**Abstract**

Sir Rowland de Bois has recently died, and, according to the custom of primogeniture, the vast majority of his estate has passed into the possession of his eldest son, Oliver. Although Sir Rowland has instructed Oliver to take good care of his brother, [Orlando](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/asyoulikeit/character/orlando/), Oliver refuses to do so. Out of pure spite, he denies Orlando the education, training, and property befitting a gentleman. Charles, a wrestler from the court of Duke Frederick, arrives to warn Oliver of a rumor that Orlando will challenge Charles to a fight on the following day. Fearing censure if he should beat a nobleman, Charles begs Oliver to intervene, but Oliver convinces the wrestler that Orlando is a dishonorable sportsman who will take whatever dastardly means necessary to win. Charles vows to pummel Orlando, which delights Oliver.

Duke Senior has been usurped of his throne by his brother, Duke Frederick, and has fled to the Forest of Ardenne, where he lives like Robin Hood with a band of loyal followers. Duke Frederick allows Senior’s daughter, [Rosalind](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/asyoulikeit/character/rosalind/), to remain at court because of her inseparable friendship with his own daughter, Celia. The day arrives when Orlando is scheduled to fight Charles, and the women witness Orlando’s defeat of the court wrestler. Orlando and Rosalind instantly fall in love with one another, though Rosalind keeps this fact a secret from everyone but Celia. Orlando returns home from the wrestling match, only to have his faithful servant Adam warn him about Oliver’s plot against Orlando’s life. Orlando decides to leave for the safety of Ardenne. Without warning, Duke Frederick has a change of heart regarding Rosalind and banishes her from court. She, too, decides to flee to the Forest of Ardenne and leaves with Celia, who cannot bear to be without Rosalind, and Touchstone, the court jester. To ensure the safety of their journey, Rosalind assumes the dress of a young man and takes the name Ganymede, while Celia dresses as a common shepherdess and calls herself Aliena.

Duke Frederick is furious at his daughter’s disappearance. When he learns that the flight of his daughter and niece coincides with the disappearance of Orlando, the duke orders Oliver to lead the manhunt, threatening to confiscate Oliver’s lands and property should he fail. Frederick also decides it is time to destroy his brother once and for all and begins to raise an army.

Duke Senior lives in the Forest of Ardenne with a band of lords who have gone into voluntary exile. He praises the simple life among the trees, happy to be absent from the machinations of court life. Orlando, exhausted by travel and desperate to find food for his starving companion, Adam, barges in on the duke’s camp and rudely demands that they not eat until he is given food. Duke Senior calms Orlando and, when he learns that the young man is the son of his dear former friend, accepts him into his company. Meanwhile, Rosalind and Celia, disguised as Ganymede and Aliena, arrive in the forest and meet a lovesick young shepherd named Silvius who pines away for the disdainful Phoebe. The two women purchase a modest cottage, and soon enough Rosalind runs into the equally lovesick Orlando. Taking her to be a young man, Orlando confides in Rosalind that his affections are overpowering him. Rosalind, as Ganymede, claims to be an expert in exorcising such emotions and promises to cure Orlando of lovesickness if he agrees to pretend that Ganymede is Rosalind and promises to come woo her every day. Orlando agrees, and the love lessons begin.

Meanwhile, Phoebe becomes increasingly cruel in her rejection of Silvius. When Rosalind intervenes, disguised as Ganymede, Phoebe falls hopelessly in love with Ganymede. One day, Orlando fails to show up for his tutorial with Ganymede. Rosalind, reacting to her infatuation with Orlando, is distraught until Oliver appears. Oliver describes how Orlando stumbled upon him in the forest and saved him from being devoured by a hungry lioness. Oliver and Celia, still disguised as the shepherdess Aliena, fall instantly in love and agree to marry. As time passes, Phoebe becomes increasingly insistent in her pursuit of Ganymede, and Orlando grows tired of pretending that a boy is his dear Rosalind. Rosalind decides to end the charade. She promises that Ganymede will wed Phoebe, if Ganymede will ever marry a woman, and she makes everyone pledge to meet the next day at the wedding. They all agree.

The day of the wedding arrives, and Rosalind gathers the various couples: Phoebe and Silvius; Celia and Oliver; Touchstone and Audrey, a goatherd he intends to marry; and Orlando. The group congregates before Duke Senior and his men. Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, reminds the lovers of their various vows, then secures a promise from Phoebe that if for some reason she refuses to marry Ganymede she will marry Silvius, and a promise from the duke that he would allow his daughter to marry Orlando if she were available. Rosalind leaves with the disguised Celia, and the two soon return as themselves, accompanied by Hymen, the god of marriage. Hymen officiates at the ceremony and marries Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phoebe and Silvius, and Audrey and Touchstone. The festive wedding celebration is interrupted by even more festive news: while marching with his army to attack Duke Senior, Duke Frederick came upon a holy man who convinced him to put aside his worldly concerns and assume a monastic life. -Frederick changes his ways and returns the throne to Duke Senior. The guests continue dancing, happy in the knowledge that they will soon return to the royal court.

