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## Regression or Progression: Pastoral Retirement to the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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### ABSTRACT

Based on Joseph W. Meeker's definition of "the comic mode" and Steve Mentz's ecological approach to genre, this article reexamines the appropriateness of reading Shakespeare's *As You Like It* as a pastoral comedy. Although most characters from the court transform—either physically or mentally—into happier figures by entering the Forest of Arden, all except Jaques and Duke Frederick leave the forest for the court after the multiple weddings are promised. If their return symbolizes the final triumph of these characters, the forest appears to have provided them with only a temporary idyllic sanctuary. A patriarchal system, distorted brotherhood, oppressed romantic relationships, and unbalanced humors are, in a sense, corrected by the milieu of the forest. However, with a prospective resumption of former ideas and statuses—exemplified by Rosalind's restoration to her female self and her marriage and consequent submission to Orlando—the play foreshadows the reappearance of old problems and the rise of new challenges after a mostly joyful and anxiety-free life in Arden. Moreover, this human comedy is a tragedy for nature, with deer hunted, trees cut or barked, and woodlands enclosed. The forest would appear as an idealized place if time in Arden were frozen and its natural environment preserved. Hence, *As You Like It* contains elements that undermine the conventional definitions of the genre to which it ostensibly belongs.

**KEYWORDS** *As You Like It*, comedy, ecology, the Forest of Arden, pastoral

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## Introduction

Although Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is often criticized for its dearth of rigorous action and spectacular scenes,<sup>1</sup> audiences enjoy its performance (Bevington). Its popularity probably results from the significant locus, the Forest of Arden, where amazing events occur, although many of them do not occur reasonably, nor are they logically linked. However, Arden is not exactly a paradise.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Arden provides shelter for oppressed or banished nobles, but also threatens both the exiles from the court and the shepherds in the pasture. Arden is a place where the ideal of order or truth is revealed, and is also a setting that Shakespeare employs to display the impact of nature on humans. It is not simply a place where people "are only too ready to leave at the close" (Gardner 65), or which makes us "become aware of Shakespeare's preoccupation with the ideal of order in society" (Brown 157), but is a milieu that makes both the characters and the audience reexamine familiar values. Instead of an ideal locale, Arden is a place where wonders occur and numerous possibilities are presented that challenge beliefs presumed to consolidate an ordered human society. Bearing in mind the particular attributes of Arden, this article reexamines the appropriateness of reading *As You Like It* as a pastoral comedy. While it is "one of the plays which appear at first glance most casual" (Barber 354), it nevertheless is delicate and serious; it becomes an amalgam of frivolity and solemnity, as the comedy renders "both a theatrical reflection of social conflict and a theatrical source of social conciliation" (Montrose 54). The theatrical, ecological, and social issues raised by the play make it complex and intriguing.

The pastoral comic mode presented in *As You Like It* appears impressive. Undoubtedly, the play is replete with mockery as well as mirth and is thus com-

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<sup>1</sup> Compared with *Twelfth Night*, which precedes *As You Like It*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*, which follows *As You Like It*, *As You Like It* is a play that differs in "its dearth not only of big theatrical scenes but of events linked together by the logical intricacies of cause and effect" (Jenkins 41). According to Cynthia Marshall, it is "not a heavily plotted play" (381). Alan Brissenden makes a similar comment: "the central acts of the play particularly have a static character" (46). Moreover, John Powell Ward makes it clear that "The 'action' of reversal, dilemma and conflict, seen as the basis of drama since Aristotle, is knowingly missing" (1). Maurice A. Hunt also talks about "a long-standing camp of critics who have noted that much is said but little performed" in *As You Like It* (51). David Daniell indicates that after the end of Act 2, "everything stops" and "[w]hat follows, instead of plot, is a succession of encounters" (114; see also Jenkins 50).

<sup>2</sup> As John Russell Brown indicates, "Arden is not necessarily or unequivocally the 'golden world' of the people's imagination" (149). Thomas McFarland similarly states: "The Forest of Arden, though a paradise, is not an unequivocal paradise" (102). Further, Brissenden also writes that "Arden is not a golden world, though to those outside it may seem to be" (42). For discussion of the "golden world," see my paragraphs below.

monly recognized as a comedy; however, whether it is pastoral remains controversial.<sup>3</sup> According to Joseph W. Meeker, comedy “depicts the loss of equilibrium and its recovery” (159) and “is concerned with muddling through, not with progress or perfection” (160). Moreover, the main characters in a comedy adapt themselves to a fluctuating environment: “Organisms and comic heroes change their structure or behavior only in order to preserve an accustomed way of life which has been threatened by changes in the environment” (165). Although the play is not entirely comical, it is indeed a comedy (Barber 354). As “[c]omic strategy . . . sees life as a game” and “[c]omedy is the art of accommodation and reconciliation” (Meeker 168), *As You Like It* reveals the game-like life of exiles who manage to survive in Arden. In other words, Arden “renews human society” (Mentz 168) and “survives as an immeasurable enlargement of the universe of comedy” (Charlton 279). As Meeker writes, “The diversity of a climax ecosystem is one of the secrets of its durability” (162). The comic mode in *As You Like It* is delicately represented by Arden.

By taking an ecological approach to genre conventions, Shakespeare’s plays are atypical for his time. Steve Mentz believes that Shakespeare invents renewed narratives to reconstruct the genres of plays. By remodeling old stories, Shakespeare’s plays create “an unfamiliar world” that “would not reject old meta-narratives about Nature, but instead use them as Shakespeare used received genres, as tools that are practical, but also fungible” (161). In Mentz’s view, Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* destabilizes conventional pastoral elements. Even though the play seems to have the features of pastoral literature—“idealized,” “nostalgic,” “unproblematic,” “golden age,” “retreat and return,” and “Arcadian” (Gifford 47-53)—it nevertheless modifies these features. While *As You Like It* is more like a “complex pastoral” than a “sentimental pastoral” (Gifford 53-54), the play is not “antipastoral literature” (54-55), but is oriented toward “postpastoral literature” (45-46, 55-60).

