

The Forest of Arden as a Liminal Site for Criticism in *As You Like It*

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Abstract

The Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's As You Like It has been conceptualised as a pastoral setting and a utopian land, and the play has been a matter of discussion in green and ecocritical studies. However, the ambiguous rendering of the setting and its contradictory qualities make the play a storm centre of such critical works. Undoubtedly, these debates meet with critical acclaim, and the play still stirs up a discussion about its spatial setting. In effect, Shakespeare's play lays bare the traits of liminal place in the deliberation of the forest setting and the experiences of its inhabitants. While the first act is set at Duke Frederick's court, the rest of the play takes place in the Forest of Arden where the characters develop communitas as outsiders. When the sixteen forest scenes of the play are analysed, one may posit that there are different definitions of Arden. First and foremost, Arden's exact location cannot be identified; it might be situated in a French, English or other European border. Secondly, Arden is fused with contradictory and ambiguous characteristics. The forest is fraught with economic difficulties, hunger, coldness and dangerous threats for men and women. Yet it is a place of familial and romantic love, friendship and bliss. In addition to its ambivalent traits, the perception of the forest changes from one character to another. Each character adds a different meaning to the forest regarding their own experiences in this setting. The forest is also a place of transformation and transition as the characters leave the court, go to the forest and return to the court after establishing new identities and restoring their positions in the end. Moreover, Arden becomes a site of resistance against usurpation and banishment, and a place of political critique of the court, corruption, exile and colonialism throughout the play. Therefore, Arden emerges as a multi-layered and ambiguous place and such qualities make the forest a liminal landscape. This paper sets out to claim that the Forest of Arden in As You Like It can be regarded as a liminal site in which Shakespeare veils his critical remarks on the late Elizabethan court, implicitly questions the practices of banishment and exile, and comments on contemporary political, social and cultural issues by using liminality as a tool for criticism.

Written at a time when pastoral works were popular on early modern stages, *As You Like It* (1599–1600) accorded with the form and content of the pastoral tradition. This comedy is Shakespeare's reworking of Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590) which is a pastoral romance. Most scholars agree, as will be outlined further below, that this source, therefore, shapes the play's pastoral mood through which Shakespeare creates a pastoral surrounding in the Forest of Arden. The retreat of the characters from the court to the green setting, their appreciation of rustic life and the dominant theme of love resonate pastoral

conventions laden with anti-court satire. The fact that Shakespeare's play presents the court only in the first act whereas the rest of the four acts are set in the Forest of Arden heralds the play's engagement with the pastoral as a critical tool. To be more specific, in the play, the forest becomes a site in which an alternative community is established to provide a critique of corruption and decay at the court. Moreover, the life in the pastoral landscape for newcomers is not associated with restriction and confinement; it rather suggests freedom and liberty from oppressive boundaries. From the start of the play, the characters and nature reciprocally define each other. As the courtiers in exile regard the forest as a place of liberation, the forest reveals itself as a place of freedom when Celia, fleeing from Duke Frederick's court with Rosalind and Touchstone, declares that their journey to Arden is "[t]o liberty and not to banishment" (2006, 1.3:135). Although it is not unusual to define all of these elements in terms of the life and culture embedded in the pastoral mode, the play offers an alternative reading, particularly in relation to its setting. When analysed closely, the details about life in the forest indicate that Shakespeare uses the setting to censure the contemporary practices of deforestation, colonialism and political punishments in the late Elizabethan period. And, it is the contention of this paper that Shakespeare creates the Forest of Arden as a liminal place which can be called an ambiguous, in-between place of transition and transformation loaded with opposite potentials, and this liminal forest serves as a means of Shakespeare's political criticism in *As You Like It*.

In effect, the ongoing debate about *As You Like It's* setting illustrates that Shakespearean scholars propose different views on the play's pastoral features and the utopian vision of this genre. On the one hand, many critics have defined the play's pastoral genre. From David Erskine Baker's definition of the play as "the truest pastoral drama that ever was written" in 1764 (Baker, 1979, p. 25) to Todd A. Borlik's most recent claim on "a pastoral vision of an ecological commonwealth" (Borlik, 2011, p. 181), the argument on pastoral has been established. What is more, such analyses present an extensive discussion of the play's utopian landscape drawing on the idea that the rustic life is tinged with images of Eden, Arcadia or the Golden Age myth as can be clear from Jan Kott's reference to "the [play's] images of the Renaissance utopia" (Kott, 1965, p. 40) to Terry Gifford's comment on "Shakespeare's English Arcadia" (Gifford, 2010, p. 84). On the other hand, Shakespeare's use of the pastoral land is atypical and ostensibly not utopian. Some scholars, therefore, have questioned the play's seemingly pastoral / utopic realm on the grounds that the characters complain about harsh weather conditions, suffer from economic troubles and easily become vulnerable to animal attacks. Ryan Farrar, for instance, argues that:

Shakespeare's pastoral comedy challenges conventional expectations as he combines a mode of utopian optimism with a mode of artistic realism, creating a dissonant conflict between the two. (Farrar, 2014, p. 367)

That is to say, *As You Like It* cannot be easily framed within the pastoral tradition while its forest setting does not reside in the utopian serenity of the pastoral site. The discussion about the play's engagement with the pastoral suggests that the forest setting is still open to further commentary since its definition remains problematic. Hence, defining Arden as a liminal place can be an alternative to the well-worn interpretations of the play's setting.

Originally referring to the beings "neither here nor there" (Turner, 1969, p. 65) and betwixt situations in the rites of passage, liminality grows into a concept to define in-between, transitional and ambiguous spatial and temporal positions. Broadly conceived, liminal locations are thresholds, borders or in-between zones which, as has been articulated by Teresa G. Reus and Terry Gifford:

may involve actual spaces in which the transition is enacted places apart, or places to escape through or to escape to, places to occupy temporarily as well as experiences of transition undertaken by an initiative to act in the decision to separate from a prior state of security (Reus & Gifford, 2013, p. 6).

Here transition is indicative of mobility for the liminal entity; the person in a process of change departs his/her place and moves to a transitional site before constructing a new self. Therefore, liminal space is temporarily occupied while the liminal figure inhabits this place for a short period of time. Arnold van Gennep includes forests in his list of in-between zones: "ordinarily deserts, marshes, and most frequently virgin forests where everyone has full rights to travel and hunt" (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 18). Van Gennep, then, emphasises the sense of in-betweenness in such places: "Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation which I have designated a transition" (*ibid.*). A similar experience can be identified in the liminal forest of Shakespeare's play when the characters from the court temporarily occupy the forest.

