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“Painting the [Forest] Red”: Conquering the Pastoral in *As You Like It*

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Abstract

This paper argues that Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* illustrates the necessary misappropriation of nature embedded within a successful pastoral narrative. Although the play is often qualified as one of the purest pastorals, nearly all of the play’s pastoral elements involve either appropriating or exploiting the green world of Arden. From the moment the characters arrive in Arden, they remain set on projecting art into a naturally artless place. Examining the play from a post-colonial standpoint reveals that the character’s negative environmental impact on the space is informed by the overarching colonial mindset of England during the late Elizabethan era. A green world is only natural before human arrival, but as humans have preconstructed, city-influenced notions of the green world, and more largely, Eden, as the utopian ideal, characters can never experience the idyll pastoral space without inserting themselves into it through city art and culture. Ultimately the play reveals the dormant artificiality implicit in any human conception of natural space, and moreover, implies an unattainable (con)quest of and for a prelapsarian world.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Pastoral, Post-colonial, Ecocriticism, Nature

“So the city became the material expression of a particular loss of innocence—not sexual or political innocence but somehow a shared dream of what a city might at its best prove to be—its inhabitants became, and have remained, an embittered and amnesiac race, wounded but unable to connect through memory to the moment of the injury, unable to summon the face of their violator.” - Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day*

It would not be for another three-hundred-fifty years after *As You Like It*'s first performance in 1598 that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer would confront an unexpected world on the rise of totalitarian fascism in the 20th century¹. Rooting their analysis in a critical reading of the Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer outline various fascist control mechanisms used to establish a monoculture of dominance that reinscribes the behaviors and practices of individuals within that system. And while the world they describe may appear nothing like the world of the late Elizabethan England, the two were really not all that different. “Nature,” Adorno writes, “in being presented by society’s control mechanism as the healing antithesis of society, is itself absorbed into that incurable society and sold off” (Adorno 119). Just as nature functions during modernity as the panacea for all society’s wounds, it too does just the same for early modern England, and more interestingly, for the entirety of the pastoral genre. *As You Like It*, arguably Shakespeare’s purest pastoral, displays characters not necessarily retreating to nature for the sake of experience, but rather to reconstruct a societal membrane that mimics that of the court, but one constructed entirely through art. While the implementation of art in *Arden* may primarily draw ecocritical complaints, their art serves as a symbol of their

¹ While the actual date of *As You Like It*'s first performance remains unknown, it is largely agreed upon that the play was most likely written between 1598-1600, with the first production taking place soon after. Shakespeare’s Globe theater did not open its doors to the public till late 1598 or early 1599, so *As You Like It* is considered to be one of the first plays which would have graced its stage.

society and culture, and therefore its projection within Arden implies a colonial agenda implicit within the pastoral quest. While fascism may have been an unknowable, distant speck while *As You Like It* was performed at Shakespeare's Globe theater, the fascist operation of creating the illusion of freedom through artistic expression eerily mirrors the pastoral experience within the fictional world of Arden and even the Globe itself. The pastoral process as seen in *As You Like It* illustrates not only how nature is appropriated and exploited by the colonial pursuit, but also presents a question: is the individual freedom of the pastoral really "a true thing" (AYLI 3.3.14)?

To examine the undoing of the pastoral in *As You Like It*, I will begin by establishing the mindset of various city characters as being inherently colonial and exploitative. My understanding of the pastoral will be one that seeks to specifically understand the green world as a symbol of a prelapsarian world, most directly related to the original home of Eden. I will argue that all of the play's figures, even those best positioned to break free of the trappings of the city, approach Arden with a desire to dominate it. Using this understanding to ground my reading, I will give specific attention to how several characters, namely Orlando and Duke Senior, use the ostensible freedom of Arden in an attempt to fashion the forest itself as a kind of Edenic art space, but inadvertently destroying any potential to exist as such a space in the process. Paying close attention to the play's preoccupation with artistic representation allows me to critically consider *As You Like It's* stance towards theater itself. Doing so reveals how theatrical representation itself is complicit in the play's depiction of the pastoral as conquest, and on a larger scale, England's colonial project. Ultimately, I will argue that the play reveals these to be an unavoidable deficiency of any pastoral narrative, as the pastoral mode is always already subject to the discourses it is trying to escape.

