

Shakespeare's Erotic Eden

Cultivating Queer Ecologies in *As You Like It's* Pleasurable Forest of Arden

JOURNAL DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944>
ISSUE DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944/20239601>
ARTICLE DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944/20239601.03>

Jose Monfred C. Sy

University of the Philippines Diliman

Abstract

In response to looming agricultural crises, early modern England saw a spectacular emergence of environmental consciousness, which, while multifaceted, is surprisingly conservation-oriented. The *pastoral*, a literary mode that has been fodder for the academia, offers a means to meditate on humankind's exploitation of the natural world, cultivating an ethos of ecological stewardship that reacts to the anxieties of the period. This paper aims to appraise the idealized vision of nature in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (*AYLI*), a popular early modern pastoral, and to show how it can be relevant to the radical intersectional concerns of modern day environmental discourse.

Getting past a listing of "green" motifs and tropes, I believe that *As You Like It* can be read as a powerful forum for imagining the radical possibility of *queer* nature-building in Elizabethan England. Such nature-building favors the deprivileging of heterosexual couplings in discourses of naturality by dramatizing an ecology of queer relations. Within the pastoral momentum of retreat and return, the play teases the sexual boundaries that gradually crystallized during the Renaissance within a critique of the consumption-driven country, city, and court. While it ends in a comic marriage that signals a return to the courtly world, *As You Like It* demonstrates new modes of harmonious living among and across species and sexualities.

Keywords

As You Like It; ecocriticism; pastoral; queer; Shakespeare

Introduction

Bred from the radical movements that sprang in the 1960s, ecocriticism is rapidly gaining traction in research. The flourishing salience of “the environment” as a major topic in science, economics, law, and public policy in the 1980s chided the marginalization of environmental issues in most versions of critical theory that dominated literature departments (Buell 4). However, it is important to note that literature’s engagement with the natural environment had taken root as far back as the invention of writing, as all works of imagination materially *exist* within the physical environment (Raber & Hallock 1). On the one hand, literary scholars and historians are still repelled by taking “Nature” as a cultural category because the word implies imperiousness to human and historical influence; on the other hand, those who subscribe to the ecocritical commitment fetishize the need for “contact” between critic, text, and the physical environment. Thus, scholars such as early modernists invested in the vestiges of the past and question the utility of ecocriticism because non-human nature, apparently, has no need for history (2).

The fact remains that historico-literary scholarship and contemporary ecocriticism pose unique, interesting challenges to each other which, once tackled, can extend and diversify traditional humanistic studies (Raber & Hallock 2-3). The recovery of, say, the early modern English concept of nature—the aim of this paper—can help readers reconsider the relation between human beings and non-human life in nature as far more fluid than contemporary framings of the environment tell us (Borlik 14).

Issues such as a population boom, the “Little Ice Age” (ca. 1300-1850),¹ and widespread deforestation, which all contributed to near-famine conditions in the Tudor period, provoked anxieties toward resource generation and community vulnerability (Borlik 12-13; Markley 133). In response to subsequent energy and agricultural crises, early modern England saw a spectacular emergence of environmental consciousness which, while multifaceted, is surprisingly conservation-oriented. Such issues laid out a volatile field for the discussion on mankind’s right to exploit the natural world, an attitude supported and circulated by prevalent Judeo-Christian

theological treatises (see Borlik). The literary landscape testifies to the development of this consciousness as Shakespeare, More, Milton, and many others show renewed (and variegated) interests in the physical world, interests that might give a glimpse of how looming ecological crises in the past are understood and redressed (Raber & Hallock 3). In other words, the ways of thinking about nature enshrined in early modern texts might help us reflect critically on contemporary assumptions about nature-culture relations in modern environmentalism.

The *pastoral* is a popular literary mode that took the stage in the English Renaissance and has inspired much scholarly rumination until today. Defined by the momentum of retreat and return (Gifford 18), the pastoral represents a subject's attempt (and potential failure) to retrace their way back to an epistemological Eden (Borlik 136), posing a figure of "the high ideal towards which life in the world should be aiming" (Cirillo 20). Renato Poggioli explains:

Pastoral poetry makes more poignant and real the dream it wishes to convey when the retreat is not a lasting but a passing experience, acting as a pause in the process of living, as a breathing spell from the fever and anguish of being. Then it fixes the pastoral moment, within the category of space as well as of time, as an interval to be chosen at both the proper hour and the right point. (134)

The pastoral retreat, in other words, delineates a program for the good life (Borlik 140). While ecocritics such as Lawrence Buell and Greg Garrard find the pastoral to be "wedded to outmoded models of harmony and balance," contemporary pastoralists believe that the mode's universality and adaptability have been underestimated (Gifford 17). Instead of framing it as a canon or genre of texts, the pastoral is here understood as a cultural function, "a mode of discourse about nature" and can therefore refer to a work produced at any time (Gifford 26).

Through this retrospective framework, studying the pastoral can offer a means to meditate on humankind's exploitation of the natural world, cultivating an ethos of ecological stewardship that reacts to the anxieties

of a period (Borlik 135-136). As such, William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, his only pastoral comedy, brings spectators to an Eden that privileges the basic delights afforded by nature and art. To illustrate the potentials of an ecocritical approach to early modern texts, this paper aims to appraise the idealized vision of nature in the Bard's *As You Like It*, and how it can be relevant to the radical intersectional concerns of modern day environmental discourse and movements.