This study thus sets out to provide a new understanding of the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's comedy as a liminal place. It is of interest to refer to Peter V. Marinelli's description of the pastoral land as

a middle country of imagination, half-way between a past perfection and a present imperfection, a place of Becoming rather than Being, where an individual's potencies for the arts of life and love and poetry are explored and tested. It points two ways, therefore, backward into the past and forward into a possible future (Marinelli, 1971, p. 37).

The landscape, in other words, has an in-between nature since it mediates between the past and the future and, hence, it puts forward the idea of becoming in its present circumstances. Viewed in this way, such a place unravels its liminal quality as it evokes a fusion of values, in-betweenness, transition and transformation by offering a process of becoming. Considering these strains, the Forest of Arden can be called a liminal place as it unfolds different aspects of spatial liminality. Although the concept of liminality has been studied in relation to Shakespearean comedy by Penny Gay (2008, p. 11) and to Rosalind's cross-dressing and gender identity by Robert H. Bell (2011, p. 128), this article examines the forest setting in *As You Like It* as a liminal site. Therefore, the argument will be built upon the play's setting as a liminal place in the rest of the article. First, the features of Shakespeare's liminal setting will be presented with respect to the forest's in-betweenness, uncertainty, ambiguous potential and its transformative and transitional power. The article will then reconsider the aim of Shakespeare's use of the liminal place in this play. In search of this aim, the article argues that Shakespeare explores the liminal forest as a tool for his political criticism. More strongly than any other settings of his plays, Shakespeare makes use of liminal Arden to criticise the late Elizabethan practices of land politics, colonisation and Elizabeth I's methods of punishing courtiers. Thus, the final part of the article will offer a topical reading of enclosure, the political conflict between England and Ireland and the case of Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex's struggle with the Queen.

Liminal Forest of Arden

The beginning of the play illustrates that Duke Senior's throne has been usurped by his brother Duke Frederick, and Duke Senior and his courtiers had to leave the court. Duke Senior and his supporters are living in the Forest of Arden as exiles. Duke Senior's daughter Rosalind, on the other hand, is still living at the court of her uncle. However, in the first act of the play, Duke Frederick banishes her from his court because he regards Rosalind as a threat to his political power and his daughter Celia's position at the court. After this crisis, Rosalind, accompanied by Celia and the court fool Touchstone, flees to the forest. Orlando, Sir Rowland de Bois's youngest son, likewise, must escape from the court and go to Arden because of his tyrant elder brother Oliver who hates Orlando and threatens his life. Therefore, the major characters of the play retreat from their usual course of social life at the court to the forest. The forest thus serves as a "place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action" (Turner 1969, p. 167). It is also telling that being in exile is, according to Mihai I. Spariosu, a liminal experience (Spariosu, 2015, p. 28) which also creates liminal worlds as "indeterminate ontological landscapes or gray

areas located in between alternative worlds, subworlds, and superworlds” (Spariosu, 1997, p. 68). Considering that Arden is the alternative world to the court, and going into exile breaks down the ordinary course of life for the characters, they go through a process of transformation in the forest. Thus, the experience of exile in Arden contributes to the forest’s liminal status. Through the withdrawal from courtly life, the forest in the play provides a refuge to the characters, but Arden is not simply a utopian pastoral setting. While the forest is a temporary host that enables the characters to transform, it is fraught with contradictions and ambiguity. In the play, Arden is rendered with liminal qualities of ambiguity, transition, in-betweenness and transformation. Taking all these into consideration, the rest of this study deals with the detailed scrutiny of Arden as a liminal place and then exposes the reason for Shakespeare’s use of liminal spatiality for political criticism.

The first feature of liminal Arden can be explored in relation to how the forest is composed in an in-between state by the playwright. The Forest of Arden, to be more precise, oscillates between fact and fiction, revealing a liminal state of in-betweenness. As Shakespeare works with both a real forest and an imaginative one in his presentation of Arden, the forest appears halfway between fact and fiction. Although the fusion of reality and imagination is a common characteristic in Shakespeare’s works, this combination functionally designs spatial in-betweenness and ambiguity. Indeed, this helps the playwright locate his play into the context of England from a safe distance through a sense of alienation. To begin with the realistic aspects of the forest, it is telling that Shakespeare, drawing from Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, ascribes the setting of *As You Like It* to the French court and the Forest of Ardennes. The play indicates this as follows: Orlando “is the stubbornest young fellow of France” (1.1:133–34); Duke Frederick’s court is a distant French court where the courtiers use some French words (1.2:96); and some characters like Le Beau and Jaques have French names. The distance from England is also advocated in the depiction of Arden in comparison to Robin Hood’s English forest by the character Charles, the wrestler of the court (1.1:111). These details of the play do not cast doubt on the setting’s Frenchness as Shakespeare works with the source text’s setting, Ardennes. A close look at the location of the real forest of Ardennes reveals a detail of the place’s liminality. The real forest of Ardennes is located between the French cities of Bordeaux and Lyons. What is peculiar about this forest is that Ardennes was a borderland among countries in early modern Europe and its boundaries still extend from Belgium to Luxembourg, Germany and France. Maurice A. Hunt clarifies that “the forest of Ardennes in Lodge’s *Rosalynde* [is] a territory straddling the boundaries of modern France, Belgium, and Luxembourg” (Hunt, 2008, p. 78). Lisa Hopkins, too, delineates Ardennes as a “border country

between France and what is now Belgium” (Hopkins, 2014, p. 70). That is to say, Ardennes is a forest on the edge of the three European countries. It being on the threshold reveals the place’s liminal quality.