Discussion:

In *As You Like It*, the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden serves as a utopian sanctuary for Duke Senior and his company, who, after being deposed by his brother Frederick, seek refuge away from the city. Describing the Duke’s exile to Oliver, Charles the wrestler remarks on Arden’s utopic quality as that of a revitalized “golden world,” like that described by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod in *Works and Days* (I.i.114). In line with Charles’s perspective, the forest qualifies as a utopian space in that it “nostalgic[ally] looks[s] back to an idealized past” and echoes “a simpler life and getting a better balance between the city and country.”5 Rather than experiencing a time of despair after losing their standing at court, the Duke’s exile instead affords him and his retinue the opportunity to bask in the Edenic atmosphere of the forest.

What qualifies the idyllic Arden as a utopian location does not simply result from its contrast with the dismal city, a common feature of the pastoral genre. Instead, its status stems from the marked differences between the forest’s prospect for a free-flowing, egalitarian social order and the city’s invariable hierarchical order. Duke Senior’s opening dialogue

admits how the forest’s verdure and liberality enchants him as he delights in the refreshing absence of the court’s pretentious opulence and ritual observances. He embraces the ripeness with which the forest fosters a pleasurable alternative to living at court:

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet Than that of a painted pomp? Are not these woods More free from peril than the envious court?

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, […] And this our life, exempt from public haunt,

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (II.i.1-5; 15-17)

Conveying a utopic attitude, the Duke describes his company as communing with one another as equals free from the frivolities of rank and distinction. The strongest indication of a utopian absence of hierarchy manifests itself in the Duke’s first lines (“Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile”) in which he addresses his followers as fraternal peers. The Duke views the forest with a Romantic spirit and takes succor in the vibrancy of the natural world, the stifling customs of the court no longer stress the Duke and his company while occupying the forest. The trees, brooks, and stones replace the emblems and banners that signaled the prestige of hierarchy and nobility with a natural vitality that is wedded to a prelapsarian joy. Rather than being led into a despairing situation following usurpation, like King Lear, the men find in Arden a new Garden of Eden, filling themselves with fantasies of repealing

Adam’s and Eve’s grievous sin and negating the original cause for all human strife. Harold Bloom rightly shares the company’s enthusiasm for the forest: “I am delighted to observe that the forest of Arden is simply the best place to live, anywhere in Shakespeare. You cannot have an earthly paradise and still have a stage comedy that works, yet *As You Like It* comes closest.”7 The Duke and his men welcome the life of the forest as the aura of utopia hangs over Arden when its residents see it as summoning a mythical past back into the present. In a metatheatrical fashion, the space of the play in this sense offers the same relaxation as Arden, allowing a holiday for both the noble characters in the play and the audiences attending it.

As You Like It*: The Thin Line between Legitimate Utopia and Compensatory Vacation*

To exclusively label the Duke’s experience in Arden as utopian would ignore the contradictions exhibited in the Duke’s behavior. Arden may certainly inspire language characteristic of a utopia with the words of the Duke expressing excitement for a realm where people can embrace one another’s humanity without the need to follow stational dress codes or heed hereditary privileges. In any vision bearing utopian qualities, however, statements of revolutionary optimism can easily betray the dream they represent by operating as mere compensation for a shortcoming or a lack. For example, once the Duke finishes his jovial reflection, Amiens immediately responds, “Happy is Your Grace / That can translate the stubbornness of fortune / Into so quiet and so sweet a style” (II.i.18-20). In these lines, Amiens may genuinely admire the Duke’s appreciation for nature and liberty in the forest, but, depending on how the lines are performed, they might subtly draw attention to the fact

that the Duke uses his enthusiasm as a mask for the despair from being displaced. As a man of high-standing, it is understandable that Duke Senior would not want to show weakness or admit defeat after being usurped, and like Aesop’s fox that despises the grapes he desires but cannot reach, perhaps the Duke’s praise for the forest is his attempt to nurse his injury by contenting himself with a lower status. Whether the forest genuinely excites him or becomes compensation for his loss of status remains unclear.

