

## **The Transformative Wilderness**

**By**

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English society in Shakespeare's time was hierarchically structured and clearly delineated. At the top of the pyramid sat the Queen or King, appointed, and anointed, by God, His representative on Earth. Below this earthly ruler came the Dukes, below them Earls and so on down through the ranks of the aristocracy to the gentry, and eventually down to the peasants and rogues and vagabonds. The classification of people was rigidly prescribed, and Sumptuary Laws existed to ensure that the stratum of society to which a person belonged could be seen at a glance, regulating as they did the fabrics and styles of dress which different ranks in society were entitled to wear. While these laws were continually being re-passed, suggesting that they were honoured more in the breach than the observance, they were frequently debated, and to give but one example, some of the ammunition which the Puritans used in attacking the players in the theatre was that they wore clothes to which they were not entitled. This rigidly codified society was underpinned by a long history of tradition, which had, however, undergone considerable schism within living memory, traumatically with the impact of the Reformation and more insidiously with the gradual rise of merchant classes, a *nouveau riche* stratum which increasingly rivalled the wealth and influence of the old aristocracy, and certainly outnumbered them. The changes in society were fervently argued, and these debates took place in political and religious arenas, but were also reflected in the cultural upsurge in the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth centuries, an upsurge of which Shakespeare was certainly a part. These changes eventually culminated in the Civil War of the mid-century, but they also fuelled a vibrant society in which debate and the clash of new ideas, coupled with a time of comparative prosperity, together with technological developments like the expansion of the printing industry, enabled a flowering of literature and drama previously unparalleled in English history.

The terrible dynastic struggles and divisions of the Wars of the Roses are described by Shakespeare in his History plays. These wars had after all only ended within the memories of his grandparents' generation, and had been followed by terrible religious conflicts, with the burning of martyrs and the execution of heretics, uprisings, and the collapse of an order in society which had held together, however tenuously, for several centuries. While the open conflicts had halted the underlying resentments still continued, as constant conspiracies, real and imagined attested, and in a society which feared clandestine assassination attempts by infiltrating Jesuits or foreign agents, order was everything. The secret service set up by Sir Francis Walsingham turned England into a nation riddled with informers, and betrayed a paranoia at the very heart of the state. Elizabeth's reign, although horribly violent by modern standards, was comparatively peaceful once the threat of Spanish invasion receded with the defeat of the Armada in 1588, but memories were long, and fear remained. Under King James the threats continued, as evidenced by the Gunpowder plot, but the peaceful transition from the English Protestant Queen Elizabeth to the Scottish Protestant King James showed that order was becoming possible if not inevitable.

In this world which was beginning to aspire towards order there were, of course, anarchic elements, and many of those elements were feared and condemned by the newly assertive orders. Puritanism took hold amongst the rising merchant classes as a way of distinguishing themselves both from what they saw as the older and more decadent aristocracy and also from the lower classes and the rustic communities, where many traces of the Old Religion, Catholicism, mingled with the vestiges of folk

traditions amongst the largely illiterate peasantry. One of the effects of this rising tide was that the Puritans drained so much that was life affirming, life enhancing and simply fun out of the lives of those they could influence, and they certainly hated the theatre. Although the theatre of Shakespeare's contemporaries was secular it grew out of roots in the old Catholic religious theatre tradition of the Middle Ages, and through some aspects based upon folk plays incorporated a legacy of festivities which had their origins in pagan pre-Christian times. For the Puritans the players represented the voice of Satan, and the players enjoyed tweaking the censorious noses of the middle classes, as did their aristocratic patrons, who fought on their behalf against many attempts to prevent performances in the City of London and elsewhere.

But despite this there was consensus around the idea of the desirability of order. In this ordered world William Shakespeare wrote a speech, in *Troilus and Cressida*, in which he describes this viewpoint admirably:

*O, when degree is shaken,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,  
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
The primogenitive and due of birth,  
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
But by degree, stand in authentic place?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows! each thing meets  
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters  
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores  
And make a sop of all this solid globe:  
Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
And the rude son should strike his father dead:  
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,  
Between whose endless jar justice resides,  
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
Then every thing includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, an universal wolf,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce an universal prey,  
And last eat up himself.*

*(Troilus and Cressida, I iii, 101-24)*

This description of the ensuing chaos is politically speaking anathema, but on the other hand represents a fertile ground for the Theatre. Indeed one can trace elements of many of those things described by Ulysses in this famous speech in others of Shakespeare's plays. The breakdown of order is the very stuff of Drama. In many plays, not just those by Shakespeare, the play begins with a breakdown of the ordered world, and then the rest of the play is an attempt to restore or replace that lost order. In tragedy this is usually achieved through a death, in a comedy through a marriage. Although more recent plays have broken away from this pattern of tragedy – death, comedy-marriage in Shakespeare's day these were the accepted norms. This initial breakdown of order may come through a shipwreck, as in *Tempest* or *Twelfth Night*, a riot, as in *Coriolanus*, an angry outburst leading to a fight as in *Romeo and Juliet* or *As You Like It*, or any one of a number of different ways, but this breakdown of order is the start of the Drama.

