Rendering the Pastoral:
Time, Evanescence and Moral Enlightenment in Shakespeare’s Green Worlds

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors in English
THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH

Submitted and pledged:

Rebecca Mooradian

Approved by:

Professor Pamela Royston Macfie

Accepted for Departmental Honors in English

Pamela Royston Macfie, Chair
Easter Term, 2011
Rendering the Pastoral:

Time, Evanescence, and Moral Enlightenment in Shakespeare’s Green Worlds

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.
- Duke Senior, *As You Like It* Act II, scene I, lines 15-17

In his 1717 edition of *Pastorals*, Alexander Pope included a new introduction to the work, entitled, “Discourse on Pastoral Poetry.” In this opening, he attempts to summarize and define the traditional characteristics of pastoral works, drawing on the genre’s creators, Theocritus and Virgil. Pope defines a pastoral as “an imitation of the action of a shepherd” and finds that, “[a] pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age: so that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been, when the best of men followed the employment” (19). Pope goes on to state that the job of the poet, consequently, is to “use some illusion to render a pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd’s life, and in concealing its miseries” (20). To modern readers this definition may appear too narrow, as it excludes any work in which the natural world and its inhabitants are portrayed in a less idealized light. As Joseph Brodsky indicates in his essay, “On Grief and Reason,” an eclogue may contain tenebrous elements; Brodsky discusses Robert Frost’s “Home Burial” as a dark pastoral, enlarging Pope’s definition of the genre to include any “exchange between two or more characters in a rural setting, returning often to that perennial subject, love” (234). It is with Brodsky’s more expansive understanding of the genre that this paper will explore the pastoral plays of William Shakespeare.
Though present in comedies and tragedies alike, Shakespeare’s Green World is a realm so subject to change that it is often difficult to divine the threads that link the different incarnations of the natural world together. No world could be further from Oberon and Titania’s enchanted forest than Macbeth’s Birnam wood, and it is difficult to read King Lear’s venture out onto the heath with the same understanding as one reads Rosalind’s sojourn in Arden. Nonetheless, this paper will argue that the primary purpose of the Green World in comedies and tragedies alike is to provide moral instruction to the characters of the plays. Most notable in the pastoral plays, the temporal nature of Shakespeare’s Green World helps to instruct the characters within the plays on the nature of their mortality. In Shakespeare’s early pastoral plays, this instruction serves primarily as a *carpe diem* message, calling the characters to find fulfillment through love and marriage. In Shakespeare’s late pastoral plays, especially plays like *King Lear* and *The Tempest* which feature elderly heroes, the Green World serves instead to prepare the characters for their approaching death, providing instead a message of *ars moriendi*.

*As You Like It* is the most explicitly pastoral of Shakespeare’s plays. With references to the golden age, shepherds and shepherdesses, and a nearly Edenic forest, the play meets Pope’s more selective criteria for a pastoral. Indeed, it presents in the wooded land of Arden a natural world that for the most part has been stripped of all conflicts except the temporary grief experienced by those in love. In this idyllic pastoral realm, the shepherds Corin, Silvius, and Phebe concern themselves not with the trials that would realistically accompany tending a flock. Rather, they seem primarily concerned with their romantic struggles. Silvius’s dialogue is devoted almost entirely to his unrequited love for Phebe; he goes so far as to consider her cruelty towards him as a fate worse than death. As he explains, “The common executioner, / Whose heart th’accustom’d sight of death makes hard, / Falls not the axe upon the humbled neck / But
first begs pardon. Will you sterner be / Than he that dies and lives by bloody drops?” (*As You Like It*, III.v.3-7). Clearly, Silvius is a shepherd best suited to Pope’s definition of the pastoral since Shakespeare portrays in him “the best side only of a shepherd’s life.” As Anne Barton notes, “Shakespeare seems to go out of his way to avoid generating suspense [in Arden]” (399).

Even the dutiful Rosalind, who begins the play mourning her lost father and who chides Celia, “Unless you could teach me to forget a banish’d father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure,” seems to forget her filial woes upon entering Arden (I.ii.5-7). In the leisurely Green World, she instead focuses her attention on her love for Orlando; she does not hasten to see the Duke, her father, and even meets with him in disguise without letting him know of her true identity (I.iv.35-38). When Celia mentions the Duke to her, she flippantly responds, “What talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando?” (III.iv.38). In Arden, the more pressing problems of the world become secondary to the characters’ trials in love.

To underscore the surreal perfection of Arden, in Act IV Shakespeare includes, as we will see, a modified version of Ovid’s tale of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” the tragic legend in which two ill-fated young lovers die after a forbidden meeting in the woods, due in large part to the aggressions of a blood-thirsty lion. In Arden’s depiction of this classic tale, however, there exists no death. As told by Oliver to Rosalind, dressed as Ganymede, in this version of the story, Orlando comes upon a “wretched ragged man” asleep in the forest (IV.iii.106). A snake has wrapped itself around the sleeper’s neck and is advancing upon his mouth, but, upon seeing Orlando, flees and slips away into a bush. It is under this bush that Orlando first spots a lioness that, like the snake, is intent on attacking the sleeping man. Orlando approaches the scene, and is about to defend the sleeper when he realizes that the sleeper is Oliver, his wicked elder brother. Orlando is tempted to turn away and leave his brother to his doomed fate, but instead, as Oliver
Mooradian, 5

recounts, “kindness, nobler ever than revenge, / And nature, stronger than his just occasion, /Made him give battle to the lioness” (IV.iii.128-130). Here, Shakespeare seems deliberately to avoid creating dramatic suspense; Oliver immediately explains that the lioness “quickly fell before [Orlando]” (IV.iii.131). He then reveals that the bloody napkin that he bears is merely the result of a wound that Orlando received that has already been tended and is not fatal.

Through a close analysis of Ovid’s original tale, it is evident that Shakespeare has translated and transformed many of its elements to underscore the idyllic quality of Arden’s soft pastoral realm. The two characters meeting beneath a tree (Ovid’s “mulberry tree, abounding with white berries” [Ovid, 127] and Shakespeare’s “old oak, whose boughs were moss’d with age” [IV.iii.104]); additionally, in each narrative the lion, and the bloody mantle are all present. However, the differences between the two tales underscore the idyllic reality Shakespeare seeks to establish in As You Like It. The bucolic lioness of Arden is far less menacing than the lioness of the classic tale. In Ovid, the lioness appears to Thisbe with “jaws…dripping from a recent kill” (Ovid, 127). Ovid’s lioness is also the purveyor of motiveless malice; when she finds Thisbe’s dropped mantle, she “pauses… / to mangle it in her ferocious jaws,” as though capable only of the desire to mar and injure (Ovid, 127). By contrast, Arden’s lioness is fruitless; Oliver says that her “udders [are] all drawn dry” and Rosalind refers to the beast as “suck’d and hungry” (IV.iii.114,126). Furthermore, this lioness is greatly unlike the beast that ferociously would seem to threaten Thisbe. Rather, the lioness is anthropomorphized and does not attack the sleeping Oliver due to her “royal disposition… / to prey on nothing that doth seem as dead” (IV.iii.118). Even the bloody mantle of the legend has been altered to suit Shakespeare’s redeemed version of the tale; the cause of Pyramus’s death in the legend, it instead becomes the proof of Orlando’s truthfulness and leads Orlando and Rosalind towards romantic fulfillment. It
is sent to Ganymede, so that “[he(she)] might excuse / [Orlando’s] broken promise” (IV.iii.153-154).

