

The Forest of Arden in Our Minds

***-the “magic stage” of Shakespeare’s “As You Like It,”
what it means to people of today
and what it meant to the author and his contemporaries***

Shakespeare in Depth 5 p
Högskolan på Gotland
Sommaren 2003
Britta Calamnius
Handledare: Gigi Stengård

Överste Lemmering:

—

Det är underligt, förresten.
Mitt land är i krig,
halva världen är i krig,
och poesin själv är en landsflyktig hertig.
Men här hos er
ja, här tycker jag den har funnit sin Ardennerskog
och här lever den fortfarande sitt muntra och fria liv.
Det brinner en eld, svensk film 1943

Colonel Lemmering:

[—]

Besides, it's remarkable.
My country is at war,
half the world is at war,
and poetry itself is an exiled duke.
But here with you,
yes, here I think it has found its Forest of Arden
and here it's still spending its free and mirthful life.
There's a fire burning, Swedish film 1943

Duke Senior:

[...]

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.
As You Like It: Act II, Scene I

Corin:

[...] Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the
behaviour in the country is most mockable at the court. [...]
As You Like It, Act III, Scene II

CONTENTS

As You Like It

- the story retold from the Forest of Arden's point of view

What the Forest of Arden means to people of today

- to the author of this essay
- to a group of film creators during WW2
- to some scholars and critics in the last few decades such as
Per Meurling, Marilyn French, Jan Kott, Leif Zern, Carl-Göran Ekerwald, Harold Bloom
- Summary of observed features

What the Forest of Arden could have meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries

- politics before, during and after the Elizabethan era, a time of unrest
- the forcing of people from the countryside to the cities contra the romantic tradition of pastoral poems and plays
- Shakespeare's contemporaries' conception of the world, their moral and philosophy, their myths and imaginations;
the cultural change between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Final account

- The Forest's influence on the characters in the play
- What is the Forest of Arden? Diverse views of Shakespeare's work
- Where is the Forest of Arden? Back to my own experience

AS YOU LIKE IT
The story retold from the Forest of Arden's point of view

Cast:

The Forest of Arden

The original inhabitants of the realm:

Corin, an old shepherd. A nice and honest man, content with life, proud of his work.

Silvius, his younger mate, extremely romantic, madly in love with

Phebe, a young shepherdess, also romantic but somewhat vain

Audrey, a goat-herd, not very smart

William, a country fellow

Refugees in the Forest:

Duke Senior, a banished Duke

Jaques, a melancholy philosopher

Amiens

Lords attending to the Duke

Other lords, with **pages** and **other attendants**

Rosalind, daughter of the banished Duke, disguised as the shepherd **Ganymed**

Celia, her cousin, daughter of the banished Duke's younger brother and usurper, disguised as **Aliena**, sister of Ganymed

Touchstone, a Fool at the false Duke's court, accompanying the ladies

Orlando, youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys, escaping from his eldest brother, Oliver, accompanied by

Adam, an old servant attending Orlando

Oliver, who is looking for Orlando in the Forest, in order to kill him

Jaques de Boys, their brother, appears in the Forest as a messenger at the end

Entering the outskirts of the Forest:

Duke Frederick, the usurper of the dukedom and brother of Duke Senior

Never entering the Forest:

Charles, a wrestler at Duke Frederick's court

Le Beau, a courtier attending Duke Frederick

Dennis, a servant attending Oliver de Boys

The Forest of Arden:

Corin, Silvius, Phebe, Audrey and William have lived here in my realm since they were born, and I remember their parents and their ancestors too. Corin is the eldest of them, a nice and honest shepherd, content with life, proud of his work. Silvius is young and romantic, a little naive, but there's no evil in him. He is helplessly in love with Phebe – unhappily, it seemed, but at last she had to give up her vanity and accept him. Audrey is not very smart but honest and upright. William is a simple-minded, good-natured country fellow.

Later, new inhabitants have appeared here. The banished Duke Senior, usurped by his brother Frederick, took refuge here with some of his lords, and they said they liked this place. Rosalind, the Duke's daughter, was still at Duke Frederick's court with her cousin Celia, Frederick's daughter. One day Rosalind and Celia appeared here, disguised as the young man Ganymed and his sister Aliena, and a Fool, Touchstone, accompanied them. They bought a cottage and some sheep assisted by Corin, and I heard that Duke Frederick had banished Rosalind, too, and that Celia, as a true and loyal friend, secretly ran away with her.

Many young men joined Duke Senior's company. One day, when they had their breakfast in a glade, a desperate youth suddenly stood close to them, threatening with a knife: Hold, eat no more! The Duke calmed him, and he brought his old servant, Adam, to the company, and they were invited to share the food. The young man told the men that he was Orlando, youngest son of sir Rowland de Boys, escaped into the Forest, haunted by his eldest brother, Oliver, who had treated him badly and now planned to kill him. After defeating the famous wrestler Charles at Duke Frederick's court, he had been warned by a courtier, who told him that he had better leave the court at once, because Duke Frederick, the enemy of Orlando's father, could be aggressive. Orlando left, but before that he met the two young ladies and fell deeply in love with

Rosalind, an emotion that was mutual. Back at home, Orlando was warned by Adam about his brother's rage, and together they left for my wilderness.