The debate about the forest’s liminal location illustrates that the play strategically works on this ambiguity to allude to England from a safe distance. In other words, the liminal in-betweenness of the forest is functionally used to a great degree to veil the references to the changes in early modern England. Shakespeare’s use of the English spelling of the French Ardennes deliberately causes confusion and diverts attention from the French setting to the English one. In this regard, the Forest of Arden can be regarded as a real landscape located within the borders of England. As a matter of fact, when the play was written, Arden was situated on the northern side of Avon in Warwickshire, Shakespeare’s hometown. Before Shakespeare’s birth, the Forest of Arden was heavily filled with trees (Hunt, 2008, p. 140), but the area was not very dense in Shakespeare’s time. The forest covered some woodlands, pastures, a few agricultural lands and mines at the end of the sixteenth century (Barton, 2017, p. 8). In the play, it is not easy to identify whether the forest is densely occupied with woods or trees. The words such as forest, wood, tree or forester are occasionally used to remind the audience of the forest setting. Although the type of trees is not clarified in these references, a palm tree, olive trees and an oak tree are mentioned (3.2:171–72; 4.3:76; 4.3:103). However, the forest is called a desert six times throughout the play (2.1:22; 2.4:71; 2.6:17; 2.7:111; 3.2:122; 4.3:140). Along with the notes in the Arden edition of the play, Robert N. Watson clearly indicates that the desert in the play refers to “the place by human abandonment” (Watson, 2011, p. 81). The fact that Duke Frederick’s moral reformation and dedication to religious life takes place in the forest reveals that Arden may have a trace of the medieval forest and the image of a desert. Corinne J. Saunders notes that:

[t]he definition of the forest as uncultivated landscape, rather than simply as woodland, allowed the writers of the Middle Ages to equate easily the forest of their own times and the desert of the Bible. This desert landscape carried with its specific associations of solitude and divine inspiration which were to be appropriated as part of the forest’s symbolism in the romances. (Saunders, 1993, p. 10)

As with Duke Frederick’s sudden conversion, Arden echoes the medieval Biblical desert as a transformative landscape of devoutness and spirituality. Read in this way, the references to the desert may advocate the meaning of the word as a barren land. Accordingly, the references to the forest can also be associated with the play’s depiction of a woodland and an uncultivated land together. Moreover, the forest in the play might illustrate the historical process of deforestation as the green areas in England diminished in time. At the beginning of the 1590s,

Borlik reports, the decline in the number of trees was a serious issue for the nation (Borlik, 2008). For this reason, according to Borlik, the current environmental crisis forced some to deal with the English forestry as a special topic in their writings among which Michael Drayton, Shakespeare's contemporary, presented the ecological devastation of Arden in one of his poems (*ibid.*, p. 40–46). Hence, Arden's ambiguous topography in the play may refer to such an ecological change at the time.

As an instance of another historical resonance, the inhabitants of the forest are portrayed in line with Arden's real population at that time. Hunt claims that there were various kinds of people in the Forest of Arden in the Elizabethan period: "Hunters, gatherers, masterless men and women, and cottage industries populated this rapidly thinning woodland" (Hunt, 2008, p. 80). Likewise, Shakespeare's foresters are exiles, outlaws, courtiers, shepherds and country people. More interestingly, a real Arden family appears in this work. Orlando and Oliver's surname, de Boys, is a play on the French "de Bois" meaning "of the forest" (Halio, 1962, p. 201). While the meaning intensifies the emphasis on the forest, this surname belonged to a family living in Warwickshire who had a manor in Arden (Barton, 2017, p. 130). This is to say that Shakespeare builds up his image of a real Arden in reference to the real inhabitants of the forest. This strengthens the claim that the play advocates a realistic forest setting in early modern England.

While Shakespeare colours Arden with some details from real life, he also borrows from previous literary works and traditions, other than the pastoral, in his presentation of the natural world in the play. This contributes to his development of the liminal land and community on the threshold of fact and fiction in his play. Among the different sources of the fictive forest, the influence of Robin Hood stories comes to the fore in Shakespeare's depiction of Arden. Indeed, this suggestion is directly made in the play when Charles tells Oliver that 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 (1.1:109–111).

The reference to Robin Hood is ostensibly an element to stress the Englishness of the setting which evokes a sense of familiarity, enabling the audience to comprehend the correlation between Arden and England. Plays with Robin Hood as the protagonist¹ were especially popular in the 1590s. Lois Potter states that:

¹ To name a few, as Jeanette Marks reports, there was a lost play called *Pastoral Pleasant Comedie of Robin Hood and Little John* (1594) (Marks, 1972, p. 158). Anthony Munday's *The Downfall of Robert Earl Huntington* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington* (1598) were other examples of popular Robin Hood plays according to Albert H. Tolman (1922, p. 75) and Jeffrey L. Singman (1998, p. 63).

[a]ll the extant Robin Hood plays belong to the 1590s, a period of uncertainty about the succession to Elizabeth I, and the plays both reflect and displace popular anxiety by dramatizing other periods of instability (Potter, 1998, p. 21).

Carrie Griffin argues that the forest in these plays is a site belonging to the outlaw and emphasises the Englishness of the place (Griffin, 2016, p. 60). Drawing on the Robin Hood tradition, Shakespeare alludes to England in Arden by using the forest as an ideological locus as in the case of Robin Hood's story.

Moreover, the reference to Robin Hood is functional for the depiction of the liminal community in Arden. According to Helen Phillips, the Robin Hood community in exile is a group of merry men away "from normal power and comfort" in their alternative site of living (Phillips, 2008, p. 86). This group's distance from "normal" life is a key point to acknowledge the Arden community's connection with liminality. In the play, Duke Senior and other courtiers are the equivalent of Robin Hood's community living temporarily away from the structural and hierarchical boundaries of the court. Duke Senior's depiction of the community as his "co-mates and brothers in exile" (2.1:1) in the forest fits into Turner's definition of *communitas*, a liminal society "as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal ritual elders" (Turner, 1967, p. 97). The exile of the courtiers in Arden is a liminal experience as Paul Stenner states that:

[a]ny situation involving the removal or erasure of the usual limits that organize life (providing recognizable social identities and positions with allocated rights and responsibilities, etc.) can be considered liminal (Stenner, 2017, p. 62).

After taking liminal action of exile, the community grows into *communitas* as they collectively experience liminality in Arden. As they suspend the structures and norms of the court in the forest, they temporarily exist together in an anti-structural state of *communitas*. Therefore, the allusion to Robin Hood functions twofold. Arden is first poised between fact and fiction, indicating the forest's liminal in-betweenness in order to create the image of England in the reader/audience's mind. Then, the correlation between Robin Hood's community and the courtiers helps to uncover the liminal community in Arden. In this respect, Arden wavering between fact and fiction provides a shelter for the liminal community who resists against the oppressive rule and structure in this in-between site.