It would almost appear that, as Charles has described Arden previously, it is indeed a pastoral realm in which one may “fleet time carelessly as they did in the Golden world” (I.i.119).

And yet, such a reading of the bucolic message in *As You Like It* would ignore the instruction that the natural world provides for the characters of the play. When Shakespeare’s audience first enters Arden, the exiled Duke Senior offers an opening monologue that explains the edifying quality of the forest:

> 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.’ (II.i.5-11).

Here, very early in the play, it is poignantly clear that the inhabitants of Arden are not “careless.” Rather, by exposing themselves to the cyclical changes of the natural world, “the seasons’ difference,” they gain self-knowledge. The signs of winter, ever symbolic of death, remind the Duke of his own insignificance and mortality. It is important to note that line 5 may be read to mean, “Here feel we *but* the penalty of Adam,” with “but” meaning only or merely (*Riverside*, 410). With this understanding of the line, it is clear that Duke Senior does not imagine that he lives in a Golden world, free from suffering or the more threatening elements of nature. Instead, he delights in the self-knowledge that he gains from these “counselors.” The Duke’s speech is
one which seems to prefigure the “servile ministers” of King Lear’s experience in the tempest, where the throneless King will gain a better understanding of his mortality and shared humanity when faced with the awful power of the storm. Here, as Lear’s comic counterpart, Duke Senior need not fear nature’s instruction: in Arden, “this [their] life, exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything” (I.iii.15-17). In this idealized pastoral play, nature’s messages come gently.

Perhaps most significantly, the natural world of Arden seems to provide a *carpe diem* message for Rosalind and the other lovers within the play. At the beginning of Act IV, Rosalind reveals a sage understanding of death; when Orlando says that he will die if Rosalind will not have him, Rosalind does not allow him to speak of death in such a melodramatic fashion, saying, “The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, *videlicet*, in a love cause” (IV.i.97). Rosalind proceeds pragmatically to remind Orlando of the true absoluteness of death: “Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love” (IV.i.106-108). Hers is a sobering statement, and one that draws on the instruction that comes from living in the natural world: death comes to all, not necessarily as a tragic end, but as an inescapable fact of nature’s cycles.

This understanding of death’s inescapability seems to inform Rosalind’s impatience in her relationship with Orlando. When Rosalind asks Orlando what time it is, he responds, “You should ask me what time o’ day; there’s no clock in the forest” (III.ii.300-301). Yet, Rosalind indicates that there is a time available to lovers that exists in the natural world; the impatience for love’s fulfillment provides a “true lover” with an acute awareness of the passage of time: “Sighing every minute and groaning every hour would detect the lazy foot of Time as well as a clock” (III.ii.303-305). It is clear that Rosalind feels this impatience deeply; following this
exchange, she often reminds Orlando of time’s passing. When Orlando arrives late for one of their meetings, Rosalind chides him, “Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while?” (IV.i.38-40). Orlando then replies that he arrives within an hour of their appointed time, after which Rosalind quips, “Break an hour’s promise in love! He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousand part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapp’d him o’ th’ shoulder, but I’ll warrant him heart-whole” (IV.i.44-49). Later, Rosalind will warn Orlando to be more punctual for their next appointment, saying, “If you break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathetical break-promise, and the most hollow lover” (IV.i.190-193). For Rosalind, who understands that life is marked by brevity and that all too soon “worms will eat” her and her lover, tardiness is unacceptable because it represents a denial of mortality.

This *carpe diem* message is made most evident by the Second Page’s song, found in the final act of the play. In this song Shakespeare uses a few brief stanzas to make explicit the message that the play as a whole is meant to convey. In the song, two lovers meet “in spring time, the only pretty [ring] time” (V.iii.19). Here, “ring” references not only the rings exchanged in marriage, which is most “pretty” when lovers are young, but also serves as a euphemism for the anatomical “ring” of the female erotic body.¹ This reference is made more clear in the following stanza, in which “These pretty country folks would lie […] / Between the acres of the rye” (V.iii.24, 22). The lovers meet in their sexual prime, but it is a period that they know is as fleeting as the spring; as with the lovers of Arden, the lovers of the Page’s song, by venturing out into the natural world of Spring, gain awareness of their mortality. They begin to sing a carol in

which they proclaim that “a life was but a flower / In spring time” (V.iii.28-29). The Page concludes his song with a command: “And therefore take the present time […] / For love is crowned with the prime” (V.iii.30, 32). This song fittingly comes just before the final scene of the play, in which four marriages will occur with Hymen’s arrival. It is as though these marriages could not take place without a final proclamation of Arden’s message: the cyclical nature of time marks men’s lives with brevity. One must therefore “take the present time” and marry while one possesses the ever-ephemeral qualities of youth and beauty.

Accordingly, the play concludes with the marriages of Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, Touchstone and Audrey, and Silvius and Phebe. Hymen, the God of marriage, arrives, declaring, “Then is there mirth in heaven, / When earthly things made even / Atone together” (V.iv.108-110). The play concludes in song; the Duke Senior invites all to “fall into […] rustic revelry. / Play, music, and you brides and bridegrooms all, / With measure heap’d in joy, to th’ measures fall” (V.iv.177-179). This “revelry” presents a final image of comic fulfillment; the lovers’ dance alludes to the dance of the celestial bodies, which move to the music of the spheres. Additionally, it indicates that they have learned to align themselves with the passage of time, and will fall in with time’s “measures.”

And yet, Shakespeare concludes this play with a discordant note. Jaques will leave the forest, saying, “I am for other than for dancing measures” (V.iv.193). This is not the first time Jaques has appeared to stand outside of others’ understanding of the passage of time and the importance of love given one’s mortality. Much earlier in the play, he has offered a darker view of the cyclical messages of the forest. Speaking to Duke Senior in Act II, he has declared that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (II.vii.139-140). Already, these lines indicate a cynicism unknown to the other characters of the play; to Jaques, man
cannot direct his own destiny. Instead, like an actor, man can only accept the “seven ages” given
him by the prescriptive passage of time (II.vii.143). Being a lover, whom Jaques describes as
“Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad / Made to his mistress’ eyebrow,” is no more than
performing one of these seven roles that men must play; it has no divinity for Jaques, and does
not serve as any fulfilling remedy to man’s mortality (II.vii.147-149). For Jaques, life can only
end in nothingness; man plays the “Last scene of all / That ends this strange eventful history, / Is
second childishness, and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing”
(II.vii.163-166). For Jaques, the love found by the youths of the final scene of the play is devoid
of any meaning; as the lovers convene to marry, Jaques states, “There is sure another flood
toward, and these couples are coming to the ark. Here comes a pair of very strange beasts, which
in all tongues are call’d fools” (V.iv.35-38). Not only does Jaques belittle here the significance of
marriage as a rite, but, by calling the lovers “beasts,” he demotes the couples’ pending weddings
to a “bestial” act. Ultimately, Jaques’ lack of understanding of nature’s carpe diem message in
this final scene foreshadows the darker themes Shakespeare will provide in his harsh pastoral
plays.

