

Shakespeare's *Silvae*:
Mapping Shakespeare's Dramatic Arboreal Landscape

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

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Accepted for Departmental Honors in English

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Easter Term, 2010

“What wood is this here before us?”

— *Macbeth*, 5.4.4

Much like Macbeth, Shakespeare was besieged by trees. his literary and theatrical fate was grafted with them. In Shakespeare’s Judeo-Christian background, a tree marked both the foundation of Man’s Fall and the beginning of His resurrection. Shakespeare not only performed within the “wooden O” (*H5* I.chorus.13) but also set many of his plays both within, and on the outskirts, of forests. In fact, many of Shakespeare’s comedies are aborescent in themselves: evoking the way that trees like the Longleaf Pine are bilaterally symmetrical in that the branches of the tree mirror the root structure, reflective doublings typically occur in what Northrype Frye termed the “Green World.”¹ Allusively, physically, dramatically, and structurally, Shakespeare encloses his work and himself in trees. How, then, does this arboreal envelopment inform his dramatic corpus? From the Forests of Arden, Athens, Windsor, and Birnan to his metaphors of ivy-encircled elms, new sapling kings, and abandoned holy groves, Shakespeare uses trees and collections of trees as shifting paradoxical images: they are a place of protection and danger, noise and silence, artificiality and naturality, structure and collapse, and freedom and entrapment.

SHAKESPEARE’S ARBOREAL BACKGROUND

Shakespeare is not the first writer to recognize the potent symbolic potential of trees. He emerges from a deeply founded arboreal background. Biblically, the Tree of

¹ Northrype Frye, “The Argument of Comedy.” *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism* Ed. Leonard F. Dean. (Oxford, 1967) p. 85.

Jesse, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life (*arbor vitae*) surround him. The tree is the Biblical place of Man's first transformation – from innocence to knowledge, from ease to toil, from purity to sin. The tree is also Biblically the representative place of Man's final transformation: Christianity proclaims that on the wood of Christ's cross God mends Man's mortality with new life. According to the medieval text *Legend of the Cross*, the wood from the Tree of Life constructed the cross.² In Renaissance folklore, following medieval belief, these trees were considered one and the same: Christ's cross was fashioned from the same tree that produced the forbidden fruit in the middle of Eden.³ In the medicinal practices of Shakespeare's time, the Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*, also known as Monk's Pepper and Lilac Chaste Tree) provided young women and vowed individuals with supplemental anaphrodisiac herbal strength to preserve their chastity.⁴ Philosophically, the Tree of Porphyry (*arbor porphyriana*), presented by Porphyry in an introduction to Aristotle's *Cateogories*, a text later translated into Latin by Boethius, served as a basis for The Great Chain of Being, a structural idea that served not only in metaphysical but religious contexts during the Renaissance, as well. Thus, the metaphor of a tree becomes the basis of many underlying ideas in Renaissance drama.

Physically, paintings of trees as well as actual trees most likely donned the Elizabethan stage, creating "tree scenes," which would have been as common as throne

² Katrin Kogman-Appel. "The Tree of Death and the Tree of Life: The Hanging of Haman in Medieval Jewish Manuscript Painting". *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies from the Index of Christian Art*. Ed. Colum Hourihane. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2005. p. 189.

³ Terry Comito. *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance*. New Jersey: Rutgers, 1978. P. 49.

⁴ William Turner. *The second part of Vuilliam Turners herbal*. Arnold Binkman. Collen, 1562.

or bedroom scenes and, thereby, would have allowed an Elizabethan audience to envision, literally and imaginatively, particular scene settings. Tree scenes easily could also have been turned into garden scenes with the mention of a wall, gate, or fountain.⁵ Hence, Benedick can inform the audience of his exact arboreal placement when he commands a servant, “In my chamber-window lies a book, bring it hither to me in the orchard” (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 2.3.3-4).

Trees reside mythologically, too, in Shakespeare’s arras. Dryads lived in trees, and gods bestowing mercy often turned such Ovidian figures as Daphne, Baucis, and Philemon into trees. Vergil describes the speed with which Aeneas and his men abandon Dido with reference to the hero’s appropriation of trees still in leaf: “*frondentisque ferunt remos et robora silvis infabricata, fugae studio* (“Eager to get away, the sailors brought oar-boughs out of the woods/ With leaves still on, and oaken logs unhewn”).⁶ Aeneas also travels to the underworld only by bearing the necessary token of a golden bough. Orpheus, the mythological lyric poet *par excellence*, had the ability to move the grounded oaks from their post with his song. The Hesperides protect the tree with the golden apples of immortality. Odysseus in *The Odyssey* uses the Cyclops’ tree walking stick-trunk in order to extinguish the creature’s single eye. Diana resides in a sacred oak grove. Cephalus’ inerrant javelin is made of an unknown tree. The Myrmidons number as many as the ants on Zeus’ sacred oak, and the Delphic oracle traditionally held laurel leaves.

⁵ Werner Habicht, “Tree Properties and Tree Scenes in Elizabethan Theater” *Renaissance Drama*. ed. S. Schoenbaum. Vol. IV. Northwestern University Press, 1971. p. 77.

⁶ Vergil. *Aeneid* trans. Robert Fitzgerald, 1981: New York. Vintage Classics. IV, 399-400, p. 110.

All of these mythological associations would have been relevant to Shakespeare since he lived during a pivotal time in which the mythologically secular and the Biblically ecclesiastical were united in the *Ovid Moralisé*, a medieval French text drawing Christian allegories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A fourteenth-century man comments on the true purpose of the *Ovide Moralisé*: "Un grant romans, couvert de cuir vermeil, des fables d'ovide qui sunt ramenez a moralite de la mort de Jesus Christ. – One gains a book, covered by a secret veil, of Ovid's stories which are meditations on the morality of Christ's death."⁷ The *Ovid Moralisé* addressed Christian metamorphosis through an Ovidian lens. In the fourteenth century, Pierre Bersuire similarly dedicated the fifteenth book of his *Reductorium Morale* to allegorizing Ovid.⁸ Trees are, thus, able to bear new and more personal allegorical meanings. Bersuire interprets Daphne fleeing Apollo as the Christian soul trying to escape Satan, and the laurel tree into which Daphne is transformed as Christ's redemptive cross, saving others from sin.⁹ Berchorius, another Ovidian fourteenth-century moralizing author, wrote the *Ovidius moralizatus*, which was published between 1509 and 1521.¹⁰ In his text, Berchorius interprets the mulberry bush under which Pyramus dies as symbolic of the passion of Christ. Pyramus symbolizes Christ, while Thisbe represents the human soul; the wall that separates them concretizes sin, and the mulberry tree under which they are finally united typifies the cross— and

⁷ Gaston Paris, "Chrétien Legouais et autres traducteurs ou imitateurs d'Ovide," in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, t. xxix (1885), p. 510.