Based on Meeker’s definition of comedy and Mentz’s ecological approach, my interpretation of the genre of the play is in keeping with that of Louis Adrian Montrose—that the play develops its comic mode under the guise of pastoral retreat (33). The play begins with complaints, conflict, and banishment, and hope and resolution appear to be built upon Arden. Nevertheless, in Arden problems persist and new predicaments are found. Although some characters

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<sup>3</sup> While R. P. Draper believes that in the play Shakespeare “compares and contrasts different types of pastoral, exposing their weaknesses without destroying what is good in them” (1), Rosalie Colie considers the play “by no means ‘officially’ pastoral” (245). Further, Paul J. Willis indicates that the play “mocks at pastoral without losing its pastoral quality” (72).

become mature and four weddings and a dance contribute to a happy ending, the play fails to forecast a promising future. After all, with their happiness, most characters will ultimately return to where they were mistreated and, hence, escaped. They do have a peculiar experience in Arden, but their growth mostly relies on artificial manipulation rather than on nourishment provided by nature. Although they look forward to an ideal life in Arden, they must face reality: “What they make fun of instead is what they can find in Arden—pastoral innocence and romantic love, life as it might be rather than life as it is” (Barber 354). Arden may symbolize an ideal, but the prospect of such an ideal life undergoes a series of challenges and adjustments. The place turns out to be a locus that the play uses to reflect its own composition—in other words, the play is “a meta-comedy” (Nevo 181-82). The play is extraordinary because of the existence of Arden and the entry of the characters into the forest. What occurs and what is addressed in Arden make the play self-referential. By ridiculing and remodeling its own pastoral and comic elements, the play reaffirms and reidentifies its own mode, or genre.

### **Arden as a Binary Location**

The Forest of Arden seems an idyllic sanctuary for the exiles from the court. Etymologically, the name “Arden” is a combination of “Arcadia” and “Eden”; thus, it must share a few characteristics of these two locales. People live a seemingly simple and innocent life in Arden. According to the wrestler, Charles, it is like “the golden world” (1.1.79-80)<sup>4</sup>—“the world in the time when no work had to be done, spring was eternal, and animals were not slaughtered, even for food” (Brissenden 41). Duke Senior also considers Arden a wonderful abode: “Are not these woods / More free from peril than the envious court?” (2.1.3-4). The songs by Amiens (except for the one written by Jaques) (2.5) also reveal the casualness and relaxation available in the forest. Arden is indeed a haven for people who escape from the court.

Meanwhile, “Arden” may also refer to two geographical places. It could be the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire (Brissenden 40-41), a place close to Stratford and which must have been familiar to Shakespeare. In addition, Arden is the maiden name of Shakespeare’s mother, Mary Arden. Charles’s mention of “Robin Hood” (1.1.78) strengthens this English association. The name is also related to the Forest of Ardennes in French Flanders (Brissenden 39), as shown in Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, the primary source of *As You Like It*. The fact that some of the

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations are from Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen’s *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*.

characters have French names—such as Amiens, Le Beau, and Sir Rowland de Bois—appears to support this relationship. Moreover, when Oliver discusses his own brother, he identifies Orlando as “the stubbornest young fellow of France” (1.1.94). Thus, Arden as a French setting appears plausible. However, these associations appear “limiting and unnecessary,” in that rather than a real place, Arden is more akin to a utopia, a fictional ideal place, “a fabulous forest where extraordinary things happen” (Brissenden 41).<sup>5</sup> According to what happens in the forest, the name suggests more than geographical sites and literary allusions; it also evokes religious, social, and ecological connotations (Ward 5).

Thus, Arden is a combination of reality and fiction. Like the “other” places in most of Shakespeare’s plays, Arden makes an alternative (and usually better) site when the main characters in the play flee from their native lands and yearn for new experiences. Nevertheless, it is neither home, such as Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice* or Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, nor simply another city, like Mantua in *Romeo and Juliet*. Moreover, it is not a place where men are driven to madness or misery, like the wilderness in *King Lear*.<sup>6</sup> Conspicuously, different from the wood near Athens in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Caliban’s island in *The Tempest*—except for the abrupt appearance of Hymen—Arden is not infused with supernatural powers (Gardner 62), but is a place full of fascinating occurrences without any mythical ramifications. More importantly, the place, though a refuge, continues to remind the characters and the audience of the existence of their society. Hence, like its geographical references, Arden is both realistic and imaginary.

The realistic aspects of Arden are reflected in its close association with human society. Albeit the ecology of the forest, life there is haunted by conventional social values. While the exiles run away from the court, they are not completely released from social conventions: “courtiers bring their urban ideas to the countryside and find that aspects of city life have preceded them there” (Egan 105). Additionally, as Arden has “a clear political structure” (Erickson 25), the pastoral picture appears to be undermined. The social mechanism is still at work: “The courtly decorum of hierarchy and deference may be relaxed in the forest, but it has not been abrogated; the Duke’s ‘brothers in exile’ remain courtiers and servants attendant upon his grace” (Montrose 41). People invariably live under a preserved patriarchal system and harsh landlordism. In Arden, where “a strong

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<sup>5</sup> To free Arden from a precise and confined location, Draper concurs with Brissenden: “Shakespeare’s Arden is neither the Ardennes of France, nor the Arden of Warwickshire. It is a composite forest drawn both from the classical tradition of the Golden Age and from the greenwood of popular romance (especially the Sherwood Forest of Robin Hood and his merry men)” (Draper 11).

<sup>6</sup> For contrasting notions of “nature” in *As You Like It* and *King Lear*, see Mentz.

parental presence” (Erickson 25) is detected, Duke Senior assumes full authority as the leader of his “co-mates and brothers in exile” (2.1.1); his followers are required to serve him and prepare banquets. Also, as the marriage rite (5.4) implies “the social subordination of wife to husband” (Montrose 51), male hegemony pervades the forest. Corin’s identification of his master as an inhospitable man “of churlish disposition” (2.4.71) who is “ready to sell his sheepfarm for gold” (Colie 257) reveals an unfavorable working environment in Arden: “Rather than conforming to the pastoral stereotype of the self-sufficient and idling keeper of sheep, Corin is a daily labourer . . . and can resume his occupation only when the aristocrats buy his master’s farm” (Egan 105).<sup>7</sup> Hence, Arden is not simply a contrast to human society: there is not “a simple antithesis of country and city” in the woodland where “commercial values are penetrating and dislocating the rural economy itself” (Eagleton 91). The pastoral life in Arden can never be completely free from social and economic systems and pressure.