The search for resolution often involves a departure from the ordered world which is presented to the audience as the norm, and a journey into a far wilder environment. This journey may be fraught with danger, or may be a place of refuge from danger, but the world into which the protagonists stray is a world where they can no longer operate within the boundaries and conventions of their normal lives. Their rank or status is gone, they are forced to depend upon their own personal qualities. This movement from order to disorder, from the court or the city to the wilderness, transforms the protagonists. If one characterises this in critical terms, the characters are moving from the world described by EMW Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World View* (1943) to what Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) called 'the Second World' or the Green World'. This world, as Frye describes it, is the place which is less structured, where the existing divisions in society mean nothing, and where resolution can be achieved. This second world can take a number of forms. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Belmont has elements of this Second World, particularly in the opening of Act V, where Lorenzo and Jessica have found peace and tranquillity after her flight from her vengeful father, but it is not a wilderness. In *Othello* Cyprus fulfils some of these functions, but although it is another world far from the city, and it certainly transforms the situation in which the characters find themselves, it is not a wilderness. In *King Lear* however there is indeed a wilderness, where Lear and the Fool venture out onto the heath in a storm. In other plays by Shakespeare people are transformed by the sea. In *Twelfth Night*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest* people are transformed by their experiences following a shipwreck, but this is different. Shipwreck is involuntary. In a shipwreck, a process heavily imbued with Christian symbolism of rebirth and baptism, the protagonists have endured an unforeseen calamity which deposits them in a strange environment. In a journey to the wilderness the characters choose to enter that environment, sometimes in flight but always knowingly. They choose to enter the transformative environment.

This phenomenon is explored in a number of Shakespeare's plays. It happens in *Cymbeline*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and as already mentioned *King Lear*. *The Tempest* has elements of the Transformative Wilderness combined with a shipwreck. *Winter's Tale* has elements of it too, in the scenes in Bohemia. In exploring some of these the characteristics can be isolated and examined.

The idea of the Wilderness is multi-faceted. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition the idea of The Wilderness is powerful, and purifying. In the *Book of Exodus* Moses leads the Children of Israel through the Wilderness for forty years, until they have purged away many of their failings and proved themselves worthy to enter the Promised Land. In the *Gospels* John the Baptist, the harbinger of Jesus, lives in the Wilderness where he performs the rite of Baptism to purge the people of their sins. Jesus, before beginning his ministry, spends forty days and forty nights in the Wilderness preparing himself. He overcomes temptation and purifies himself before setting out on his mission. In the Western tradition the concept of The Wilderness tends towards contemplation and purification. It was often a home to saints and prophets, such as Elijah, in the Old Testament, or St Simon Stylites and St Cuthbert who sought solitude in the Wilderness as an escape from distraction. Later writers, like Henry David Thoreau, in *Walden* (1854) said "...in wildness is the preservation of the world...".

In Shakespeare's early comedy *Two Gentlemen of Verona* the idea of a Transformative Wilderness makes a tentative appearance. Valentine, banished from Milan, seeks refuge in the forest. There he finds, temporarily, escape from his troubles. He celebrates this: "...How use doth breed a habit in a man!/This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,/I better brook than flourishing peopled towns..." (*TGV*, V,iv,1-3) But into this wood, where he has fallen in with and then become leader of a group of Outlaws, come all of the other main characters, his beloved, his former best friend and now rival, the Duke who banished him. In this environment a resolution is achieved which would have otherwise been impossible, and indeed even the Outlaws, who were, as it turns out, once gentlemen, pardoned and enabled to return to the city, forgiven for their crimes.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* the denouement takes place in the forest of Great Windsor Park, beside the oak named for Herne the Hunter, the old Celtic god of pre-Christian times, where Falstaff disguised with antlers is outwitted, tormented and sent packing, the antlers of Herne the Hunter now revealed as the horns of the cuckold he intended to make of Ford and Page, burgesses of Windsor, in his assignation with their wives. The park is not what a Twenty-first Century city dweller might imagine, with railings and fountains and well-laid pathways, but a park or area set aside for the Queen and her court to hunt deer, a far wilder place than modern audiences might be used to. The assignation has been sought away from the structures of the small town, so reminiscent of the bourgeois world of Stratford, where Shakespeare had grown up, but Falstaff, who is in this play closer than ever to his prototype of the Vice in Medieval Mystery plays, is not the wildest element in the play. The disguised "fairies" have nipped and tormented him, and he has been brought to book for his cozening of Brook and will be forced to repay the money. He has been ridiculed, humiliated and will be forced to make amends, so the transformation is not one which Falstaff sought, but one which brings resolution to the good burghers of Windsor. There have been several layers to the transformation, with disguise, with a series of misapprehensions, and finally repentance. At the end the resolution achieved in the Park enables all of the characters to return to the town, with order restored.