⁸ Robert Levine, "Exploiting Ovid: Medieval Allegorizations of the *Metamorphoses*," *Medioevo Romanzo* XIV (1989), p. 198.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 205.

¹⁰ Daniel Javitch, "Rescuing Ovid from the Allegorizers." *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 30, No.2 (Spring, 1978), pp.98-99.

even the fruit of the cross, purpled by love's sacrificial blood.¹¹ Shakespeare, then, inherited not only both the mythological and Biblical tree traditions but also the moralized combinations of them both.

However, trees for Shakespeare chiefly did not offer an antiquated idea or poetical trope. He joined a more contemporary arboreal literary tradition. Chaucer casts trees as central meeting locations in both *The Merchant's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Tale*. In *The Merchant's Tale*, January is remedied from blindness only to find his wife May *swiving* with Placebo in a tree in the garden, and in *The Pardoner's Tale*, the three thieves finally meet Death under the same oak tree under which they found gold. The Wood of Error is the chief setting of the first book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, villains hang Horatio from a tree, and, as a result, his suicidal mother Isabella destroys her arboreal garden in grief, crying:

Down with these branches and these loathsome boughs
Of this unfortunate and fatal pine!
Down with them, Isabella; rent them up,
And burn the roots from whence the rest is sprung.
I will not leave a root, a stalk, a tree,
A bough, a branch, a blossom, nor a leaf.
(4.2.6-7)

Because a tree was the vehicle for her son's death, Isabella wreaks havoc on her own arboreal garden, blaming nature itself for the evildoing. In doing so, she mimics not only the Fall of Man by discovering the "fatal" potential of trees, but she also recreates the murder of her son itself by destroying a living tree, an emblem of a person who has a "trunk" and "limbs," as well. A plethora of interpretive potential and possibilities for the transformation of arboreal symbolism existed for Shakespeare.

¹¹ Ovidius *Metamorphoseos moralizatus a Fratres P. Berchorii*, appendix to F. Ghisalberti, *Ovidius moralizatus, Studi romanzi*, 23 (1933), p. 114-115.

However, despite this rich arboreal background, little to nothing has been written about Shakespeare's use of trees. No unified, comprehensive study exists, and furthermore, the little criticism that explores how trees work specifically in the plays mostly dates to over twenty years ago. H. T. Price explores the import of the Yew in *Titus Andronicus* (1963), and Rosemary Wright explores the symbolism of the lime tree in *The Tempest* (1984); however, these scholars are rare exceptions. Northrype Frye explores the Green World, but his study centers on the overall role of the forest as a setting and the freedom it generally allows Shakespearean characters as opposed to the court.

Shakespeare's use of trees in his plays deserves critical attention solely based on the importance of trees in his literary background; however, his works themselves delineate a unique relationship with trees that merits study even if he were not working within a tradition. Shakespeare, like his Biblical, mythological, and moralizing sources, heavily associates the tree with transformation; however, he uniquely overshadows other authors in his tree usage. Going beyond presenting the tree within a heavy-handed allegory or as a mere vehicle of setting, even a symbolic setting, Shakespeare creates his trees as shifting paradoxical images, both through individual metaphors and as collective symbols in his plays at large.

In this paper, I will attempt to examine not only the role of specific gatherings of trees (ie. as forests, groves, or woods) in Shakespeare's work but also the function of Shakespeare's individual usage of trees in metaphors, similes, and allusions. I hope to show Shakespeare's paradoxical usage of the forest and of trees by juxtaposing their roles in two plays written almost coetaneously, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tragedy*

of *Titus Andronicus*, and by investigating the two-fold identity of the forest and the trees within it in *As You Like It*.

**Early Tragedy and Comedy:
Trees in *Titus Andronicus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Is the Shakespearean forest a place of danger or discovery? Ask Lavinia. Ask Bottom. While their answers would probably join in a resounding, “Both!,” *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1591) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1594) are two extremely different plays, in a large part because of the contrary roles of the forests that define settings for these plays’ crucial transformations. Despite the close proximity of the plays’ creations, the two scripts present irreconcilably divergent views of the woods. In *Titus*, “the forest walks are wide and spacious,/ and many unfrequented plots there are,/ fitted by kind for rape and villainy” (2.1.114-7). *Dream*, by contrast, plants its wood as an enchanted location *en route* to marital happiness, a joy only temporarily shadowed by forest fears. Both plays, however, hinge on the metamorphoses that the forests harbor. Indeed, whether the forest provides a hiding place for violence or shelter for amorous experiment determines the ultimate categorization of comedy or tragedy for the two productions.

Titus Andronicus

“Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears,
And tears will quickly melt thy life away.”
— Titus (3.2.50-51)

What happens in the forest does not stay in the forest for the characters of either play. On the other side of the errant wood, the characters of *Titus* must endure a physical

metamorphosis while the characters of *Dream*, at least in part, enjoy a mental one (with the singular exception of Bottom). The difference between comedy and tragedy, then, resides in what kind of transformation happens in the forest and how the characters react to those transformations. *Dream*'s lovers undergo emotional and psychological revolutions about the person with whom they want to be paired for the rest of their lives, ultimately reaching a harmonious concord. Puck transforms Bottom's head into the "monstrous" (3.1.104) vision of an ass, but Bottom reports a nearly religious experience when he finally awakens without it, making Quince's earlier words "Bless the, Bottom, bless thee!" (3.1.116) come to fruition.

However, in *Titus*, Lavinia's marital chastity is stolen through rape and her arms and tongue are hewn off. While Titus could have responded lovingly to his (only female) child "dearer than [his] soul" (3.1.102) after this trauma, he instead chooses to preserve her life only long enough to discover her aggressors and murder them with her aid; he concludes by self-indulgently killing her to end his own shame and sorrow (5.3.46-7) in a sequence seeking more tit for tat (as his name suggests) for the wrong. Indeed, *Dream* is an amorous dream only tinged with darkness, allowing the characters to purge some of their fears, while *Titus* is nothing but a nightmare that makes its characters live out life's hellish possibilities. Perhaps the characters of *Titus* would have done well to sing an exorcising lullaby, as the fairies sing for Titania, before they entered the forest.