Getting past a listing of "green" motifs and tropes—what Estok berates as "green thematicism" (79)—I believe that *As You Like It* can be read as a powerful forum for imagining the radical possibility of *queer* nature-building in Elizabethan England. With an approach endeavoring to be both anthro- and *ecocentric*, that is, concerned with how the text articulates the materiality of nature (81), I contend that the play can show how heterosexism figures in the network of oppressive power relations that also organizes the exploitation of the environment. The play disturbs such oppression by dramatizing its negative: freedom, pleasure, and subversion. Within the pastoral momentum of retreat and return, the play teases the sexual boundaries that gradually crystallized during the Renaissance within a critique of the consumption-driven country, city, and court. While it ends in the comic marriage that signals a return to the courtly world, *As You Like It* demonstrates new modes of harmonious living among and across species and sexualities.

Eroticizing Pastoral Pleasures

What takes place in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* can be a challenge to exact, reiterating the elusiveness its title suggests. The play draws from the work of English poet and dramatist Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde* (1590), a prose romance based upon the anonymous *Tale of Gamelyn* (c. 1350). The popularity of *Rosalynde* outlasted Lodge himself who died in 1625. His permanent fame, such as it is, is in debt to *As You Like It*, a work made by a schoolmate six years his junior (Bryant 146). Entered on the Stationers' Register as a stage adaptation of *Rosalynde*, *As You Like It* presents spectators with a compressed but messy plot that can hardly be used as a framework for investigating the play (Snyder 231).

The plot unfolds quickly in the opening act: Oliver, oldest son of Sir Rowland de Boys, conspires against his younger brother Orlando who wins against him in a match of wrestling and falls in love with Rosalind whose father Duke Senior has been banished with his band of men from the duchy. To be spared from Oliver's treachery, Orlando runs off with Adam his manservant while Rosalind, accompanied by her cousin Celia, flees from the dukedom upon Duke Frederick's orders. By the end of the play, Duke Frederick, the usurper, and the hostile Oliver are converted, repent, and give up their political power for a life away from the court. Besides that, all the young people, including the shepherds Silvius and Phoebe, the fool Touchstone and the goatherdess Audrey, get married. Very little takes place in the middle three acts.

Despite the lack of exceptional action in majority of the text in comparison to, say, *Henry V* or *Richard III*, the most interesting feature of the play is cultivated in the seemingly stock-still middle acts that happen in the Forest of Arden. As the title declares, this is a story that purports to please all tastes and Arden can best embody that playfulness because it is "where a very mixed collection of people very happily [goes] their own various ways" (Traci 92). Following the conventions of the pastoral mode, *As You Like It* unravels through a symbolic contradiction Elizabethan audiences were familiar with: the country and the court (Gay 83). In the fiction of the play, Arden functions as the antithetical world of the court, a country-space primarily facilitating the activities of characters who stumble into it temporarily. After languishing in this world, they leave with a fresh perspective on life (Cirillo 21). I say "facilitating" instead of "locating" to reiterate the ecocritical thrust of this paper. The pastoral, after all, is now understood to be referencing real environmental concerns for urban pollution, forest resources, and even food security and ethics (Gifford 20). Here, then, Arden is not merely a passive setting where action takes place. Rather, it is a textual reconstruction of the natural English landscape and its physical, psychological, and social operations—that is, insofar as early modern ecological discourse goes.

By depicting a negative of dominant eco-sexual networks of power, Arden becomes the locus of both the play's subversion of an emerging

sexual binary in the Renaissance and its critique of the world “of painted pomp” (*AYLI* 2.1.3). This negative accentuates pleasure—as anyone would like it—in the formation of radical eco-sexualities. Devoid of such pleasure, the dukedom functions as an environment where injustices happen without motive. Oliver expresses his desire right after he entreated the wrestler Charles to incapacitate Orlando in the match: “I hope I shall see an end of him [Orlando], for my soul—yet I know not why—hates nothing more than he” (1.1.162-164). While envy and the fragility of primogeniture are arguably reasons behind his contempt, to Oliver’s own perspective, his hatred is gratuitous. In a parallel manner, Duke Frederick’s fear of Rosalind’s betrayal is unfounded: “Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not” (1.3.58). Rosalind reasons, “[t]reason is not inherited, my lord, / Or if we did derive it from our friends, / What’s that to me? My father was no traitor” (1.3.64-66). But Frederick keeps on grappling in the dark for a basis to banish Rosalind, even trying to involve cousin Celia: “She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience / Speak to the people, and they pity her” (1.3.80-83).

The Forest of Arden affords the characters of the courtly world a retreat from political violence. Duke Senior, the rightful but exiled ruler-turned-proverbial-Robin-Hood, announces to his coterie of allies:

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
The seasons’ difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter’s wind,
Which when it bites and blows upon my body
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
“This is no flattery. These are counselors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.” (2.1.1-11)

Instead of mourning their exile, Duke Senior regales the refuge offered by Arden, where they can be spared from the peril of the court’s envy and pomp. Adam, Oliver’s servant, acknowledges to Orlando that the highly political

court is not the best place to foster the boy's gentlemanly training: "Your virtues, gentle master, / Are sanctified and holy traitors to you" (2.4.12-13). Arden, then, can shelter such education, as we shall see in his attempts to woo Ganymede-as-Rosalind. When Act 1 ends and Rosalind has received her sentence of banishment, Celia announces that she will no longer perform the part of the obedient daughter and will flee with her "coz." The excited couplet that ended Celia's announcement—"Now go we in content / To liberty, and not to banishment" (1.3.144-145)—can even be interpreted as one of the most dangerous of rally cries, *liberty!* (Gay 85). Arden affords our cast this pleasurable distance from political concerns, allowing them to "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world" (1.1.117-118).