The Pastoral (Con)Quest

As I will argue, moments of appropriative exploitation can be found throughout the play dangling from the tongues and fingertips of all the city characters. Perhaps the best place to start deconstructing the antagonistic relationship between the court and nature is in the dialogue between the fool, Touchstone, and the shepherd, Corin. When Corin questions his opinion of the shepherd's life, Touchstone, in a series of conditional statements, praises the forest life for what it is but just as quickly laments it for what it is not. It may be considered a "good life" as an isolated integer, but once classified as a shepherd's life, "it is naught" (*AYLI* 3.2.13-4). Just the same, a life "in the fields" may very well please Touchstone in theory, but as he knows "it is not in the court," the shepherd's life falls short of expectation (*AYLI* 3.2.16-7). While Touchstone has yet to turn his generalized disapproval towards Corin, his statements, and specifically his peculiar choice of delivery, reveal the disapproval that roots his ostensibly objective conclusions about country life. This structural formatting suggests that this professed appearance of general distaste for forest life is permeated by a predisposition to reject anything that can be compared and subsequently qualified as divergent from the familiar. Touchstone abstractly sees no problem with the customs, traditions, and location shepherd's life—he even goes so far to suggest he may enjoy it—and the second half of each of his statements reveal that the real drawback of the life is that it is not a mirror image of the world he is accustomed to. Touchstone can only ever comprehend the forest and shepherd's life based on his pre-existing scheme of what life is meant to look like. And while it may initially seem to merely be an expression of a personal desire for familiarity, Touchstone soon makes it clear that not only can he never enjoy the shepherd's life as it exists in contrast to the court, but in diverging from life as he likes it, it can never be the right way to live.

The casual dialogue between Touchstone and Corin quickly turns hostile after Touchstone bluntly claims that Corin, having revealed himself as never having been at court, is “damned, like an ill-roasted egg all on one side” (AYLI 3.2.32-3). Although this specific comparison to a poorly cooked egg may seem tangential in light of Touchstone’s overarching assertion of Corin’s imminent perdition, the simile shows how Touchstone assumes that a life lived solely in the solidarity of the forest ruins people, regardless of how they live it. Shepherds who have never ventured far from the treeline have been charred by a lifetime of “wicked manners” and incivility as they have never been exposed to the correct way of conducting oneself, or in other words, the customs of the court (AYLI 3.2.27). Corin, still with more sense to grasp the illogicity of a monocultural world, retorts that Touchstone is mistaken, as the “good manners of the court as ridiculous in the country as the behavior of the court is most mockable at the court,” but Touchstone still refuses to dissent (AYLI 3.2.39-41). Even after Corin cites irreconcilable differences of opinion in an attempt to close the argument, Touchstone still continues because it is not enough for him not to be wrong—he must prove himself and his way as the dominant way of life. The very existence of an equally “moral” alternative seems to delegitimize the status of the city as a “neutral” that supersedes all other moral schema. Touchstone’s understanding of the court life as both the positive and neutral parallels itself to the way we configure the concept of gender. Theorist Simone de Beauvoir famously observes that the “terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only a matter of form,” as “man represents both the positive and the neutral” and women are left to be defined with “limiting criteria, without reciprocity” (21). Just as women become outsiders within a linguistically “neutral” *mankind*, the shepherd’s life (and really any life aside from that of the court) is othered

by existing characters who presuppose their own existence as the objective neutral, and therefore, the “natural” way of life.

While the dispute ends with the arrival of Rosalind in the guise of Ganymede moments later, it is not before Touchstone offers one more charge against Corin—the sinfulness of his labors:

That is another simple sin in you: to bring the ewes and the rams together and to offer to get your living by the copulation of cattle, to be bawd to a bellwether and to betray a shelamb of a twelvemonth to a crooked-pated old cuckoldy ram, out of all reasonable match. If thou beest not damned for this, the devil himself will have no shepherds. I can not see else how thou shouldst scape. (*AYLI* 3.2.67-73)