In addition to the liminal sense of spatial in-betweenness, the play provides another aspect of liminal landscape, namely the forest's presentation of conflicting possibilities to its inhabitants. The liminal forest plays on different aspects of potentiality because the land is betwixt and between both an idyllic and dangerous site. First, Arden manifests the creative potential of liminality as the forest offers an ideal vision to its visitors. In this respect, the play

essentially reveals that Arden provides the foresters with a comfortable zone as well as pleasure and peace. For instance, Duke Senior and his men live like those in the Golden Age (1.1:111–113). Duke Senior conceptualises an ideal place and declares that they “[h]ere feel [. . .] not the penalty of Adam” (2.1:5). In this context, even in the forest’s name, Arden evokes the garden of Eden, recalling a paradisiacal atmosphere. In contrast to the Biblical story, the courtiers are not expelled from their Eden; conversely, they are driven into the forest after they leave the court. Also, the characters who suffer from the corrupt policies of the court dwell in Arden where peace prevails. While the court is the home of ambition and degeneration, Arden is immediately associated with contentment and serenity. Duke Senior’s address to other lords indicates the difference between the two worlds: “Are not these woods / More free from peril than the envious court?” (2.1:3–4). Likewise, Rosalind, with Celia and Touchstone, willingly goes to the forest “in content / To liberty” (1.3:134–135) to make the most of the idealised land. After a while, they all find happiness in the forest where “love is crowned with the prime” (5.3:36). While the forest enables its inhabitants to lead an alternative life by rejecting the adverse qualities of the court life, their lives are devoted to pleasure, peace and idleness. In this light, there is a common tendency to read the forest as the Edenic landscape with respect to the discussion on the pastoral elements of the play. Alternatively, Phebe Jensen (2008) presents an extensive discussion on the festive culture merged with the Robin Hood tradition in the play. Analysing the play’s application of Robin Hood with traditional parish entertainments, Jensen concludes that “the religious potential of festivity” embedded in the pastoral can be observed in Shakespeare’s comedy (Jensen, 2008, p. 148). What remains to be seen in the context of liminality is that the elements of festive and merry life in Arden reveal only one aspect of the liminal place. Regardless of religious festivity, Arden, broadly speaking, is an in-between zone of positive and negative potentiality. Thus, the utopian picture of the forest evidences the creative potential of the liminal site.

The process of becoming by the characters and the transformative agency of the liminal land can be pieced together to explore the reciprocal relation between the place and characters. Of importance is the potential of love to transform the characters during their rites of passage within the context of spatial liminality in Shakespeare’s comedy. In fact, the play demonstrates that liminal “power acts upon ‘self’ and identity at specific points in space” (Slater & Coyle, 2017, p. 385) as the characters “let the forest judge” (3.2:119) from the beginning of the play. By this point, Jeffrey S. Theis’s depiction of early modern forests as places of change and transformation is also noteworthy because the act of transformation is directly related to liminality (Theis, 2009, p. 39). Considering that liminality is about the process of change,

Arden's transformative agency manifests the liminal land's power over the characters. Although there is always a possibility of negative process in liminality because of the indeterminate nature of liminal experience (Stenner, 2017, p. 185), *As You Like It* pinpoints the positive transformation of the characters through different kinds of love in the forest thanks to its generic structure as a comedy.

Initially, romantic love is underlined in the play. As Arden reveals its creative potentiality as a happy land, the characters complete transitional rites and return to the society that they had left before. Therefore, Arden acts as a limen to maturity which leads them to a happy ending and a reintegration process through the manifestation of love. Considering that "[t]he theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it" (Frye, 1957, p. 43), the play celebrates the marriage of four couples, Rosalind–Orlando, Celia–Oliver, Phoebe–Silvius and Audrey–Touchstone (5.4:126-38), when the last phase of rites of passage, the rite of incorporation in the case of a wedding ceremony, takes place in the forest. As the forest becomes a home of romantic love, the characters transform themselves and embrace stable identities in society through marriage. In the last scene of the play, the wedding of the characters takes place after the intervention of the supernatural Hymen when Rosalind unmask her real identity, but only Touchstone has already married before. For his marriage ceremony, despite Jaques's warning about Sir Oliver Martext's incompetence as a priest, Touchstone chooses Martext (his surname as a pun of marring) to marry him in case he may later leave his wife (3.3:76–85). Nevertheless, the play does not indicate that Touchstone is leaving his wife in the final scene so the liminal forest functionally leads all of these characters to love and marriage as a sign of their reintegration. At the end of the play, the last phase of rites of passage takes place in the forest through the wedding ceremony, which is a rite of incorporation. Therefore, the union of all couples emphasises the positive transformation of the characters.

Furthermore, the forest transforms the characters who have caused troubles in their families. The transformation of Oliver and Duke Frederick is worth noting because it evidences the liminal setting's power to change the characters dramatically. In addition to romantic love, familial love pins Arden's positive potentiality in the case of Oliver. In the relationship between Orlando and Oliver, it appears that violation takes place both on the domestic scale, that is in the family, and on a larger context of governance. Denton J. Snider asserts that Shakespeare

has here [in the play] portrayed society in contradiction with its fundamental object; it has driven off those whom, by every tie of blood and of right, it was bound to protect, both State and Family have become the instruments of the direst injustice; on all sides we behold 'the world of wrong' (Snider, 1997, p. 317).

The happy atmosphere of Arden, too, enables the characters to redress the wrongs of family and state. Although Oliver previously plots against Orlando to harm him, Orlando makes peace with his elder brother Oliver after saving his life. Moreover, after this reconciliation, Orlando regains his property when Oliver tells him that:

[i]t shall be to your good, for my father's house and all the revenue that was old Sir Rowland's will I estate upon you (5.2:9–11).

Familial love, accompanied by the characters' romantic love experience, restores the relationship between Oliver and Orlando so that the problem of inheritance is solved. When Oliver also falls in love with Celia and marries her, he takes his wife's family property as well. Therefore, familial love and the constitution of family through marriage both enable them to solve problems. As it is the forest that allows this change to take place, the liminal setting's transformative function manifests itself again.

Lastly, Arden's transformative potential comes out in the form of religious love in the play. Precisely, in the usurpation plot concerning Duke Senior, religious love becomes influential in the transformation of Duke Frederick. In the last act, it is announced that Duke Frederick who intends to kill Duke Senior in the forest meets a religious man on his way and becomes a different person:

And to the skirts of this wild wood he came, / Where meeting with an old religious man,
/ After some question with him, was converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world" (5.4:157–60).

