

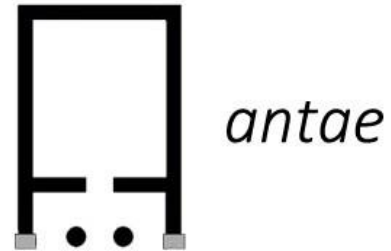
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The Space of Dissent in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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The year 1599 in which *As You Like It* was first produced marks a “crossroad” between a dying feudal order and the birth of globalisation, as well as between Medieval and early Modern world views.¹ The latter view breaks with medievalism by shaping a new way of viewing spatiality that is no longer based on oaths of fealty and allegiances, but is also a continuation of medievalism in that it displaces to the periphery all that is radical, anarchical, and dissident. Both historicity and textuality, therefore, participate in these contemporary cultural negotiations by either confirming or challenging authority and power. Pamphlets that circulated at the time varied from eulogies to sovereignty to radical and dissenting voices, including *An Homily Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion*, alongside pamphlets which furthered the crown’s power, while other treatises nonetheless demystified the monarchy’s divine legitimacy, such as *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince*. Both textuality and historicity chronicle this mobility in space and time that was viewed as either progressive or regressive, teleological or degenerate. A new way of seeing space has emerged.

The play under examination, *As You Like It*, is in this regard an exception. It chronicles an unexpected “regressive” move from “civilization” to “barbarism”, from court to forest, and from a policed to an untamed state. The text interacts with these negotiations without sidestepping either. The playwright embarks in a new project that maps the vicissitudes of its episteme, and the text is a sociopolitical map in which characters are regressively displaced from the court to the forest. In other words, the text signals a move in space, from policed and organised space to all that is free and non-hierarchical. This spatial mobility is political in that it signifies a move to the alternative world of greenwood. The alternative world (re)maps established rules, and thus reconfigures, disrupts, and displaces poetic, political, and theatrical orders. It enters a space of dissent that invests in both alternative stage and state matters. A threefold examination of poetic, political, and theatrical spatiality allows for such a hypothesis to take shape. My argument is neither that the text, through this mobility, expresses a nostalgia for a bygone feudal past, and nor that it supports the emerging early Modern order. Rather, this mobility in space is a negation of authority, order, and hierarchy. In so doing, the play introduces a space of dissent that is generic, political, and theatrical. In the first part of this essay, I will discuss the generic re-appropriation of the pastoral that transgresses hypotextuality and invests in the anarchic and egalitarian dimension offered through this genre. Subsequently, I shall examine the political implications of the displacement from court to forest, or rather, from the policed to the unruly alternative world of the forest. Finally, this displacement offers space for dissenting bodies to interrogate, to disturb, and to dislocate.

¹ See James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 309.

Poetic Spaces and the Reappropriation of the Pastoral

The spatial mobility in question here is primarily possible through the pastoral genre. A generic tradition of pastoralism is appropriated and shaped to fit in the spatial mobility towards the forest. In this regard, I will be undertaking a geocritical approach through which I will be examining the dialogue in which the text engages itself in with other texts and genres. In Barthesian parlance, this text and every text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, texts, and traditions blend and clash.² This heterospatiality translates the social heteroglossia that I will be discussing in the second part.

Alan Sinfield regards this genre as aristocratic in its concerns in claiming that “the pastoral is not just a literary genre, but an ideology implicated in the power structure”.³ Further, he argues that the pastoral is

a mechanism through which writers of a higher class flatter themselves, their patrons and their readers by patronizing people of a lower class [...]. This effect is probably inevitable, once you allow that the artist is distinguished by his special sensitivity; it is the faultline upon which the aspiration for a ‘proletarian literature’ founders.⁴

