

‘a fool i’ th’ forest’ –
jaques’ relationship to
the concept of a fool



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Jaques is a static, melancholy character who continually prefers to remain removed from the imprudence of love, wishing he could speak his mind without reprehension. In contrast to most of the other characters, who seize opportunities for change, Jaques, for the most part, successfully resists the magic of the Forest of Arden. His use of the word "fool" is telling. He frequently uses the term 'fool' to describe others, such as Orlando and Touchstone, for pursuing love. Also, the post of a fool in court intrigues him, for such fools are allowed to speak their mind without consequence – an ability that Jaques desires. Eventually a reversal of circumstances renders Jaques the fool, which causes his stubborn character to give way and recognize the merits of love and cordial speech. This essay shows how the word and role of "fool" both strengthen and humble Jaques. Jaques uses "fool" frequently in Act II, scene vii, where it merely describes the profession of a court jester. Such a fool has the ability to say anything he wishes because however sarcastic or biting his statements towards others might be, they could be interpreted as jest and forgiven. He speaks with Duke Senior about how he "met a fool i' th' forest," and how he wishes he were a fool so that he might "blow on whom he please," or criticize whomever he wants to without consequence. However, he modifies the meaning of the role of the fool that he wishes to play from an optimistic one, to one more dark and heavy of purpose. The jester in the forest was musing generally about fortune and the passing of time, whereas if Jaques were to have the ability to speak freely, he would "Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world, /If they will patiently receive [his] medicine." By stating his desire to 'purge the world of its infections,' he taints the purpose of the fool from that of simply making a situation more lighthearted to 'lifting the world

<https://assignbuster.com/a-fool-i-th-forest-jaques-relationship-to-the-concept-of-a-fool/>

from its wrongdoings.' Although the purposes are similar – changing a negative situation into a positive one – Jaques chooses to word the purpose of a jester in such a way that a negative outlook of the world is emphasized; the words “foul body o th' infected world” lends a resonating image of pus and festering flesh, which one would not naturally associate with a court fool. Jaques also suggests superiority of thought to the specific fool that he met in the forest by mocking the fool's intelligence. He laughed for an hour “sans intermission” after hearing the contemplative musings of the fool, and later compares the fool's brain to a sea biscuit that has been dried after a voyage, having “strange places cramm'd/With observation, which he vents/in mangled forms,” or having a jumble of thoughts which he fails to present coherently. By suggesting the idiocy of the fool in the forest, Jaques inherently implies that he finds himself more intelligent, and so further justifies his thought tendencies of dwelling on the negative; now, not only does he view the world as a more negative place, but feels that he is right to think so and those that think otherwise are not as smart as he. To ensure he does not compare his own intellect to that of the fool's, he emphasizes his desire to wear the clothing of a fool: a “motley coat,” or patchwork costume. By wishing to only dress as a fool, he attains the right to free speech without compromising his opinions and ‘sinking’ to a level of intelligence in which he would maintain the incoherent thoughts of the fool he met. In Act III, scene ii, Jaques' use of the term “fool” shifts during a conversation with Orlando. He initially bids Orlando to sit with him and “rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery,” or complain about the state of the world. When Orlando refuses to sit with Jaques, Jaques responds, “The worst fault you have is to be in love,” and later, further belittles Orlando by addressing him as “Signior <https://assignbuster.com/a-fool-i-th-forest-jaques-relationship-to-the-concept-of-a-fool/>

Love.” Jaques has made it clear that he associates Orlando strongly with Orlando’s preoccupation with love, and thinks poorly of Orlando for it. Indeed, he states, “ By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you,” Jaques may have been looking for a “ fool” as in a court jester, but upon its association with Orlando, the meaning of the word changes from that of a jester to that of ‘ one who has a deficiency in sense and understanding.’ Again, with the aid of the word “ fool,” Jacques has scoffed at the ideals of love. However, the nature of Orlando’s retorts stings Jaques. Orlando states that the fool Jaques was seeking has “ drown’d in the brook,” and if Jaques were to look in, he should find the fool. When Jaques replies he would see only his reflection, Orlando continues, “ Which I take to be either a fool or a cipher.” He cannot endure being called a fool and leaves abruptly. Suddenly, his means of strengthening his melancholy has betrayed him; he has used the term “ fool” to his advantage thus far and unhappily found himself to be the subject at which it is directed. Through this reversal of who is called, “ fool,” Jaques’ superiority complex is kept in check, and although he continues to call such lovers as Orlando, “ fools,” he also shows faint recognition of the reasoning behind the pursuit of love. In the final scene, Act V, scene iv, when Touchstone and Audrey enter the wedding scene, he remarks, “ There is sure another flood toward, and these couples are coming to the ark.” He compares the lovers to a pair of animals seeking the shelter of Noah’s ark, recognizing the ‘ flood’ of ever-present dangers that reside outside of the forest: corruption, hatred, and the vengeful, approaching army of Duke Frederick. He also recognizes the ‘ shelter from the storm’ that marriage might provide; it would allow them to focus their attention on a more intimate and loving counterpart and distract them from the threats