Rosalind, now disguised as Ganymed, met Orlando in my realm, and he did not recognize her. She had found some verses he had written about "Rosalind", and suggested that they could pretend that "he" was the beloved Rosalind, and so they met many times in the cottage. Her intention was to "test" the seriousness of Orlando's love declarations. Young Silvius and Phebe were there, too, and Phebe unhappily fell in love with "Ganymed", painful to Silvius, who loved her with all his heart. By this time, Oliver entered the forest. When he lay down to sleep in a glade, a lioness was waiting to attack him. Orlando, who was passing by at the moment, defeated the lioness but got some wounds on his arm. After that, the two brothers became reconciled. When Oliver came to the cottage to tell the ladies what had happened, he and "Aliena" fell in love with each other, nearly at first sight, and he decided to give up his heritage and live with her as a shepherd.

Now, Rosalind found the time to put an end to the disguise, and she called a priest, Orlando, Oliver, Celia, Silvius and Phebe to the glade where Duke Senior and his company were dwelling. When Rosalind and Celia appeared in their own gowns, Duke Senior recognized his daughter and Orlando his beloved Rosalind. Phebe's feelings for "Ganymed" were cooled down immediately, and she promised to marry Silvius. By that time, Touchstone had been attracted by a goat herd, Audrey, whose admirer, the country fellow William, he had easily outstripped. Now, the priest got the commission to marry four couples. Even Hymen, the God of marriage, was there to bless the married couples. As if this end were not happy enough, Jaques de Boys, Oliver's and Orlando's brother, arrived with a message from Duke Frederick. He had armed his soldiers and started marching towards my sphere to attack his brother and his friends, but when he reached my outskirts, he met a religious man, a hermit, and at once he was reformed and decided to stay with the pious man and leave the dukedom to his brother, the rightful Duke.

So, they all left my realm, though they had praised it so much until then. Only one of the Duke's lords, the melancholy philosopher Jaques, was left. When he heard about Duke Frederick's decision, he was so impressed and found him so interesting that he opted to stay with him and the hermit, too.

I can't deny that I miss the merry men, who lived here like the Robin Hood of yore - but the shepherds and their sheep are still living in my surroundings, and all my animals and trees and flowers are growing, my streams flowing, the deer no more hunted and killed by hungry men. The joyful songs are forever echoing around my hills and valleys. And it will be interesting to listen to Jaques discussing deep existential problems with ex-Duke Frederick and the hermit!

WHAT THE FOREST OF ARDEN MEANS TO PEOPLE OF TODAY **- to the writer of this essay**

Before inquiring what the Forest of Arden means to people of today, I will mention what it means to myself as a randomly selected representative of the group, at the same time as I state the reason why I chose this topic.

I remember my first acquaintance with the place. When I was about ten or eleven, my grandfather gave me a book, containing Shakespeare's most famous plays, transferred into short stories, adapted for children by Charles and Mary Lamb and translated into Swedish.¹ This became to me a new world of imagination, and one of the most absorbing stories was "Som ni behagar" - *As You Like It*. There were three illustrations to the story: The disguised young ladies wandering towards the forest, the scene when Orlando disturbs the Duke and his lords, crying: Häll, åt ej mer! Jag måste ha er mat!" ("*Forbear, and eat no more!*") and the scene, related by Oliver, when Orlando saves his brother from being attacked by a lioness. *The Forest of Arden* (in Swedish called *Ardennerskogen*) appeared in my imagination like the meadows, woods and forests with sunlit glades, where, since early childhood, I used to walk with my grandfather along paths and running waters, while he told me the names of the wild flowers. Those excursions appear to me as a kind of "*golden age*," so of course, a glade in my rural environment had to be the most likely place where the banished men could dwell - although the Forest of Arden simultaneously was a very special place, fancifully mixed with exotic and incredible features.

Lamb: *Mycket väsen för ingenting och andra av Shakespeares dramer, berättade för barn*, Stockholm 1928.

- to a group of film creators during WW2

This was a child's experience. Another, and probably more representative example of modern people's view of the Forest of Arden, also selected by chance, is a Swedish film from 1943, *Det brinner en eld* (*There's a Fire Burning*)² This movie was given intense attention in Sweden because of its highly topical subject, alluding to the Nazi-German occupation of Norway. I see no reason to relate the whole story in detail, but I will mention what is relevant to this topic. A national theatre ensemble is going to have its first performance of *As You Like It*. A military attaché from another country, Ernst Lemmering, is a keen friend of the actors' and deeply in love with the leading actress, Harriet. When the film begins, he invites the ensemble to

a party in his home after the performance. After his invitation, he receives the message that his country is going to occupy the country of his friends. The performance and the party are ordered to be carried through. The next morning the invasion is a fact. On his own request, Lemmering is appointed commandant of the district. Yet, he cannot stop some unfair treatments. Two of the actors, Lauritz and Georg, leave the society to join the resistance movement. Later, Henrik, the director, refuses to work according to the occupants' wishes and gets dismissed, his place immediately taken by Paul, a traitor belonging to the ensemble.

A parallel is successfully drawn between two intrigues: Shakespeare's *As You Like It* of the early 1590s and the Swedish movie *Det brinner en eld* with its motif from an occupied country in the 1940s. What they have in common is most obviously the escape from cruel tyrants. In the Swedish movie there are two glimpses from the rehearsal of *As You Like It*: Duke Frederick's banishing of Rosalind and Duke Senior's lines in act II, scene I, where he describes the advantages of wilderness living. From the performance Rosalind's epilogue is to be seen. The parallel is also carried through by giving the part of Duke Senior to Henrik, the part of Duke Frederick to Paul, the traitor and "usurper" and that of Rosalind to Harriet, the leading actress and, in the end, a strong heroine.