Yet, a tree-tied darkness does reside in the fairies' lullaby of *Dream* that reminds the audience of the potential violence in the woods. They ask "Philomele, with melody, [to]/ Sing in our sweet lullaby" (2.2.13-4). The reference to Philomel effects a tree-tied image that Shakespeare presents both in *Dream* and *Titus*. While Philomel is an explicitly

controlling image defining the character of Lavinia in *Titus*, Philomelian fears present themselves more implicitly throughout *Dream*. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the original source of the tale, Tereus takes Philomel to the "wood to feede his fire" (Golding, VI. 612), and, after the rape, she threatens, "If thou keepe me still/ As prisoner in these woods, my voice the verie woods shall fill,/ And make the stones to understand" (Golding, IV. 696-8). For Philomel and those cognizant of her tale, the forest is a place of terror, desecration, and imprisonment; however, at least potentially, it is also a place of voiced liberation from shame.

Philomel's plight is one of the most plangent advisory reasons not to go into the woods. Aaron rejoices in this same opportunity for possible violence against Lavinia that the forest provides, "The forest walks are wide and spacious,/ And many unfrequented plots there are,/ Fitted by kind for rape and villainy" (2.1.114-6). Contrary to Philomel's threats of voiced liberation in Ovid's forest, Aaron admits that Shakespeare's wood is different, "The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull" (2.1.128). The forest fear on which Aaron capitalizes is only allusively present in *Dream*. Shakespeare literalizes the Philomel tale in *Titus* while he only briefly reminds the audience of Philomelian anxieties in the queen's lullaby in *Dream*.

Because Lavinia's story so closely resembles Philomel's (indeed, she literally points to the Ovidian myth to decry her desecrators), an audience might expect Shakespeare to describe Lavinia in terms of the nightingale and bird imagery that ultimately frees Philomel from human cruelty. However, Lavinia is not freed: her father murders her because of shame. Unlike Philomel, Lavinia begs her captors for mercy and death. Because she must accept the shame through forced silence, the woods are not a

place of independently voiced defiance. What, then, if not the nightingale, is Lavinia's controlling image? Trees.¹² Men metaphorically ravage the forest that they physically plunder by hunting. The rape and bloody dismemberment of Lavinia's body is described in terms of arboreal destruction. In fact, every tree image and reference in *Titus* is emphatically negative. This is not Oberon's and Titania's shadowy and mazed fairy forest.

Tree imagery is vicious in *Titus*. "Dian," the divine emblem of chastity, is suggested to have "abandoned her holy groves to see the general hunting in this forest" (2.3.57-9). *Titus'* forest makes the gods abandon their own holy groves, thereby leaving them vulnerable, in order to relish in the destruction of mortal groves. Lucius proclaims of Aaron, "Hang him on this tree,/ And by his side his fruit of bastardy" (5.1.47-8). A tree, something that should provide nourishing and natural fruit, is converted into an agent of execution that literally fruits bastards. Immoral intentions in the play transform what could be a *locus amoenus* in the forest into a perverted garden image of hellish carnal delights. Tamora describes to her Moor lover their secreted surroundings:

The birds chant melody on every bush,
The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun,
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind
And make a chequered shadow on the ground.
(2.3.12-15)

What potentially could be a *hortus conclusus* in the forest of the play, as Tamora describes it (2.3.9-29), is merely an arbor for adultery, recalling the arbor in Chaucer's

¹² I am anticipated by Tzachi Zamir in my recognition of Lavinia's "symbolic reduction to a tree" in his article, "Wooden Subjects" *New Literary History*, 2008, 39: 277-300; however, I will go further in my argument, as Zamir primarily views Lavinia's association with trees as an aesthetic vehicle and does not explore the implications of the transformation of the Ovidian myth of Philomel.

Merchant's Tale. Indeed, what should have been a pleasant place, accenting by chanting birds and a snake that sleeps unthreateningly in the “cheerful sun,” reveals its true malignancy through its arbor. The leaves “quiver,” a sign of fear, and they make a “chequered shadow” on the ground so that a viewer cannot be completely sure what lies in truthful illumination and what resides in the cloak of darkness. Similarly, at the beginning of his malicious plot, Aaron leaves gold under a tree in 2.3, turning a treasure into a trap. Shakespeare’s allusion harkens the audience to remember the central location of the tree in Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale* and heed the warning that self-inflicted vengeance and death will ensue.

In *Titus*, characters even begin to describe themselves negatively in arboreal terms. The skin of dead men is compared to “the bark of trees” (5.1.138). Tamora wishes that “the hounds should drive upon [Bassianus’] newly-transformed limbs” (2.3.64). She linguistically plays with the image of cuckold’s horns by alluding to Acteaon, who was mauled by his own hounds, and by referring to his horns as limbs. Limbs not only signified parts of the body at the time but they also referred to branches of a tree.¹³ Thus, the hounds may not only drive upon Bassianus’ fleshly limbs, thereby killing him, but they may also torture his wooden limbs so that, even after death, the hounds may entertain themselves with his horns as dogs would play with tree branches. Lavinia’s husband’s “dead trunk” serves as a “pillow” to her rapists’ “lust” (2.3.130). Her attackers refuse to recognize his body as human, categorizing as a fallen tree in the landscape. Titus calls Lavinia’s nephew, who is sympathetic to her and asks Titus to comfort her, a

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “limb, n.: 4.a. A main branch of a tree. (1578).”

“tender sapling” (3.2.50), suggesting that he will die unless he hardens like the king oak and becomes unsympathetic.

Titus confesses to Marcus, “We are shrubs, no cedars we” (4.2.46). This image may at first seem to be a positive arboreal image in the play because cedars are implied to be tall and strong; however, Titus describes Marcus and himself literally in negative terms, in terms of what he and Marcus are not but should be. Shakespeare, thus, transforms the reference to cedars into yet another harmful arboreal image. When Titus asks disguised Tamora to “witness this wretched stump” (5.1.22), he speaks not only of the tree branch with which Lavinia’s signified the names of her attackers but also himself. He is wretched, not only for his own suffering and the loss of his hand but also for the pain that he inflicted on other characters in the play. In a self-revelatory moment, Titus admits that he is the trunk from which nearly all of his children, the branches of hereditary, have been cleaved — both by himself and others. The events of the play transform him into a stump, a dead, dismembered thing, like Lavinia.

While one would expect Lavinia to be surrounded by bird imagery because of the Philomel story, she is, in fact, entwined in tree imagery. Lavinia is “trimm’d,” as a tree would be trimmed (5.1.93).¹⁴ In describing how Lavinia hurriedly stumbles through the pages of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Titus proclaims, “Soft, so busily she turns the leaves!” (4.1.45). Just as the tree-shades in Dante’s Wood of Suicides try to gather leaves (images of page-like textuality), Lavinia grapples with the pages of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in order to reconstruct her identity, tell her story, and gain a human connection through

¹⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “trim v.: 2. to put into proper condition for some purpose or use; to prepare, make ready; to dress; to get (land) into condition for cropping, to till; to cultivate (a tree). (1517).”

sympathy. Titus refers to her arms as “stumps” multiple times in the play (3.2.42). He also describes Lavinia’s rape as “the root of [her] annoy” (4.1.48). It is the unseen foundation for Lavinia’s woe from which her stumped body sprouts.