As stated above, Duke Frederick's moral conversion in Arden is a residue of the medieval forest concept, echoing the Biblical desert. In line with Arden's liminal potential, the spiritual power of the forest resonates with the landscape's transformative and constructive agency over the characters. This final transformation taking place in the forest is significant for Duke Senior to restore his position so that it brings a solution to the political problems of usurpation and tyranny. As can be seen, in different types of love, Arden becomes a transformative place because these characters develop into different figures in the forest. Therefore, the forest's transformative power reveals its liminal trait as a threshold to new identities.

Following the analysis of the forest's generative aspects, it has to be clarified that liminal places, unlike utopian places, do not merely embody positive possibilities. What is unique about the forest's liminal potentiality is that this place is hedged around with destructive capability. Shakespearean scholars, such as Kott (1965, p. 224) and Farrar (2014, p. 367) have underlined the adversity of the forest life that contradicts the Arcadian image in the play, but there is no clear definition to enunciate the conflicting qualities of Arden. Thus, it is possible

to identify the physical and economic challenges of the landscape in terms of the forest's liminal potential. Arden remains on the threshold of creative and destructive possibilities because liminal places are indeterminate sites with positive and negative potentials. Arden's uncertain potential capacity comes to the fore with its serious challenges to the characters. The play both renders the natural world as a comfortable place and packs it with potential danger that could destroy them.

The first negative potential of the liminal zone is a problem related to living in nature. This is the struggle experienced in harsh weather conditions. Broadly speaking, living in open air in close proximity to nature is advocated in the pastoral tradition, but this pleasure of life is only limited to spring and summer. This fact emphasised in Arden gives a realistic detail about the foresters' lives. It is Duke Senior who first voices their suffering from cold weather (2.1:6–8), and his follower Amiens also sings a song about winter and coldness, claiming that “winter and rough weather” are their enemies in the forest (2.5:7).

Secondly, wild beasts inhabiting Arden threaten the foresters' lives. Possible attacks from animals indicate the insecurity of the inhabitants, and it is possible to interpret both the threat of and actualised attacks as Arden's negative potential both on literal and allegorical levels. Beyond doubt, the animals that attack Oliver, a lioness and a serpent, demonstrate that Arden is a dangerous and savage world; thus, the rural reality is obviously far from the idealised conceptualisation of Arden. People and animals both fight to survive, suggesting untamed wilderness and savagery dominant in the forest. It is also possible to focus on animal symbolism here. The interpretation that the serpent and the lion may symbolise evil in the Christian context indicates that the Forest of Arden does not foster a positive ambience and devilish forces may threaten the foresters. More strikingly, Samantha S. Snively offers a political reading of the land and animals that Oliver depicts and relates them to Elizabeth I's threatening and dangerous power in England at that time:

The aged and barren landscape that frames the encounter with the snake and lioness links these allusions with anxieties about the psychic threat posed by Elizabeth's body. Reading the landscape as an allusion to an aging, nonreproductive Elizabeth reframes the animals' potential meanings as well: the threats in the landscape of a barren, aging sexuality highlight the serpent's dominance through the threat of oral penetration and the lioness's monstrous nonmaternal body that disrupts patriarchal success and succession. (Snively, 2018, p. 335)

Snively's topical reading highlights how the Queen's political and sexual power is considered to be a threat to her country. What is interesting is that the literary and allegorical perception of the animals both suggests that the forest poses a direct threat to its inhabitants. Therefore, Arden displays not only its conflicting values but also proves its liminal in-betweenness by

shifting between safety and danger. In other words, the forest is between generative and destructive possibilities because of its liminal nature.

More significant as evidence for Arden's adversity is the problem of finding food and coping with economic troubles. In stark contrast to the idealised version of shepherds' lives, Arden is a hostile place to its inhabitants as can be strongly observed in the case of the shepherds Silvius and Corin's standard of life in the forest. Shakespeare subverts the idyllic representation by highlighting their lack of food and subsequent hunger in the forest. Although natural life may be regarded self-sufficient with its resources, Orlando and his servant Adam's first appearance in Arden points to the hardship of survival in the forest. When Adam is dying of hunger (2.6:1–4), Orlando finds food at Duke Senior's banquet. Moreover, the play displays that the circumstances make life unbearable for those who permanently inhabit Arden. As a point of interest, when Celia and Rosalind come to the forest, they come across Silvius and Corin. Celia asks these shepherds to give them food, but Corin unexpectedly rejects to share. He discloses that he cannot afford to offer food because he has to answer to his absent master:

But I am shepherd to another man
And do not shear the fleeces that I graze.
My master is of churlish disposition
And little recks to find the way to heaven
By doing deeds of hospitality. (2.4:77–81)

In these lines, Corin indicates that shepherds do not enjoy natural life because they are stuck in a master-servant relationship. Corin, a labourer in the forest, depicts the economic system that dominates Arden (3.2:70–4). Arden's economy is stimulated by a system prioritising private ownership and profit. In this capitalist system to earn more, the forest's land and the shepherd's flock are both on sale. Corin announces that his master's

cote, his flocks and bounds of feed / Are now on sale, and at our sheepecote now, / By
reason of his absence, there is nothing / That you will feed on [. . .]" (2.4:82–85).

Thus, Rosalind offers gold to buy "the cottage, pasture and the flock" (2.4:91). Corin's selling draws attention to the changing dynamics of natural life in which the power of money prevails above all. Therefore, Shakespeare situates the forest between the shepherd's pastoral idyll and capitalism, placing it on the edge of different value systems. Although the forest is a land of escape and freedom, it is not easy to survive in this money-based economy. Challenging the view that a green site offers many opportunities to its inhabitants, the play suggests that Arden is not a suitable place for those without financial power. The fact that nature is not always kind to these characters renders a realistic picture of Arden and highlights another facet of liminal

site by placing the forest between a wonderland and an insecure zone owing to its negative potentiality.