King Lear is one such play in which a harsh pastoral world is presented. Arguably one of
Shakespeare’s darkest heroes, Lear is defined by a tragic lack of self-knowledge that could not
be redressed in an idyllic Green World like that of Arden. Instead, Shakespeare creates a world
where the natural realm has become aberrant and tormented. Indeed, the play begins with the
parceling out of Lear’s kingdom, the division of a seemingly Edenic land, “with shadowy forests
and with champains rich’d / With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads” (King Lear, I.i.64-
65). Yet it is clear that this nearly prelapsarian realm will, like its Biblical forerunner,
deteriorate: the division of land represents a moral shortcoming on the part of Lear, who is
willing to sacrifice the unity of his kingdom that he may “Unburthen’d crawl toward death” (I.i.41). This desire perverts the cycle of life; by ceding his sovereignty to his offspring, Lear, as his Fool later reminds him, “mad’st [his] daughters [his] mothers” (I.i.172-173). Lear does not understand the true nature of mortality, in which one cannot “shake all cares and business from [one’s] age” (I.i.39). Rather, by prematurely relinquishing his sovereignty and parceling out his kingdom, Lear demonstrates that he believes himself to be impervious to the temporal laws of nature that govern other men.

In the first scene of the play, Goneril and Regan reference this shortcoming of their father’s. In speaking of Lear’s treatment of Cordelia, Regan blames Lear’s “infirmity of age,” but adds, “Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (I.i.293-294). Goneril concludes, “The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash” (I.i.295-296). Lear, then, presents the last chapter of a life that has been devoid of nosce teipsum; instead, Lear has relied upon his identity as a king to dictate his understanding of his humanity. By ceding his kingship before his death, Lear has divorced himself from the only identity he has ever understood. This has tragic implications; Lear no longer knows who he is and must ask: “Does any here know me? This is not Lear. / Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either this notion weakens, his discernings / Are lethargied – Ha! Waking? ’Tis not so. / Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (I.iv.226-230). To these sad questions, the Fool simply replies, “Lear’s shadow” (I.iv.231). Lear has become a ghost before his death, a shadow of his former self, because he refused to understand his humanity and the mortality to which he, as with all natural beings, is prey. This hamartia, then, can only be tempered in the natural world.

Accordingly, Shakespeare creates in Lear a world on the verge of apocalypse. Following Lear’s disownment of Cordelia, the bequeathing of the kingdom to the “unnatural hags” Goneril
and Regan, and his own son’s purported betrayal of him, Gloucester provides a description of the current natural and societal state of the world:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack’d ’twixt son and father. […] We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves (I.ii.103-114).

Gloucester presents a world on the verge of moral and natural collapse, in which the disharmony of the spheres is evidenced in the discord of Lear’s subjects at every level of society: in cities there is politic strife, in the country there is communal strife, in the monarchy there is treason, and in families there is division. This tormented realm could never contain an Arden; it is as though the same spiritual disease which afflicts Lear has spread to his body politic and his kingdom.

It is only in the “storm scene” of Act III of Lear that the Green World begins to play a more prominent role and that the play truly participates in the pastoral tradition. This scene has defied a uniform interpretation by literary critics, with many holding substantially different views of the scene’s significance. It was viewed primarily in punitive terms by E. Catherine Dunn, who, in her 1952 paper “The Storm in King Lear,” finds the storm to be the result of Lear’s wish for “the microcosm (himself) and the macrocosm (the universe) to be crushed, so that his curse is at the same time both self-destruction and revenge upon his daughters” (332). Josephine Waters Bennett cites this scene as the ultimate turning point in Lear’s sanity; the storm detracts from his emotional pain, compelling him to focus instead on his physical suffering.
It is once Lear is forced to go into the hovel that he must then confront his mental demons, driving him to final insanity (140-144). Other critics, like actors Morris Carnovsky and Peter Sander, see Lear as a storm in its entirety and view Lear’s venture out into its fury as the result of a self-realization of his own insignificance as well as a desire to test his force and strength against the evils of the world (146).

The fact that this scene resists a uniform interpretation from critics seems effectively to convey Lear’s own confusion in the storm; Shakespeare has thrust Lear out into a wilderness where, at every turn, he is confronted with the great truth of his own insignificance and, by relation, the ephemeral quality of human life. If the storm maddens him, it is because these truths are too grand to be fully comprehended. Shakespeare, then, transfers Lear’s confusion to Lear’s audience; it is as impossible to confine the implications of this scene as it is to confine the fury of Lear’s storm. Ultimately, I find that, though certainly serving as a self-inflicted punishment and containing important clues as to Lear’s mental state, Lear’s travel into the storm serves primarily to lead Lear to a tragic realization of his own limitations as a human.

The “storm scene” is clearly meant to mark a pivotal turning point within the play. As the scene opens, Lear appears all powerful, shouting to the skies: “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage, blow!” (III.ii.1). Here, Dunn’s view of the storm as a self-inflicted punishment is evidenced well as Lear asks that the storm to “Singe [his] white head” (II.i.6). However, as the storm persists, Lear begins to appear less firm in his authority and more pitiable in his condition. After one final bellowing line, “let fall / Your horrible pleasure,” Lear grows suppliant, calling himself a “slave, / A poor, infirm, weak and despis’d old man” (III.ii.18-19, 19-20). It is clear that Lear has relinquished his sense of impervious immortality. The storm has altered him. As the storm scene progresses, Lear grows more desperate, alternating between intense declarations
(“Pour on, I will endure”) and pathetic rebukes of his daughters (“In such a night as this? O Regan, Goneril!”) (III.iv.18-19). Lear the omnipotent king has vanished, replaced by a “despis’d old man” who recognizes his powerlessness in the face of Nature, the storm. Thus, in many ways this scene is representative of the play as a whole; Lear must confront and come to terms with his aging, that process of nature.

It is clear that Lear understands the instructive role that nature is playing in this pastoral scene. He describes the agents of the storm as “servile ministers, / That will with two pernicious daughters join / Your high-engender’d battles ’gainst a head’/ So old and white as this” (III.ii.18-24). With this claim, Lear detracts from any potential power he appeared to possess; one can no longer view the storm to be the result of his cry for vengeance upon Goneril and Regan, for Lear no longer pretends to hold sway over the tempest. Additionally, by calling the agents of the storm “servile ministers,” Lear invokes the same image that Duke Senior has used before him; in Lear’s tormented Green World, the “counselors” of Arden have become “servile ministers.” They instruct, but it is too late for them to appear to Lear as comforters. Just before entering the hovel, Lear echoes his Arden counterpart once more; Kent invites him to come out of the storm, but Lear responds, “Thou think’st ’tis much that this contentious storm / Invades us to the skin; / But where the greater malady is fix’d / The lesser is scarce felt” (III.iv.6-9). These lines hearken back to Duke Senior’s speech at the beginning of the second act of As You Like It in which the storm, “willingly persuades [the duke] who [he is];” as with Duke Senior, Lear understands the educative power of the storm as it “fixes his greater malady.” Though these lines most explicitly indicate that the physical suffering caused by the storm takes Lear’s focus off of the emotional suffering caused him by his daughters, they also reference the ability of the
storm to correct his tragic flaw, the lack of self-knowledge that has been the “greater malady” of his life.