With this political freedom, Arden's refugees take pleasure in idleness as they waste their time and play meaningless games to a point where action becomes inconsequential: "Go ahead and do whatever you want. It doesn't matter," the lines seem to say (Garrison & Pivetti 3). As explained by Shakespearean critic Snyder, "time is out: out of customary course, displaced from the usual relentless sequence, not pressing on with problems to be solved and deadlines to be met, liberated from its own rules" (232). Upon being offered nourishment by Duke Senior, Orlando exclaims, "But whate'er you are / That in this desert inaccessible, / Under the shade of melancholy boughs, / Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time" (2.7.114-117). Acts 2-4 only loosely follow a coherent narrative sequence for energy flows as a cyclical life force and this cycle is dramatized by the almost superfluous exchanges among the characters onstage. At one moment, we see Rosalind-Celia, then Rosalind-Orlando, then Orlando-Jaques, or is it Jaques-Touchstone who comes first? Or Touchstone-Rosalind? Almost all inciting action that take place are conversations between the camps of "shepherds"—Corin, Silvius, Phoebe, and Audrey, including the recently enlisted Rosalind-as-Ganymede, Celia-as-Aliena, and Touchstone—and the "foresters"²—Jaques, Duke Senior, and their coterie, including Orlando. We count each dialogue and not the days.

We spectators join Rosalind in asking Orlando, "I pray you, what is 't o'clock?" The noble youth replies, "You should ask me what time o' day.

There's / no clock in the forest" (3.2.305- 306). How, then, can one keep time in the Forest of Arden? "Then there is no true lover in the forest; else sighing every minute / and groaning every hour would detect the lazy foot of / time as well as a clock" (3.2.307-310). In Rosalind's understanding, time is a lived experience. Moreover, she clarifies that "time travels in divers paces with divers persons. I'll tell / you who time ambles withal, / who time trots withal, who time gallops withal, and who he stands still / withal" (3.2.13- 17). Time, while abstract, is initially occasioned by the contact between human and physical landscape and not by any chronometric mechanism used to calculate labor in "the working-day world." With this subversive conception of time, it is possible for Orlando to keep track of time. He says later, "I must attend the Duke at dinner. By two / o'clock I will be with thee again" (4.1.191-192). Why exactly two o'clock? The Elizabethan theatergoing public knows that, for shepherds in their time, early afternoon—that is, twelve to three o'clock—is the perfect time for dozing off, playing, and socializing as sheep frolic in the pastureland to graze, allowing shepherds to rest or eat under a tree's shade (Daley 175). In the early modern psyche, early afternoons represent a pleasurable respite from labor and this is when the temporality of the play is fixed. As famously described by Charles the Duke's wrestler, "[the Duke] is already in the Forest of Arden, / and a many merry men with him; and there they / live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say / many young gentlemen flock to him every day and / fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world" (1.1.113-118).

Time being immeasurable allows for pleasurable idleness: "as a space where idleness itself is a form of work," rendering visible "the possibility of a fuller, denser, more crowded *now*" (Garrison & Pivetti 5). Free from political and temporal constraints, Arden is a world "to test out poses and hypotheses;" human beings assume different roles or positions in a playful and ephemeral way to see how it feels like and, as expected from a pastoral, even learn from a perspective that is not one's habit (Snyder 233). The most interesting of these are the homoerotic³ tensions that arise from pleasurable freedom. Writing *As You Like It* in 1599, Shakespeare toyed with his audience's expectations about the pastoral mode and the environmental concerns that

call for the circulation of such modes. As expected, the Bard took them into areas audiences could not have predicted by weaving around it his own fascination in gender politics, an inclination explored by scholars up until now (Gay 83-84). *As You Like It* might be famous not for its execution (and satirization through the character of Touchstone) of pastoral conventions but for the cross-dressing, homoerotic Rosalind and her charismatic role in the story (84). What makes the discussion of Rosalind's homosexuality interesting (and appear subversive) to contemporary scholarship is that the early modern period had witnessed a volatile and variegated development of sexual boundaries. Karen Newman, Catherine Belsey, and others have described early modern England as permeated by waves of economic changes and social class mobility. Part of this social mobility is a considerable instability of a developing gender system (Howard 425). Howard suggests that a paradoxical doublethink toward gender encroached upon the Elizabethans:

In some discourses masculine and feminine identity *were* seen as points on a continuum, not separate essences. [However] the Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one to subordinate the other, to provide a key element in the hierarchical view of the social order and to buttress its gendered division of labor [. . .] Then as now, gender relations, however eroticized, were relations of power, produced and held in place through enormous cultural labor in the interests of the dominant gender. (423, emphasis in original)

Of course, the English Renaissance is quite a stretch of time, and thus the above hypothesis—a dialectic of perspectives on sexuality—is plausible.

Cities, obviously alluded to as the courtly world in the play at hand, are a site of gender tension as they provide renewed (and even unsettling) positions for middle-class women (Howard 420). Apparently, an example of these urban pleasures is theatergoing. As loosely dramatized by the injustices in Frederick's duchy, ritual punishments such as the charivari and the cucking stool were instituted to register the importance of class and gender boundaries (426). The English Renaissance was far from a pleasurable Renaissance for women at that time. Doing ecocriticism with *As You Like It* reveals that an interrogation of the crystallizing sexual categories is occasioned by the

affordances of the textually reconstructed natural landscape, underscoring the contingencies between the oppression in gender and natural systems.