The play is an archetext that dialogues not only with other texts but also with different categories and genres. It either affirms a particular tradition or transgresses it. *As You Like It* also parodies poetic traditions, including the pastoral and that of the sonnet, entering, therefore, the space of dissent. It, therefore, enters the poetic space of dissent. Contrary to the opinion that the pastoral is an expression of a nostalgia for a bucolic, innocent, and golden feudal past, an examination of the generic reappropriation of the pastoral in the context of an emerging new order, early Modernism, leads to the claim that the text can be read as a social intervention and a political comment on its contemporary society. Former readings of the pastoral observe that the genre is trans-historical and universal. In this regard, Alan Sinfield comments further:

Pastoral has been apprehended through literary-historical analysis, but it has often been esteemed for its representation of an allegedly trans-historical experience [...]. Pastoral expresses a natural desire for simplicity and innocence, a golden age, a world of leisure, song and love.⁵

Having placed the pastoral in the context of its production, 1599, Sinfield further argues that the play in the early Modern context is still a genre that supports hierarchy and order. He claims that the ‘egalitarian spirit of [the] Robin Hood’ myth is illusory.⁶ The green world, accordingly, is not an alternative world as long as order is restored by the end. This argument

² Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), p. 146.

³ Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 37.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 36.

is one that should be interrogated, as shall here be done via investing in Shakespeare's appropriation of the pastoral in *As You Like It*.⁷

As mentioned earlier, this text is a re-appropriation of the pastoral genre, which may be regarded as one that cherishes the golden-age myth and which expresses a certain nostalgia for a pre-capitalist life. Contrariwise, this text defies this tradition in two ways. It unveils the corrupt behavior of the upper-class, and hence the movement to the untamed space of the forest is an act of usurpation, and, furthermore, the pastoral myth is not idealised. Characters express their dissatisfaction and unease with this primitive life. While the play does not idealise the Golden Age myth or the return to a feudal past, the return to the court does not necessarily imply a return to and, hence, a confirmation of order. Duke Senior, in this regard, claims about the two worlds:

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court? (A, II. 1. 2-4)

In addition to commenting on the corrupt life of courts, he expresses his unease with life in the forest:

The seasons' difference; as the icy fang
And Churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which [...] bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold (A, II. 1. 6-9)

One of the lords also claims:

Yes, and of this our life; swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,
To fright the animals, and to kill them up
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place. (A, II. 1. 60-64)

In departing from a romanticisation of life in the forest as pure and innocent, the play, therefore, transgresses the pastoral tradition, reappropriates it, and displaces the poetics of the genre, entering the poetics of dissent.

What the play invests in from this category is the egalitarian aspect it exalts and longs for. This movement in fictional and generic space ideally cancels hierarchy. In this dialogic encounter, each character spells out its worldview without having one eclipsing the other. It is worth pointing to Jacques's vision of time and space. He utters his "seven ages" monologue in

⁷ See William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by Mike Gould (London: Collins Classics, 2011). Henceforth cited in text as (A, Act. Scene. Line/s.).

which he summarises ‘this strange eventful history’, the life of a Man. He views life in spatial terms, as stage. All men and women enter through the same ‘exits and entrances’ and are ‘merely players’ on this ‘stage’ (see *A*, II. 7. 138-171). Noblemen and plebeians, kings and peasants, males and females, fathers and sons, are all equal in this worldview and are merely players. It is important to note, however, that this worldview does not belong to Jacques alone. Similar radical voices circulate in Shakespeare’s stage. Jacques is offered a larger space than other characters to utter his monologues, and his world view is foregrounded without literally up-staging other characters’ consciousnesses as discussed earlier. He observes that:

Last scene of all that ends this strange eventful history

[...]

Is [...] mere oblivion. (*A*, II. 7. 170-2)

Jacques’s monologue reverberates with other protagonists from other stages. Macbeth bitterly claims that ‘Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing’.⁸ Hamlet, as well, defyingly claims: ‘Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat King and your lean beggar is but variable service – two dishes, but one table. That’s the end’; going on to say: ‘A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm’.⁹ Gonzalo in *The Tempest* speculates:

I’th’ commonwealth I would by contraries

Execute all things. For no kind of traffic

Would I admit, no name of magistrate.

Letters should not be known. Riches, poverty,

And use of service, none. Contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none.