In *Cymbeline* Imogen (or Innogen as some editors render it) takes refuge in the Welsh mountains, and while disguised as "Fidele" is sheltered by Belisarius and his sons, living with them in a cave. They are drawn together by a strange affinity, not realising that no-one is the character they seem to be. Belisarius' "sons" are in fact lost royal princes, the boy Fidele is the girl Imogen, and in fact the sister to the two boys, and it takes a convoluted series of happenings, chance encounters and several deaths before the possibility of resolution is arrived at. But on the way a prince has been killed by a shepherd, a vassal king has defeated the army of an emperor, a princess falsely accused of infidelity has been vindicated, a liar has repented, and all of these things have had the opportunity to happen because the characters have been outside the world in which they normally exist.

In the wilderness, either through extremity, or contemplation, or chance, characters begin to arrive at an awareness of who and what they really are. In *King Lear* the king, blind to the reality of his situation, and to the consequences of his actions, only begins to achieve understanding when he finds himself out on the heath in a storm so terrible that it drives him over the brink into madness. It is the extremity of his peril in the face of "...cataracts and hurricanoes...sul'phurous and thought executing fires..." and "...oak-cleaving thunderbolts..." (*KL, IIIii, 2,4,5*) and his eventual loss of reason that he encounters Gloucester, a man physically blind as he has been metaphorically blind and an outcast disguised as a madman, and in the end recognises his own common humanity, no different from "...poor naked wretches..." (*KL, IIIiv, 28*). Perhaps the most eloquent rendition of this scene in many years has been the moment in Grigori Kozintsev's film of the play, *Korol Lir* (1974), where the hovel in which they take shelter from the storm is actually filled with those poor, naked wretches, and Lear sits amongst them. It is his madness, coupled with his dawning of self-realisation, engendered by his experiences on the heath, that enables Lear to become reconciled with Cordelia, although that reconciliation is fleeting, in the short time before their deaths.

Perhaps the most vivid workings of the Transformative Wilderness, however, come in the two comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. In the first of these the wilderness is the "...wood a league without the town..." (*MSND Ii, 165*) of Athens. To this wood flee two fugitive lovers, pursued by her other would-be lover and HIS would-be lover. To this wood resort a group of Rude Mechanicals, determined to find solitude to rehearse their play. But in this wood they have walked unsuspectingly into a place of magic, where the "real" world and the fairy world intersect. This wood is not an ordinary Athenian wood, and neither is it an English wood. It is a wood which lion, lynx and leopard frequent, monkeys and bears are to be found and feared. In Greece in ancient times a lynx is feasible, a bear conceivable, but lions and leopards are from a different world. In Greece one is in reality more likely to encounter a tortoise, which does not convey the same sense of

danger<sup>i</sup>. But this wood contains other dangers, in that it is a place where the fairies' paths across the world meet and collide.

In this wood Oberon and Titania and their trains are in conflict. The conflict is so severe that the climate is affected, the seasons are out of sequence, and environmental disaster threatens. Into the midst of this conflict stumble the human characters, and the confusion which ensues for them is collateral damage. In part this is brought about by the mistakes made by Puck. Puck, despite his presence near Athens is very much an Old English fairy, part of an English folk tradition rather than a classical one. Oberon and Titania "...are spirits of another sort..." (*MSND* IIIii, 388) from the run-of-the-mill fairies, but so too is Robin Goodfellow, or "...Hobgoblin...or Sweet Puck..." (*MSND* Iii,40). A Hobgoblin is a very dark sort of fairy indeed. As Jan Kott reminds us, it is one of the names for the Devil. (1981,p171). Puck is mistaken in his application of the transforming juice of the flower Love-in-Idleness<sup>ii</sup>, and his attempts to put this right further exacerbate the confusion, but he has no instruction to transform Bottom by giving him an ass's head. He does this out of his own sense of mischief, or malevolence. But whether deliberate or not, whether premeditated, spontaneous or accidental, the transformations in the wood make possible the resolution of seemingly intractable problems brought from the world of the Athenian court.