When Rosalind and her cousin Celia chose to avoid the court's male-dominated environment, the two make a significant decision on their public identities which are determined by their costumes. Rosalind opts for a male persona, a swashbuckling lad armed with not one but *two* phallic weapons:

Were it not better,
Because that I am more than common tall,
That I did suit me all points like a man,
A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh,
A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will,
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3.104–112)

She names herself Ganymede, the pagan deity Jove's young male lover. It is also a slang term for homosexual boy toys in Elizabethan England (Gay 85). Celia dons herself "in poor and mean attire, And with a kind of umber smirch my face," a jump down in class status. However, she retains a womanly appearance and thus also the political vulnerability of femininity unlike Rosalind. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, crossdressing is a highly political act. What causes the most controversy is that of women who are thought to encroach on the privileges of the advanced sex (Howard 420). Incidentally, Rosalind changes both in appearance – from a lady of the court to a shepherd boy – and in her manner of conduct. She used to be mum and slightly more subdued than Celia in Act 1 (Celia is in her own home, after all). In Arden, she plays "the eloquently witty and outrageously flirtatious Ganymede" for the rest of the Acts (Gay 88).

One cannot dismiss the strong bond between Rosalind and Celia. We learn early on why Duke Frederick allowed Rosalind to remain in the dukedom: "Ay, Celia, we stayed her for your sake; / Else had she with her father ranged along" (1.3.70-71). Celia retorts that she had not entreated her father at all, but she does acknowledge that Rosalind is exempted from

her father's treachery because she cannot possibly be separated from her cousin. Celia's feelings are unmistakably sisterly, but one cannot dismiss the intensity of this homosocial affinity that out-passions most heterosexual bonds in the play. Rosalind tells dear Celia, "I show more mirth than I am / mistress of, and would you yet I were merrier? / Unless you could teach me to forget a banished / father, you must not learn me how to remember / any extraordinary pleasure" (1.2.2-6). To this, her cousin responds:

Herein I see thou lov'st me not with the full
weight that I love thee. If my uncle, thy banished
father, had banished thy uncle, the Duke my father,
so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught
my love to take thy father for mine. So wouldst thou,
if the truth of thy love to me were so righteously
tempered as mine is to thee. (1.2.7-13)

As if moved by Celia's plea, Rosalind gives in, saying, "well, I will forget the condition of my estate / to rejoice in yours (1.2.2-15). Celia asks Rosalind to requite her loving disposition, which the latter capitulates. Other characters' textured descriptions of Celia and Rosalind accentuate the intimacy of the two cousins. As Charles the wrestler says, "never two ladies loved as they do" (1.1.97). Le Beau informs Orlando that their "loves are dearer than the natural bond of sisters" (1.2.242-243), implying that their relationship grows beyond cousinhood. Celia even promises Rosalind that when her father passes, "thou shalt be his heir, for what he hath taken away from thy father perforce, I will render thee again in affection" (1.2.15-17). In promoting Rosalind as heir, Celia alludes to a bond akin to marriage (Bullion 23). Their bond exceeds the heterosexual logic of the court, especially when Rosalind chooses to become male, opening the possibility of heterosexual tension.

Rosalind's crossdressing, granted by the freedom in the Forest of Arden, positions her betwixt a masculine-feminine contradiction. This positionality allows Rosalind to test the possibilities of love from both points of view (Cirillo 28) as *she* likes it, challenging the male dominance in the court. She cracks the fissures of heteroeroticism in *As You Like It* – dramatized

by Touchstone and Audrey, and Silvius and Phoebe, by knotting Arden's network of desire. To put it simply, she assumes the role of the beloved to other characters in the play, Phoebe and Orlando.

In terms of dialogue, Rosalind-as-Ganymede exploits prose, which permits fluid and fickle verbal play, being unimpeded by the rhetoric traditions underlying blank verse (Gay 88-9). The only considerable blank verse speech is in Act 3, directed to the besotted Phoebe:

But, mistress, know yourself. Down on your knees
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love,
For I must tell you friendly in your ear,
Sell when you can; you are not for all markets.
Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer.
Foul is most foul, being foul to be a scoffer. (3.5.63-67)

Rosalind-as-Ganymede switches to a domineering male role—and seems to revel in it—in order to redirect Phoebe's attraction. Phoebe mentions that Ganymede is a "pretty youth" (3.5.113) and that "he'll make a proper man" (3.1.115). Phoebe's credulousness to Rosalind's sexuality is based on features ascribed to youth and not to men. She is therefore attracted to what would seem female, but has the potential to become a male. Shakespeare piques our awareness of the resemblance between young boys and women to cajole us into suspending our belief of the sexual differences between them. Being the rightful representative of homosexuality in the play, Rosalind-as-Ganymede explains that "for every passion something, and for / no passion truly anything, as boys and women are, / for the most part, cattle of this color" (3.2.420-422). Phoebe and Rosalind's one-sided affair is nothing but homoerotic because the sexual binary is unclear in the first place. Later in Act 5, Phoebe takes Silvius precisely because he is a man, and Ganymede is really a woman (Traci 92).

Nothing in the play smacks of homoeroticism and -sexuality more than the affairs of Rosalind and Orlando. A major plot development in Act 1 is the highly sentimental exchange of love promises between the two youths—"O, how full of briers is this working-day world!" cries the madly-

in-love Rosalind (1.3.11-12). Arden is a place where “ifs” are tested, and for a Rosalind- turned-Ganymede, “Love is merely a madness, / and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a / whip as madmen do” (3.2.407-409). Rosalind inadvertently mocks the overtly sentimental deployment of desire (again found in relationships such as that of Touchstone and Audrey, who decides to marry on the first day of dating) common in early modern pastoral materials (Cirillo 19), challenging an androcentric tradition that, at times, encodes benign versions of conquest of the plains and pastureland, erasing any form of violence⁴ (Garrard 60).

