid.
five appearances. For example, the lovers' first appearance reveals their plight to the audience; then the rustics appear and are cast as young lovers troubled in a similar situation. Shakespeare uses the production of Pyramus and Thisbe to satirize sentimental, romantic love like that of the four lovers. Just as Pyramus and Thisbe are forced to meet secretly because of parental interference, Lysander and Hermia must flee to the woods. The situations are similar, and despite the fact that the four lovers do not commit suicide, they are linked to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When poor acting and bad lines make Pyramus and Thisbe look ridiculous, this same ridiculousness is cast also on the young lovers by association.

The transformation of Bottom also parallels the lovers, or as Champion points out, it burlesques the harried romantic confusions of the Athenian lovers. Just as Helena, having convinced herself that she is "as ugly as a bear," becomes the object of Demetrius' affection, so does Bottom, literally as ugly as an ass—at least in part—become the object of Titania's affection. Titania's love-at-first-sight, of course, parallels the frantic and frequent interchange of such passion among [the young Athenians].

Involved with the ideas of love and reason are the ideas of imagination, dream and reality. Bottom figures heavily in these also. Sometimes in the play, imagination seems to be held up for scorn. Usually this occurs when

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17Champion, pp. 55-56.
18Ibid.
it is connected with the love-madness theme. As R. W. Dent says, "In Dream the origin of love never lies in the reason. . . . Although the eyes are integrally involved in the process of inspiring and transmitting love, nevertheless 'love sees not with the eyes' [and here eyes are a metaphor for the reason]; instead, the eyes 'see' what the lover's imagination dictates." Bottom, or rather Titania's love for him, serves as the supreme example of love's blindness, for "Titania was 'enamoured of an ass,' and knew it, but her selective imagination found beauty in its 'fair large ears,' 'sleek smooth head,' even in its voice." 19

The imagination is not always held up to ridicule, however. When it is connected to art, it rather than reason is supreme. Bottom is important here, for like the lovers, he has a marvelous experience, but unlike the lovers who easily dismiss it as a dream, and hence of no significance, Bottom sees his dream as a "rare vision" which "hath no bottom." Young explains the significance of Bottom's dream speech (IV. iv. 204-222) in the following manner:

"Dream" and "rare vision" are equated and the suggestion of an encounter with divinity is strengthened by a comically scrambled passage from the Bible. . . . we are closer . . . to the mystery of dream experience than at any other point in the play. Bottom's awe at this vision . . . is enormously suggestive in terms of our normal contempt for the shadowy,

irrational world of dreams, for, all things considered, he is right, and his healthy respect for his limitations gives him a more accurate sense of what has passed than is possessed either by the lovers or by Theseus. It is also significant that in his wordless confusion, in his discovery that his dream is not reportable by normal means, Bottom's instinct is to have it turned into art. . . .

Bottom is an artist, or he has at least the soul of an artist. This, as well as his joy in make-believe, probably accounts for his dedication to the play. Palmer believes that Bottom's thoughts about the play during its preparation reveal more artistic merit than do the remarks on its failure delivered by the Duke and others during its performance. Palmer also remarks that "Bottom's famous protest to the Duke is no mere impertinence, but the forthright gesture of an artist anxious to be well understood." While Bottom may be an artist, *Pyramus and Thisbe* is not a successful production. Shakespeare uses this play to satirize his own profession. The style is that of earlier drama, with exaggeration of acting and language filled with rhetorical devices. Champion enumerates the faults of the play:

utterly inappropriate in tone and title, . . . the ridiculous casting with Bottom demanding every role and Flute embarrassed at having a

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20Young, p. 124.
21Palmer, p. 106.
22Ibid., p. 105.
23Champion, p. 55.
24Young, p. 35.
female part, the pompous manner of delivery, . . . actors who confuse actual lines with cues, the endless death scene in which the protagonist loses more breath than blood, and the doggerel rhythm certain to turn the most serious of themes to laughter.25

The satire might extend beyond drama, for "the dramatic poetry of the mechanicals would of course remind the audience of bad verse in general—conventional details, redundancies, obvious padding and the tortured rhyme."26

Besides Bottom, the low-status characters of A Midsummer-Night's Dream do not on the surface seem individualized. Peter Quince, however, is more complicated than he seems at first glance. He is director or leader of the playing group. He has picked the play and cast it. Because of Bottom's exuberance, it seems that Quince has little real leadership over the group, but as Palmer asserts, this is not true, for "Bottom accepts his authority . . . and . . . though prolific in advice, fancying himself in all parts, is neither envious nor pushful, but just immensely eager to get things done."27 Actually, Quince has more leadership ability than many would guess. He knows how to handle each problem as it comes. He convinces Flute to play Thisbe by telling him that he can hide his beard with a mask. Bottom, of course, is a little

25Champion, p. 55.
26Young, p. 37.
27Palmer, p. 98.
harder to handle, but Quince does it with flattery. He tells Bottom that he cannot play the lion because he will play it too well and frighten the ladies. Bottom dodges this by saying that he will be careful. Quince then becomes more flattering and convinces Bottom that he must play Pyramus because no one else could possibly do it as well as he. Bottom is satisfied. Quince illustrates the fact that although a character is seen only shortly, Shakespeare can fully delineate his personality.

In the next play, The Merchant of Venice, the low-status characters are not as important or as interesting as they are in A Midsummer-Night's Dream. These low-status characters are Nerissa, Launcelot Gobbo, and Launcelot's father, Old Gobbo.

Nerissa's primary function is to allow her mistress' wit to surface. This is evident in her first appearance (I. ii.) where by naming the suitors, she allows Portia to comment upon them. (This scene is, of course, very similar to the Julia and Lucetta dialogue in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Just as Lucetta helps to establish Proteus' worth and Julia's love of him, Nerissa says of Bassanio, "he of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady" [I. ii. 129-131], and Portia's fondness for him is revealed in her reply, "I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise" [I. ii. 132-133].) Portia's comments on the other suitors
are really a satire on national characteristics and resemble the description of Nell delivered by Dromio of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors*. It is worth noting that here the witty remarks are not given to the low-status character, but to a high-status female. This is probably because Shakespeare is working out a new type of character, the witty, wise female such as Viola or Beatrice. Nerissa functions only as a parallel to Portia in the later parts of the play. Both are engaged and then marry, and both participate in the ring trick.

Launcelot Gobbo is a much more complicated character. Draper feels that Shakespeare wanted to create a character who had successfully transplanted himself from the country to the city. Draper sees him as "an English realistic figure who illustrates the practical manipulations of the day by which a silk purse might be fashioned out of a sow's ear," meaning that Launcelot yearns for good clothing and more learning, and that "he has little respect for his father and the country ways he represents."28

Draper characterizes Launcelot as lazy and careless and believes that he is perhaps the least loyal of Shakespeare's early servants.29 It is true that Launcelot wishes to leave Shylock, but he does feel some hesitation as his

29 Ibid., p. 18.
monologue in II. ii. shows. Furthermore, Launcelot feels loyalty to Jessica and cries when he leaves her. Shylock, after all, is not a good master, for he is slow to spend money to provide for his servant. Even Jessica admits that "our house is hell..." (II. iii. 2). Draper suggests that Launcelot wishes to leave Shylock because he is ambitious and that he yearns for "the splendor of guilt braid." Yet, this ambition does not come out in Launcelot's talk with his father. He wishes to leave because "I am famished in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs" (II. ii. 113-114). It is doubtful that Shylock was actually starving Launcelot, but this was certainly the grounds for frequent disagreements, for Shylock is not sorry to see Launcelot, whom he calls "a huge feeder" (II. v. 46), go.

Draper comments that Launcelot does "nothing for the major and little for the minor plot." Launcelot's major function seems to be characterization and broad comedy. His dialogue between his conscience and his evil self (II. ii. 1-33) is funny. It has some similarities to a morality play which often had personifications of good and evil battling over a soul. Here, the battle is funny partly because it is not fairly fought, but it is just Launcelot's

30 Ibid., p. 19.
31 Ibid.
way of justifying a decision he has already made. The very fact that Launcelot feels the need to justify his behavior signals that he does indeed feel guilty for breaking his agreement. This dialogue also helps to characterize Shylock, for Launcelot calls him "the very devil incarnal" (II. ii. 28). Throughout the play, characters describe Shylock in this manner. When Shylock quotes scriptures to justify his interest taking, Antonio says, "the devil can cite scripture for his purpose" (I. iii. 99). Later, Jessica's statement that "our house is hell" links Shylock to the devil. In this same speech she calls Launcelot "a merry devil" (II. iii. 2). Therefore, Launcelot is to parallel Shylock. There is another hint in the play that this parallel is valid.