Even the language used in Arden is rather unpastoral. Martha Ronk has noted this aspect of the play: “throughout *As You Like It* the pastoral picture is represented and denied, especially in Act 2, in which the Forest of Arden is constantly interrupted and even obliterated by long set speeches that conjure up the court” (271). Jacques, who appears to be a genuine forest lover, speaks in an artificial language. His words are full of social allusions. When Jacques sees a group of deer run indifferently by a seriously wounded stag, he laments the miserable scene (2.1.56-59). Jacques’s address reveals “the narcissistic self-involvement of his claim to care for an other” (Watson, “As You Liken It” 83). Although apparently expressing sympathy for the dying deer, Jacques is instead thinking about his social position. Subsequently, when Jacques delivers his speech on the seven stages of life (2.7.142-46), he expresses no concern for the forest (Ronk 271). Jacques comes into the forest much earlier than the exiles from the court and decides to remain when the others are ready to return to the court. Moreover, his sympathy for the herd and trees indicates his compassion for nature. However, his use of social language reminds us of human society instead of ecology. Although Robert N. Watson jokingly states that Jacques “would end up writing some good ecocriticism” (“Shadows of the Renaissance” 42), he would probably write it in a “mannered” style (Ronk 270). Gabriel Egan believes that Jacques “cannot apprehend the countryside other than through his courtly mind” (101), so he “equally pierces the natural and the human worlds by showing that they are essentially alike:

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<sup>7</sup> Robert N. Watson interprets the life of the rural shepherds as a suppressed one: “the laws of money, and what Marxism calls alienated labor, are already evident, already resident in this alien forest” (“As You Liken It” 99).

human society is not so different from animal society” (102). Jaques’s language, evidently, discloses his egoistic and anthropocentric perspective.

This artificiality permeates the love relationships in the forest in particular. When Orlando begins to pursue his love interest by writing lousy poetry on the bark of trees, his writing is acutely criticized by both Touchstone and Rosalind. After caricaturing Orlando’s affected poems for Rosalind, Touchstone unrelentingly mocks Rosalind’s love (3.2.86, 88). Although Rosalind is delighted with the fact that someone has written poetry for her, she tells Celia that some of the poems are awfully factitious (3.2.130-31, 133-34). In addition to the awkward meter, the contents revolve around affection and are fraught with anxiety regarding cuckoldry: “The poems of feigning lovers and the horns of cuckolded husbands are the complementary preoccupations of Arden’s country copulative” (Montrose 49). In these poems, love becomes insignificant, but disguise and betrayal are the main concerns.

The folly of love is revealed. One of the songs in the play includes the following phrase: “most loving mere folly” (2.7.185). In each set of lovers, deception or misunderstanding intermingles with love: “someone is fooled or disguised or misapprehended or rendered artificial in a way implying that all this coincidence adds up to something” (Ronk 275). Love at first sight is the obvious absurdity. When Phoebe first meets Ganymede/Rosalind and becomes attracted to Ganymede/Rosalind brusquely, she justifies her impetuosity: “Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?” (3.5.81). Oliver and Celia also fall in love with each other abruptly after they first meet. Orlando believes that the development of their love is incredible; he questions Oliver, “Is’t possible that on so little acquaintance you should like her? That but seeing, you should love her?” (5.2.1-2). Subsequently, Rosalind uses a metaphor to describe this close relationship between Oliver and Celia: “they are in the very wrath of love and they will together: clubs cannot part them” (5.2.28-29). Further, a famous passage by Rosalind reveals the insanity of love: “Love is merely a madness, and . . . deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too” (3.2.295-97). Love in Arden is blind and preposterous. Moreover, disguise helps the begetting of love in Arden. Neither Orlando nor Phoebe knows that Ganymede is a woman in disguise; Oliver is not aware that he adores the daughter of Duke Frederick, who has banished him and deprived him of his estate. In disguise, Rosalind can tease Orlando regarding his vows of love

(4.1.72-73).<sup>8</sup> Playing Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind, she also tells Orlando about the infidelity of men and women (4.1.103-05). Even though her love “hath an unknown bottom” (4.1.146-47), Rosalind still warns Orlando of female duplicity (4.1.115-17). The other two pairs of lovers also bring in courtly conventions. Silvius and Phoebe’s relationship represents “the ridiculous (and perverse) possibilities of . . . exaggerated romanticism” (Barber 365). While Silvius is a typical lovelorn shepherd whose unrequited love appears hopeless, Phoebe is the proud shepherdess who is not moved by Silvius’s pursuit. They are “caricatures of courtly love” (Hayles 65). Next, Touchstone’s “earthy love-affair with Audrey” (Draper 8) embodies corporal or realistic love, and the interaction between Touchstone and Audrey “makes fun of idealized life” (Barber 361). Although Touchstone teases Rosalind regarding Orlando’s love for her, his mocking foretells his infatuation for Audrey, who does not appear to understand his notion of love (3.2.74-77). When he attempts to tell Audrey what love is, he also admits that love is a kind of pretense (3.3.10-13). Subsequently, not satisfied with his poor service at their wedding ceremony, Touchstone expels Sir Oliver Martext (3.3). In addition, Touchstone attempts to win Audrey by defeating William with his wit (5.1). However, ultimately, Touchstone admits that he would like to marry Audrey “amongst the rest of the country copulatives” (5.4.47-48). As a court jester, he mocks and practices courtly love. Both his taunting and his courting display the inanity of love.

Further, social pressure influences not only relationships but also identities. Because of social pressure, both Rosalind and Orlando must ultimately reclaim their original status. Rosalind’s disguise helps her control the affairs in Arden: “Rosalind-as-Ganymede and Ganymede-as-Rosalind—the woman out of place—exerts an informal organizing and controlling power over affairs in the forest” (Montrose 51). Her discourse when in disguise becomes brilliant and influential, but she has to restore her female identity when she wants to marry Orlando. Her final silence is remarkable at the arrival of Hymen (Marshall 384), when Rosalind changes from an articulate young man to a silent young woman: “Positioning herself in relation to father and husband, Rosalind enters the culturally mandated silence of femininity” (Marshall 386). Orlando finally becomes the lord after he has been teased and instructed by Rosalind-cum-Ganymede.