At the start of the play Theseus has brought Hippolyta captive from her own people, the race of the Amazons, who have been defeated in war. He tells her he will marry her. Hippolyta makes a limited reply. She is then silent until Act IV. Theseus, it must be remembered, is one of the more ambiguous characters in classical literature. He is notorious as a serial philanderer, he is a rapist<sup>iii</sup>. Although she remains on stage through a large part of the scene she does not utter a single word after her initial acknowledgement that she will marry him, a sentiment couched at best in lukewarm language. The next sight that Hippolyta, queen of a race of powerful women who have been defeated by Theseus, sees is one of his close followers bringing in his daughter for sentencing to death if she does not marry the man of his choice against her own preference. The Duke offers three alternatives – to marry against her will, to become a nun in a cloistered order, or to die. This leaves a series of problems. Obviously there is a problem for Hermia, who must pick one of those three alternatives. It also leaves a problem for the bride-to-be, Hippolyta. How does she, Queen of a race of independent women, have a relationship with such a man?

The answer to the former problem is suggested by Lysander. They are to run away together. By escaping from Athens they can be together, in a place to which "...the sharp Athenian law/Cannot pursue us..." (*MSND* Ii, 162-3). This brings them into the wood. Theseus and Hippolyta do not enter the wood until much later. By the time they reappear, out hunting in the forest, a change has taken place. While it is perfectly self-evident that the transformation of the situation in which Lysander and Hermia find themselves is arrived at through the agency of the fairies, this is actually achieved by changing the mind of Demetrius, who has reverted to his original attraction to Helen. But this has been brought about by magic, and in fact at no point in the scene, when the antidote is administered to Lysander, does Shakespeare indicate that the love juice is removed from Demetrius' eyes.

The question of the way in which the wood transforms the situation of Theseus and Hippolyta is far more complex. Theseus and Hippolyta have no scene in which to reconcile the differences between them. Theseus expresses his intention to do so, just before demonstrating a piece of unabashed misogyny. There is no opportunity to see them repair the damage, yet in Act IVi they are able to have a perfectly amicable conversation around their shared love of hunting, and in particular dogs. But while no scene involving them has been shown which offers the possibility of reconciliation another storyline has been followed which does.

In the theatre Theseus and Oberon, and Hippolyta and Titania, are frequently played by the same actors. This doubling was widely popularised by Peter Brook's epoch-making production of the play in 1970. While having a basis in the practicalities of staging in Shakespeare's own company, where

doubling of actors enabled the plays to be staged with a main company of approximately twelve actors, this doubling did not have a strong currency in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Since Brook's production the pairs have almost always been doubled. Yet it is seldom that directors who employ this doubling are able to articulate their reasons for doing so. There is a pragmatic reason, that of saving two salaries, but there is another reason for doing so which unlocks some of the problems thrown up by the situations in which the characters find themselves.

Oberon and Titania have fallen out. They are feuding. Their feud is so cataclysmic that the seasons are out of kilter. The effects upon the climate are profound. They have fallen out over a young Indian boy. Oberon wants him as a page, Titania wants him because "...his mother was a vot'ress of my order...". (*MSND III*, 123) Neither is prepared to give up their claim. The real significance of this is not explained any further. Suffice to say that this is presented as an intractable problem. Oberon uses magic to punish his wife. He makes her besotted with a monster. It has the desired effect, she gives the boy to him, but they are reconciled. He has been delighted by her humiliation, yet eventually this turns to pity. It is after they have been reconciled, and have left together, that Theseus and Hippolyta re-enter the story, now able to speak to each other. At this point the sleeping lovers are discovered, and Egeus, Hermia's father, demands the severity of the Athenian law. Theseus overrides the edict, and allows Hermia to marry Lysander, in part because Demetrius has expressed a return to his love for Helena, but crucially it enables him to demonstrate to Hippolyta a changed perspective.