Altogether, Arden is replete with good and bad qualities. Bearing in mind all these liminal potentialities of Arden, the setting's liminality extends to its ambiguity. As Arden operates in the multiple views that the characters have, the setting's liminal ambiguity becomes clear. In other words, when the forest is delineated in a different way by each character, the setting's liminal ambiguity unfolds itself in the opposing perceptions of Arden. Therefore, throughout the play, the ambiguity of the setting is reliant on the characters, their language and experiences. Crudely put, the definition of the forest changes upon the characters' viewpoints, indicating its ambivalent liminal status. For example, Orlando's definition of the forest is significant to grasp this point. When he approaches Duke Senior and his followers with his sword, he is shocked by their attitude towards him and says: "I thought that all things had been savage here" (2.7:108). Orlando's words suggest that in contrast to the civilisation that the court represents, the forest initially may denote the ideas of barbarity and savagery. The animals that Orlando later fights allude to the brutal nature of the forest to which he alludes. However, Arden is threaded with liminal ambivalence as Orlando acknowledges at the moment in this particular scene. To take another example, Arden's physical depictions display the setting's indeterminate quality. On the one hand, the play depicts the forest as a pastoral landscape filled with different trees, animals and a peaceful atmosphere. On the other hand, the references to the barren land and harsh living conditions remind the audience that Arden is not a utopian place either. Moreover, although the forest resolves the problems between brothers and lovers, it is not a source of happiness and joy for all characters. Touchstone, for example, calls himself "the more fool", expressing his regret for his presence in Arden (2.4:14). The forest is also a ground for Jaques's melancholy. Although Jaques is part of Duke Senior's community living in Arden, he complains about their usurpation of the real inhabitants of the forest. After a stag is killed, he laments over the forest life (2.1:40–43). Consequently, these conceptions give differing meanings to Arden so it cannot be defined in a singular way. In Theis's words:

As You Like It's forest begets multiple, conflicting definitions so that a single site can be repository to multiple meanings based upon individuals' differing, lived experiences. (Theis, 2009, p. xii)

The multiple voices that define Arden also bring out an ambiguous state for the perception of the forest, contributing to its liminal status. Given the different definitions of Arden, the forest remains in flux and appears to be as each character 'likes it' (to use the play's title).

Having established various aspects of the liminal forest, what remains to be discussed is a final point about Arden's liminality in reference to its ending. The last scene of the play culminates in the idea of transition, and Arden's emergence as a transitional site can be regarded as the last attribute of the liminal landscape. According to Carol C. Davis, the forest is a symbol of a threshold (Davis, 1989, p. 300) so the place is grounded on not only an experience of in-betweenness but also transition when one occupies the forest. Considering that the concept of liminality is also about transition, the forest as a passageway between the corrupt and restored courts becomes a liminal site for the characters. In the play, the characters come from the court and meet in Arden. The banished characters no longer belong to the court, but they find a new place to stay. After the separation from their usual circumstances at the court, they are in the forest to gain new and independent selves. Yet they cannot be thoroughly a part of Arden because they occupy the forest for a temporary period. Thus, Arden grows into a liminal transition place as the characters (except for Touchstone and Jaques²) decide to return to the court at the end of the play. This act of returning unfolds that Arden is a transitory place. The forest, situated in-between the two courts, becomes a passage for the courtiers who come and go back. As an intermediate place, Arden is a liminal site which positively contributes to the establishment of a good government since the courtiers do not return to the same court. Between Duke Frederick's tyrannical court and Duke Senior's restored court, Arden becomes a temporary place of residence for the courtiers, revealing its liminality.

The Liminal Forest as a Site of Criticism

The evidence highlights that Shakespeare makes use of the liminal setting in *As You Like It*. The reason why he exploits liminal characteristics in Arden can be ascribed to Shakespeare's critical approach to the destructive practices and policies of the late Elizabethan court. Because of the rules of censorship enacted on the early modern stage, Shakespeare had to find out some means to veil his political criticism so that the liminal forest becomes his tool to implicitly comment on the contemporary political atmosphere during the late Elizabethan age. Therefore, a topical reading of the Elizabethan land policies, colonial practices in Ireland and the Queen's punitive methods is necessary to understand how the liminal forest becomes a tool for criticism in the play.

² Only Touchstone who tells Duke Senior that he "press[es] in here [Arden], sir, amongst the rest of the country copulatives" (5.4:55–56) and Jaques who decides to attend Duke Frederick (5.4:182–183) stay in Arden.

Turning to the historical context of the late Elizabethan period, the 1590s emerged as one of the periods of trouble, decay and chaos in English history. The war with Spain, religious tension in the country, the concurrent succession problem and financial troubles exhausted the aging Queen. In addition to those troubles, a series of economic and political practices afflicted the country. In this atmosphere of the late Elizabethan period, the liminal forest in Shakespeare's play enables the playwright to allude to the contemporary troublesome practices in a critical tone. In the period of theatre censorship and restrictive punishments on the playwrights, Shakespeare unveils his critical approach to the destructive state policies with ambiguity thanks to his use of a liminal site. Accordingly, the first issue that the liminal forest is functionally used to illustrate is the practice of enclosure and the subsequent social unrest at the time. Although there were four million acres of forest in sixteenth-century England (Ward, 1992, p. 6), the number of such lands went into a decline, especially in the Elizabethan era, because of the enforcement of enclosure. In the sixteenth century, certain English forest areas were privatised since they were transformed into agricultural areas or lands to raise livestock and produce wool, and the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire was among such converted sites (Borlik, 2011, p. 183). Elizabeth not only burnt down green areas to create material sources for the wood industry but also sold royal forests to avoid possible financial trouble since the Irish wars costed much (Theis, 2009, p. 52; Barton, 2017 pp. 6–7). Viewed in this way, the forest was converted into a battlefield for the market economy which resulted in enclosure riots. According to Chris Fitter's account, Shakespeare was most probably informed about the ongoing problems at Stratford caused by such practices of enclosure and deforestation in Arden when he wrote *As You Like It* (Fitter, 2012, p. 176).