The resumption of their original identities foreshadows these characters’ return to the court. Their stay in Arden is simply an “episodic” experience of a pastoral life; they will return home “which will impose on them the duties of

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<sup>8</sup> For more discussion of disguise in *As You Like It*, see Hayles 64-68.

extended social responsibilities” (Charlton 279). They soon will face reality after preparing to achieve their happy life back in the court: “the visitors to the forest return at the end of the play to the courtly lives that they earlier claimed to have found inferior to country life” (Egan 104). The final triumph results from the recovery of the patriarchal system: “male control is affirmed and women are rendered nonthreatening” (Erickson 19). Once more, the power struggle appears to be an advantage for men. Rosalind is a woman again and will be a submissive, reticent wife to Orlando, who will be the legitimate heir to Duke Senior: “Her possession of the male costume and of the power it symbolizes is only temporary. But Orlando does not have to give up the emotional enlargement he has experienced in the forest. . . . [I]n fact it is the men rather than the women who are the lasting beneficiaries of androgyny” (Erickson 31). While Orlando shall eventually assert his dominance, Rosalind will retreat and hand over the ascendancy to her father and her husband. Ultimately, the women in the play become mute and passive while the men benefit from their final submission.

Arden, therefore, is a locale where reality mingles with fiction, lovers interact with opponents, aristocrats and plebeians live together, the disguised lady is dominant until the final revelation, and the inhabitants are ambivalent about whether to go or to stay. These binary characteristics which typify the place make the conventional values ambiguous. The environment conspicuously exerts influence over those who enter it. Moreover, the transformations that occur in Arden represent the impact of the forest and further its equivocal functions.

### Transformations in Arden

Almost everything undergoes transformation in the forest even though the ending may appear formulaic. While the exiles retain several social conventions, the ecology apparently changes nearly everyone, if not all. In Act 1, the setting is the court, but moves to Arden after Act 2:<sup>9</sup> “It is the flight into the forest during the long second act which effects this transformation” (Nevo 183). Although the description of the forest remains vague, it is still better than the court from where the exiles escape: “What the forest is, is never made entirely clear, although it is obvious that, even with the season’s difference, the forest is a better place than the usurper’s court” (Colie 257). Arden is better than the court because, as a natural environment, it provides unprecedented experiences for the refugees.

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<sup>9</sup> Except for the brief 18 line of Act 3, Scene 1, a scene that occurs in the court, most of the scenes after Act 2 occur in the forest.

Although people in the forest are not completely free from patriarchal authority, they foster congenial fellowship. Charles tells Oliver about the happy life led by Duke Senior in Arden (1.1.77-78). The conflict that Duke Senior and Orlando face in their houses is dissolved in Arden. Duke Senior is free from Duke Frederick's tyranny, and Orlando can leave Oliver's maltreatment behind. In the forest, they both show and win devotion and camaraderie.

Harmonious relationships are also established between lovers and between brothers. The romantic love between Rosalind and Orlando evolves in the forest. Rosalind represents "the office of love to lift mankind to a richer life" (Charlton 283). Their love grows and helps them both become mature. Moreover, the development of this love between them compensates for the conflict between brothers: "In the Forest of Arden romantic love replaces, and thereby almost seems to participate in the antisocial nature of, the darker motif of Cain against Abel that had characterized the action at court" (McFarland 112). Subsequently, the two pairs of brothers are also reconciled. Orlando forgives Oliver and saves him from danger; Oliver decides to bestow his inheritance on Orlando, whom he attempted to suppress and get rid of. Further, Duke Frederick eventually bequeaths the dukedom to Duke Senior, whom he earlier usurped, banished, and even wanted to murder. Thus, Arden is indeed "a world where even real brothers can be brothers" (Colie 259). Reconciled brotherhood, as well as romantic love, has the opportunity to thrive only in Arden.

Meanwhile, the characters of the play blossom in the forest. Remarkably, Rosalind achieves independence in Arden. Her disguise as Ganymede helps her explore experiences that she could never have had in the court. Moreover, she discovers her real self and makes good use of it. As a man, she even establishes her own household within the forest. Thus, Arden is indeed "a place of discovery where the truth becomes clear and where each man finds himself and his true way" (Gardner 65). Without social bounds, Rosalind's disguise releases her from her former predicament of expressing her inner desire. John Powell Ward specifically indicates the advantages of this dissimulation: "the diverse conceptions of disguise, cross-dressing, androgyny and transvestitism break up the straightforward matter of gender concealment into a subgroup of yet further possibilities" (38). It is true that "Rosalind has explored the limits of the magic that her male costume has afforded her in the forest of Arden" (Erickson 18) and that "Ganymede releases in Rosalind her best powers of improvisation, intuition, and witty intelligence" (Nevo 190). Almost everything becomes attainable for Rosalind/Ganymede, and her self-identity is unveiled and brought into full play in Arden. Further, the role of Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind helps her express

inner claims that are difficult for a woman to state and re-create her holistic identity: "In playing herself . . . Rosalind is able to state her own needs in a way she could not if she were simply herself" (Hayles 65). Without this disguise under a disguise, Rosalind would never have been able to achieve better self-recognition.

Among her explorations of these possibilities, Rosalind is able to develop her homosexual inclination. When she is relieved from repression, she is able to return to happiness: "the disguised Rosalind is, or more precisely becomes, the real Rosalind" (Marshall 381). It is interesting that Rosalind uses "the Ganymede persona" to interact with Orlando; this suggests that she wants to integrate her heterosexual love with her homoeroticism: "she does not wish to participate only as a female in a heterosexual couple. She also wishes to be a boy interacting with Orlando" (Marshall 380). In addition, Rosalind's homophile need is satisfied by her attraction to and rejection of Phoebe. Valerie Traub delineates in detail the ambiguous relationship between Rosalind-cum-Ganymede and Phoebe (137-39) and the ambiguous relationship between Rosalind-cum-Ganymede and Orlando (139-40). Traub summarizes the impact of this: "S/he thus instigates a deconstruction of the binary system by which desire in subsequent centuries came to be organized, regulated and disciplined" (137). Rosalind's achievements are marvelous: before she resumes her female identity, she skillfully reshapes or demolishes conventional values and experiments with illicit activities. In her interactions with Orlando and Phoebe, Rosalind never ceases to take advantage of her disguise (Nevo 192-93). Thus, Rosalind not only breaks through the existing social limitations on women, but also probes men's freedom of action in the forest. She exquisitely and successfully integrates her fantasies, and our imagination, into reality in the play.