In fact, the behavior of the Duke’s own men contradicts his egalitarian sensibility, problematizing the authenticity of the camp’s claims to reside in an Edenic utopia. For instance, the formalities of the court still persist when the men address Duke Senior as “my lord” rather than using a signifier free from distinguishing rank. While the newly formed foresters verbally share the Duke’s utopic perspective of Arden, one may wonder if the forest really has taken possession of the Duke’s followers or if they simply parrot the highest ranked member of their company to remain in his favor. In line with Eagleton’s ideas about the play, the scene may show the court as “trac[ing], narcissistically, one’s own subjective moods.”8 In fact, despite the “golden world” impression given about the Duke’s and others’ experience in Arden, not everyone is content. As the First Lord informs the Duke, another follower named Jacques remains unhappy among them. Though the Duke entreats his humor, Jacques willingly elects to be melancholic, which illustrates how the camaraderie in Arden fails as a homogenous experience. Jacques’s unhappiness may further taint the utopia sprouting from the forest because rather than being troubled by his discontent, Duke Senior and his followers laugh at him derisively instead. Their taunting of Jacques demonstrates a

lack of unity and harmony that is conventionally known to belong to utopias. Jacques’s inability to conform to the others’ merriment is best characterized in his attitude towards the killing of a stag. Jacques denounces the Duke’s and his followers’ residence as encroaching on the natural order of the forest, describing their presence as horrid and unbecoming of paradise when he calls them “usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse, / To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and native dwelling place” (II.i.61-63). Jacques’s criticism points out the flaws and contradictions in the group’s outlook on Arden as he draws attention to the fact that their utopia is itself a usurpation of a land not belonging to them.If the deposed court’s presence intrudes on Arden, it appears to do so only from the perspective of Jacques, “a social satirist and a mocker of Arden,” whose *contemptus mundi* skeptically tests the amount of goodness in his fellow men and remains unconvinced that the forest has genuinely changed them for the better.9 Contrary to Jacques’ criticisms, Bevington argues that the utopian aspects associated with the location reside in the virtue of the characters that enter Arden. Touching on Orlando, Bevington claims that “the vision of a regenerative Utopia secretly abides in the heart of this courtly creature,” and this statement applies to the other relationships in the play as well.10

Besides Duke Senior, Orlando, too, possesses a sense of Utopia in craving to rectify the dystopic injustice that he suffers in Oliver’s care by elevating himself to a level of prosperity worthy of his family’s name. Oliver tyrannically and jealously denies him an education and makes him eat with the servants. Oliver’s cruel treatment of his brother is explicitly dystopian in that he abuses Orlando and then contrarily professes brotherly care of

him to Charles the Wrestler (I.i.146-147). Publically, Oliver postures as a caring brother while his private oppression of Orlando betrays his façade. This mistreatment moves Orlando into such despondency that he contrasts Oliver’s treatment of him as worse than that of the family livestock (I.i.6-24). Oliver arbitrarily and hostilely bars Orlando from all avenues of advancement. In the play’s opening scene, Orlando illustrates his suffering to the family’s elder servant Adam, relating the woes that visit him as a result of his brother’s primogenital privilege. Orlando’s lack of mobility reflected the experiences of audience members who would have encountered the same constraints as him. After pronouncing his discontent, Orlando discloses to Adam a desire to resist his condition and appeals to his lineage: “the spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutiny against this servitude”

(I.i.21-23). The memory-driven threat escalates to violence when a few lines later Orlando grasps Oliver by the throat to show that he will not yield to Oliver’s oppressive authority.

Orlando’s resistance to his brother’s authority ambivalently appeals to two entirely different audiences. The invocation of his father instills in him a resilience to tyranny that audience members of any rank would laud at the same time that his resilience stems from his sense of entitlement and nobility, which gives him the courage to challenge Oliver. In the latter sense, the memory of station and heritage reinforces conservative social expectations since his resistance justifies the preservation of social distinctions through the succession of bloodlines. As the son of an aristocrat, Orlando does not aim to redefine distinction and instead seeks to seize upon the privilege due to a man of his pedigree. Alternately, his

resistance may also attract a collective contempt for the discouragement of social mobility within Elizabethan society. During the time of the play’s performance, this message could have certainly engrossed the groundlings. According to Chris Fitter, “Overseers of the Poor” were given full sway in exercising social control, “[c]lassifying the poor as deserving or undeserving” and “enjoy[ing] discretionary powers to supplement—or otherwise—the income of workers paid too little to survive: a brutally substantial number.”

While Fitter notes the appeal of Orlando to the poorer citizenry, he also points out the ambiguity of his redeeming features, claiming that “Orlando is correspondingly abusive of the lower classes.”13 Orlando’s disdain for labor may appease the higher ranked audience members, positing their lifestyle as the more desirable one, as it simultaneously, yet subtly, draws critical attention to their own abuses of the lower ranks. In fact, Fitter describes Orlando as a mixed figure that is portrayed as both an impetuous brat and a rebellious champion, especially in regards to how Adam bestows his earnings on him upon their retreat from the city: “offensive in his whining genteel insistence on the insulting insufficiency of the wealth bequeathed him, comically hapless in his deictic sightlessness, he yet echoes the language of underclass resentment, and embodies the exciting spirit of active resistance.”14 Though Orlando may not desire a complete reformation of the national order, he does desire a radical change in his own treatment, which, aligned with Bevington’s perspective, shows traces of utopia. To perceive an injustice and see it corrected directly ties in with the aims of a utopia.

As seen here, though, the justice is subjective and is heavily embroiled with the expectations and wants of a particular rank.