It is possible to focus on Shakespeare's critique of destructive practices and its consequences by means of the liminal setting in more detail. In the play, for instance, the clearing of forest land is indicated in Oliver's question "[w]here in the purlieus of this forest stands / A sheepcote fenced about with olive-trees?" (4.3:75–76). The word "purlieus" is "the legal term for a cleared area on the edge of a forest retaining certain privileges within – and Arden itself" (Barton, 2017, p. 208). Shakespeare mentions the deforested area in this detail, illustrating that the forest is cleared to open land for rearing sheep. While the liminal sense of in-betweenness and ambiguity makes it hard to pin down the location and topography of Arden, Shakespeare functionally uses the liminal forest to represent the current troubles in England. More than that, as in the case of the increase of the population in the historical Arden, the number of characters in the play's Arden increases with the arrival of seven characters from the court. Thus, the changing population, as reflected in the play, was prone to the trouble of

finding land and producing food after the practices of enclosure at the time. When the historical Forest of Arden was exposed to the practice of enclosure, people were competing to obtain land in order to survive the threat of starvation. Victor Skipp highlights the rapid change in Arden in the late sixteenth century and claims that “the local food supply [...] simply was not increased quickly enough to feed all the additional mouths” (Skipp, 1978, p. 53). While Adam’s hunger, Orlando’s search for food and the inequality between shepherds and masters resonate the troubles of local foresters, Shakespeare might be alluding to the ongoing unrest in the country in his representation of Arden. Mihoko Suzuki claims that “the 1590s were especially marked by social disorder and protest” (Suzuki, 1996, p. 181) as poor and hungry people rebelled. As the practice of enclosure ended in the riots of the foresters in the 1590s all over England, Shakespeare’s comedy presents such rebellious actions in a delicate manner as well. For instance, it is known that the rioters disguised themselves with masks at nights and dressed like women to damage the surrounding areas (Wilson, 1992, p. 10). The same practice of crossdressing, albeit for different purposes, is used as an important element of the play considering that crossdressing initially triggers the course of events between Rosalind and Orlando in the forest. Richard Wilson also explains Shakespeare’s reference to the rebellions that:

[p]oaching, damaging trees, sending letters in fictitious names, blacking, and crossdressing: *As You Like It* parades all the felonies associated with forest rioters. (*ibid.*, pp. 13–14)

In other words, Shakespeare offers non-violent ways of protest in the way that he reminds his audience of enclosure riots. In contrast to the government’s denunciation of the outlaws, poor and vagabonds through a series of acts from the 1570s to the 1600s, Shakespeare displays the problems of rural life and presents the resistance of outcasts in his comedy. Undoubtedly, the genre of comedy provides Shakespeare with proper means to veil his criticism since the change of place, a convention in his comedies, enables the playwright to transfer the courtiers to the place of rebellion. Fitter rightly observes that:

demystifying its fake golden world as a realm of injustice and desperate poverty, the drama conversely rehumanizes its economic victims, the demonized woodland vagabond [in Shakespeare’s play]. (Fitter, 2012, p. 176)

Of significance is that the playwright critically deals with such problems by setting his work in the liminal place by creating a medium of criticism without any fear of punishment.

Secondly, the play dwells on another practice, that is colonialism, in the liminal setting. Hopkins (2002, p. 4) and Leah S. Marcus (2014, p. 171) both refer to *As You Like It*’s source, Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, by highlighting that Lodge wrote it during his journey to the Canaries. The

voyage to the Canaries, for both critics, acquires a special topicality with respect to English colonialism. Hopkins emphasises that the use of the Golden-Age world in the play can be deemed relevant to the material search and abuse in English colonialism (Hopkins, 2002, p. 5). She specifies how the play associates Rosalind with Ireland by dealing with England's colonial practices in reference to the play (*ibid.*, p. 11) and she reaches her argument to Shakespeare's mocking of Sir Walter Raleigh's colonialist ideals (*ibid.*, pp. 17–20). On the other hand, Marcus mostly focuses on Jaques and his ambiguous attitude to colonialism. Although Jaques takes the side of the victim of colonialism in the forest, he still acts as a coloniser from Marcus's point of view through his "narcissistic" sense of "moral superiority" (Marcus, 2014, p. 179). To further argue, the play proposes the practice of colonialism in Ireland in different ways. Chris Butler, for instance, embarks on the idea of primogeniture problematised in the conflict between Orlando and Oliver and alludes to England's colonial strategies in Ireland. Butler specifically mentions a pamphlet called *A letter sent by I.B. (1572)* in which the practice of "send[ing] these 'yonger brothers' to colonize 'the cuntrie called the Ardes' in the north of Ireland" is encouraged (Butler, 2013, p. 90). Albeit his different motivation to escape from the court, Orlando, troubled by his elder brother out of the rule of primogeniture, goes to Arden, the place that has a nominal correlation with "Ardes of Ireland." According to Butler, Ireland's colonisation by younger brothers was once supported by the first Earl of Essex, Walter Devereux, Robert Devereux's father (*ibid.*). Although Shakespeare does not promote a war over inheritance rights between Orlando and Oliver, he alludes to Elizabeth I's sending of Robert Devereux to Ireland to quell the riots against the English in 1599, which will be recounted in detail below, in the play. As indicated in the notes of the Arden edition, Rosalind's mention of "an Irish rat" and "the howling of Irish wolves against the moon" (3.2:173; 5.2:105–106) is a topical allusion to Essex in Ireland when the play was penned. While these political readings highlight the characters' relation to colonialism in the play, the argument can be extended to Shakespeare's use of the forest to deal with this political matter. Bearing colonial practices in Ireland and deforestation in England in mind, the play unveils the story of the colonised land in its details. From this standpoint, one may look anew of Arden's liminal ambiguity and in-betweenness. The forest's unclear depiction as a green land and a barren land, the killing of deer and the attack of animals may display the negative influence of colonialism on the forest and the forest's struggle to preserve itself. The exploitation of the natural landscape reveals itself with the loss of green site, and the play alludes to this fact through the forest's oscillation between woodland and desolation. The murder of the animal suggests the annihilation of the forest's native inhabitants by the colonial oppressor. Yet the attack of the

lioness and snake may be associated with the agency of the forest. Arden's non-human residents resist and react the oppressive forces even though they are defeated. With respect to colonial history, Arden turns into a political territory as it becomes a site of struggle between the opposite groups. In this context, Arden's liminal features enable Shakespeare to approach the issue of colonialism in a critical manner from a safe distance. While he does not directly attack on the ongoing abusive practices, he is able to show its negative consequences by working with the liminal setting.