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil.

No occupation; all men idle, all,

And women too, but innocent and pure.

No sovereignty [...].¹⁰ (II. 2. 150-159)

These radical and anarchic voices populate Shakespeare’s stage. What these monologues have in common is the egalitarian and disorderly ring to their philosophies and world views. Order

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by George K. Hunter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), V. 5. 22.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Cedric Willard Farnham (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), IV. 3. 21-28.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Stanley Wells (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), II. 2. 150-9.

implies hierarchy, but disorder does not necessarily connote chaos. This genre therefore, and its reappropriation, allows for such alternative worlds to be shaped. This green and alternative world presented onstage is anarchic and disorderly even if temporary.

Here the playwright succeeds in underscoring the egalitarian aspect of the pastoral while similarly negating its aristocratic aspect. Every man and woman go through the same ‘exits and entrances’ and ‘that’s the end’, in Hamlet’s words, ‘sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything’ (A, II. 7. 173). Hierarchy is canceled in this strange eventful history.

As You Like It departs from Theocritus’ romanticised *The Idylls*, Virgil’s *Arcadia*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and ultimately even Thomas Lodge’s *Euphues, the Golden Legacy*. Thomas Lodge’s text idealises the Arcadian past while not in effect transgressing the Renaissance world picture. While the play re-appropriates Lodge’s narrative, its dramatization here allows for a plurality of consciousnesses to come to the fore. The text is a mosaic not only of texts, but most importantly of perspectives that are simultaneously self-reflexive. This self-reflexivity serves, in one aspect, to parody the sonnet tradition that Orlando takes refuge in so as to woo his lady; in this regard, Orlando is an allegory for Petrarchan love, and the tradition he partakes of and the poetry he elucubrates are burlesqued by Rosalind and Touchstone.

Similarly to the Duke and his followers, Orlando invades the forest with an imperialist attitude. He brings with him a capitalist view of space as an individual property. The verse he inscribes on the trees stands as an opposition to the tradition of the pastoral, one that is based on the sense of “*communitas*”.¹¹ The claim could be made that verse and sonneteering, unlike theater in general, are individualistic. Rosalind will therefore push him to metamorphosise on two levels: both the poetic and, consequently, the political.

Upon entering this collective space with his individualistic and capitalist worldview, Orlando is parodied by different characters that adhere to the new space and its social necessities. He starts by proudly grafting his verse on the trees acknowledging:

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. (A, III. 2. 1-5)

Rosalind attacks this act on two levels. On the one hand, she scathingly criticises the poetic tradition of sonneteering. She mockingly says: “O most gentle pulpiter! What tedious homily of love have you wearied your parishioners withal, and never cried ‘Have patience, good people’” (A, III. 2. 150-152). Rosalind mocks Orlando’s amateurism and the tradition of

¹¹ See Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Invisible Bullets’, in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Oxford and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 18-47, p. 36.

sonneteering that is 'tedious' and self-centered, further on attacking his colonialist attitude by claiming:

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. If I could meet that fancy-monger, I would give him some good counsel. (A, III. 2. 339-45)

This individualistic expression of the self neglects both otherness and the sense of community. In the same regard, Jacques mocks Orlando, the 'good Signior Love', by ironically asking him:

You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths' wives, and conn'd them out of rings? [...] You have a nimble wit; I think 'twas made of Atalanta's heels. Will you sit down with me? And we two will rail against our mistress the world, and all our mistery. (A, III. 2. 260-67)

He adds, "I'll tarry no longer with you; farewell" (A, III. 2. 271). Likewise, Touchstone parodies this poetic tradition, particularly of aggrandizing and idealizing love and the chastity of the fair lady through his bawdy language and dexterity that is libidinal and anarchic at once. He states the reasons behind his reunion with Audrey: 'As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires; and as pigeons bill, so *wedlock* would be nibbling' (A, III. 3. 68-70).