In I. iii. Shylock compares himself to Jacob in several instances. As Norman Nathan says, "it appears that numerous passages, names, and events in Genesis are woven into the play," and he suggests that "it is Shylock's identification of himself with Jacob which gives him the desire to get his pound of flesh through God's intervention."^2 Nathan and other critics who have dealt with the Biblical allusions of The Merchant of Venice have missed an important one. This occurs in II. ii. where Launcelot talks with his father. Just as Shylock identifies

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himself with Jacob, Launcelot through his actions compares himself to Jacob. Launcelot's confrontation with his father replays Genesis 27 where Jacob tricks his father out of a blessing by pretending to be his brother Esau. Both Jacob's and Launcelot's fathers are blind. Both fathers are not sure that the young men before them really are their sons. Just as Jacob was after a blessing, Launcelot says, "Pray you, let's have no more words about it, but give me your blessing: I am Launcelot, your boy. . . ." (II. ii. 89-90). It is the hairiness of Jacob which is crucial, and in this scene, Old Gobbo comments of Launcelot, "what a beard thou hast got! thou hast more hair on thy chin than Dobbin my fill-horse has on his tail" (II. ii. 99-101). Jacob's trick is, of course, more serious than Launcelot's jest of telling the old man that his son is dead, but both men are shown to be capable of deception. In fact, this might be the primary importance of the section, to remind the audience that Jacob was deceitful and thereby show Shylock's deception by association.

If Shylock and Launcelot are both identified as the devil and as Jacob, then a parallel between them is indicated. The parallel comes in their treatment of Jessica. Launcelot, not Shylock, performs the role of father. While Shylock plans his revenge of Antonio, Launcelot is busy arranging the details of the elopement of Jessica and Lorenzo. Here Launcelot is performing the father's role
of matchmaker and giver of the bride. While Shylock seems
to lack a deep affection for Jessica as revealed by his
deeper concern for his stolen ducats, Launcelot reveals
a deep concern for Jessica in his worry that she is damned
for not being a Christian (III. v.).

This scene (III. v.) shows the greatest difference
between Launcelot and his father. Old Gobbo's speech is
full of malapropism. For example, he says, "infection"
for "affection." Launcelot, however, is skillful with
language. He deliberately misunderstands what is said to
him in order to bring up his own views.33 Old Gobbo's
role is that of a foil for his son, as might be expected
since he only appears in one scene (II. ii.) and in that,
he is befuddled completely by Launcelot who is in complete
control of the situation.

The low-status characters of the next play, Much
Ado About Nothing are not in control of any situation.
Dogberry and his fellow law-enforcement officials manage
to catch the villain and right the wrongs only by accident.
Shakespeare seems to have had several reasons for adding
these minor characters which do not appear in his sources.
It was necessary that someone discover the deception against
Hero, and this is an important function of Dogberry and
his gang, but as Draper says, "a single scene, or even

33 Wilson, p. 47.
less, would have sufficed to accomplish this resolution of the comedy."\(^{34}\) The Dogberry scenes, then, must have other functions. They are surely, just as those of Dull were, a satire on the rural constable.

Dogberry's malapropisms are juxtapositioned against the witticism of Beatrice and Benedick; the juxtaposition enhances both Dogberry's asininity and the intelligence of Beatrice and Benedick. The Dogberry episodes, of course, add much humor to the play. Francis Fergusson suggests that these were to "lighten the catastrophe at Hero's wedding and the character of Don John; we cannot take a villain seriously who can be apprehended by Dogberry."\(^{35}\)

Before examining each of these functions in detail, Dogberry's personality should be explored. Draper capsulates Dogberry's character in the following statements:

He thinks in logical non-sequitur and speaks in malapropism fluent and rampant. He is the very incarnation of the lower bourgeoisie; their moral truisms slide off his tongue so serious and so elevated and so inept; he boasts of his humility, and flaunts his wealth and learning, for he has no inkling what wealth and learning really are. He is a pillar of society, and yet will not arrest a thief.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\)Draper, p. 268.


\(^{36}\)Draper, Stratford, p. 279.
Dogberry is certainly a low-status character as Draper's statement shows: "Like most constables, he is of low degree; not only does his name suggest a humble rustic origin; but also his exclamation, 'God save the foundation,' seems to imply that he was brought up in a home for foundlings and so was probably base-born." As a constable, Dogberry is not completely successful. His type of law enforcement is that of the course of least resistance. If a man will not halt in order to be examined by the watch, they are to "take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave" (III. iii. 29-31). Draper suggests that Dogberry is neglecting his duty in a more serious way when he appoints Seacole as head of the night watch, while he "apparently plans to go home peacefully to bed. ... A petty constable was allowed to appoint a deputy, though hardly, one suspects, for the discharge of his own ordinary official functions."  

Dogberry's extreme ignorance would not seem so funny except that he sees himself as a "superb creature, a wise fellow, as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina."  

37 Ibid., p. 270.  
38 Ibid., p. 272.  
As Evans points out, although Dogberry has numerous language problems, he is not aware of them because "much of his conversation is with persons from his own little world who seem to find him comprehensible, and who indeed speak the same language." Evans further suggests that this is one reason Dogberry is so confident of his skill, and "on those occasions when Dogberry is in the company of people from outside his circle, his self-confidence remains intact because his vocabulary and his personality allow him to interpret what is said to him according to his own desires. . . . The honorable people of the play, amused or annoyed though they may be by Dogberry's verbosity, never belittle him in a form plain enough for him to recognize the rebuke." 40

It is Dogberry's combination of stupidity and ego which causes him to parallel the main characters of the play. As Thorndike points out,

_Lugh Ado About Nothing_ is reminiscent of _Love's Labour's Lost_. Constable Dull is elaborated into Dogberry, and Rosaline and Biron into Beatrice and Benedick. As in the earlier play, the verbal wit and elegance of the court are contrasted with the absurd twisting of language perpetrated by the clowns. 41

Dogberry, "while apparently an opposite to the wit-crackers . . . is also a parallel: in that pride of self-opinion

40 Evans, pp. 431-432.
41 Thorndike, p. 109.
and a nice appreciation of one's own wisdom and cleverness is as much theirs as his."^2 Dogberry's egotism links his plot to both of the other plots because as Graham Storey points out, all three plots turn about love. Two of the plots involve romantic love, but Dogberry is not a young lover. He is a self-lover, and so his plot also involves love.\(^3\) Fergusson elaborates on this parallel: "Dogberry is not suffering the delusions of young love, like Claudio, but those of vanity and uncontrollable verbosity. His efforts to find his way, with lanterns, through the darkness of the night and the more impenetrable darkness of his wits, forms an ironic parallel to the groping of the young lovers through their mists of feeling."^4

There is another interesting parallel between Dogberry and the lovers. Champion points out that "by the time the constables make their final exit, Benedick and Beatrice are well on their way to becoming lovers as they attempt to pen their affections in lyric form only to find themselves virtually as inept as Dogberry in the use of the King's English."^5

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\(^2\) Rossiter, pp. 53-54.


\(^4\) Fergusson, p. 20.

\(^5\) Champion, p. 78.
Dogberry's ineptness with words helps to weave his plot into the theme of the play since "all three plots turn on understandings and misunderstandings." Through the verbal misprision that prevents their conveying information concerning Don John's dastardly deed, Dogberry and Verges "create another layer of the mis-noting" which becomes one of the outstanding themes of this drama.

Another feature of Dogberry, and the watch in general, is to satirize the rural English law official. The watch blunders ridiculously. Dogberry reveals his irresponsibility when he appoints Seacole to lead the night watch, a job which was the constable's duty. Dogberry allows much laxness in his men; he allows them to sleep on the job and "frequent the local taverns." Dogberry violates the concept of innocent until proven guilty when he begins his examination of Borachio and Conrade by calling them "villaines." Furthermore, Dogberry "is treating their declaration of 'not guilty' as if it were perjured evidence." To compound the errors of the trial, "when there was no charge preferred against them the prisoners are urged to speak . . . when there is one, they are not allowed" to speak in their own behalf. Even after Borachio has confessed, Dogberry feels that his most serious offense

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46 Rossiter, p. 49.

47 Champion, p. 78.
is calling Dogberry an ass. After this supreme incompetency has been shown, one can only marvel that the watch has successfully uncovered the deception and has carried the information to the prince and governor. Champion suggests that Borachio "from sheer frustration at having been arrested and tried in such inarticulate fashion, voluntarily admits his guilt rather than endure any longer the sheer fatuity of his captors." 

The social status of Borachio and Conrade seems to be somewhat low. Draper says that they "seem to be 'serving men,'" and although technically this was not a menial position, the young man did not inherit the family fortune. Furthermore, the family sometimes could not even afford to provide the usual food and clothing allowance. Draper suggests that their position is even more low than most serving men for they work for a younger son who is not heir to the family wealth. The lack of security caused by their low position might explain, says Draper, why Borachio and Conrade do not refuse to help Don John in his deception. Draper feels that Borachio does not seem to be a "deep-dyed villain," for he "confesses readily in the end, and seems to be detained more as state's evidence than for his part in the affair." Furthermore, as Draper

48 Draper, Stratford, pp. 272-278.

49 Champion, p. 78.
says, "his chief concern is to exonerate Conrade and Margaret..." Draper seems to ignore the fact that it is Borachio who devises the plot (II. ii.). Once this fact is observed, it is hard to agree that Borachio is a basically good man who is forced by his dire circumstances to do evil as Draper seems to see him.