Directly following these lines, Lear offers a soliloquy in which he demonstrates a newfound awareness of the humanity he shares with his subjects. He speaks of the state of the poor, “That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,” asking, “How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / Your loop’d and window’d raggedness, defend you/ From seasons such as these?” (III.iv.29-32). Lear’s pastoral world is not peopled by care-free, lovesick shepherds as Arden was; it is peopled by “poor naked wretches” whose defenselessness serves to remind Lear of his own human frailty (III.iv.28). As his soliloquy continues, he confesses, “O, I have ta’en / Too little care of this!” (III.iv.32-33). With this line, Lear admits a moral shortcoming, acknowledging that as a ruler he has been careless; this admittance represents a great step towards a greater understanding of his role as king. When he divested himself of his title, not only did he sever himself from his divinely appointed identity before his death, but he demonstrated a disregard for his citizens, leaving them under the charge of the monstrous Goneril and Regan. Following these lines he issues a command: “Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, / And show the heavens more just” (III.iv.33-36). Though it is too late for Lear to implement the lessons of the storm as a ruler, in these final lines he provides instruction to his audience, encouraging them to experience poverty as he now does. This encouragement indicates once more that he understands that this storm is providing him with moral lessons, and demonstrates as well that Lear recognizes the necessity of this experience. Moreover, Lear reveals in this scene that he understands that his death, his final sleep, is drawing near; as he states before beginning this
speech, “I’ll pray, and then I’ll sleep” (III.iv.27). This soliloquy serves as a final confession of his shortcomings in life; Lear’s death will soon follow.

Inside the hovel, Lear meets with the maddened Edgar and quickly seems to recognize in Edgar’s pitiable state a fate similar to his own; both have been betrayed by their family members and both are now reduced to poverty in the tempest. Considering Edgar’s desperate state, Lear muses, “Is man no more than this? […] Thou ow’st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume” (III.iv.103-105). Edgar is, as Lear notes, “the thing itself: unaccomodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, fork’d animal as thou art” (III.iv.106-108). In these lines Lear presents a bleak view of humanity by describing Edgar in bestial terms; in his lack, Edgar nonetheless possesses a certain sovereignty, a state in which he is indebted to no man for his attire or his identity. Lear desires to experience this same liberation; he cries, “Off, off, you lendings!” By calling his vestments “lendings,” Lear indicates that he wants only what is natural to the state of man; he desires to live without guise or the false trappings of society.

When Lear reappears in Act IV, it is clear that these messages have reached the dethroned king too late; in this harsh pastoral world, Lear will find no retribution. Instead, he enters scene 6, “mad, crowned with weeds and flowers” (IV.vi). Here, Lear’s act of crowning himself with flowers at first seems to arise from a pathetic inability to accept his current fate; the maddened monarch has desperately fashioned a crown out of his natural findings in an attempt to reclaim his former status. However, under closer inspection, the act of crowning himself with flowers and weeds indicates a shift in Lear’s understanding of his mortality and his role as king; when Lear ceded his true crown, a crown that would presumably have been made of a permanent metal like gold or silver, he also ceded his identity as an all-powerful ruler. His decision to don a
crown of weeds and flowers, fleeting and ephemeral as the seasons, indicates his new understanding of the transient nature of his own mortality.

However this realization has proved too difficult for Lear to accept, as his “mad” behavior in this scene demonstrates an inability to accept his new understanding of death. He explains that he has lived a life full of vanity, in which his daughters have “flatter’d [him] like a dog” (IV.vi.97). He reveals that the storm has provided him with a new vision of his significance: “When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found ’em, there I smelt ’em out. Go to, they are not men o’ their words: they told me I was every thing. ’Tis a lie, I am not ague-proof” (IV.vi.100-105). Lear understands now that he enabled his daughters and courtiers to convince him he was unlike other men; once “every thing,” he was deific in his power and stature; now, the harsh pastoral realm has convinced him of his true powerlessness. A few lines later, when Gloucester asks to kiss Lear’s hand, Lear replies, “Let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality”(IV.vi.133). Lear has learned nature’s messages of aging and death, but they have driven him to bitterness and insanity.

Throughout the remainder of the scene, Edgar notes that Lear’s speech consists of “matter and impertinency mix’d, / Reason in madness!” (IV.vi.174-175). Lear speaks against expensive clothing and other riches, noting that “Thorough tatter’d clothes small vices do appear; / Robes and furr’d gowns hide all” (IV.vi.163-165). In the natural realm, Lear is able to recognize the hypocrisy that existed in his society. He advises Gloucester, “Get thee glass eyes, / And like a scurvy politician, seem / To see the things thou dost not” (IV.vi.170-172). This line references his own previous blindness; the politic world that Lear has previously been a part of has been a world of flattery and hypocrisy.
As his speech closes, Lear grows urgent, desperate to divest himself of more of his clothing, remnants of the deceptive world of court. He calls, “Now, now, now, now. / Pull off my boots” (IV.vi.172-173). Here, Lear’s impatience seems at once to recall a verse of Rosalind, whose understanding of mortality led to an eagerness for love’s fulfillment. Lear’s impatience indicates instead a desire to rid himself of all of society’s deception. Before he begins “preaching” to Gloucester, he removes his crown of weeds as well; he is now stripped of all remembrances of his former courtly self and stands, as Edgar has done before him, as an “unaccommodated man.”

In the “sermon” that follows, the now cynical Lear presents a view of the world not unlike the view which Jaques has provided in As You Like It, comparing the world to a theater. Lear says, “When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools” (IV.vi.182-183). He tells Gloucester to be patient, for he “came crying hither” and likens these tears to the tears of a children, who “the first time that [they] smell the air / [They] wawl and cry” (IV.vi.179-180). Lear has entered what Jaques called “second childishness” (As You Like It, II.viii.165). Accordingly, the remainder of the play will present Lear’s “last scene of all,” “mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing” (As You Like It, II.viii.165-166). As his “sermon” concludes, Lear invokes this oblivion; he states that once he has reached his son-in-laws, he will, “kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!” (IV.vi.187). Though he will not seek vengeance, Lear prefigures here the play’s close, which will end in oblivion. More chillingly, Lear’s six “kills” spoken here foreshadow the sixth deaths that will occur in the final scene of the play, one of which will be his own.

As this final scene of the play opens, Lear offers a heart-rending monologue that demonstrates an understanding of the truths that nature has offered him. When Cordelia asks if
he would like to see Goneril and Regan, Lear begs instead to be imprisoned immediately, where he says, “We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage” (V.iii.9). Lear has experienced glimpses of vast and incomprehensible truth out on the heath; there he looked upon the infinite macrocosm that man can never fully understand. Now, he desires to be confined once more to a sheltered ignorance, a microcosm within a prison cell, where he and Cordelia can lead a contemplative existence. In this microcosm, Lear imagines a world not unlike the court; in prison, he and his daughter will “live / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news” (V.iii.11-14). Here, Lear’s reference to “gilded butterflies,” meaning “trivial and ephemeral people,” evokes the same references to courtly attire Lear has made out on the heath; he has not forgotten nature’s messages, he has merely softened them, turning the hypocrites of “robes and fur’d gowns” into harmless butterflies that he and Cordelia may jovially mock (Riverside, 1339).