Orlando must possess some charm for Adam to so readily forsake his service to Oliver and endow Orlando with his savings in order to follow him into Arden. The gesture certainly affects Orlando to the extent that he responds with a utopian declaration: “Oh, good old man, how well in thee appears / The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed!” (II.iii.56-58). Echoing the Duke’s prelapsarian reference earlier in Act Two, Orlando nostalgically invokes “the antique world,” seeing in Adam a servitude based on ideal loyalty rather than for the sake of profit, which Orlando goes on to critique as sign of the time’s wretchedness. He celebrates Adam’s attitude towards service as one that is unfortunately rare, making him an invaluable asset in his exile. Yet, if Fitter’s intriguing reading of this scene as being one that robs the groundlings of carnival pleasure in portraying Adam as the caricature of a Puritan masochist and worthy of scorn, then the utopian aspect of Adam’s service may scandalously carry a conservative message that co-opts Orlando’s utopian declarations and renders Adam a dystopian toady.15 Fitter’s perspective, though, comes across as counterintuitive to the main plot, which emphasizes the virtuous natures of Orlando and Rosalind. Considering these strains, Adam’s service can embody true loyalty and virtue in order to demonstrate the manner in which people can construct utopian relations by simply expressing genuine care for one another.

While this scene extols Adam’s and Orlando’s camaraderie and cheer, the stark reality of the pair’s exile carries the potential to blemish the utopic fidelity and harmony they

embody. Though the forest is a space filled with beauty, its pleasing exterior betrays its harsh conditions as Adam and Orlando encounter firsthand the dangerous reality of the wild. After wandering in the forest with Adam for a time, Orlando’s impression of “the antique world” eventually gets turned upside down when they begin to starve. In Hesiod’s Golden Age, from which the antique world derives, “the golden race died a painless death that overtook them unawares, a death presaged neither by illness nor even by aging.”16 Far from experiencing this kind of ataraxia, Orlando and Adam face the very real pain that accompanies a brush with death. After succumbing to hunger and fatigue, Orlando desperately resorts to a state of primitive hostility when he draws his sword against the Duke Senior and his men demanding food. Rather than presenting himself as a man full of cheer and composure, Orlando instead reveals a natural aggression, showing that even the farthest reaching utopian vision cannot fully suppress the wilder instincts of humans.

The forest initially inspires Adam and Orlando with the image of a golden world, but it quickly dissolves in the face of hunger, and it is not until the pair encounters civilizing forces that their paradisiacal sentiments are renewed. Just as quickly as Orlando holds the Duke’s company at the point of his blade, he sheathes his sword when they treat him kindly. Ashamed, he tries to excuse his behavior, claiming that “bare distress hath ta’en from me the show / Of smooth civility,” which further underscores the way in which both Utopia and civilization can act as artificial coverings and repressive apparatuses for the more animalistic drives of humans (II.v.95-96). This repression is not necessarily negative. In fact, it is at this particular moment that the utopian virtues of the deposed members evinces an observable

effect. In the face of the court’s cheerful civility, Orlando quickly transforms from an impetuous thief back to his former, good-natured self. His transformation suggests that in spite of his hardships, the latent nobility in his character provides the chance for others to reawaken his civility, suggesting that such exchanges are necessary to repress humanity’s baser instincts. Yet, rather than champion a radical transformation, Orlando’s reversion gives proof to Feste’s words in *Twelfth Night*, when he tells Olivia that “Anything that’s mended is but patched; virtue that transgresses is patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue” (I.v.44-47). Feste’s words argue that virtue can be a disguise for sin, or in reference to *As You Like It*, civility can mask natural instincts. In obligingly providing for Orlando’s and Adam’s basic needs with food, the Duke and his followers give occasion for camaraderie, harmony, and cooperation that subdue Orlando’s desperate violence.

Oliver undergoes a similar change of character to his brother while in Arden When Oliver seeks his brother Orlando out in the forest, the romance aspects of the plot manifest in both realistic and fairy-tale fashion. After nearly being bitten by a green snake, a symbol of Oliver’s jealousy of Orlando, and devoured by a ravenous lioness, Oliver recognizes, as if by some religious visitation, the goodness of Orlando when his younger brother intervenes and saves his would-be assassin from certain death. His heroics bear both dimensions of the pastoral romance and the fairy tale since Oliver’s conversion from a tyrannical brother to comrade happens instantly when a fissure in his complacency when his life is put at stake and then spared. This utopian turn speaks to the powerful theme of forgiveness that pervades the play, especially when Frederick, in another fairy-tale turn, later relinquishes his stolen dukedom in exchange for a religious life, returning the legitimate order to its original bearer, Duke Senior.