We are reminded of the link between the idealized and the mundane, and the romantic and the bodily by the common Elizabethan pun on hart/ heart. Rosalind’s “cure” is the replacement of one strain of madness with another:

grieve, be / effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, / fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, / full of smiles; for every passion something, and for / no passion truly anything, as boys and women are / for the most part cattle of this colour – would now / like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then / forswear him; now weep for him, / then spit at him, that I drave my suitor from his mad humour of love / to a living humour of madness, which was to for- / swear the full stream of the world and to live in a / nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him, and / this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean / as a sound sheep’s heart, that there shall not / be one spot of love in ’t. (3.2.417-431)

When Orlando is offered a “cure” by Rosalind in the form of a stooge courtship (between two men!), Orlando excitedly replies, “Now, by the faith of my love, I will” (3.4.436). The gallant youth would also like to tickle the pleasurable “ifs” offered by the respite from court. This therapy that replaces one malady with another suggests the curative properties of the Forest of Arden. Rosalind-as-Ganymede’s cure, moreover, appears to be a marvelous teasing of homoerotic tensions, which primarily develop out of the fact that women are prohibited on the English stage, and the subsequent female roles young boys would play. Therefore, the early modern theater was not espe-

cially concerned by underlying male-to-male homoeroticism in what we now consider as “heterosexual” relationships between characters onstage, but it found rather unwieldy uncontrolled displays of female sexuality (Orgel 35-36).

Traci points out that whether or not the boy actors who play Rosalind-as-Ganymede and Orlando are homosexual, the text comically emphasizes the potential homosexual relationship between men (96). In the Forest of Arden, this homoerotic tension between the two young male actors is compounded by the fact that the two roles (Ganymede and Orlando) are both boys. Again, according to Phoebe, Rosalind is a young boy fit to be a man one day (3.3.113). Jaques also refers to Rosalind as “pretty youth” (4.1.1) and Orlando the same in their first meeting (3.3.413, 321) and a lot of other times (1.1.127; 1.2.149, 161, 162, 169, 188, 210-211, 218, 222, 226).

The play’s homoerotic energy reaches its apogee in what may be one of the most comical scenes in the play: Ganymede and Orlando’s mock marriage. Regarding marriage, Tudor law did not particularly discriminate against kinds of individuals; rather, the social and legal standards of sexual activity only covered acts. What we regard now as “homosexual” was then a sexual act with no link to one’s gender identity and sexuality (Bullion 2). These laws, however, reflect a societal privileging of heteronormativity—a standard questioned by this scene in the play. As early as their second date, Rosalind-as-Ganymede arranges a makeshift wedding ceremony as part of Orlando’s “roleplay” courtship: “Why then, can one desire / too much of a good thing?—Come, sister, you shall / be the priest and marry us.—Give me your hand, / Orlando.—What do you say, sister?” (4.1.128-131) To their dismay, Celia “cannot say the words” (4.1.133). Marriages, of course, are matters of the court, and thus do not follow the rules (or the lack of which) in the green world of Arden. Celia’s lackluster retort indicates the play and the audience’s recognition that a mock marriage is as valid as the real one, especially when said with the real lines (Latham qtd. in Traci 98).

While Orlando specifically answers that “[he] take thee, *Rosalind*, for wife,” signifying his preference for a heterosexual bond (4.1.143, emphasis mine), he is echoing the reply expected by Ganymede: “Then you must say

'I take / thee, Rosalind, for wife'" (4.1.141-142). Rosalind-as- Ganymede is a boy acting as a girl disguised as a boy roleplaying as a girl, and Orlando, while aiming to marry the girl, concedes and thus is wed to a boy, Ganymede. Sodomy haunts the fringes of *As You Like It* but most especially this scene. Here, a male actor, who theatricalizes the self as female, invites audiences to play the woman's part in sexual congress (Howard 424). In fact, in Tudor England, sex between a woman and a man could even be considered sodomy if it were without the intention of procreation (Bullion 3).

While homosexuality is a category specific to our own moment of history, homoerotic/sexual behavior and its varied registers "may be [. . .] cross-cultural, transhistorical phenomenon" (Smith 12). Ganymede, then, is not love; Ganymede is desire. The character engenders heterosexual (with Phoebe), homosocial (with Celia), and most importantly homoerotic desires (with Orlando) (Traub 122)—behaviors permissible in the pastoral retreat that is Arden. The Forest is not only a refuge from the court's pomp and politics but also a site of gender experimentation without the capital punishment. Male dominance in the green world is challenged *by* the Forest of Arden itself. The play reverts once more to a scene depicting a masculine authority and violence, only briefly, when Orlando stumbles on Duke Senior and his coterie feasting and requires food with his sword drawn (2.7). The young boy is so quickly corrected from the necessity of violence and he is next seen gently carrying onstage and feeding Adam, his old servant: "like a doe," he says, "I go to find my fawn / And give it food" (2.7.128-129)—"a striking image of feminine nurturing" (Gay 87). Masculine dominance, the supposedly privileged sex in Elizabethan England, can taper upon encounter with bare life conditions such as hunger which one may experience in the wilds should that person lack knowledge and enough affinity with the natural world. This discourse budding from the trees of Arden exposes the link between male dominance over other sexes and human dominance over nature. Nature is a force that restores balance and equality.