Lear indicates moreover that he desires to continue his spiritual journey; he tells Cordelia that within their cell they will “take upon [them] the mystery of things / As if [they] were God’s spies” (V.iii.16-17). As this speech concludes, Lear demonstrates that he still views himself to be apart from other men; he says that he and Cordelia will “wear out, / In a wall’d prison, packs and sects of great ones, / That ebb and flow by the moon” (V.iii.16-18). Lear still imagines that he possesses a certain immortality, an immunity to time’s passing; here, however, that immortality is born of a religious submission to God. As “God’s spies,” Lear and Cordelia will live apart from petty men as servants of God; they will outlive members of the politic world not because they are all-powerful, but because they have learned to submit themselves to an eternal authority (Riverside, 1339).
Additionally, Shakespeare includes in Lear’s speech in this scene the language of a bridegroom. As Edmund orders Lear and Cordelia to prison, Lear asks, “Have I caught thee?” adding, “He that parts us shall bring a band from heaven, / And fire us hence like foxes” (V.iii.21-23). By saying that he has “captured” Cordelia, Lear describes their relationship in marital terms. Cordelia is like his bride, whom only “a band from heaven,” rather than any earthly strife, can rend from him. Though these words indicate a reprisal of Lear’s former possessiveness, which originally caused Lear to disown Cordelia because she refused fully to submit to him, Lear’s care for her in the following lines seems to indicate a return to a more paternal concern for his daughter. Before the two exit, he warns her not to cry, saying, “Wipe thine eyes; / The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell, / Ere they shall make us weep!” (V.iii.22-24). With these lines, Lear fully demonstrates the temporal lessons he has learned in the tempest; he now understands that the “good years shall devour [him], flesh and fell.” As a result of this knowledge, he is resolved to mourn no longer, and to live in peace, with grace, with Cordelia, like foxes in a den.

However, these opening lines of the scene belie the dark end Lear and Cordelia will meet; in this harsh pastoral world, they can find no fulfillment in marriage as the lovers of Arden have done before them. Cordelia is married to another, and the suspicious onlooker may well fear that, Lear’s “catching” his daughter precludes her being cast forward into genuine marital love and motherhood. Indeed, Shakespeare presents in this last scene a coupling of love deaths, in which the tormented characters will be able to consummate their bleak lives only through violence. Just after being stabbed, Edmund learns that Goneril and Regan are dead. Goneril has poisoned her sister out of jealousy. As Edmund explains, “I was contracted to them both; all three / Now marry in an instant” (V.iii.228-229). Edmund will die and the three will be united in
a marriage of the damned. Just before he dies, Edmund reveals that the deaths of Lear and Cordelia have been ordered. This confession comes too late; Cordelia has already been hung, and the weeping Lear enters, bearing his dead child in his arms.

While one might imagine that Lear and Cordelia’s deaths would be described in a less bleak fashion, perhaps indicating that the two find in death a fulfillment that was unavailable to them in life, Lear’s final words indicate that, just as the deaths of Goneril, Regan and Edmund before them, Cordelia and Lear will find in death only finis, only a canceling termination of life. As Lear reenters the scene, he cries, “Howl, howl, howl!” (V.iii.258). In his grief, Lear becomes the “bare, fork’d animal” he has seen previously in Edgar. One is reminded, albeit by contrast, of the slippery words Goneril and Regan use in the play’s opening scene to flatter their father; their words were characterized by artifice. Here, Lear is artless, speaking in desperate exclamations. He pours forth a bestial wail that both signals his frustration, felt in the repetition of “howl,” and demonstrates his unaffected and natural anguish. As his speech continues, Lear cries, “She’s gone forever! / I know when one is dead, and when one lives; / She’s dead as earth” (V.iii.263). Lear demonstrates once again his acute awareness of mortality, but it is a view of the afterlife that is without hope; moreover, by describing “earth” as dead, Lear presents a view of a sterile world, a natural realm entirely unlike the leisured pastoral realm of Arden. Additionally, by evoking the image of a sterile land, Lear, in a moment of dramatic irony, references his own sterility; all of his daughters are now dead, and Lear’s royal line will end with him.

Directly following this monologue, Kent questions “Is this the promis’d end?” to which Edgar responds, “Or image of that horror?” (V.iii.263-264). Albany concludes, bleakly, “Fall, and cease!”, indicating that the earth might as well come to its “promised end” rather than endure this misery (V.iii.265; Riverside, 1342). Cordelia’s death is likened to an apocalypse;
Gloucester’s premonitions from Act I have been realized since the aberrance of the natural and societal worlds has finally plagued even the gentle and kind-hearted Cordelia. Lear says that if she lives, “It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever [Lear] has felt” (V.iii.267-268). These words seem to indicate that Cordelia’s death is a touchstone; her death here has great implications to those messages of *King Lear* which deal with Lear’s sorrows regarding his mortality. Had Cordelia lived, one might view Lear’s presentation of the world as redemptive, in which, by heeding the natural wisdom offered him in the tempest, thereby “tempering” his moral blindness regarding his mortality, Lear is finally rewarded with the redemption of his daughter. Instead, Cordelia is truly dead and one understands that, in this harsh pastoral world, nature’s messages, though edifying, will not deliver Lear from his fate; Lear has already doomed himself to a meaningless end, and his recent revelations have only served to announce his coming death, not to deter it.

Accordingly, the play closes with his death. As Lear dies, he once more evokes the image of sterility, “No, no, no life!” (V.iii.206). He says again that Cordelia will “come no more,/ Never, never, never, never, never,” underscoring the finality and irrevocability of death (V.iii.309). With his dying words, Lear explicitly directs his attention once more to Cordelia, as though he seeks, as his last act, to impart to his audience the messages he has learned. He cries, “Do you see this? Look on her! Look her lips, / Look there, look there!” (V.iii.311-312).

Cordelia serves as a final reminder of mortality in the play, a *memento mori*; death has come to her abruptly as an unwavering and nullifying force. Lear focuses on this reminder of death as he dies; it is as though, even in his last moments, he tempers his former blindness, “looking” on that which he once ignored. Fittingly, this harsh pastoral play will end with “a dead march”; this final choreography seems the bleak mirror to the dancing found at the end of *As You Like It.* In this
tormented world, *King Lear’s* final scene closes upon the deliberate motion of the characters off stage, a symbolic movement that alludes to the deliberate and unstoppable passage of time, leading us ever closer to death.

In this way, *King Lear* proves to be the ghostly mirror to *As You Like It*, presenting a natural realm as harsh and tormented as Arden was leisured and idealized. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare presented a idyllic pastoral realm, where shepherds live a life of ease, worrying only about love. In *King Lear*, the pastoral world Lear encounters out on the heath is instead tormented; when he enters the hovel, he encounters only the disguised Edgar, who comes to represent “unaccomodated man.” Similarly, Lear learns compassion for the “poor naked wretches” who must weather this storm “houseless”; in Lear’s natural world, the lower classes who people this dark pasture are “ragged” and “unfed.” The natural world of *King Lear* does not accommodate its inhabitants as nature did in Arden, but seems instead to be sterile and barren. Additionally, in Arden, Shakespeare has underscored the idyllic realm of the forest by providing his audience with an altered version of Ovid’s “Pyramus and Thisbe,” in which even the monstrous lion is anthropomorphized, rendered noble in its comportment towards the sleeping Oliver; by contrast, in *King Lear*, a contagious monstrosity afflicts the kingdom, purveyed by the bestial and “unnatural hags” Goneril and Regan. Most importantly, *As You Like It* closes with dancing and marital fulfillment, a scene of “rustic revelry.” As Duke Senior concludes, “We’ll begin these rites, /As we do trust they’ll end, in true delights” (V.iv.197-198). Contrastingly, at the end of *King Lear*, the funerary rites of the fallen King are begun, and they will certainly end in darkness.