Although he does not become completely independent, Orlando is able to reach maturity after he enters the forest. In Arden, Orlando finds "love and knowledge" (Brissenden 43) and obtains "manhood and marriage, wealth and title" (Montrose 30). When Orlando first arrives in the forest, he is desperate, helpless, and full of menace. For example, he draws his sword to stop the Duke and his followers from having their meals (2.7.99-101), but his rashness is assuaged immediately by Duke Senior's kindness. Later, after taking lessons from Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind, Orlando confirms his love for Rosalind, and thereafter Rosalind decides to marry him. Further, because he is generous and brave enough to save Oliver's life, he receives his father's inheritance from his brother. These experiences help Orlando become mature, regain connection with his brother, and find his love. More importantly, when he marries Rosalind, he is "socially reborn as heir apparent to the reinstated Duke" (Montrose 38).

Before he leaves the forest, he is a triumphant man who has attained everything that he believed he had earlier lost.

Further, the conversion of the two villains is also momentous. Oliver's "conversion" (4.3.136) is described by himself. Duke Frederick is also "converted" (5.4.134) at the end. Although they both were villains in the court, their entry into Arden dramatically changes them. While both enter the wood to challenge their brothers, they are somehow soothed by the experience: "the usurping brothers spontaneously restore what they took" (Egan 97). They are completely reborn and transformed into kind people. As the elder brother, Oliver is willing to renounce his primogeniture. As a usurping younger brother, Duke Frederick abdicates and returns everything to his banished brother. Then, some "magic" occurs in the forest; hence, "[n]either the duke nor anyone else who comes to Arden emerges the same" (Halio 202).

By contrast, Jaques, a "traveler" (4.1.15) in Arden, undergoes transformation in a very different manner. Different from the exiles from the court, he shows sympathy for the hunted deer from the beginning. Curiously, at the end of the play, when other characters prepare to return to the court, he decides to remain in the forest with Duke Frederick, who has "put on a religious life" (5.4.155). Jaques wants to learn more from Duke Frederick (5.4.158-59). As Watson describes, Jaques is looking for something spiritual, not physical ("As You Liken It" 83). In other words, Jaques's sentiments move from the corporeal to ethereal. His final decision to remain in Arden is significant as this ensures that he will continue to transform himself instead of returning to mainstream society.

In addition to human relationships and individual growth, the verbal expressions in the court and those in the forest are in sharp contrast. The court is fraught with "vicious, disruptive, or inadequate speech—even as pervaded by frustrating silence" (Hunt 60). Duke Frederick's response to Orlando's identity is indifferent (1.2.159-65), and his accusation of Rosalind is mean and unfair (1.2.70-77). Subsequently, when Duke Frederick attempts to seize Oliver's property, his words to Oliver are harsh (3.1.1-12; 15-18). By contrast, in Arden, the discourse is friendly, soothing, and decent. Interestingly, according to Duke Senior, even nature "speaks" in Arden (2.1.15-17). In particular, Duke Senior's tender words to Orlando are indicative of how he is different from his brother. When Orlando, with a drawn sword, threatens Duke Senior and his fellows, and demands that they must not eat their food, Duke Senior responds to him gently; this instantly moves Orlando (2.7.93-96). Then, although Orlando presses on with his menace, Duke Senior cordially offers Orlando hospitality; Orlando is embarrassed and sheathes his sword (2.7.120). While Duke Frederick's cold

words dismay Orlando, Duke Senior's warm welcome impresses Orlando.

The verbal expressions of Orlando and Rosalind also appear to be transformed in the forest. From reticence or inarticulateness to eloquence, both Orlando and Rosalind find vivacity in words after entering the forest (Marshall 384; Hunt 59-60). When Orlando first meets Rosalind in the court and receives a chain from her, he is dumbstruck, even though he has fallen in love with her (Lifson 93). After Rosalind leaves, he blames himself for his own speechlessness (1.2.187). By contrast, in the forest, he begins writing love poems and hangs them on the trees to express his love for Rosalind. When he plays the wooing game with Ganymede as Rosalind, he is also articulate about his devotion to her. Orlando becomes creative and outspoken in Arden: "Granted the expressive possibilities of the pastoral forest, Orlando enlists Nature in creating physical (and so presumably more permanent) words expressive of this love for Rosalind" (Hunt 61). Similarly, Rosalind is not very loquacious in the court.<sup>10</sup> After Orlando leaves, Rosalind remains silent, and Celia teases her about her muteness (1.3.1). Rosalind does not frankly admit her admiration for Orlando to Celia, and even when Celia urges her to admit her true feelings, Rosalind simply answers, "The duke my father loved his father dearly" (1.3.21). Rosalind's modesty and reticence are further confirmed and criticized by Duke Frederick, who warns his daughter Celia to keep away from her (1.3.70-72). To defend Rosalind from Duke Frederick, Celia is more eager and more fluent than Rosalind herself. However, Rosalind's volubility blooms in Arden.<sup>11</sup> Arden fosters Rosalind's "narrative flexibility" (Mentz 164). Compared with Rosalind, Celia becomes much quieter than she was in the court. It is Rosalind who pronounces that they have arrived in the forest (2.4.9). Her conversation with Touchstone shows her wit (2.4.45); her comments on Jaques's melancholy make Jaques a figure that is worse than a fool (4.1.19-20). Then, to censure Phoebe for her rejection of Silvius, Rosalind tells her the very truth: "Sell when you can, you are not for all markets" (3.5.61). Further, and most importantly, Rosalind teaches Orlando how to love through a series of persuasive lessons. As mentioned earlier, Rosalind ridicules the love of both men and women. Her remark that men never die for love (4.1.65-73) and women are changeable (4.1.103-10; 114-17) impels Orlando to reexamine and acknowledge his love. In Arden, both Orlando and

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<sup>10</sup> The only exception may be evident in Rosalind's debate with Celia about "nature" and "fortune" at the beginning of Act 1, Scene 2. For an analysis of this debate and Rosalind's verbal performance, see Mentz 163.