The causes for Oliver’s benevolent turn also carry practical dimensions that throw a crux into the neat interpretation of these moments as fairy-tale redemptions. It is reasonable to question if Orlando’s sudden actions are truly responsible for Oliver’s new attitude or if the change occurred more gradually. In relating his story of the lioness attack to Rosalind and Celia, Oliver describes his disheveled appearance resting under the tree as that of “a wretched, ragged man, o’ergrown with hair,” suggesting that like Orlando and Adam he too suffered from great hunger (IV.iii.107). Furthermore, Oliver’s repentance only occurs after he becomes a victim to tyranny, which may allow him to witness its overbearing nature when Duke Frederick abruptly seizes his lands and turns him out to Arden to find his brother (III.i). In other Shakespeare plays, including *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Winter’s Tale*, and especially *King Lear*, characters holding high positions are commonly brought lower in order for a lesson to be realized that amends a flaw they possess. This dynamic certainly applies to Oliver, who, lacking the tools to continue his tyranny, must either change genuinely or, as Orlando says, at least put on “the show / Of smooth civility” and adapt to new values if he is to survive in Arden and receive welcome from Duke Senior.

While the ethos of characters like Duke Senior, Orlando, and Rosalind perhaps carries more of the utopian spirit than the Forest of Arden, this does not entirely deprive the forest of its power. The cheeriness of the Duke’s court takes its cue from Arden’s verdant surroundings, and only an enchanted space like the forest created through dramatic illusion could explain Hymen’s inexplicable arrival in act five. Also, Frederick’s sudden conversion to a religious life after entering the forest with an army intent on killing Duke Senior could only result from the bewitching influence of the wood, producing the seemingly divine intervention of a religious old man who persuades Frederick to abandon his unlawful station.

The resolution of conflicts at the play’s end keeps the nature of utopia in the play mutable and unstable. Duke Senior and his attendant lords may revel having freedom from the responsibilities of court, but the utopia they enjoy dissolves as rapidly as a carnivalesque occasion with the men returning to the order from which they were exiled. As Kristian Smidt points out, there is a disparity between the renewal of previous statuses and the devotional declarations of the Duke, his followers, Celia, and Oliver to the pastoral way of life.17 The end of their enchantment with Arden threatens to undo its utopian dimensions by reducing it to a restorative vacation spot for Duke Senior rather than a space that fosters radical change in social relations. For the nobles in attendance, subduing Arden’s influence could certainly bring a satisfying conclusion to the play since the Duke’s privilege is restored and his unorthodox life in the forest extinguished. However, similar to other plays by Shakespeare, the conclusion may eject the Duke and his men from the forest, but it is availed to his younger brother, Frederick. If his being “converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world” means a spiritual hermitage in the woods, Frederick may show that the forest still contains utopian possibilities where he and Jacques may enjoy more permanently what could not last for Duke Senior and his company. Despite the swapping of places, the utopian potential of the forest with regards to Duke Senior persists metatheatrically. Like *Twelfth Night* where Viola is never seen donning her maiden weeds, the end of *As You Like It* does not show Duke Senior and his company outside the boundaries of Arden, impressing their time in the forest onto the collective memory of the audience (V.iv.160-161).

Other problems regarding the utopian status of Arden arise when taking into account the roles of the play’s fool, Touchstone, and malcontent, Jacques. While the popularization of a utopia with a changeable, open system is not explicitly outlined until H.G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905), the peripheral positions of Jacques and Touchstone offer the chance for a pre-modern, satirical critique of Arcadian virtue and those presumed to practice it.

While this is more the case with Jacques, Touchstone’s character is similar. In relation to the setting, Touchstone is the gravity that weighs down the airy dreams and thoughts emanating from the encounters with Ardne. Regarding the characters, Robert Bell asserts that “[b]oth are intruders in Arden” and Bevington adds that “[Touchstone] and Jacques are not touched by the play’s regenerative magic.”18 Considering how the majority of characters acclimate to the Arcadian culture, Touchstone and Jacques remain relatively aloof in that they do not admire the reverie or the peasant culture. From their perspective, their status as outsiders grants them the ability to accurately criticize the behaviors of other characters, because they believe, however mistakenly, that their opinions are not compromised by vice or folly.

In his conversation with Cori the shepherd, Touchstone relies on his courtly learning to mock both the utopian foundations of the forest’s rustic “clowns” and the customary practices of the court as his dialogue slyly deconstructs the boundaries between the country’s and the city’s manners. Eagleton offers a similar argument, stating that in *As You Like It* “Shakespeare deconstructs this binary opposition [between Nature and culture; or in this case, city and country] showing how each term inheres in the other.” Discussing the

preferability of the court to the country with the shepherd, Touchstone evaluates certain qualities within the context of each respective locality and offers a series of deft contradictions that undercut Corin’s own appreciation for the country while deprecating the practices of the city. The contradictions permit Touchstone to make contrary claims as when he states that bucolic solitude offers pleasure for an individual’s desire for contemplation away from city crowds at the same time that city crowds offer diversions away from the madness of an isolated mind (III.ii.11-21).