The last issue of criticism in the play is about the contemporary courtly politics of the time. When the play was written at the turn of the new century, the Elizabethan court was going through a period of crisis. John Guy calls the period from the 1590s to the Queen's death as Elizabeth's second reign and comments on the political atmosphere at the court:

A sense of *fin de siècle* is crucial to an understanding of Elizabeth's 'second' reign. Contradictory forces changes the atmosphere: ambition, apprehension, expectation, insecurity, authoritarianism, self-interrogation. (Guy, 1995, pp. 7–8)

This late Elizabethan court can be seen to be represented in the corrupt court of the play that Duke Senior and others challenge in Arden. In the first act, the way that Duke Frederick and Oliver hold power at the court indicates that the court is the locus of tyranny, envy and rivalry. Nick Potter claims that the forest "is identified with values arising from a consideration of 'naturalness' against 'artificiality', and 'authenticity' against flattery and self-interest" (Potter, 1990, p. 83). Duke Senior's restoration of the court highlights the corruption of Duke Frederick's court which can be regarded as a representative of the late Elizabethan court. In this regard, Arden emerges as an ideological site, pointing to the decay, competition and corruption at the court in a critical manner. Although Elizabeth I entrusted her favourite courtiers with important governmental duties, the eminent figures of her court tended to plot against her and each other to attain power and status even after her death. The rivalry between Robert Cecil and the Earl of Essex was illustrative of such a contest, and their factional strife finally led Essex to rebel against the Queen. As Juliet Dusingberre states, there is not one particular character that represents Essex in the play, but the play energises the Earl's character by means of several characters such as Rosalind, Orlando and Jaques (Dusingberre, 2006, p. 104). Moreover, the play implicitly evokes and criticises the courtly atmosphere in which Essex and Cecil struggled. In order to offer a critique of the late Elizabethan court, the play presents Arden as the ideological landscape in which the liminal society, *communitas*, challenges power structure and restrictive hierarchies with their sense of equality and comradeship. In contrast to the competition and ambition of Duke Frederick's court, the Arden community endorses

collective support, sharing and contentment. In addition, the play strongly demonstrates that the court, rather than the forest, is a centre of savagery and cruelty when Orlando observes a civilised community in Arden considering the fact that he fights hard in order to save his life and escapes from death at his brother's court. As can be observed in Rosalind and Celia's life in Arden, the liminal forest also enables the community to transgress boundaries and offers liberation from the structures and norms that have limited the characters at the court. Thus, Arden hosting the liminal community underpins a criticism of the court by enabling a group of people to unite and exist together without oppressive divisions in an alternative place.

Considering that the play is about the experience of political exiles escaping from the usurped kingdom and corrupt court to the forest, it is possible to highlight the play's criticism of the political practices of punishment as well. In particular, the use of the liminal setting provides the playwright with a safe distance to deal with the political context of the late Elizabethan period concerning the troubles of the Earl of Essex who was a close friend of Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton. After the years of success and reputation, Essex fell out of Elizabeth's favour as he tried to control the Queen's appointments at the court in order to empower his own position. Particularly when he was sent to Ireland to quash the revolt led by the Earl of Tyrone in 1599, Essex knew that his absence at the court would trouble him after his return. His presence in Ireland might have provided an opportunity to re-establish his reputation, but it was rather like an exile for the Earl, and his conflict with the Queen next drove him to an enforced exile. It is true that Essex was a representative of England so that he was the symbol of the English colonial power in Ireland. However, Essex felt himself banished there. Drawing on David Bevington's idea that this play illustrates Essex's banishment in the figure of Duke Senior (Bevington, 1968, p. 18), it is possible to establish a connection between Arden and Ireland in terms of Essex's story. When the Privy Council under the influence of the Cecilian faction did not provide Essex with more military supplies in Ireland (Asquith, 2018, pp. 176–177), the Earl returned without Elizabeth's order and intruded into her bedchamber to talk with her. This transgression resulted in his punishment in the trial on 5 June 1600, and the decision was for him to be put under house arrest, totally banished from the Queen's court. When the proclamations of banishment are examined during the Tudor reign, it becomes clear that it was a common punishment and the Queen's favourite penalty:

Under Elizabeth, proclamations were issued for the banishment of Anabaptists, the Irish, Negroes and even those whose swords exceeded the length set down in the sumptuary laws. (Kingsley-Smith, 2003, p. 11)

In addition to the Arden-Ireland correlation in Essex's exile, the retreat of the courtiers to the forest in the play echoes Essex's withdrawal to the woods following his banishment. In a poem, "O sweet woods," written by John Dowland (2002), an acquaintance of Essex some of whose poems were claimed to be written by the Earl, the speaker retreats into the woods after having a problem with his lover. The poem specifically refers to Wanstead as the rural place of withdrawal (Dowland, 2002, lines 29–32), the frequent address of Essex in the 1590s (Ruff & Wilson, 1969, p. 38). This reference corroborates Essex's voice in the poem so the banished courtier withdraws into the forest on a self-imposed exile. The poem and Shakespeare's play, therefore, have a common point which is the idea of taking refuge in the forest following departure from the court. Although the withdrawal to nature is a convention of pastoral, the experience of being in exile is a key point for Arden's liminal spatiality. Considering the fact that the experience of characters defines the site that they occupy, their exile which is a liminal act augments Arden's liminality in the play. In the play, the liminal site is politically designed to allude to Elizabeth's practice of punishment as in the case of Essex's banishment and exile. The ambiguities arising from liminality in this landscape veil Shakespeare's criticism of the Queen's methods to punish her rivals at the court. While Arden enacts transgression for the courtiers as an ideological place, the political tension of retreat suggests a critical reading of the late Elizabethan policies of punishment.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Shakespeare employs liminality to the forest setting of *As You Like It*. The sense of in-betweenness and ambiguity, the transformative agency and the transitional state that define Arden can be reconsidered as the attributes of this liminal forest. The exile of the characters and their process of becoming in Arden also lay out the forest's liminality. It is the particular argument of the article that Shakespeare has a political aim in using the liminal forest. In other words, the use of liminal characteristics in the setting is functional to carry the political undertone and criticism of the play when the Elizabethan playwrights suffered from theatrical censorship and punishment. In reference to the protests arising in the 1590s and the play's topical allusions, Fitter is right to observe that *As You Like It* is "a protest play" which obviously highlights the play's political content (Fitter, 2010, p. 114). Drawing on Fitter's words, I claim that Shakespeare's "protest" takes place in the liminal landscape of Arden. As Duke Senior declares that their life "[f]inds tongues in trees" of Arden (2.1:16), Shakespeare uses the forest to criticise deforestation, colonialism and political punishments. Opposing the destructive practices in the late Elizabethan period, the playwright forms a site of resistance

and criticism by using the elements of ambiguity, in-betweenness, uncertain potentialities, transformation and transition. While the play upholds the view that liminality “is a state in which the capacity for change, for inventiveness and communion is maximised, where the polluting and dangerous properties associated with it can be productively harnessed to effect social critique and social reform” (Duffy, 2011, p. 25), the liminal forest veils Shakespeare’s criticism of the late Elizabethan court and the problematic practices.

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