Yet, the parallel is not carried through in the whole movie. The end is not as happy as that in the play. Many people die in the struggles between occupying soldiers and resistance fighters, and at the end two of the actors, Lauritz and Harriet, meet a heroic death, saving the lives of two fellow actors, Georg and Eva, who pass the border skiing into a free neighbour country. In the final scene, Georg and Eva promise to continue their fight for freedom. Perhaps they could say with Celia: *Now go we in content/ To liberty, and not to banishment*². Neither is there any refuge like the Forest of Arden after the occupation. The atmosphere of freedom and good company is mainly to be found before the painful events, expressed by colonel Lemmering soon after the rehearsal:

Det är underligt förresten. Mitt land är i krig, halva världen är i krig, och poesin själv är en landsflyktig hertig. Men här hos er, ja, här tycker jag den har funnit sin Ardennerskog, och här lever den fortfarande sitt muntra och fria liv.

(It's peculiar, by the way. My country is at war, half the world is at war, and poetry itself is an exiled duke. But here with you, yes, here I think it has found its Forest of Arden, and here it's still living its free and mirthful life. My translation.)

It seems to me that Ernst Lemmering in these words clearly expresses what kind of part the Forest of Arden can have played in the minds of war-threatened Europeans in the '40s.

2) *Det brinner en eld*, MS by Karl Ragnar Gierow and Gösta Stevens, direction by Gustaf Molander. SF 1943.

3) Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act I, scene III: 133-134.

-to some modern scholars and critics

When reading several books about Shakespeare's plays, written in the twentieth century, it occurs to me how authors with different interests and kinds of education have observed various features of the Forest of Arden. Many writers and scholars have written about Shakespeare. Choosing just a few of these, must be another arbitrary work.

For instance, **Per Meurling**, a historian of religion and ideas, maintains the historical-political setting.⁴ He concerns himself with the aristocrats in the circles around the earls of Essex and Southampton, who were out of favour with the queen in those days because of their opposition activity. Meurling supposes that Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* to amuse these threatened and anxious noblemen and -women. It would be easy for them to identify with the banished duke, his lords and the young people in the forest. He mentions the green Forest of Arden as a bewitching place where the refugees could live, praising the natural way of life as better than being at court, but when banishment was ended, immediately turning back to old customs.

The feminist **Marilyn French** describes the Forest of Arden as a feminine world.⁵ Its most apparent feminine features, according to French, is its freedom from aggressions and pretensions, characteristics that here are defined as male. Illustrating this idea, she quotes Touchstone's words about different grades of aggression, which can lead to irrevocability – if not the word *if* is there to conclude peace. While the structures of power and those of nature are drawing limits to man's possibilities, emotions still are free though dependent of both spheres. In this respect, French emphasizes, the Forest of Arden is the realm of emotional life, not of Nature.

4) Meurling: *Shakespeare*, pp 163-172. Stockholm 1952.

5) French: *Manligt och kvinnligt i Shakespeares diktning (Shakespeare's Division of Experience)* Stockholm 1982, pp 95-99.

Jan Kott, a Polish critic of theatre, links the turbulence of Shakespeare's age to his own experiences as a member of a resistance movement during WW2.⁶ His book title: *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* surely has a special, adequate meaning. To Kott, the Forest of Arden means "escape; escape from the cruel kingdom [...]" He describes the opening of the play as "violent and brutal", and "the only hope of salvation is escape [...]". He praises the Forest of Arden as "the most English of

all Shakespearean forests," a place where people of many kinds meet and enjoy company, "[...] a real forest, as well as a feudal utopia and a sneering comment on that utopia. [...]" Using a metaphor, he compares the forest to Arcadia, where "all are equal." However, he also observes a tone of disharmony, listening to the lamentations over the haunted deer, the "*native burghers of this desert city*"⁷ and states that "The kingdom of nature is as ruthless and egoistic as the world of civilization. There is no return to primeval harmony." Kott also discusses "the green world" or "the green sphere," drawing comparisons to Ariosto and Cervantes; a "sphere" of combat with "the feudal madness," that must be mocked but is necessary for its beauty and poetry that enrich our lives.

Shakespeare, according to Kott, "takes us into the Forest of Arden in order to show that one must try to escape, although there is no escape."

Leif Zern, a Swedish critic of theatre, points at the sharp borderline between the court and the forest, and the different attitudes to time.⁸ Shakespeare, he maintains, is clearly conscious of the fact that the conflict between two ways of production means rivalry between two value systems. The court and the city are equal to him as places of order and hierarchy. Further, Zern points at the "part" of the Forest of Arden as a stage and as the classic abode and hide-out for outlaws; the oppositional, those who cannot stand the turbulence of power. In this connection Zern alludes to the comparison with "*the old Robin Hood*" in the play.⁹ He has also noticed that the border between the court and the forest is so sharp that Duke Frederick, when he comes "*to the skirts of this wild woo*", turns good: he meets "*an old religious man*" and decides to stay with him, leaving the riches and power to his brother.

Carl-Göran Ekerwald, a Swedish author, translator and writer on cultural matters, sees links to Rousseauian nature philosophy.¹⁰ He even names Shakespeare "Rousseau before Rousseau." The ideas Shakespeare shares with Rousseau are, according to Ekerwald, praise of a life in harmony with Nature, brotherhood, priority of emotion, and distrust in conventional acquiring of knowledge. After quoting Duke Senior's praise of the wilderness where man will learn to understand his place in the order of things and referring to the shepherd Corin, content, free from envy and hate, sharing others' happiness and proud of his work, Ekerwald points at other plays where the same idea appears. As examples he quotes for instance, Gonzalo's vision of an ideal society in *The Tempest*: a vision of the Golden Age, a Utopia free from weapons, crime, hard work, richness and poverty.¹¹

The importance of emotions, another feature of the natural sphere, is exemplified in Jaques' tears over a wounded stag in *As You Like It*. Also, in *Timon of Athens*, Timon talks to the weeping Flavius: *What! dost thou weep? Come nearer. Then I love thee, / Because thou art a woman, and disclaim'st / Flinty mankind; whose eyes do never give, / But thorough lust and laughter. [...]*¹² Shakespeare has noticed the male and female features in every human being, Ekerwald point out, a fact that can be studied in the mix of sexes so frequent in his plays.