Another low-status character of interest in the play is Margaret. Many critics find it hard to believe that someone as witty as she is could be involved in the ruining of Hero. William McCollom suggests that Margaret is an example of the typical Elizabethan tendency of sacrificing character consistency for the plot. He describes Margaret as:

a witty lady-in-waiting, on excellent terms with both Hero and Beatrice, but the plot demands that she play her foolish part in the famous window scene that almost destroys Hero. After the rejection of her mistress, we see Margaret enjoying herself in a bawdy dialogue with Benedick, for all the world as if we were still in Act I. . . . As she must be aware, her foolishness has been a main cause of all distress, and she supposedly does not know of the happy solution brought about by Dogberry's men; if she does know, she also realizes her role at the window is now revealed. Is she so indifferent to what has happened? Apparently we are not supposed to raise this question.51


Shakespeare seems to have been aware of the inconsistency for he has Leonato say, "Margaret was in some fault for this, / Although against her will, as it appears" (V. iv. 4-5). Yet, this statement does not solve the problem.

Except for her role in the deception, Margaret is a likable character. She is full of bawdy jokes aimed good-naturedly at Hero and Beatrice. She and Ursula, another lady-in-waiting, are instrumental in the plan to cause Beatrice to admit her love for Benedick. Margaret is the one who bids Beatrice to come to the orchard, but it is Ursula who talks to Hero. This arrangement may have been made because Beatrice could more easily believe Ursula and Hero are speaking the truth than she could have believed Margaret, a self-admitted joker. Certainly, it fits Margaret's character to inform Beatrice that her cousin is talking about her and suggest that she overhear the conversation.

The next play to be considered is The Merry Wives of Windsor, which has perhaps the largest constellation of ordinary people of all Shakespeare's comedies. The group is as varied as it is large, a situation which gives Shakespeare an opportunity to satirize many different types. Shallow, a country justice, provides him occasion to continue the satire of the English rural law official begun with Dull and Dogberry. Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson and schoolmaster, and Doctor Caius, a French physician,
allow him a few ethnic jokes. Nym, Bardolf, and Pistol provide occasion for his satiric treatment of the Elizabethan soldier or those pretending to be soldiers. Rounding out the cast of low-status characters are the servants, Robin, Simple, Rugby, and Mistress Quickly.

Several of the characters in this play had appeared in the earlier history plays, Henry IV, I and II (e.g., Falstaff, Shallow, Bardolf, Pistol, Nym, and Mistress Quickly), and much of the criticism concerning this play concerns a debate on whether the characters have changed, and if so, what are the differences. Since the present study deals with the comedies, this debate will not be mentioned unless it reveals the personality of a character as he appears in The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Wilson suggests that Justice Shallow's primary role is to provide a link between Falstaff of the histories and the comedy. He states that "the poaching incident gives Falstaff an opportunity for some of his accustomed effrontery . . . and old man Shallow drifts aimlessly through the rest of the play. He has served his turn, which was that of a hyphen between Falstaff as the Master of Revels and Falstaff as the slave of Venus."52 This seems to be an oversimplification, for Shallow has other functions. Draper says that Shallow is an "unsympathetic picture" of

52Wilson, p. 78.
old age. Both Falstaff and Shallow are portrayed as old in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Draper says of Shallow that he is old and without even wit to redeem him. . . . He is pompous and boastful and so generally ridiculous that even Falstaff, who is progressing toward his age, makes fun of him. He is wizened with years and yet lecherous; he is avid of honorific titles and yet connives at petty corruption; in fact, he is one of the most satirically depicted figures in all Shakespeare.53

As a ridiculous figure who happens to be a law official, he also serves as a satire on all English rural law officials. He is not very successful in his official capacity, for he cannot even settle a crime against himself. He demands justice from Falstaff who has "beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge" (I. i. 113-115). Falstaff has, as Draper explains, "fled the country to evade the jurisdiction of [Shallow] . . . and carried some of the venison to Windsor, where even at the moment, they were about to enjoy it at the table of Master Page."54 Shallow not only does not receive justice, he even accepts an invitation to eat his own venison. Leslie Hotson suggests that Shallow is a satire on a Justice Gardiner with whom Shakespeare had trouble in 1596. This disagrees with a previous theory that Shallow was a satire of Sir Thomas Lucy whom Shakespeare

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54 Ibid., p. 212.
knew in boyhood.55 Both of these assumptions lie in textual allusions, but as Draper says, "Shallow . . . may well be Lucy or Gardiner and doubtless a dozen more, for the players of the time were in constant collision with the lesser officers of the law and Shakespeare must have known these gentry well." Draper concludes that "Shallow seems to be the essence of a whole social class . . . depicted with the ingrained characteristics of old age."56

But Shallow has another function; he tries to arrange a marriage between Anne Page and his cousin Slender. Slender needs someone to help him, for he is an incompetent lover. Wilson describes the anguish Slender feels when he must speak to Anne Page alone as the "ordeal of his life." He cannot ask her to marry him, and when she asks him, "What would you with me?" he blunders, "Truly, for mine own part, I would little or nothing with you" (III. iv. 64-67). Wilson stresses the fact that Slender really does want to marry Anne. He knows who she is even before his cousin suggests a marriage, and "so love-struck is he . . . that he remains unconscious of all that happens between Sir Hugh and Dr. Caius at Frogmore fields. . . ."57 Slender, of course, does not marry Anne even though he is her

56Draper, Stratford, p. 219.
57Wilson, pp. 84-87.
father's choice. He could not have for this is a merry comedy, and Anne must marry a suitable match like the young Fenton.

Anne's other suitors do not fare any better. Two of them, Sir Hugh Evans and Dr. Caius, were added partly from the humor arising from their thick accents. The whole play, as Wilson points out, is a collage of different language abuses. Evans reminds one of Holofernes of Love's Labour's Lost. Both are schoolmasters, and just as Holofernes' ignorance was more ridiculous because of his belief in his superior ability, so too is Evans'. Shakespeare gives Evans a whole scene (IV. i.) in which to reveal his ignorance of what he is supposedly teaching.

The whole play, as Sen Gupta alleges, is based upon gulling:

Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh Evans are hoodwinked by the host on whom they avenge themselves by stealing a horse. Mistress Ford not only gulls Falstaff, but also imposes on her husband. Master Page and Mistress Page think they are fooling each other, but in the end they find they have both been tricked by their daughter and her lover.

Another example of a gulling is when Dr. Caius, like Slender, is not allowed to marry Anne Page although he is one parent's favorite.

The three followers of Falstaff, Bardolf, Pistol, and Nym, claim to be soldiers, but their main occupation

58 Ibid., p. 87.
59 Sen Gupta, p. 269.
seems to be thievery. Wilson says that "they are stage-
figures introduced to remind the audience of the his-
torical plays . . . and possess little life of their
own."60 These characters do have other functions, however.
They serve as a realistic portrait of the Elizabethan sold-
dier's plight. Times have not been kind to Falstaff and
his followers. He is forced to turn away some of his fol-
lowers because he cannot support them. He manages to find
Bardolf a job with the Host as a tapster. This job was
necessary, for Bardolf was no good at the profession of
Pistol and Nym. Falstaff says of him, "his thefts were
too open; his pilchings was like an unskilful singer"
(I. iii. 27-28). Draper explains that "in Elizabethan
times . . . the decay of feudalism and the military changes
that gunnery imposed threw out of employment the older sort
of soldier and reduced him to thief or parasite. . . ."61
He further suggests that Bardolf, however, is the only real
soldier of Falstaff's followers. In peace time many sol-
diers had to beg for a living, and often men who had not
been soldiers pretended that they were in order to do like-
wise. Nym is one of these. Nym may have been using the
soldier image as a cover for his true profession, that of
a thief. Draper says of him, "Nym is a born thief: his
name, which means take or steal, declares as much; and

60 Wilson, p. 80.
61 Draper, Stratford, p. 188.
his ability to instruct Robin in the master-craft of picking pockets, a highly skilled profession, suggests an early start and long years of training in the underworld."

Nym has another function, to signal Shakespeare's attempt to either produce or satirize the humor plays like those of Jonson. Wilson says, "Like Every Man in his Humour, The Kerry Wives is . . . a comedy of humours, i.e., a collection of whimsical characters. For example, there is little except mere oddity in Host, Pistol, and Nym and not much more in Evans and Caius." Wilson suggests that this explains Nym's use of the word "humour" in almost every speech in the play.

Most critics discuss Pistol as a humour figure. Campbell thinks that Pistol's humour "is an irresistible impulse to form horrendous speeches out of . . . remembered tags from old plays in 'Cambyses' vein.'" He suggests that this "verbal ammunition" of Pistol's "is a grotesque mask which conceals cowardice and baseness." Paul Jorgenson agrees and comments that Shakespeare picked a very descriptive name for this character because "the pistol of the

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62 Ibid., pp. 237-238.
63 Wilson, p. 91.
64 Ibid., p. 92.
65 Campbell, pp. 72-76.
sixteenth century was an unruly, blustering weapon.