<https://assignbuster.com/a-fool-i-th-forest-jaques-relationship-to-the-concept-of-a-fool/>

that lie in the outside world. However, such recognition is short-lived, and he overthrows any glimmer of sympathy he might have had for the lovers with his next sentence, " Here comes a pair of very strange beasts, which in all tongues are call'd fools." Even though he has openly noted the safety which marriage would provide, he proceeds to pronounce the folly of the pursuit of love, and marvels at the ' strangeness' of the couple. Such an opinion implies that Jaques would prefer the storm of the outside world than the safe haven that love provides, reconfirming Jaques' negative attitude and his preference for a state of mind in which the fears of the world are not ignored, but openly recognized and embraced. Throughout the rest of the scene, Jaques shows evidence of both maintaining his aversion to love and recognizing its merits, but he continues to use " fool" to strengthen his superiority of thought. Addressing Duke Senior with regards to Touchstone, Jaques remarks " Is not this a rare fellow, my lord? He's as good as anything, and yet a fool." Since Touchstone is both a fool by profession and a fool to Jaques because he is in love, Jaques' line can be interpreted with the application of both meanings of " fool": ' he's as smart as they come, even though he is only a jester,' and ' he's as smart as they come, yet still foolishly in love.' Either way, Jaques projects an air of superiority to Touchstone – he places the esteem of the profession below that of his own as a court fool and implies that a fool would not be of comparable intelligence to him, and in the interpretation where ' fool' holds the meaning of one in love, Jaques judges Touchstone and categorizes him as one without calculation and reason. During his departure speech, his implications of superiority are maintained in that he bestows gifts on many of the characters that were not his to give. For instance, he ' bequeaths' Duke Senior's former honor to him, <https://assignbuster.com/a-fool-i-th-forest-jaques-relationship-to-the-concept-of-a-fool/>

and gives Rosalind to Orlando again. However, he passes this opportunity to share his negative opinions with others, and instead, speaks cordially to them. In his re-giving of Rosalind, he says to Orlando, “ You to a love, that your true faith doth merit,” recognizing the admirability of Orlando’s faithfulness and the goodness that it deserves, again recognizing the delights and benefits of love. He addresses Touchstone genially as well, and appropriate to Touchstone’s position as a jester, jokes with him about the strength of his relationship with Audrey, stating, “...thy loving voyage/ Is but for two months victuall’d,” meaning that his love for Audrey is not the kind of deep love that would last beyond two months. And even though he still refuses to partake in love or the festivities associated with it, he departs the scene to join Duke Frederick and his group of religious converts stating, “ There is much matter to be heard and learned [from them].” He leaves the audience with the impression that, although he has not grown to love, his steadfastness in his negative perspectives has been humbled a bit through his interactions with the other characters. Jaques’ melancholy is an object of curiosity – the audience does not know why he chooses to brood over the world the way he does, remaining so solitary, but Jaques makes it clear through the use of the word “ fool” that he prefers the sullen state such a sullen state. He addresses Orlando and Touchstone as such, believing them to be foolish in their pursuit of love, and also expresses his desire to wear the costume of a court fool so that he might criticize others freely. He uses the term “ fool” to project his intelligence over others; however, he does not remain completely unaffected by criticism. Even though he remains melancholy for the entirety of the play, after being rendered a fool, he

becomes slightly more humbled and expresses an ability to see the merits of amiable speech in addition to the legitimacy of others' romantic ideals.