Further, Ekerwald discusses Shakespeare's attitude towards learning. Several of his good or heroic characters are presented with a book in their hands, and Shakespeare himself is known to have been a keen reader of books. On the other hand, there is a distrust of books which he, for instance, demonstrates in *The Tempest*, when Prospero is going to throw his book into the sea.

*[...] this rough magic [...]*¹³ In Gonzalo's Utopia a condition is stated: *Letters should not be known*.¹⁴ A kind of learning that Shakespeare, however, truly believes in, is what Nature tells you if you listen, exemplified in Duke Senior's philosophy: *[...] tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / sermons in stones, and good in everything*.¹⁵ Here, Ekerwald develops Duke Senior's thoughts on natural phenomena.

In comparison with Corin the shepherd, Ekerwald also reminds us of Shakespeare's rustic background, which can be traced in his plays. As a former country boy, he knows rural life in detail, and he makes use of this knowledge naturally.¹⁶

Harold Bloom, author, critic and Professor of Humanities, tells us of the Forest's ability to change, even transform people's lives and their personalities.¹⁷ He claims that, for instance, the love story between Rosalind and Orlando could come to pass only in the Forest of Arden, simply because "the forest of Arden dissolves hierarchies, at least for a blessed time". The "bad guys" turn surprisingly good: the false Duke Frederick gives up the dukedom to his brother, the rightful Duke, and Oliver gives up their father's heritage to his brother Orlando.¹⁸ Though not blind to the "shadows in the forest of Arden", Bloom maintains that "the forest of Arden is simply the best place to live, anywhere in Shakespeare".¹⁹ *As You Like It* is the closest you can get to an earthly paradise, considering Shakespeare's sense of reality.

Bloom also makes some remarks on the geographical place of the Forest of Arden. It is impossible to put it onto a map, because its features are mixed: Arden is the maiden name of Shakespeare's mother and the name of a forest in his childhood neighbourhood, and simultaneously the Ardennes, is the name of a large forest in Belgium. The dukedom seems to be in France, but the names of the lords are both French and English.

6) Kott: Shakespeare Our Contemporary, New York-London 1974 (Szkice o Szekspirze, Warszawa 1964) pp 269-292.

7) Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act II:1, 21-24. Duke Senior: [...] And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools, / Being native burghers of this desert city, / Should in their own confines with forked heads / Have their round haunches gor'd.

8) Zern: *Ålskaren och mördaren*, pp 7-44. Stockholm 1984.

9) Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act I:1, 114-119. Charles: They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.

- 10) Ekerwald: Shakespeare – liv och tänkesätt, Stockholm 1998, pp 216-233
- 11) Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, Act II:1, 154-175
- 12) Shakespeare: *Timon of Athens*, Act IV:3, 491-495
- 13) Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, Act V:1, 50-56
- 14) *Ibid*, Act II:1, 157
- 15) Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act II:1, 1-17
- 16) Ekerwald pp 216-217
- 17) Bloom: Shakespeare – The Invention of the Human, London 1999, pp 202-225
- 18) *Ibid*, p 203
- 19) *Ibid*, p 205

Summary of observed features

In the texts of the writers whose thoughts, ideas and statements I have described, I discern some clearly expressed features:

- The contrast between urban and rural life and attitudes
- The healing effect of nature, the Rousseauian ideas before Rousseau
- The myths: the Paradise myth, the “Golden Age,” “the old Robin Hood”
- The forest’s influence on the characters in the play: love stories flourish independent of social customs, bad guys turn good; princes and courtiers accept and even praise the adventurous wilderness
- The escape from tyrants

Now, let’s find out how Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the 16th and 17th centuries possibly looked at these phenomena!

WHAT THE FOREST OF ARDEN COULD MEAN TO SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The political unrest before, during and after the Elizabethan era

The reign of Queen Elizabeth, 1558-1603, has been called England’s golden age. Compared to the past and the following times, it could be called so for good reasons. The painful centuries of civil war and insecurity had come to an end. The struggle between the dynasties York and Lancaster, *the War of the Roses*, was finished when Elizabeth’s grandfather, Earl of Richmond, came to the throne as King Henry VII.²⁰ Now a period of relative stability followed. Colonies were founded, and in 1588 the invincible Spanish Armada was defeated. Trade and shipping flourished, and industries developed earlier than in other European countries. Wool production and refinement improved in quality and was a successful export product. Production of coal and iron increased to the highest level in Europe.

Culture reached high levels in many ways: Theatre, poetry, music and other fine arts increased in popularity in wider circles.²¹ In the 1590s, when *As You Like It* was created, there was a notable upswing in theatre and literature, and simultaneously the English language became enriched with a lot of new words, a vocabulary that Shakespeare had an extraordinary gift to use and develop.

Yet, life was not quite safe for Shakespeare and his fellow countrymen. Stability had its price. Conflicts between Catholics and Protestants remained. Rebellions threatened the Queen. If you were loyal to the “wrong” side, you could run the risk of imprisonment, even execution. A nobleman loyal to Elizabeth could fall into disgrace with her successor, King James I. Even a relative of Shakespeare’s was beheaded and got his head shown at The Tower Bridge, for religious-political reasons. Shakespeare himself and his colleagues had to carefully avoid writings that could displease the monarch – that is an explanation for the sometimes historically incorrect depictions in his chronicle plays.