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Pistol and Nym are important to the plot for they inform Masters Page and Ford of Falstaff's intention to woo their wives. This arouses Ford's jealousy and helps to bring about the gulling of Falstaff. Another low-status character who is instrumental in bringing about Falstaff's gulling is his page Robin. Robin is another one of the carry-over characters from the history plays. In Henry IV, II he is not named and does little but carry messages, but in The Merry Wives of Windsor, he is finally given a name and an important function in the plot. Draper suggests that Robin's lack of loyalty to his master is because Falstaff's cheapness makes it necessary for him to support himself in any way he can. Furthermore, Falstaff has not been the best example for the boy's moral education.67

Mistress Quickly also appeared in the history plays; however, Wilson feels that she is a different Mistress Quickly. She is less bawdy in The Merry Wives of Windsor, and one is confronted with the question of "How came that presiding genius over Falstaff's revels in London to be house-keeper to a French doctor in Windsor?" Whether she is the same Mistress Quickly or not, she is important to


67Draper, Stratford, pp. 228-229.
the play. Wilson suggests that her relationship with Anne Page and the suitors places her in the tradition of the nurse of Roman and Italian comedy, therefore the same type as Juliet's nurse.\footnote{Wilson, pp. 81-82.} Mistress Quickly agrees to help all of the suitors, which does not do much to get Anne married, but it does help Mistress Quickly because she is well paid by all. Another important function of Mistress Quickly is her role in the gulling of Falstaff. She is somewhat like a double agent. Falstaff thinks that she is helping him in wooing Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, but all the while she is helping them trick him. Thomas Parrott points out that one of Mistress Quickly's funniest and most endearing traits is her malapropism. He says of her, "No character in Shakespeare, not even Dogberry, has such a gift for abusing the King's English."\footnote{Thomas Marc Parrott, Shakespearean Comedy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 262-263.} Of the two servants, Simple and Rugby, Simple is the more complex character; Rugby is only a messenger boy. Simple goes to Dr. Caius' house to see Mistress Quickly about helping Slender with Anne Page (I. iv.). While there, he gives a comic description of Slender. Also, his being found by Dr. Caius gives a reason for the Caius-Evans quarrel, for Mistress Quickly informs Caius
that Simple is Evans' servant rather than Slender's.
Simple appears again later in the play (IV. v.) when he
is sent to inquire from the witch, the disguised Falstaff,
about Slender's chances of marriage with Anne. In this
scene Simple shows himself worthy of his name.

Moving from a realistic Tudor village to an en-
chanted forest, one finds the low-status characters of As
You Like It. These characters, Corin, Silvius, William,
Phebe, and Audrey, are part of the play's satire of romantic
Petrachian love conventions and the artificiality of the
pastoral convention. The low-status character, Adam, is
one of Shakespeare's most flattering portraits of a servant.

Most of the play's humor arises from the subtle
contrasts between the pairs of lovers. As Helen Gardner
points out, As You Like It differs from Shakespeare's other
comedies in that it lacks the farce and broad humor provided
by such characters as Launce, Dromio, and Dogberry.70 This
type of humor is replaced by the more subtle humor of Touch-
stone. Touchstone is a court jester, a new kind of char-
acter which Shakespeare refined in his development of Feste,
the fool of Twelfth Night, and in Lear's fool. Wilson
suggests that Shakespeare developed this new type of char-
acter because Will Kempe, who played Dogberry, Bottom, and

70 Helen Gardner, "As You Like It," in Shakespeare: The Comedies, ed. by Kenneth Muir (Englewood Cliffs, New
Sly and whose skill ran to broad farce, was replaced in Shakespeare's acting company by Robert Armin, who was "evidently a much subtler comic man than Kempe." The court fool, while technically a servant, was a much more privileged character than other servants. This, coupled with the very different style of humor, has caused the present author to exclude Touchstone and the other court fools from this study. They will only be discussed when they are closely related to a low-status character.

Alice Shalvi sees the play as a satire of courtly love conventions. Two of the low-status characters figure heavily in this. Silvius has all of the symptoms of the courtly lover: "worshipping his lady with uncritical and undying devotion, pining away if his love were unrequited, fasting, not sleeping, writing poetry." When he first makes his appearance (II. iv.), Silvius is glowing in his suffering. In this respect, he is like Duke Orsino of Twelfth Night, and one suspects that, like Orsino, he is more in love with love than with Phebe. Certainly, he has received no more encouragement from Phebe than Orsino did from Olivia, yet Phebe has no dead brother to mourn. Rather, she seems to reject Silvius from convention. The Petrarchian

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71 Wilson, p. 144.


73 Ibid.
convention demanded a woman who, although beautiful, witty, and virtuous, was cruel and haughty in rejecting her lover's devotion. This is certainly Phebe's role, and she seems to enjoy it as her words reveal,

Thou tell'st me there is murder in mine eyes;
Now do I frown on thee with all my heart;
And if my eyes can wound, now let them kill thee.

(III. v. 10, 15-16)

Yet, Phebe seems to be growing tired of this role. It is really the only role Silvius is allowing her to play. It seems as though Phebe has begun to realize that Silvius' love is shallow, for she says,

Now counterfeit to swoon; why now fall down;
Or if thou canst not, O, for shame, for shame,
Lie not, to say mine eyes are murderers.

(III. v. 17-19)

The underlined words suggest that Phebe detects the fake sentiment in Silvius.

At this point, Rosalind disguised as Ganymede appears and begins to chide Phebe for her cruelty in rejecting Silvius. It should be remembered that Rosalind has already identified herself with Silvius because they are both in love. Because of this identification, Rosalind can detect no falseness in Silvius' love. Once Rosalind has finished telling Phebe that she is ugly and cruel, Phebe is not angry but replies, "I had rather hear you chide than this man woo" (III. v. 65). Rosalind immediately assumes that "she'll fall in love with my anger" (III. v. 67-68), and this, of course, is what Phebe does. Like
Olivia, Phebe has fallen for a maid in man's clothing. She, like Silvius, loves an image rather than the reality of the person. This love of Phebe's is a good dramatic device to complete the satire. Yet, if one reads the play carefully, he cannot help but feel some sympathy for Phebe, for Rosalind's words could easily be interpreted as a coy invitation to love:

I pray you, do not fall in love with me,
For I am falser than vows made in wine;
Besides I like you not. If you will know my house,
'Tis at the tuft of olives hard by.

(III. v. 72-75)

Phebe had not asked where Rosalind lived, and this sudden piece of information sounds like an invitation.

Jay Halio suggests that "at the opposite extreme from Silvius and Phebe, and therefore no closer to a balanced approach, . . . are Touchstone and Audrey." Most critics see Touchstone as Shalvi does: "Where relations between the sexes are concerned, Touchstone is . . . without illusions, maintaining that cuckoldry is inevitable and exists among both poor and rich. But nonetheless lust urges man to marry . . . . He sees Audrey for what she is, ugly and stupid. . . ." Most critics believe that Touchstone's relationship with Audrey is only physical, but John Russell

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75 Shalvi in Mendilow and Shalvi, p. 153.
Brown feels that Touchstone really loves Audrey and that this love grows throughout the play. The critics do not agree in appraising Audrey. Halio seems to see her as a gold-digger for he says, "Audrey has not wit nor language nor manners equal to Touchstone's . . . but she has just enough ambition to become 'a woman of the world.'"

Harold Goddard is far more sympathetic to her:

She is indeed just a goatherd, plain in appearance (though doubtless not as plain as Touchstone would make out) and so unlettered that most words of more than one syllable bewilder her simple wits . . . . But the attentions of this stranger from the court have awakened unwanted emotions and aspirations in her breast, and nothing could be clearer than her desire to be modest and true and pure. Love is the great leveler as well as the great lifter, and Audrey, perhaps for the first time in her life, feels that even she may have a place in the world.

Halio takes a slightly different view of Audrey's morals: "a most earthy wench, Audrey seems as ready as Touchstone to get through any kind of marriage ceremony if it will expedite what is apparently for both of them the real business of love--sex."
Whatever their opinions of Audrey's and Touchstone's personalities, most critics see their relationship as a means to parody romantic love, for there seems to be little emotion in this relationship. Furthermore, they are hopelessly mismatched. Campbell takes this idea further than most critics because he says that the courtship of Audrey "is a caricature of the lavish inappropriate mating which, in the manner of all romantic comedies, takes place at the end of As You Like It. . . . Shakespeare was poking fun at the hurry-scurry unions usually made in the last scene of a romantic comedy."80 There does not seem to be much evidence in the play to support this view, however.

William, Audrey's old boyfriend, appears only once in the play (V. i.). His only function seems to be that of a foil for Touchstone's wit. He is baffled by Touchstone and gives up all right to Audrey without argument.

Two other low-status characters, Corin and Adam, are very sympathetically portrayed. Draper says that Adam is "the most admirable" of all of Shakespeare's servants because he "shares his modest savings with his master [and] forsakes home and shelter for him."81 Gardner points out that Adam's virtue is repaid by the devotion of his master.82

80 Campbell, p. 59.
81 Draper, Stratford, p. 19.
82 Gardner, p. 67.
Orlando refuses the food offered him until Adam can be fed also (II. vii. 127-133).

Halio suggests that Corin represents the best model of rural life in the play.\textsuperscript{83} Parrott agrees and says that Shakespeare uses Corin to "expose the fantastic figment of the pastoral. . . . He is a simple representative of the shepherd's life as it really is, the hired servant of a churlish master, his hands hard and greasy with the handling of his ewes. . . ."\textsuperscript{84} Most critics agree with Sen Gupta who says that Corin's simple wisdom is a refreshing contrast to the fallacious method of reasoning employed by Jacques and Touchstone.\textsuperscript{85} Halio thinks that Corin is an equal to Touchstone's wit;\textsuperscript{86} however, Shalvi feels that Touchstone wins the battle of court life versus the shepherd's life.\textsuperscript{87}

In the last play of this group, \textit{Twelfth Night}, there are three low-status characters, Malvolio, Maria, and Fabian. Three others of Olivia's household, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste, will be discussed whenever they function in connection with the low-status characters.