The antagonism behind Touchstone’s remark should at this point come as no surprise. By refusing to accept Touchstone’s and the court’s customs as the singular way of life, Corin has launched an attack on the status of court life as the presumed neutral, and so the issue has become personal. Corin may believe himself to be a “true laborer,” but the trees of his labors yield nothing more than sinful fruit, at least insofar as Touchstone is concerned (*AYLI* 3.2.63). Conflating the expectations of human marriage with the breeding of sheep as Touchstone does is a failed attempt to dissolve the distinctions between human and animal to reveal a shameful illegitimacy of the shepherd’s existence in favor of a proper court life. If we are to begin taking animals’ desires into consideration when determining the extent of sin, what are we to take from the “big, round tears” which “coursed one another down [the] innocent nose” of a deer slaughtered by Duke Senior and his companions, the first of the city characters to arrive in Arden (*AYLI* 2.1.39-40)? Touchstone’s retort is hypocritical at best and clearly used to delegitimize the shepherd’s life as a viable and acceptable counter to court life.

Although the sentiment behind it is one based in hegemony and absolutism and is fundamentally wrong on a moral and ethical level, the construction of the dialogue invites us to consider the way Touchstone's observation is not entirely inaccurate. Touchstone may be using the imperialist mindset to assert his way of life as superior to Corin's, but the shepherd's lifestyle would not even exist to be overpowered if they had not first claimed the forest as their factory and the animals as their workforce. The genre trope of "natural" shepherds within a pastoral narrative is so normalized we often forget they do not really belong there either. While Corin may (appear to) be more natural than Touchstone and the other city characters who so openly exploit Arden, he still actively participates in the exploitation of the forest, just merely in a different form. What Touchstone and Corin both fail to understand is that the customs of court and forest life do not exist pinned against one another within a binary system, but rather both cultures exist dialectically within the space of Arden in terms of how much each affects the space. Moreover, while they bicker away over what qualifies as sinful living within the forest walls, sheep are sheared, cows are milked, and deer shot dead all in the comfort of their own nature's den.

My reading of the dialogue between Corin and Touchstone invites us to take a more critical stance towards the actions of other city characters in Arden. To move to a more concrete social sphere, the political dimensions of the migration from the city can be understood through an examination of Duke Senior's actions while inhabiting Arden. Whereas Touchstone's debate with Corin functions as a representation of the colonizer mindset, Duke Senior's actions model the weight of exercising that same politically-charged mindset in a world not one's own. In referring to the city characters' habit of interpreting their happiness within Arden "in terms of Elizabethan political values such as freedom, counsel, and consent," Paul Zajac directly refers to

Arden as “Duke Senior’s pastoral counter-court” (325). While this rhetorically apt phrasing may go unnoted lodged within Zajac’s larger observation, it is still incredibly important because it is precisely the issue. The very phrase “pastoral counter-court” implies a court created in natural opposition to the city court. For Duke Senior, Arden *is* his attempt at a “pastoral counter court”: an opportunity not to reimagine the court, but to use his imagination to reconstitute the world taken from him in a new, pastoral setting. It is a chance not to begin anew, but to bring back what once was. If the “counter-court” offers the Duke and his companions more “freedom, counsel, and consent,” it only does so by simultaneously infringing upon the “freedom” of the forest and the life that grows within it. As Zajac observes, “characters repeatedly associate pleasure with a tyrannical exercise of power over another” (310). For the city characters, and particularly Duke Senior, the notion of pleasure is so far embedded within the possibility of their own contentment they fail to even recognize it. Their entire understanding of happiness is based on recreating that same oppressive system once used to repress themselves and others in a new place, and by that, recreating that same endured oppression and imposing it onto a new place and “society.” Utilizing the lexicon of the court to term deer as “native burghers” and Arden as a “desert city” as the Duke does allow him to rhetorically reproduce the “city” for him to reinhabit and the citizens for him to rule over (*AYLI* 2.1.23).

Of all the play’s characters, Jaques’ role is perhaps the most interesting in terms of the play’s colonial formulation because he exists in disjunction with the actions of the other characters. Jaques is notably marked as a traveler, and one specifically having traveled inland.² As such, he not only is poised to provide the only real instances of individual, multi-faceted subjectivity, but is also the character most poised to escape the colonial discourse. While Duke

² In an explanation from Leah Marcus, “inland” is defined as “being distant from port cities and the diversity of accent and nationality that accompanies international commerce” (5).