Hence, Rosalind, Jacques, and Touchstone are here considered dissenting characters. They act as iconoclasts to an imperialist and individualistic culture. They triumphantly penetrate a poetic space. The poetic is also an expression of the political, as that which acts against all that is corrupt. Pastoralism, being a collectivist genre, penetrates this spatial orthodoxy and engages itself in a space of dissent by being cautious of the risk of censorship and governmental surveillance and policing. It addresses the audience, being itself a collectivity unlike in poetry, romance, epic and other genres, to guide it likewise to the space of dissent. This poetic dissidence offers space for political transgression and socialist intervention.

The Politics of Space Remapping

The closure that restores order and the colonialist attitude of courtiers in the forest can be read as reactionary attempts to support order. By way of example, Terry Eagleton aligns himself with the argument that the play is discursive, observing that the text is political par excellence in that it supports order and regards hierarchy as an indispensable element in societies. Eagleton claims:

Private property is thus naturalized along with the aristocracy. The discourse whose task is to naturalize a particular social order, imbuing it with the immutability and

inevitability of Nature itself, is commonly termed ideology; and the last comedies are therefore ideological in a very precise meaning of that term.¹²

Eagleton's claim is that comedies, including *As You Like It*, are reactionary par excellence. The mission of the critic, accordingly, is to demystify and deconstruct the subtext that lies beneath the veneer of levity and merriment. This historical interpretation relies primarily on the fact that, seeing in the playwright a "businessman" who makes money out of theatre, order becomes a necessity. This historical argument overlooks contemporary surveillance on theatre that was essentially regarded as threatening and disorderly. For instance, on *The Anatomy of Abuses*, Phillip Stubbes writes: 'Oh blasphemy intolerable! Are filthy plays and bawdy interludes comparable to the word of God, the food of life, and life itself?'¹³ Theatre was in fact commonly regarded as a disreputable institution, particularly by religious ideologues who sought to oppress it.

C.L. Barber and Francois Laroque further argue that the play suggests the idea of fate as that which shapes whoever attempts to violate order, in this case the usurpers, Frederick and Oliver. Laroque observes: 'In this particular instance, festivity, far from being a means of liberation is instead directed towards punishing those who refuse to remain in their place: disorder is used to restore order'.¹⁴

Romantic love, possibly the main concern of the play, is likewise related to the ideas of order and liberty, as C.L. Barber claims:

[T]he reality we feel about the experience of love in the play, reality which is not in the pleasant little prose romance, comes from presenting what was sentimental extremity as impulsive extravagance and so leaving judgment free to mock what the heart embraces. The Forest of Arden, like the Wood outside Athens, is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day.¹⁵

Barber asserts that the play rejoices in what he terms the 'comedy of Dionysia' whereby characters display extreme attitudes and intoxication is to be celebrated.¹⁶

This multi-faceted political space brings to the fore the revolutionary dimension of the text. My chief concern in this part is to address the relationship between spatiality and politics, focusing on the plot as that which centres on a mobility that generates metamorphosis in its characters.

Greenblatt points to what he terms as the "communitas" versus individualism dichotomy, defining the former as 'a union based on the momentary breaking of the hierarchical order

¹² Terry Eagleton, *Rereading Literature: William Shakespeare* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 92-3.

¹³ As quoted in Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 216.

¹⁴ François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 254.

¹⁵ C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 223.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 239.

that normally governs a community'.¹⁷ The first act takes place in the court where, in each scene, a character invades the stage to inform the audience of their problem. Scene one concerns itself with the gerontocratic rule in which the first-born male child inherits the family estate, where Oliver expresses his distress to Adam. In scene two, Rosalind and Celia openly mock the wheel of fortune where, in the words of Rosalind, 'her benefits are mightily *displaced*' (A, I. 2. 32-3). The third scene is concluded with Rosalind's decision: 'Now go we in content | To liberty, and not to banishment' (A, I. 3. 144-5). Therefore, all characters willingly opt to move through space. 'Content' and 'liberty' are interrelated and politically charged terms, disorderly and anarchic. Charles, in fact, interferes in the first scene to depict this displacement as follows:

They say [Duke Senior] is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world. (A, I. 1. 106-110)

It is important to stop at the causes behind Charles's anxiety, and the courtiers' in general, toward this voluntary act of displacement. Charles is disturbed by both the Robin Hood-like and the Golden Age-like states of being. The myth of Robin Hood entails a state of being in which hierarchy and class are subverted or even canceled. Then, he points to the state of idleness which the 'merry men' enjoy, and idleness, likewise, is regarded as a threat to order. Therefore, through religious vindication, it is advanced as a sign of moral and social regression.