\textsuperscript{83}Halio, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{84}Parrott, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{85}Sen Gupta, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{86}Halio, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{87}Shalvi in Mendilow and Shalvi, p. 153.
Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, although they are portrayed in the manner that Shakespeare usually reserves for commoners, are knights and so their social position is too high for them to be included in the present study. Feste is a court fool and is also not in this study's domain.

The action involving low-status characters is the gulling of Malvolio. The gulling seems cruel to modern audiences. Most people feel that the joke has gone too far, and some even see Malvolio as a tragic figure. Joseph Summers suggests that the problem does not exist because "Malvolio . . . is justly punished, and . . . his arrogance to the end, and his threatened revenge, now that he is powerless to effect it, sustains the comedy and the characterization and prevents the obtrusion of destructive pathos." Yet, the problem does exist because the sight of Malvolio stamping off the stage is not always viewed as ridiculous, but as pathetic. Robert Langbaum offers two explanations for the modern audience's reaction to Malvolio. First, they are "unable to keep uppermost in . . . mind a distinct idea of the social limitations Malvolio has violated in daring to aspire to a Lady's hand. . . ." Secondly, "the modern reader can sympathize with any character, regardless of his moral position in the

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plot, provided that he is sufficiently central to claim our attention, and has a sufficiently definite point of view and sufficient power of intellect and will to hold our interest. The second reason not only explains one's sympathy for Malvolio, but also the view of a tragic Shylock and one's anger at Prince Hal for dropping Falstaff once he becomes king. The only solution seems to be that one must make a conscious effort to read the play in an Elizabethan frame of mind.

How would an Elizabethan view Malvolio? He would consider him justly punished for he dared to upset a social order constructed by a Divine will. The Elizabethans believed in a chain of being in which all things from the four elements to God were established in a hierarchy. Man had his place—a little higher than the animals and a little lower than the angels. All men were also ranked in this chain of being with women being subordinate to men and servant being lower than master. The Elizabethans saw this hierarchy as a natural law. They believed that it had not been created by man but that he had to conform to it.

Shakespeare often treated the upset of this natural order. His primary symbol for this upset had been the

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shrewish woman who is not subordinate to man, like Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*, Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Now in *Twelfth Night* he deals with another breach of natural order, a servant who tries to break out of his natural position by marrying his mistress. Craig points out that "the name 'Malvolio' means 'evil desires or ambition,' and he is a humor character whose peculiarity, or 'humor' it is to attempt to climb impertinently above his own station." Malvolio himself feels the need to rationalize his desires as he cites a similar case history: "There is example for't; the lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe" (II. v. 44-45). The return to natural order is the result of the gulling of Malvolio by Maria and her friends. The desires of Malvolio are even more upsetting when his motives are examined. As Wilson asserts, "He is not in love with Olivia. He dreams of becoming her husband, as a means of becoming the lord of her house; and his dis-tempered imagination is constantly presenting him visions of himself in that exalted position." Campbell points out that "Malvolio is Shakespeare's representative of the upstart, who was the butt of all the satirists, formal and dramatic, of the 1590's. Like the rest of the writers of the age, Shakespeare takes the conservative side in the

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90 Craig, p. 617.
91 Wilson, p. 172.
struggle of the new classes for recognition." Draper agrees that Shakespeare takes the conservative side in this argument and concludes that "he no more approved of Malvolio than he did the usurping dukes in The Tempest or in As You Like It. . . ."  

Malvolio, despite his ambition, is a good servant. Draper ventures an explanation for Malvolio's displeasure with Sir Toby: "in a house of mourning, he surely seems quite justified in putting down the riot of Sir Toby and his rout and in giving what protection he can to the person and feelings of his youthful mistress." Campbell offers another good explanation: Malvolio "is an enemy to the . . . liberality because of the strait it puts on his lady's purse. He detests Toby's revelry, not because it is wicked, but because it is both indecorous and expensive. . . ." The play gives evidence that Malvolio was bid by Olivia to quiet Toby, for Maria says, "What a caterwauling do you keep here! If my lady have not called up her steward Malvolio and bid him turn you out of doors, never trust me" (II. iii. 77-79). Also when Malvolio appears, he says, "Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My

92 Campbell, p. 86.
93 John Draper, "Olivia's Household," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 806.
94 Ibid., pp. 797-798.
95 Campbell, p. 87.
lady bade me tell you. . ." (II. iii. 102). Olivia also assures the audience that Malvolio is a valuable servant because she says, "I would not have him miscarry for half of my dowry" (III. iv. 68-69).

It is this confrontation between Malvolio and Toby which leads to the gulling of Malvolio. The trick and its significance should be examined in detail. The trick works, of course, because the dupers know Malvolio's personality. As Champion points out, Shakespeare was wise to use servants "who move in his circle and have the best opportunity to know his true nature," for this makes the plot believable. Olivia has also diagnosed Malvolio as sick of self-love, but Maria goes farther when she sees that "so crammed as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him. . ." (II. iii. 162-164). Maria knows her man, for as Curry points out, "the riddles . . . are so artfully couched that Malvolio, given his propensities, cannot help but construe them the way he does and conclude that greatness is being thrust upon him." Malvolio is tricked not only because of his ego, but also because of his belief in fortune. He feels that some of men's affairs are fated to happen. Therefore, he can easily accept the idea that

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96 Champion, p. 8.

97 Curry, p. 124.
"some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them" (II. v. 156-158). Julian Markels explains why Malvolio can be gulled by the letter:

... drunk with delusions, he has forgotten what his "degree" really is. But that only leads him to believe that Olivia no longer thinks "degree" a relevant criterion of human conduct. When circumstances adhere together, degrees and scruples may be forgotten. That is why only Jove is to be thanked.98

The trick is significant, for as John Hollander points out, it forces Malvolio to bring out into the open his "own vision of himself" and see that vision scorned.99

Harold Jenkins gives this detailed description of Malvolio's humiliation:

The ironic fitness of Malvolio's downfall is dramatically underscored in every detail of his situation. When he dreamed of his own greatness he pictured Sir Toby coming to him with a curtsey and he told Sir Toby to amend his drunkenness: it is now his bitterest complaint that this drunken cousin has been given rule over him. When he rebuked the tipsy revelers, he began, "My Masters, are you mad?" and their revenge upon him is to make it seem that he is mad himself. Particularly instructive is the leading part taken in his torment by the fool he began the play by spurning. The fool taunts him in the darkness of the dungeon and he begs the fool to help him to some light.

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It is to the fool that the man contemptuous of fools is now made to plead his own sanity. . . . And Malvolio ends the play as he began by being called a fool. 100

Draper suggests another irony of Malvolio's gulling: "yellow stockings and cross garters seems in the 1590's to have a plebeian connotation. . . . Malvolio then in the very act of his social ascent, is gulled into appearing in the uniform [of] . . . the very class from which he is trying to escape." 101

Malvolio's gulling parallels the main action of the play in several ways. Jenkins asserts that since the play begins with the Orsino-Olivia-Viola plot, the "love delusions of Malvolio . . . fall into perspective as a parody of the more delicate aberrations of his mistress and her suitor. Like them, Malvolio aspires toward an illusory idea of love, but his mistake is a grosser one than theirs. . . ." 102

G. K. Hunter points out the existence of another parallel: "Malvolio's lunatic power to find encouragement in insults reflects directly on Olivia's refusal to accept Viola's words. . . ." 103


102 Jenkins, p. 83.

the characters of *Twelfth Night* wear a mask, Malvolio is one of the characters who will not admit his mask.¹⁰⁴

There has been some controversy among the critics concerning Maria's accusation that Malvolio is "a kind of Puritan." Most critics now agree that Shakespeare did not intend to suggest that Malvolio was actually a member of that religious group, but some suggest that his personality has traits which are usually associated with that group. Wilson says, "Malvolio is not a typical puritan. . . . But he is somewhat of that way of thinking; and he quite obviously stands for order and sobriety in the commonwealth of Olivia's household." Wilson continues by listing the aspects of Malvolio's character which he considers to be puritan: "absence of humor, intolerance of innocent pleasures of life, and belief that order, seemliness, and respectability are the greatest things, if not the only things, that matter." Wilson also concludes that Malvolio really sees himself as "the true representative of order, the heaven-directed censor and corrector of the morals and habits of people."¹⁰⁵ Champion disagrees. He feels that Malvolio has adopted "his puritanical facade . . . only so long as he has been convinced such posture was desired by his employer. Since he is motivated by ambition rather than

¹⁰⁴Summers, pp. 111-118.

¹⁰⁵Wilson, pp. 176-177.
principle, he now hesitates not a moment to accept an opposite pattern of action."\textsuperscript{106} Draper believes that Malvolio is not a puritan, but he does not see him as the hypocrite depicted by Champion. Draper suggests that "the charge of Puritanism is only a casual fling of a detractor; and at that he is only 'sometimes' a 'kind of Puritan'; had he really been one, Maria would hardly have qualified the phrase." Draper further suggests that Malvolio's actions are most unpuritanical. For example, although "sad and civil," Malvolio had dispatched himself in yellow stockings before the forged letter urged him to do so; and he had hoped in the fullness of time to occupy a "day-bedde" and toy with "some rich jewell"; and, most significant of all, the anger of Sir Toby . . . is aroused not against his religious or even sober demeanor, but against his ambition to become his mistress' husband, a most un-puritanical desire.\textsuperscript{107}

Malvolio's chief guller is Maria, a maid in Olivia's household. Draper comments on a seeming paradox in Twelfth Night. It is odd, as he suggests, that while Malvolio is punished for pursuing his mistress, "Maria, a chambermaid, marries a knight who is uncle, or at least cousin, to her mistress and their union is applauded as appropriate. . . ."\textsuperscript{108} Draper explains that Maria is perhaps a younger daughter of a high-status family. Because of her sex and her position as a younger child, she is not an heir. He

\textsuperscript{106}Champion, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{107}Draper, "Household," p. 798.