The links between Theseus and Hippolyta and Oberon and Titania go further than the simple suggestion, underlined by both fairies that Theseus and Titania and Oberon and Hippolyta have been lovers, until very recently. (*MSND III*, 70 et seq.) The mirroring of the two relationships, the very intermingling of the quartet, suggests a parallel between the pairs. The play is a dream, as the title states. The question remains as to whose dream it is. It is not Bottom's dream. He is going to get Peter Quince to write that at some future point, as he states in *IVii*, 217 et seq. The lovers have what they perceive to be dreams, yet they wake from those, and the audience knows that the things they believe to be dreams really happened to them. Theseus and Hippolyta may have dreamed. Oberon and Titania may have been the dreamed projections of their mortal selves. The conflict between them may have been resolved within a dream by the reconciliation of their projected selves.

This is a suggestion which is implied by the doubling of the actors, and does not necessarily exist in the text. It is, however, arguably based upon theatrical practice in Shakespeare's own company. It is impossible to assert dogmatically, yet it is implied in the vast majority of post-1970 productions of the play. Whether this interpretation is accepted or not, it is the experience in the forest, in the wilderness, which transforms the characters and their situations both literally and metaphorically, and enables them all to return to the city with their conflicts resolved, to resume their lives.

At the end of the play, in the very last speech, the audience is left with the one character who is arguably not part of a dream. It is Puck, who addresses the audience directly, pointing out that "we shadows...[are]...no more yielding but a dream" (*MSND VI*, 425 et seq). Puck is the character who reminds the audience that this is not real, and by doing so connects the play world to the real world. He translates the audience back into their own reality.

If the wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers a range of transformative possibilities, *As You Like It* takes things even further. Most of the play takes place in the Forest of Arden. This forest is both that of the Ardennes in modern day Belgium, suggested by the French names of the characters, and the forest in the vicinity of which Shakespeare grew up in Stratford, the forest which shared a name with his mother's family. Into this forest come a number of characters whose main shared characteristic is that they are exiles, fleeing tyranny. Not all of the characters are exiles, there are

also shepherds and shepherdesses who live there. The play is also a hymn to the pastoral tradition. In this it shares characteristics with the Bohemian scenes in *A Winter's Tale*. The pastoral idyll, the Arcadian tradition, goes back to Ancient Greece, and has been strongly represented in European literature and art. So popular has this tradition proved over centuries that Marie Antoinette, the last Bourbon Queen of France, constructed a village in the grounds of the palace of Versailles in which she and her courtiers could play at being shepherds and shepherdesses. This *Petit Hameau de la Reine* as it was named was considerably better than the real villages in which many of her subjects actually lived, but it enabled the aristocrats of France to role-play within the conventions of this pastoral and Arcadian tradition without having to actually castrate rams or butcher mutton.

Shakespeare, as a man who knew the English countryside, plays with some of these pastoral conventions while subtly undermining others, but the transformation this life effects upon the courtiers who come into contact with it is profound, and in a play in which magic does not feature, almost magical in its intensity. Whereas in the *Dream* the transformations are magical, in this play the transformations are in the sensibilities of people. The Duke, usurped by his own brother, has sought refuge in the forest, but has been transformed by the experience:

*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?  
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,  
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang  
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,  
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say  
'This is no flattery: these are counsellors  
That feelingly persuade me what I am.'  
Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
And this our life exempt from public haunt  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones and good in every thing.  
I would not change it.*

(AYLI III 1-18)

In the Forest of Arden many of the social niceties break down. Touchstone, a courtier as well as a Fool, argues with Corin, a shepherd, that a courtier is no better a man than one who tends his sheep. Another cynical courtier becomes sentimental over the fate of a wounded deer. But these transformations are as nothing compared to the changes of gender. In a number of his plays Shakespeare plays with the convention of having the girls played by boys in his theatre. In *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet*, for example, this is never a feature. The boy who plays Juliet or Ophelia remains safely cocooned within the established convention, but in *Twelfth Night*, *the Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Cymbeline*, as already noted and most tellingly of all in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare runs along the boundaries between the sexes, and highlights, indeed revels in, the anomalies. A boy playing a girl plays a boy again. In *As You Like It* a boy playing a girl plays a boy playing a girl. There is no escaping the focus on the boundaries between the genders, and gender indeed becomes clearly seen as something which is performed and perceived, rather than a binary absolute.