Yet, the educative power of nature unifies these two pastoral plays. Lear and the characters of *As You Like It* allude to an educative, tempering power of the Green World that is
present in both natural realms. Additionally, these plays are united in a focus on mortality; Lear’s lack of understanding of his mortality has been tempered by the heath’s storm. Ultimately, as a consequence of his sojourn in the wilderness, Lear practices the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, gaining awareness of his shared humanity as he approaches his “oblivion.” Though presented in a far less grim light, death has also played a role in Arden. Duke Senior is also taught by natural “counselors” to accept his own powerlessness, but these messages have led him towards gratitude and contentment rather than oblivion; Rosalind’s understanding of the passage of time informs her impatience for marriage, love’s fulfillment. The natural world has thus provided her with a *carpe diem* message. And yet, perhaps these two play’s most disturbing similarity lies in their mutually improbable portrayal of the Green World. *As You Like It* is too entirely given to an idyllic vision of the natural world, while in *King Lear*, as Kent concludes, “All’s cheerless, dark, and deadly” (V.iii.292). Arden is too idyllic; Lear’s heath is too apocalyptic.

Ironically, Shakespeare presents his most realistic version of the Green World in what is arguably his most enchanted play, *The Tempest*. In this work, Shakespeare creates a pastoral realm that is both leisured and harsh, in which the characters must work diligently or be punished in order to find fulfillment at the end of the play. As with *King Lear* and *As You Like It*, the temporal lessons of the Green World of *The Tempest* will inform the characters of their mortality: for Ferdinand and Miranda, this will result in a *carpe diem* message, leading them to find fulfillment through marriage at the play’s close; for Prospero, a kind of “romance” counterpart to Lear, this will result in a different, hearkening to nature’s messages, as Prospero will participate in an *ars moriendi* as Lear has done. Yet, this redemptive play will close upon Prospero’s moral fulfillment, not his mortal failure.
Hearkening back to the “storm scene” of *King Lear, The Tempest* begins with a ferocious storm; thunder and lightning open the scene. The crew aboard a drowning ship offers what they believe to be their last prayers; Mariners enter the stage calling madly, “All lost! To prayers, to prayers! All lost!,” and “a confused noise” comes from within the ship’s cabin, as the ship men cry out, “‘Mercy on us’ – ‘We split, we split’ – ‘Farewell, my wife and children’” (I.i.51, 61-62). Gonzalo offers the bleakest speech of the scene, declaring, “Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown [furze], any thing” (I.i.65-67). In this way, the scene presents an image even bleaker than those found in *Lear*; Gonzalo would exchange his current state, aboard a drowning ship, for the “barren heath” of Lear’s tempest. However, immediately following this scene, Prospero reveals that the storm has been no more than his own conjuration and that, more importantly, no harm has been done to the men aboard the ship. Prospero quickly reveals that, he has, “with such provision in [his] art / So safely ordered that there is no soul -- / No, not so much perdition as an hair, / Betid to any creature in the vessel/ Which thou heardst cry, which thou saw’st sink” (I.i.28-32). Since this storm constitutes the only true “tempest” of the play, its brevity and conjured origin obscure the significance of the play’s title. True, this scene serves as the impetus for the action that follows, but that alone does not seem to explain the title’s significance.

In *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance*, Northrop Frye offers a different explanation of the play’s title – an explanation that explicitly links *The Tempest* to this paper’s discussion of time in the Green World. Frye writes:

[The] feeling for the right time ramifies into all the imagery of *The Tempest*. The moon and the tides […] are a part of its rhythm, and so is the moral virtue of patience, or waiting for the time to accomplish one’s desires. Patience is one of the two virtues
personified in this dialogue; the other is the “delicate wench” Temperance, the central virtue of all comedies, the etymology of which connects it, like the tempest itself, with time (tempestas) and the distribution of time. (153).

When we hold this understanding in mind, the storm becomes a symbol for the roles that patience and temperance will play in this work. By titling this work _The Tempest_, Shakespeare underscores the importance of the passage of time in this pastoral realm.

However, by placing the tempest at the beginning of the play, Shakespeare seems to be revealing certain differences between this play and _King Lear_. In Shakespeare’s dark pastoral, the storm scene marked a crescendo in the action of the play; Lear finally begins to understand his own humanity when he is placed in the awe of the storm. Once he has traversed its fury, he is capable of self-knowledge and a greater understanding of mortality. In _The Tempest_, because Shakespeare places the storm at the beginning of the play, it is as though the characters have already navigated its fury; in this work, they will be “tempered,” but the storm and its fury will not be to them what they have been to Lear.

Indeed, when Prospero tells Miranda the story of their past lives in Milan, it becomes clear that Prospero has already traversed a storm of his own, similar to Lear’s in its fury and purpose. As Duke of Milan, Prospero reveals that he “neglect[ed] worldly ends” and, instead, “all dedicated / To closeness and the bettering of [his] mind” (I.ii.89-90). Though he did not suffer, as Lear did, from a tragic lack of understanding regarding his mortality, Prospero similarly misunderstood his role as Duke; like Lear, he has abused his role as leader, paying too little attention to the affairs of his court. As a result, Prospero’s brother Antonio usurps his dukedom, exiling Prospero and the young Miranda. The two flee by sea, where they are left, “To cry to th’ sea, that roar’d to us; to sigh / To th’ winds, whose pity, sighing back again, / Did us but loving
wrong” (I.ii.148-151). Like Lear, Prospero has been tempered by the natural world; when
Miranda asks him how they finally arrived ashore, Prospero answers, “By Providence divine”
(I.ii.159). Prospero, having felt his own insignificance on the vast sea, now possesses a greater
understanding of his mortality, attributing his final safety to divine intervention rather than his
own art. Moreover, when he lands on the island he is immediately forced to take on a new role of
leadership; on this island, Prospero will be forced to turn his attention to the “worldly ends” that
he previously neglected as Duke of Milan. The island will continue to instruct him, but it will not
madden him as it has his bleak counterpart, for Prospero has learned to align himself with the
natural world, even going so far as to become its great imitator. Accordingly, the storm that he
conjures at the play’s open is not a device of vengeance. Instead, like the storm of Lear and the
storm that Prospero has experienced previously, the purpose of this tempest is primarily
educative. Because Prospero constructs the storm in such a way that none are harmed, it is clear
that he desires redemption of those aboard, not vengeance.

However, if these aspects of the tale seem to paint Prospero as a benevolent ruler, his
treatment of Ariel and Caliban indicates instead that he has grown tyrannical, at least by turns, in
his command of the island. Just as the Green World of The Tempest rests somewhere between a
harsh pastoral realm and a leisured one, Prospero himself seems at the same time to be a just
ruler and a severe one. When Ariel first enters, Prospero soon tells the history of their
relationship: Prospero has rescued Ariel from a tormented confinement inside a tree, where his
“groans / Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts / Of ever-angry bears” (I.ii.287-289).
The witch Sycorax, the previous ruler of the island, had confined him there; Prospero reveals
his opinion of such an imprisonment, which he says, “was a torment / To lay upon the damn’d”
(I.ii.289-290). Moved by Ariel’s pitiable state, Prospero uses his magic to release him. However,
Prospero then takes Ariel to be his servant, making the sprite an indentured slave of sorts, whom he now sends to do his bidding around the island. While it is clear that the two share a mutual love and esteem for one another, Ariel nonetheless feels his enslavement acutely. When Prospero asks him harshly, “What is’t that thou canst demand?”, Ariel responds, movingly, “My liberty” (I.ii.244-245). It is clear that, though he has been released from the hold of the tree, Ariel remains in the hold of an at times brutal lord; later in the scene, Prospero will chide him, “If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till / Thou hast howl’d away twelve winters” (I.ii.294-296). A few lines later, Prospero returns to his more compassionate treatment of Ariel, promising to discharge him in two days’ time, provided that Ariel obeys Prospero’s commands.