As Meurling points out (p 9), it is not by chance that Shakespeare – in the autumn of 1599, according to Meurling – wrote a comedy about young aristocratic ladies and gentlemen escaping from a tyrant’s court. This was exactly the situation of his audience. His friend and patron, the earl of Southampton, was planning a revolt against the queen soon after, together with the earl of Essex and others. They were imprisoned, and Essex was beheaded, not long before the queen’s death.²² Another former favourite of Elizabeth’s, Sir Walter Raleigh, was temporarily out of her grace and imprisoned, but set free after some time. Later, he was imprisoned again, set free, allowed to lead a voyage to Latin America and at last beheaded for disobedience, in 1618, by order of James I.²³

During such circumstances, there was good reason for relaxing at the theatre, enjoying the comedy about merry men and young lovers in the freedom of the green Forest of Arden. The end in real life, however, would not be as happy at that of *As You Like It*.

“The wonder is that with life as insecure as it must have been in his time he, and others of his contemporaries, found so many expressions for sheer enjoyment of it.” This conclusion is drawn by **Erik Frykman** in *Aspects of Shakespeare*.²⁴ I am inclined to agree – with the exception of the word “wonder.” I don’t regard it as a wonder, but as a psychologically natural reaction, not very unlike the phenomenon of gallows humour. The same attitude to danger is to find in the uneasy aristocrats’ interest in comedies like *As You Like It*.

20) The fact that Shakespeare was well familiar to the bloody history of his country, is apparent in his historical plays, from King John to Henry VIII.

21) Rystad, Carl-Göran: England från Elisabet till Cromwell, *Bonniers världshistoria 11: Furstarnas tid*, Stockholm 1990.

22) Meurling, pp 163 and 166-72.

23) *Groundbreakers: Sir Walter Raleigh*

24) Frykman-Kjellmer: *Aspects of Shakespeare*, p 34

The forcing of people from the countryside to the city contra The romantic tradition of pastoral poems and plays

High society was not the only group feeling threatened. Another advantage that had its price was increasing wealth. The growing industries led to a stream of people looking for work from the countryside into the cities. Old values were put to the test by new ways of living and new economic circumstances. This trend, which, more than four centuries later, probably has not yet reached its highest point, had its beginning already in the early 1500s. Many people rooted in rural environment, could not always feel secure to remain in their districts. Peasants had to leave their homes to meet with an unknown future, when landowners concentrated on sheep breeding. The seed of the future industrial proletariat was sown; there is a thread from Shakespeare’s age as far ahead as to the social evils in the mining communities of the 1920s as described by D. H. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

Simultaneously, a romantic pastoral view on country people flourished. Songs, poems and plays about extremely romantic shepherds and shepherdesses were very popular, mostly in high society, but also well known in wider circles. The image of the shepherds, peasants and other working rustic people was very far from the reality of their lives. It seems obvious that the passionate lover Silvius – crying Phebe! Phebe! Phebe! – was created as a parodic image of the hero of pastoral poetry. Phebe, too, has obvious pastoral features, as the romantic but vain and flighty shepherdess.

In fact, the plot of *As You Like It* is taken from a pastoral play, *Rosalynde* by Thomas Lodge. Yet, Shakespeare transformed it in his own manner, enriching it with ironic features and greater depth. He also created two new, remarkable characters, Touchstone and Jaques.

In *As You Like It*, genuine country people are displayed in three ways. Silvius and Phebe seem partly ridiculous and Audrey and William stand out as stupid and still more ridiculous. This one can find astonishing, knowing that Shakespeare himself was of rural origins. **Jonathan Bate**, Professor in English literature, suggests that William, “the tongue-tied country bumpkin,” is a caricature of the creator himself. He points out that “countryman William was born in the Forest of Arden, and William Shakespeare, son of Mary Arden, was born in Warwickshire, where there was a Forest of Arden.” It is supposed that Shakespeare played the part of old Adam. Possibly, he doubled his contribution as an actor playing William’s part; in order to make fun of his origin, according to Bate, and some ironic intention could be underlying: the writer himself, a country boy, “provincial and therefore assumed to be boorish,” became a successful dramatist without a university education.

²⁵

The old shepherd Corin is the only countryman who is presented in a realistic manner. Apart from the fact that he is created as the ideal archetype of a shepherd, he shows a striking, down-to-earth reasoning, mostly in his dialogue with Touchstone, the sophisticated court jester. **Göran O. Eriksson**, the Swedish translator of *As You Like It*, points out that Corin evidently has the sympathy of his creator, wise, ordinary and upright as he stands out, and that Touchstone’s puns are addressed not against him, but against the customs at the court.²⁶ Yet, it is Corin who turns the view upside down, replying: “[...] Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour in the country is most mockable at the court. [...]”²⁷

What kind of environment Shakespeare preferred we may never know for certain, but **Caroline Spurgeon** has found, in a detailed examination of Shakespeare’s imagery, that the life of the English countryside is the theme which occupies him most: “[...] the weather and its changes, the seasons, the sky, sunrise and dawn, the clouds, rain and wind, sunshine and shadow; the garden, flowers, trees, growth and decay, pruning and grafting, manuring and weeding; [...]”²⁸

25) Bate: *The Genius of Shakespeare*, London 1997, pp 7-8.

26) Eriksson: *Comments, Som ni vill ha det*, Swedish translation of *As You Like It*, Stockholm 1984, p 139.

27) *As You Like It*, Act III, Scene II: 44-47.

28) Spurgeon: *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, London 1935, p 44.