Act I records the struggle inside the court, that of the family and gender. The family acts as an oppressive tool that ensures the continuity of order. Women are, likewise, subordinated to guarantee the continuity of a patriarchal rule. Hence, this opening is provocative. Characters interrogate existing rules and order and escape this space towards an alternative world that is the green world of the forest. The Forest of Arden provides a radical shift from individualism to community and unity, and the rationale behind this return to the greenwood is due to a corrupt system and a longing for a new order. Arden is an imaginary space that is structured as an imagined place of disorder and community. Outside the parameters of court life, an egalitarian and horizontal gathering takes shape. This sense of *communitas* is embodied in the dialogic encounter between characters regardless of their class or gender. The second act, on the other hand, is set as the antithesis to the first. It takes place in the Forest Arden, whereby the exiled Duke triumphantly claims: 'Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile, | Hath not old custom made this life more sweet. | Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods. | More free from peril than the envious court?' (A, II.1. 1-4).

The Duke stresses the sense of community by addressing his 'co-mates and brothers' in a way that denotes classlessness: they are all equal in exile. Here is a reunion between the aristocratic and the populist voice, and, therefore, the green space allows for egalitarian coexistence regardless of hierarchy. The duke addresses the freedom this space offers, which.

¹⁷ Greenblatt, p. 36.

Rosalind, Celia, Orlando and Adam join. In this egalitarian space, characters dialogue equally, regardless of class, each able to advance their own worldview.

As mentioned earlier on, however, the characters are described as usurpers. Their mobility in space is partly colonialist. The Duke and his followers, Rosalind and Celia, as well as Orlando bring with them a court-like understanding of space. They exercise power by different means; hunting, exchanging land for jewels, and violence. In doing so, the playwright exposes the cruelty of the ruling class that can resort to all means, including violence, to secure its power. Contrariwise, Jacques is the exception who opposes the rituals and violence of Orlando. By the end of the play, all characters move back to the court and there restore their “natural” rights. The play thus ends in a way that can be described as open-ended, particularly regarding Jacques’s decision not to leave the forest. His stay in the forest can be read as a seed of a subversive and alternative state of being against the emerging individualist society.

Most readings of the play indeed direct their attention to this restoration of order and regard it as an expression of the playwright’s view of order as a necessity. However, Shakespeare also exposes this colonialist and imperialist attitude of the upper class so as to ‘hold the mirror up to nature... [to] scorn her own image’, in Hamlet’s words, about the role of theatre itself.¹⁸ Jacques promises an alternative and revolutionary world against the corrupt and unnatural world of courts and ‘painted pomp’ (A, II. 1. 3). This interlude in the greenwood, therefore, ultimately allows for a sense of community to rise against the individualism of the court, this despite the intruding nature of some characters.

Theatrical Spatiality: Dissenting bodies

Transvestitism was not a common phenomenon in England except in Shakespearean theatre. Investing in cross-dressing allows both the characters and the playwright to transgress spaces that police the body and depend on its subordination to survive. Remapping bodies is a dissident and transgressive tool. The previous space functions through the intersectionality between the private and public body for further control and oppression; on the contrary, the mobility toward new and liberating spaces requires a *confusion* of identities that transgresses the private space of the body in favor of the public and the political.