Queer Nature-Building in Early Modern England

Berlant and Warner explain that a queer framework can offer exceptional perceptions into the “the pleasure of unruly subplots; vernacular idioms and private knowledge; voicing strategies; gossip; elision and euphemism; jokes; identification and other readerly relations to texts and discourse” (349). Queer as a descriptor of sexuality privileges a playful diffusion of binaries and boundaries, and, as we have seen in the above discussion, *As You Like It* is a play that insists on depicting a plot that is all “distraction, foolishness, and idleness” (Garrison & Pivetti 4). Rosalind-as-Ganymede provokes all kinds of acts that circumvents the sexual boundaries of the Renaissance, ranging from the homosocial to the homosexual. The pastoral tradition has long included homosexuality among its erotic possibilities, but David Shuttleton remarks that the “gay pastoral,” as he calls it, tends to occlude the polemics of particular instances and their implications in history (qtd. in Garrard 60). *As You Like It* is a pastoral that, while still acknowledging the widely accepted heterosexuality (Orlando does imagine Ganymede as female), does not allay but rather celebrates homoerotic pleasure as seen by the play’s preference for courtship scenes rather than those of violent action. This is what queer ecofeminist Judith Halberstam and Sandilands describe as—

a queer way of life, [which includes] subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric modes of being, [responding] to and [calling] into question such institutions as the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality, rigidly dimorphic gendered embodiments, and normative reproductivity. (Sandilands 305)

What makes *As You Like It* a play ready for a queer ecocritical approach is that the “alternative methods of alliance” it dramatizes operate not only among sexualities but also between human and non-human entities. The Forest of Arden affords a rumination of human acts against nature as well, espousing ecological humility.

Arden’s rich, if not chaotic, biodiversity is a perfect site for fostering eccentric modes of being and alliances. As Snyder comments, “the forest

itself is not an ordinary woodland, harboring as it does not only deer and gilded snakes but palm trees and a lioness [. . .] Sheep eat grass, which is not plentiful in forests” (232). Borlik also notes the eccentric—or queer, as this paper pursues—representation of the Forest of Arden as an intermezzo of “purlieus” and as an idyllic sylvan oasis (4). While much commentary like Snyder’s and Borlik’s are on point in noticing the playful ecological arrangement of Arden, it is important to note that much of this scholarship misses available information about the primary landscape of the play:

For two centuries now, *forest* has suggested to the reader a dense growth of trees and underbrush covering thousands of acres. During medieval and Tudor times, [. . .] *forests* denoted a largely untilled district composed of pastures, wastes, and usually but not necessarily woods. Originally, the term designated a territory managed by the Crown for the propagation, preservation, and hunting of game. (Daley 174)

The image of Arden smothered with leaves, then, is but an anachronistic yet romantic contraption. What is surprising to see in the Elizabethan woodlands are snakes, lions, palm trees, and more importantly, human beings from the world of the court.

Within this biodiversity, Duke Senior celebrates the basic delights of life, the very lesson taught by the pastoral retreat. He signals this early on in Act 2: “And this our life, exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything” (2.1.15-17). The newly conscripted Robin Hood and his band of brothers are beginning to adapt to the fresh environment of the forest—as expected of any animal species—but being denizens of urbanity, and thus are estranged from “this desert city,” the most effective way to cope is by using their courtly experience to augment their puerile knowledge of the forest, finding books in brooks and sermons and stones.

At the next instant however, Duke Senior suddenly proposes that they hunt deer in order to feed themselves. He misses the opacity in the idyllic way of life: “that the deer, ‘the poor dappled fools, / Being native burghers of this desert city’, should be ‘gored’” (2.1.22-23). Senior is already learning a strong

pathos of companionship toward the denizens of the Forest, but his “natural” instinct as an urbanite elides this seed of environmental consciousness. Before they set out for a hunt, a Lord reports to the group that—

The melancholy Jaques grieves at that,
And in that kind swears you do more usurp
Than doth your brother that hath banished you.
Today my Lord of Amiens and myself
Did steal behind him as he lay along
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood;
To the which place a poor sequestered stag
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt
Did come to languish. And indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting, and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase. And thus the hairy fool,
Much markèd of the melancholy Jaques,
Stood on th' extremest verge of the swift brook,
Augmenting it with tears. (2.1.217-244)

The philosopher among the court-in-exile, “the melancholy Jaques” pointedly dramatizes the ethical ambiguities of their acquisitive life in the woodlands. Jaques seems to be, to use an anachronistic term, the resident “environmentalist” of the group. He even denigrates Orlando for writing poems on trees for Rosalind: “I pray you mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks” (3.2.264-265). To go back to the deer narrative, it is noticeable that the language used by the Lord in telling the events that took place by the stream is still within urban diction: “sequestered” which would most likely mean being cut off from fellows can mean, through a financial metaphor, the act of seizing the wealth of a debtor to recompense creditors. This is what Jaques may be melancholic about all along—the pervasive understanding that nature exists for human consumption. Interestingly, venison, the meat of deer, is commonly thought of as a source of melancholy in the humoral biology of the early modern period (Egan 102). Therefore, a diet

of skipping too much venison, that is, too much black bile, would allow the other humours of the body—blood, phlegm, and yellow bile—to return one’s temperaments to a state of balance.

This does not mean that they are not learning however. In fact, the exiles’ use of courtly language to apprehend the eccentric forest is a way of coming to terms with a new mode of living. This epistemology is salutary not only because it allows the Forest to be knowable but also because “it renders the human, cultural and social guises of queer less familiar and more captivated by natural and biological force” (Wilson qtd. in Sandilands 307). It subjects the human as a natural category.