In his exchange with Corin, Touchstone appears as a mock emissary on behalf of the court in trying to reorient Corin’s values to align with those of city culture, and in doing so, he devalues the court’s superiority. Touchstone argues that Corin should adopt the court’s manners for his own betterment in a manner that derides the court’s pompous vogue as being as mean and dirty as the country man’s way of life. Through a range of comparisons, Touchstone directs Corin into seeing the similarities between country dirtiness and courtly dirtiness. In one example, Corin argues that the customs of the court would not suit a country lifestyle. He describes the idea of shepherds kissing each other’s’ hands like courtierswould be a disgusting practice since they are often covered with sheep grease and “tarred over with the surgery of our sheep” while the courtiers have soft hands scented by civet perfume (III.ii.57-58). However, Touchstone dismisses his concerns and replies that sheep grease is as “wholesome” as human sweat and that tar from sheep surgery is less base than civet perfume since civet derives from a cat’s anal pouch (III.ii.52-53; 63-65). While these accusations obviously needle Corin, they show how noblemen can be on par with countrymen in terms of grotesqueness. Nobles may strive for refinement, but they cannot cease to sweat, and their finer perfume of civet literally derives from the anal extremities of felines. While nobles

regard themselves as highly placed in the great chain of being, their practices and bodies continue to speak to human grossness, which undercuts their elevated sense of worth and notes that economic disparity results from an arbitrary prejudice.

Proceeding with similar jests in his discussion with Corin, Touchstone as a voice of practicality draws more attention to the animalistic side of humanity as a basis for humor. In their dialogue, he perverts the honesty of Corin’s utopic expression about enjoying his pastoral lifestyle by pointing out the double meanings in the shepherd’s words. In answering Touchstone’s accusations that the shepherd will die damned for not learning from the court, Corin says:

Sir, I am a true laborer: I earn that I eat, get that

I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness, glad of other men’s good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck. (III.ii.71-75)

Corin’s rustic passivity certainly cherishes a pastoral peace of mind, even if the instability of this living space escapes his detection. Humorously, though, Touchstone accuses Corin of pimping out his livestock for his living in trying undercut his contentedness, which equates him with unscrupulous flesh-peddlers. Throughout the play, while shepherds and nobles live blithely in the forest, Touchstone tries to heave their chimerical perspectives back to solid ground. To do so, he resorts to bawdy jokes that present him as an antithesis to the idealism of the pastoral romance and Petrarchan love. Ultimately, he is associated with the filthy loam as opposed to the celestial skies as he demonstrates how all people have a fair share in the world’s baseness.

Using such paradoxical logic, Touchstone jestingly chides Corin’s idyllic lifestyle, informing him that he risks damnation for not having ever attended court to learn good manners. Corin adroitly defends his lack of city manners as a utopian way of living and describes the country and the court as equal but separate realms that simply adhere to different social codes: “[…] Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as / the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court” (III.ii.43-46).

Potentially subversive, Corin’s sentiment suggests that the court’s practiced rituals do not outweigh the country bumpkins’ uncouth conduct in social worth. Instead, he sees the spheres as equally independent ideological fields, which, in a utopian fashion, levels the nobility’s belief that it serves as the paragon of all human behavior. This is merely one interpretation, though. Corin’s lines can also be seen as rigorously conservative in how they acknowledge that nobles and commoners belong to separately appointed spheres, which subtly denounces social permeability and betrays the utopian seemliness of his discourse.

This interpretation would closely align with the attitudes that coded Elizabethan sumptuary laws protecting the barriers between high and low ranks, and it can serve as a potent example of utopia being co-opted to maintain the status quo. Thus, the utopian content of Corin’s retort remains ambiguous and open to both traditional and progressive interpretations.

The attitude expressed in Corin’s utopian lines may admit a kind of ignorance that situates him in a dystopian situation since fail to take into account the presence of the noblemen in the forest. Despite Corin’s appreciation for separate spheres, the noble ranks, represented by Duke Senior and Frederick, are encroaching on the lands that Corin and the other peasants inhabit effectively shrinking the area belonging to their sphere. The noblemen’s presence reveals that Corin’s words may be ironic. While he enjoys the

simplicity of rustic living, he fails to understand the court’s ambitions for controlling resources and is too passive and distracted to try. In this sense, *As You Like It* may quietly dramatize the results of land enclosures that occurred since the past century, of which, intellectuals, including Sir Thomas More, suggested were a major source of social strife.20 Where the rustic population lacks the grounds to protest against the nobles’ movements, the nobles can smoothly acquire these lands to which they lacked an inherent right on the principle of their superior standing.

Similar to Touchstone, Jacques has an attitude that departs from the enthusiasm and idealism of those inhabiting Arden in that he embodies a perspective that is pessimistically utopian. As one that is consistently gloomy, Jacques acts as an obnoxious dissenter who can never be fully satisfied with any social situation. In the modern world, adopting an extremist ideological stance usually seems absurd and potentially dangerous to others, and in a similar fashion, Jacques’s melancholic disposition meets with derisive snickers from his cohorts.