Shakespeare's contemporaries' conception of the world, their moral and philosophy, their myths and imaginations; the cultural change between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

The pastoral idea mentioned above was not a unique phenomenon of Elizabethan England. It existed already in ancient Greece and Rome. For instance, the Swedish translator **Björn Collinder** mentions that Virgil's poems of shepherd life are considered the models for Renaissance pastoral poetry, and in ancient Greece, Dion of Prusa praised the honest, hard-working and contented peasants.²⁹ These ideas are linked to the belief in the healing effect of Nature, that one also of ancient origin. As a result of their belief in the happiness of countryside inhabitants, urban people thought that dwelling in rural realms would be a wholesome thing for themselves as well. The same idea has resounded through the centuries, not to say millenia, and still prevails.

Furthermore, the world picture in Elizabethan England was on its way from the Medieval to the Renaissance level of consciousness. According to Medieval belief, the earth was the centre of the universe, surrounded by the spheres of the moon, the sun, the planets and the fixed stars, and beyond it all was Heaven. All this was created by God about five thousand years earlier and was destined to have an end. In the second half of the sixteenth century some astronomic discoveries were made by Copernicus, Kepler and Tycho Brahe, but the radical change of the world picture was not a fact until 1610, when Galilei's work was published. By that time, Shakespeare's activity as a dramatist was finished. Yet, it is possible that he knew something about the Copernican system.

A parallel was drawn between the cosmos and the human beings. As cosmos had its fixed order, so should it be in society. Everyone has a special place, fixed from life's start, and special duties to fulfill. With the Renaissance new ideas about the individual became gradually known and assimilated. Naturally, there was a time of struggle between old and new ideologies. Shakespeare, who happened to live in this period of renewal, shows in his work features from both eras. We can see this in his created characters, all of them strikingly individual personalities. Sometimes they change in a sudden or incredible way, but they never become stereotypes. This is an obvious feature in the comedies, where, for instance, women are disguised as men and behave like them.

Though far-seeing and searching for knowledge, Shakespeare was also firmly rooted in the Medieval way of thinking, a conclusion easy to draw from many details in his plays. Among other things, the plays show that he was familiar with the belief in the four humours of temperament - the blood, the phlegm, the yellow bile, and the black bile - but also well informed about contemporary medical treatment.³⁰

Simultaneously, the plays contain a diversity of thoughts and ideas, some of them strange

to the Elizabethan establishment. With regard to forward-looking consciousness,

Shakespeare was ahead of most of his contemporary countrymen as we can trace

in his plays. His awareness of health matters, for instance, was a modern mindset compared

to those prevailing at the time. The same thing could be said about his unusually strong

compassion for animals as displayed in Jaques' and Duke Senior's attitudes to the wild

deer in the forest.

Among the myths that flourished in England since a long time back, those of "old Robin Hood" and "the Golden Age" are mentioned in *As You Like It*. It is Charles, the wrestler, who makes the comparison, telling Oliver about the life of the banished men in the forest. The adventures of the outlaw hero Robin Hood, an old English symbol of freedom and fairness from the twelfth or fourteenth centuries³¹, was a well known and appreciated folklore legend. It is also known that plays on Robin Hood were staged in 1598 by the Rose Theatre.³² The Golden Age is an ancient myth, traced to Greek philosophers, understood as a distant Archaean era, when all mankind lived in supreme happiness, without death, disease, war or starvation - a theme very much appreciated by pastoral romantics. This myth was also well known to the theatre visitors. Everyone had the possibility to form one's own image of these mythical worlds. Thus, the comparisons with Robin Hood and the Golden Age are well suited to the spread of a romantic light over the Forest of Arden.

29) Collinder: *Comments, Som ni behagar*, Swedish translation of *As You Like It*, Stockholm 1962

30) Frykman-Kjellmer: *Aspects on Shakespeare*, pp 26-31

31) Legends and searchings show a great diversity in opinions about the life of Robin Hood. Source: Dick Harrison, *Docent of History: Mannen bakom myten, Populär Historia*.

32) *As You Like It*, Act I: I note 116.

FINAL ACCOUNT

The Forest's influence on the characters in the play

In the past chapter, I mentioned the healing effect of Nature. Shakespeare reflects the idea in *As You Like It*, in the sense that the Forest of Arden changes its visitors to the better. Duke Senior and his lords, men of dignity, used to a comfortable life at court and to being attended by servants, adapted themselves to an existence full of hardships and enjoyed it, exposed to "winter and rough weathe," as Amiens sings.³³ It is remarkable, by the way, that *As You Like It* contains more songs than any other Shakespeare drama, probably due to the spirit of the Forest, too! It seems that the courtiers have brought with them only their best qualities into their new way of life – bad manners are not suitable there, which comes naturally. We can perceive how keen and sensitive they are with each other, how they listen with honest interest to each other's thoughts. The same can be said about Orlando. He treats Adam tenderly, but is also ready to fight violently for food. According to French, he finds that "male" manners are not desirable in the Forest; if you want food, just ask! The Arden Forest is what French understands by "a feminine world."³⁴

To Orlando's eldest brother, Oliver, the Forest brings a remarkable metamorphosis. The selfish, proud, cruel man we met in the first act, gives up his heritage to his brother and decides to marry a woman whom he believes is the shepherdess Aliena and share her modest life. Two events contribute to his change. Orlando saves him from the lioness, taking the risk of being wounded, and Oliver meets Celia-Aliena, who supports his improvement. Yet, could this happen anywhere else than in the Forest of Arden?