This is difficult for modern audiences for two reasons. In the first instance our contemporary view of masculinity and femininity are largely Nineteenth century constructs, which differ from and in some cases even invert Renaissance norms<sup>iv</sup>. In the second instance the roles are nowadays usually played by women. While this has undoubtedly allowed great actresses to explore depths and nuances in Shakespeare's heroines which no man could hope to find, it has conversely restricted some aspects of the cross-dressing heroines. To have a woman playing Rosalind is only to perform three quarters of the role. There have of course been magnificent portrayals of Rosalind by many actresses, but it is not the Rosalind, in the end, that Shakespeare wrote. This boundary is explored thoroughly in the play. At the end Orlando is left marrying a girl who has played a boy playing a girl, and then that girl speaks the epilogue as a very ambiguously gendered figure indeed. It is left for the audience to work out who exactly it is that Orlando is in love with.

This forest is not just any forest. It has lions and snakes in it. These are even less likely in Belgium, or Warwickshire, than they were near Athens. But in this forest people change, sometimes instantly. While it may be argued that Oliver, Orlando's wicked older brother, has come to the forest already having begun his process of transformation, no such suggestion can be made for the usurping Duke Frederick, leading an army into the forest to capture his brother, who meets a hermit and is converted from his tyranny to a life of solace and contemplation. This happens out of nowhere. This may be, like the doubling of the characters in the *Dream*, because the two Dukes were played by the same actor. But even if it is, Shakespeare deliberately chooses this wildly implausible explanation, demonstrating once again the transformative power of the wild place. This is only one of the *deus ex machina* moments in the play, rivalling anything in Euripides. The sudden appearance of Jaques de Boys, or indeed the intervention of Hymen, the classical god of marriage, are equally extraordinary. But the power of the wilderness enables resolution, and the return to the court for all of the characters except one. The one who remains is Jaques. The most cynical of all the characters, he is in the end the one who elects to remain in the forest. His transformation from a courtier to a forest-dweller is complete. He remains behind, his refusal to depart with the others casting an ambiguous note over the whole ending, as if any further degree of ambiguity were needed.

It is in the wilderness that characters, stripped of rank and status, cut off from the familiar, discover who they really are, and this enables them to resolve the conflicts. It is from a basis of self-realisation, be it of actual identity or affirmation of inherent qualities, that progress can be made against the most intractable problems.

Like the ending of the *Dream*, *As You Like It* returns the audience to the real world. This parallels the action of the plays. After the time in the Transformative Wilderness the protagonists return to their "real" world. Their conflicts have been resolved, they have been purged by their cathartic experiences. This is the same for the members of the theatre audience. The audience, like the characters in the play, have entered a world where defined roles are broken down, where status is turned on its head. They too have shared empathetically in a cathartic experience, the purpose of which, as it is for the characters, is to allow them to return to the real world changed by the things they have lived through. Thus the ultimate Transformative Wilderness, as Puck and Rosalind remind us, is the theatre itself.

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<sup>i</sup> Although, according to an old legend, a tortoise caused the death of Aeschylus. This story states that in Greece eagles eat the tortoises by swooping down on them, picking them up and dropping them onto rocks from a height to break them open. Aeschylus being bald, an eagle, mistaking his head for a rock glinting in the sun, dropped a tortoise onto his head, killing him. Having said that, the tortoise was no doubt a unwilling participant in his demise. The story, although undoubtedly fanciful, held wide currency for a long time.

<sup>ii</sup> A wild pansy, white with a purple centre which can sometimes, due to the shape of the petals, look like a heart. The pansy is one of England's most common garden flowers, but Love in Idleness is less common.

<sup>iii</sup> "...from Perigenia, whom he ravished..." (*MSND liii*, 78) He also abducted (in some versions of the legend) Helen of Troy when she was 12. In other versions of the story it was Antiope, and in *MSND* Shakespeare refers

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to her as one of Theseus' paramours (ibid). He uses, deserts and fathers children with women throughout his story, well-known to readers in Shakespeare's time. He failed to change the sails of his ship when he returned from Crete, causing his father, who believes him to be dead, to commit suicide. A marriage to Theseus is scarcely the answer to a woman's prayers.

<sup>iv</sup> In Shakespeare's time all children were dressed as girls until a boy was old enough to be "breeched". Young men were likely to blush, or burst into tears, or behave in a number of ways which would, in the post-Victorian view, be behaviour considered "effeminate". In Shakespeare's time effeminate was a term used to describe someone besotted by love and unable to act, as for example Romeo or Mark Antony. In many portraits of the time, for instance in the miniatures of Nicholas Hilliard, it is extremely difficult to distinguish young men from young women. Boy's voices broke considerably later in Shakespeare's day, at any age up to nineteen, twenty or even later, as opposed to the present day.

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