<sup>11</sup> Martha Ronk Lifson believes that language helps Rosalind become mature: "Rosalind . . . comes to adulthood by means of language" (93).

Rosalind become eloquent; they know what they want and express their thoughts and feelings effectively.

Such transformations are only possible in Arden. The freedom provided by the ecology helps improve human competence, personality, relationships, and verbal expression. In addition to the various dualities in the forest, the characters who enter go through a process of transfiguration. Such changes occur very often in a comedy but are unusual in a pastoral. Specifically, the literary genre is swayed by the forces of the physical environment. The ecology of Arden is key to defining the play.

### **Comic Survival in the Forest of Arden**

Because of all these transformations in Arden, the play is very much a comedy. As shown above, the transformations are also characterized by exuberance and delicacy: “Though the comic, ecological view of life may be modest and unheroic, it is anything but simple. . . . Ecology challenges mankind to vigorous complexity, not passive simplicity” (Meeker 168). In other words, the court exiles must attempt to survive in Arden. As they willingly accept their fate, they develop their potential to survive, if not prosper, in the forest. They learn to cope with the situation of living in accord with “the biology of comedy” (155-60): “Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon man’s ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him” (168-69). In this sense, Arden is not only a haven for the people who have escaped from the court but also a place for them to grow. It is not actually a “golden world,” as Charles delineates, but a realistic—albeit idealistic—province. According to Ward, “the silver-rather-than-gold argument” is therefore valid: “That would imply that the foresters are in a naturally fallen world, not a full and golden garden of Eden, but one in which, however, at least the horrors of warfare and urban civilization have not appeared” (85).<sup>12</sup> Because of its advantages and disadvantages, the forest provides for the comic development of the exiles.

However, the inhabitants of Arden have to at least learn to survive in the inhospitable natural environment in which they find themselves. After all, Arden is not a paradise that is free from rough weather: “Arden is not a place where the laws of nature are abrogated and roses are without their thorns” (Gardner 63).

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<sup>12</sup> Colie has a similar observation about this combination of perfection and reality: “this forest is at once ideal and real; the inhabitants of Arden insist that their life is unvaried, as in the Golden Age; but the play works in the rhythms of experience’s human actuality” (258).

Duke Senior admits that they have to suffer “The seasons’ difference” and “the icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter’s wind” (2.1.6-7). In one of Amiens’s songs, “winter and rough weather” is a common phenomenon (2.5.7). Subsequently, “winter wind” (2.7.178) and “bitter sky” (2.7.188) also appear in the lyrics that are supposed to soothe the listeners. When Orlando first arrives in Arden, he complains about “this uncouth forest” (2.6.5) and is afraid to die in “the bleak air” (2.6.10-11). Aside from rough weather, natural dangers lurk in Arden. Orlando’s description of the place as “this desert inaccessible / Under the shade of melancholy boughs” (2.7.111-12) indicates the threats in the forest. Moreover, there are a “green and gilded snake” (4.3.106) and a “lioness” (4.3.112) that intend to hurt Oliver and actually wound Orlando. Thomas McFarland highlights this feature of Arden: “the existence of natural danger in the forest makes it a place halfway between reality and paradise” (102). The perils of Arden make the retreat a place that requires people to strive for survival.

Consequently, to survive, people must derive sustenance from the environment. In Act 2, Scene 6, Orlando and Adam almost die of hunger. For Duke Senior and his followers, deer hunting becomes necessary as a source of food. The comic survival of the characters becomes the tragic ruination of animals such as the deer. Although Duke Senior expresses great sympathy for the hunted deer, he nevertheless eats venison (2.1.22-25). The supposed paradise-to-be becomes another human society in which creatures must live or die to serve human needs. The adverse effects of human requirements lead Jaques to censure Duke Senior for the hunt. The First Lord tells Duke Senior of Jaques’s accusation (2.1.27-29). Like his brother, who has taken his power in the court, Duke Senior deprives the deer of their right to live: “The exile of the courtiers in *As You Like It* bringing with it the necessity to hunt is, in that sense, also a forced return to an earlier form of production and what was formerly the height of aristocratic leisure must be done to survive” (Egan 106). Paul J. Willis distinguishes between two different ethics: “For the Duke, it is ‘this our life’ which *finds* good in the forest; for Jaques, it is ‘this our life’ which *brings* evil to the forest” (68). Unlike the innocent Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, here, it is sophisticated people who impose their needs on Arden and impact other creatures:

[T]he deer, with its human coordinates of feeling, . . . brings the reality of human pain into the forest; and Jaques’s moral criticism, by linking the killing of the deer with usurpation and tyranny, indicates that the forest is not completely divorced from the reality of the urban spectacle. (McFarland 105)

When people from the court find themselves residing in Arden, they alter the ecology of the forest.

This detrimental human behavior collides not only with animals but also with plants. To express his love for Rosalind, Orlando carves his poems on the bark of trees. Orlando's act is described by Rosalind as haunting and abusing (3.2.269-71) and is criticized by Jaques as damaging (3.2.201). The trees suffer because of Orlando's passion while Orlando's banal poems are appreciated only by Rosalind. Moreover, although the shepherds and goatherds in this play do not actually put sheep or goats out into the fields, the existence of these employees in the forest suggests necessary enclosures by landowners. Orlando simply spoils the bark of trees, but the landowners have probably hewed down acres of woodland.