Only one bird image describes Lavinia in the entire play. Marcus laments at the loss of his sister’s tongue:

O, that delightful engine of her thoughts,
That blabb’d them with such pleasing eloquence,
Is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage,
Where like a sweet melodious bird it sung
Sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear!
(3.1.82-6)

Lavinia’s mouth is described as “a pretty hollow cage” and her tongue as a “sweet melodious bird” that “sung sweet varied notes.” Lavinia is not described as independent before the rape: Shakespeare only describes her in terms of to whom she belongs. After the attack, an informed audience would heed closely the lack of bird imagery. Although this bird image appears after the dismemberment, Marcus describes his sister as bird-like before the violent encounter. Thus, Shakespeare inverts Ovidian expectation. Lavinia’s character is not miraculously redeemed. She is not even imagistically redeemed. The attack has opened the cage to her bird-like qualities. She is now more like the thing in which birds live – trees, a resource that men use.

Indeed, trees are a resource that men persistently exploit in *Titus*. Aaron plots against Lavinia with his mistress’ sons:

The Emperor’s court is like the house of Fame,
The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and of ears;
The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull.
There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take your turns,
There serve your lust, shadowed from Heaven’s eye,
And revel in Lavinia’s treasury.
(2.1.126-131)

Aaron reveals that the forest, unlike the court, is conducive to rape because it is “ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull.” It is the place to “speak,” “strike,” and “serve your lust” because, out in the woods, no one can hear a victim, no matter how protesting, scream. Indeed, Lavinia neither can offer the Philomelian protest, “My voice the verie woods shall fill,” nor does anyone hear her suffering (Golding, IV. 698). For nearly all of the characters of the play, as Hamlet suggests, “The rest is silence” (*Hamlet*, 5.2.532); however, unlike the quiet that crowns *Hamlet*, *Titus*’ silence only imports death for the characters, not teleological contemplation or existential repose.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

“Out of this wood do not desire to go.”
— Titania (3.2.152)

In stark contrast to *Titus*’ deaf wood, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* offers an extremely divergent and emphatically noisy view of the forest. The wood of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* resounds with melody, confusion, and amazement. Much of the play unfolds during the night, making hearing an all-important sense, as Hermia notes:

Dark night, that from the eye his function take,
The ear more quick of apprehension makes;
Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,
It pays the hearing double recompense.
(3.2.177-80)

Because the sense of sight is impaired during the darkness of night in the play, hearing becomes an important and enhanced sensitivity. Sound resides and reverberates in *Dream*. A boisterous troop of amateur actors meet at “the Duke’s oak” (2.1.110) in the

forest in order to “rehearse most obscenely and courageously” the play of Pyramus and Thisbe (1.2.106). The faeries sing a lullaby and dance a roundel to protect their queen from the unwanted unpleasantness of the wood that might inhibit sleep, including “the clamorous owl that nightly hoots” (2.2.6). Titania and Oberon have a (presumably loud) marital argument in the middle of the forest. Theseus asks Hippolyta to “mark the musical confusion of hounds and echo in conjunction” with him (4.1.110-11). Puck’s soliloquy as he “sweep[s] the dust behind the door” (5.1.390) before Titania’s and Oberon’s final song-blessing begins with auditory invocations: “The hungry lion roars, and the wolf howls the moon; whilst the heavy ploughman snores. . . whilst the screech-owl, screech[es] loud” (5.1.371-3. . . 376). From warbling song to screeching howl, Shakespeare imbues *Dream*’s forest with sound.

In fact, a lack of noise augurs something amiss in *Dream*’s forest. Silence in *Dream*’s forest inspires dread for some of its inhabitants. Hermia exhibits this dread upon her waking from a nightmare in the wood:

. . .Lysander! lord!
 What, out of hearing gone? No sound, no word?
 Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear;
 Speak, of all loves!
 (2.2.151-4)

For Hermia, the lack of sound coming from her lover-protector in the forest could be fatal. She relinquishes hope that he is nearby at the end of her vain calling by admitting, “Either death, or you, I’ll find immediately” (2.2.156). Likewise, Bottom is disturbed by silence when his fellow actors abandon him in the arbor, and, in order to summon courage, he fills the forest with song:

The woosel cock so black of hue,
 With orange-tawny bill,
 The throstle with his note so true,
 The wren with his little quill—. . .
 The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
 The plainsong cuckoo grey,
 Whose note full many a man doth mark,
 And dares not answer nay—
 (3.1.125-9. . . 130-3)

Bottom does not choose his song arbitrarily. He sings of birds. He invokes cock, throstle (song thrush), wren, finch, sparrow, lark, and cuckoo as if he were asking them to sing with him and comfort him with the sound of other creatures in the wood. His musical invocation, of course, does not help him. Bottom's song acts as a spring by which Titania may catch him like a woodcock, and silence again proves harmful. As Titania becomes enamored of Bottom and invites, nay, forces him into her bower, she demands that he be made silent by commanding her faeries: "Tie up my lover's tongue, bring him silently" (3.2.201). If Bottom wanted to protest the loss of Titania's marital chastity or the swift decision to accompany an obviously non-mortal being, he could not because he has been silenced. *Dream's* silent wood is shadowed by probable violations of chastity as well as murder and the fear of these possibilities.

The sound of the wood itself takes on multivalent meanings in *Dream*. The noun "wood," meaning a collection of trees, is a homophone with the words "wode," an adjective meaning furious or mad, and "wooed," the past and passive tenses of the verb to woo.¹⁵ Shakespeare plays with the breakdown of language in the forest of *Dream*.

Demetrius laments, "And here am I, and wode within this wood" (2.1.192). On one level, Demetrius laments that he is furious in the forest. On another homophonic level, his

¹⁵ Helge Kökeritz. *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1953. p. 155.

words also represent a breakdown of his being. The wood metamorphosizes and envelops his own existence so that he begins to lose his own identity; his surroundings parasitically claim him by breaking down the barrier between self and other. He begins to recognize himself as the wood, and the madness of the wood turns him mad. The wood is potentially both a maddening and an angering place. Titania and Oberon change the mortal world because of their wooded struggles. During their argument, Oberon asks Titania, “How long within this wood intend you stay?” (2.1.138). He could be merely asking about her plans to stay within the forest; however, Shakespeare adds the alternate homophonic meaning of wode, as if Oberon were patronizingly asking Titania, “How long within this anger intend you stay?” Indeed, as she replies to him, she does only stay angry “perchance till after Theseus’ wedding-day” (2.1.139).