The flourishing of harmonious relations between human and natural landscape, as discussed earlier, occasions pleasurable structures of experience such as the bliss of political ignorance and the importance of idle time. More than empowering Rosalind’s homoerotic ventures, these modes of living also foster amicable human relations. A striking repartee on feasting and an attitude as basic niceness take place when a famished Orlando attempts to mug the court-in-exile of food. Duke Senior, however, retorts with charity:

DUKE SENIOR	Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table
ORLANDO	Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you. I thought that all things had been savage here, And therefore put I on the countenance Of stern commandment [. . .] Let gentleness my strong enforcement be, In the which hope I blush and hide my sword. (2.7.107-124)

Orlando, who is maybe the most horrendous figure for environmental concern in the play, is forced to change his perception of the Forest of Arden as a “savage” world. Seeing Arden’s biodiversity as a civilization (in contrast to savagery) is a step toward forming a continuity between himself and the natural world.

Later entrants to the forest—particularly Duke Frederick and Oliver, both of whom hold political power in the world of the court—also undergo

a transformation. Duke Frederick by the end of the play is reported to have chosen the monastic life thanks to his pastoral retreat to the Forest of Arden, “Where, meeting with an old religious man, / After some question with him, was converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world, / His crown bequeathing to his banished brother” (5.4.165-168). This monastic life would require vegetarianism which would then cure his melancholy (by skipping black bile). Oliver’s transformation is also rooted in a close, in fact dangerous, contact with the natural world. Slumbering in Arden to hunt for Orlando, he becomes a prey of a lioness and his brother comes to the rescue: “And nature, stronger than his just occasion, / Made him give battle to the lioness, / Who quickly fell before him; in which hurtling, / From miserable slumber I awaked (4.3.136-139). After this encounter, the two restore their natural blood bonds as brothers. These restorations facilitated by the Forest of Arden are a testimony that the countryside is (and, statistics confirm, rightly) “a healthier place to live than the city, and going there was a means to recover something of the physical vigour [*sic*] of prelapsarian humankind” (Egan 96).

These are only a few of the many instances in *As You Like It* that depict what many contemporary queer ecocritics understand as a queer mode of life full of pleasure, harmony, and idleness. On the surface, the Forest of Arden serves as an epistemological Eden that embodies the “old custom” as a contrast to the court’s world of politics where passersby learn the possibility of life that is “[a]bstemious but not ascetic, economical but never stingy, pleasure-seeking but wary of decadence” (Borlik 140) This pastoral life scorns, in Borlik’s precise words, “civilization’s luxuries to enhance the relish one takes in enjoying certain basic delights afforded by nature and art (not least of all, the delights of language)” (140). From an ecocentric approach however, *As You Like It* emerges as an instructive handbook for the flows of energy and desire among species and, as we have learned earlier, sexualities. While the forest or pastureland environment can restore a balance to our physic (at least, according to the early modern science) and to an extent morality, human beings are also tasked to be proper stewards of the natural world so as to keep both entities in a pleasurable state.

Signs of queer nature-building in early modern England can be glimpsed from the idle middle acts of the play. Comedy, while set in topsy-turvy and delightful worlds such as Arden, is structured conservatively (Gay 91). Heterosexual couplings close Act 5, as all festive comedies would. However, I would like to contend that *As You Like It* demonstrates new modes of harmonious living among and across species and sexualities even when it ends in the comic marriage, signaling a return to the courtly world. After all, the radical aspirations of queer nature- building are “not just a safe zone for queer sex, but the changed possibilities” of ecocritical understanding “that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or privileged example” in conserving ecosystems (Sandilands 306).

Eight individuals are wed at the end of the play in heterosexual couplings. Additionally, in Shakespeare’s crossdressing narratives, it seems that the thrust is always toward “that long-delayed moment of disclosure, orchestrated so elaborately in Act V when the heroine will doff her masculine attire along with the saucy games of youth and accept [...] her gender identity, and the semiotics of dress will coincide” (Howard 434). On the surface, it seems that heteronormativity wins over the homoerotic tensions stirred earlier by Rosalind. Spectators have to realize, however, that the heterosexual side of the romantic outcomes is “damn’d like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side” (3.2.36-37). In other words, homosexuality is largely dramatized by the recognition of manifold gender identities being brought on the stage—the boy actor, Rosalind, and Ganymede. Hence, to appraise the text’s final word on sexuality is to critique the part of the play that most intimately encroaches on audiences: the epilogue, which is nothing comparable elsewhere in other plays of the time, even in Shakespeare’s own (Traci 92).

In this additional scene, the boy actor of Rosalind comes out to the audience not as Rosalind or Ganymede but as the male actor. In other words, he is “the Lie Direct” in person. Even though the resolution of *As You Like It* appears to be heteronormative, a logic of homoerotic desire lingers in this epilogue which maintains the fluidity between the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexuality/homosexuality while defying the domination of heterosexual passions (Bullion 21):

It is not the fashion to see the lady the / epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see / the lord the prologue [. . .] My / way is to conjure you, and I'll begin with the / women. I charge you, O women, for the love you / bear to men, to like as much of this play as please / you. And I charge you, O men, for the love you bear / to women—as I perceive by your simpering, none / of you hates them—that between you and the / women the play may please. If I were a woman, I / would kiss as many of you as had beards that / pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths / that I defied not. And I am sure as many as have / good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths / will for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell. (EPI.1-20.)

The epilogue is delivered as a homoerotic tease. A similar reference to homosexuality also appears earlier when Hymen the god of marriage advises the shepherdess Phoebe about an alternative: “Or have a woman to your lord” (5.4.133). The boy does not explicitly claim that, since he is male, he would *not* kiss them when he says: “[i]f I were a woman, I / would kiss as many of you as had beards that / pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths / that I defied not” (EPI.17-20). He will kiss the men if they pass his checklist detailing a standard of virility, which includes beards. The pun on “fare well” may have even signaled to the male viewers that the boy actor has not surrendered his hopes that someone would accept his offer (Traci 105). The flirtatious performance of the epilogue by a young boy—who, as discussed earlier, is the same cattle as women—demonstrates how this epilogue “highlight[s] the constructedness of gender and the flexibility of erotic attraction” (Traub 128).