Hence, while Arden provides accommodation, the people living there have a considerable impact upon nature. The conflict between humans and nature arises periodically, thereby creating tension between them. When Orlando first arrives in the forest, he believes that he must survive like a beast (Egan 99). He tells Adam, who is starving to death, that he must strive to live like an animal: "If this uncouth forest yield anything savage, I will either be food for it or bring it for food to thee" (2.6.5-6). However, human nature gradually defeats nonhuman nature (Egan 99), and this victory can also be positive. When Orlando threatens Duke Senior for food, Duke Senior displays his civility and mitigates Orlando's menace. Seeing Duke Senior's kindness, Orlando asks for his pardon (2.7.107-08). Attending the banquet prepared by Duke Senior, Orlando confirms the human culture in Arden, for the banquet "is emblematic of the imposition of civilization on the Forest of Arden" (Draper 9-10). Thus, the exiles from the court bring both harmful and beneficial effects to Arden. On the one hand, the forest and the animals are exploited; on the other, the exiles build a better society in the forest than the one in the court.

Overall, the pastoral life reveals a certain ambivalence. As Touchstone analyzes his situation in Arden, people both like and dislike the life there (3.2.12-17). Touchstone's words display the binary features of life in the forest.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the borderline between man and nature appears fuzzy in Arden. Although man and nature appear to be in conflict, they coexist in the forest: "the play holds culture and nature in tension and refuses to confirm the triumph of either" (Egan 99). *As You Like It* breaks through the traditional demarcation and weaves a complex

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<sup>13</sup> I would borrow the term "comic juxtaposition" from Harold Jenkins, but his use of this term is about the coexistence of "the contrasting elements in human nature" (43).

interaction between man and nature: “this play insistently tests the membrane separating the biological world from human artifice and illusion” (Watson, “As You Liken It” 96). While humans establish an anthropological ecology in the forest, nature also influences human life. With regard to love, Rosalind compares lovers to different animals: “likening Celia and Oliver’s instantaneous reciprocity to ‘the fight of two rams’ (5.2.29-30) and the general exclamations to the love of Phoebe, Silvius, and Orlando to ‘the howling of Irish wolves against the moon’ (5.2.104-05)” (Egan 103). Animals, like humans, need to survive and develop relationships in the natural environment (106-07). In Arden, humans are required to tame nature, but they are also subjugated by it.

In this sense, although marriage is the consummation of love, none of the lovers actually get married in the wood (Ward 80). Two “marriages” are aborted before Act 5 (Ward 81): one is between Touchstone and Audrey under Sir Oliver Martext (3.3), and the other between Orlando and Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind (4.1). Later, the appearance of Hymen is probably *deus ex machina*, and the god does not actually hold a wedding ceremony for the couples. The god comes to “make conclusion / Of these most strange events” (5.4.99-100) and to sing the wedding song (5.4.114-19). Although Peter Erickson believes that “marriage becomes a way of incorporating women since Rosalind is complicit in her assimilation by patriarchal institutions” (35) and that “the effect of the play is to separate them [Rosalind and Celia] by transferring their allegiance to husbands” (129), as the wedding ceremony does not officially take place in Arden, the close relationship between Rosalind and Celia is not *de facto* spoiled. Hence, to claim that “*As You Like It* is primarily a defensive action against female power rather than a celebration of it” (Erickson 37) appears far-fetched. The ambiguity of the wedding ceremony strengthens the idea that Arden is a place that combines the real and the ideal: “[R]ather than the marriages ending the play, the play ends the marriages. . . . That leaves them as a utopian and unexamined future, which can therefore be left as obverse dream to the Golden Age origin and setting conceived for Arden” (Ward 83). All the lovers are together and have committed themselves to their beloved mates, but the promise of the future is suspended as the play comes to an end.

This ambiguity is also present during the time in Arden. Time can either be everlasting or ephemeral in this place; the forest inhabitants may tell the time or lose track of it: “On one side, Arden is holiday, and thus timeless. . . . [B]ut time passes . . . , as we are continually reminded, and men ripen and rot in spite of the lack of clocks” (Colie 258). As a pastoral convention, that “timelessness” is found here (Brissenden 47). Charles states that the exiles in the forest “fleet the

time carelessly as they did in the golden world” (1.1.79-80). People in this world appear to transcend the limits of time and have no worry about it flitting. When Orlando first reaches the forest, he thinks that people in the place “[l]ose and neglect the creeping hours of time” (2.7.113). Subsequently, after Rosalind-cum-Ganymede asks what time it is, he answers, “there’s no clock in the forest” (3.2.230). In addition, in the mock-court scene, before Orlando departs, he tells Rosalind-cum-Ganymede that “[b]y two o’clock I will be with thee again” (4.1.128). Thus, definite time still exists in the timeless forest. In the song of the Second Page, time becomes significant again: “take the present time” (5.3.16). The appeal of *carpe diem* emphasizes the transience of time. Ironically, when Touchstone criticizes the song—“I count it but time lost to hear such a foolish song” (5.3.31)—he also wants to seize the precious time. The characters’ awareness of the evanescent nature of time leads us to reconsider the relationship between man and nature. In the court, time is surely important (Halio 204); by contrast, in the forest time can be occasionally ignored, although there are reminders of it. The time-free Arden is still haunted by acute time-consciousness (Ward 86), and the duration of time varies in the forest: the famous speech made by Jaques regarding man’s seven stages (2.7.142-69) expounds on the limitations of definite time: “Jaques’s speech describes a man in his time playing many parts and suggests that his speed, or ‘pace,’ will vary along with his role; the series of vignettes illustrates the movement of a person *in time*” (Halio 204-05). Earlier in the same scene, Jaques has already expressed his admiration for Touchstone with respect to the notion of time (2.7.22-27). Apparently, Touchstone’s words have inspired Jaques; thus, Jaques composes his lament for a measured time in his analysis of man’s life. Nevertheless, Rosalind’s observation of time breaks through the confinement of measured time. As Jay L. Halio points out, Rosalind “shifts the emphasis from the movement *of a person*, to the movement *of time* as apprehended . . . by the young maid. . . . In this way, she more thoroughly accounts for *duration*, or the perception of time, which . . . is not the same for everyone” (205). Indeed, Rosalind is “Orlando’s time-keeper” (Halio 205). While there are no clocks in the forest, Rosalind reminds Orlando that “time travels in divers paces with divers persons” (3.2.234). She has keener insight with regard to time than either Jaques or Touchstone. Time, indeed, varies from person to person, particularly in Arden. It may accord with time in the human world, but it can either last longer or instantly fade out. This duality of time permeates life in the forest: “the timelessness of the forest world” is in contrast with “the time-ridden preoccupations of court and city life,” and “the juxtaposition is both dramatically and thematically emphasized” (Halio 204). The immeasurable nature of time in

the forest is not only gauged and defined but is also released and expanded.