Indeed, Rosalind in a caustic repartee with him asserts that “Those that are the extremity of either [melancholy or laughter] are abominable fellows and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards” (IV.i.4-6). She criticizes his severe melancholy as an odious annoyance that characterizes him as pretentious and self-righteous. Though his melancholy is a nuisance, Jacques’s character continues to be memorable in how the negative attitudes toward him spring from a fear that his criticisms have a ring of truth to them.

In the play, Jacques’s distant behavior from Duke Senior and his company hinges on a sense of what he feels to be his overlooked genius. Like Touchstone who exposes

humanity’s animalistic impulses for humor, Jacques uses the occasion of stag’s death as a dystopian analogy for feeling neglected. He transforms the death into a metaphor for a discarded outsider, in this case himself, forgotten by the “flux of company” (II.i.52). The lack of recognition saddens him, a view which Rosalind later mocks in an anecdote, quipping, “I fear you have sold your own lands to see / other men’s. Then to have seen much and to have / nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands” (IV.i.20-22). He even tries to persuade Rosalind that his brand of melancholy does not fit into the current social order, using various negative references to common occupations, including lawyers, courtiers, scholars, and musicians (IV.i.9-19). In line with Jameson’s view of utopists, Jacques is the maniac or oddball in that he is “a deformation readily enough explained by the fallen societies in which [he] had to fulfill [his] vocation” who, being misunderstood, is ridiculed.21 He may be mocked, but Jacques’s perception of himself in relation to society rings of a discontent that beckons utopian remedies.

However unpleasant and ornery everyone else finds Jacques’s personality, it may make him the most genuinely Utopian character. For instance, in his exchange with Duke Senior concerning satire, Jacques lays out his hope for a better world that would achieve through deconstructive criticism. Showing his kinship to Touchstone, Jacques confesses, perhaps jocularly, that he longs to serve as a fool, proclaiming that “Motley’s the only wear” (II.vii.34). He goes on to claim he would have fantastical abilities if he could regularly act as a fool: “[…] give me leave / To speak my mind, and I will through and through / Cleanse the foul body of th’infected world, / If they will patiently receive my medicine” (II.vii.58-61).

Considering the theatrical privilege of jesters during the English Renaissance as the wisest of characters (“The fellow is wise enough to play the fool” *Twelfth Night* III.i.59), Jacques desires the immunity granted to courtly fools to freely criticize immoral behavior to obliterate the behaviors depressing him. In playing the fool. Like a salesman, he claims that he can deliver to others a utopian remedy for everyday vices if he were assigned to such a role. In Jacques’s apology for satire, he suggests that his type of witticism can cause no ill for good people since it will only upset those who bear guilt for committing the vices he ridicules. In claiming this, he moralizes to Duke Senior about the shape moral behavior can take when corrections are widely prescribed, taking advantage of Arden’s alternative space to offer a different way to live.

The utopian spirit seems to inhabit the Duke and his men while residing in “the golden world” culture of Arden, but the degree to which their utopia fails remains inconclusive. The desire pride and pomp mostly spring from the commentaries of the borderline anti-utopian Touchstone and the radically utopian Jacques. If Touchstone could be categorized under any Utopian mode, it would be a body utopia like that of the licentious land of Cockaigne due to his promiscuous desire for the rustic Audrey and his grotesque manner of collapsing disparate forms of dirtiness into each other. For the pessimistic Jacques to remain in the forest appears to suit his radical disposition. Perhaps on the margins of his society he can preach more openly about all of humanity’s ills, constantly meditating on the ways to develop a panacea for all of them, even if they are misguided.

The weddings at the end also appear quite conservative and characteristic of a traditional happy ending where good cheer for the newlyweds is meant to remove all dissembling disguises and fill the audience with joyous relief. However, the ending of *As You*

*Like It* like many of Shakespeare’s plays remains both tidy and subversive with regards to how the treatment of station affects the audience. From the conservative stance, the play echoes the condemnation of rebellion against an established order as sacrilegious and treasonous, promising death for those who attempt to defy the principle of divine right. Yet, the theme of forgiveness appears reverse the effects of Frederick’s overthrow of his brother and Oliver’s maltreatment of Orlando as both Oliver and Frederick receive amnesty from a seemingly providential grace that pardons them once they vow to repent from continuing their previous transgressions. Conservatively, the reconciliation allows the legitimized order of the Duke to return to his place, and Orlando appears to receive the respect due to a man of his breeding. However, grinding against the reinforcement of conservative conventions, a new order appears to be brewing in the forest with Jacques and Frederick. In this sense, then, the play appeals to early modern audiences of both high and low stature in that the dual messages in the ending aim to satisfy their respective fantasies, as they like it, both affirming an order that rewards privilege and one that redefines it. The play, then, presents ideas that speak to anticipations of an ideal livelihood at the same time it tempers that anticipation with society’s realistic qualities.