Many critics, however, argue that the liberty offered to women in their spatial move is temporary. In this manner, Laroque claims that Rosalind and Celia’s behavior is ‘colonialist’:

In Shakespeare’s plays, as in the upside down world characterized by all the ambiguities and metamorphoses of desire, it was the affinities and passions and, by means of impersonations and acrobatic costume changes, eventually managed to restore the world to rights at the same time ensuring their own personal well-being. When the pitch of confusion is at its height and everything is upside-down, Rosalind [...] find[s] ways of rectifying the situation and getting what [she] want[s].¹⁹

¹⁸ *Hamlet*, III. 2. 20-1.

¹⁹ Laroque, p. 264.

Laroque claims that disorder is used to attain order and power. Accordingly, carnivalisation is temporary and order is natural and inevitable.

Nonetheless, it is worth examining the transgressive and destabilising aspect of the transvestite, even if temporary. As aforementioned, Rosalind and Celia's act of exchanging jewels and money for land and food is regarded as an imperialist and upper-class attitude that penetrates the untamed space of the forest. However, this mobility causes a state of confusion that permeates this alternative world and allows a state of being outside constructs and gendered identities. Regardless of their attitude, moving into space allows these two females to practice a traditionally male ritual, that of transaction. Here, two political acts converge to allow them to transgress the public and private male world through the spatiality afforded by transvestitism. The very act of transvestitism is both transgressive and progressive, and its powers of violation is one of the most anarchic and disturbing practices in the early Modern world.

Hierarchy based on gender is undermined in the forest. The transvestites interrogate, subvert, and therefore successfully undermine an established hierarchy, vindicated by church, nature, and the patriarchal family space. It also challenges the contemporary Manichean division between the two sexes having no third or liminal space allowed, and, as such, *As You Like It* is the play of liminality and liminal spaces. Hence, Rosalind invests in this liminality to remap and displace both body and land. Displeased by Orlando's jejune wooing strategies and quasi-Petrarchan poetry, she decides to teach him the proper ways to woo a lady. Rosalind, like Touchstone, acts as an iconoclast who burlesques the world of 'the painted pomp'.

The act of cross-dressing also allows for covert allusions to homosexuality, then regarded as a crime by the state. The state's regulation of sex, as an act which has to be procreative, is to affirm its control over the family and therefore the whole macrocosmic society. Towards the end, the play affirms heterosexual love whereby all the couples get married under the elders' approval, and therefore the state's as well. Rosalind says to Orlando: 'to you I give myself, for I am yours' (A, V. 4. 111). Once undisguised, she is displaced from 'liberty' to being subordinate to the institution of marriage, regulated by church and state, leaving Phebe in despair. Contrariwise, the fact that the characters are staged by male actors opens the possibility for homoerotic overtones. The play, therefore, does not provide the audience with satisfactory closure, and its open ending epitomises the role of gender play as understood here, delivered by a male actor playing the female heroine: 'If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me, complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not' (A, epilogue). The play thus ends with layered tones regarding the issue of sexuality and the audience may 'like as much of this play as please [them]' (A, epilogue). This remark acknowledges the dialogic and disorderly aspect of the play, a resistance to finalised closures.

In conclusion, therefore, the forest is a free space in which characters are mobilised to experiment with the possibility of a liberated societal coexistence free from class, gender, and all forms of policing and surveillance, including church and family. The play ends up with a return to the policed space, that of the court, yet leaves the reader pondering upon the possibility of such a form of existence outside the rules of the state. An anarchic existence is

what the play subversively suggests. The audience as a collectivity, belongs good part of it belonging to the ascribed lower stratum of society, is exposed to a stateless realm whereby no upper class or power governs or controls it. This space is anathemised by the state and its ideological arbiters, yet is nonetheless liberating and anarchical and, therefore, both disturbing and dislocating.

The play can be said to “transvestify” order on three levels: the generic, political, and theatrical, approaching and even inhibiting, for a while, the space of dissent. It appropriates the pastoral, unveiling the corruption of an upper class and disturbing patriarchal rule. Comedy, under the veneer of levity, is therefore here reveals as serious interrogation of order and authority.

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