Finally, the sense of equivocation evoked by nature is revealed in the notion of homecoming. As the marriages do not actually occur in the forest, the exiles do not really go back to the court. The couples intend to get married, and the nobles from the court intend to return to their homes; however, at the end of the play, they remain in the forest and engage with nothing but preparation for the wedding ceremonies. It is interesting to reflect upon the fact that “the characters are banished to Eden, not from it” (Ward 85). Their homecoming, after all, is not a return to paradise. Perhaps except for Touchstone, who once says that “When I was at home, I was in a better place” (2.4.10-11), the other characters plan to go back to the court that they scorned. Indeed, in Arden, “they find refuge, gain strength, learn—and return” (Halio 207). They have to go back, but they have not yet departed. Of course, their return portends certain disadvantages, particularly the loss of Rosalind-cum-Ganymede: “The liberation that Rosalind experiences in the forest has built into it the conservative countermovement by which, as the play returns to the normal world, she will be reduced to the traditional woman who is subservient to men” (Erickson 23). Nevertheless, the regression has yet to come. At least two characters decide to remain in Arden: “Both the usurping Duke and the melancholy Jaques are ejected from, rather than reconciled to, the new society” (McFarland 119). The repentant Duke Frederick has no intention of retaining his dukeship (5.4.133-38) and has “thrown into neglect the pompous court” (5.4.156), and Jaques chooses to stay to learn from the converted duke (5.4.158-59). Hence, Arden provides opportunities for those who wish to be transformed or be different from who they were in the court.

## Conclusion

The “muddling through” of a comedy as defined by Meeker is confirmed by Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Further, Arden is “no ordinary forest” (Halio 203). The forest incubates hope for the exiles, a place “which gives men and women the opportunity to enjoy life, to come to full stature as human beings, yet without turning their backs on everyday life, without succumbing to the noble illusions and false sentiments that are so readily fostered by romance” (Draper 12). People from the court mature in Arden, which provides them with “a means of exploring instead of escaping from life” (Draper 17). Without completely forsaking civilization, people develop their potential to attempt something new: “Shakespeare’s Arcadia offers a further turn: his comic heroine’s own potencies

for the arts of life and love and poetry are explored and tested by a variety of contingencies even while she is testing and exploring these same potencies in others” (Nevo 190). In addition to the growth of Rosalind, other characters are inspired or nudged to a certain metamorphosis.

Further, nature, represented by Arden, exerts a great influence. Paradoxically, while the natural environment is often inhospitable, it also fosters the characters. Although Arden is different from the court, it grants the refugees space to grow and prosper:

The forest . . . shelters a countersociety, idyllic and playful, offering a model of possibility to the real world, a countersociety made up on the one hand by the fictions of a literary convention and on the other by the types of that convention, determined to express the goodness of their natures. (Colie 261)

Curiously, through his art, Shakespeare “invites us to doubt our ability to clearly perceive the exact tidings of the book of nature” (Willis 71), for “[n]ature seems paradoxically artificial, something represented and manipulated through human narrative artifice” (Mentz 170). The play, according to Devon L. Hodges, is “constituted out of conflicting desires: the desire to escape the orders of language and society and the desire to celebrate them” (Hodges 50). Arden has a double effect—nature reflects both the positive and negative features of humans and converts them.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that nature can solve human complications; rather, it suggests that nature offers alternatives. Mentz argues that “Shakespeare’s diverse portraits of nature provide options, if not solutions” (170). Therefore, it is not an ultimate truth, but numerous plausible truths can be found in the forest. This exists in tune with Touchstone’s use of “if” (5.4.56-113) or “supposition” (Lifson 105): “All is accomplished with the help of an ‘if,’ Touchstone’s peacemaker” (Hodges 56). Actually, the word “if” is used 133 times in the play (Ward 63). The notion of the conditional situation diffuses the entire play (see, for example, 2.4.20, 26, 29, and 32). According to Ward, it is used “to explore all the possibilities of human ramification” (63).<sup>14</sup> Touchstone’s words “If you said so, then I said so” (5.4.76) and “Much virtue in ‘if” (5.4.77) highlight the significance of the thesis of possibilities. Arden is a place for people to try and to test. Even when Hymen wants to conclude the “confusion,” he also uses a conditional clause (5.4.98-103). Hymen’s use of “if” does not seem to

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of the word “if,” see Ward 63-67 and Lifson.

reveal the truth but to wrap it within another membrane (Hodges 58). “If” provides flexibility for the play, as “it allows any humanity, any language, yet because always conditional, it is never violent, is gentleness itself” (Ward 67). The play with the merits of “if” becomes adjustable and variable, and adaptability is the essence of a comedy. Apart from these few examples,<sup>15</sup> numerous possible consequences are referred to in words and conveyed by acts.

When Oliver narrates his encounter with Orlando in the forest, he talks about his conversion with an ambiguous identity: “’Twas I. But ’tis not I” (4.3.135). This description of his change “admirably summarizes Rosalind’s reappearance” (Ward 91). Rosalind’s disguise as Ganymede and her resumption of her female identity show the magic power of Arden. Rosalind’s reference to the “old religious uncle” (3.2.259) as “a great magician” (5.4.32) is a clever deception or symbolization of the forest. Because of the setting, the play contains elements that undermine the conventions of the genre to which it ostensibly belongs. To answer whether the play shows human regression toward uncivilized imbalance or progression to civilized stability, Touchstone’s equivocal statement regarding wisdom and folly appears to provide the direction: “You have said, but whether wisely or no, let the forest judge” (3.2.92). The ambivalence of both the characters and the play itself about whether to stay or go remains pending. The judgment resorts to Arden, a binary location full of uncertainties and vicissitudes. Continuous oscillations between regression and progression are, after all, part of Nature’s law.

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Jaques barely uses “if,” and his speech on seven ages contains no “if” at all; Celia, a foil to Rosalind, also avoids any use of the word (Ward 67).

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**Pastoral Retirement  
in *As You Like It***

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