As Titania, Demetrius, and Oberon reveal, Helena, too, demonstrates that in *Dream*’s forest, the act of wooing, the state of being wode, and the site of the wood are all intimately interconnected and confused. Helena bewails to her unwilling suitor Demetrius:

. . .Fie, Demetrius!
 Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex.
 We cannot fight for love, as men may do.
 We should be woo’d, and were not made to woo.
 (2.1.239-42)

On the surface, Helena laments the seeming misogyny of certain early modern gender assumptions that delineate a social and sexual inequality between men and women: women, in Helena’s opinion, cannot outwardly struggle in order to win their beloved, as men may; women are expected to wait for the man to make the overtures of love, and women do not have the physical strength or empowered anatomy to seize a man and do

him “mischief” (2.1.237). However, under Helena’s complaint, “We should be woo’d,” lies the homophone of “wood,” which, when taken in reference to her previous comment to Demetrius, takes on troubling Ovidian implications. Helena shouts to Demetrius:

Run when you will; the story shall be changed:
 Apollo flies and Daphne hold the chase;
 The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
 Makes speed to catch the tiger— bootless speed,
 When cowardice pursues and valor flies.
 (2.2.229-34)

She tells Demetrius to run wherever he would like because she will aggressively defy social expectations for females and find him no matter where he goes. She will be the tiger to catch him, even as he is the mild hind. She will be the griffin to pursue the Demetrian dove, and she will be Apollo to make him, the new Daphne, flee. Helena’s allusion to Daphne and Apollo is the most troubling. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Daphne flees Apollo because of the threat of rape. Daphne is faced with two options: escape Apollo, the god of the hunt, by outrunning him or exhaustedly relinquish her body to rape. Luckily for Daphne, just as Apollo is about to seize her, her father Peneus, a river god, takes pity on her and changes her into a laurel tree.

When one fully considers Helena’s allusion to Apollo and Daphne just before she cries, “We should be woo’d, and were not made to woo” (2.1.242), Shakespeare reveals a new meaning. “Woo’d” and “wood” are homophones. A Shakespearean audience would have as easily heard Helena grieve that women such as she are not wooed by the men whom they love as the audience would have heard her mourn that women are not being turned into trees because of the threat of rape. “Forester” Oberon (3.2.390) hears this embedded allusion and apostrophizes Helena as if she were the nymph Daphne seeking to play Apollo’s part, “Fare thee well, nymph. Ere he do leave this grove,/ Thou shall fly

him, and he shall seek thy love” (2.2.244-6). Oberon’s emphasizes “this grove” as a transformative place. In the woody linguistic breakdown and confounding in *Dream*’s forest, Helena both feministically complains that women are not allowed the same sexual rights and expectations as men and asserts the misogynistical protest that men should pursue women in rape.

Despite Helena’s and Hermia’s forced subservience to the volatile whims and fancies of Demetrius and Lysander, Shakespeare explores women’s control through other tree imagery in the play as well. Titania explains her relationship with Bottom to him in terms of trees, “So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle gently entwist; the female ivy so enrings the barky fingers of the elm” (4.1. 42-4). In her vision, Titania acts as the parasitic honeysuckle to Bottom, who is a woodbine, and also as the ivy to the elm. Both ivy and honeysuckle attach themselves to large plants or trees, such as the woodbine or the elm, in order to gather nutrients, to position themselves better for photosynthesis, and more easily to garner room to live. In Titania’s opinion, she (and perhaps all women, as she deems the ivy to be “female”) gains succor, a better social position, and an easier life by subsiding off of the male Bottom. Thus, comparing herself to a parasitic plant of trees, Titania would seem to say that Bottom, as the male, is the more powerful partner in the relationship; however, Shakespeare again plays with sounds in the forest in order to uncover alternate possibilities.

Titania claims that the “female ivy so enrings the barky fingers of the elm” (4.1.44). In the Renaissance, the sound of the consonant “h” was often dropped at the beginning of words bearing vowels as their second letter (such as [h]ounour, [h]oneste,

and [h]ost).¹⁶ Thus, the word “elm,” as an Elizabethan actor would have pronounced it, would have been homophonic with the word helm. If one were to interpret the alternate meaning of “helm” in Titania’s metaphor so that it would read, “the female ivy so enrings the barky fingers of the [h]elm,” the power of the relationship shifts. If helm were heard, Titania would literally hold the power of the relationship. Bottom, the man, would be compared to a helm, the steering mechanism of a ship by which the rudder is maneuvered, and Titania would be the ivy growing on the helm, steering it and stabilizing it with her vines. Helms literally have fingers, the extension by which a person holds the wheels, and they are barky.

The sounds in the forest, including the words describing the trees in the forest themselves, are potent and changing. Homophones, homonyms, as well as references to noises (and to the lack of sound) in *Dream*’s wood create alternate realities and interpretations that leave both the characters and the audience to interpret their own meaning, as one interprets his own meaning when waking from a dream.

AS YOU LIKE IT

“Peace, you dull fool, I found them on a tree.”
— Rosalind (3.2.315)

As You Like It presents yet another play that originates in the court and, because of jealous intrigues, flees to the forest; there, most of its action, according to the name adopted by the play’s chief director, unfolds with Ovidian implications. However, unlike *Titus Adronicus* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It* openly explores at

¹⁶ Fausto Cercignani. *Shakespeare’s Works and Elizabethan Pronunciation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981. p.334.

length, especially through the clown Touchstone and the shepherd Corin, the Renaissance debate, dating back to Horace, over the virtues of the country versus the court.

Specifically, *As You Like It* is a play concerned about that which is natural versus that which is artificial. The words “nature” and “natural” together appear twenty-five times during the play, and concerns over “feigning” (3.3.20) and “counterfeit[ing]” (5.1.172) pervade the play – a play in which a woman artificially feigns male authority in order to discover the natural truth about her potential lover.

As You Like It's tension between nature and artifice especially permeates its trees. The focal setting of the play is the Forest of Arden. “Forest” is the only consistent term physically and topographically to nominate Arden in the play. Shakespeare rarely identifies Arden as a wood and never characterizes it a grove or any other kind of arboreal setting. This distinction is dynamic. Forests themselves grapple with an artificial and natural identity. Forests are expanses of land that are not only covered by trees but are also intermingled with pastures.¹⁷ While the tree-filled habitats in a forest may be completely natural, the tilled land interrupting those habitats is artificial because humans have molded it. The forest, then, is a place where the artificial juxtaposes itself to the natural. The word “forest” also refers the careful reader to both completely natural and entirely artificial definitions. In Shakespeare’s time, “forest” served as a legal term to describe a sovereign’s extension of courtly power over a part of the natural world, which he used for hunting.¹⁸ Beyond this legal connotation of “forest,” “forest” also would have

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “**a.** An extensive tract of land covered with trees and undergrowth, sometimes intermingled with pasture. Also, the trees collectively of a ‘forest’ (1300).”