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., p. 797.
He further suggests that, "Maria . . . had doubtless been sent early from home to get 'her education under a great countesse'; and so since her parents were unable to provide a dowry, she remained in the household as 'chamber maid' . . ."; therefore, there was no blood-line status difference to block the marriage of Maria and Toby.\textsuperscript{109}

Maria is, as Curry points out, "the main deceiver in the plot against Malvolio." She has been very observant and very successful in diagnosing both Malvolio and Olivia, for "not only is the letter which she indites accurately aimed at the chinks in Malvolio's armor, but in it she suggests to him the precise behavior which is specifically calculated to irritate her mistress."\textsuperscript{110}

Summers suggests that Sir Toby marries Maria "simply in admiration for her ability as an intriguer."\textsuperscript{111} There are hints throughout the play that Maria and Toby have been close before the gulling of Malvolio. Whether this closeness developed because of Maria's clever tricks or not, it did not blossom suddenly. Maria and Toby are probably one of the best matched couples in Shakespeare's comedies.

The last low-status character in the play is Fabian. Draper suggests that like Maria and Conrade and Borachio of Much Ado About Nothing, he is a youngest child who has

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., p. 802.

\textsuperscript{110}Curry, pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{111}Summers, p. 115.
sent to a more noble family as a servant. Fabian seems to have a legitimate grudge against Malvolio because the steward apparently caused Fabian and Olivia to clash over a bear-baiting contest, whereby Fabian lost favor with his mistress. Except for watching, he does not participate in the gulling of Malvolio.

These middle comedies represent the height of the low-status character in Shakespearean comedy. After Twelfth Night, Shakespeare began to develop a different kind of comedy, going first to dark comedy such as Measure for Measure, and then to the romances such as The Tempest. In these comedies, a character like Dogberry or Bottom could not exist. In the last comedies the low-status character is different and less important.

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Shakespeare's last comedies can be subdivided into two groups. The first group contains two plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, which can be called the dark comedies because they do not leave the audience in a gay, relieved state, but rather tend to make the audience sullen and strangely bothered. The other type, containing *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, can be referred to as Romances because of their story-book qualities. None of these six plays relies as heavily on low-status characters as the plays in the early and middle groups did. Here, the low-status character no longer is a fun-loving, farcical figure. Some are symbols of a particular attitude. Many are not much more than stage figures or servants whose only traits are their modesty and loyalty.

Examining the dark comedies first, one finds in *All's Well That Ends Well* two low-status characters, a steward and a mercenary soldier named Parolles. The steward can be quickly dispensed with. He is one of those intensely efficient and loyal servants which inhabit Shakespeare's last comedies. Indeed, the first lines he speaks assure
the countess of his loyalty, "the care I have had to even your content, I wish might be found in the calendar of my past endeavours. . ." (I. iii. 3-5). The steward, out of duty, reports to the countess the fact that he has overheard Helena confess her love of Bertram. The steward's main function is plot promotion. It is necessary that the countess know of Helena's love so that she can assure the audience of the girl's worthiness and encourage her in the pursuit of Bertram.

The other low-status character, Parolles, cannot be handled so easily. He is, or as Parrott points out, at least claims to be, a soldier. He has exaggerated his real experiences or created some out of a vivid imagination in order to impress and therefore attach himself to someone of high status. He has succeeded with Bertram to such a degree that, as Parrott says, he "boasts that he is the young lord's companion rather than servant, and addresses him familiarly with the endearing term of sweetheart." No other character believes Parolles' lies, and they all say as much to him, to each other, or to themselves. The fact that only Bertram is fooled by Parolles is significant, says Robert Hunter, for it reveals early in the play Bertram's main flaw, his inability to perceive things as

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1Parrott, p. 353.
2Ibid.
they really are.3 Dennis Huston says that Parolles functions in revealing Bertram's character because he "draws attention to the count's weaknesses by manifesting them in an exaggerated degree."4

The critics agree on Parolles' minor sins; he "possesses all the failings characteristic of youth: the loving of passing fashions, irresponsibility, and moral cowardice."5 What the critics cannot agree on is the extent to which Parolles is responsible for Bertram's sins. Huston believes that Parolles actively "misguides the young count" because "repeatedly he maligns the heroine, slandering her before her husband, and even more frequently he misguides the hero as he 'instructs' him in the ways of courtly life."6 Robert Hunter disagrees that Parolles is the cause of Bertram's misdeeds, for he says that although

Parolles is unquestionably a low fellow and far from suitable company for the young, . . . we never see him actually misleading, tempting or corrupting Bertram. . . . He is a parasite, a yes-man, rather than a corrupter of youth. . . . The most we can blame Parolles for is his failure to disapprove of Bertram's plans.


6 Huston, pp. 431-435.
Hunter gives ample evidence to support his views, the most important being that "Bertram has dismissed Parolles from his favor, and if Parolles had been previously responsible for Bertram's ignoble actions, we would be justified in expecting Bertram to begin acting decently. . . . Nothing of the kind happens."\(^7\) Hunter's view of Parolles seems the most valid. When Bertram, Parolles, and Lafeu discuss the king's sudden cure (II. ii.), Parolles reveals his role as yes-man. He adds no new views to the discussion, but only punctuates each statement with, "so say I," or, "right." Later (II. ii. 283 ff), when Parolles and Bertram discuss Bertram's marriage, Parolles says, "To the wars, my boy, to the wars!" At first glance, we would assume that Parolles is actively misleading Bertram, but actually he is just repeating what Bertram has already decided. Furthermore, Parolles has a reason for wanting to leave the court. Lafeu has recently informed him that he sees through his lies. Parolles probably fears that Lafeu could convince Bertram to drop him, and he therefore wishes to leave.

Parolles is tricked into revealing his real self, much as Malvolio is, by soldiers who are aware of his weaknesses and faults. The gullers of Malvolio were after personal revenge, while those of Parolles simply wish to reveal his real character to Bertram. William Lawrence

\(^7\) Hunter, pp. 120-121.
seems to suggest that the gulling of Parolles is independent of the main action involving Helena and Bertram. Hunter sees Parolles' situation as a parallel of Bertram's. He says,

The basic difference between the unmasking of Parolles . . . and the unmasking of Bertram in the last act is that Parolles learns nothing about himself, because he has never been the victim of any illusions about what he is. . . . In order to profit by Bertram's credulity, Parolles is willing to pretend to be what he is not, but he knows that he is playing a role.

Huston points out another parallel. The world of All's Well That Ends Well is a dying world in the beginning of the play. Helena represents a regenerative force. As Huston points out, each character seems to be regenerated by the end of the play. The king is no longer sick; the countess is no longer preoccupied with her husband's death; and Bertram becomes a new man. Parolles' gulling fits into this theme of regeneration because after a brush with death, he returns a new man. He is no longer pretending to be something he is not.

All of these regenerative acts except the gulling of Parolles involves Helena. Oddly enough, in the relationship of these two characters, the regenerative force seems to come from the opposite direction. Hunter suggests

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9 Hunter, p. 126.
10 Huston, pp. 433-434.
that after the exchange of Parolles and Helena about virginity, "Helena stops merely yearning and begins planning how she may lose her virginity. . . ."\textsuperscript{11} While Huston never labels Parolles' influence on Helena as a regenerative force, he suggests it heavily in his statement that

the most important quality that Helena derives from Parolles is an energetic commitment to life. Until his appearance, she has been completely influenced by the oppressive atmosphere of the palace. Her talk has been only of death and of the hopelessness of her situation. But as soon as Parolles begins to speak . . . Helena realizes that she is too young to surrender to death.\textsuperscript{12}

This regenerative force, coupled with the fact that Parolles never actively misleads Bertram, makes him less the villain and more of a hero than first seems possible for such an outrageous liar.

The other dark comedy, \textit{Measure for Measure}, contains many low-status characters. Pompey is a solicitor for a bawdy house. Mistress Overdone runs the house. Elbow is a constable in the same vein as Dull and Dogberry. These three characters serve as a parallel to the main action. Like Claudio, Pompey and Mistress Overdone are involved in sexual crime. George Geckle points out that the audience is shocked when "the relatively decent Claudio is to be punished for being caught, whereas the real bawds can

\textsuperscript{11} Hunter, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{12} Huston, p. 436.
escape because 'a wise burgher put in for them.'" This, Geckle concludes, points to the theme of the play--what is justice? This theme is presented graphically in the trial of Pompey where one views "what happens when one simply equates law and justice" and sees "the unmitigated stupidity of the law's representative, Constable Elbow."\(^{13}\) In other words, the low-status characters, Pompey, Mistress Overdone, and Elbow, help to reveal the truth that the law, represented by Elbow, may be stupid and confusing, while those who break the law like Pompey and Mistress Overdone have the human qualities one admires. As G. Wilson Knight suggests, there is "more natural honesty in the charity of Mistress Overdone than in Isabella condemning her brother to death with venomed words in order to preserve her own chastity. Mistress Overdone has looked after Lucio's illegitimate child."\(^{14}\)

Lawrence feels that these low-status characters fulfill an important dramatic function for "in their very detachment from the artificial details of plot; they serve to make us forget the improbabilities . . . and they throw


over the whole an illusion of vivid and unforgettable reality."