Senior suggests that they may go out “and kill [some] venison” for food, Jaques weeps for the dying deer, appalled by the Duke who chooses to “fright the animals and to kill them up in their assigned and native dwelling place” (*AYLI* 2.1.21, 2.1.62-3). Later he pleads with Orlando: “I pray you, mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks” (*AYLI* 3.2.232-3). Jaques repeatedly attempts to denounce the actions of the court characters of the forest, and yet despite his ostensibly refined understanding of the world, he still falls victim to the language of conquest. Jaques, however, noticeably shifts in Act 4 Scene 2 when he comes across the group of the Duke’s lords who have killed a deer. Instead of rebuking them, he suggests that they should “present him to the duke like a Roman conqueror” (*AYLI* 4.2.3). Leah Marcus observes that these antithetical reactions highlight a “stark contradiction between two incommensurable early colonial attitudes: the desire to admire and emphasize with the newly discovered, and the desire to destroy or appropriate it as a proof of conquest” (181). Perhaps realizing the futility in attempting to alter Duke Senior’s pastoral city created in the image of the same tyrannical, political structure which usurped him of his power, Jaques submits to the system of power created in the space.

Is it Arden or Is it Art?

Approaching *As You Like It* from a post-colonial perspective allows us to see a pernicious pattern at work in Shakespeare’s play. Once established, this new understanding allows us to better engage with one the most remarked upon facets of the play: its preoccupation with the relationship between art and nature. From the first moment the play enters Arden, Duke Senior is seen gallivanting with his companions, preaching the ways forest life is superior to that of the city. To ask rhetorically “[h]ath not old custom made this life more sweet/[t]han that of a painted pomp?” as the Duke does suggests that the forest can offer them a desirable transparency

unattainable within the kingdom walls (*AYLI* 2.1.2-3). There is supposedly no artificiality in the forest: the animals and the natural resources are all real and untouched, making Arden, as Alice-Lyle Scoufos notes, “a place that mirrors truth” (Scoufos 218). And while it is true that Arden offers the Duke a chance at his own personal truth through natural “counselors/[t]hat feelingly persuade [him] what [he is],” what actually arises from this truth is confirmation that the forest had little bearing on the Duke’s identity, and instead that it is explicitly his human interpretations of the natural space which actually alter his perception (*AYLI* 2.1.10-1).

A few lines further in his speech, the Duke states that because they are free from their city shackles, they can effortlessly “find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,/[s]ermons in stones, and good in everything” (*AYLI* 2.1.16-7). These lines highlight how the Duke is set on locating art in a supposedly artless place. Moreover, not only is he attempting to bridge the divide between nature and art, his method is a form of art itself. In claiming that there are “tongues in trees” and “books in running brooks,” the Duke utilizes a string of metaphors, a form of linguistic art, to place art within the artless (*AYLI* 2.1.16). In a pastoral, part of the green world appeal is the overwhelming simplicity of the landscape and the lack of postlapsarian conditions poised to jeopardize the delicate balance between natural innocence and courtly artifice. Arden, however, is not beautiful due to its lack of complexity, but for the overabundance of places that complexity could be. It is not the “running brooks” and “stones” that catch the Duke’s eye, but the “books” and “sermons” he deliberately projects upon them (*AYLI* 2.1.16-7). The Duke is unaffected by the understated beauty of Arden, but rather enamored by the idea that human art can be found almost anywhere, even within nature, so long as someone is willing to put it there. Arden becomes misunderstood as this vastly “better” place that can somehow maintain the simplicity of nature while simultaneously encapsulating the complexity of art. In reality, because

of the human tendency to interpret surroundings instead of appreciating them for their lack of unnatural meaning, Arden has been unnatural since human arrival, and this layering of art upon (what appears to be) nature is merely a new appropriation laid atop what was already colonized and lost. When the Duke explains that these sights allow him to see the “good in everything,” it becomes apparent that the “good” he is referring to are the human creations of literature and religion (*AYLI* 2.1.17). Since the Duke is so fixated on the specks of humanity that can be found within Arden, he is never really admiring it for its natural beauty, and the initially tiny specks evolve into an all-encompassing whole of art within the once-natural space. He is simply remaking this new world in the image of his old one. As Albert Cirillo suggests: “the only real reconciliation between the actual and the ideal ... is subjective” (Cirillo 29). Arden, therefore, is not ideal because it is a natural space, but because once stripped of its simplicity by the presence of humans, it is ambiguous enough to allow people to find what they truly desire within it.