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “**2. Law.** A woodland district, usually belonging to the king, set apart for hunting wild beasts and game, etc. (cf. quots. 1598 and 1628); having

signified for a Shakespearean audience a place of uncultivated wilderness.¹⁹ By choosing a forest as his work's central location, Shakespeare surely plays with the multivalence of the word itself so that it contains both meanings of the crux of one of the play's fundamental concerns: the tension between artifice and nature.

Trees also serve physically, not just linguistically, as negotiators in this dichotomous tension. Orlando hangs his verse, which is laughably artificial as Touchstone later proves, on the trees in the forest:

Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love,
 And thou, thrice-crowned queen of night, survey
 With thy chaste eye, from thy pale sphere above
 Thy huntress' name that my full life doth sway.
 O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books,
 And in their barks my thoughts I'll character,
 That every eye which in the forest looks
 Shall see thy virtue witness'd every where.
 Run, run Orlando, carve on every tree
 The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she.
(3.1. 5-10)

Orlando's ten-line speech, which celebrates an act of unwitting eco-terrorism as an act of love, presents many shortcomings for the Renaissance auditor. Poetically, Orlando is one "a-b-a-b" quatrain short of an English sonnet, and this shortfall alone discloses a certain inadequacy of his doggerel rhymes. In his abrupted sonnet, Orlando asks those in the forest to bear legal "witness" to his love through a secondary source, his writing. In the orally contractual period of Early Modernity, Shakespeare's audience would have recognized a pledge of love formulated as an oath taken by two people who were present; by sad contrast for Orlando, they would not have recognized as legal a pledge of love as

special laws and officers of its own. (1297)"; (which is interesting given the questions of law in *As You Like It*).

¹⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "3. A wild uncultivated waste, a wilderness. (c. 1320)."

an oath issued by one person through writing. Religiously, and perhaps most abhorrently, to a Renaissance audience, Orlando is tries to exert creative ownership over a text that is not his. Orlando observes that “these trees shall be *my* books.” He claims them as his own; however, a Renaissance audience would have recognized that these trees cannot be Orlando’s books – nor any person’s books: they are a part of God’s book, the Book of Nature.

While Orlando might not recognize the significance of his tree marring, a Renaissance audience consciously living in a world of symbolic meaning would have condemned him religiously because of his destruction of the Book of Nature.²⁰ An Italian cotemporary of Shakespeare’s, Hieronymus Zanchius, writes on the importance of the Book of Nature (also known as the Book of Creatures) during the late sixteenth century:

There are two divine books through which God thought it proper to express his eternal essence and perfect nature, and to communicate his best will and highest love toward us. First is the Book of the Creatures or Works; the other is the book [of] Sacred Scripture or the word of God. If you compare these a little, you will see that although they are different, they have this common character: to show forth and work together for this end, the knowledge of God and our happiness.²¹

The Book of Nature, according to Zanchius, is of the same importance as the Book of Scripture, if not of greater importance because it is older. Orlando, by carving on the trees, replaces “the knowledge of God” with his knowledge of Rosalind and, even more disturbingly, his all too partial knowledge of himself. Thus, he intends to change the inherent divine meaning of every tree he touches: they will not reveal God’s virtue but

²⁰ I am anticipated sympathetically in my argument that Orlando is a destroyer of the Book of Nature by Paul J Willis in his article “‘Tongues in Trees’: the Book of Nature in *As You Like It*”; however, I diverge from Willis in my study because he does not explore the significance of the specific trees themselves or the inter-textual significance of Orlando’s interactions with trees.

²¹ Zanchius, *De operibus Dei* (preface).

“thy (Rosalind’s) virtue” (3.1.7). He wants to rewrite what God has written. Orlando, with his “tedious homily of love” (3.2.155), has created a homily not for God but for himself.

Rosalind later reveals that she found this homiletic verse “on a palm tree” (3.2.175). Although David A. Griffin argues that the placement of the palm in an English forest is a result from “the Folio compositor . . . working from a hastily written manuscript copy,” an equally plausible poetic explanation, which concerns the aboreal, exists.²² The detail that the palm is not indigenous to an English forest would not have been as disturbing to a Renaissance audience as the fact that palms were used to welcome and announce Christ’s arrival into Jerusalem. Blasphemously, the palm now proclaims Orlando’s arrival in the forest. Rosalind and Celia learn of Orlando’s presence in the forest through the evidence of his arboreal destruction. Orlando not only uses his text to pervert the Book of Nature but also to establish himself as parallel with Christ by announcing himself through the palm. In the same narcissistic fashion, Orlando’s verse ultimately eternizes himself more than any of Rosalind’s virtues: the poetry that Shakespeare shares with us seems primarily to describe Orlando’s poetic process and his plans to write about Rosalind. Orlando’s poetry mentions himself in the form of his name or a personal pronoun nine times while he only refers to Rosalind in the same manner ten times. By making his poetry so self-reflective, his audience cannot help but wonder about him (as Celia, Touchstone, and Rosalind speculate) so that even references to Rosalind intimately involve Orlando’s own identity.

²² David A. Griffin, “The ‘Palm’ Tree in the Forest of Arden.” *American Notes & Queries*. (Owingsville, KY, 1971) 9, p. 84.

Like his action of marring of the palm, the majority of Orlando's arboreal destruction does not deify Rosalind but, instead, idolizes Orlando's presumed power over nature and his ability to teach through it. In fact, Rosalind herself becomes a tree. She complains to Orlando:

. . . There is a man haunts the
 forest, that abuses our young plants with carving
 "Rosalind" on their barks; hangs odes upon hawthorns,
 and elegies on brambles; all, forsooth,
 deifying the name of Rosalind.
 (3.2.359-363)

As Adam "nicknamed God's creatures" (*Hamlet*, 3.1.145-6) in the Garden of Eden, Orlando (re)names the trees, according to Rosalind. He carves "'Rosalind' on their barks" as if he were identifying them as a forester would. By carving "Rosalind" on the trees, Orlando creates an intimate connection between the tree as an object and the word that represents Rosalind. "*Rosa*" means "rose" in French while "lind" was a term referring to any type of tree during the Renaissance.²³ Thus, Rosalind's name itself connotes a special relationship with trees: her name etymologically means "rose tree," another name for a rosebush during the time.²⁴ Thus, Orlando, in a sense, acts as a re-creator through his poetic imagination: every tree on which he carves becomes a rose tree in his imagination; every tree becomes a sign of feminine sexuality, not only sexuality but also the highest form of chastity. The rose not only represented the mysteries of the female anatomy but also the mysteries of the Virgin Mary. Orlando's imagination endows a

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "lind, n.: 1. The lime or linden (*Tilia Europaea*). In ME. poetry often used for a tree of any kind, esp. in phr. *under (the) lind*. (a. 700)."