Considering the playful possibilities fissured by the epilogue, heteronormativity comes out not as the dominant ideology of the play. Rather, it is a useful language to show how those “experiencing homoerotic desires in the play seek representation in identities that already exist” (Smith 12). As Howard pointedly wisecracks, “if a boy can so successfully personate the voice, gait, and manner of a woman, how stable are those boundaries separating one sexual kind from another, and thus how secure are those powers and privileges assigned to the hierarchically superior sex,

which depends upon notions of difference to justify its dominance?” (435) Through a queer frame of thinking, no certain sexual alliance wins over the other. It must include a process of displacing heterosexual couplings at the heart of ecology, championing instead subversive pleasure (all heterosexual couplings are *not* necessarily unpleasant after all).

In Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, the challenge posed to the privileging of a certain sex is juxtaposed with the critique of an exploitative and accumulative ethos toward the natural environment. Showing how sexual boundaries are made permeable in natural landscapes where the old custom of playfulness and idleness is observed, the play shows how the pastoral’s epistemological Eden which prescribes a harmonious affinity with the physical environment can also foster a pleasurable erotic experience. Like other pastorals of the early modern period which are written to proffer an alternative to the human structures that cause ecological crises, Shakespeare’s play also responds to an anxiety of a calcifying gendered order by braiding the two concerns—the environmental and the sexual—in an Arcadia of interspecies-gender harmony. This erotic Eden can only be maintained by sustaining a queer mode living that fosters new methods of alliance-building (Duke Senior, Duke Frederick, Orlando) and the acceptance of eccentric ways of being (Rosalind, primarily). In texts like these, “it is easy to see queer [entities] as countering the pernicious and persistent articulation of homosexuality with what is unnatural [. . .] making sexual diversity part of a larger biodiversity” (Alaimo 55). This is the fruit of doing ecocriticism with Shakespeare.

Notes

1. The Little Ice Age which lasted from 1300 to 1850 was a period of climatic cooling in Western Europe. Springs were shorter than common and winters were longer. Violent shifts in weather patterns took a toll on agricultural activity and food security. See Markley for more information regarding this point in climatological history and its impact on early modern culture.
2. As indicated in the stage direction of Act 2, Scene 1.
3. Erotic, as I shall use the term in this paper, describes objects or situations that appeals to (or disturbs) norms of sexual arousal. John Bristow's discussion on erotic identities may be useful for further studies.
4. This remark on the androcentrism of desire in some early modern pastorals is embodied in works such as "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" by Christopher Marlowe which juxtaposes a longing for a woman with the monarchic tallying of the features of the pastureland, suggesting a form of ownership under which the shepherd wishes to subsume the female object of desire.

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. "Eluding Capture: The Science, Culture, and Pleasure of 'Queer' Animals." *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands & Bruce Erickson. Indiana UP, pp. 51–72.
- Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 3, 1995, pp. 343–49.
- Borlik, Todd. *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures*. Routledge, 2011.
- Bullion, Leigh. *Shakespeare and Homoeroticism: A Study of Cross-dressing, Society, and Film*. 2010. Colby College, Honors thesis. digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorsthesis/600. Accessed 22 September 2022.
- Bristow, John. *Sexuality*. Routledge, 1997.
- Bryant, J.A., Jr. *Shakespeare and the Uses of Comedy*. The UP of Kentucky, 1986.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell, 2005.
- Cirillo, Albert. "As You Like It: Pastoralism Gone Awry." *ELH*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1971, pp. 19–39. Daley, Stuart. "Where are the Woods in *As You Like It*?" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1993, pp. 172–180.
- Egan, Gabriel. *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2006.
- Estok, Simon. "Doing Ecocriticism with Shakespeare." *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, edited by Thomas Hallock et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 77–91.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012.
- Garrison, John & Kyle Pivetti. "What's So Funny 'Bout, Peace, Love, and Shakespeare? A Peace Studies Approach to *As You Like It*." *Shakespeare*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2016, pp. 1–14.
- Gay, Penny. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Comedies*. Cambridge UP, 2008. Gifford, Terry. "Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral." *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, edited by Louise Westling, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 17–30.
- Howard, Jean. "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1988, pp. 418–440.
- Markley, Robert. "Summer's Lease: Shakespeare in the Little Ice Age." *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, edited by Thomas Hallock et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 132–142.
- Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge UP, 1996.

- Poggioli, Renato. "The Oaten Flute." *Harvard Literary Bulletin*, vol. 11, 1957, pp. 147-184.
- Prescott, Anne Lake. "Naming and Caring: The Theme of Stewardship in *Paradise Lost*." *Approaches to Teaching Milton's Paradise Lost*, edited by Galbraith M. Crump, MLA, 1986.
- Raber, Karen & Thomas Hallock. "Early modern Ecostudies." *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, edited by Thomas Hallock et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 1-8.
- Sandilands, Catriona. "Queer Life? Ecocriticism After the Fire." *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 305-319.
- Seymour, Nicole. *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. U of Illinois P, 2010.
- Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*, edited by Barbara Mowat & Paul Werstine, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1997.
- Smith, Bruce R. *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics*. U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Snyder, Susan. "As You Like It: A Modern Perspective" *As You Like It*, edited by Barbara Mowat & Paul Werstine, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1997, pp. 231-242.
- Traci, Philip. "As You Like It: Homosexuality in Shakespeare's Play." *CLA Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1981, pp. 91-105.
- Traub, Valerie. *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. Routledge, 1992.