While the Duke merely internally inserts art within his surroundings, Orlando takes it further by not just physically altering Arden, but altering it so extensively that it appears not a single space has been preserved. Orlando’s (mediocre) poetry has been literally etched into so many trees that he claims “every eye which in this forest looks/[s]hall see [Rosalind’s] virtue witnessed everywhere” (*AYLI* 3.2.8-9). As he inscribes his poems deep into the bark, any remnants of the tree’s natural truth trickle out from each loving incision. As Touchstone astutely observes when Audrey questions the truthfulness of poetry: “truest poetry is the most feigning” (*AYLI* 3.3.16). In human hands, poetry, and art more broadly, possesses the power not only to construct inaccurate depictions, but to do so in a way that appears genuine. In short, art lacks truth by design. Orlando has no idea if Rosalind’s spirit holds “Lucretia’s modesty,” but he still

writes it within his poetry because “lovers are given to poetry,” and what is said by the lover is almost always “feign[ed]” (*AYLI* 3.2.136, 3.3.18).

Love is understood as one of the most natural things a person can experience; however, individual conceptions of love are, more often than not, socially constructed. Because of the way Orlando glamorizes love within his poetry, it deceptively appears as though he must have known Rosalind for years, when in reality he has spoken to her for mere minutes. The biological attraction which consumes Orlando oddly drives him not to naturally seek out Rosalind to satisfy his urges, but to aesthetically reify those same desires in the form of tangible, love poetry. Moreover, this reflexive reaction illustrates how Orlando utilizes art as an expressive medium to mediate biological impulses. The fact that he believes he loves Rosalind allows him to produce poetry that is indeed a representation of love, just perhaps not an entirely honest one. Love, then, morphs into art itself by way of poetic vessel, and by its attachment to Orlando’s “feign[ed]” poetry, loses its place within the natural (*AYLI* 3.3.18). Like the relationship between love and poetry, the space of Arden is meant to be synonymous with truth, but the space can never be truthful when inhabited by humans because they will never fail to bring along their devotion to artistic creations. The ecocritical implications of artistic expression in Arden draw attention to the mindsets of those who encounter the green world. For all those in the play, the green world is not a place meant to be experienced for itself (if such a thing is even possible in a postlapsarian world), but instead as a place to dominate. Their individual experiences of artistic bliss are necessitated by the subconscious need to be both the protagonists of their own pastoral journey and the protagonist of every journey to come. “Every eye which in this forest looks” includes the eyes of all animals, shepherds, and native court folk to come, and the trees will forever be marked with “[Rosalind]’s virtue” for all those eyes to see (*AYLI* 3.2.8-9). That is, at least until

the animals disappear, hunted for their skin to be made into vellum, like Shakespeare's first folio would be printed on—but even then, the trees and Orlando's poetry will remain, at least until we, as Robert Watson points out, “turn trees into paper, on which professions of love for nature become confessions of crime against it” (107). And, just as the literary forest and its creatures are marred by the characters, our world's nature is simultaneously exploited for the written version of this very play and for the scholars who continue to write on it.

“All The World's a Stage”

While the city characters utilize an array of physical and figurative artistic mediums to reconstitute segments of Arden through an artistic lens, it is the play's recurring gestures towards its own theatrical form that most fully tethers the forest in its entirety to the cultural practices of the postlapsarian world. Individual stones and trees may take on new existence as contrived images of sermons and poetry, but only through theatrical depiction can Arden fully be encompassed and circumscribed to the bounds of human art. The play is very aware of this, and calls attention to its own artistic quality by repeatedly referencing its theatrical form. With the exception of the play's epilogue where the boy actor playing Rosalind steps out of character to directly address the audience, the most notable instance of metatheatricality comes during an exchange between Jaques and Duke Senior. After offering Orlando food for his famished companion, the Duke tells Jaques:

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy:
 This wide and universal theater
 Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
 Wherein we play in. (*AYLI* 2.7.136-9)

On the most fundamental level, this statement illustrates how the Duke understands the world as a “wide and universal theater” and Arden as “the scene/[w]herein [they] play” (*AYLI* 2.7.137, 139). Through this analogy, the Duke is once again attempting to encapsulate Arden by artistic means; however, this time instead of finding art within the space of Arden, he sees Arden (and the world) as the art space itself. The small pieces of art the Duke initially manufactured to “enhance” the space have coalesced into a singular, artistic entity and produced an understanding not of art within the world, but the world in its entirety as art. By equating the space with the artistic mode of theatrical expression, the Duke is implicitly suggesting that like theater, the green world is a space that can offer a person many new roles and scenes. This idea implies that nature itself is merely a blank page on which art is *meant* to be created, and thus the transference of art to the green world is meant to signal freedom through the limitless creative possibilities. The Duke, however, is mistaken because by literally rewriting the green world as art upon entry, any of the freeing characteristics that serve to idealize it are lost at the moment of their arrival. As the green world was already defined and understood as a utopian freedom prior to their physical experience of it, its liberating qualities have already been constructed around a city ideal, and therefore can only ever be understood in terms of the culture of an artificial life.

In response to the Duke’s statement, Jaques keeps to the Duke’s metaphor by structuring his own dialogue in terms of theatrical expression. This rhetorical continuity comes quite surprisingly seeing as Jaques has throughout the play appeared to don the suit of city cynic through his open expression of detest for how the Duke and other city characters have fashioned themselves within the forest. This perpetuation suggests that Jaques, like the Duke, believes Arden can be read as a theatrical space; however, he quickly veers from and replaces the Duke’s optimistic interpretation with a more sardonic outlook. When Jaques retorts that “[a]ll the

world's a stage," he is expressing that although Arden *is* a space of artistic creation, it is no different from any other place because all spaces within the world are set on the same "stage" (*AYLI* 2.7.139). Arden has no more benefit as a space than any other because any freeing advantage to being within the green world is lost when its natural elements are marred by the human art newly embedded within the space.

As he progresses through his speech, Jaques goes on to list how a person will live a total of "seven ages," ranging from the "infant" to "mere oblivion" (*AYLI* 2.7.143, 165). The assertion that life not only has a specified number of sections but that each section remains the same regardless of the individual invites the nihilistic interpretation that life is nothing more than a series of fixed stages that everyone is forced to pass through. Each individual has already been locked into their fate from the moment they enter the world, and there is nowhere to escape that fate if the world as a whole takes part in this lifelong show. The idea that an escape to nature could liberate an individual from the rigidity of their time is hopeful, but as the Duke understands the green world as the setting of their current "scene," he is reinforcing the conclusion that residing within the green world fails to exclude them from this stage narrative they are so desperately seeking to avoid. As such, although Howard Cole is correct in stating that Jaques uses this speech to argue the "vanity and insignificance of human experience," I must disagree with his claim that Jaques' articulate linguistic style depends upon him "ignor[ing] the whole truth, settl[ing] for platitudes, and distorting the small amount of truth his truisms contain" (25). Not only does Jaques' speech expose the reality that Arden, once redefined and coveted as art in the form of theater, becomes wholly unnatural and is essentially the equivalent of any other non-natural place within the world, it simultaneously and implicitly gestures towards the fact that

postlapsarian life, much like the colonial enterprise, inherently rests upon the pursuit of conclusions.

The imperial project is pursued not for the journey to power, but for the accumulated power and capital to be gained as an empire is progressively established and expanded. In the colonial-influenced life of the characters (and as is often true for individuals of our present moment), the “goals” of life can be stripped down and seen as a track-record of linear advancement. One must always be looking to the future and is forever incapable of living solely in the present moment. This search for endings, however, not only annihilates the present, but will forever be an impossible task, with the only exception being the ultimate conclusion every being must face: death. An accumulation of power or goals will never be enough for the hungry hands of people and empires constantly grasping for more, and the only true conclusion one can realistically expect is to return again to what one once was: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (KJB, Gen. 3:19). In terms of the green world, if one can never be entirely “present,” how can one ever appreciate the space as it truly is without past influence of city culture or future aspirations for a more blissful life? The pastoral process reflects not how one can experience the green world, but what can be gained through that experience, fundamentally implying an (albeit metaphorical) individualized colonial pursuit. The “players” within this pastoral narrative and the “players” of our “world too wide” ultimately all find themselves chained to an ostensibly boundless “stage” erected upon a history of acquisitional aspirations (*AYLI* 2.7.140, 160).