Conclusion

[**As You Like It**](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it) was likely written between 1598 and 1600. It was entered in the Stationers' Register on August 4, 1600 but no edition followed the entry, thereby leading to the ambiguity in its publication date. Two topical references have been used by scholars to claim 1599 as the date of writing, but even this is inference only. For instance, Francis Meres, a contemporary of Shakespeare, listed the plays known to him in September of 1598 and did not include **As You Like It** among them. The first known publication is in the 1623 First Folio, taken either from Shakespeare's promptbook or less likely from a literary transcript of the promptbook.

The source for the plot of **As You Like It** is derived from Thomas Lodge's extremely popular prose romance Rosalynde. Written in 1586-87 and published in 1590, Shakespeare knew the story quite well although he changed a great deal of the details and emphasized different things. Lodge for example did not have ducal brothers, but Shakespeare chose to make enmity between brothers central to the theme of the play. Shakespeare also chooses to make primogeniture a target of his criticism by allowing [Oliver](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#oliver) to inherit everything, whereas Lodge had an equal inheritance between the brothers in his version. The clown [Touchstone](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#touchstone) and the melancholically satirical [Jaques](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#jaques) are also both creations of Shakespeare.

The Forest of Ardenne is from Lodge's romance, and actually describes an ancient woodland comprising parts of France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Shakespeare used the French setting through his choice of the French spelling, "Ardenne". However, the First Folio indicates another spelling, namely the Forest of Arden, an Anglicized spelling that also corresponds to a forest near Shakespeare's birthplace in Warwickshire. This happy coincidence is indicative of the doubleness in the play; although set in a foreign kingdom the play refers to English customs such as Robin Hood and primogeniture. Thus the play can deal with problems at home in spite of its seemingly foreign setting.

The story of [Orlando](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#orlando) and Oliver comes from another source, that of The Tale of Gamelyn, a Middle English story in which a younger brother seeks revenge on an older brother who mistreats him. This story invokes the name of Robin Hood, the famous English outlaw who lived near Nottingham and poached the king's deer. Indeed, the opening scenes of **As You Like It** invoke the image of Robin Hood when [Charles](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#charles) the Wrestler describes [Duke Senior](http://www.gradesaver.com/as-you-like-it/study-guide/character-list#duke-senior) as a modern day Robin Hood with his band of nobles around him.

**As You Like It** finds its origins in the pastoral tradition of the Renaissance in which the rustic field and forest provides a sanctuary from urban or courtly issues. The play itself takes place in a forest where the characters are hiding from treachery at court or injustice in the family. This pastoral tradition began with Theocrites in ancient Greece, whose writings explored the sorrows of love and daily injustices in a rural setting. Virgil expanded the tradition, emphasizing the distinction between urban and rural lifestyles even more. Renaissance literature focused more on the distinction between court and country life, and Shakespeare had many contemporaries who worked in this literary vein, including Edmund Spenser who based his Shepherdess Calendar in 1579 on Virgil's Eclogues, and Sir Philip Sidney who wrote a romance in 1590 titled The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia.

The pastoral tradition, in spite of taking many literary forms, conformed to a traditional set of rules. A typical story would involve exiles from the court or city going into the countryside and living either with or as shepherds. While in the rural area, they would hold singing contests and philosophically discuss the various merits of both forms of life. Eventually the exiles would return to the city having resolved their particular problems.

Pastoral works have most frequently been used as social criticisms due to their ability to question the natural world versus the artificial manmade world. The characters often discuss whether life in the country is preferable to that of the city, usually focusing on such evils as cruel mistresses or the dishonesty of courtiers for themes. The simplicity of the countryside is always celebrated in a highly artful manner, imitating the Western literary tradition as it has developed over time. Indeed, the pastoral genre provides authors with a way to pretend; the characters immerse themselves in another world and can act out their ideal worlds. Thus in this "simplistic world" we see many disguises where courtiers pretend to be shepherds, men dress as women, women dress as men, and nobles become outlaws. The pastoral world gives its cast an opportunity to alter their own world when they return through the games they play in this contrived, imaginary location.

Shakespeare adopted the pastoral as a chance to deal both humorously and seriously with his two themes of brotherly betrayal and doting love. Indeed, the play has more songs in it than any other Shakespearian drama, a sign that Shakespeare enjoyed the pastoral genre he was using for the play. The forest of Ardenne, where the characters all end up, turns out to be very similar to other forests: it causes fear through the wild animals but provides the right atmosphere for healing to occur. This corresponds closely to the forest in **A Midsummer Night's Dream** where most of the action occurs before the cast returns to Athens with their problems resolved. Indeed, after hunting deer, tending sheep, singing songs and writing love sonnets on bark, most of the cast in this play returns home again with all their problems solved.