Prospero has a similarly conflicted relationship with Caliban, the son of Sycorax. Prospero, in speaking with Caliban, reveals the history of their relationship as well: “I have us’d thee / (Filth as thou art) with human care, and lodg’d thee / In mine own cell” (I.ii.345-347). While Caliban lived with them, Miranda also treated him charitably; she says, “I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour one thing or other… I endow’d thy purposes / With words that made them known” (I.ii.353-355). However, when Caliban attempts to rape Miranda, desiring to “[people] / This isle with Calibans,” Caliban is confined to a rock and made the slave of Prospero and Miranda alike (I.ii.350-351). While Miranda calls this treatment “deserved,” Prospero’s subsequent treatment of Caliban often seems too harsh; before Caliban exits the scene, Prospero commands him, “Hag-seed, hence! / Fetch us in fuel, and be quick, thou’rt best, / To answer other business” (I.ii.365-367). More startlingly, when Caliban “shrugs,” Prospero threatens him, saying, “If thou neglect’st, or dost unwillingly / What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps, / Fill all thy bones with aches, and make thee roar /
That beasts shall tremble at thy din” (I.ii.368-371). Here, Prospero requires not only obedience, but willful obedience; he demands the same submission that one would give a god. It is as though Prospero has moved from two extremes: in Milan, he was a negligent ruler, quickly usurped because he focused too greatly on intellectual pursuits; on this island, he is a tyrannical ruler, ascribing to himself the powers best befitting a deity. Prospero will willingly temper this overreaching sin before the play’s close; his desire and capacity to change will enable him to look towards the fulfillment in death that was unavailable to Lear.

As pertains to the discussion of the pastoral worlds in Shakespeare, these passages also indicate that the island is not the idyllic world of Arden. In Arden, the shepherd Corin explains that he is “a true laborer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man’s happiness, glad of other men’s good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lams suck” (As You Like It, III.ii.73-77). Though Corin must labor, he describes the work in such a way that it seems pleasurable, as it seems that his work leads him to a greater moral understanding of his position in life; Corin seems satisfied, proud of his societal status as laborer. Moreover, in the next lines, Touchstone undermines Corin’s claims, stating that he makes his living merely “by the copulation of cattle,” indicating that Corin’s labor is not even as difficult as Corin has described it (As You Like It, III.ii.80).

By contrast, Prospero’s isle must be worked. Caliban and Ariel have become his servants, and he relies upon them to derive sustenance from this island “pasture.” As Caliban sings when he believes he has been liberated from Prospero by Trinculo and Stefano, “No more dams I’ll make for fish, / Nor fetch in firing / At requiring, / Nor scrape tranchering, nor wash dish” (The Tempest, II.ii.180-183). Here is a catalogue of all of the labor that seemed suspiciously lacking in the enchanted forest of As You Like It.
And yet, Prospero’s island is not the tormented, sterile heath of *King Lear* either, but instead contains many elements of a “soft pastoral” world. When Ferdinand first arrives upon the isle, he sits on a bank, “Weeping again the King [his] father’s wrack” (I.ii.300-301). Soon however, Ariel, invisible to Ferdinand, beckons to the stranded prince with a song; Ferdinand explains, the “music crept by me upon the waters, / Allaying both their fury and my passion / With its sweet air” (I.iii.392-294). As with Rosalind in Arden, Ferdinand finds his sorrows are cured in this pastoral realm. When Ferdinand sees Miranda for the first time, Shakespeare seems to reprise Rosalind’s experience in Arden once more, as Ferdinand, like Rosalind, immediately forgets his filial grief, swearing, “My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up, / My father’s loss, the weakness which I feel, / The wrack of all my friends…/ … are but light to me” (I.ii.487-490). The island presents to Ferdinand a world like Arden, in which his other sorrows are alleviated so that he may focus entirely upon love and “seize the day,” responding to nature’s *carpe diem* messages.

Gonzalo also provides a description of the island that illustrates the similarities between it and the “soft pastoral” Green World of *As You Like It*. His speech, which is interwoven with a set of cynical lines spoken by Antonio and Sebastian, indicates that the island bears resemblance to its Arden counterpart; he states, “Here is every thing advantageous to life” (II.i.50). He then praises the verdure of his pastoral surroundings, exclaiming, “How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!” (II.i.54). He imagines founding here a new kingdom, wherein, “nature should bring forth, / Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance, / To feed [his] innocent people” (II.i.163). Gonzalo indicates that this pastoral realm is capable of sustaining a prelapsarian purity, where people are innocent and nature provides them with all that they need.
In this way, Prospero’s island truly lies between the realms of the hard and soft pastoral. While possessing a certain Edenic quality that is entirely unattainable in *King Lear* after Lear parcels out his kingdom, this realm is far less idyllic than dream-like, leisured realm of *As You Like It’s* Arden. Accordingly, characters in *The Tempest* will not be able to find fulfillment as easily as those in *As You Like It*, nor will fulfillment be unavailable to them, as it was to the characters of *King Lear*. Instead, they will have to work diligently to achieve moral fulfillment by the play’s end.

Northrop Frye indicates that patience and waiting for the right timing are all important in a play that revolves around the *tempestas*, the time, of the natural world. Frye cites as his example Miranda’s chastity: “The chastity of Miranda is a controlled energy that must develop from virginity to marriage by observing the proper rhythms of time and of ritual, otherwise the whole order of nature will go out of alignment” (153). Here, we are reminded of Lear, whose tragic misunderstanding of “the proper rhythms of time” caused him to disrupt nature’s order when he ceded his title before his death. Prospero, who has already traversed one corrective “tempest” when he was exiled, seems astutely aware of the importance of aligning one’s actions with the dictates of natural time. As Frye notes, “[Prospero] observes time closely (‘The very minute bids thee open thine ear’ he says to Miranda), and his charms are effective only if he follows the rhythm of time” (152).

As the reigning force of the island, Prospero uses this understanding of time to instruct and guide the other characters towards moral fulfillment. Accordingly, though he has in fact commanded Ariel to lead Ferdinand to Miranda and inwardly rejoices in their love for one another, revealing in several asides that their relationship “goes on [...] / As [his] soul prompts it,” he does not wish for their love to be consummated too soon (I.ii.420-421). He therefore
decides to temper their new relationship, explaining: “They are both in either’s powers; but this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light” (I.ii.451-453). In these lines, Prospero demonstrates a better understanding of time and patience than Lear did previously; we are reminded that Lear wishes to “unburden” himself before death. Prospero understands that hardship is necessary in order truly to appreciate life. For that reason, Prospero accuses Ferdinand of being a traitor and requires him to do manual labor. As Ferdinand explains, “I must remove / Some thousands of these logs, and pile them up/ Upon a sore injunction” (III.i.9-11). However, it appears that Prospero’s scheme is working; Ferdinand reveals that, “This my mean task / Would be as heavy to me as odious, but / The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead, / And makes my labors pleasures” (III.i.4-7). Here, Ferdinand echoes both the Duke of Arden, who rejoices in nature’s instruction, and, more explicitly, Lear, who states that, “where the greater malady is fix’d / The lesser is scarce felt” (III.iv.9-9). Ferdinand says that while he works “[His] sweet mistress/ Weeps” (III.i.11-12). It is clear that through these struggles, Ferdinand and Miranda are both growing more resolute in their love; in this more realistic pastoral realm, fulfillment is not easily obtained, but must be worked for diligently.