The collective instances of theatrical conquest is at much at work outside the world of the play as within it, and much like the ways the characters attempt to create a communal, Edenic experience through the insertion of art into Arden, the continuous framing of Arden in terms of

theater calls attention to the purpose of the audience for the function of the performance itself. Critics have long noted the metatheatrical habits of *As You Like It*, but P. H. Parry places specific emphasis on the role of the audience in an equation consisting of actor (x), character (y), and audience (z): “the z in this formula - the audience in whose presence the play is performed - is not only fundamental to the theatrical experience, but can only consist of real human beings: one cannot substitute puppets or German shepherds or corpses or coffee tables” (2). In short, plays must take place in the presence of people. And as Parry later notes, the audience in early modern English theater played a far more integral role in contrast to contemporary productions where “a play’s actions are bounded by the limits of the stage” (11). For a modern audience, a play stops where the physical stage ends because modern dramaturgical tradition often encourages plays to be produced in such a way where “characters do not acknowledge the presence of an audience” (Perry 11). What is an untraversable wall limiting the actor-audience relationship in modern adaptations was nonexistent in Renaissance productions. With actors directly addressing the audience and nothing but the stage’s edge to divide person and player, Renaissance performances blurred the theater’s space until there was no clear distinction between where the play ends and real life begins. Once a part of the production, the ideologies and cultural practices within the play, through a kind of theatrical osmosis, filter out into the audience whose entire place as an audience is presupposed upon their standing as members of white, English society. Even the groundlings, packed ever so tightly in the cramped pit and lacking the necessary funds to secure better seats in the Globe’s literal classed hierarchy are given the authority as members of the audience to become what Leah Marcus cleverly terms “armchair colonials” as class distinctions briefly dissolve for the play’s duration to establish a singular colonial body (174). Interestingly enough, the motto of Shakespeare’s Globe comes straight from the pages of *As You Like It*: “all

the world's a stage." From the total erosion of space between stage and world, a new space is born - one where "all the world's a stage," and more importantly, where all the stage is the world. With all boundaries between stage and world eliminated, scenes are no longer confined to their artistic role within a theatrical production, and the staging and dialogue which once seemed so far removed morph into legitimate rationale for the colonial project that would "make the world England."

The theatrical osmosis of the early modern stage was not directionally confined to flow solely from stage to auditorium, and just as the public's place within the audience is predicated upon their ability to assume the roles of "armchair colonials," the play's plot, in order to please the audience, is held captive by the cultural pretenses of the world in which it was written. As *You Like It* most clearly conforms to the constraints of its historical moment in its resolution – that is, the mass marriage ceremony that occurs. Although I do wish to call attention to the fact that this pastoral narrative only happily concludes through the city's religious and cultural institution of marriage in the space of Arden, my primary concern in terms of the play's conformity is rooted in the fact that all comedies must end in marriage. It's no surprise that *As You Like It* conforms to the expectation of a matrimonial ending (as any play deemed a comedy must do), especially since the play never veers far from the more joyous nuances of the Shakespearean comedic blueprint.³ This play, like any other, is constrained to the ending permitted by the comic formula, and by extension, held captive and effectively colonized by the preexisting ideals of the Elizabethan social order. Comedy becomes an attempt through marriage

³ This is not to say, however, that Shakespeare never stretched the bounds of comedy. *Measure for Measure*, while ending in a host of marriages, incorporates capital punishment, ethically questionable bed tricks, and attempted sexual coercion throughout, and the tone of the play often results in a lingering feeling of discomfort. The tone of *As You Like It* validates its matrimonial conclusion, but a play like *Measure for Measure* displays that a Shakespearean comedy need not be merry and bright; beneath *As You Like It*'s felicitous overtones, however, lie the dark roots of conquest, and while its appearance may be a merry one, its more sinister reality is drowned out by the blissful banter of characters who have continually exploited Arden to reach their happily ever after.