The scenes involving these low-status characters are the only comic moments in the play. Much of the play's humor arises from the bawdy jokes. The characters joke especially about venereal disease and pregnancy, two serious side effects of sexual pleasure, which hardly seem to be joking matters. These jokes, and the carefree attitude they reveal, contrast sharply with the attitudes of the main characters. Hunter points out that Angelo, Isabella, and the Duke see Claudio's deed as a sin, a very evil vice. Even Claudio seems to repent of his deed as he says, "a thirsty evil; and when we drink we die" (I. ii. 134).

By carefully examining the low-status character scenes, two separate attitudes can be detected. The first attitude is represented by Pompey. He views sex as a natural occurrence. This attitude is reflected in his discussion with Escalus when he asks if "your worship means to geld and splay all the youth of the city." Escalus answers that he does not, and Pompey replies, "Truly, sir, in my opinion, they will to't then" (II. i. 242-246). The other attitude can be seen in a character named Lucio. The most bawdy jokes come from him. As Campbell states,

15 Lawrence, p. 110.
16 Hunter, pp. 208-209.
"sexual promiscuity to Lucio is a joke, and a merry one. This attitude lends to all his comments a careless and cynical tone..."\(^{17}\) Knight describes him even more harshly:

Lucio is a . . . loose-minded, vulgar wit. He is the product of a society that has gone too far in condemnation of human sexual desires. . . . Not that there is anything of premeditated villainy in him; he is merely superficial, enjoying the unnatural ban on sex which civilization imposes because that very ban adds point and spice to sexual gratification.\(^{18}\)

Lucio serves as a contrast to Isabella and Angelo. Knight says that "Lucio can only exist in a society of smug propriety and self-deception. . . ."\(^{19}\) Both Isabella and Angelo are members of that society; they are smug in their sinless images which are embodied in their virginity. And that smugness leads to the horrors of the play. Isabella would rather see her brother dead than lose the virginity she prizes so highly. Angelo's pride of his blemishlessness leaves him merciless and deceitful. In the course of the play Angelo and Isabella change. This change is rewarded; Isabella marries the Duke and Angelo's life is spared. Lucio, however, who is a product of that kind of smugness does not change. He is at the end of the play

\(^{17}\)Campbell, pp. 128-129.

\(^{18}\)Knight, p. 42.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 43.
still a "cold-hearted lecher, informer and slanderer." And only he is punished. As Knight says, "Lucio is the one person that Duke finds it all but impossible to forgive." Angelo and Isabella, who had an unnatural attitude toward sex, are rewarded only after they change. Lucio with his unnatural attitude is punished. Pompey and those characters who reveal a natural attitude are not punished. Shakespeare's attitude may best be summed up in the Duke pardoning of Barnardine speech:

Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul,
That apprehends no further than this world,
And squarest thy life according. Thou'rt condemn'd;
But for those earthly faults, I quit them all;

(V. i. 484-488)

Barnardine is the symbol of the humanity of man, and he is pardoned.

*Pericles*, the first of the Romances, contains quite a few low-status characters, but none of them is of much interest. There are servants, bawdyhouse characters, fishermen, and pirates. The fishermen appear once (II. i.). They seem to be English characters who mix folklore ("I saw the porpus how he bounced and tumbled? they say they're half fish, half flesh . . ." [II. i. 25-27]) and moralizing ("I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as to

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21 Knight, p. 21.
a whale" [II. i. 32-33]). Unlike the English low-status characters of previous plays, these fishermen are not comic figures. They function primarily to prepare the way for Pericles' marriage.

Of the servants, only Lychorida and Leonine are worth mentioning. Both of them have very short parts, and the main interest comes from comparing them to similar characters. Lychorida is Marina's nurse. She is dull when compared to Juliet's nurse or the nurse-like Mistress Quickly. Lychorida speaks only once (III. i.) when she informs Pericles of his wife's death and his daughter's birth. She is loyal and optimistic enough to encourage Pericles to crush his grief in order to care for Marina. By the next act, Lychorida is dead, leaving Marina unprotected. Leonine is Dionyza's servant who has been ordered to murder Marina. Unlike the servants in the other Romances, Leonine accepts the challenge and would have killed Marina if she had not been captured by the pirates. Leonine and the pirates seem to have been added only for the extra melodramatic thrill.

The last low-status characters of this play are the bawdyhouse group, Boult, Pandar, and Bawdy. Parrott suggests that Shakespeare rewrote only parts of the last three acts of Pericles, and not even these are totally his work. He further asserts that Shakespeare was primarily interested with the scenes of Marina's being lost and
recovered, and he did not spend much time with the bawdy-house scenes. Hardin Craig suggests, however, that the bawdyhouse scenes were reworked by Shakespeare who changed Lysimachus so that he would be a more suitable match for Marina, but otherwise, apparently cut the significance and size of these scenes.

It is natural to compare Boult, Pandar, and Bawdy to Pompey, Mistress Quickly, and other bawdyhouse figures in Shakespeare's earlier plays. The three characters in Pericles compare poorly because they have none of the human kindness which endears us to Pompey and the others. In the early plays, the business end of prostitution is seldom mentioned, while in Pericles this is the sole interest of Boult, Pandar, and Bawdy. In their first scene (IV. ii.), they discuss the women who work for them in the cold light of merchandising. They feel no emotion about the ill health of these women, but only regret that, since they are sick, they do not earn as much money. They look at Marina's virginity only as an extra commodity. Even when Boult agrees to find Marina honest work, he does so not because of sympathy, but because he realizes that this is the only way his master will get any return of investment.

Cymbeline, the next Romance, contains only one low-status character of interest, Pisanio, the servant of

\[22^{\text{Parrott, p. 373.}}\]

\[23^{\text{Craig, p. 1154.}}\]
Posthumus. When Posthumus leaves court, Pisanio remains to serve Imogen and act as go-between for the couple. Pisanio is portrayed as a loyal servant, willing to do anything for Posthumus. In answer to the Queen's bribery, he says, "When to my lord I prove untrue, I'll choke myself" (I. v. 88-89). Yet, Pisanio is guided by more than loyalty. His loyalty is grounded in high moral standards. He serves Posthumus because he knows him to be good, and he does not accept the Queen's bribe because to do so would be wrong. His moral standards come into conflict when he is ordered by Posthumus to kill Imogen. He does not waver long. He quickly realizes that he cannot murder Imogen, and he says, "If it be so to do good service, never / Let me be counted serviceable" (III. ii. 14-15). He seems shocked that Posthumus could not only order him to murder, but also that Posthumus really expects him to carry out the order. He wonders, "How look I, / That I should seem to lack humanity. . . " (III. ii. 15-16). Not only does he refuse Posthumus' order to murder; he also refuses Imogen's. Once she has learned that Posthumus believes her unfaithful, she begs Pisanio to kill her. Some might think, as Imogen does, that Pisanio had indeed intended to kill her since he led her into the woods, but Imogen's emotional scene does not save her life, for Pisanio never intended to kill her. He did not suddenly make up the plan to
disguise her and send her to Rome; the fact that he had
the clothes in his saddlebags proves this. Nor is he al-
lowing Imogen to come into danger when he lets Cloten find
the letter from Posthumus, for he says that "She's far
enough, and what he learns by this / May prove his travel,
ot her danger" (III. v. 103-104). Pisario is one of the
most blemishless characters in Shakespeare. Although
a servant, he appears more noble than Cloten, Posthumus,
the Queen, and Cymbeline. Indeed, his only fault seems
to be that he was not perceptive enough to suspect the
Queen's motives in giving him the box of medicine. Hunter
suggests that Pisario "Has served as the good instrument
of the gods."\(^24\) Pisario himself echoes these sentiments
in his words:

The heavens still must work.
Wherein I am false I am honest; not true, to be true,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
All other doubts, by time let them be clear'd;
Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer'd.
(IV. iii. 41-42, 44-45)

Perhaps this strong belief that Right will triumph gives
Pisario the courage to follow his own moral code steadfastly.

There are similar situations in The Winter's Tale.
Here, Camillo is parallel to Pisario in Cymbeline. His
master orders him to kill the king of Bohemia who he feels
has been too intimate with his wife. Camillo is, as Craig

\(^24\) Hunter, p. 174.
says, "the perfection of faithful loyal servant." Yet, he knows that his intended victim is innocent. Camillo is less passive than Pisanio. He argues with Leontes, and when he is not successful in changing the king's mind, he decides to "forsake the court" rather than murder Polixenes. Yet, Camillo's actions do not seem as firmly grounded in moral conviction as Pisanio's, for he says, "to do it, or no, is certain / To me a break neck" (I. ii. 362-363). And he tells Polixenes,

For myself, I'll put
My fortunes to your service, which are here
By this discovery lost. (I. ii. 439-441)

The self-interest these statements reveal may be natural since Camillo is older than Pisanio, and hence he may better understand the world's ways. The self-interest appears later when Camillo confronts Florizel who is planning to leave the country. Camillo is willing to help him, yet he says, "Now were I happy, if / His going I could frame to serve my turn" (IV. iv. 518-519). Camillo does sincerely want to help Florizel, but he also wishes to help himself. This self-interest does not appear in the more likable Pisanio.