To Rosalind and Celia the Forest means freedom: to Rosalind freedom from conventions limiting a woman's activities and behaviour and to both of them freedom from the unpleasant atmosphere at court. In the Forest, the disguised Rosalind is able to "test" Orlando and meet him in a way that would be impossible elsewhere. Besides, the young women have shown good character and loyal friendship before they left the court – but in the Forest, their qualities are allowed to flourish. "Now go we in content/ to liberty, and not to banishment".

Touchstone, the court jester, patronizingly but kindly-protectingly treated at the court,³ gains encouragement in the Forest. Here he is seen as an equal, and his sophisticated mocking conversation is appreciated. Like Feste in *Twelfth Night*, he has the fool's unique privilege to express a stranger's perspective.

Duke Frederick, the desperate and suspicious usurper and tyrant, is the most metamorphosed of them all. Is it quite magical that he, just as he reaches the outskirts of the Forest, turns good at once and decides to stay with the hermit as a humble disciple.

Jaques, the odd man among the lords, the melancholic philosopher, discovers new material in the Forest for the gaining of knowledge. If his melancholy has been a pose according to fashion, it grows more serious, and at last, impressed by Duke Frederick's conversion, joins the hermit company in hopes of getting a deeper existential insight. When the Duke and the lords return to the court, he remains in the wilderness.

The original inhabitants of the Forest are remaining, too, for natural reasons, and their daily life, work and pleasures go on as before. They need no change, because they were born in the realm of the Forest and are formed by its atmosphere and mentality.

Yet, are all these metamorphoses supposed to evidence the healing effects of Nature? Is the Forest of Arden identical with Nature?

Returning to French, I pay attention to her conclusion that the realm of the Forest of Arden is a "realm of emotional life, not of Nature." Ekerwald and Latham point in the same direction. Furthermore, returning to Kott and Zern, I consider their remarks on the forest as a "stage and a classical hideout for outlaws" (Zern) and "escape, escape from a cruel kingdom" (Kott).

Thus, the qualities of the Forest, according to French, Ekerwald, Latham, Zern and Kott, might be of a more mixed origin. Duke Senior and his lords are refugees, this means out of established society, which means freedom from all its duties. In such circumstances, one is free to find new ways of self-knowledge and self-fulfillment. It means also freedom from the tyranny of time. "There's no clock in the forest," Orlando replies to Rosalind, and that is true (even if the jester owns one); but Rosalind³⁶ shows in similes how irregularly time is going on, sometimes fast, sometimes slow.

Agnès Latham defends the virtues of the Forest against those who don't take the Duke's and his company's estimate of the Forest seriously. To their claim that the men returned from it as soon as they had the chance, she replies that they are conscious of their responsibilities. They are, according to Latham, "escaping but no escapist."³⁷ If the Forest has changed them, it is for the better. They have been brought face to face with all the features of the wilderness and endured it. Once brought through such a process of maturity, they might have gained lasting insights into life and the ability to put them into practice.

Latham also points to the good human influence in close co-operation with the natural environment: [about the wild woods] "The Duke's little commune will civilize them, and so does Corin's careful husbandry."³⁸ Here, Duke Senior and

Corin may stand for positive, humble attitudes to Nature, in contrast to those who thoughtlessly devastate it. Also in this case, they have parallels in people of the present day.

33) *As You Like It*, Act II:V. [Amiens sings.] *Under the greenwood tree, / Who loves to lie with me, / And turn his merry note / Unto the sweet bird's throat, / Come hither, come hither, come hither. / Here shall he see / no enemy, / But winter and rough weather.*

34) French pp 30-35, 95-96. French's theory also applies to comedy as female: expansive, describing the web of life, emphasizing solidarity, and tragedy as male: concentrated, goal-directed, emphasizing power. *As You Like It* is a good example of comedy according to French's definition.

35) Agnes Latham has put a detailed explanation of the attitude to "fools" in her introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of *As You Like It*, London 1975, pp lv, lxxiii-lxxvii.

36) *As You Like It*, Act III:II, 295-96

37) Latham, p lxxxv

38) Latham p lxx

What is the Forest of Arden? Diverse views on Shakespeare's work

An all-embracing view of Shakespeare's work, also concerning the comedies and their "stages", is presented by **Kiernan Ryan**, Professor of English Language and Literature. In his book *Shakespeare*,³⁹ Ryan criticizes some other critics, overthrowing, generally expressed, two ways of reading Shakespeare which, according to Ryan, point in the same direction through shallow diversity. The one, an old and prevalent view, rooted in earlier scholars' canonizing doctrines, is concerned merely with reading Shakespeare in his historical context, and the other, a modern one, ignores history and strives to interpret Shakespeare's work to fit some idea of the critic's own. Ryan, on the contrary, finds a point in reading a Shakespearean text as "not a final product of its age, but a productive practice of both its moment and our own."⁴⁰ He recommends "a genuine dialogue, which permits our present situation to re-read itself in the light of the past, and the past to be construed anew in the light of the present."

Concerning the comedies and romances, Ryan refers to some critics who maintain that the alternative worlds in Shakespeare's comedies – like the Forest of Arden, the fairy-populated forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Illyrien in *Twelfth Night* or the post-war, idyllic Italian landscape in *Much Ado about Nothing* – are created to disappear again, in order to strengthen the established society. Against them, Ryan argues that the comedies have an encouraging effect, making people observant of possible ideals and wishes, pointing at their qualities to "create opportunities to explore the way the world might look and feel with the dead weight of prevalence and probability lifted from its shoulders."⁴¹