at a reconciliation with the status quo. The fact that comedies are structurally obliged to culminate in marriage(s) is even more significant as the social institution of marriage implies a transformation from unrestrained individual to half of a socially constructed union. As capitalism begins sowing its seeds in the fleeting roots of feudalism, marriage forces individuals and their disruptive natural drives (most notably, their sex drive) into a partnership necessitated upon endless reproduction of the labor force through birth. Marriages served a utilitarian purpose in keeping the imperial pursuit alive, and its place within the comic formula illuminates the extent to which genre itself could become a propagandist tool for maintaining the social order that fueled this British dream.

Relatedly, the obscuring of the play's more cynical undertones mirrors the mere whispers that discreetly gesture towards its underlying colonialist sentiments. Specifically, during the time that Shakespeare was writing, the intentions of British colonization were never concealed, and other plays like *The Tempest* tend to offer a more accurate perception of England's glaring colonial pursuit. As Deborah Willis suggests about *The Tempest*, "by representing the 'other' in terms that suggest its disruptive potential, colonial discourse also indicates the inherent instability of the colonial project" (1). While a modern postcolonial understanding leaves us far more accustomed to the abusive and divisive nature of colonialism, the idea, while no doubt then still expressed, did not exist in language because the term colonialism was not created until the late nineteenth-century. While the colonial powers within *The Tempest* use the portrayal of the monstrous "other" Caliban to justify the colonial project, the "other," through its classification as a "disruptive" power, aids in establishing a clear binary between 'us and other.' And through this rhetorical framing, not only is the colonial "other" characterized as having enough power to disturb the colonial project, but its clear designation as

an “other” allows for any injustices it faces to be documented within colonial history, admittedly justified by the people of the time.

The colonial project of *As You Like It* is more subliminal because Arden, although consistently extracted from and written over with art for the court characters’ personal gains, is never even remotely qualified as an “other,” but rather an extension of oneself. Robert Watson notes that *As You Like It* was penned in an era “infatuated with recovering some original and authentic reality,” where “gardening manuals boasted of reproducing Eden” (77-8). The green world of the pastoral narrative, if viewed as a postlapsarian substitute for the original home becomes reminiscent of a place which was once ours. It is not the real Eden, but close enough in likeness and proximity for us to grasp. And, in the minds of individuals raised on Europe’s proclaimed destiny to conquer the world, not only is there nothing wrong in overturning Arden for their own desires, it is rightfully theirs for the taking. The colonization of Arden goes unnoticed since the characters fail to recognize the implications of their own actions, and Arden, unlike the “disruptive ‘other,’” has no power to stop it.

Pastoral Through a Lookingglass

At one moment towards the play’s end, Rosalind tells Jaques that “to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands,” and it is this singular comment that manages to fully expose the colonizer mindset which plagues all of the characters (*AYLI* 4.1.20-1). There is no joy in experiencing the green world if the green world has nothing to offer them, and so they must stake their claim into Arden through art to establish the utopian ideal that city culture has ingrained within them. Throughout this paper I have argued that the problem with attempting to represent any natural, Edenic homeland is just that: it will always be only a representation. As such, any attempt to understand, represent, or experience it must do so in a

language and idiom tragically removed from that initial paradise. The idealization and romanticization of the green world nearly always ends in a gentrified space and any sense of pastoral rusticity within the forest is lost, because the pastoral genre itself inherently implies a necessary colonial pursuit. There is a sadness deeply-rooted in this structure, because the further the characters interpolate themselves and their own desires into Arden, the further away from an actual paradise they are. The characters may physically “have nothing” at the end of the pastoral, but what they do have is a “utopia” built to match the court, and it appears that that is just as they like it. And just as the gardeners of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* paint the white roses red to match the color of their kingdom, the characters of *As You Like It* stain the forest with the color of empire to match their life of courtly artifice. You may be able to, as Carroll’s gardeners suggest, always paint the roses red, but the question is: at what cost?

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