A similar character in the play is Paulina. She, too, is a loyal servant. Hunter suggests that she is more--the instrument of the gods. He says that "through . . . Paulina, they conceal from Leontes the fact that Hermione is alive, and his ignorance, which is the source

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25Craig, p. 1216.
of his sixteen-year-long penance, is his punishment."

He further suggests that Paulina

serves them [the gods] . . . by exacerbating Leontes's mental sufferings through her constant reminders of his crimes. She is the personification of Leontes's conscience, and she is determined that his sufferings will continue until the pattern of the gods has worked itself out.26

If we are to view Paulina sympathetically, it must be in this manner, for there is little of human kindness in her. She is, in a large part, responsible for Perdita's abandonment because she brings the child before Leontes while he is in a fit of jealous rage. She pushes further and further until she drives him to order the child's death. So full of pious indignation is she, that she cannot see the humanness of Leontes. Her unwavering position not only endangers the child, it endangers her husband, yet she will not relent. She is not a human character—only an instrument of the gods. She represents only punishment. Unfortunately, the innocent are also punished. Her husband dies, the queen loses both children, the king's son dies, and his daughter is abandoned. All of this casts an unfavorable light on the gods and their instrument, Paulina.

The other low-status characters of The Winter's Tale are shepherds and the rogue Autolycus. Autolycus is a master of many trades, all of them dishonest. He meets

26 Hunter, pp. 199-200.
the shepherd's son on the road and pretends to have been robbed. When the young man stops to help him, Autolycus picks his pocket. He has no real significance to the plot. He seems to have been added simply for comic effect. The scenes with Autolycus are some of the most farcical outside of the early plays. They more nearly resemble the plays of the first and second period than those of the last.

The shepherds are not really comic characters except in the scenes involving Autolycus. The old shepherd is very cynical. His first words are a complaint against the frivolity of youth. His explanation for Perdita's abandonment is that she is the result of a casual affair between two court servants. Still there is kindness in him because he takes the child and raises her as his daughter. The shepherd's son's chief trait seems to be his gullibility. He cannot recognize the evil in men, particularly in Autolycus' many persons.

The last of the Romances, The Tempest, contains three low-status characters. These are Caliban, who is a native of the island and Prospero's servant, and two men from the shipwreck, Stephano and Trinculo. Theodore Spencer says that "Stephano and Trinculo are Shakespeare's last clowns, representing the laughable, amorally lovable, and quite unchangeable level of human nature. . . ." He also suggests that they, like Caliban, are not capable of learning abstractions. He says, "they get befouled and belabored,
as is appropriate—the stuff they are made of must be beaten in shape; it lacks the deeper awareness necessary for purgation." 27

These two characters are added partly for the comic effect. It is humorous to see their drunken antics and their interaction with Caliban, who first fears them as some of Prospero's spirits and then worships them as gods. Finally, he persuades them to help him kill Prospero. Hunter says,

The Caliban-Stephano-Trinculo plot to murder Prospero and seize the island is a comic analogue both to Alonso's original crime and to Antonio and Sebastian's frustrated attempt to repeat it. The effect of the analogue is principally comic reduction of the pretensions of evil through a comparison of them to the deformed and the drunken idiocies of the clowns. 28

Caliban is the most interesting low-status character of this group. He is subhuman, the son of a witch and the devil. Yet, he is a character modeled on the new world savage. The Elizabethans would have viewed him as a realistic character. Hallett Smith says, "Mentally he is incapable of any but practical education; moral principles are beyond him. He is only fit for drudgery but resents it. . . . His yearning for freedom is in no way respectable,


28 Hunter, p. 231.
since if he had it he would use it for devilish purposes."29

Spencer is a little less harsh on Caliban, who, he says, "gives a hint of reformation at the end, [but] . . . Caliban, in Prospero's eyes, is unimprovable; he cannot be tamed by reason."30 Caliban seems to represent the earthly qualities of man, while Ariel represents the spiritual qualities. Caliban is the natural man, and he is no noble savage since Shakespeare is no Rousseau. Caliban reveals man's worst traits. He is lazy and greedy. He attempts murder, rape, and usurpation. He is more a symbol than a character.

The last comedies are suitable for symbolic characters because they deal with ideals and moral problems. In the closely related tragedies, Shakespeare created memorable characters: Hamlet, Iago, Othello, Lear—all of them upper-status characters. In these last comedies he creates Imogen, Marina, and Prospero, again all upper-status characters. In these plays his vision has risen, and the low-status character becomes less useful to him. Even the use of parallel situation is less. The low-status clown has no place in a dark comedy, and the fairy tale world of the Romances will not allow a realistic picture of English life.

30 Spencer, p. 44.
CONCLUSION

The low-status characters in Shakespeare's comedies are important. Although it has been suggested that these figures were added by Shakespeare simply to please the ignorant masses that could be interested in nothing but slapstick and crude puns, the low-status character functions significantly in the development of theme and plot. While it is true that the low-status character is more likely to participate in farce and misuse of language than are the higher-status characters, the low-status characters are also more alive. They are likewise more English, and they are used by Shakespeare when he wants to comment on English life. For this reason, the low-status character is often a satiric figure.

Shakespeare's treatment of low-status characters is not static. In the early plays, the characters are more farcical and more often participate directly in the action of the play. During Shakespeare's middle period, low-status characters are less farcical, but more satiric. They are more likely to appear in parallel action than participate directly in the main action. In these last comedies, low-status characters become less alive, and in some cases are almost symbols. They are less comic, and
they participate in direction action rather than parody.

In the early plays farce is quite common. The two Dromios of *The Comedy of Errors* are beaten almost every time they appear. *The Taming of the Shrew* is full of physical blows. As Shakespeare progressed, the physical comedy softened. The blows of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* are merely described by Launce; they are not shown on the stage. As the farce becomes less important, jokes based on language become more important. Most of the humor of *Love's Labour's Lost* arises from the sputterings of the school master. In the middle comedies this trait is especially exaggerated as Shakespeare creates the malapropistic Bottom, Dogberry, and Mistress Quickly. The two extremely physical comic scenes of the middle comedies, the beating of Falstaff and the duel between Sir Andrew and Viola, do not involve low-status characters. In the later comedies both farce and the misuse of language are almost totally absent. Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* is the farcical exception, while Elbow in *Measure for Measure* is the one character of this group who is malapropistic, and one suspects that Elbow has this trait simply because his predecessors, Dull and Dogberry, had it.

As previously mentioned, the low-status characters are usually more English than the other characters of the play. One only has to compare Bottom to the four lovers
of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to see that they belong to different worlds. The same comparison can be made for each play. Bottom is a weaver in a small Tudor village. Holofernes is the school master of that village. The village is also populated with Constable Dogberry, Dr. Caius, Malvolio the steward, and a multitude of other servants like Grumio, Launce, and Launcelot. These characters refer to English folklore and topics of current interest. Dromio describes Nell in the metaphors of the current political arena. Bottom's world is quite literally peopled with English fairies. Holofernes and Sir Hugh Evans speak the language of the English grammar school pedant. Corin is an English shepherd who, unlike his Italian counterparts in Lyly, actually gets his hands dirty with sheep. Dogberry, Dull, Shallow, and Elbow represent the genuine problem of law enforcement in rural England. Nym, Pistol, Bardolf, and Parolles reveal the plight of the Elizabethan soldier. Maria and Fabian, who, although children of the nobility, do not inherit and hence become servants, revealing the social changes of the times.

Since the low-status character is a model of English life, he is often also a satiric figure. Shakespeare satirizes the English school master in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He pokes fun at the law officials in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Much Ado About Nothing*,
The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Measure for Measure. He derides those who pretend to be soldiers in order to beg or steal in The Merry Wives of Windsor and All's Well That Ends Well. He uses low-status characters to satirize courtly love conventions in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, As You Like It, and A Midsummer-Night's Dream.

Besides the satiric themes, the low-status characters help to establish such themes as reality versus appearance, the role of the artist, and the law versus justice. Most of this thematic development comes through the use of parallel actions. The earliest plays do not use low-status characters in this manner. The Dromios of The Comedy of Errors participate in the main action and are an intricate part of the plot. So are the servants of The Taming of the Shrew. Love's Labour's Lost and The Two Gentlemen of Verona use small amounts of parallel action. In the middle comedies this use of parallel action is very important, and except for the burlesquing, the low-status characters are not an intricate part of the play. An excellent example is A Midsummer-Night's Dream where the antics of the rustics add almost nothing to the plot, but through parallel action they develop several themes. While the low-status characters of Much Ado About Nothing are necessary to the plot, their role is exaggerated beyond necessity. In the later comedies the low-status characters, except for the bawdyhouse characters of
Measure for Measure, are again more important to plot and less involved in parallel action.

Shakespeare uses low-status characters in many ways. Although these characters are as varied as Corin, Dogberry, Pisanio, and Maria, all of them are necessary for the perfection of Shakespeare's dramatic art.
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