Similarly, when we reexamine Prospero’s treatment of Ariel and Caliban, we would seem to discover that Prospero has desired in these instances as well to make obtaining their goals, “uneasy lest too light winning/ Make the prize light” (I.ii.452-453). Perhaps most notable in his treatment of Ariel, Prospero persistently reminds Ariel that though he must obey, it is only for a time. When, in Act I, scene ii, Ariel says that he desires his liberty, Prospero grows indignant, responding, “Before the time be out? No more!” (I.ii.246). Ariel then reminds him of their agreement, in which, Prospero “did promise / To bate [Ariel] a full year” (I.ii.248-249). This year, however, has “tempered” Ariel, who explains that during this indentured servitude he has
“done [Prospero] worthy service, / Told [him] no lies, made [him] no mistakes, serv’d / Without or grudge or grumblings” (I.ii.246-248). By serving his master, Ariel has learned honesty and humility and learned to align his will to the will of his lord. Prospero will eventually reward these virtues, but once more, it will only be after Ariel has completed his year; Prospero understands the importance of patience, and the ways in which working towards a moral fulfillment or an accomplishment of one’s goals makes one more grateful than if “winning the prize were light.” This temporal element of waiting for and working to attain moral fulfillment has only existed on Prospero’s island; on Arden, the lovers’ relatively quick and trouble-free progress to the altar seemed too surreal to speak to the true temporal lessons of the Green World, while for those in Lear’s apocalyptic world, Lear’s inability to wait for his death hastened the bleak end of the play, in which moral fulfillment was unattainable for all characters, save Edgar, who invites us to obey, and to learn from, such tragedy (V.ii.324-327).

Perhaps the most telling example of how Shakespeare’s late romance differs from its two earlier pastoral counterparts, however, rests in Prospero’s self-prescribed adherence to the temporal messages of the Green World. Throughout many early scenes in the play, as we have previously seen, he appears tyrannical; the storm, much like the enslavement of Ariel and Caliban, has been the product of his magical arts. Similar to Lear’s role as King, Prospero’s magical powers have, in many ways, led him to believe he was more than mortal; he requires from his servants the respect one would give a god. However, Prospero is not Lear; he well understands that he is mortal and that he is growing ever nearer to death. In a speech to Ferdinand and Miranda, whose love he has just openly blessed through a pageant of spirits, he reveals an understanding that his magical powers are as ephemeral as his human life:

These our actors
(As I foretold you) were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d tow’rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148-158)

Prospero understands that all natural things are subject to transience and dissolution; unlike Lear who had been flattered into believing that he was more than human, Prospero understands that even his magic cannot alter the fleeting nature of his existence.

Most notably, this speech is not marked by bitterness, nor should it frighten the young lovers, who, as yet, have likely given little thought to death. Prospero presents death by underscoring its universality; everything on earth is subject to time, and therefore everything will eventually decay. While it is sobering to think that that which dissolves shall “leave not a rack behind,” it is important, even for young lovers like Miranda and Ferdinand, to think on their mortality; an understanding of their death will inform their pending nuptials, just as it has informed Rosalind and Orlando’s before them. Additionally, by calling life a “dream” and death the “sleep” that encases it, Prospero does not paint an unpleasant picture of the afterlife. Death will not come as a nullifying oblivion, but rather as a comfort.
To prepare himself for his death, Prospero in the final act of the play divests himself of his magical powers. He understands that he has at times been too tyrannical in his treatment not only of Caliban and Ariel but, most notably, of the court from Milan whom he shipwrecked on the island, using his magic as an agent of his fury to make them suffer for their past crimes against him. Since he learns that they are now penitent, he will instead rely on his “[his] nobler reason,” for “The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (V.i.25-27). Accordingly, Prospero will now give up his magical powers. He explains that has used them to control the natural world: he has, “bedimm’d / The noontide sun, call’d forth the mutinous winds, / And ’twixt the green sea and the azur’d vault / Set roaring war” (V.i.41-44). Prospero also reveals that he has used his magic to raise the dead. He says, “graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let ’em forth / By my so potent art” (V.i.48-50). It is clear that his powers have given him a false sense of his humanity, as they enabled him to manipulate the natural world like a god. In *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare*, Jonathan Bate notes that Prospero’s speech is actually an imitation of a speech given by Medea in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

Prospero’s final and most sustained humanist oration is an *imitatio* of a negative *exemplum*: his renunciation of rough magic is cast in the form of a translation of the incantation of Ovid’s witch, Medea. The magic is now revealed to involve a blasphemous transgression of Christian mores, the opening of graves – only God the Father and God the Son are entitled to raise the dead. (Bates, 128)

Like Ovid’s vengeance-driven Medea, Prospero has used his powers tyrannically. By indicating that Prospero has engaged in magical acts like those of Ovid’s wicked enchantress, Shakespeare underscores the immorality of Prospero’s magic. However, by the speech’s close, Prospero
indicates that he is ready to relinquish his magical powers. He says, “this rough magic / I here abjure” and he promises soon to “break [his] staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / [ He will] drown [his] book” (V.i.50-51, 54-57). Prospero is now ready to turn his focus instead on thoughts of his mortality; as the play closes, he reveals that he will return to Milan, “where / Every third thought shall be [his] grave” (V.i.311-312).

By the end of the play, Prospero, Ariel, Caliban, Ferdinand and Miranda will all achieve the moral fulfillment they worked for. Prospero, divested of his powers of enchantment, reconciles himself with the court party from Milan and regains his formal place in society, tempering his soul in these last days as he nears his death. Ariel will receive his freedom, Caliban will live on the island alone, ruling over it as he has longed to do, and Ferdinand and Miranda will wed, their wedding blessed by both of their fathers. No character’s fulfillment, however, has been the easy, overly-idyllic fulfillment of Arden. More realistically, these characters have had to suffer, to struggle, and to make sacrifice in order to obtain moral fulfillment at the play’s close.

In each of these Green Worlds, Shakespeare has fashioned a different incarnation of the pastoral realm best suited to temper the sins of his characters. In the light and airy world of *As You Like It*, no character suffered from a sin grave enough to require a tempest. Accordingly, the reminders of this natural world were slight; worms informed Rosalind of her mortality, and the winter’s cold taught a cheery Duke self-knowledge. In *King Lear*, immorality had already pervaded the kingdom; in his reflections upon his courtly past, Lear describes a world wrecked by vanity and hypocrisy. The tempest is the only force of nature powerful enough to undo the flattery of the court that persuaded Lear that he was more than mortal. In *The Tempest*, Prospero
already possesses an awareness of nature’s temporal messages, and creates storms and trials in order to lead the other characters slowly towards a mutual moral fulfillment at the play’s end.

As the last play which Shakespeare authored alone, *The Tempest* provides us with Shakespeare’s most hopeful message. On Prospero’s island, we find a world not unlike our own. It must be worked, but it provides sustenance to those who are willing to do so. Here, love does not come without struggle, freedom does not come without travail, and death is comforting to those who have been mindful of their mortality. By also making this more realistic play one of his most enchanted, Shakespeare seems to speak to the magic that is born of the ephemeral nature of our mortality. Our human brevity and struggle give meaning to life’s fleeting beauty and love. Miranda’s enthusiasm, then, though perhaps born of her naiveté, might also speak to a deeper understanding of life’s transience and hardship; as she looks upon a group of men who have all undergone tempering in this natural world, she cries:

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in’t! (V.i.182-185)

The “bravery” of the world rests in man’s ability, as demonstrated in this play, to internalize the messages of evanescence and time spoken to us by the Green World, and to use this understanding to spur us onward, toward moral fulfillment.
Works Cited