²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "rose tree, n.: A rose-bush (c. 1340)"; The only other places where reference to a "rose tree" also occurs in Shakespeare is in *Two Noble Kinsmen* (5.1.163) and *Othello* (5.2.13-16).

greater paradox on the trees of the forest so that they become both a prominent symbol of chastity and sexuality.

Shakespeare, however, through the medium of comedy, forces the audience to forgive Orlando for damaging the natural world. Through his verse, Orlando proclaims, “Tongues I’ll hang on every tree” (3.2.127). He cannot see what Duke Senior observes:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.
(1.3.15-16)

Orlando does not realize that, in the Book of Nature, trees already have tongues. His ignorance lessens the degree of guilt that Shakespeare’s audience would be willing to see within him; thus, Shakespeare relieves a negative verdict that the audience might endow upon Orlando. Jacques, in a comic scene, gently urges Orlando, “I pray you mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks” (3.2.360) just before Rosalind bestows an important title on him: “forester” (3.2.297). Jacques, who acts in many ways as like-minded internal commentator for the audience, easily forgives Orlando for his destruction of the natural world. Likewise, the heroine and “busy actor” (3.4.54) of the play with whom the audience feels a connection because, like her, it seeks to find solutions for the complications of the play, Rosalind, pardons Orlando’s arboreal destruction by giving him the humorously ironic title “forester.” Because the characters with whom the audience most likely connects in the play view Orlando’s intentions as harmless, the audience, too, is prone to exonerate him

Orlando ultimately sees himself in the role of forester, indeed, as a teacher of the Book of Nature. In a poem that Celia reads, Orlando writes:

But upon the fairest boughs,
 Or at every sentence end,
 Will I 'Rosalinda' write,
 Teaching all that read to know
 The quintessence of every sprite
 Heaven would in little show.
 Therefore heaven Nature charg'd
 That one body should be fill'd
 With all graces wide-enlarg'd.
 (3.2.135-143)

Orlando proclaims that he will teach “all who read to know” the graces in which Heaven instructs humans through Nature’s chief creation: Rosalind. He asserts that he will act as a mediator between God’s text, Rosalind – the “little” body that is “fill’d with all graces wide-enlarg’d” – and everyone else in the forest. As priests are interpreters of the Book of Scripture during the Renaissance, Orlando sees himself as the “forester” (3.2.297) that Rosalind calls him: he is an interpreter (albeit still somewhat misguided) of the Book of Nature.

Rosalind transforms views of the forest as well. She (playing Ganymede) informs Orlando that she and Celia (playing Aliena) dwell in “skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat” (3.2.336). Through Rosalind’s imagination, the forest adopts a distinctly androgynous character. In feminine form, the forest wears “skirts” and can be likened to a “petticoat” on which Celia and Rosalind create the fringe. This metaphor places Rosalind in a particularly close relationship with the forest. She is privy to and familiar with its petticoat, a feminine undergarment. In fact, she is its fringe: she adorns it. However, during the Renaissance, men also donned petticoats, or undercoats worn under a doublet

and over a shirt.²⁵ Thus, much like Rosalind in “doublet and hose” (4.1.187) and much like the Ovidian figure whom she chooses to name her alternate identity, the forest as Rosalind sees it presents an androgynous figure.

An audience might expect Rosalind and her view of the forest to cause the other characters in the play, especially Orlando, to wonder at her sexual ambiguity. However, strange and miraculous natural happenings are not out of place in the Forest of Arden. After all, in this forest, men and deer cry in accord over the death of the hunted, a mythical god descends from the sky in order to marry lovers, and people can miraculously appear through conjuring. Trees present no exception to this enchantment. Despite its setting in the English forest of Arden, the trees of Arden are as diverse as the trees of Eden.²⁶ Palms reside in this English forest, and, furthermore, Rosalind herself resides by a “sheep-cote fenc’d about with olive trees” (4.3.77). Olive trees neither belong in an English Renaissance forest nor in any other forest where oaks are so abundant. Jacques, Oliver, and Orlando all are found under oaks. Thus, since the olive is so out of place, like Ganymede herself, it must import some meaning. The Mount of Olives is the place where Jesus wept over the destruction of Jerusalem, delivered some of his most famous teachings, and spent some of his last free hours. Like Christ returning to the Mount of Olives for the last time, Rosalind contains a melancholy that she brings with her to the cote of olives, and, like the olives in Arden themselves, Rosalind is out of

²⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “petticoat, n.: 1. a. A man's tight-fitting undercoat, usually padded and worn under a doublet and over a shirt; (also) a padded jerkin worn under armour for protection. Now *hist.* (c.1425).”

²⁶ Shakespeare’s contemporary, Michael Drayton writes *Polyalbion*, his late sixteenth-century poetic mapping of England’s landscape. In it, he reveals that Arden was an actual English forest: “What is now *Woodland* in *Warwickshire*, was heretofore part of a larger Weald of Forest call’d *Arden*.” *Song XIII* (Illustrations); Works, p. 286.

place. However, with such a religiously bound image, an audience might expect Shakespeare to explore even greater meaning in the olive.

In a play in which trees have the potential to import such deep Christian significance, the often comic dissolution of their symbolic nature is important in itself. In fact, little seems to be done with them or religion itself in the play. Rosalind fictitiously mentions an “old religious uncle” (3.2.344), but he is later revealed to be a magician. “An old religious man” (5.4.160) converts Duke Frederick, and Jacques leaves the weddings to pursue that elder’s teaching at the end of the play; however, the audience is never allowed to make a judgment on the nature of this man because information is received about him only through a messenger. The conclusion of the play requires Hymen, a pagan god, to perform weddings that would not be binding in a religious context because an ordained priest does officiate over them. Sir Oliver Martext is the only traditional religious figure in the entire play. Yet, his name harkens not only to Rosalind’s cote of Olives but also to Orlando’s marring of trees with his text.

While Martext has the ability to serve as the sole religious authority in the play, the genuine power of his character is dismissed, as well. Jacques divests his spiritual power in a metaphor about trees. He warns Touchstone:

And will you (being a man of your breeding)
 be married under a bush like a beggar? Get you
 to church, and have a good priest can tell
 you what marriage is. This fellow will but join
 you as they join wainscot; then one of you
 will prove a shrunk panel, and like green timber
 warp, warp.

