

Examine the role of social class in shakspear's play-as you like it and twelfth n...

[Literature](#)



Social In the Renaissance period, ambiguity in social distinction was dominant, as many countries were changing from the antiquated feudal economy to a capitalist economy; this resulting into one of the worst peasants' revolution in Europe. The last quarter of the sixteenth century marked ambiguity in social condition and status because of the rapid changes, making the boundaries between gentry and upper elite, as well as wealthier professional classes and those below them, difficult to establish (Lynch 113). William Shakespeare, the legendary English dramatist and scholar, incorporated the notion of social class in his plays "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night". Despite their different contextual plots and theme, both the plays integrate the issue of social class into their setting to examine the social class effects of primogeniture between two main characters in each of the play. Below is a discussion of the two plays, with the role of social class in each one.

In "As You Like It", Shakespeare utilizes the problems associated with different social classes in the setting of the plot for the play. He tries to examine the role of different social classes, most of which result from primogeniture, by centering the play on the conflict of pastoral (shepherds) versus courtly. The play setting is in the Forest of Ardenne, a golden world filled with romantic natural sounds, gentle shepherds, and pleasant odor (Lynch 34). Duke Frederick banishes his elder brother, Duke Senior, to the Forest of Ardenne. The audience is informed by one of the characters that he and his lords were living like "the Robin Hood of England".

Duke Senior's deposition from the court to the forest is a change from a higher social class to a lower one. One common aspect in the play is the way

the characters display virtues of peasantries or of the court. Oliver and Orlando have bad experiences in the pastoral setting of the play, as they are used to the courts. The lives of the shepherds are known to be simple, kind, and beautiful, despite their lower social class ranking. This is evidenced by Corin in Act II Scene IV, when explaining the behavior of his master towards Rosalind and Celia (Lynch 69). Touchstone, a court jester, maintains the behaviors of a person in court but, surprisingly, falls in love with a goatherd Audrey, and proceeds to threaten William, a polite man in love with the same girl. The setting and the characters in the play help reflect Shakespeare's opinion of the romantic notion of the shepherds as ridiculous and the behavior of court individuals as absurd.

The other play, "Twelfth Night", is a comedy where royalty and commoners speak using blank and prose verse (Bloom 61). Shakespeare employs the two forms of speech to highlight the difference in social class and status. The plays in the Elizabethan era used blank verse for nobles like Orsino the Duke, Olivia, a countess, Sebastian, and Viola. Blank verse was normally in the form such that each line in the play contains ten syllables that do not rhyme. This was intentionally done to enable the speaker to talk in a halting and dignified manner. In contrast, prose was common for illustrating clowns, fools, and lower classes, like Antonio the sea captain, Malvolio, a friend to Viola, Olivia's servants Feste and Fabian, among others. Shakespeare uses this literary technique to highlight the difference in social class status. However, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Tolby Belch use prose, but their role is to provide dramatic irony, as they are nobles. Another instance of such a scenario is Olivia speaking in prose, while she is a noble (Bloom 35). In

general, Shakespeare uses these social class differences in mocking the laws in place that distinguished nobles from commoners through speech and dress codes.

Work Cited

Bloom, Harold. *Twelfth Night*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008. Print.

Lynch, Stephen. *As You Like It: A guide to the Play*. West Port, CT:

Greenwood Press, 2003. Print.