This conclusion can be added to the others as a positive view on the Forest of Arden and, besides, on Shakespearean comedy world as a whole. I have already mentioned the positive views of French, Ekerwald, Latham, Zern and Kott. Even Kott, the one with the darkest visions, defiantly states the acknowledgement that "one must try to escape, although there is no escape." Bloom declares shortly that the Forest of Arden is "simply the best place to live, anywhere in Shakespeare." Bate mentions the play, yet more shortly, but apparently as something edifying or encouraging, saying that generations of men and women "have felt good at the end of *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*"⁴² and telling us that "in Spain, anti-Franco productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* emphasized the power of youths to go against oppressive parental will and achieve freedom in the magical world of the forest."⁴³

Only Meurling, the historian, claims that the visitors estimate the Forest merely as long as they are bound to stay there, making a virtue of necessity. Concerning Jaques, Meurling describes him as a comic, snobbish highbrow, far from the melancholic character which is often conceived as his image. Here, I cannot help comparing Meurling to Jacques; like the latter, he stands out among the others, maintaining a dissentient opinion. To me, believing that comic and serious sides do not necessarily exclude each other, Jaques appears as both comic and serious, yet with emphasis on the serious side; more honourable than mockable. His concern about the animals and his engagement in ex-Duke Frederick's conversion seem to me like genuine attitudes.

39) Ryan: *Shakespeare*, Third Edition, London 1989-2002.

40) *Ibid*, p 15

41) *Ibid*, p 102

42) *Ibid*, p 159

43) *Ibid*, p 223

Where is the Forest of Arden? Back to my own experience

In summertime, simultaneously as I prepared this essay, I studied Flora and Fauna. For five weeks we went to meadows, woods, hills, heaths and seashores, studying insects and wild flowers under the guidance of our teacher. It was an amazing world into which we got an insight, but the whole time the Forest of Arden was in my mind. In my imagination, the

teacher was the banished Duke, and we, the students, were his affectionate lords, accompanying him into the wilderness. Any time we had our lunch unpacked in a glade or on a river bank, it occurred to me that a desperate Orlando would appear, crying: Forbear, and eat no more! When we were chasing and collecting the insects, I felt pity for them, remembering Jaques' concern about the hunted deer in the Forest of Arden. As we discussed the animals and flowers, the exiled men were on my mind again. There were, of course, lots of animals and flowers in the Forest of Arden, and I am sure the men had many interesting dialogues about their nature discoveries. True Renaissance men as I believe they were, they must have been curious about everything that came into their sight.

That is to say, in my consciousness the Forest of Arden still exists, not only in Shakespeare's comedy. At the end of the play, we are still unaware of what will happen later. The end is open, I would say. It is likely that the creator invites us to ponder over the following course of events. How lasting is the change when the refugees are back in their old realms? Can they keep the wisdom and insight alive, that they learned in the Forest? How will Duke Senior rule his dukedom? Will Oliver and Celia stay in the cottage as shepherds? There is no end, in fact, to this play. There will always be matters for returning thoughts.

The idea of the healing natural life is still of vital importance in our time. Urban people seek recreation in the country, some of them for short sojourns, others to settle there, trying to share the conditions of the original inhabitants. I have seen the phenomenon, and I see it now, in my home community; in my close surroundings I can easily find a Corin and a Duke Senior and observe their various ways of managing their lives. Such lines of thoughts indicate that I have assimilated the whole plot.

Thus, where is the Forest of Arden? After studying various texts concerning the Forest, I would say that it exists where human beings are free in their feelings, thoughts and behaviour, enjoying nice, enriching, developing company, supporting, amusing, comforting and encouraging each other – and where “bad guys turn good”. Shortly: The Forest of Arden exists – and even if the state of things were so bad that it did not exist geographically, it would still exist as long as it exists in our minds.

Sources:

Books, essay and film quoted or mentioned in the essay:

- Bate, Jonathan: *The Genius of Shakespeare*, London 1997
Bloom, Harold: *Shakespeare – The Invention of the Human*, London 1999
Ekerwald, Carl-Göran: *Shakespeare – liv och tänkesätt*, Stockholm 1998
French, Marilyn: *Manligt och kvinnligt i Shakespeares diktning (Shakespeare's Division of Experience)* 1981
Frykman, Erik – Kjellmer, Göran: *Aspects on Shakespeare*, Stockholm 1970
Kott, Jan: *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, London 1965
Lamb, Charles and Mary: *Mycket väsen för ingenting och andra av Shakespeares dramer berättade för barn*, Stockholm 1928
Lawrence, D. H.: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, London 1928
Meurling, Per: *Shakespeare*, Stockholm 1952
Ryan, Kiernan: *Shakespeare*, London/Basingstoke 2001
Rystad, Göran: *England från Elisabet till Cromwell, Bonniers världshistoria 11: Furstarnas tid*, Stockholm 1990
Shakespeare, William – Latham, Agnes: *As You Like It (The Arden Shakespeare)* London 1975
Shakespeare, William: *Som ni behagar (As You Like It)*, övers. Björn Collinder, Stockholm 1962
Shakespeare, William: *Som ni vill ha det (As You Like It)*, övers. Göran O. Eriksson, Stockholm 1984
Spurgeon, Caroline: *Shakespeare's Imagery*, Cambridge 1935
Zern, Leif: *Ålskaren och mördaren – Shakespeare och den andra spelplatsen*, Stockholm 1984
Harrison, Dick: *Mannen bakom myten, Populär historia*
Det brinner en eld, Swedish film by Gösta Stevens-Karl Ragnar Gierow-Gustaf Molander, SF 1943
Other works by William Shakespeare:
A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Adoo for Nothing, The Tempest, Timon of Athens, Twelfth Night
By Thomas Lodge: *Rosalynde*

Other books and texts of importance for my studies:

- Draper, R.P.: *Shakespeare, The Comedies*, London 1999
Frykman, Erik: *Shakespeare*, Stockholm 1986