(3.3.83-89)

Jacques views the country priest as a bad carpenter. Jacques ultimately demystifies Martext's religious authority by accusing him of being a craftsman who would use green timber, wood that is not sufficiently aged for building. According to Jacques, Martext is either unknowledgeable or dubious in his carpentry because of his use of ill-suited materials. Jacques compares the potential marriage to wainscot, wooden paneling that adorns the walls of a room. While, in Jacques' and the Renaissance mind, marriage should be one of the strongest of human bonds, wainscot is an especially weak joining. Touchstone, in an aside, admits his reason for choosing Martext is because his marriage will be like wainscot: "... He is not like to marry me well; and not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife" (3.3.92-4). Trees are truthful in *As You Like It*: they not only reveal Sir Oliver Martext's true nature as a priest; they also disclose uncomfortable truths about other characters.

As You Like It's forest dissolves the barriers between the human and the arboreal, especially in its names. Orlando carves Rosalind's name on the trees, making Rosalind and the trees representative of one another. Additionally, Sir Oliver Martext's name becomes an overt reminder of this act. However, perhaps most importantly nominally, Silvus' name originates from the Latin term "*silvam*," meaning "forest." Aside from employing the pastoral archetype by a naturally derived name, Shakespeare uses Silvius' name in order to mirror Orlando's arboreal degradation. Like Orlando, Phoebe writes love "railing[s]" (4.3.46) that she conveys through Silvius, who nominally represents the forest. Just as Orlando used the trees as a messenger-like medium for his love-text, Phoebe uses Silvius, a symbol of trees, to convey her love rhymes to Ganymede. Rosalind, the "rose tree," once again becomes the deified love-object who receives

messages through trees. Phoebe asks Silvius, “I’ll write to him a very taunting letter,/ And thou shalt bear it; wilt thou, Silvius?” (3.5.134-5). Silvius bears her letter to Ganymede, and, although both Phoebe and Orlando use trees as messengers, Phoebe’s verses seem to possess even less poetic prowess than Orlando’s. Both suitors use trees, linguistically and physically, in order to convey their artificial verse in the hope that it, thereby, will become a more acceptable offering to the beloved.

Ironically, in a play about the tension between artifice and nature, Shakespeare’s and the actors’ ultimate challenge will be to use words in order to feign the metatheatrical Forest of Arden as though it were naturally unfolding before the ear and eye. In the Forest of Arden and through the characters’ interaction with trees, Shakespeare explores and unites the dichotomy between artifice and nature. Trees become natural conveyors of artificial language. Thus, the characters’ involvement in forest itself becomes a solution to questions of naturality and artificiality in the play: one cannot choose which is better because they both are paradoxically intermingled. The forest is both a place of nature and artifice.

Concluding Thoughts

“But till 'tis one o'clock,
Our dance of custom round about the oak
Of Herne the Hunter let us not forget.
Pray you, lock hand in hand; yourselves in order set;
And twenty glow-worms shall our lanterns be,
To guide our measure round about the tree.”
— *Merry Wives of Windsor* (5.5.174-80)

From *Psalm 1* of the Bible to Spenser’s Wood of Error in *Book One* of the *Faerie Queen*, the arboreal literary tradition that Shakespeare joins is large. Although

Shakespeare becomes part of a literary tradition of trees, he reinvents that tradition. Instead of using trees merely as vehicles of simile or as allegorical symbols, Shakespeare continually reinvents trees' definitions in order to reveal their multifarious identity. The forest is a silent place in *Titus*, and its noises, undoubtedly, augur danger for the play's characters. Conversely, the wood echoes with melody in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and its silence is hazardous. While trees represents a total loss of power for Lavinia because others dehumanize her by referring to her in arboreal terms, Titania gains control of male authority through trees as she twists herself around the arboreal poetic pun of Bottom as the elm/helm. Ultimately, the transformations that happen within the woods of these two plays determine the outcome for their characters and the play's genre: comedy or tragedy. Is the wood evil or magical? Silent or Noisy? A deadly trap or a place of laughable foibles revealed through pranks? A location of loss or gain? Shakespeare does not make us choose: both are correct. The Shakespearean forest is a place of paradox.

Shakespeare's use of trees reveals him as a writer who is not only open to the paradoxes that nature presents but also deeply affected by nature's mysteries — and the violation of those mysteries. Arboreal destruction is a theme throughout all three of these plays. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, nature destroys its own trees through parasitism: the ivy feeds off the elm. In *Titus Andronicus*, human disfigurement parallels itself with arboreal disfiguration. Fragmented people become only parts, not the whole, of trees — stumps, limbs, leaves, trunks, and roots. Linguistically, the trees themselves are splintered. In *As You Like It*, Orlando carves into the bark of trees. The bark of trees holds the xylem (meaning “wood” in Greek), tubes which transport water and nutrients. Orlando's action literally threatens the trees' lives. If he were to interrupt the xylem on all

the sides of a tree, the tree (his monument of love) would die from starvation. Thus, linguistically at least, Shakespeare presents himself as an Early Modern “tree-hugger.”

Shakespeare’s relationship with trees imports great significance. Not only does this relationship support the idea of Shakespeare’s inspiration from the natural world around him; it also reveals more about his characters: those who have a negative view of or an all too keen empathy with the natural world (especially trees) often will be the “fellow[s] that hath [created or] had losses” in Shakespeare’s plays (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 5.2.82-3). Iago poises himself throughout *Othello* as an enemy to nature. He urges Cassio to reconsider committing suicide by diverting Cassio’s lethal urges onto nature, “Drown cats and blind puppies” (1.3.332-3). Iago, an adversary of nature, becomes the destroyer of *Othello*. At the other extreme, Jacques, who is the only character in *As You Like It* literally to mourn the destruction of the natural world (in the form of a deer), cannot remain part of the community at the end of the play because of his connection to nature. He must pursue a deeper spiritual connection in (and with) the forest. Only the characters who can solidify a stable relationship with nature, including the paradoxes of the forest and its trees, can mediate a secure place in the human community. Orlando stops carving on trees, and he joins the community through marriage. The lovers of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* neither fight forest fears nor accept them. They endure these fears, and as a result, the guardians of the forest and the natural world, Titania and Oberon, not only mend the broken bonds of their amorous relationships but also bless the lovers’ marriages. In stark contrast, the provocateurs of *Titus Adronicus* not only disrupt nature with the homicidal intrigues and plots of their court but they also manipulate the forest in order to accomplish their immoral agendas.

As a consequence, most of the play's characters die, both guilty and innocent alike. A sense of Shakespearean justice resides in one's relationship with nature, especially with trees and the forest.

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